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Man as the Image and Likeness of God

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The understanding of man as the image and likeness of God, fundamental for the development of Christian thought, is rooted in the first chapter of the Bible: “God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth’” (Gn 1:26). These words which complete the process of creation should be understood in the context of Yahweh’s absolute transcendence, which was safeguarded by the Old Testament ban on making graven images of God, as only man is the true image of Yahweh.

In the New Testament, the term “the image of God” refers primarily to Christ. The Second Letter to the Corinthians explains why some listeners reject the Gospel: “the god of this world (οὗ θεοῦ τοῦ αἰῶνος) has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ (τοῦ φωτισμοῦ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τῆς δόξης τοῦ Χριστοῦ), who is the image of God (εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ)” (2 Cor 4:4). The concept “εἰκὼν” has an ontological meaning here, since in Christ the essence of God and his glory (ἡ δόξα) has been revealed. In the Letter to the Colossians, the Christological expression “He is the image (εἰκὼν) of the invisible God” (Col 1:15) begins the hymn (Col 1:15-20), whose main theme is Christ’s divinity and his role as the only mediator in the work of creation and redemption.

The ethical meaning of εἰκὼν derives from its Christological meaning. The Letter to the Romans states that in God’s plan of salvation, believers are “to be conformed to the

image of his Son (th/ j eivko,noj tou/ ui`ou/), in order that he might be the first born within a large family” (Rom 8:29). In its ethical meaning, “eivkw.n” has a relational character, since it speaks of the special bond between believers and the Savior. The Letter to the Colossians makes mention of this bond referring to the creation account in the Book of Genesis: “Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator (katV eivko,na tou/ kti,santoj auvto,n)” (Col 3:9-10). The spiritual transformation of the Christian which happens as a result of following Christ (*imitatio Christi*) is a renewal of the image of God which was “inscribed” in every man in the act of creation and later deformed by the reality of sin.

The biblical truth about man’s creation in the image of God became an important theme of reflection for the Fathers of the Church, both Greek and Latin, and reached its most complete formulation in the theology of St. Augustine. *Imago Dei* also formed an important part of theological reflection for scholastic theology, for the the Cistercian, Franciscan and Dominican schools among others. In the theology of the Rhineland and Carmelite mystics the Christological and soteriological understanding of *imago Dei* was supplemented by an ascetic interpretation – similarity to Christ, who is the image of God, is possible only through the ascetic and spiritual purification of the soul from all other images.

Leo Scheffczyk notes that the concept of *imago Dei* has lost its significance in those modern theological currents in which the relation with biblical thought has been seriously weakened. In some currents of negative theology, for example in dialectic and existential theology, or in the theology of the death of God, the concept of *imago Dei* has been rejected as excessively anthropomorphic. Political theology, on the other hand, has rejected this concept because of its connection to anthropological individualism, which is not capable of a critique of unjust social, political or economic structures.

We owe the contemporary renaissance of the concept of *imago Dei* in Catholic theology to the Second Vatican Council, where it finds its primary expression in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. The history of this document is well known, and there is no need to review it here. It is important to note, however, that the concept of “*imago Dei*” appeared in Schema XIII as a fruit of the efforts of its authors to root the Constitution in biblical theology and to present a Christian anthropology in the text. This anthropology, which begins with an inductive or phenomenological description of the experience of modern man, was meant to provide Christian answers for urgent questions posed by contemporary society.

The concept of *imago Dei* appears already in the first section of the first part of the Constitution, which presents the foundation of Christian anthropology: “Sacred Scripture teaches that man was created ‘in the image of God,’ is capable of knowing and loving his Creator, and was appointed by Him as master of all earthly creatures that he might subdue them and use them to God’s glory” (GS 12). The biblical truth about man being the image of God is presented as the ultimate foundation for the dignity of the human person, and, at the same time, human freedom is emphasized as a special sign of God’s image in man (cf. GS 17).

The first chapter of the Constitution, devoted to the subject of human dignity, ends with a presentation of the Christological understanding of *imago Dei* in the New Testament:

He who is ‘the image of the invisible God’ (Col 1:15), is Himself the perfect man. To the sons of Adam He restores the divine likeness which had been disfigured from the first sin onward.... The Christian man, conformed to the likeness of that Son Who is the first born of many brothers, received ‘the first-fruits of the Spirit’ (Rom 8:23) by which he becomes capable of discharging the new law of love (GS 22).

The renewal of God's image in man is a fruit of the action of the Holy Spirit who makes believers similar to Christ, the perfect image of the Father.

The theology of *imago Dei*, as present in the Council's documents, also has a social dimension. This is evident in the previously quoted following passage of the Constitution, which is very important for John Paul II's reflections:

Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when He prayed to the Father, 'that all may be one. . . as we are one' (Jn 17:21-22) opened up vistas closed to human reason, for He implied a certain likeness between the union of the Divine Persons, and the unity of God's sons in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for himself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself. (GS 24)

Scheffczyk notes the fundamental role that the concept of *imago Dei* plays in the Council's theology, although it does not appear frequently in Vatican II documents, and its content is not discussed in a systematic manner. Scheffczyk writes thus about the importance of the anthropological dimension of this concept:

theology after the Council must undertake again this truth and present its richness; this task was not undertaken systematically by the Council. Therefore, a further reflection needs to be conducted in the direction indicated by the Council. The static and ontological view should be rejected for the dynamic view connected with the history of salvation, which enabled personalistic and Christological interpretation of this doctrine.

Anticipating further reflections in this chapter, we may say that in his catecheses on the theology of the body, John Paul II undertakes the Second Vatican Council's commitment to restoring the concept of *imago Dei* to its proper place in Christian anthropology and theology.

