

**The Human Person as *Imago Dei*:
Christian and Jewish Perspectives**

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requirements for the degree of PhD

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DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of PhD is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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**THE HUMAN PERSON AS *IMAGO DEI*:
CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH PERSPECTIVES**

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the evolution of the biblical concept of *imago Dei*. Written from the perspective of Christian theology, the thesis engages select Jewish and Christian voices in analysis of the shared theological premise that the human person is created in the image of God. The discussion will begin with the scriptural origins of the concept, drawing upon exegetical interpretations as well as the early perspectives of the Rabbinic and Patristic period. It will then offer a comparative account of the contributions of Maimonides and Aquinas, in their intellectualist conceptions of human distinctiveness. From there, the discussion will turn to the Christological appropriation of the concept in work of Karl Barth and then to the covenantal, dialogical interpretation of David Novak. In both of these thinkers, we will observe a rejection of the intellectualism of Aquinas and Maimonides in favour of relational interpretations which are, in their integrative understanding of the person as body and soul, more consistent with the biblical – and Rabbinic – view of the person. The desire for an integrated view of the person will also emerge as significant when the discussion turns to feminist engagements with the concept, which also emphasise the inclusive potential of *imago Dei*. The thesis will conclude with a consideration of the enduring relevance of the concept of *imago Dei* in the context of contemporary Jewish and Christian theology.

INTRODUCTION

The biblical concept of *imago Dei*, which is located at the intersection between our understanding of personhood and our concept of God, is the foundation of Jewish and Christian theological anthropology. Derived from the first Genesis creation account, the idea that the person is created in the image and likeness of God underpins the theological assumption that each human life has intrinsic value. Beyond its enigmatic and largely unelaborated primary statement in Genesis 1:26-27, and two further brief references elsewhere in the book of Genesis, the idea that the person is created in the image of God is accorded little consideration in the Hebrew Scriptures. However, despite the absence of much biblical reflection on the concept, an expansive interpretive tradition has ensued, which has made the concept of *imago Dei* the focal point in the quest to articulate human self-understanding, human distinctiveness and human relation to God. Written from the perspective of a Christian theologian, this thesis draws upon select Jewish and Christian voices to explore the evolution of the biblical concept of *imago Dei* at key moments of this interpretive history.

Taking an inclusive rather than a comparative approach, this study proceeds from the assumption that the *imago Dei* is a shared concept, which derives from a shared text, that has stimulated centuries of intellectual engagement in the Jewish and Christian traditions. Given the intention to trace the evolution of the *imago Dei* from its biblical origins to its interpretation in contemporary theology, drawing upon two distinct and internally diverse religious traditions, the parameters of this thesis present a significant challenge. Selectivity has been required and there is much of significance and wisdom that has not been explored in this thesis: for example, we have not included the treatment of *imago Dei* in early Hellenistic Judaism or in the mystical Kabbalistic tradition; neither have we drawn from the Reformers or from the perspectives of Eastern Orthodox theology. It has also been necessary to limit our Patristic analysis to two thinkers and our Christian engagement with gender to theologians largely drawn from the Roman Catholic context. That which *has* been included is intended to reflect the primary interpretive currents that have characterised the reception of *imago Dei* in the Jewish and Christian religious traditions: image and likeness; human distinctiveness; deification; intellectual apprehension of the divine; embodiment; dominion; sexual difference and relationality.

The thesis will take a narrative approach, beginning with the biblical origins of the

concept and concluding with the insights of contemporary theology. **Chapter One** will engage contemporary Jewish and Christian biblical scholarship to examine the scriptural origins of *imago Dei*, chiefly Genesis 1:26-27, the primary locus of the concept. Through engagement with biblical scholarship, we will attempt to uncover what the text might have meant for its original authors before we then proceed to explore what the text came to mean in some of the formative theological elaborations of the concept. Despite the absence of explicit theological reflection on the concept within the Hebrew Scriptures, the *imago Dei* re-emerges prominently in early Rabbinic literature, situated at the junction between theology and law. Such writings emphasise the physical dimension of our likeness to God and the halakhic implications of the concept, also invoking the *imago Dei* to underpin ideas of human unity and individual worth. We will then return to the Bible to discuss the emergence of the theme in the writings of Paul, the most significant influence on what the concept would come to mean in Christian theology. While Paul refers to our transformation into the fullness of the image after death, he also envisages a gradual increase in likeness to Christ through the modelling of our earthly lives after his example, an influential idea for the subsequent Patristic tradition. Turning then to the Patristic era, a time when reflection on the *imago Dei* flourished, we will engage the work of two contrasting thinkers, Irenaeus of Lyons and Augustine of Hippo. Although both thinkers emphasise human rational capacity as that which defines our distinctiveness, their contrasting interpretations of the second creation account result in markedly different theological anthropologies.

Chapter Two will address the interpretation of *imago Dei* in the philosophy of Moses Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas. Both thinkers exhibit a significant philosophical dependence on Aristotelian epistemology in their attempts to articulate the meaning of human distinctiveness and our connection to the divine. While both Maimonides and Aquinas define the *imago Dei* in terms of human intellectual capacity, their emphases differ. Maimonides restricts the *imago Dei* to those who actualise their intellects, offering a stronger intellectual focus and also exhibiting a certain elitism in his vision of intellectual perfection. Aquinas, in his tripartite vision of the image of God in terms of nature, grace and glory, envisions a gradual growth into the likeness of God, though his disassociation of women from the capacity to reflect the image colours our appreciation of the merits of this scheme. While both thinkers recognise the limits of human reason on account of our fallen nature, Aquinas, we will argue, places greater emphasis on the necessity of grace to illuminate the intellect.

The limits of human reason, acknowledged in the theology of Aquinas and Maimonides, present an insurmountable challenge for Karl Barth in his modern assessment of the capacity of the human intellect to know God. We thus find, in **Chapter Three**, a radically distinct Christian theology of *imago Dei* that severs the connection between the speculative intellect and the divine which characterised scholastic theology. According to the Christological derivation of Barth's theological anthropology, our understanding of personhood is entirely revealed by the Word of God. Our efforts to encounter God through intellectual contemplation are misguided and superfluous. Christ, the focal point of Barth's theology and the ground and limit of his theological anthropology, reveals both who God is and who we are as persons. We will discuss Barth's radically Christocentric interpretation of *imago Dei*, exploring the merits of a 'relational' interpretation that is characterised by a very limited sense of mutuality or human response to God's gracious election. How does this limitation affect the enduring relevance of the concept and how does Barth's theological anthropology, inextricable from his doctrine of the Word of God, function outside of the Christian context?

The quest to articulate revealed wisdom in a way that is philosophically intelligible in an inter-religious and non-religious context characterises the work of the contemporary Jewish theologian, David Novak, the subject of **Chapter Four**. Like Barth, Novak proposes a relational interpretation of *imago Dei*, though his covenantal theology allows for greater mutuality in the envisaged divine-human relationship. Novak's interpretation of *imago Dei* is particularly concerned with natural law, the law of God as it applies to all of humankind, discoverable by every rational person but established by the Jewish tradition in the Noahide laws. We will discuss the manner in which Novak's covenantal, Torah-centred approach to *imago Dei* informs his understanding of the relation between Jews and non-Jews and also the way in which the concept of *imago Dei* functions, for Novak, as the primary point of contrast between secular and religious understandings of personhood. This will illustrate the tension between Jewish religious existence and Western culture that is inherent in Novak's work, a tension that Novak retains in his attempt to bridge secular and religious modes of reasoning.

Chapter Five will explore the theological implications of sexual difference, taking the impetus from the situation of the reference to 'male and female' creation in the image of God in Genesis 1:27. The chapter will engage with Jewish and Christian feminist theologians who see in the concept of *imago Dei* a resource for an egalitarian theological anthropology. In response to the often hierarchical understanding of gender that has

characterised many notable interpretations of *imago Dei* – such as those of Augustine, Aquinas and Barth – feminist theological anthropology finds in Genesis 1:27 the strongest confirmation of the equal capacities of men and women to image God. Egalitarianism, however, does not imply sameness: it is possible to present an egalitarian approach to *imago Dei* in a manner that accommodates the assumption that sexual difference has meaning beyond our reproductive capacities. Although there is no consensus on the exact content of such meaning, the chapter will draw upon select voices from within the diverse fields of Jewish and Christian feminist theology to discuss the issues central to the debate: is the model of gender complementarity, which has traditionally been argued to encapsulate the biblical vision of male and female relatedness, conducive to the flourishing of women and men? How does the language we use to describe God affect our view of lived gender relations? How do we live out our creation in the image of God as male and female?

Chapter Six will offer some concluding reflections, drawing together the insights of the previous chapters before considering the central themes that have emerged in the thesis in the context of contemporary Jewish and Christian theology. Each of the diverse interpretations of the concept of *imago Dei* that we will encounter in this thesis is reliant upon ideas of human distinctiveness. Such ideas are potentially problematic, as regards the contemporary reception of the text, because of our increasing sensitivity to animal rights and our awareness that those attributes that were formerly regarded as distinctively human are now found in rudimentary forms in other animals. In this concluding chapter, we will explore the manner in which a theocentric idea of distinctiveness might be reconciled with our duty to care for the created world. Is it possible to emphasise our connectedness with the created world without weakening the ontological status of the person? We will also discuss the enduring relevance of the biblical concept of *imago Dei*, its interfaith potential and its relevance beyond the religious context.

Our narration of the evolution of the concept of *imago Dei* will uncover great diversity of insight, offering a range of resources from which to draw in elaborating a contemporary theological anthropology. We turn first to the beginning of the story, Genesis 1:26-27 in the Hebrew Bible.

CHAPTER ONE

THE CONCEPT OF *IMAGO DEI*: BIBLICAL ROOTS AND FORMATIVE INTERPRETATIONS

'Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth." And God created humankind in his image. In the image of God he created him; male and female he created them' (Gen 1:26-7).

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים, נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדֹמֹתֵינוּ; וְנִרְדּוּ בְדִגְתַּי הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם, וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-
הָאָרֶץ, וּבְכָל-הַרֹמֵשׁ, הָרֹמֵשׁ עַל-הָאָרֶץ.
וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ, בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ: זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה, בָּרָא אֹתָם.

Many of the biblical passages that have been accorded the most consideration throughout the expansive interpretive tradition receive relatively little attention in the Hebrew Scriptures themselves. Consider, for example, the proclamation of the oneness of God in the *Shema Yisrael* (Deut 6:4) or the theologically rich Eden narrative (Gen 2-3), neither of which re-emerge for consideration elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. The establishment of the *imago Dei* in Genesis 1:26-27 is a further example of a concept whose interpretation appears to outweigh its original biblical significance. For an idea that has carried so much weight in the interpretative tradition, the scriptural occurrence of the concept is very rare. This chapter will examine these references to the *imago Dei*, in particular Genesis 1:26-27, the primary locus for the concept, with two objectives: firstly, to explore what the text may have meant in its original biblical and extra-biblical context and, secondly, to discover what the text came to mean for key interpreters in the formative years of the Jewish and Christian religious traditions.

1.1 The Near Eastern Context of the Biblical Idea of *Imago Dei*

Almost all modern biblical commentaries note the importance of the Ancient Near Eastern context for understanding of Genesis creation account.¹ It is accepted that the nineteenth century rediscovery of comparable texts, such as the Babylonian *Enuma Elish*, offers the contemporary reader a certain insight into the concerns of the ancient writers of the Hebrew Scriptures, also illuminating possible areas of interdependence between the texts of neighbouring cultures.² Yet, while there are certainly striking similarities between the Genesis account and the parallel creation narratives of Babylon and Egypt, this should not take from our appreciation of the distinctiveness and profundity of the Genesis account.³ There are significant theological differences between Genesis and the texts of neighbouring cultures. In fact, the Genesis account implicitly denies the theology of the competing cosmogonies and can thus be understood to have polemic intent. For example, since Israel's God has no rivals, Genesis 1 contains 'no theomachy, or cosmic conflict among the gods, or victory enthronement motif.'⁴ Nahum Sarna notes a similar distinction in relation to the creation of humankind in *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian creation myth, and the Genesis account. Referring to the creation of the person in *Enuma Elish*, Sarna writes:

There he is almost incidental, fashioned as a kind of afterthought as a menial of the gods to provide them with nourishment and generally to satisfy their physical needs. The Book of Genesis seems to be emphasising the antithesis of this, for the very first communication of God to man [...] is an expression of divine concern for man's physical needs and well-being.⁵

¹ The late 19th century work of Hermann Gunkel has been most influential in this regard. Gunkel established the parallel between the creation account and its Babylonian counterparts in 1895 in *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006).

² J. J. M. Roberts notes that the 'value of ancient Near Eastern literature for the interpretation of the OT is profound, and that value is immediately apparent when one studies OT law, psalmody, or wisdom literature'. *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002), p. 44.

³ Parallels to Near Eastern literature such as *Enuma Elish* are discussed by Bruce Vawter in *On Genesis: A New Reading* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1977) and also by Gerhard von Rad in *Genesis: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1972), p. 58.

⁴ Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 32.

⁵ Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books 1966) p. 14. Joel Kaminsky writes that 'one of the most theologically innovative moves made in the P creation account is the high place accorded human beings. In the *Enuma Elish* humans are created from the blood of the rebel deity Kingu to alleviate the workload of the lower gods. In this view, human life is an endless task of low level servitude. In effect humans function as a type of guest workers created to help the lowest status inhabitants of the divine realm avoid chores they find demeaning'. 'The Theology of Genesis', in *The Book of Genesis*:

The Genesis use of the term ‘image’ illustrates this biblical distinctiveness. While parallel texts use ‘image’ to infer the superiority of the king over the people, the Genesis text uses the term to refer to every human person.⁶ In Genesis, Jon Levenson writes, the ‘entire race collectively stands vis-à-vis God in the same relationship of chosenness and protection that characterizes the god-king relationship in the more ancient civilisations of the Near East’.⁷ In this sense, Genesis 1:26 ‘appoints the entire human race as God’s royal stand in’.⁸ J. Richard Middleton provides us with a useful way of describing the distinctness of the Genesis *imago Dei* idea when he refers to the ‘democratization’ of Near Eastern royal ideology. The status that the *imago Dei* grants to every human person is, Middleton writes, ‘analogous to the status and role of kings in the ancient Near East vis-à-vis their subjects’.⁹

The acceptance of the ‘democratization’ idea should not lead to the assumption that respect for life was exclusive to the Hebrew Scriptures. J.J. M. Roberts’ comparative study of the biblical laws and the Laws of Eshnunna and the Code of Hammurabi illustrates the strong dependence of biblical law on extra-biblical law codes. He concludes that respect for life was ‘part of the legal tradition in the Near East and in Israel well before the formulation of the doctrine of the image of God in Genesis 1. Its author has simply undergirded received ethical and legal mores with theological reflection’.¹⁰ Therefore, in pointing to the possible distinctiveness of the *imago Dei* idea in its ‘democratization’ of royal ideology, we must not lose sight of the fact that respect for life was also propagated in extra-biblical literature.

1.2 The Biblical Context of *Imago Dei*

The primary reference to *imago Dei* arises in the context of the first creation account in Genesis 1. Before we look at this reference in detail, it is necessary to establish the biblical meaning of its component terms, image and likeness. The Hebrew word for

Theology, Reception and Interpretation, ed. by Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr and David L. Petersen (Boston: Brill, 2012), pp. 635-657 (p. 637).

⁶ Gerhard von Rad notes that the Pharaoh in Ancient Egypt was regarded as the image of God living on earth. *Genesis*, p. 58.

