

Human Nature in Theistic and Evolutionary Perspectives

with Michael L. Spezio, "Social Neuroscience and Theistic Evolution: Intersubjectivity, Love, and the Social Sphere"; David Fergusson, "Humans Created According to the *Imago Dei*: An Alternative Proposal"; Thomas F. Tracy, "Divine Purpose and Evolutionary Processes"; Thomas Jay Oord, "The Divine Spirit as Causal and Personal"; and John W. Cooper, "Created for Everlasting Life: Can Theistic Evolution Provide an Adequate Christian Account of Human Nature?"

HUMANS CREATED ACCORDING TO THE *IMAGO DEI*: AN ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL

by David Fergusson

Abstract. Classical approaches to the idea of the *imago Dei* in the theology of creation have tended to postulate a distinctive element of the human being not found in other creatures, with the possible exception of angels. This is often combined with attempts to use the *imago* concept as an organizing principle within Christian theology. Such approaches are now problematic not merely on account of their exegetical findings, but for methodological reasons. In light of recent exegesis, the *imago Dei* in Genesis 1:26–27 should be seen as a signifier of human life under God, rather than a single determining characteristic or essential attribute. Following the wisdom literature, the *imago Dei* can be understood, in a more diffused manner, as represented by human persons over long periods of evolutionary history in their characteristic quotidian forms of life, thus signifying the providential ordering of human life everywhere. The recent work of David Kelsey on theological anthropology is engaged in this context.

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The creation of human beings in the image of God is a theological platitude. A widespread and popular notion, its prevalence can be explained both by its early appearance in one of the best known Scriptural texts and its apparent ethical significance in explaining the sanctity of all human life. Reference to the *imago Dei* has thus become convenient shorthand

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in church reports and theological pronouncements concerning threats to personal dignity and the value placed on human life. But whereas its force is undoubtedly striking, its meaning is opaque. In what follows, I shall argue that the concept of the *imago Dei* is best interpreted as a signifier not of some ontological property or moral attribute that sets human animals apart from others, but as designating a complex identity that is established by a providential ordering of human life. As such, the *imago Dei* is not about any one thing, as if it named a mysterious anthropological ingredient which human beings possess but other creatures lack. To understand its meaning involves recourse to a more holistic description that includes functional, relational, and practical elements. In this way, a theological account of human existence requires to be narrated rather than defined by reference to a single property. This diffusive strategy, it will be further claimed, has the advantage of broadening the scope of theological anthropology to other sections of Scripture, in ways that might prove fruitful for the dialogue of theology with accounts of human evolution.

IMAGO DEI: RATIONAL POWERS

For the most part, the Western theological tradition identifies the *imago Dei* with the possession of rational powers. These set human beings apart from other animals, placing us somewhere between angels and nonhuman creatures in the chain of being. Augustine (1972) viewed the human mind as reflecting the divine trinity in its self-conscious reflective activity. Anticipating the later *cogito* argument of Descartes, he writes, “We resemble the divine Trinity in that we exist; we know that we exist, and we are glad of this existence and this knowledge” (*City of God*, XI, 26).¹ In knowing of our existence, there is no possibility of deception, since this awareness of self does not depend on the truths of the bodily senses. Augustine acknowledges the very significant differences between God and creatures, and insists on our need of redemption. However, in the knowledge and gladness that we exist, there is nothing closer in all creation to God’s own nature. This is made possible by a special act of creation in which God gives the human being a soul that is distinguished by its reason and intelligence. By virtue of this soul, human beings surpass all other creatures on the earth (*City of God*, XII, 24).

Despite his Aristotelian leanings, Thomas Aquinas also attributes an intellectual potency to the human soul that enables it by divine grace to be raised to the beatific vision. Ordered in this way, the soul will naturally transform the conditions of its embodied existence. Human animals alone bear the image of God by virtue of possessing a rational soul (*Summa Theologiae*, 1a. 93). This is true of all human beings, although they must be considered to bear the image of God less perfectly than the angels whose intellectual nature is superior. As elsewhere, his theology here closely follows

Augustine. When dealing with Christology, Aquinas (2007) also speculates that by virtue of the perfect ordering of his body by his soul, Jesus could have suffered no genetic disorder. So, he would not have been liable to leprosy or epilepsy, although he voluntarily submitted to such general deficiencies as hunger, thirst, and death (*Summa Theologiae*, 3a.14.4).