The “Philosophical Exegesis” of the Concept of *Imago Dei* in the Elohist and Yahwist Accounts of Creation

John Paul II’s roots his reflection on the creation of man in the image of God in the inspired text of Genesis: “God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gn 1:27). The papal interpretation of this fundamental text is twofold. First, the text needs to be interpreted in the context of the priestly account of creation (Gn 1:1-2, 4), and, second, this interpretation ought to be supplemented through a reflection on the theology of the older, Yahwist account of creation (Gn 2:4-25).

John Paul II emphasizes that in the priestly account, the creation of man is presented as the most important moment, the crowning, of the whole process of creation. This truth is evident in the language of the biblical text itself: “speaking about matter not endowed with life, the biblical author uses different predicates, such as ‘separated,’ ‘called,’ ‘made,’ ‘put.’ Speaking about beings that have the gift of life, by contrast, he uses the terms ‘created’ and ‘blessed’” (TB, 135). The account of the creation of man clearly differs from the account of God’s previous works; the creation of man, for instance, is preceded by a solemn introduction “as if it were a case of God deliberating before this important act” (TB, 135). Thus, the priestly account of the creation of man in the image of God points to the exceptional dignity and value of every human person in the eyes of God.

The priestly account of creation places emphasis on the inclusion of man in the whole of the visible cosmos. The creation of man is a part of the rhythm of the seven days of creation: “man is created on earth together with the visible world” (TB, 135) and is to subdue the earth (cf. Gn 1:28). In reference to man, however, the biblical narrative “does not speak of his likeness with the rest of creatures, but only with God” (TB, 135).

Paul Lamarche points out that “man, who is created by God, cannot be compared with nature or with the animals. Man, as the image of God, is ‘on the side’ of God” (Lamarche, col. 1402). Another commentary to the

biblical account of creation states that “in the oriental world as a whole, nature was deified and the presence of gods and spirits in its midst induced men to make them harmless by devoting a cult to them. In Hebrew religion there is no bond between man and nature. Thus salvation for man will not consist in the adoration of nature but in dominion over it” (Jacob, 153). Certainly, according to the Old Testament human dominion over nature was not absolute, because it was to unfold, as all human activity, within obedience to God’s law.

John Paul II observes that the fact that man is created in the image of God excludes the possibility of a cosmological definition of man: “Man can neither be understood nor explained in his full depth with the categories taken from the ‘world,’ that is, from the visible totality of bodies” (TB, 135). In the priestly account of creation, the essence of man can be defined only in relation to God, and “it includes at the same time an affirmation of the absolute impossibility of reducing man to the ‘world’” (TB, 135). The Pope emphasizes that the fundamental truth that man is created in the image of God and cannot be adequately defined by a cosmological definition applies equally to man and woman; it refers to what is common to them both.

According to John Paul II, Adam’s original solitude, as described in the second creation account, is helpful for understanding the truth that man was created in the image of God. Adam’s experience of original solitude, which comes to the fore in the process of naming the animals, starts with his discovery that he is different from all other animals: “but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner” (Gn 2:20). Alone in the created world, Adam experiences his uniqueness and superiority. To use a term from the first creation account, in the whole visible cosmos only Adam is created “in the image of God” (Gn 1:27).

In the Yahwist account—as in the priestly one—, Adam’s original solitude reveals the relational character of human existence: “*Man is ‘alone’: this is to say that through his own humanity, through what he is, he is at the same time set into a unique, exclusive and unrepeatable relationship with God himself*” (TB, 151). Man created as “the image of God” is

not defined primarily in relation to the world, but in relation to God as a “subject of the covenant and ‘partner of the Absolute’” (TB, 151).

In his analysis of the Yahwist account of creation, John Paul II distinguishes several constitutive elements of Adam’s original solitude: (1) consciousness, (2) the alternative of life and death, which reveals human freedom and (3) dominion over creation, which is connected with the experience of the meaning of the human body (cf. TB, 146-156). According to the Pope, the fundamental meaning of man’s original solitude has to do with his uniqueness in the whole of creation, which is rooted in his special relation with God, and with his superiority over all other creatures. As a result, each of the three elements of Adam’s original solitude -- consciousness, freedom and dominion -- reveals the truth about his uniqueness and superiority, and indirectly the truth about the image of God in man.

Another fundamental term which John Paul II uses to clarify the biblical truth about the creation of man in the image of God is the concept of *communio personarum*. The Pope observes that the reality defined by this concept is present in both creation accounts, though differently in each. The author of the first creation account states immediately that man was created in the image of God as man and woman (cf. Gn 1:27); the Yahwist author precedes the account of the creation of woman by pointing to the experience of Adam’s original solitude (cf. Gn 2:18-20). In both accounts, God’s act of calling man into existence ends with the creation of the communion of persons, the communion of man and woman.

John Paul II emphasizes that the statement that man was created in the image of God in the priestly account refers not only to every person individually, but also to the communion of persons:

Man became the image of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons, which man and woman form from the very beginning. The function of the image is that of mirroring the one who is the model, of reproducing its

own prototype. Man becomes an image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion. He is, in fact, “from the beginning” not only an image in which the solitude of one Person, who rules the world, mirrors itself, but also, and essentially the image of an inscrutable divine communion of Persons. (TB, 163)

As we have seen, the papal theology of *imago Dei*—which is a “philosophical exegesis” of the two creation accounts in Genesis—points to the fundamental elements of John Paul II’s theological anthropology. The creation of man in the image of God reveals man’s unique place in the cosmos, and points to the impossibility of understanding him “with the categories taken from the ‘world’” (TB, 135). Every human person is an *imago Dei*, and the *communio personarum* of man and woman created in love is the image of the community of the Trinity. These fundamental themes will be developed further in the next sections of this paper, which will also contain other elements of the Pope’s theology of *imago Dei*: the theological concept of “gift,” the sacramental meaning of the human body, the negative role of sin in the transmission of the *imago Dei*, as well as the Christocentric and eschatological understanding of the *imago Dei*.