⁷ Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 114.

⁸ Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, p. 116.

⁹ J. Richard Middleton, J. R., *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), p. 121.

¹⁰ J. J. M. Roberts, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, p. 45.

image (צלם) transliterated as ‘*tselem*’, corresponds to the idea of duplication or similarity to the original. It is mentioned seventeen times in the Hebrew Bible, usually in a negative sense in relation to foreign deities, e.g., Num. 33:52, or to idolatrous images, e.g., 1 Sam 6:5. In the book of Ezekiel, the term *tselem* is used exclusively in relation to the condemnation of idolatry: ‘Because they made them stumble into guilt – for out of their beautiful adornments, in which they took pride, they made their images (*tselem*) and their detestable abominations – therefore I will make them an unclean thing to them’ (Ezek. 7:20).¹¹ The word for likeness, (דמות) ‘*demut*’, is used twenty-five times, most commonly in Ezekiel. It usually corresponds to the words ‘appearance’ or ‘similarity’ – e.g. ‘an appearance resembling (*demut*) a throne’ (Ezek. 10:1) – but it can also share the anti-idolatrous connotations of *tselem*.¹² In Isaiah 40:18, for example: ‘To whom, then, can you liken (*demut*) God?’

The continuous resistance of the Israelites to the idea that anything in the world could image God – what scholars refer to as Israel’s aniconic tendency – is the context against which the Hebrew *tselem* ‘*Elohim* can be understood.¹³ It is sinful to try to make an image of God, for ‘who in the skies can equal the Lord, can compare with the Lord among the divine beings?’ (Ps. 89:7) Yet although God cannot be adequately represented by images or objects, Israel, in her obedience, *can* be seen as an appropriate locus of the divine presence. It is this contrast between the arguably countercultural prohibition of fixed images of God and the designation of the person *as* the image of God that represents what Walter Brueggemann identifies as a ‘striking proclamation about God and about humanness’.¹⁴

There is one further point to make regarding the intra-biblical context of *imago Dei*. It relates to the unity of the human person, important in light of the intentions of the

¹¹ Hebrew Bible references follow the *Jewish Publication Tanakh Translation* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1985). A similar use of *tselem* occurs in Ezek. 16:17 and 23:14. J. K. Kutso argues that *imago Dei* plays an important – if implicit – role in Ezekiel’s theology, specifically as that which underlies Ezekiel’s aversion to idolatry. *Between Heaven and Earth: Divine Presence and Absence in the Book of Ezekiel* (Winona Lake: Biblical and Judaic Studies 7, 2000).

¹² *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. by Francis Brown, Wilhelm Gesenius, Edward Robinson, Charles Augustus Briggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952).

¹³ Nathan MacDonald discussed aniconism in the Hebrew Scriptures, particularly in Exodus 32-4, Deuteronomy 4 and Ezekiel. ‘Aniconism in the Old Testament’, in *The God of Israel*, ed. by Robert P. Gordon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 20-35.

¹⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), p. 32. P. D. Miller suggests that Israel’s aniconism represented an anomalous situation in the Ancient Near East where the religious use of images was ubiquitous. *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (London: Library of Ancient Israel, 2000). T.N.D Mettinger finds greater continuity between Israelite aniconism and Ancient Near Eastern culture. *No Graven Image?: Israelite Aniconism in its Ancient Near Eastern Context* (Stockholm: CBOT 42, 1995).

Genesis creation accounts as well as the greater context of the Hebrew Bible.¹⁵ The Hebrew Bible contains no distinction between spirit and soul. The terms of description, *ruach* (רוח) and *nephesh* (נפש), which both mean ‘breath’ and ‘wind’ are used interchangeably in the Bible. Both terms correspond to the idea of ‘life’, which is often depicted as a gift from God. Consider, for example, Job 10:12: ‘Your providence watched over my spirit (*ruach*)’ or Ps. 66:8-9: ‘O peoples, bless our God [...] who has granted us life (literally: ‘God kept our *nephesh* alive’).¹⁶ The fact that *nephesh* is believed to be located in the blood conveys this sense of unity between body and soul that is inherent in biblical thought, thus contrasting with the idea of the transcendence of the soul over the body.¹⁷ The point regarding the contrast between the wholeness of the biblical view of the person and the somewhat fragmentary approach of the reason-centred interpretation of *imago Dei* will recur throughout the course of our discussion.

1.3 References to *Imago Dei* in the Hebrew Bible

Genesis 1:26-27 is the foundational text for Jewish and Christian theological anthropology, and the first Biblical reference to the creation of humankind:

‘Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.” And God created humankind in his image. In the image of God he created him; male and female he created them’ (Gen 1:26-7).¹⁸

¹⁵ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans. by John J. Scullion (London: SPCK, 1984), pp. 147-155. Gerhard von Rad makes the same point in *Genesis: A Commentary*. He writes that ‘one will do well to split the physical from the spiritual as little as possible’. p. 58.

¹⁶ *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. IV, ed. by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. by David E. Green (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1980), p. 338.

¹⁷ ‘But make sure you do not partake of the blood; for the blood is the life (*nephesh*), and you must not consume the life with the flesh’ (Deut. 12:23). *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, p. 659. There may, however, be some evidence of independence of the soul from the body in the Hebrew Scriptures, e.g., Psalm 49:16 ‘But God will redeem my life (*nephesh*) from the clutches of Sheol’ (JPS), translated in the King James Bible – there labelled as Ps 49:15 rather than 49:16 – as ‘God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave’. For a discussion of conceptions of the afterlife in the Hebrew Bible that is particularly relevant to this discussion, see Jon Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). In examining the origin of the Jewish doctrine of the resurrection, Levenson concludes that the longing for immortality that emerges from the Hebrew Scriptures is not based upon an idea of the disembodied soul, but rather upon the vision of the embodied person ‘immune to the ravages of disease, death, scarcity, injustice, and enmity, living forever in a perfected world, the world symbolized, most commonly, by the Temple’. p.107. James Barr notes that the soul could be regarded as separate from the body in post-biblical Judaism, possibly due to Hellenistic influence, *Old and New in Interpretation: A Study of Two Testaments* (London: SCM, 1982), p. 52.

¹⁸ Gen. 1:26-27. The compound Hebrew word בְּצַלְמֵנוּ *betsal'mênû*, is composed of בְּ *be*, the prefix ‘in’, צַלֵּם *iselem* ‘image’, and the נוּ *-nû* suffix which corresponds to ‘our’.

When used in relation to the creation of humankind, the words *tselem* and *demut* denote the similarity of the image to God, the original image. The terms seem to imply human relation to God, which we can infer from the only other coinciding instance of *tselem* and *demut* in scripture: ‘When Adam lived 130 years, he begot a son in his likeness (*demut*) after his image (*tselem*), and he named him Seth’ (Genesis 5:16).¹⁹

The *imago Dei* is rearticulated in the flood narrative of Genesis 9. The distinction of human beings from other animals is established when it is decreed that while humans can eat other animals, no human can kill another human: ‘Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in His image did God make man’ (Gen 9:6). This text establishes God’s right of dominion over all life. God himself will not avenge murder but the human person is empowered to do so. Human dominion over other animals is also reaffirmed here and situated in the covenantal context (Gen 9:1-8).

Because other scriptural references to *imago Dei* contain the word *tselem* without reference to *demut*, ‘image’ has been taken as the primary term for the concept of *imago Dei*. ‘Likeness’, however, has retained a theological significance, particularly as regards the assumption that humankind has not retained the high status granted at creation. At this point, it is of particular importance to note that there is no reference to the loss of the image or indeed to the loss of likeness in the Hebrew Bible. However, as we will see, the loss of the image will emerge as a central point in our discussion of the interpretation of the concept. The idea is, of course, significantly dependent on the second creation account of Genesis 2-3 – as interpreted in Paul (Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:21-22, 45-49) – within which we find what has been traditionally interpreted as the ‘fall of man’ narrative. However, before moving on, we should note that the legitimacy of the interpretation of Genesis 2-3 in terms of the ‘fall’ – a rupture in relations between God and humankind – is contested by many biblical scholars.²⁰ At this point, it is necessary to analyze the

¹⁹ The Genesis 5 echoing of 1:26 lends weight to C.L. Crouch’s argument that the *imago Dei* refers to the divine parentage of humanity. ‘Genesis 1:26-27 as a Statement of Humanity’s Divine Parentage’, *Journal of Theological Studies*, 61 (2010), 1-15.

²⁰ James Barr, who is particularly opposed to the reading of Genesis 2 in terms of ‘fall’, writes that ‘OT scholars have long known that the reading of the story as the ‘Fall of Man’ in the traditional sense, though hallowed by St. Paul’s use of it, cannot stand up to examination through a close reading of the text.’ *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), p. ix. Similar positions are expressed by Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, p. 41 and Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, p. 276. In contrast, John T. Strong argues that Genesis 2-3 indeed depicts a loss of image in ‘Israel as a Testimony to YHWH’s Power: The Priests’ Definition of Israel’, in *Constituting the Community: Studies on the Polity of Ancient Israel in Honor of S. Dean McBride Jr.* ed. by John T. Strong and Steven S. Tuell (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005), pp. 89–106.

components of Genesis 1:26-27, specifically: (i) the plural ‘let us make’ (ii) the commission to rule the created world and (iii) human creation as male and female.

1.3.1 Interpretations of the Phrase ‘Let us Make’

The Hebrew plural, *na-aseh*, represented in most English translations as ‘let us make’, is unique to the depiction of the creation of the human being. God speaks in the singular – ‘Let there be’ – in the description of the creation of celestial bodies, plants and animals. The Hebrew text reverts to the singular use in the subsequent verse which also relates to the creation of the person. This plural is a point of interest among biblical scholars, though no particular interpretive consensus is evident. Some contemporary scholarship cites Israel’s gradual ascension to monotheism as a relevant factor.²¹ Gerhard Von Rad suggests that the plural indicates God’s place among the multiplicity of heavenly beings:

The extraordinary plural (“Let us”) prevents one from referring God’s image too directly to God the Lord. God includes himself among the heavenly beings and thereby conceals himself in this multiplicity. That, in our opinion, is the only possible explanation for this striking form.²²

Other biblical scholarship draws our attention to the grammatical structure of the text: Ephraim Speiser remarks that the plural in the original Hebrew is a grammatical device corresponding to the plurality of the word, *Elohim*, the Hebrew term for God (אלהים). We know that the word *Elohim* is plural because it is used in Psalm 114:7 in the singular, *Elo’ah*. Further, God referring to Godself may account for the formal plural. The plural use does not, Speiser suggests, have any direct bearing on the meaning of the text.²³

Nevertheless, many interpreters certainly have invested this use of the plural term with theological significance. Some Christian thinkers, for example, saw in the passage an early allusion to the Trinity.²⁴ Some Jewish interpreters draw parallels to a ‘divine council’ (1 Kings 22.19-22; Isa 6; Job 1-2).²⁵ The divine council refers to the biblical and

²¹ Joel Kaminsky attributes the plural to the monolatrous nature of Israelite worship at the time. ‘The Theology of Genesis’, p. 637. For a discussion of the development of monotheism in Israelite religion see R. K. Gnuse, *No Other Gods: Emergent Monotheism in Israel* (Sheffield: SJSOT, 1997) and Nathan MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of ‘Monotheism’* (Tübingen: FAT II/1, 2003).

²² Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 58.

²³ E.A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation and Notes* (London: Yale University Press, 2008) p. 7.

²⁴ This was the interpretation proposed by Augustine and Karl Barth, as will be discussed.

²⁵ The Genesis plural is discussed in *Genesis Rabbah* 8, 3, 1: “And God said, ‘Let us make man’ ” (Gen 1:26). And with whom did he take counsel? R. Joshua b. Levi said, “With the works of heaven and earth he took counsel.” It is also discussed in relation to Genesis 3:22 in *Genesis Rabbah*, 21,5,1-2 “Behold, the man has become like one of us” (Gen 3:22): R. Pappias interpreted the verse as follows: “Behold, the man

Rabbinic depiction of God's consultation with an assembly before a decision is made.²⁶ This is the meaning proposed in the influential medieval biblical commentaries of Rashi (1040-1105 C.E.) and Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089-c.1167). Rashi takes the plural as an indication of the humility of God. He suggests that God consulted the angels to prevent their jealousy: 'Similarly, when He judges kings, He consults His heavenly court.'²⁷ Ibn Ezra reiterates the idea that we are created in the image of angels. In response to the sequence of the passage 'in the image of God he created *him*' with 'male and female he created *them*', Ibn Ezra remarks that we were originally created with two faces. Here, Ibn Ezra may be referring to the dual nature of the person in terms of body and soul, or perhaps he is following the Rabbinic tradition that the human was originally created androgynous.²⁸ The interest in the divine plural extends to contemporary interpretations of Genesis 1:26, which often emphasise the idea of human collaboration in creation, a process which has not yet been completed by God.²⁹ This is an important point in relation to the limit of human dominion over the rest of the created world, to which the discussion will now turn.

1.3.2 The Climax of Creation?

The interpretation of *imago Dei* in terms of the commission to rule the created world – referred to as the functional interpretation of *imago Dei* – is the preferred understanding of the concept among biblical scholars.³⁰ We have already mentioned the work of Levenson and Middleton, and their reference to royal imagery in extra-biblical literature

has become like one of us' means, like one of the ministering angels.'" *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, trans. by H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, (London: Soncino Press, 1939). The idea of ministering angels recurs in the Talmud: 'Rab Judah said in Rab's name: When the Holy One, blessed be He, wished to create man, He [first] created a company of ministering angels and said to them: Is it your desire that we make a man in our image?' [Gen 1:26], *Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin* 38b, ed. by I. Epstein, trans. by Jacob Shachter and H. Freedman (London: Soncino P, 1969).

²⁶ *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. by Raymond E. Brown and others (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1991), p. 11.

²⁷ *Rashi's Commentary: Genesis*, trans. by M. Rosenbaum and A.M. Silbermann (London: Shapiro, Vallentine & Co., 1949).

²⁸ Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Commentary on the Pentateuch: Genesis (Bereshit)*, trans. by H. Norman Strickman and Arthur M. Silver (New York: Menorah, 1988), p. 46.

²⁹ For examples of this view, see Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *Genesis: The Beginning Desire* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995), p. 19 and Tikva Frymer-Kensky, 'The Image: Religious Anthropology in Judaism and Christianity' in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, ed. by Frymer-Kensky, T., Novak, D., Ochs, P., Fox Sandmel, D. and Signer M. A., (Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), p. 331.

³⁰ This existence of this scholarly consensus was argued in 1988 by G.A. Jónsson and, according to Nathan MacDonald, Jónsson's 'assessment that the functional view is the predominant view among Old Testament scholars remains valid' today. Jónsson, *The Image of God: Genesis 1:26-28 in a Century of Old Testament Research* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1988); MacDonald, 'A Text in Search of Context: The *Imago Dei* in the First Chapters of Genesis', in *Leshon Limmudim: Essays on the Language and Literature of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. by David A. Baer and Robert P. Gordon (London: T&T Clark, 2014), pp. 3-17 (p. 4).

to support their view of dominion as the hermeneutical key to the Genesis text. We can also refer again to work of Gerhard von Rad who offers a concise rationale for the functional approach: [O]ne will admit that the text speaks less of the nature of God's image than of its purpose. There is less said about the gift itself than about the task. This then is sketched most explicitly: domination in the world, especially over the animals.³¹ Although for Von Rad at least, the commission to rule does not belong to the definition of *imago Dei*, 'it is its consequence, i.e., that for which man is capable because of it'.³² Due to its importance in contemporary exegesis, the idea of human dominion merits further reflection.