While generally eschewing speculative patterns of thought, John Calvin also locates the *imago Dei* in the distinctively spiritual and cognitive capacities of the soul (*Institutes*, I.15). Insisting that it is in the soul rather than the body that the *imago* is to be located, Calvin (1960) argues that it is immortal though created. His account of the image, however, is inflected with strong soteriological themes. After the Fall, nothing remains of the image of God except what is “confused, mutilated, and disease-ridden” (*Institutes*, I.15.4, 190).² A clearer understanding of the image is derived from Christ, our second Adam. In some measure, his image is evident in the lives of the sanctified, but its full luster will be displayed only in heaven. One further consequence of this shift of perspective is that Calvin rejects Augustine’s speculative account of the human mind as an *imago trinitatis*, as also the attempt to see the divine image in human dominion of the world. The likeness of God lies within the internal good of the soul, now mostly lost in its postlapsarian condition.

What is also apparent from a survey of the Western tradition is the way in which this anthropological tendency has been embedded in treatments of key doctrines such as sin, grace, the person and work of Christ, Mariology, and eschatology. A fuller treatment would require some exploration of these. Nevertheless, despite its scope and significance, this tradition of theological anthropology has been in difficulty since the 19th century. Attracting an array of criticisms, the traditional reading is now in a state of some fragmentation for the following reasons.

The scientific account of human origins suggests a much greater continuity of human beings with other species. The earlier notion of a separate act of creation that individuates the human person by virtue of some distinct ontological property is harder to maintain, although revisionist theories have populated the literature. At any rate, belief in a first couple created *ab initio* in a state of moral, physical, and intellectual perfection is untenable in light of the findings of the natural sciences, at least since the time of Darwin. The conditions that govern suffering, disease, struggle, and death among species were prevalent long before the appearance of hominids. To attribute the causes of such hardship to the first human lapse is no longer tenable, however attractive this may appear as a cornerstone of Christian theodicy. In much of the literature today, acceptance of this scientific claim is an unargued assumption or axiom. In other quarters, however, it is still fiercely resisted. This is less on account of its disturbance to the doctrine of creation and more through its wider ramifications for anthropology, ethics, and redemption (see Finlay et al. 2009).

Recent exegetical work on the key passage at Genesis 1:26–27 has tended to reject the view that *the imago Dei* is to be identified with a distinctive noetic feature or single component of human existence. The holism of Hebrew anthropology renders this problematic, as is evident from the problem of translating any of the key nouns by the Greek or Latin equivalents of “soul” or “mind.” In any case, commentators have also pointed out that the notion of the image of God is largely absent from the Hebrew Bible outside the opening chapters of Genesis. Its brief appearance in the first creation narrative has resulted in a disproportionate attention being accorded this concept in Christian theology. Genesis 1:26–27 has been the focal point of discussion, rather than later references to the *imago* in Genesis or to wider anthropological sections of the Hebrew Bible. In addition to this, we need to recognize that the dominant use of the *imago Dei* in the New Testament is in a Christological and soteriological context. As the true image of God, Christ is the one in whom we are to be recreated. In this respect, the *imago* is not so much protological as eschatological. It is a divine promise rather than the state of our aboriginal existence.

This criticism of the tradition is also supported by trends in neuroscience that have increasingly revealed the ways in which the brain conditions the mental life of the human person. While this does not refute the possibility of some form of mind-brain dualism, it does indicate that any top-down causal trajectory from mind to body requires to be qualified by recognition that the ways in which we think, speak, and act are significantly shaped by the assembly of the brain, itself the product of long processes of human evolution. Summarizing this recent consensus, Malcolm Jeeves has written, “One of the more consistent findings of research capitalizing on the convergence of experimental psychology, comparative neuropsychology, and brain imaging techniques has been how specific mental processes or even component parts of those processes appear to be tightly linked to particular regions or systems in the brain” (2004, 17).

A more philosophical line of criticism suggests that the Western stress on the soul or mind has produced a distorted account of how as human beings we understand ourselves. Fergus Kerr’s work on *Theology after Wittgenstein* is an indispensable guide here with its compelling argument about the distortion of personal existence as disembodied *Wand* deracinated in the writings of theologians from Augustine to Rahner. The ways in which meaning, language, and thought are embedded in physical and social settings have been occluded by accounts of the human person that have privileged the possession of an immaterial soul or mind as the distinguishing characteristic of being human. The tradition has been haunted by the notion that the human being is really a “deficient angel” (Cornelius Ernst) whose destiny is to transcend the physical limitation of others creatures (Kerr 1997).