Gift Reveals the Human Likeness to God

The concept of gift plays an important role in the papal search for that dimension of man which makes him similar to God. In the economy of salvation, God endows man with many gifts through creation and redemption, and, primarily, the gift of himself. The creation of the world itself is “a fundamental and ‘radical’ gift” (TB, 180). Redemption, too, is a gift, though “not only the fruits of redemption are a gift, but above all Christ himself is a gift” (TB, 493).

John Paul II emphasizes that God is a “complete” and “radical” gift primarily in the uncreated Trinitarian communion of divine persons (cf. TB, 501). The Pope writes as follows in the encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem*:

It can be said that in the Holy Spirit the intimate life of the Triune God becomes totally gift, an exchange of mutual love between the divine Persons and that through the Holy Spirit God exists in the mode of gift. It is the Holy Spirit who is the personal expression of this self-giving, of this being-love. He is Person-Love. He is Person-Gift. (DV 10)

If creation is the work of God, who is gift in his essence, then “every creature bears within itself the sign of the original and fundamental gift” (TB, 180). Every gift, however, indicates first of all a personal relationship between the giver and the recipient. Therefore, this “sign of the gift” takes a completely different form in the case of non-rational creatures and in the case of man.

According to John Paul II, the unique meaning of the “sign of the gift” in man is based on the fact that only man is “*able to understand the very meaning of the gift* in the call from nothing to existence. He is also able to respond to the Creator with the language of this understanding” (TB, 180). Only man is capable of comprehending that he is gratuitously endowed by the Creator and Redeemer; only man can consciously understand “the logic of gift,” in which one responds to a gift with a gift.

Czesław Miłosz, in his poem *Gift*, presents a moving account of human experience, which may be defined, in line with the Pope, as “an understanding of the meaning of gift”:

The day so happy.

Fog lifted early, I worked in the garden.

Hummingbirds were stopping over honeysuckle flowers.

There was no thing on the earth I wanted to possess.

I knew no one worth my envying him.

Whatever evil I had suffered, I forgot.

To think that I was the same man did not embarrass me.

In my body I felt no pain.

When straightening up, I saw the blue sea and sails.

The beauty of creation is experienced by the author of the poem as an unnecessary and free gift. It can be said that exactly this lack of necessity constitutes the essence of giving. As opposed to the exchange of goods in trade, a gift is always free and unnecessary.

The traditional Latin metaphysical term for the unnecessary and free character of creation is *contingentia* (cf. Thomas Aquinas, SCG I, 99 nr 824; I, 55 nr 1307; I, 85 nr 712-14).

The experience of being endowed with the beauty of creation, “an understanding of the meaning of gift,” evokes in Miłosz the experience of peace and internal harmony. It is worth noting that, as described in the poem *Gift*, the poet’s almost metaphysical opening to the gift has ethical consequences. There is a lack of greed, “There was no thing on the earth I wanted to possess”; a lack of jealousy, “I knew no one worth my envying him”; forgiveness, “Whatever evil I had suffered I forgot”; and the acceptance of oneself, “To think that I was the same man did not embarrass me.” The experience of the “understanding of gift” caused an interior change in the author.

Further reflection, which is not part of this work, could focus on the negative psychological and spiritual effects of being spiritually closed to God’s endowment or on an inability to perceive God as the Creator, as the Giver of gift, instead seeing him as a rival and enemy.

Another description of the experience of “an understanding of the meaning of gift,” this time not the gift of creation, as above, but the gift of redemption, can be found in the works of St Thérèse of Lisieux:

This grace, my Beloved, was only the prelude to the even greater graces which You willed to lavish on me; let me remind You of them now, and forgive me if it is foolish

to want to tell You once again about my hopes and desires which border on the infinite; yes, forgive me and heal my soul by fulfilling all of them. To be Your Spouse, my Jesus; to be a Carmelite; to be, through my union with You, a mother of souls, surely this should be enough? Yet I feel the call of more vocations still; I want to be a warrior, a priest, an apostle, a doctor of the Church, a martyr – there is no heroic deed I do not wish to perform.

The experiences described by St. Thérèse of Lisieux ought to be described “classic”: as fundamentally human, and at the same time very Christian: the experience of love leads to the desire to respond to love by love. Using the language of the catecheses, we may say that “an understanding of the meaning of gift” in creation and redemption ought to lead the recipient of the gift to answer the Creator with “the language of this understanding” (TB, 180). This answer consists in becoming a gift.

Undoubtedly, “an understanding of the meaning of gift,” which leads the recipient to answer with “the language of this understanding,” precisely describes the dynamic of love which creates human marriage and family. However, the law of the gift, which creates the communion of persons, concerns every person, including those who are unmarried. In the third part of the catecheses, John Paul II notes that a sincere self-gift also constitutes the essence of life in chastity: “when he chooses continence for the kingdom of heaven, man has the awareness that in this way he can realize himself ‘differently,’ and in some sense ‘more’ than in marriage, by becoming ‘a sincere gift for others’ (GS 24)” (TB, 427). In the exhortation *Vita Consecrata* on the consecrated life (1996), the Pope writes that the man who lives according to the three evangelical counsels reflects the dynamic of gift which exists within the Holy Trinity and also builds up the *communio personarum* in monastic communities and in the Church (cf. VC, 21). In the thought of John Paul II, therefore, gift is

revealed as the destiny of every person, male and female, and, at the same time, as a trace of God's creative and redeeming activity, *imago Dei*.