The human commission to rule other creatures, inherent in Genesis 1:26, is restated in Genesis 1:28: 'God blessed them and God said to them "Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth"'. The idea recurs in poetic form in Psalm 8: 'You have made him little less than a God and crowned him with glory and honour. You have made him rule over the works of your hands. Put all under his feet' (vv. 6-7). To the contemporary reader, mindful of the current ecological crisis and questions of animal rights, such references to human rule are quite challenging. It is important, however, to situate the scriptural idea of human dominion in the correct context, specifically as regards its conceptual dependence upon divine and royal dominion. The Hebrew Bible depicts God's righteousness and mercy, and also God's providence, in his dominion over Israel and the created world: 'Righteousness and justice are the base of Your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness stand before you' (Ps 89:15). The importance of service and care also translates to royal dominion. Psalm 72, a prayer for the success of King Solomon, establishes the strong link between royal dominion and stewardship: 'Let him [Solomon] be like rain that falls upon a mown field, like a downpour of rain on the ground, that the righteous may flourish in his time, and well-being abound [...]' (Ps 72:6-7).³³ These ideas of divine dominion and royal dominion provide the context for the understanding of human dominion in terms of stewardship and care for the created world.

³¹ Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 58.

³² Von Rad, p. 58.

³³ Phyllis A. Bird, 'Theological Anthropology in the Hebrew Bible', in *The Blackwell Companion to the Hebrew Bible*, ed. by Leo G. Perdue (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), p. 265. In commenting on the biblical idea of human dominion, Phyllis A. Bird notes the recurring biblical theme of the threat to the land of returning to wilderness, inhabited only by wild animals (Isa 32:13). The ancient author was writing in a world of peasant farmers trying to sustain life in an area of marginal rainfall. Psalm 8 should be taken as an expression of the psalmist's faith in the wisdom of God as opposed to any theological justification for ecological irresponsibility.

It is possible to reconcile the belief that creation exists for human benefit with the duty to care for the created world as long as the emphasis is theocentric rather than anthropocentric. The person is the steward of the land which ultimately belongs to God: 'But the land must not be sold beyond reclaim, for the land is Mine; you are but strangers resident with me' (Lev 25:23). This passage illustrates the extent of human accountability to God, the true owner of the land, an idea that finds particular expression in the following midrashic text that reflects on Genesis 2:

When God created the first human beings, God led them around the Garden of Eden and said, "Look at my works! See how beautiful they are! For your sake I created them. Do not spoil and destroy My world; for if you do, there will be no one to repair it".³⁴

Further scriptural passages institute the sabbatical and jubilee years in the Jewish religious calendar, with a view towards the correct care of the land (Exod. 23:10-11; Lev. 25). Here we see the pattern of six years of use of the land followed by a seventh year of rest. This mirrors the first creation narrative: six days of creation and one day of rest.

While the creation of the human person on the sixth day is commonly regarded as the climax of the Genesis creation narrative, we should also attend to the actions of the seventh day (Gen 2:2) and the institution of the Sabbath (Exod 31:17). The seventh day is a plausible alternative point of climax in the creation narrative. Interestingly, the Book of Jubilees, an early retelling of narrative from Genesis and Exodus, emphasises the actions of the seventh day.³⁵ Further, despite its elaborate creation account in its second chapter, the book makes no reference to the idea of *imago Dei* in the context of creation.³⁶ The institution of the Sabbath is, however, greatly emphasised. It is placed at the beginning of the creation account and is frequently mentioned throughout the narrative (Jub 2:1-24).³⁷

³⁴ *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 7:28, discussed by Eilon Schwartz, 'Mastery and Stewardship, Wonder and Connectedness: A Typology of Relations to Nature in Jewish Text and Tradition' in *Judaism and Ecology: Created World and Revealed Word*, ed. by Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 99.

³⁵ The oldest copy of the book, written in Hebrew, dates from 125-100 BCE though the book is believed to have been written before this. It claims the status of revelation rather than midrash. James C. Vanderkam, *An Introduction to Early Judaism* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2001). Vanderkam dates the book at 150 BCE, p. 97.

³⁶ The single reference to *imago Dei* in Jubilees is a repetition of Genesis 9:6: 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made He man.' *The Book of Jubilees*, trans. by J.C. Vanderkam (Leuven: E. Peeters, 1989), 6:8.

³⁷ The opening verse of chapter II emphasises the Sabbath: 'And the angel of the presence spake to Moses according to the word of the Lord, saying: Write the complete history of the creation, how in six days the Lord God finished all His works and all that He created, and kept Sabbath on the seventh day and hallowed

Returning to the biblical account, it is interesting to note that the chapter division of Genesis 1 and 2, established in medieval times and subsequently standardized, purposely breaks the seven-day narrative into six days and one day, thereby instituting this arguably false sense of climax after the sixth day. The chapter and verse division of Genesis places the creation of humankind (day six) at the end of Genesis 1 and the seventh day at the beginning of Genesis 2.³⁸ One feels that Genesis 2:4 – ‘Such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created’ – would make a far more logical conclusion to Genesis 1.³⁹ It would perhaps offer a more integrated picture of the person as a part of the created world rather than the climax and would also bring the Sabbath into focus, that which Abraham Joshua Heschel referred to as the ‘great Cathedrals’ of Judaism.⁴⁰

1.3.3 Creation as Male and Female

While Chapter Five will elaborate the theological implications of our human creation as male and female, we will at this point note briefly some contemporary biblical scholarship relating to the situation of the ‘male and female’ clause in Genesis 1:27: ‘And God created man in his image. In the image of God he created him; male and female he created them’. The text of this verse is understood to constitute a three-line poetic unit situated within an otherwise prose text. According to J. Richard Middleton, it is doubtful, on syntactical grounds, that ‘male and female’ defines the nature of the image. This is because ‘the third line in three-line Hebrew poetic units typically does not repeat a previous idea, but more usually serves a progressive function, introducing a new thought’.⁴¹

Phyllis Bird also disassociates the concept of *imago Dei* from sexual distinction. According to Bird’s exegesis of 1:26-28, the two statements of Genesis 1:27 contain two distinct statements about humanity. Bird writes that ‘*adam* is created *like* (i.e.,

it for all ages, and appointed it as a sign.’ Discussed by Michael Segal in *The Book of Jubilees: Rewritten Bible, Redaction, Ideology and Theology*, (Leiden: Brill, 2007) p. 238.

³⁸ The division of the Bible into chapter and verse is discussed in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. by Peter Ackroyd et al., vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 147. Walter Moberly remarks that it is ‘doubtful that the author of this seven-day creation would have approved, and yet this structural division, which in a certain way changes the logic of the text, has been incorporated into its standard form’. *The Theology of the Book of Genesis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 47.

³⁹ Especially since Genesis 2:4 marks the transition between what source critics refer to as the Priestly (Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a) and Yahwistic (Genesis 2:4b – 2:25) sources.

⁴⁰ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: FSG, 1951). ‘Judaism teaches us to be attached to holiness in time, to be attached to sacred events, to learn how to consecrate sanctuaries that emerge from the magnificent stream of a year. The Sabbaths are our great cathedrals’. p. 8.

⁴¹ J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), p. 49. See also Robert Alter, *The World of Biblical Literature* (San Francisco: Basic Books, 1992), pp. 177-78.

resembling) God, but *as* creature – and hence male and female. The parallelism of the two cola is progressive, not synonymous. The second statement adds to the first; it does not explicate it'.⁴² In relation to the theology of the priestly author, sexual distinction relates to the broader theme of nature and fertility in the created order. 'Male and female he created them' tells us nothing about the image or about God:

It relates only to the blessing of fertility, making explicit its necessary presupposition. It is not concerned with sexual roles, the status or relationship of the sexes to one another, or marriage. It describes the biological pair, not the psycho-social pair; male and female, not man and woman or husband and wife.⁴³

The verse also does not indicate an original androgyne but rather the bi-sexual order of creatures. Furthermore, according to Bird, the fact that sexual difference does not pertain to the image means that we should not seek any sexual differentiation in God. Sexual difference is a biological entity, functioning only in relation to our animal nature.⁴⁴

In spite of the intentions of the authors of Genesis, as portrayed by biblical scholars such as Bird and Middleton, the specific identification of *imago Dei* with our gendered existence has carried great weight in the interpretive tradition of the concept. Our creation as male and female does seem an unlikely definition of *imago Dei* considering the fact that it is something that we share with other animals. The image of God, unlike gender, is distinct to human creation. However, although biblical scholarship rules out the definition of *imago Dei* in terms of sexual difference, this does not mean that our gendered existence is irrelevant to the way in which we image God. We will fully explore this question in Chapter Five, where will draw upon the insights of feminist theology. At this point, having explored the biblical meaning of *imago Dei*, we turn to the interpretation of the concept in Rabbinic literature.

⁴² Phyllis Bird, 'Sexual Differentiation and Divine Image in the Genesis Creation Texts', in *The Image of God*, pp. 5-29 (p. 11).

⁴³ Bird, 'Sexual Differentiation and Divine Image', p. 13. Michael Welker questions Bird's insistence that the passage intends only the *biological* couple. He writes that the 'dichotomization of "nature" and "culture" is foreign to the classical creation accounts'. Rather, 'so-called natural and so-called cultural factors are seen very subtly in indissoluble reciprocal connections'. *Creation and Reality*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1999), p. 69.

⁴⁴ J. Richard Middleton writes that the terms 'male' and 'female' are 'biological, not social terms and thus cannot support either the notion of human relationality or culturally male/female characteristics'. *The Liberating Image*, p. 50.

1.4 Theological and Halakhic Appropriation in Tannaitic Literature

As a text-centred tradition in which ‘the centrality of the text takes the place of theological consistency’, Judaism has evolved around an expansive body of literature that comprises Torah.¹ Barry Holtz writes that the study of, and interaction with, these writings is ‘the dominant religious preoccupation throughout the history of Judaism, at least until modern times, and for many even now’.² Holtz proposes that we view the vast expanse of Jewish literature as an inverted pyramid: ‘The Bible is at its base, but the edifice expands outward enormously – midrashic literature, the Talmuds, the commentaries, the legal codes, the mystical tradition, the philosophical books. All this literature is Torah’.³

Although the references to *imago Dei* in the Hebrew Bible are few, the concept manifests itself quite significantly in early Rabbinic literature, both explicitly, through halakhic prescriptions, and implicitly, through the high esteem for human life that pervades Rabbinic literature: ‘For one man is equal to the entire work of creation’.⁴ We will specifically draw upon Tannaitic literature, the formative layer of Rabbinic writings that records the sayings and homilies of the Tanna’im, the Palestinian sages of the first to the early third-century. These writings, according to the notable work of Yair Lorberbaum, allude to the iconic significance of *imago Dei* and the imminence of God:

The *Tzelem* theology occupied a central place in early Rabbinic literature. In Talmudic literature, the biblical notion of *Imago Dei* was given a strongly iconic interpretation. God’s icons are His dwelling in the mundane realm [...] In light of the conception of image as presence, the creation of man in tannaitic literature is perceived as ‘the need’ of the divine. God’s desire to expand Himself motivated Him to create humanity in His own ‘image and likeness’.⁵

¹ Moshe Halbertal, *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning, and Authority* (London: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 2. Text, Halbertal argues, is one of Judaism’s ‘central operative concepts, like “God” or “Israel”’. He writes that ‘Jews have had diverse and sometimes opposing ideas about God: the anthropomorphic God of the Midrash, the Aristotelian unmoved mover of Maimonides and his school, the Kabbalah’s image of God as a dynamic organism manifested in the complexity of his varied aspects, the *sefrot*. These conceptions of God have little in common and they are specifically Jewish only insofar as each is a genuine interpretation of Jewish canonical texts’. p. 2.

² Barry W. Holtz, *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts* (New York: Summit Books, 1984), p. 12.

³ Holtz, *Back to the Sources*, p. 13.

⁴ *Avot of Rabbi Nathan* xxxi, trans. by Antony J. Saldarini, (Leiden: Brill, 1975).

⁵ Yair Lorberbaum, ‘Human Dignity in the Jewish Tradition’, in *The Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by Marcus Düwell et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 135-147 (p. 138).

The Rabbinic interpretation of *imago Dei*, Lorberbaum argues, emphasises the tangible presence of the divine in every human being. The person functions as an icon of God, similar to the manner in which idols functioned in the pagan world. Each person, as an icon of God, is unique, a point alluded to in the following Talmudic passage:

For if a man strikes many coins from one mould, they all resemble one another, but the supreme king of kings, the holy one blessed be he, fashioned every man in the stamp of the first man, and yet not one of them resembles his fellow. Therefore every single person is obliged to say: the world was created for my sake.⁶

This is a striking statement which articulates both human unity and individual worth. Though we share a common ancestry in a world that has been created for our benefit, each individual human person is unique. The following Mishnaic passage reaffirms the special status of the person, while also distinguishing those created in the image of God – humankind – from the people of Israel, who are called children of God:

Beloved is man, for he was created in the image [of God]; still greater was the love in that it was made known to him that he was created in the image of God, for it is written, “For in the image of God, He made man”. Beloved are Israel, for they were called children of God; still greater was the love in that it was been made known to them that they were called children of God, as it is stated: “You are children of the Lord your God”.⁷

In addition to such reflective passages relating to the special status of humankind – and Israel – the rabbis were also interested in the halakhic implications of the concept of *imago Dei*, particularly in relation to the issue of capital punishment. The scriptural precedent for such interpretation is the Genesis 9:6 reference – ‘Whosoever sheds the blood of man, By man shall his blood be shed’ – where anthropology is brought into the context of law and ethics. The Rabbinic tradition struggled with this paradoxical prohibition of murder, where the sanctity of human life is protected with the death of another human being. The following Mishnaic text is often cited to illustrate the discomfort found in the Rabbinic tradition with the biblically sanctioned practice of capital punishment:

⁶ *Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 37a.*

⁷ *Mishnah, Aboth, 3:15, trans. by Herbert Danby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).*

A Sanhedrin that puts one man to death in a week of years is called “destructive.” R. Eliezer b. Azariah says: Or one in even seventy years. R. Tarfon and R. Akiba says: Had we been in the Sanhedrin none would ever have been put to death.⁸

We should not, however, regard this statement as definitive of Rabbinic attitudes to capital punishment. As Beth A. Berkowitz writes, the early rabbis also ‘mobilized the death penalty as part of an argument for their religious authority, and this point has largely been missed’.⁹ Although they indeed utilized the death penalty, the high esteem that the early rabbis held for human life is indicated by the fact that they constructed elaborate legislation which placed considerable obstacles in the way of capital sentencing. Even after the death sentence had been passed, there were opportunities for witnesses to come forward: ‘If any man knoweth aught in favour of his acquittal let him come and plead it’.¹⁰ There were also complex procedures in place to determine the certainty of witnesses – ‘the more a judge tests the evidence the more is he deserving of praise’ – lest they be responsible for the death of another human being:

For this reason was man created alone, to teach thee that whosoever destroys a single soul of Israel, scripture imputes [guilt] to him as though he had destroyed a complete world; and whosoever preserves a single soul of Israel, scripture ascribes [merit] to him as though he had preserved a complete world.¹¹

This Mishnaic passage provides us with another statement of the Rabbinic recognition of individual human worth. Despite the emphasis Rabbinic Judaism places on community, the sanctity of each human life is highly valued.¹² It is on account of this sanctity, the divine presence within the person, that the rabbis upheld the biblical decree of murder as a capital offence.¹³ For the rabbis, Moshe Greenberg writes, the ‘guilt of the murderer is

⁸ *Mishnah, Makkoth* 1.10.