The anti-Cartesianism of thinkers such as Wittgenstein and Heidegger has been a powerful force in modern philosophy and has required a rethinking of many deeply held assumptions about human identity. A consequent stress on embodiedness and sociality is evident in much theological anthropology since the mid-twentieth century (e.g., Macquarrie 1985). In some quarters, this has been conjoined with an attack on all forms of anthropocentrism in contemporary theology. The ontological privileging of the human person is viewed as ecologically problematic and neglectful of the moral status of other animals.

This criticism of the default setting of Western theology must also extend to its ethical outcomes. When the *imago Dei* and rationality are equated, there follows inevitably a tendency to view some human beings as more exemplary of the divine nature than others. Gender-biased assumptions about the relative distribution of rational powers are not hard to detect; these led to the further erroneous claim that in some respects men rather than women more fully represent God. Against such reasoning of course there stands the implicit equality of the sexes in Genesis 1:26–27. This tendentious outcome of the tradition reflects a strategy in which one element of our makeup is exclusively identified with the *imago*. If some are judged (implausibly) to possess it more than others, then an unacceptable hierarchy or even a binary distinction is established between those who are fully human and those who are not.³ For this reason alone, we should avoid a simple equation of the *imago Dei* with our cognitive functions.

ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATIONS OF THE *IMAGO DEI*

More recent treatments of the *imago Dei* have reflected these concerns by offering alternative trajectories of interpretation. Relational accounts, to give one example, have sometimes appealed to the doctrine of the Trinity, the image of God being reflected in human interaction. Here, the triune *perichoresis* of divine persons is mirrored by relations of freedom and love in society (see Grenz 2001 and McFadyen 2012). Such a shift in perspective has several undoubted advantages. It avoids the anthropological search for a single property or component of the human person by which he or she is distinguished from every creature, while at the same time breaking with the hierarchical connotations of the regnant tradition. However, this revisionist strategy engenders two further problems, neither of which is easily overcome. The first is the strained reading of the key Genesis texts that is required. Even if later Christological texts might nudge us in this direction, there is little warrant in the Hebrew Bible for a Trinitarian reading of Genesis 1.26–27. Its original setting in the creation theology of Genesis does not readily admit of such construction. For the Priestly writer of Genesis 1, the image is already a given that determines human

existence; it is not something that is proleptically anticipated or realized only through eschatological fulfillment. We are already creatures made according to God's image.

Furthermore, this relational interpretation of the *imago* is also beset with an abstractionism that makes it of limited anthropological significance. The function of Trinitarian categories in the early church was to maintain the unity and revelation of God in such a way that terms had to be reworked and pressed into service in hitherto unfamiliar ways. This was true *a fortiori* of the Greek word "hypostasis" that was used originally for the divine being but later became the preferred term for the triune persons. The triunity of God therefore had to be carefully distinguished from creaturely notions of both unity and plurality. The primary intention of the doctrine of the Trinity was never anthropological, as if the divine society were the archetype of a model human community. So, the analogical move from the Trinity to creaturely relations *pace* Feuerbach could never be a simple one, especially as social models for God were generally combined with psychological ones in the classical accounts (see Kilby 2000). So, the term "person" could not be used univocally of divine and human persons.

Relational accounts of the *imago Dei* have drawn upon the resources of personalist philosophy. The image is here determined by the relationship of encounter and address established by God with human beings. In many ways, this makes sense of much of the subsequent narrative of Scripture with its account of a complex divine-human exchange. Human beings are determined by a relationship to God that is not restricted to an initial creative impulse or to the providential ordering of our anthropological condition. The divine-human relationship is one that continues throughout the stories of Scripture. This dramatic interaction is prefaced by the creation story, but its specification requires a history of address and response. In this way, relational accounts of the *imago Dei* are at least more adjacent to the Hebraic understanding of human beings under the rule of God, than those that they succeeded. Personalist philosophy can capture elements of the divine-human relationship that need to be preserved in any adequate account. Yet, even this approach may yet be too clouded by those earlier anthropologies that abstracted human beings from the earth and its other creatures. By isolating the divine-human encounter, such constructions tend to obscure the ways in which human beings belong to the natural order and are related to other creatures. Welker (1997) points out that in more ecologically aware approaches, personalist themes have been replaced or complemented by a stronger sense of the human being as belonging to the natural world. "The human being created in the image of God is to cultivate and preserve the community of creation and to exercise dominion in a certain form—namely, a form that bears responsibility for weaker creatures" (448).