The Communal Dimension of *Imago Dei*¹

In the theology of John Paul II, mutual self-gift, understood as the existence of a person “for” another (cf. TB, 163), creates the communion of persons. The communion of persons, therefore, is indicative of a unity of persons which is created by mutual love. *Communio personarum*, thus understood, is the basis for an analogy between the human community and the divine community of the Holy Trinity.² In the catecheses we read that

The value in question is that of the body's spousal meaning, the value of a transparent sign by which the Creator – together with the perennial reciprocal attraction of man and woman through masculinity and femininity – has written into the heart of both the gift of communion, that is, the mysterious reality of his image and likeness (TB, 324; emphasis - JK).

The Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, frequently cited in the catecheses, is an important source for John Paul II's reflection on the communal dimension of the *imago Dei*:

¹ In discussing the similarity between the human community and the divine Trinity, theologians often use the term “social image of the Trinity” or “social dimension of *imago Dei*” (cf. John L. Gresham, Jr, *The Social Model of the Trinity and its Critics*, “Scottish Journal of Theology,” 46 [1993] 3, 325-43). John Paul II does not use these expressions even once in the catecheses, preferring the terms: “communal image of the Trinity” or “communal dimension of *imago Dei*” (cf. TB, 426). Undoubtedly, this linguistic and theological choice made by the author points to the importance of the concept “*communio personarum*” in the theology of *imago Dei*.

² It is important to remember that when John Paul II introduces the term “*communio personarum*” for the first time in his theology of the body, he is referring to the understanding thereof as presented in the documents of the Second Vatican Council (cf. TB, 162). As a result of the analyses already conducted in the third chapter of this book, we know that the term “*communio*” was used by the Council in four different, deeply interrelated theological meanings: community of the Persons of the Trinity (*communio Sanctissime Trinitatis*), community of local Churches (*communio ecclesiarum*), community of ministries in the Church (*communio munerum*) and the human communion of persons (*communio personarum*). Each of these four analogical terms refers to the others. The semantic relationship between the first and the last term is of particular importance for our present analyses. This relationship indicates that the term “*communio personarum*” intrinsically refers us to *communio Sanctissime Trinitatis*, and that there is a “certain likeness” between the human community and the divine communion of the Holy Trinity.

Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when He prayed to the Father, ‘that all may be one. . . as we are one’ (Jn 17:21-22) opened up vistas closed to human reason, for He implied a certain likeness between the union of the Divine Persons, and the unity of God's sons in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for himself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself (GS 24; cf. TB, 98).

The Constitution speaks of a “certain likeness” (*aliqua similitudo*) between the unity of the human community and the divine community of the Holy Trinity. *Gaudium et spes* 24, much like the writings of John Paul II, presents the theory that the unity of persons, which is the basis of this “certain likeness,” is created “through a sincere gift of oneself.” “Living in a reciprocal ‘for,’ in a relationship of reciprocal gift” (TB, 182), therefore, means imitating God in a twofold manner: First, it is a reflection of the interior structure of the Holy Trinity, where three Persons are a gift for one another. Second, man’s self-donation to another person reflects God’s relationship to every living person – it enables man to recognize the other person as “the only creature in the world which God willed for his or her own sake.” Being a gift for another, by which one creates the communion of persons, is therefore a way of being that is non-utilitarian and that affirms that the other was made “for their own sake.”

In his theology of the body, John Paul II clearly draws the limits of the analogy between the divine Trinity and the human community. The first boundary is ontological and protects the monotheistic teaching on the Trinity against tritheistic interpretations: uncreated Divine Persons, sharing one nature, exist completely in relation to one another in a way which is impossible for human existence. This theological truth of the Christian *credo* is accepted *a priori* in the catecheses, which are themselves based on the teaching on creation *ex nihilo*, and is not itself a theme for reflection.

For every human person living in history, that is for every “historical man” or “man of threefold concupiscence,” to use John Paul II’s terminology, the second fundamental limitation to the communion analogy of *imago Dei* is sin. Every sin, and particularly original sin, means “casting doubt in his heart [man’s - JK] on the deepest meaning of the gift, that is, on love as the specific motive of creation” (TB, 237). The Pope illustrates this thesis by showing how this “casting doubt” radically changed the original communion of Adam and Eve: “Almost unexpectedly, an insurmountable threshold appeared in their consciousness that limited the original ‘self-donation’ to the other with full trust in all that constituted one’s own identity and at the same time diversity, female on the one side, male on the other” (TB, 247). Sin caused human sexuality to become “an ‘obstacle’ in man’s personal relationship with woman” (TB, 248-249), which in turn led to the destruction of “the original relationship ‘of communion’” (TB, 249). Treating the other person as an object, especially in the dimension of his or her sexuality, introduced shame and fear to the mutual relationship of man and woman. Appropriation replaced mutual belonging (cf. TB, 261-262).

The Body as a Sign of *Imago Dei*

John Paul II, inspired by biblical categories of thought, considers the human body as the only possible way that man can exist in the world; man is simply a “body among bodies” (TB, 152). Therefore, the creation of man in the image of God also concerns the creation of the human body: “Man, whom God created ‘male and female,’ bears the divine image impressed in the body ‘from the beginning’; man and woman constitute, so to speak, two diverse ways of ‘being a body’ that are proper to human nature in the unity of this image” (TB, 179). This unity of the image of God, therefore, concerns what is common to man and woman –human

nature, which always exists in the form of a specific sex, male or female. Thus the image of God refers to “humanity itself in all the truth of its male and female duality” (TB, 237).