⁹ Berkowitz cites the example from *Sifra*, a halakhic commentary on Leviticus, of the death penalty being administered for the crime of teaching law in front of one’s rabbi. Such a crime was committed by a student of Rabbi Eliezer: ‘It once happened that a student made a legal decision before him [R. Eliezer]. He said to Ima Shalom his wife: He will not last the Sabbath. He [the student] died’. 45c. Beth A. Berkowitz, *Execution and Invention: Death Penalty Discourse in Early Rabbinic and Christian Cultures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 5.

¹⁰ *Mishnah, Sanhedrin*, 6.1.

¹¹ *Mishnah, Sanhedrin* 5.2 and *Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin*, 37a.

¹² Jacob Neusner writes that in rabbinic Judaism ‘the word “Israel” does refer to persons, Israelites one by one, not only to the people. So a dialectic, not to be resolved, takes shape between the public and the private. Individuals each enjoy their own justice’. *Rabbinic Judaism: The Theological System* (Boston: Brill, 2002), p. 90.

¹³ *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 7 contains a discussion of other biblically sanctioned capital offenses, e.g., blasphemy, idolatry, profaning of the Sabbath, sorcery and so forth. The *Mishnah* qualifies what we find in the Bible, explaining the extent to which one would have to blaspheme, for example, in order to merit the death sentence.

infinite because the murdered life is invaluable'.¹⁴ We find an elaborate midrash on Genesis 9:6 in *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, which also restates the royal icon idea:

How were the Ten Commandments given? Five on one tablet, and five on the other. By writing "I am the Lord your God," and opposite it, "You shall not murder," Scripture states that if anyone sheds blood, Scripture regards this as if he diminishes the image of the King. This is comparable to a flesh-and-blood king who entered a province, and portraits of him were set up, images were made of him, and coins of him were minted. Some time later, his portraits were overthrown, his images were smashed, his coins were cancelled, and thus diminished the image of the king. So, too, if anyone sheds blood, Scripture accounts it for him as if he diminishes the image of the King, as it is said: "Whoever sheds the blood of man [...] for in His image did God make man".¹⁵

Further light can be shed on Rabbinic interpretation of *imago Dei* through observing the halakhically permissible means of execution for the *tanna'im*, which reveal a strong concern to preserve the integrity of the body.¹⁶ Though the court has the power to inflict – in order of gravity – burning, stoning, strangling and beheading, the rabbis adjust these practices to limit (visible) bodily damage. The ordinance of burning, for example, can and should, in practice, be fulfilled by partial strangulation after which the executioner (the witness) must 'kindle the wick and throw it into his mouth, and it goes down to his stomach and burns his entrails'.¹⁷ Although this sounds even more gruesome than the impermissible burning 'with bundles of branches', the point here is that the preservation of external appearance was, for the rabbis, a large part of what it meant to acknowledge the *imago Dei* within the person.¹⁸ The following Talmudic parable, attributed to Rabbi Meir, illustrates the point:

'[T]wo twin brothers [lived] in one city; one was appointed king, and the other to highway robbery. At the king's command they hanged him. But all who saw him exclaimed, 'The king is hanged!' whereupon the king issued a command and he was taken down'.¹⁹

¹⁴ Greenberg writes that an 'absolute wrong has been committed, a sin against God which is not subject to human discussion'. 'Some postulates of Biblical Criminal Law', in *Yehezkel Kaufmann Jubilee Volume*, ed. by M. Haran (Jerusalem: Magnus Press, 1960), pp. 5-28 (p.16).

¹⁵ *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, Bahodesh*, ed. and trans. by Jacob Z. Lauterbach (Philadelphia: JPS, 1933-35), p. 262.

¹⁶ *Talmud Balvi, Sanhedrin*, 52a.

¹⁷ *Mishnah, Sanhedrin*, 7.2.

¹⁸ The Talmudic discussion of the ordinance of burning does, however, suggest that the concern for a humane death may have been another motivating factor: 'R. Nahman answered in the name of Rabbah b. Abbuha: The verse saith, *But thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*, [which implies:] choose an easy death for him.' *Talmud Balvi, Sanhedrin*, 52a. This is restated in 45a.

¹⁹ *Talmud Balvi, Sanhedrin*, 46b.

Because we image God in a very physical sense, respect for the body, even that of an executed criminal, is important. The body, that which Hillel refers to as the ‘masterpiece of God’, must be respected and maintained in life and death.²⁰ Decapitation – ‘there is no death more shameful than this’ – is the exception that proves the rule.²¹ This practice, which the rabbis abhor as a ‘hideous disfigurement’, is intended for the murderer. It appears that such cases do not require the same concern for the theomorphic body, since, as Rabbi Akiva writes, ‘whoever sheds blood cancels the image’.²²

Before moving on from Rabbinic engagement with Genesis 9:6, we should briefly note one further Talmudic response. In the verse in question, Rabbi Eliezer invokes Genesis 9:6 in an argument against celibacy: ‘R. Eliezer stated, He who does not engage in propagation of the race is as though he sheds blood; for it is said, *Whoso sheddeth man’s blood by man shall his blood be shed*, and this is immediately followed by the text *And you, be fruitful and multiply*’.²³ Since the command to beget offspring follows from the scriptural establishment of our creation in the image of God, it, therefore, diminishes the similitude when we refrain from procreation. It has been interesting to observe the Genesis prohibition of murder evoked in two contrasting ways in Rabbinic literature: to (uneasily) justify the death penalty and to promote fecundity and new life.

This brief survey has revealed the practical, halakhic nature that characterises much Rabbinic engagement with *imago Dei* and the manner in which Rabbinic writings emphasise the physical dimension of our likeness to God.²⁴ One of the issues that will emerge consistently in discussion of the evolution of the concept of *imago Dei* is the

²⁰ ‘It is man’s duty to keep his body in a state of cleanliness, as well as to keep his soul in a state of purity. Hillel, when going to bathe, used to tell his pupils that he was going to do a godly deed. Once his pupils ventured to ask for an explanation. “Have you not observed,” said he to his disciples, “how the caretakers in the theatres and other public places always wash the statues and keep them clean? If then such care is bestowed on inanimate sculptures, the works of man, it must surely be a holy duty scrupulously to clean the handiwork and masterpiece of God”.’ *Leviticus Rabbah* 34.

²¹ *Mishnah, Sanhedrin*, 7.3

²² *Talmud Balvi, Sanhedrin*, 52b and *Tosefta, Yevamot* 8:7, trans. by Jacob Neusner (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav, 1977-1986). Beheading is also the appropriate means of execution for the ‘people of an Apostate City’. This is derived from Deuteronomy 13:16: ‘Thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly’.

²³ *Talmud Balvi, Yevamot* 63b.

²⁴ The practical approach is sometimes taken to characterise Jewish biblical interpretation, in general. The argument that biblical theology is a primarily Christian pursuit is presented by Jon Levenson, ‘Why Jews are Not Interested in Biblical Theology’ in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel*, ed. by Jacob Neusner, Baruch A. Levine, and Ernest M. Frerichs. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 281–307. Stefan Reif remarks that ‘Jewish exegesis [...] emphasises the people, the land and the language more than it does any systematic theology’. Stefan C. Reif, ‘The Jewish Contribution to Biblical Interpretation’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed by John Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

question of fidelity to the biblical view of the person. The Rabbinic writings upon which we have drawn seem to indicate that the rabbis subscribed to an integrated view of the person as body and soul. This naturally leads to the assumption that Rabbinic writings are more consistent with the intentions of the prevalent monistic view of the person in the Hebrew Bible than, for example, more speculative anthropologies that isolate spiritual aspects of personhood. We should note, however, that the rabbis were certainly not immune to the type of dichotomous thinking that we will observe in formative Christian interpretations of *imago Dei*. We can briefly refer to two examples from the Rabbinic corpus, though there are many more. The following text from *Genesis Rabbah* creates a sharp division between physical needs and spiritual attributes:

He created in him four features from on high and four from below. He eats and drinks like a beast, he propagates like a beast, and relieves himself like a beast, and dies like a beast. From on high: He stands like the Ministering Angels, he possesses understanding like the Ministering Angels, and he sees like the Ministering Angels.²⁵

The second example, from Rabbi Judah the Patriarch, vividly depicts the somewhat fragmentary nature of human composition. Our souls, we receive from God; our bodies from our parents:

And when his time to depart arrives [death], the Holy One, blessed be He, takes his share and leaves that of his father and mother before them, and his father and mother weep. The Holy One, blessed be He, says to them: 'Why do you weep? Have I taken ought of yours? I have taken only that which is Mine'. They answer him: 'Sovereign of the universe, so long as Thy portion was integrated with ours, our share was preserved from worms and maggots; but now that Thou hast taken away Thy share from ours, our portion is lying exposed to worms and maggots.'²⁶

These examples certainly challenge the assumption that the rabbis presented a unified view of person or are somehow representative of the 'Hebrew' mind, as opposed to the more hellenistically influenced Church Fathers. Such a distinction, as James Barr argues, is, perhaps, more indicative of our modern self-perception than it is descriptive of the

²⁵ *Genesis Rabbah* viii, 11, p. 64. A parallel text is found in *T.B Hagiga* 16a.

²⁶ This saying of Rabbi Judah is translated and discussed by Ephraim E. Urbach in *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, trans. by Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnus Press, 1979), pp. 218-219. Urbach also discusses the rabbinic speculation as to when the component parts of the person are fused. pp 214-254.

mental life of ancient Greece or Israel.²⁷ The complexity of the Greek-Hebrew distinction should be kept in mind as we turn to the New Testament and the Patristic era. We should not, however, regard these dualistic Rabbinic passages as contradictory to our central points as regards Rabbinic engagement with *imago Dei*. Bearing in mind the diverse, multi-authored nature of Rabbinic literature, the assertion that the physical dimension of likeness is that which most characterised the early Rabbinic iconic interpretation of *imago Dei* still holds. The dualistic interpretations of creation merely serve to illustrate the fact that the rabbis, as with subsequent Christian theologies that isolated the faculty of reason, also strove to account for our similarity to God and our dissimilarity to other creatures. Though this quest led some Rabbinic writings beyond the physical, it did not result in a repudiation of the physical, or to a negative view of the human body which is something that we observe in some Patristic writings. Though it is not necessary to force reconciliation between diverging strands of Rabbinic literature, we can conclude the following: Rabbinic writings illustrate a high esteem for the sanctity of human life on account of our creation in the image of God. While there is a strong emphasis upon the physical dimension of our likeness to God as that which manifests our iconic status, we also observe, in some writings, a tendency to look beyond the human body, to the (separate) soul, to define the God-like dimension of human personhood. The emphasis on the rational soul characterised Patristic interpretations of *imago Dei*, to which the remainder of this chapter will be devoted. We will first turn to the writings of Paul, the most significant influence on the Christian appropriation of the Genesis concept of *imago Dei*.

1.5 *Imago Dei* in the Letters of Paul

Walter Brueggemann acknowledges the long history of interest in the theological concept of *imago Dei* but argues that it is informed by subsequent theological categories, especially those developed by Paul, that are imposed upon the Hebrew Scriptures. Though the writings of Paul cannot account for the significant Rabbinic interest in *imago Dei* discussed above, it is true that the Pauline letters are of immense importance with

²⁷ Barr rejects the familiar contrast between the Hebrew mind as historical, concrete and personal and the Greek mind as timeless, unhistorical and centred on logic: 'Because the contrast is an analysis of elements within modern culture, it sees the ancient cultures not as they were but as their influence feeds into more modern streams.' *Old and New in Interpretation: A Study of Two Testaments* (London: SCM, 1982), p. 35. Barr would probably object to Matthew Arnold's comment that the 'uppermost idea with Hellenism is to see things as they really are; the uppermost idea with Hebraism is conduct and obedience'. 'Hebraism and Hellenism', in *Selections from the Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. by William Savage Johnson (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), p. 275.

regard to the Christian re-shaping of the concept in an incarnational light.²⁸ Though we can encounter Paul as an interpreter of the Genesis text he is, for Christians, much more than that. His writings form a significant part of the Christian biblical canon and, as such, these writings, and the interpretation of *imago Dei* in Christ, contribute to the Christian 'biblical' view of the person.²⁹

Paul identified Christ as the image of God and as the embodiment of the invisible God (Col 1:15; 2 Cor 4:4; Phil 2:6). Through faith, we are transformed into the likeness of Christ: 'For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family' (Rom 8:29). By identifying Christ as the image of God, Paul distinguishes Christ from God while at the same time identifying Christ's glory with God.³⁰ While Paul refers to our transformation into the fullness of the image after death, he also envisages a gradual growth in likeness to Christ through the modelling of our earthly lives after his example, an influential idea for the subsequent Patristic tradition and the idea of 'deification' or 'theosis': 'And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit' (2 Cor 3:18). In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul writes that we should disregard our old selves which are corrupted by deceitful desires in order to 'put on our new selves' who are created to be like God (Eph 4:22-24). Paul contrasts Adam, the earthly man, and Christ, the heavenly man: 'Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven' (1 Cor 15:49). Just as sin and death came through Adam, justification and life come through Christ (Rom 5:12-21).³¹

²⁸James Barr writes that 'the centrality of the incarnation carries with it a new emphasis on man and, also, through the relation between the incarnation which has already happened and the eschatological promises for the future, his future destiny, resurrection, immortality and so on. Thus there are good theological reasons why some essential thinking of the New Testament might be expected to spread beyond the limits given by the Old Testament and the Jewish heritage'. Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation: A Study of Two Testaments* (London: SCM, 1982), p.58.

²⁹ R.W.L. Moberly writes that a 'fundamental weakness of the biblical theology movement [...] was its tendency to separate "pure" biblical thought (of a Hebrew nature) from the distorting influences especially of patristic interpretation (of an unduly Greek nature), without realizing that to separate the biblical text from the continuing tradition of Christian thought and practice is to deprive oneself of the necessary resources for responsible weighing and appropriating of the text'. *The Theology of the Book of Genesis*, p. 15, fn14.

³⁰ The connection of Paul's Christology to the Genesis creation account is discussed by Herman Ridderbos in his *Paul: An outline of His Theology*, trans. by John Richard de Witt, (London: SPCK, 1977) pp 69-78.

³¹ A similar idea is found in the apocryphal Jewish text, *2 Baruch*, which is thought to have been written in the late first or early second century: 'For Adam first sinned and brought untimely death upon all. Yet of those who were born from him, each one of them has prepared for his own soul torment to come, and again each one of them has chosen for himself glories to come.' 2 Baruch 54:15, in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. by James H. Charlesworth (New York:

This Adam-Christ motif is a most influential theological idea, particularly, as we shall see, for Augustine's development of the doctrine of original sin. The image is lost in Adam but restored in Christ. This restoration of the image does not refer to a return to the Garden of Eden but rather to a new creation brought about through Christ.

Thus, in the Pauline letters, we find the framework around which the Christian theology of *imago Dei* would develop: (i) the image universally granted at creation but lost from humankind through the sin of Adam; (ii) our growth in likeness through a life modelled on Christ, the true image of God; and (iii) the restoration of the fullness of the image after death in Christ. Though we have noted the references that ground this view, we should also mention another Pauline reference to *imago Dei* which arises in the context of a discussion of the conduct of men and women in worship in 1 Corinthians 11:7. According to Paul, the man should leave his head uncovered since he is the image and glory of God, whereas the woman is the glory of man. Paul proceeds to write that 'man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man' (1 Cor 11:9). Here, Paul seems to place greater emphasis on the second creation account (Gen 2:4-3:24), which describes Eve as created after Adam, than on the first account in Genesis 1. His argument for the dominion of husband over wife is likely inferred from Genesis 3:16 which posits Eve's sin as the reason for consequent hierarchical gender relations. We observe strong echoes of this sentiment in 1 Timothy 2:12-14: 'I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor'.³² However, to return to the passage from 1 Corinthians, Paul does not explicitly here write that women are not created in the image of God and he concludes his discussion with the assertion that neither woman nor man can be deemed independent from one another. 'For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God' (1 Cor 11:12).