This signifies a turn to more functional readings of the divine image in human persons, although even these now face the charge of an excessive anthropocentrism. It is not so much that the *imago Dei* is identified with a defining component as that the whole person functions in a distinctive way under the rule of God. In some respects, this more modest reading of the *imago* is successful in making sense of its original context in the key Genesis passages while also being consistent with the psychosomatic unity of the self whether in Hebrew or contemporary anthropology. Whether we read the Hebrew verb *rada* in terms of dominion or stewardship, the proximity of this command to the *imago* verses might confirm this functional reading. On the other hand, this simpler interpretation tends to shift the problems rather than resolve them. The issue of *which* functions are exclusively performed by human beings is not readily discerned in Genesis 1:26–27. So, if the *imago* texts no longer enable us to answer what the human being is or typically does, then we will have to find other ways of tackling this problem.

A DIFFUSED INTERPRETATION

The divergent readings of the *imago Dei* in the reception history of Genesis 1:26–27 might suggest that there is insufficient textual support fully to resolve these disputes. The absence of any sustained reflection on the concept elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible may itself provide some scope for a more “diffused” reading of this text that, in turn, can generate other possibilities for theological anthropology. In what follows, I shall attempt to sketch this rather different approach that seeks to make a virtue out of a necessity.

The Hebrew terms for image (*tselem*) and likeness (*demuth*) appear to draw upon notions from Egyptian and Mesopotamian culture in which a local ruler, viceroy, or physical statue can “image” the king.⁴ While this might imply the aforementioned functional reading of the *imago Dei* by which human beings exercise God’s rule upon the earth, there are two reasons for hesitation. The first is that the image of God appears to be reflected by the whole human race rather than particular individuals deputed to exercise authority. Second, we know from elsewhere in Genesis that the divine presence is not mediated through human agents so much as displayed before human beings in a series of theophanies. The transcendence of God is signaled more by an appearance *before* people rather than a presence mediated *through* them. In this respect, human beings do not have a sacramental significance in the Hebrew Bible, even although they fulfill a divine role in relation to others.

We should also consider the possibility that the inclusion of the key text in Genesis 1:26–27 may have been a later introduction in the P (Priestly)

source to complement earlier appearances of the *imago Dei* in Genesis 5:1–3 with its bare reference to creation in the image of God, and Genesis 9:6 with its prohibition on the taking of human life on the ground that it is created in God’s image.⁵ These later instances are not so much explanatory of an initial citation in Genesis 1:26–27, but instead precursors to what became the more familiar adaptation of the concept. So, Genesis 5 might have been the earlier beginning of the P source that was later expanded by a further sequence of events which preceded it, thus setting it in context. According to this reading, Genesis 1 represents a new prologue that was placed at the front of a composite work and which offers a programmatic summary that anticipates later themes in P and non-P. The deliberate juxtaposition of image and likeness seems to confirm this more developed use of these related concepts. This, however, suggests that the *imago Dei* might be better understood as a marker or signifier of a history that will unfold than a substantive notion that is central to Hebrew anthropology. What it signifies is that human beings have a central and distinctive place in the story that is about to be told. They are to become the object of divine address and encounter in a wide variety of ways, beginning in Genesis 2 but extending to the history of Abraham and his seed. The story that is about to be narrated is the story of human beings and God, although other actors are also present—it is not only the God-human relationship that is constituted by the creation of heaven and earth. While the *imago Dei* signifies here our identity as God’s covenant partners, what this entails will require subsequent narration in the stories of Noah, Abraham et al.

This reading of the text follows Westermann’s analysis in important respects. It defuses the issue of what anthropological component the *imago* specifies while, in turn, diverting attention to other portions of the Hebrew Bible. One might see the text as indicating in a preliminary way *what* human beings are—they are situated within the created order in a particular way. As the addressees of God, a response is required of them. Beyond this, however, the text does not really resolve speculation as to what human beings are—the lack of interest in the *imago Dei* after the opening chapters of Genesis indicates that it is not the core concept of a developed anthropology, nor should it be.⁶ It is not as if there is some elusive ingredient that once located would explain how and in what ways human beings are distinguished from all other earthly creatures.