John Paul II writes that created man was “endowed with a deep unity” of what is male and female (TB, 164). Human masculinity and femininity, as expressed in the body, are two “incarnations” of the same metaphysical solitude before God and the world – *two reciprocally completing ways of “being a body” and at the same time of being human* – as two complementary dimensions of self-knowledge and self-determination and, at the same time, *two complementary ways of being conscious of the meaning of the body...* femininity in some way finds itself before masculinity, while masculinity confirms itself through femininity. (TB, 166)

John Paul II calls attention to the constitutive role of the human body in creating the *communio personarum* of man and woman. Certainly, the communion of man and woman exceeds the physical dimension and concerns every part of human existence. However, at the same time, the body is “the constitutive element” (TB, 168) of the marital union of man and woman, when two become “one flesh” (cf. Gn 2:24). In this way, the human body participates in the dignity of the image of God in the communion of persons:

the human body was from the beginning a faithful witness and a perceptible verification of man’s original “solitude” in the world, while becoming at the same time, through masculinity and femininity, a transparent component of reciprocal giving in the communion of persons. Thus, in the mystery of creation, the human body carried within itself an unquestionable sign of the “image of God” and also constituted the specific source of certainty about this image, present in the whole human being. (TB, 241)

The place of the human body in the theology of *imago Dei* was a subject of various controversies in the history of Christian thought. For the Elohist author of the first creation

account in the Book of Genesis, the question whether the image of God is present in the human soul or in the human body would be incomprehensible, because according to Hebrew thought man is a unity of the spiritual and the corporeal. Gerhard von Rad notes, however, that if we had to choose one alternative, while remaining simultaneously in the Hebrew sphere of thought, then the *imago Dei* would concern physical likeness.

Edmund Jacob similarly states that: “Man is representative by his entire being, for Israelite thought always views man in his totality, by his physical being as well as by his spiritual functions, and if choice had to be made between the two we would say that the external appearance is perhaps even more important than spiritual resemblance. The Old Testament teaches in fact that in man’s exterior aspect there is a beauty and dignity found in no other living being.”

Among the Fathers of the Church, two lines of interpretation in regard to the place of the body in the theology of *imago Dei* can be detected. Syrian exegetes (Ireneus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Pseudo-Clemens) emphasize that the image of God is present both in the body and in the soul of man. This understanding frequently accompanies the Christological interpretation of *imago Dei* which presents the human person as created *ad imaginem* of God’s incarnate Son. On the other hand, representatives of the Alexandrian school (Clemens of Alexandria, Origen) teach that the image of God is realized primarily in the spiritual sphere of man. Man is the living image of God to the extent that he participates in the life of the spirit. The Fathers then point to the spiritual characteristics which make the soul similar to God: immateriality, indestructibility, freedom, *apatheia*.

The Alexandrian understanding of the place of the body in the theology of *imago Dei* was accepted by the Cappadocian fathers, and also by the most outstanding theologian of Christian antiquity, St. Augustine. Indeed, the idea that the spiritual part of man is the place

where the image of God is realized has dominated the development of Christian theology throughout the ages.

Thomas Aquinas states that “Man is said to be to God’s image (*ad imaginem Dei*) not because he has a body (*non secundum corpus*), but because of his superiority to other animals (*secundum id quod homo excellit alia animalia*)... This superiority man owes to reason and intellect (*quantum ad rationem et intellectum*). So that man is to God’s image because of his intellect and reason (*secundum intellectum et rationem*), which are not bodily characteristics (*incorporea*)” (STh I, 3, 1).

At times, under the influence of neo-Platonism or radical spiritualistic currents, this perception that the image of God is limited to the soul has led to some extreme interpretations, in which the image of God did not refer to the body at all. For instance, Origen.

A contemporary author argues that nowadays the reflection about man is practiced “in the shadow of the body.” Certainly, this insight refers also to the attempts made by contemporary theological anthropology to once again find a place for the human body in the theology of the image of God. It seems that John Paul II’s reflections, as presented above, should be interpreted in this way.

The Influence of Sin on the Image of God in Man

The influence of original sin on the image of God in man has been the subject of long and numerous controversies in the history of Christian theology and has always been tied up with the way that the *imago Dei* is understood. The traditional interpretation, most common among theologians until the Reformation, linked the presence of God’s image in man with human nature itself. According to this interpretation, original sin did not cause the loss of *imago Dei* by man (cf. Gn 5:3), because even after he sinned man retained his rational nature.

The traditional theology did not hold, however, that original sin and individual sins have no influence on the image of God in man. Generally, theologians accepted the existence

of grades of perfection of the *imago*. St. Irenaeus, for instance, distinguishes the theological meaning of the two words used in the Elohist account of creation: image (εἰκων) and likeness (ὁμοιωσις) (cf. Gn 1:26).

It was not the intention of the ancient author of the Elohist account of creation that the distinction between image (*selem*) and likeness (*demut*) have significant theological meaning. In the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, these two Hebrew words were translated into Greek as: εἰκων and ὁμοιωσις. According to the old Platonic school, *eikon* was understood as a copy, or pattern, which always differed from the original; *homoiosis*, on the other hand, was understood as a perfect spiritual similarity to the divinity, toward which man should strive. It is impossible to know the intentions of the translator of the Septuagint, however, for he uses the terms εἰκων and ὁμοιωσις interchangeably. It was the Fathers of the Church who added a theological interpretation to the semantic difference between the two terms.

According to St. Irenaeus, in the act of creation man received the image and likeness of God, but while the image is connected with rational human nature, which is what differentiates man from the animals, likeness is connected with the grace of original innocence (*iustitia originalis*). Therefore, man retained the image of God after original sin, but lost the likeness which may be regained only through becoming similar to Christ, the perfect image of God. This retrieval of human likeness to God (ὁμοιωσις) is possible only through Christ's grace of redemption (cf. Col 1:15).

Reformation theologians broke with the ontological interpretation of *imago Dei* and introduced a relational and existential understanding of God's image and likeness. For the Reformers, image and likeness are to be understood as an actual bond with God, that can exist only in Christians living in grace and friendship with God. Such an understanding of the *imago Dei* led Reformation theologians to the conviction that original sin destroyed both the image and likeness of God in man. Modern Protestant theologians depart from this original position of the Reformation, admitting that the *imago Dei* was not completely destroyed in man after sin.