The two points drawn here from the brief survey of Paul's idea of *imago Dei* will be important in the discussion of the development of the concept in Christian theology.

Doubleday, 1983-1985). Other apocryphal Jewish texts appear to lend weight to the idea of the biological transmission of sin. For example, in 4 Ezra, because of Adam's sin 'the infirmity became inveterate [...] with the evil germ.' (4 Ezra 3.21-2; 4:30-2; 7:116).

³² Raymond F. Collins, *I & II Timothy and Titus: A Commentary* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), p. 72. For a feminist critique, which also acknowledges Paul's positive collaboration with women in the early Christian communities, see Lone Fatum, 'Image of God and Glory of Man: Women in the Pauline Congregations', in *The Image of God: Gender Models in the Judaeo-Christian Tradition*, ed. by Kari Elizabeth Børreson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 50-134.

Firstly, we note that the Genesis text and Paul's identification of Christ with the image were, arguably, of equal importance in the Christian development of the doctrine. Christ came to be seen as the archetype of human existence through whom we may participate in the divine life. Secondly, Paul's reference to male and female in Corinthians has been influential in the development of Christian theological anthropology and remains of interest to feminist theology. We will discuss Augustine's attempt to reconcile this text with the egalitarian idea of Genesis 1:27 later in this chapter. For now, we turn to the interpretation of the concept in the Patristic era, a time when writing on the concept of *imago Dei* flourished.

1.6 Irenaeus of Lyons

The writings of the Fathers contain frequent references to biblical passages and efforts to uncover their meaning for Christian theology, as it was emerging. Together with the Gospels and the writings of the Prophets, the book of Genesis features prominently in the Patristic writings.³³ Though many of the Church Fathers addressed the concept of *imago Dei*, the discussion will be limited to two thinkers, Irenaeus of Lyons and Augustine of Hippo, each of whom helped to shape Christian theological anthropology. We turn first to the second century Church Father, Irenaeus (d. 202 C.E.), who is often regarded as the first Christian systematic theologian, based on his two surviving complete works, *Against Heresies* and *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*.³⁴ As indicated by the title, *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus' aim in writing his five-volume major work was the counteraction of the teachings of those of his contemporaries that were outside of his view of Christian orthodoxy. Writing in the century in which Christian orthodoxy was beginning to be defined, Irenaeus was troubled by the emerging groups that propagated a distortion of the Christian message while claiming authenticity.

Though Irenaeus was responding to a diverse set of religious beliefs, the thinking that he opposes is often referred to generally as 'gnosticism' though this does not necessarily refer to a particular gnostic sect.³⁵ Irenaeus' use of the term '*gnostikos*' is

³³ Boniface Ramsey, *Beginning to Read the Fathers* (London: SCM, 1993) p. 22.

³⁴ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, trans. by Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut, ed. by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885); *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, par. 11, trans. by J. Armitage Robinson (London: The Macmillan Co., 1920). Subsequent references will be parenthetical with the abbreviations AH and Dem respectively.

³⁵ Denis Minns notes the inaccuracy of the general use of the term 'gnosticism' in relation to Irenaeus' opponents since gnosticism relates to specific sects and not to each of the various systems of belief to which Irenaeus referred. 'Gnostic' may, for Irenaeus, have been synonymous with 'heretic'. In book II, for

ambiguous and could be argued to refer to all of the groups that he opposes. Though he referred to the gnostic sect (AH I.11.1), he saw a continuity between all the positions he sought to refute, the gnostics being forerunners of the Valentinians which all led back to Simon Magus (Acts 8:9 – 24). ‘Gnostic’ may, for Irenaeus, have been synonymous with ‘heretic’.³⁶ With this caution regarding the use of the term ‘gnostic’ in mind, it is still possible to note some general characteristics of the teachings to which Irenaeus was responding, most notably the tendency to place knowledge, and not faith, at the centre of religious experience.³⁷ Knowledge (*gnosis*) obtained through revelation, and not faith in Christ, leads to salvation. Salvation, according to Gnosticism, is an exclusive construct: It is guaranteed to the divine ‘gnostics’ on account of their possession of knowledge; it is attainable to those not fully gnostic but in possession of a soul, and it is denied to those persons who were identified primarily with matter without possession of a soul. The belief in the conflict between the evil world of matter and the divine world of the spirit naturally leads to a negative view of the material.

It is against this background – the spirit ‘trapped’ in matter – that we come to appreciate Irenaeus’ contrasting emphasis upon the human person as soul *and* flesh:

Now the soul and the spirit are certainly a *part* of the man, but certainly not *the* man; for the perfect man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the spirit of the Father, and the admixture of that fleshly nature which was moulded after the image of God’ (AH V.6.1).

The image of God – ‘His own form on the formation’ – corresponds to the whole person (Dem 11). Irenaeus depicts the creation of the person by God’s own hands ‘taking from the earth that which was purest and finest, and mingling in measure His own power with the earth’ (Dem 11). Irenaeus’ emphasis on our creation from the earth – derived from Genesis 2:7 and 3:19 – strengthens the bond between Adam, the first earthly man, and every person thereafter. We retain the earth as part of ourselves. God ‘breathed on his

example, Irenaeus refers to ‘the rest who go by the false name of Gnostics’ (AH II.35.2). Denis Minns, *Irenaeus: An Introduction* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), p. 19. See also Thomas G. Weinandy, ‘St. Irenaeus and the Imago Dei: The Importance of Being Human’, *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, 6 (2003), 35-50 and Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 33-37.

³⁶ In book II of *Against Heresies*, for example, Irenaeus refers to ‘the rest who go by the false name of Gnostics’ (AH II.35.2).

³⁷ Irenaeus was most acquainted with the thinking of the Gnostic teacher Valentinus. He had read the writings of disciples of Valentinus containing ‘the doctrine of those who teach in error at the present time – I mean Ptolemaeus and his followers, whose doctrine is the “flower” of the school of Valentinus’ (AH I pref. 2). Discussed by Robert M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (London: Routledge, 1997) pp 21-28.

face the breath of life; that both for the breath and for the formation man should be like unto God' (Dem 11).

1.6.1 Irenaeus' Distinction between Image and Likeness

Although biblical scholarship regards the two terms as synonymous, Irenaeus is well-known for his influential theological distinction between 'image' and 'likeness'. While Irenaeus distinguished between the terms 'image' and 'likeness', he also uses the term 'similitude'. The distinction between the terms is not always consistently applied in his writings and the terms are often used interchangeably. The distinction between 'image' and 'likeness' is put to good theological use throughout Irenaeus' writings and is, arguably, the aspect of his interpretation that has the most enduring relevance. In Irenaeus we begin to see the origins of the sense of image as a static, ontological entity and likeness as a dynamic moral force, an idea that would characterise subsequent Patristic theology.³⁸ We also see, in Irenaeus, the identification of human rationality as the defining element of human distinctiveness, a most important theme in subsequent Christian theological engagement with *imago Dei*. Though Irenaeus derives the terminology for the image/likeness distinction from Genesis 1, its theology is based on Genesis 2 and the writings of Paul.

Prior to the fall, Irenaeus argues that humankind lived in a state of 'true rationality': '[H]aving been created a rational being, he lost the true rationality, and living irrationally, opposed the righteousness of God, giving himself over to every earthly spirit, and serving all lusts' (AH IV.4.3). Though lost through the fall, the image of God has been restored in Christ.

When, however, the Word of God became flesh, He confirmed both these [image and likeness]: for He both showed forth the image truly, since He became Himself what was His image; and He re-established the similitude after a sure manner, by assimilating man to the invisible Father through means of the visible Word (AH V.16.2).

Christ shows us, in his person, what the image really is. Furthermore, through his saving work, Christ reconciles humankind to God. Irenaeus' understanding of redemption draws upon the Pauline analogy between Adam and Christ that we have referred to earlier (Rom 5:12-21). While the Son was with the Father from the beginning, He was made man in

³⁸ John Anthony McGuckin explores the influence of this understanding of *imago Dei* in the Patristic period. *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology*, (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), p. 179.

order to grant salvation ‘so that what we had lost in Adam – namely, to be according to the image and likeness of God – that we might recover in Christ Jesus’ (AH III.18.1). Christ, ‘through His transcendent love, becomes what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself’ (AH V. pref.). Our salvation through Christ was intended by God when we were created in God’s image. This is the meaning that Irenaeus intends in his frequent restatement of the Pauline idea of gathering all things in Christ (Eph 1:10: AH III.16-23).³⁹

Therefore, while the image remains in every person through the saving work of Christ, the ‘likeness’ – or similitude – is something that we have to work at, with the help of the Spirit: ‘But if the Spirit be wanting to the soul, he who is indeed of an animal nature, and being left carnal, shall be an imperfect being, possessing indeed the image of his formation, but not receiving the similitude through the Spirit’ (AH V.6). This citation contains rich theological ideas. Firstly, it establishes the permanent status of the image, even with those of an ‘animal nature’, i.e., those who have not yet received the Spirit of God. It also distinguishes Spirit from soul and suggests that our similitude – our likeness – is something that some people receive through the Spirit. It also suggests that, in order to increase our likeness to God, we have to become more ‘spiritual’. What, we might ask, does it mean to be ‘spiritual’ during our earthly lives? How can we grow in likeness?

1.6.2 Growth in Likeness

For Irenaeus, all persons are determined by union between flesh and spirit: ‘The saved man is a complete man as well as a spiritual man’ (AH V.6.1). In divergence from the Hebrew Bible, Irenaeus distinguishes between the Spirit and the breath of life. While the latter is that which makes a person animated, the Spirit has a more transcendent dimension in Irenaeus’ writings for it is regarded as eternal.⁴⁰ We find a strong emphasis on reason in this aspect of Irenaeus’ thought. Those that have received the gifts of the Spirit are not enslaved by lust but are guided by the light of reason. Thus, while all people are animated, only some receive the Spirit. And, as we have seen, it is the Spirit that allows our growth in likeness, envisaged by Irenaeus as a daily progression towards God:

³⁹ Irenaeus’ reliance on Paul in expounding key aspects of his theology – particularly Ephesians, Romans and 1 Corinthians – is discussed by Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 189-192.

⁴⁰ As Iain MacKenzie explains, ‘Spirit’ in patristic writings is used in reference to the third Person of the Trinity and also in reference to the Deity as encompassing all three Persons, *Irenaeus’s Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching: A Theological Commentary and Translation* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002), p. 82.

Now it was necessary that man should in the first instance be created; and having been created, should receive growth; and having received growth, should be strengthened; and having been strengthened, should abound; and having abounded, should recover [from the disease of sin]; and having recovered, should be glorified; and being glorified, should see his Lord (AH IV. 38.3).⁴¹

Likeness is dynamic, pertaining to human behaviour and the potential for transformation. Spiritual and moral growth is within our grasp. Because of our likeness to God, we possess free will and the capacity to choose good or bad actions throughout our lives (AH IV.37.1). However, God does not exercise compulsion on those who 'flee from his hands' (AH IV.39.3). In fact, freedom, the ability to make decisions, is part of what Irenaeus understands by the image of God (AH IV.4.3). Through faith and receptivity we are transformed into the likeness of God and can ascend to what is perfect: 'If then, you shall deliver up to Him what is yours, that is, faith towards Him and subjection, you shall receive His handiwork, and shall be a perfect work of God' (AH IV.39.2). Our bodies reflect the image of God throughout our earthly lives but upon our redemption we will receive the full grace of the Spirit. Then, we will be restored to the fullness of the image and likeness of God. The whole person, body and soul, will partake in a 'blissful and never-ending life granted by God' (AH V.3.3). What Irenaeus is describing can also be referred to as 'deification' or 'theosis', the transformation of the person into the likeness of God.⁴² As Eric Osborn explains:

The purpose of the divine exchange is that man might become what God is. God's light or glory shines not in supernal heights but in living man. From the vision of God who is light comes the life of man, and the end of all things is the participation of God in man and of man in God.⁴³

⁴¹ Growth in likeness is a continuous theme in Irenaeus' writings. As MacKenzie writes, 'the progress, the leading, the development, the advance, the furthering from an infantile state to the adult, the gradual movement towards God of humanity in and through and by the Word and Spirit, are themes which are scattered throughout *Adversus Haereses*.' *Irenaeus's Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, p. 105.

⁴² Irenaeus' language of deification or 'theosis' was influential for subsequent Patristic writers – most notably, the Cappadocian Fathers – and for the developing Orthodox tradition. There is grounding in the New Testament for this idea. See, for example, 1 John 3:2: 'Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is', and also 2 Peter 1:3. There are also seeds of the idea in Paul, most notably, 2 Corinthians 3:18 as referred to earlier. See Stephen Finlan, 'Can We speak of Theosis in Paul?', in *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, ed. by Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007), pp. 68-81. See also Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁴³ Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, p. 22.

It is important to note that while we ourselves participate in our own growth in likeness in a most significant way, this process is ultimately the work of God. The failure to accept this fact corresponds to Irenaeus' interpretation of original sin.

According to Irenaeus' insightful interpretation of the Eden narrative, the story depicts the human failure to accept that growth in likeness to the Creator is a gradual process. Though regarding Adam and Eve as historical figures, Irenaeus also addresses their symbolic significance. Although the sequence of the historical narrative is important to Irenaeus, it is also his intention to establish the figures of the historical narratives as iconic images for present-day humanity as well as eschatological images for the future. Irenaeus held that even before the fall, Adam and Eve were imperfect and infantile in relation to God. This is because only that which does not depend on another for its existence can be called perfect.⁴⁴ Adam and Eve were of material nature in a time-bound existence and, as such, were at a distance from their Creator. Perfection would never have been sustainable for Adam and Eve even if they had not sinned: 'God had the power at the beginning to grant perfection to man; but as the latter was only recently created, he could not possibly have received it, or even if he received it, could he have contained it, or containing it, could he have retained it' (AH IV.38.2). The idea that humankind was not created perfect is important in the understanding of Irenaeus' quite positive theological anthropology and his idea of original sin as the failure to accept the progressive nature of human likeness to God.⁴⁵ Adam and Eve, designated by Irenaeus as 'children', lost their likeness because they could not wait for God's plan to reveal itself (AH III.22.4; III.23.5).⁴⁶ Original sin, for Irenaeus, is the attempt to take matters into our own hands and an unwillingness to wait for God's plan for our perfection to be revealed to us.

Irenaeus presents revelation as a unified picture of the relationship between God and his creation. His story is, as Denis Minns writes, a 'theology of history built upon the belief that it is the God-given destiny of humankind to grow to perfection by gradual

⁴⁴ Robert F. Brown, 'On the Necessary Imperfection of Creation: Irenaeus's *Adversus Haereses* IV, 38,' *The Scottish Journal of Theology*, 28 (1975), 17-25.

⁴⁵ As with his positive view of the body, Irenaeus' emphasis on the imperfection of the created and the need for patient endurance can also be understood in the context of his critique of gnosticism, in particular the belief that perfection was already attained by those in possession of the truth (AH I.6.4).