In pointing to a universal story of encounter between God and human beings, this account of the *imago* has an anticipatory significance. It attests not an ontology of the human so much as the heralding of a story that will unfold. Within this story, other creatures can also take their appointed place, hence avoiding any sense that a theological account of the human as created in the image and likeness of God must lead to the denigration of nonhuman creatures (see Deane-Drummond 2012). As a somewhat

deflated reading of the Genesis text, which in the past has suffered from an overdetermination of meaning, it can also facilitate the more eschatologically oriented use of the concept in the New Testament. At least three New Testament passages (Colossians 1:15; 1 Corinthians 15:49; 2 Corinthians 4:4; with Hebrews 1:3 as a functional equivalent) suggest that Christ is the true image (*eikon*) of God and that our destiny is to receive that image as we are raised to new life. This is a rather different employment of the *imago* concept in the context of our final fulfillment and it needs to be recognized in this discrete and alternative sense, rather than attempting a Procrustean strategy of forcing different Scriptural usages into a single framework of meaning. In this latter sense, Jesus alone is truly the image of God; others become likewise by “imaging the image” (Kelsey 2010, Vol. 2, 1008ff). It is not bestowed originally but is gifted eschatologically. By connecting these somewhat equivocal uses of the *imago* to different settings in creation and Christology, we can also avoid the implication that redemption is the return of the human being to a perfect and aboriginal condition. Jesus does not restore what was lost in the Garden of Eden, so much as raise us to the estate that God intends, this being revealed proleptically in his resurrection from the dead. Recognition of these different usages of the concept might spare us from rather sterile Protestant disputes about whether the image of God is lost at the fall or merely defaced in some way before being restored. In addition, this uncoupling of the different senses of the *imago Dei* may have the added advantage of showing why the historical Jesus does not require the historical Adam. There is no exact parallelism between what the image of God is and how it was lost with the way in which it will subsequently be regained.

EXCURSUS—KELSEY ON THE *IMAGO DEI*

David H. Kelsey’s criticisms of the uses of the *imago Dei* as a systematic and organizing principle in Christian theology are both instructive and cautionary (2010, Vol. 2, 895–1051). His contention is that the largely incommensurable uses of the concept in the Old and New Testaments prevent any single exegetical pattern emerging. An acute difficulty concerns the idea that the *imago* is in some sense given through Christ, either sacramentally (now) or eschatologically (in the future). This prevents the concept being deployed to describe human life more generally, which is precisely the direction in which Genesis 1 points. Theological attempts to unite these different exegetical uses generate further difficulties when the *imago* is held to be defaced or lost at the Fall, again a view for which there is no exegetical support in the Hebrew Bible. Human beings, whether prelapsarian or postlapsarian, inside or outside the church, are made in the image and likeness of God.

By contrast, a schematizing of the different Scriptural uses of the *imago Dei* is attempted in Moltmann's *God in Creation*, where he stratifies the three notions of the created image, the messianic image, and the eschatological image (1985, 215–243). This sequencing is attractive and Moltmann (1985) displays a sure-footed touch in arguing initially that the created image concerns not some element of our human constitution but the whole of human existence. Yet, his attempt to integrate all three notions into a drama of sin, redemption, and eschatological fulfillment runs into trouble with the introduction of a distinction between our relating to God and God's relating to us. The former is lost through sin but the latter remains so that our created existence continues to be determined by God's love. This becomes an attempt to explain how and why the human agent can be considered *simul iustus et peccator*. But this move, while working within its own parameters, fails to connect with the ways in which Moltmann has already characterized human existence as representing God in all its facets. In failing to distinguish adequately rather different questions about what we are and how we should live, Moltmann imposes upon the Scriptural material a single organizational pattern, based upon the *imago* concept, which it lacks. This may explain why Kelsey, by contrast, deliberately delays any sustained discussion of the *imago* until the final codas of his long two-volume study of theological anthropology.

Kelsey's solution is largely to reserve the use of the *imago Dei* for its Christological and eschatological contexts. This enables us to answer the *who* and *how* questions of human existence but not the rather different question of *what* is a human being, a question that belongs more to the plot line of creation than to the stories of redemption and eschatological consummation. While these stories are integrated in important ways, they remain different narratives that are more clearly and unsystematically separate than in previous theological projects. As a result, the *imago Dei* does little work in the context of his theology of creation, Kelsey preferring to draw upon a wider range of Scripture resources, particularly those from the Wisdom tradition. The attractions of this approach are that its separation of discourses alongside his careful exegesis of Scriptural passages produces a more supple and differentiated account of theological anthropology that avoids the Procrustean nature of earlier attempts to systematize theology around the *imago* concept. In this respect, it is a deflationary strategy that produces some real gains, not least in avoiding the overdetermination of the Genesis 1–3 narratives in Christian theology.