In his theology of the body, John Paul II emphasizes that every living descendent of Adam is created in the image of God. Original sin did not, therefore, completely destroy God's image in man. Moreover, after original sin, not only the individual but also the communal dimension of *imago Dei* was preserved and the marital *communio personarum* remains a sign of the mystery of the Trinity (cf. TB, 507-508).

However, John Paul II indicates that original sin has led to a certain blurring of God's image in man:

this man... was deprived of the supernatural and preternatural gifts that were part of his "endowment" before sin; in addition, he suffered damage in what belongs to nature itself, to humanity in the original fullness "of the image of God." The threefold concupiscence does not correspond to the fullness of that image, but rather to the damage, to the deficiencies, to the limitations that appeared with sin. (TB, 239-240)

In his theology of the body, John Paul II provides a theological interpretation of the "damage, the deficiencies, and the limitations that appeared with sin" in the human *imago Dei* through a reflection on the change in the meaning of original nakedness after the first sin of Adam and Eve.

According to the Book of Genesis, Adam and Eve notice their nakedness only after original sin. Only then does nakedness cease to be something that is matter of course, but becomes a problem and must be hidden with loin-cloths (cf. Gn 3:7). John Paul II explains the change in the meaning of nakedness after sin:

in the mystery of creation, the human body carried within itself an unquestionable sign of the "image of God" and also constituted the specific source of certainty about this image, present in the whole human being... The words, "I was afraid, because I am naked, and I hid myself" (Gn 3:10), attest to a radical change in this relationship. *Man*

in some way loses the original certainty of the “image of God” expressed in his body.
(TB, 241)

The radical change in the meaning of original nakedness after sin is linked with the appearance of shame in Genesis (cf. Gn 3:7). John Paul II stresses that it is not only a question of sexual shame, but also “immanent shame” which is

the shame produced in humanity itself, that is, caused by the innermost disorder in that through which man, in the mystery of creation, was “the image of God,” in his personal “I” as much as in interpersonal relationship, namely, through the primordial communion of persons constituted by man and woman together. (TB, 243)

The man who experiences “immanent shame” no longer identifies himself with his body. One could say that anthropological dualism expresses and systematizes this consciousness of man after original sin in a particular way.

The appearance of immanent shame reveals “a certain constitutive fracture in the human person’s interior, *a breakup, as it were, of man’s original spiritual and somatic unity*” (TB, 243-244). Consequently, man experiences difficulty in identifying with his own body and “he realizes for the first time that his body has ceased drawing on the power of the spirit, which raised him to the level of the image of God” (TB, 244). As a result of original sin, the human body is constantly in danger of being given over to the determinism of sexual instinct, and, therefore, instead of being similar to God in the reality of mutual self-donation, man becomes similar to the animals, “which like man have received the blessing of fruitfulness” (TB, 257).

The Christocentric Character of *Imago Dei*

It is important to remember that John Paul II's Wednesday catecheses on the theology of the body have *in genere* a Christocentric structure. The main part of the Catecheses is based on the three statements Christ makes in regard to the three states of human existence: original innocence (Mt 19:3-8; Mk 10:2-9); the fall which is permeated by the ethos of redemption (Mt 5:27-29); and eschatological fulfillment (Mt 22:24-30; Mk 12:18-27; Lk 20:27-40). John Paul II provides a "philosophical exegesis" of these three fundamental statements of Christ and it is precisely in the light of Christ's words that a theological anthropology is developed. The text of the Second Vatican Council's Constitution *Gaudium est spes*, often cited by the Pope, describes the Christocentric structure of the catecheses well:

The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear.

(GS 22)

Getting to know Christ and his teaching leads to a greater understanding of the mystery of man.

The first part of the catecheses is based on an analysis of Christ's answer to the Pharisees' question about the indissolubility of marriage (cf. Mt 19:3-8; Mk 10:2-9). In his statement, Christ refers to "the beginning" in order to root the truth about the indissolubility of marriage in the mystery of creation, despite later historical distortions and compromises. John Paul II notes, however, that Christ's reference to "the beginning" already includes the perspective of redemption. Christ's listeners are burdened with the legacy of original sin and the weight of their own sins, but in the meeting with the Messiah they are invited to accept the

gift of redemption. Only Christ's grace can enable them to undertake anew the task of realizing the destiny and plans given to man by the Creator in the mystery of creation.

The Christocentric character of the Wednesday catecheses means, above all, that the Redeemer who renews the image of God in created, sinful, and redeemed man is placed at the very center. Christ's gift of redemption helps man to rediscover that his life is a gift from the Creator and Savior, and to respond to this giving by becoming a gift himself. Christ's grace, which allows man to participate in the divine *communio personarum*, also renews man's ability to create the human communion of persons. For redemption is a calling to overcome the sinful desires of the flesh and to live by the ethos of redemption of the body, which transforms human *eros* (cf. TB, 313-321). Through moderation, purity of heart, and the gift of piety (*pietas*) every Christian who lives by the ethos of redemption may rediscover the spousal meaning of the body, which allows the building up of the *communio personarum* (cf. TB, 340-358).

John Paul II's interpretation of the passage from the First Letter to the Corinthians, in which St. Paul reflects on the mystery of the resurrection, reveals the Christocentric character of his theology of *imago Dei*:

What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. (1 Cor 15: 42-46)

St. Paul's reflection is based on the opposition of "the first Adam" and "the last Adam." John Paul II emphasizes that every human person in history should be able to find himself in this opposition:

By contrasting Adam and (the risen) Christ – or the first Adam and the last Adam – the Apostle in fact shows in some way the two poles in the mystery of creation and redemption between which *man is situated* in the cosmos. One could even say that man is “set in tension” between these two poles *in the perspective of eternal destiny* that concerns from the beginning to the end his same human nature. (TB, 406)

The “tension” between Adam and Christ indicates that every human person experiences the mystery of creation and redemption in his or her life. Moreover, only thanks to Christ’s grace of redemption is man able to fully understand and realize the “eternal destiny” contained in the mystery of creation in his life.