⁴⁶ The depiction of childhood in Eden, prominent in both of his works, is an interesting feature of Irenaeus' idea of sin. The merit of a literal or figurative reading of the child motif is discussed by M. C. Steenberg, who suggests that the term 'infant' should not be understood to be of pejorative intention. The context establishes Irenaeus' conviction that such a state is entirely natural and appropriate to a created being. Moreover, there is nothing in Irenaeus' writings to indicate that the reference to children should not be taken at face value. M. C. Steenberg, 'Children in Paradise: Adam and Eve as "Infants" in Irenaeus of Lyons doctrines', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 12 (2004), 1-22.

stages, and that God guides this development in a loving, infinitely patient, ever-vigilant and non-coercive manner.⁴⁷ Since the history of salvation is coexistent with the history of the world, the incarnation does not constitute the beginning of a different story. All things, from Adam to Christ, are as was intended by God. What Irenaeus draws from the story is the conviction that faith is an expression of our obedience to God and a dependence on his goodness. Faith is the willingness to wait for the fullness of God's revelation and our restoration to the full image and likeness of God; since we are the work of God we must await the hand of our Creator. In this endeavour we must exercise both freedom and self-control.⁴⁸ Irenaeus, we conclude, greatly contributed to the theological development of *imago Dei*, particularly as regards deification, our gradual growth into the likeness of Christ. According to Irenaeus' vision of deification, the Christian life is characterised by patience: If we live spiritual lives and avoid the 'original sin' of impatience, we will advance in perfection and become perfect works of God.

1.7 Augustine of Hippo

Of all the Church Fathers, Augustine's thought was perhaps the most influential with regard to the development of the concept of *imago Dei* in Christian theology. The Genesis creation account was of particular interest to Augustine and he returned to its interpretation many times in his life, attempting five commentaries on the creation stories over a period of thirty years.⁴⁹ In addition to this interest, Augustine's writings reveal a preoccupation with human interiority and the inner life of the person as a means of apprehending the divine. Thus, Augustine approached Genesis with view to an intellectual understanding of the text since, as John Rotelle writes, he viewed creation 'not only as a truth of faith but also as something accessible to human reason'.⁵⁰ The concept

⁴⁷ Minns, *Irenaeus*, p. 69.

⁴⁸ Iain MacKenzie notes the dynamic nature of Irenaeus' conception of freedom and self-control which are 'not statically fixed as formal concepts of natural attributes in themselves, but point beyond themselves to where they are grounded, wherein resides their validity and in reference to which they may be exercised. The double contingency of humanity's existence to and from God is the light in which these terms are to be understood in Irenaeus' employment of them' p. 109.

⁴⁹ These five commentaries are: *On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees* (388-389); *Unfinished Literal Commentary on Genesis* (393-395); *Commentary on Genesis* in the final three books of *Confessions* (397-401); *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (401-416); book XI of *City of God* (416).

⁵⁰ Rotelle writes that Augustine wanted not only to hear but to understand the biblical message in Genesis. 'The creation of the world by God was a matter not only of faith but of reason'. *On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees*, in *The Works of Saint Augustine*, ed. by John E. Rotelle, trans. by Edmund Hill (New York: New City, 2002), p. 15.

of *imago Dei* is, therefore, something of a point of intersection of the key aspects of Augustine's theology, namely the quest for self-knowledge and knowledge of God.⁵¹

Like Irenaeus, Augustine affirms the goodness of God's creation and the similitude to God of all that is created.⁵² Though similitude is present in all things, it increases according to status.⁵³ The human being, as created, existing and knowing, participates in God's likeness to a degree greater than any other created being:

Since man can participate in wisdom according to the inner man, as such he is in the image of God in such a way that he is formed without the interposition of any other nature. Therefore, nothing is more closely united to God, for man knows and lives and exists and thus is unsurpassed among created beings.⁵⁴

Irenaeus and Augustine are alike in their emphasis on our intellectual capacities as reflective of the *imago Dei*. In contrast to Irenaeus, however, the idea that God could be circumscribed by the body is, for Augustine, a 'debased and empty one.'⁵⁵ The image relates to the rational mind – or the 'illuminated' mind – where the knowledge of God can exist (Lit Gen III.20). As our discussion proceeds, we will observe that Augustine appears to use the terms 'soul' and 'mind' interchangeably in terms of the *imago Dei*. There is, however, a distinction between the terms that we should clarify. In brief, *animus* is the rational soul and *mens* is its highest level. The mind (*mens*) is the highest function of the rational soul.⁵⁶ It is spiritual in nature and the locus of the *imago Dei*.

The idea that our intellectual nature allows for knowledge of God is an important Augustinian idea, which will re-emerge in the context of Aquinas' thought. According to Augustine, our intellect is that which enables the transformation of the creature from our

⁵¹ In *Soliloquies*, Augustine writes: 'I want to know God and the soul. Nothing else? Absolutely nothing else!' (I. 2,7) and 'O God who are ever the same, I want to know myself, I want to know you.' (II. 1,1), *The Soliloquies of St. Augustine*, trans. by Rose Elizabeth Cleveland (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1910).

⁵² This emphasis forms part of Augustine's refutation of Manicheism, which holds a dualistic view of creation in terms of the two opposing cosmic forces of good and evil. Manicheism is the system of belief based on the struggle between the good, spiritual world of light and the evil, material world of darkness, to which Augustine adhered for almost a decade before his conversion to Orthodox Christianity. The effect of this dualistic world-view on Augustine's writings is discussed by Jason BeDuhn in *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma: Conversion and Apostasy, 373-388 C.E.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010) and by John Kevin Coyle in *Manichaeism and its Legacy* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 307-329.

⁵³ Augustine, *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, in *Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 70, trans. by David L. Mosher (Washington: CUA Press, 2002), LI. 2.

⁵⁴ *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, LI. 2. The reference to the 'inner man' is derived from Paul: '[I]f our outer man is corrupted, nonetheless, the inner man is renewed from day to day' (2 Cor 4:16).

⁵⁵ *The Trinity*, in *Augustine: Later Works*, trans. and ed. by John Burnaby (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), XII.7.12. Subsequent references will be parenthetical and abbreviated as Trin.

⁵⁶ Augustine also employs the term *anima* to denote the soul, though this does not always correspond to the human soul. Where it does correspond to the human soul it depicts its lower functioning aspects.

unformed state to our status as created beings. Though Augustine and Irenaeus share the belief in the goodness of creation, Augustine, unlike Irenaeus, posits the idea that humankind *was* created perfect prior to the fall. Though we can value the wisdom of both thinkers, Augustine's writings, permeated with a greater emphasis on human failure, lack Irenaeus' valuable conviction that all things are as intended by God. Augustine's interpretation of Genesis 2, however, became the dominant influence on the Christian theology of grace.

1.7.1 The Fall from Perfection

Augustine is renowned for his vivid depiction of our fallen nature and for his formulation of the Christian doctrine of original sin.⁵⁷ This idea finds expression in the following extract from Augustine's interpretation of the second creation account: 'From this state, after he [Adam] had sinned, man was banished, and through his sin he subjected his descendants to the punishment of sin and damnation, for he had radically corrupted them, in himself, by his sinning'.⁵⁸ Adam and Eve, in their pride, succumbed to temptation in order to become like God.⁵⁹ Consequently, all who were descended from Adam, Augustine's *massa damnata*, 'stood condemned, lying ruined and wallowing in evil'.⁶⁰ Contemporary scholarship draws our attention to the effects of Augustine's use of a mistranslation of Paul's Greek in the Latin Vulgate, which rendered 'because all' have sinned (NRSV) as 'in whom [Adam]' all have sinned (Rom 5:12). Michael J. Gorman writes that 'Paul's point was not really to blame Adam, and much less to suggest that original sin is passed on biologically (i.e., through sexual intercourse), but to affirm the

⁵⁷ Augustine's idea of the Fall was most significantly influenced by Ambrose. E. W. Kemp warns against the tendency to attribute too much originality to Augustine's idea of original sin. He suggests that of the six propositions of Augustine's doctrine of the Fall, none are in fact original to Augustine but are already present in the work of Ambrose, by whom Augustine was baptised. Further, Kemp writes, 'it must be remembered that having once become a Christian Augustine had the most profound respect for the authority of the Church in doctrine, and it is therefore important to understand what seemed to him to be the authoritative doctrine of the Church on the subject'. 'Augustinianism' in *Man: Fallen and Free: Oxford Essays on the Condition of Man*, ed. by E. W. Kemp (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1969), pp. 158-172 (p.164). For a discussion of original sin in Augustine, see also James Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and Tatha Wiley, *Original Sin: Origins, Developments, Contemporary Meanings* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2002).

⁵⁸ *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), VIII.26.7.

⁵⁹ Augustine's designation of pride as the evil impulse responsible for the Fall is indicated in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 11.5.7 and *The City of God*, trans. by Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 1984), XIV.13.

⁶⁰ 'The whole condemned mass of the human race lay in evils, or even rolled about in them, and was precipitated from evils into evils [...]. *Enchiridion*, VIII.27.

universality of sin.’⁶¹ However, in acknowledging the significance of the mistranslation, we must also note that Augustine’s idea was not exclusively reliant on Romans 5:12, but also upon the general thrust of Paul’s theology of Adam and Christ in the entirety of Romans chapter 5 and also upon 1 Corinthians 15:22, ‘For as in Adam all died [...]’.

Though his depiction of the *massa damnata* is much more forceful, Augustine’s use of the Pauline Adam/Christ motif is not dissimilar to Irenaeus. Like Irenaeus, Augustine follows the Pauline idea of reconciliation between God and humankind in Christ:

Since men are in this state of wrath through original sin – a condition made still graver and more pernicious as they are compounded more and worse sins with it – a Mediator was required, that is to say, a Reconciler who by offering a unique sacrifice, of which all the sacrifices of the Law and the Prophets were shadows, should allay that wrath.⁶²

Importantly, for Augustine, reconciliation to God is not something humankind can do alone. It is the work of Christ.⁶³ Because of the fall, the only divine-human relationship that Augustine can conceive of is that which is made possible through the grace of Christ. Furthermore, since the image of God is restored in Christ, it endures in every person. Though defaced on account of our fallen nature, the image is never lost. Since the image is identified with this ever-present rational soul it never ceases to be: ‘whether this image be so worn out as to be almost none at all, or whether it be obscure and defaced, or bright and beautiful, certainly it always is’ (Trin IV.4.6). The consequences of the fall are, for Augustine, physical in nature and, therefore, do not relate to the rational soul. Though the infirmities that we inherit through the fall – pain, aging, lust and so forth – may make it difficult to exercise rationality, they do not alter the soul as such.⁶⁴ William E. Mann captures the centrality of the rational soul to our human identity when he suggests that ‘an alteration of the soul’s innate abilities would be tantamount to the creation of a new

⁶¹ Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul & His Letters*, (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2004) p. 366. See also W.D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology*, third edition, (London: SPCK, 1979). Davies writes that ‘to infer [...] that Adam’s transgression injected a kind of virus into man’s system which made him sin inevitably is to read into the text ideas borrowed from later theological speculation.’ p. 32.

⁶² *Enchiridion*, VIII.33.

⁶³ Here we see the effects of Augustine’s dispute with Pelagius, who posited an idea of salvation through works. For Augustine, in contrast: ‘What good works could a lost soul do?’ *Enchiridion*, VIII.30. See Dominic Keech, *The Anti-Pelagian Controversy of Augustine of Hippo, 396-430* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁶⁴ Some of the consequences that Augustine attributes to the fall include: pain, fatigue, aging, lust and, ultimately, death. See *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* 11.32.42 and *The City of God* XIV 14.16-19.

species'.⁶⁵ It is worth keeping this point mind in order to grasp the innateness of Augustine's view of the rational soul and, consequently, the *imago Dei*. Although the soul is corruptible and the extent to which the faculty of reason is present in the soul varies, 'the soul itself is never anything but rational or intellectual' (Trin. XIV.2.6). The question of universality in relation to the image of God, and in relation to rationality, leads to the question of gender. How does Paul's treatment of male and female relations in 1 Corinthians function in Augustine's theology? Does Augustine understand the image of God to be equally present in every human person?

1.7.2 Augustine's Interpretation of Male and Female Creation

Augustine's early writing, which are marked by his opposition to the Manichaean world-view, depict a spiritual view of the first human beings. Augustine, therefore, relates the command to 'Be fruitful and multiply' to the propagation of 'good works of divine praise.'⁶⁶ His later writings, however, explicate the view that sexual differentiation was present when man and woman were created in God's image.⁶⁷ The fact that both men and women are created in the image of God is, Augustine acknowledges, affirmed in Genesis (Gen 1:27). This text, however, must be reconciled with the Pauline text that appears to prioritise the male imaging of God (1 Cor 11:7). Augustine's attempt at reconciliation of the two texts is somewhat complex.⁶⁸ The nature of the problem is expressed in book VII of *The Trinity*:

For after saying that God made man in the image of God, He created him, it says, male and female: or at any rate, punctuating the words otherwise, male and female created He them. How then did the apostle tell us that the man is the image of God, and therefore he is forbidden to cover his head; but that the woman is not so, and therefore is commanded to cover hers? (Trin VII.7.10)

⁶⁵ William E. Mann, 'Augustine on Evil and Original Sin', in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. by Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 40-49 (p. 47).

⁶⁶ *The Catechising of the Uninstructed*, 18.26 discussed by John M. Rist, *Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) p. 113.

⁶⁷ *Against Julian*, 4.14.65. The chronological development of Augustine's attitude to sexual difference is discussed by Christopher C. Roberts in *Creation and Covenant* and by John M. Rist in *Augustine*, pp. 112-121.

⁶⁸ A noted early contribution to this discussion is the work of Kari Elizabeth Børreson in *Subordination and Equivalence: The Nature and Role of Women in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas*, trans. by Charles H. Talbot (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1981). The question is also considered by Judith Chelius Clark in *In God's Image, But Less So: Feminist Interpretations of Augustine*, ed. by J. C. Clark (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

Although, for Augustine, the distinction between male and female applies only to the body, the mind of the man also has its feminine and masculine dimensions, ‘the masculine part as the planner, the feminine as the one that is made.’⁶⁹ In an introspective reading of Paul’s distinction between male and female, Augustine interprets the Corinthians passage in relation to this dual dimension within the mind. The external role of women and men is an outward sign of the two dimensions of the male mind:

In this way what can be seen more clearly in two human beings, that is, in male and female, may be considered in a single person; that the interior mind, like the manly reason, should have as its subject the soul’s appetite and desire, through which we put the limbs or parts of the body to work, and by a just law should keep its help within bounds – just as a man ought to govern his wife.⁷⁰

Yet, for Augustine, this distinction within the mind is not relevant to the *imago Dei*. The important part of the mind is that part ‘devoted to the contemplation of immutable truth’ (Trin III.22). Although, for Augustine, the outward appearance of the woman may suggest otherwise – ‘for all her physical qualities as woman’ – she is certainly created in the image of God, insofar as she has a rational mind which, like the rational mind of a man, bears an analogical likeness to the Creator (Trin XII.7.12). Women are also intended as heirs of grace. As Augustine puts it, ‘who will hold women to be alien from this fellowship?’ (Trin VII.7.12)

If he reaffirms that men and women are created in the image of God, what then does Augustine take from the Pauline text? Essentially, what Augustine draws from the text is the reaffirmation of his conviction that the more the mind is oriented towards the eternal the more fully it images God:

As we said of the nature of the human mind, that both in the case when as a whole it contemplates the truth it is the image of God; and in the case when anything is divided from it, and diverted in order to the cognition of temporal things; nevertheless on that side on which it beholds and consults truth, here also it is the image of God, but on that side whereby it is directed to the cognition of the lower things, it is not the image of God (Trin VII.7.10).