But whether the concept of the *imago Dei* can be withdrawn altogether from creation theology is less certain. Its early appearance in the Hebrew Bible has ensured its place in important anthropological and ethical settings throughout the history of the church. The discarding of the notion in this context is hard to accomplish, given the ease which it can be used to express key ideas in Jewish and Christian thought. My own proposal

therefore seeks to retain it in the context of describing human existence everywhere and not only *en Christo*, but only as a theme that permits different and occasional variations, each of these requiring to be situated in wider narrative accounts of what it is to be human and of ways in which our lives are multiply characterized as embodied, mortal, social, responsible, fragile, blessed, and many other things besides. What the *imago* concept does not enable is some shortcut to identifying a single property or function that differentiates us from the other animals and which may be considered godlike in some privileged sense. Nor is it a moral concept that might suggest human virtue or justification in the presence of God. Here, again, it cannot be seen as denoting a single attribute or component that signals an ontological or ethical affinity with the divine nature. Within the theology of creation, our being made according to the divine image simply points to those forms and conditions that characterize human life in community. These become the locus of subsequent divine address and interaction in Scripture, the setting for a drama that unfolds, including the form that the incarnation takes. But to overload the concept of the *imago Dei* is a mistake in the theology of creation, not only in relation to the exegetical adequacy of such a move but also in relation to the significant distortions that can arise from using it as an organizing concept in one's systematic theology. For this critical insight into a long theological tradition, we are indebted to Kelsey's ground-breaking study.

THE *IMAGO DEI* AND HUMAN EVOLUTION

Despite Kesley's important strictures, the *imago Dei* in its setting in Genesis 1 can still serve a theological purpose. The positioning of the concept at the front of the Bible enables us to develop some important aspects of Biblical anthropology that may prove significant in a dialogue with theories of human evolution. For example, a salient feature of Genesis 1:26–27 is its universal scope. We cannot think of any human being as not bearing the image of God. To this extent, the use of the *imago Dei* can be ethically significant as it has been in Judaism with its less philosophically speculative tendencies (e.g., Altmann 1968). Since the whole human race is created in the image of God, this determination is restricted neither to prelapsarian Adam nor to the covenant people. To this extent, we must assume that all human beings are addressed by God before and beyond the appearance of Abraham in the history of Israel. In some sense, human existence must always be understood as a religious existence, a theme taken up later in the Hebrew Bible where peoples other than Israel are positively related to God's providential action. The prehistory of Genesis 1–11 points to ways in which all the peoples of the earth are theologically determined. Reminders of this are offered elsewhere in the canon, for example, in the healing of Naaman the Syrian, and in Jonah's mission to Nineveh.

Other significant aspects of human existence seem to be assumed in the subsequent unfolding of the human relationship with God. The divine encounter is a social event. It is peoples who are addressed by God and are the subject of divine promise, even when this is communicated to representative individuals, such as the patriarchs, Moses, and the prophets. The encounter is also ethical in that the demands, judgments, and gifts of God require concepts of mercy, kindness, and justice. It is received by embodied agents who are rooted in the natural world. They may be only a little lower than the angels in terms of their relationship to God and their appointed place in the cosmos (Psalm 8), but they are also creatures of dust in all their transience and frailty (Psalms 90 and 144).

It is not only within social groups that human beings are addressed but also as persons. While there is a danger of reading into the text later assumptions, it seems that the address of God establishes a set of relations with embodied humans that are marked by freedom, interaction, responsiveness, dependence, and love. These characterize the relations both between God and human beings, human beings and the creation, and human beings themselves.⁷ This again militates against an essentialism in which only some are paradigmatically human. By being born of a woman, we are all set within a nexus of flesh and blood relations that characterize human existence under God.