The key phrase for the theology of *imago Dei* as found in the excerpt from the First Letter to the Corinthians under consideration here reads as follows: “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust (τῆς εἰκόνας τοῦ κοίτου/), we will also bear the image of the man of heaven (τῆς εἰκόνας τοῦ ἐπουρανίου)” (1 Cor 15: 49). The Pope comments on this biblical sentence:

This “heavenly man” – the man of the resurrection, whose prototype is the risen Christ – is not so much the antithesis and negation of the “man of earth” (whose prototype is the “first Adam”) but above all his fulfillment and confirmation. He is the fulfillment and confirmation of what corresponds to the psychosomatic constitution of humanity in the realm of eternal destiny, that is, in the thought and plan of the one who created man from the beginning in his image and likeness. The humanity of the “first Adam,” the “man of earth,” carries within itself, I would say, *a particular potentiality* (which is capacity and readiness) *for receiving all that the “second Adam” became*, the heavenly Man, namely, Christ: what he became in his resurrection. (TB, 407)

It is worth noting that John Paul II chooses his words carefully so as not to suggest in any way that becoming similar to “the last Adam” (*imitatio Christi*) consists in a return to the

mystery of creation. For the redemption of man in Christ is not a repetition, but a completely new and definitive stage in the history of salvation. On the other hand, however, redemption, however, does not mean breaking with the “eternal destiny” contained in the mystery of creation, but is its “confirmation” and “fulfillment.”

The eschatological destiny of man therefore consists in becoming similar to the Resurrected Christ. In becoming similar to Christ man becomes His icon (*eikon*), which simultaneously means the fulfillment of all possibilities and potentialities of human nature as inscribed in man by God in the act of creation. If similarity to “the first Adam” means that every man living in history carries within himself an image and likeness of God, which has been deformed by sin, then only the eschatological becoming similar to “the last Adam,” who is “the image of the invisible God” (Cor 1: 15), will allow the human *imago Dei* to shine perfectly.

Eschatological Fulfillment

As is already made clear in the reflections of the previous section, John Paul II’s theology of *imago Dei* is characterized by an eschatological dynamism. Christ’s grace of redemption causes the recovery of the *imago Dei*, blurred by sin in man, and this action of sanctifying grace leads to the resurrection, when human beings “having regained their bodies in the fullness of the perfection proper to the image and likeness of God – having regained them in their masculinity and femininity – ‘will take neither wife nor husband’” (TB, 387). As has already been discussed, Christ’s words regarding the reality where they “do not marry” (cf. Lk 20:35) indicate that “the resurrection... means not only the recovery of bodiliness and the reestablishment of human life in its integrity, through the union of body and soul” (TB,

388), but also the advent of a new meaning of the human body which will be different from its procreative meaning.

Christ's statement that "those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead ... are like angels and are children of God" (Lk 20:35-36) is crucial for John Paul II's reflection on the new state of the human body after the Resurrection. The Pope describes the eschatological reality of being "like angels" and being children of God with the aid of two notions: spiritualization and divinization. Each of them refers to the full restoration and perfection of God's image and likeness in man, deformed as it was by sin. Spiritualization indicates "a new submission of the body to the spirit" (TB, 389):

In the resurrection, the body will return to perfect unity and harmony with the spirit: man will no longer experience the opposition between what is spiritual and what is bodily in him. "*Spiritualization*" signifies not only that the spirit will master the body, but, I would say, that *it will also fully permeate the body and the powers of the spirit will permeate the energies of the body.* (TB, 391)

According to John Paul II, eschatological divinization will consist in the unity of man with God and in human participation in God's Trinitarian life. Thanks to the loving gift of grace thus understood, eschatological man will obtain an authentic and mature personality that is "incomparably superior to what can be reached in earthly life" (TB, 392). This recovery of authentic subjectivity and identity will mean that the grace of divinization will embrace all of man, especially - given the context of the Papal theology of the body - his attitude towards his own body and his relationships with others. The mysterious likeness between created man and the Creator will find its perfect fulfillment in "*God's most personal 'self-giving': in his very divinity to man*" (TB, 393).

John Paul II stresses that eschatological man's participation in God's Trinitarian life will not suspend or break inter-human relations. Rather, it will bring about the perfect

realization and fulfillment of human *communiones personarum*. The truth about the communion of the saints (*communio sanctorum*), as stated in the *credo*, points therefore to “the perfect realization of the ‘trinitarian order’ in the created world of persons” (TB, 396). One could say that if the human communion of persons is the image of the divine communion of the Holy Trinity in the order of creation and redemption, then the communal *imago Dei* thus understood will find its fulfillment and perfection in the reality of heaven: “the concentration of knowledge and love on God himself in the trinitarian communion of Persons can find a beatifying response in those who will become sharers in the ‘other world’ only through realizing reciprocal communion commensurate with created persons” (TB, 396).

The Synthetic Character of John Paul II’s Theology of *Imago Dei*

In his comprehensive treatise on the theology of *imago Dei*, Stanley Grenz distinguishes two ways of understanding the *imago Dei*: one structural and the other relational. The structural understanding of *imago Dei*—the approach which clearly dominates the history of Christian theology—attempts to find and isolate that dimension of human nature which differentiates the human person from the animals and which make him to be in the image of God. A classic example of such an understanding of *imago Dei* is St. Augustine’s psychological analogy which finds the image of the Trinity inside the human mind.