Therefore the lack of necessity for the male covering of the head, Augustine reasons, is the reminder of this orientation towards the eternal and a disassociation from the corporeal

⁶⁹ *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 3:22.

⁷⁰ *On Genesis*, II, 11.15.

and temporal. Women, it seems, represent the temporal aspect of the mind. The masculine part of the mind must restrain the temporal part for fear that it should slip irrevocably into outward things. However, Augustine does recognise that the consideration of the temporal is necessary for our earthly lives. Further, he does not forget the other Pauline text relevant to the image of God as male and female: 'there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3:28).

Augustine's refusal to prioritise one scriptural text over another is characteristic of his exegetical approach and we see that his solution favours a symbolic reading of Corinthians. There has been much criticism of aspects of the resulting interpretation of the Pauline text, in particular Augustine's deterministic association of men and women with the eternal and temporal respectively, and his suggestion that the female body does not image God as much as the male.⁷¹ Though problematic in relation to the contemporary relevance of Augustine's work, there is nothing extraordinary about this aspect of his thought given the context within which he was writing. We note that in the part of the person that is clearly of the most importance to Augustine – the rational mind – men and women are equal.

1.7.3 The Image of the Triune God

In our earlier analysis of the Genesis 1:26 plural – 'let us make' – we noted the tendency of some Christian interpretations to find Trinitarian significance in the verse. Augustine exemplifies this tendency: 'Because of the three persons, it is said *to Our image*; because of the one God, it is said *to the image of God*.'⁷² As the Genesis plural is taken to relate to the Trinity, the human person, for Augustine, images the one, Triune God. It is on this point that Augustine develops one of his most notable theological ideas, that is, the existence of a Trinity in the part of the human mind that has the capacity to know God. While the divine mystery is greater than anything that the finite human mind can understand, Augustine draws an analogy between human interiority and the Triune God: 'We too as a matter of fact recognize in ourselves an image of God, that is of this most

⁷¹ Tina Beattie remarks that 'Augustine's vision of eschatological reality is tempered by his acceptance and justification of a created order in which women and men are orientated towards one another in a hierarchical relationship that reflects the psychological relationship between the will and the passions. Just as the healthy mind is one in which (masculine) contemplative wisdom prevails over (feminine) everyday knowledge and emotions, so a healthy society is one in which men have authority over women.' *New Catholic Feminism: Theology and Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2006) p. 119.

⁷² *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Vol. 1, trans. by John Hammond Taylor (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), III. 19. Subsequent references will be parenthetical and abbreviated as Lit Gen.

high Trinity, even if the image is not equal to Him in worth, but rather very far short of being so.⁷³ Though the image of God is not of the same substance as God, it is closer to God than anything else that is created, since it is the means by which we attempt to understand and behold God.⁷⁴ It is understandable that Augustine should choose such an analogy given the preoccupation with human interiority that pervades his writings: 'Do not go outward; return within yourself. In the inward man dwells truth.'⁷⁵

Augustine specifies three different activities of the human mind: memory, understanding and will (Trin X.11.17). Memory refers to the knowledge that the soul has of itself. The knowledge contained within our memory is not always explicit; we may not know that it is there. It can only be drawn out by the activity of understanding, the capacity to elevate truth above falsehood. However, understanding by itself does not guarantee that we will choose the good. The orientation of this understanding towards love engages the third activity, the will. According to Augustine, everything that we do is done by the power of these faculties of the human soul, which are, in themselves, inextricably linked to one another. Intelligence, for example, cannot be engaged without memory and will. Interestingly, we can understand Augustine's personal conversion narrative in terms of these dimensions: the conversion of the intelligence and the conversion of the will. As John O' Meara notes in his introduction to *The Confessions*, 'Augustine represents the first of these as achieved through Platonic learning and the reading of Scripture [...] and the second through Christian submission.'⁷⁶ Augustine formed a conviction of the veracity of his theory of human life in general from his experience of the working of the Spirit in his own life. When the faculties of the mind operate correctly, he saw, all that we do is good.

Thus, we observe in Augustine a radical emphasis on interiority and also, perhaps, individuality. As Charles Taylor writes:

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that it was Augustine who introduced the inwardness of radical reflexivity and bequeathed it to the Western tradition of

⁷³ *The City of God*, XI.26.

⁷⁴ Mary T. Clark writes that the 'dissimilarity between the temporal being and eternal Being, between changeable and unchangeable Being, is greater than the similarity. The divine Trinity is one with God; the human image is not identical with the human being. Remembering, understanding, and loving are functions of a human subject, whereas the Trinitarian Persons are not functions of a divine subject. There is no substitute for faith in Christ and what he reveals of Father and Spirit'. 'De Trinitate', in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, pp. 91-103 (p. 99).

⁷⁵ *Of True Religion*, trans. by J.H.S. Burleigh (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1959), XXXIX.72.

⁷⁶ John J. O' Meara, *The Young Augustine: An Introduction to the Confessions of St. Augustine* (New York: Longman, 1954), p. 11.

thought. The step was a fateful one, because we have certainly made a big thing of the first-person standpoint.⁷⁷

Augustine's introspection, however, ultimately serves the greater purpose of leading us to God. While each of the activities of the mind can be directed back to the self, they can also be directed to God and this, for Augustine, is the goal. If the mind remembers God, it will be wise, not by its own merit or 'light', but by the participation in the supreme light. This will result in the renewal of the *imago Dei* within the person, envisaged by Augustine as a gradual process, a transferral of love from temporal to eternal, from carnal to spiritual and from things visible to things intelligible. Augustine's stance is individualist in the sense that we each turn to the self in our own particular way. Yet, when we turn inwards, the space where we are present to ourselves is illuminated through the work of God. To draw again from Taylor:

And so at the end of its search for itself, if it goes to the very end, the soul finds God. The experience of being illuminated from another source, of receiving the standards of our reason from beyond ourselves, which is the proof of God's existence already brought to light, is seen to be very much an experience of inwardness.⁷⁸

At the end of the search for self, we are led to God, the eternal, unchanging truth upon which we depend. The journey to this end is difficult since each of the faculties of the mind can be obscured: memory by forgetfulness; intelligence by error; will by evil. The distorting effect of human sinfulness on the mind is ever present in Augustine's writings. As Matthew Drever writes:

This means that Augustine's inward turn into the self in *Trin.* does not represent a simple road through a stable psyche to the truth of the triune God. It is neither the inner-Cartesian space of rational self-reflection, nor the objective and transparent—geometrical, nomological—space of Newtonian physics. It is an ethically charged space, opaque and treacherous as a result of human sin, wherein one is easily deceived and corrupted.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 131.

⁷⁸ Taylor, p. 135. See also Philip Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Cary, who explores the question of interiority in the context of the influence of Platonism on Augustine's work adopts a quite critical stance towards Augustine's treatment of this theme: 'Why should we want to turn to our inner selves if God is to be found in something external, the flesh of Christ?', p. x.

⁷⁹ Matthew Drever, 'The Self Before God: Rethinking Augustine's Trinitarian Thought', *Harvard Theological Review*, 100 (2007), 233-242 (239).

The inner space is a soteriological space, ever in need of redemption. This is an appropriate point at which to conclude this brief account of Augustine's exposition of *imago Dei* since it highlights again those central aspects of Augustinian thought around which his interpretation of the concept is developed: the importance of interiority and our ultimate dependence upon divine grace. Augustine's Trinitarian analogy, we conclude, should not be understood as the mind providing the framework for an understanding of the Trinity. The *imago Dei* is a relational term, dependent upon our relationship to God. Thus the speculative exercise of *De Trinitate* is, as Matthew Drever writes, 'one of attachment rather than detachment, dependence rather than independence'.⁸⁰ While Augustine's explanation does indeed proceed from the human mind to the Trinity, this movement from the temporal to the eternal must be seen as necessary only on account of our fallen human nature. A reverse of this sequence is Augustine's intention: Through the restoration of the *imago Dei* within the mind, we can come to an understanding of the Triune God and ourselves. Yet because God transcends his creation, this understanding can only be minimal. However, 'when this image therefore has been renewed by this transformation, and thus made perfect, then we shall be like God, since we shall see him not through a mirror, but just as he is, which the Apostle calls face to face' (Trin XV.11.21).

1.8 Conclusion

In his 2007 discussion of *imago Dei*, the biblical scholar, Nathan MacDonald, describes Genesis 1:26-27 as 'a text in search of a context'.⁸¹ In this chapter, we have attempted to fill in some of that much needed context: the function of royal ideology in the Ancient Near East; the meaning of *tselem* and *demut* within the Hebrew Scriptures; aniconism in ancient Israelite religion; divine and royal dominion in the Hebrew Scriptures; Gnosticism as the background for Irenaeus' positive view of matter and emphasis on our participation in our growth to likeness, and Manicheism as the context for Augustine's affirmation of the goodness of creation. Together, these ideas form part of the tapestry within which we understand Genesis 1:26-27 and its early reception. The diversity and vastness of contextual material also illustrates the near impossible nature of interpreting any biblical

⁸⁰ Drever, *Image, Identity, and the Forming of the Augustinian Soul*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 111.

⁸¹ MacDonald, 'A Text in Search of Context: The *Imago Dei* in the First Chapters of Genesis', p. 3.

text ‘in itself’. We read the Bible with our own concerns in mind and in the knowledge that Jews and Christians have lived with this text for centuries, both intellectually and – in synagogue and church – liturgically. As the biblical scholar, Brevard Childs writes: ‘I cannot act as if I were living at the beginning of Israel’s history, but as one who already knows the story, and who has entered into the middle of an activity of faith long in the process’.⁸²

We have, nonetheless, attempted to return to origins – the beginning of the story – in order to determine what the text might have meant for its authors and what it came to mean for interpreters in the formative years of the Jewish and Christian religious traditions. We have seen that the functional interpretation of *imago Dei*, the reading of the text that finds less concern with what the person *is* than what the person *does*, is that favoured in contemporary biblical scholarship. We have observed that early Rabbinic literature offers a concrete interpretation of *imago Dei*, emphasising our physical similarity to God and the halakhic implications of such resemblance to the divine. These sources also provide evidence of an early conceptual development of the idea of the worth of the individual human person in relationship with the community and with God.

Drawing on Paul’s identification of Christ with the image of God, Irenaeus and Augustine elaborated the Christological and Trinitarian implications of the concept of *imago Dei*. The ways in which Irenaeus and Augustine interpret the ontological state of the first humans in Eden reveal their vision of the ideal human life. Similarly, their understanding of the fall of Adam and Eve points to their conception of the archetypal pattern of human sinfulness. Irenaeus’ interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve is interesting in the sense that it is, as Denis Minns notes, ‘alive to the symbolic function of the story’.⁸³ However, despite the richness of Irenaeus’ interpretation, it is Augustine’s more literal reading of Genesis that has influenced the Western Church for most of its history, bequeathing the Christian doctrine of original sin to subsequent generations, a doctrine that, it could be argued, overshadows theological anthropology.

While the Hebrew Bible presented the human person as an indivisible union of body, spirit and soul, Irenaeus and Augustine incorporated some ideas of their predecessors in the Greek philosophical tradition into their theological anthropology. The Platonic influence is generally taken to account for the emphasis on the mastery of the body by the soul – in Augustine more so than Irenaeus – which provided the rationale for

⁸² Childs, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 29.

⁸³ Minns, *Irenaeus*, p. 71.

a type of early Christian ascetic teaching. Because the body was essential to the Christian doctrine of the resurrection, it was not completely discounted in the Patristic understanding of personhood. Further, Irenaeus and Augustine emphasised the goodness of all that God had created, including the human body. There is, however, a definite prioritisation of the mind in their thought, particularly in Augustine, who could not allow for the capacity of the human body to image God. The negative ramifications of this type of thinking have been recognised in modern Christian theology, particularly with regard to Augustine and human sexuality.⁸⁴ In later chapters, we will discuss the rejection of this type of thinking and the re-embrace of embodiment as central to the theological understanding of personhood. However, we should note, the Patristic emphasis on the mastery of the body is not without worth or relevance for succeeding generations. Through this emphasis, the Fathers offer good advice for responsible self-governance in many aspects of our lives. Given their largely halakhic intent, Rabbinic writings have a more practical dimension than formative Christian writings. For the same reason, perhaps, they offer a more realistic confrontation of the lived realities of bodily life. However, in their more speculative moments, as we have seen, the Rabbinic writings exhibit a certain philosophical overlap with the 'Hellenism' of the Patristics. We must acknowledge, however, that the rabbis do not share the Patristic emphasis on intellect as reflective of the *imago Dei*.

As the discussion proceeds, it will become evident that much of what the concept of *imago Dei* would come to mean to subsequent Jewish and Christian theologians was already present in the formative interpretations that have been discussed in this chapter. We will see an alternative approach to the concept of *imago Dei* in the modern era, which will be characterised by a rejection of the centrality of rationality in favour of a more relational approach. Yet, prior to rejection, we have intensification. Thus, we turn to the fully developed intellectualism in the medieval philosophy of Thomas Aquinas and Moses Maimonides.

⁸⁴See Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'Augustine: Sexuality, Gender, and Women' in *Feminist Interpretation of Augustine*, ed. by Judith Chelius Stark. An exploration of Augustine's more positive ideas with regard to sexuality is presented by David G. Hunter, 'Augustinian Pessimism? A New Look at Augustine's Teachings on Sex, Marriage and Celibacy, *Augustinian Studies*, 25 (1994), 153-77.

CHAPTER TWO

IMAGO DEI AND THE HUMAN INTELLECT: MOSES MAIMONIDES AND THOMAS AQUINAS

This chapter will address the concept of *imago Dei* in the writings of two thinkers of the medieval period: the Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides (1138-1204 CE) and the Christian thinker Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 CE). The discussion will focus on the concept of *imago Dei* as reflected in the human intellect and, accordingly, on the human capacity for knowledge of God through this faculty. In spite of their differing religious traditions, we will observe significant similarities in the way in which Maimonides and Aquinas engaged the concept of *imago Dei*.¹ Drawing upon the scheme of Aristotle in the philosophical interpretation of their respective religious traditions, both Maimonides and Aquinas emphasise the capacity of the human intellect to grasp metaphysical truth. With regard to commonality, we must also note Aquinas' direct engagement with the writings of Maimonides, indicating what David Burrell refers to as 'a medieval climate far more open to interfaith and intercultural exchange than our stereotypes have presumed it to be'.² Aquinas cites Maimonides twenty-one times between the *Summa Theologiae* and the *Summa contra Gentiles*.³ Aquinas' references to Maimonides reveal a particular interest in Maimonides' appropriation of Aristotle's thought. Because of the extent of Aristotle's influence on both Maimonides and Aquinas, the discussion will begin with a brief outline of those aspects of Aristotelian thought that are particularly relevant to this analysis of *imago Dei*.

¹ David Novak comments on the commonality between the 'friends and the enemies' of both thinkers: 'Both Maimonides and Aquinas had to battle against the fideists in their respective communities, those who seemed to think that ascribing reason to God's law limits the infinity of God's power and will. *Talking With Christians: Musings of a Jewish Theologian* (London: SCM, 2006), p. 85.

² Burrell has conducted several comparative philosophical studies between Maimonides, Aquinas and the Muslim philosopher Ibn-Sina. *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), p. ix. See also, Burrell, *Faith and Freedom: An Interfaith Perspective* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

³ *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, second and revised edition, (London: Burns, Oates & Benzinger, 1912–1936). Subsequent references will be parenthetical, abbreviated as ST. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3.57. trans. by The English Dominican Fathers from the latest Leonine Edition, (Benzinger Brothers: New York, 1924).