Kelsey has also drawn attention to the proximate contexts in which human beings know and serve God, in particular the wisdom literature that underscores the importance of the quotidian as ordained by God (2010, Vol. 1, 190ff). Often these proximate contexts have been ignored by theologians who moved too swiftly to the story of redemption, as if Genesis 1–2 were merely the prelude to Genesis 3 and the story of a subsequent rescue. This has led to the constriction of anthropology in Christian theology with human existence too exclusively characterized by its existential plight for which redemption in Christ and the ministrations of the church were offered as the remedy. By contrast, Kelsey wishes to establish distinct though interrelated plotlines for creation, salvation, and eschatological consummation in order that each might display its own integrity. This strategy enables him to say more about God's good creation and the place of human beings in it than is generally achieved in a preface to the doctrine of salvation. Our imaging of God in everyday existence is not confined to some religious province of life but is expressed in a multitude of human practices, institutions, and forms of life. As a teacher of wisdom rooted in Hebrew traditions, Jesus himself points to the presence of God in the ordering of the quotidian. His commendation of birds of the air and the lilies of the field recalls the providential order of the natural world celebrated in the wisdom literature. Here, the warning of Bonhoeffer (2010) remains salutary:

Only when one knows that the name of God may not be uttered may one sometimes speak the name of Jesus Christ. Only when one loves life and the earth so much that with it everything seems to be lost and at its end may one believe in the resurrection of the dead and a new world. Only when one accepts the law of God as binding for oneself may one perhaps sometimes speak of grace. And only when the wrath and vengeance of God against God's enemies are allowed to stand can something of forgiveness and the love of enemies touch our hearts. Whoever wishes to be and perceive things too quickly in a New Testament way is to my mind no Christian. (2010, 213)

One of several gains here resides in a providential account of human existence not directly touched by the salvation history recorded in Scripture. This is surely important given our knowledge of how long human beings have inhabited the earth prior to the recorded history of the Bible. All people image God and can do so in mundane ways that relate to the typical quotidian features of embodied social existence. For the wisdom literature, everyday existence does not require to be characterized as fallen from an initial state of perfection and thus in need of recovery and restoration. As finite, it is fragile, vulnerable, and ambiguous but this is part and parcel of the created world that is declared good. Its quotidian life is marked by typical practices, these including farming, manufacturing, managing households, child rearing, education, government, and science. Within this more capacious creation theology, there is scope for accommodating under divine providence long stretches of history and prehistory through which these practices developed. An account of creation that includes an anthropology of the quotidian is better placed to understand the evolutionary history of human beings as expressive of the wisdom and delight of God in creatures, especially human ones, than a theological anthropology that moves too rapidly from the definition of the *imago Dei* to the story of fall and redemption.

CONCLUSION

The concept of the *imago Dei* requires to be treated in this diffuse manner, rather than continuing the search for a single ingredient of which it is the referent. To this extent, the theology of creation could probably manage without it, although its prominence in the tradition together with its place in the opening chapter of the Bible instead necessitate some repair work. A simple discarding of the concept under a theology of the first article today would be prone to misunderstanding, as if tantamount to the affirmation that human beings were *not* created or sustained according to the image of God.

The *imago Dei* names us as God's creatures of flesh and blood, distinguished from, yet related to the other creatures of the earth in our ways of life. Yet, it must do this as a signifier of the human condition before

God rather than the specification of some elusive ontological or ethical ingredient. It is a mistake to assume that the failure of philosophers and theologians in the past to identify a key element corresponding to the *imago* could be remedied by modern science. To describe the ways in which God's wisdom is manifested in the divine image requires more patient and mundane description of human life drawn from other sections of the Hebrew Bible. This, in turn, can be complemented by the different and more eschatological sense in which Christ is the image of the people we shall become. And in following this route deeper into the traditions of Scripture, we may discover resources that can enrich conversation with other fields of enquiry, while avoiding some of the pitfalls of the past.

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NOTES

1. Philo appears to have been the first Jewish theologian to develop this identification of the *imago* with our spiritual capacities. See the survey of the history of interpretation in Westermann (1984, 147–58) and also the discussion in van Huyssteen (2006, 111–62).
2. For discussion of Calvin's anthropology, see Partee (2008, 80–105).
3. This theological *Tendenz* is criticized by McClintock Fulkerson (1997, 99–115).
4. Here, I am following Westermann (1984).
5. I am indebted here to Auld (2005, 116, 259–62).
6. Westermann (1984, 158) also notes that this reading of the human being as addressee of God avoids any collision with passages such as Isaiah 40:18ff, where God is incomparable and not to be depicted in images.
7. This is developed by Fretheim (2005).

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