The relational interpretation of God’s image in man emphasizes the living relationship and bond of love between God and man. Grenz finds examples of such an understanding of *imago Dei* in the theology of the Reformers: Martin Luther and John Calvin. Paul Ramsey, one of the commentators cited by Grenz, summarizes Calvin’s relational view of *imago Dei* in the following way:

The image of God ... should be understood as internal relation, thanks to which an obedient man as the mirror reflects God's will in his life and actions. ... The mirror in itself is not an image; the mirror reflects; the image of God is in the mirror. In this view, the image of God consists in man's attitude to God; or rather the image of God is reflected in man thanks to his attitude before him.

The sharp distinction drawn by Grenz between the structural and relational understanding of the *imago Dei* leads to a deformation of the rich heritage of Christian theology. Both dimensions of *imago Dei* are present in the thought of the great masters of Christian theology. St. Irenaeus is merely one example here. The relational and Christocentric understanding of the difference between *imago* and *similitudo* as laid out in his works was discussed earlier in this chapter in the context of the influence of original sin on the *imago Dei*. The structural dimension of *imago Dei* is also present in the theology of St Irenaeus, who claims that God's image in man consists in man's rationality.

Cf. St. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 4.4.3 (SC 100, 425). The theology of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas are quoted most frequently as examples of the structural view of *imago Dei*. For the account of the relational view of *imago Dei* in the thought of these two theologians.

Both the structural and relational dimensions of *imago Dei* are present in John Paul II's theology of the body. The structural understanding of *imago Dei* comes to the fore in the papal distinction between the cosmological and personalistic definitions of man: "Man can neither be understood nor explained in his full depth with the categories taken from the 'world,' that is, from the visible totality of bodies" (TB, 135). It is precisely this dimension of the human person, to which he owes his transcendence over material creation and other creatures, that constitutes the trace of *imago Dei* in man. The biblical experience of original solitude, therefore, is what reveals the structural dimension of *imago Dei* and, moreover, it can only be explained by means of aspects of human nature—such as consciousness, freedom and self-governance—which are responsible for man's superiority over other creatures.

The relational dimension of *imago Dei* in the thought of John Paul II is indicated primarily by the theological category of gift, which serves in the papal analyses as a fundamental tool for explaining the meaning of supernatural love (*agape, caritas*) and of the communion of persons in man's vocation. Man, in similarity to the divine Trinity who is Gift, is called to become a gift himself. "An identification of the sense of gift" of God's creation and redemption leads a Christian to answer God with "the language of this understanding" (TB, 180). In practice, this answer is realized through creating the communion of persons in its vertical and horizontal dimensions.

The relational dimension of God's image in man, reminiscent of the theology of St. Irenaeus, is present in the thought of John Paul II due to its Christocentric character, emphasized by the Pope through his application of St. Paul's distinction between "the first Adam" and "the last Adam" – Christ, the perfect image of God (cf. 1 Cor 15:46; Col 1:15).

No theological distinction is made between *imago* and *similitudo* in the theology of the catecheses. John Paul II uses both terms interchangeably.

Man, who is created in the image of God, can understand and realize his eternal destiny in life as communicated in the mystery of creation only by becoming similar to Christ - the Redeemer (*imitatio Christi*), which is possible only through the grace of redemption. Likeness to Christ will find its fulfillment in the eschatological mystery of the resurrection.

Noteworthy in the Wednesday catecheses is the importance that the Pope assigns to the communal dimension of *imago Dei*. Man is the image of God not only as an individual, but also as a communion of persons, which is formed by grace and supernatural love, and which reflects the reality of the Trinity. The communal or social image of the Trinity, so important for John Paul II, has rarely appeared in the history of Christian theology. In a historical survey of the social understanding of *imago Dei* one generally finds references to the theology of the Cappadocian fathers, and of Richard of St. Victor who argued in the twelfth century that the perfect love of God requires the existence of three Persons. However,

in Western Christianity, the theology of *imago Dei* was mostly dominated by the psychological model of St. Augustine, which was then taken up and adapted by St. Thomas Aquinas.

Currently, historians of theology point to a renaissance of the social model of the Trinity which began in the twentieth century. Claude Welch pinpoints the beginning of this renaissance among British Anglican theologians at the beginning of the twentieth century, and mentions among its later representatives the theologians of different Christian denominations such as Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Juan Segundo, Leonardo Boff, Joseph Bracken, and Kallistos Ware. In Catholic theology, it was the Second Vatican Council which was crucial for the present renaissance of the social image of the Trinity. The most important statement concerning this issue from *Gaudium et Spes* was quoted in the introduction to this chapter.³

Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God, put out by the International Theological Commission in 2002, sheds light on the stance the Church takes on the social dimension of *imago Dei*:

When one speaks of the person, one refers both to the irreducible identity and interiority that constitutes the particular individual being, and to the fundamental relationship to other persons that is the basis for human community. In the Christian perspective, this personal identity that is at once an orientation to the other is founded essentially on the Trinity of Divine Persons. God is not a solitary being, but a communion of three Persons. (*Communion and Stewardship*, 41)

Today, the concept of *imago Dei* arouses great interest among theologians and is often the main thrust for theological explorations, particularly in the area of theological

³ It should be emphasized that “carefully crafted” statements of the Constitution on the social dimension of *imago Dei* are the result of a long debate and compromise between many earlier ways of describing the phenomenon. For the Council’s discussion on the social dimension of *imago Dei* during the process of preparing the Constitution cf. Kupczak, *Komunijny wymiar*....

anthropology. The communal dimension of *imago Dei* seems to be an especially promising theological subject in the context of intellectual efforts to overcome modern individualism as well as to find a place for female experience of and thought about God in theology. Undoubtedly, in an era of increased inter-relatedness and of an ever greater dependency of people on one another, the development and deepening of the communal dimension of *imago Dei* theology remain an important task for Christian theologians.