2.1 Aristotle's Idea of Human Perfection

In his identification of the human person as the rational animal, Aristotle (384-322 BCE) presented the mind as the divine element within the human body: 'Man deprived of perception and mind is reduced to the condition of a plant; deprived of mind alone he is turned into a brute; deprived of irrationality but retaining mind, he becomes like God.'¹ The mind, the place where the soul thinks and judges, must be 'related to what is thinkable.'² The mind is separable from the body and must be 'capable of receiving the form of an object; that is, must be potentially identical in character with its object without being the object'.³ The well-lived life, for Aristotle, is the life that is lived according to the authority of the divine element of reason within us. It is the life that strives towards excellence, or virtue of the soul.⁴ As Aristotle writes, 'if reason is divine, then, in comparison with man, the life according to it is divine in comparison with human life.'⁵ The study of philosophy, as the intellectual contemplation of truth, is a most worthwhile pursuit to this end.

In his explication of the good life, Aristotle divides his idea of virtue into two categories: intellectual virtue and moral virtue. This distinction is explored in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle's most well-known ethical treatise: 'Virtue, then, being of two kinds, intellectual and moral, intellectual virtue in the main owes both its birth and its growth to teaching (for which reason it requires experience and time) while moral virtue comes about as a result of habit.'⁶ The idea of habit – influential to Aquinas – is indicative of the importance of action to Aristotle's conception of virtue. As Aristotle writes, we become 'just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts'.⁷ The state of our character corresponds to our habitual actions. Aristotle is critical of those who take refuge in theory, comparing them to 'patients who

¹ *Exhortation to Philosophy* in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, trans. by W.D. Ross, ed. by Jonathan Barnes, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

² *De Anima* III.4 429a in *The Works of Aristotle Translated into English*, Vol. 3, ed. by W.D. Ross, (London: Oxford, 1931).

³ *De Anima* III.4.429a.

⁴ Virtue is defined by Aristotle as a state of character which 'brings into good condition the thing of which it is the excellence and makes the work of that thing be done well, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.6a.15, *The Works of Aristotle Translated into English*, Vol. IX, trans. by W.D. Ross (London: Oxford University Press, 1915). See also Jonathan Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 153.

⁵ *Nicomachean Ethics* X.7.

⁶ *Nicomachean Ethics* II.3.15.

⁷ *Nicomachean Ethics* II.3b.5.

listen attentively to their doctors, but do none of the things they are ordered to do'.⁸ Intellectual perfection, though pertaining to the soul, also has a practical dimension. According to Aristotle, practical wisdom is that which prepares the way for theoretical excellence and contemplation, which is the highest level of human happiness through which 'beautiful and divine' realities are apprehended.⁹ Such theoretical excellence pertains to the *nous*, the part of the soul 'that thinks and judges', belonging in first potentiality to every human person. *Nous* does not refer to ordinary thought (*dianoia*), or to love and hate, but rather to that which 'seems to be an independent substance implanted in the soul' which is 'incapable of being destroyed'.¹⁰ In other words, the intellect (*nous*) seems, for Aristotle, to come from without, as an extra type of substance. As Myles F. Burnyeat writes, 'the divine intellect is cast as a non-material medium through which the intelligible forms become apparent to the human intellect'.¹¹

There is much more that could be written about Aristotle's idea of the noetic soul. However, this brief survey has begun to illustrate the reason why Aristotelian metaphysics held such appeal for Maimonides and Aquinas in their philosophical elaboration of the biblical concept of *imago Dei*. Aristotle provided them with a framework within which to view both human distinctiveness and the spiritual connection to the divine inferred in Genesis 1:26. This framework centred on an intellectualism that permeated both Aristotle's writings and those of his medieval interpreters. As Isaac Husik writes, for Aristotle, 'God is pure thought thinking eternally itself, the universal mover, himself eternally unmoved, and attracting the celestial spheres as the object of love attracts the lover, without itself necessarily being affected'.¹² The prioritisation of the speculative intellect, and the sense that the person has potential for knowledge of God through this faculty, influenced both Maimonides and Aquinas in a most significant way.

2.2 The Interpretation of Moses Maimonides

Aristotle is the philosophical source most often referred to in Maimonides' most famous work, the *Guide of the Perplexed*, first published in 1190.¹³ In the *Guide*, Maimonides

⁸ *Nicomachean Ethics* II. 5b.15.

⁹ *Nicomachean Ethics* X.7a.15. Aristotle's distinction between theoretical and practical wisdom is discussed by James L. Wood in 'Contemplating the Beautiful: The Practical Importance of Theoretical Excellence in Aristotle's Ethics', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 4 (2011), 391-412.

¹⁰ *De Anima*, I.4, 408b.

¹¹ Myles F. Burnyeat, *Aristotle's Divine Intellect*, (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2008), p. 41.

¹² Isaac Husik, *A History of Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1930), p. 299.

¹³ *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. by Shlomo Pines (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1963). Subsequent references to the *Guide* will be abbreviated as GP. Maimonides' other sources – in particular

writes that he agrees with Aristotle with ‘great regard to any point he has demonstrated’, the term demonstrate (*apodeixis*) in this instance referring to the strongest form of philosophical proof, a deduction that produces knowledge (GP I.71). Addressed to a disciple of Maimonides, the *Guide* is directed ‘to one who has philosophized and has knowledge of the true sciences but believes at the same time in the matters pertaining to the Law and is perplexed as to their meaning [...]’ (GP I. Introduction). The perplexity referred to in the title of the work, therefore, relates to the tensions that arise from the contradictions between the principles of philosophy and the literal interpretation of scripture, a concern that will resonate with many contemporary readers of Maimonides. This tension is one that Maimonides intends to at least partially resolve by illustrating the compatibility between philosophy and revealed scripture.

Maimonides was a Torah-observant Jew, writing for fellow Jews. Though some interpreters have questioned where indeed Maimonides’ true loyalties lay – whether his work originated from Athens or Jerusalem – many readers who are familiar with both his legal and philosophical texts see in Maimonides’ writings an intentional synthesis of biblical and philosophical thinking that co-exists with his deep commitment to the Torah and the Talmudic world view.¹⁴ The commitment to halakhic life that we observe in the *Mishneh Torah* is the context against which we can understand Maimonides’ philosophical writings.¹⁵ As Menachem Kellner writes:

His Judaism is a religion in which concrete behaviour serves the needs of abstract thought; that abstract thought is the deepest layer of the Torah and, at least in Maimonides’ day, could be clearly and accurately expressed in the vocabulary of the Neoplatonized Aristotelianism which Maimonides accepted as one of the highest expressions of the human spirit.¹⁶

the Muslim sources – in the *Guide* are explored by Alfred L. Ivry in ‘The Guide and Maimonides’ Philosophical Sources’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides*, pp. 58-82. See also Joel L. Kraemer, ‘The Islamic Context of Medieval Jewish Philosophy’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, pp. 38-71.

¹⁴ Leo Strauss presents a dualistic interpretation of Maimonides’ writings, arguing that the *Guide*, rather than the legal writings, reflects Maimonides’ true views. See *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (New York: Free Press, 1952), pp. 38-94. Through illustrating the philosophical content of Maimonides’ legal writings, David Hartman presents a very convincing argument for an integrated understanding of Maimonides’ philosophical and legal writings. See D. Hartman, *Maimonides: Torah and Philosophic Quest* (New York: JPS, 1976).

¹⁵ The *Mishneh Torah*, for which he is renowned in the Jewish tradition, is Maimonides’ compendium to Jewish law, completed, after ten years of work, in 1180. His other legal writings include a commentary on the *Mishnah* as well as a commentary on several tractates of the Babylonian Talmud.

¹⁶ Menachem Kellner, *Maimonides’ Confrontation with Mysticism* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilisation, 2006), p.1. Marvin Fox argues that ‘with all his regard for the great teachers of Greek antiquity and for their intellectual heirs among the Islamic thinkers, he never became an uncritical imitator’.

It is the Jewish context of Maimonides' philosophy that ultimately separates his work from his Greek and Islamic philosophical sources.

2.2.1 Maimonides' Aversion to Literalism

Maimonides' treatment of *imago Dei* is placed at the beginning of the *Guide*, thus providing an early example for the general theme and intention of the work: uncovering the hidden implications of those passages which may have been interpreted exclusively according to their literal sense. Genesis 1:26, in its reference to image and likeness, is one of the many scriptural passages that has, Maimonides regrets, suffered misinterpretation, largely due to literalistic tendencies. A brief digression to *Perek Helek* will illuminate Maimonides' position as regards the literal interpretation of scripture.¹⁷

In the introduction to *Perek Helek*, Maimonides offers a timeless account of three differing approaches to the writings of the Rabbinic sages, though further in the passage he states that his views are equally applicable to biblical interpretation. The first group, which for Maimonides forms the regrettable majority, accept the teachings of the sages exclusively according their literal sense. Maimonides attributes the failure to recognise the deeper insights of the sages' writings to a lack of scientific understanding on the part of the reader:

They understand the teachings of the sages only in their literal sense, in spite of the fact that some of their teachings when taken literally, seem so fantastic and irrational that if one were to repeat them literally, even to the uneducated, let alone sophisticated scholars, their amazement would prompt them to ask how anyone in the world could believe such things true, much less edifying.¹⁸

The second group – also numerous – are those who read the sages and assume that the literal meaning found within is the totality of what the sages themselves intended. Such readers may accept the writings of the sages at face value while adopting a position of superiority towards them. This group largely comes from the realm of medicine and astrology, perhaps those we would refer to as 'scientists' in contemporary parlance:

Inevitably, they ultimately declare the sages to be fools, hold them up to contempt, and slander what does not deserve to be slandered. They imagine that their own

Interpreting Maimonides: Studies in Methodology, Metaphysics and Moral Philosophy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 124.

¹⁷ *Perek Helek* forms part of Maimonides' commentary on the *Mishnah*, tractate *Sanhedrin*. *Perek Helek* is particularly well-known since it concludes with Maimonides' Thirteen Principles of the Torah. *Introduction to Perek Helek*, in *A Maimonidean Reader*, ed. by Isadore Twersky (New York: Behrman House, 1972), pp. 401-424.

¹⁸ *Introduction to Perek Helek*, p. 407.

intelligence is of a higher order than that of the sages, and that the sages were simpletons who suffered from inferior intelligence. The members of this group are so pretentiously stupid that they can never attain genuine wisdom.¹⁹

The third group, whose number is almost too few to mention, constitute those who can truly appreciate the greatness of the sages and the profound truths contained within their writings. They can accept the fact that ‘whenever the sages spoke of things that seem impossible, they were employing the style of riddle and parable which is the method of truly great thinkers’.²⁰

Though expressed in terms that might seem a little unforgiving to the contemporary reader, there is much in Maimonides’ insights here that transcend his historical and religious context. Many present-day readers of scripture will recognise themselves and others amongst the groups that Maimonides describes. These passages also serve as a very good introduction to the thought of Maimonides. They indicate the tendency that permeates Maimonides’ writings to differentiate between the intellectually able and the ‘multitude’ according to their capacity to decipher meaning in scriptural/Rabbinic writings and also, as we will see, their capacity to progress towards intellectual perfection. In this sense, they provide evidence for what some commentators refer to as Maimonides’ intellectual elitism, a point to which we will return. The passages also strongly illustrate Maimonides’ forceful aversion to literalist interpretation and his commitment to uncovering the profound truths of biblical and Rabbinic writings. At this point, we return to the *Guide* to discuss what this means for Maimonides’ idea of *imago Dei*.

2.2.2 The *imago Dei* as the Intellect *in Actu*

In its opening chapter of the *Guide*, Maimonides presents the terms *tselem* and *demut* as examples of such terms that can easily lend themselves to literalist misinterpretation. Because these terms denote the shape and configuration of a thing, Genesis 1.26 could potentially be interpreted as linking the physical attributes of God and the person, thereby entailing the corporeality of God as a ‘necessary consequence’ (GP 1.1).²¹ Maimonides’ point of departure in his interpretation of Genesis 1:26, therefore, is the refutation of the doctrine of the corporeality of God. He argues that physical shape or form is denoted by

¹⁹ *Introduction to Perek Helek*, p. 408.

²⁰ *Introduction to Perek Helek*, p. 409.

²¹ Maimonides counts the denial of the corporeality of God among thirteen principles of faith to which every Jew must subscribe: ‘We are to believe that he is incorporeal, that His unity is physical neither potentially nor actually.’ *Introduction to Perek Helek*, pp. 401-23.

the Hebrew term *toar* (Gen 39:6, 1 Sam 28:14). *Tselem*, on the other hand, is more appropriate to the description of natural form. By this Maimonides means ‘the notion in virtue of which a thing is constituted as a substance and becomes what it is’ (GP I.1). Within the human person, this defining substance which makes us what we are is, for Maimonides, the intellect. Maimonides’ understanding of the intellect is non-corporeal: ‘In the exercise of this [intellect], no sense, no part of the body, none of the extremities are used’ (GP I.1).

So far, we see that Maimonides’ view of *imago Dei* illustrates a strong dependence on the Aristotelian intellect, though his writings do not contain a systematic account of this theme.²² From the references to the intellect that are dispersed throughout Maimonides writings, we can observe the following: We have each been born with the capacity to acquire knowledge through the potential or material intellect. The potential intellect is described as the bond between God and the person, which must be strengthened in our ‘endeavour to come closer to him’ (GP III.51). We engage the acquired intellect in the learning of abstract truths ‘from the emanation of the active intellect’, whose source is God (GP II.4).²³ This process actualises the intellect, though the human capacity to learn varies: ‘There is no doubt that the intellect of one who understands something significant is not like the intellect of one who does not grasp it. The former possesses actual intellect, and the latter possesses only potential intellect.’²⁴ The highest degree of perfection refers to the intellect *in actu*, the intellect ‘in his most perfect and excellent state’ and it is this state of intellect that corresponds to Maimonides’ idea of *imago Dei*: ‘It is on account of this intellectual apprehension that it is said of man: *In the Image of God created He him* [...] not their shape and configuration’ (GP I.1). What we are born with is simply a capacity, ‘whereas the thing that after death is separate from matter is the thing that has become actual and not the soul that also comes into being’ (GP I.70). Only the actualised intellect survives death.

²² This aspect of Maimonides’ thought is also influenced by Avicenna and Alfarbi, as discussed by Herbert A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect: Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 197-207.

²³ Space does not allow a detailed assessment of Maimonidean cosmology. Herbert A. Davidson provides a good survey, explaining: ‘Like the matter of the sublunar world, forms come from the ever-present and never-changing emanation of the active intellect, and the active intellect is accordingly termed the “giver of forms” (GP II.12)’. *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes*, p. 198. The medieval Arabic tradition forms a large part of the context here. As Alexander Altmann writes ‘Maimonides subscribes to an Avicennian type of ontology which sees the total reality, including God, as a continuum in which the flow of emanations from God through the hierarchy of Intelligences reaches down to the Active Intellect as the immediate fountainhead of the activity of forms in the sublunar world’. ‘Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas: Natural or Divine Prophecy?’ *AJS Review*, 3 (1978), 1-19 (7).

²⁴ *Commentary on the Mishnah* i.37.

Knowledge of God is the ultimate goal of human life, an Aristotelian idea that Maimonides attempts to ground in Scripture, specifically in those references to *knowing* God:

Thus it says: "Unto you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord," and so on [Dt. 4:35]; and it says: "Know this day, and lay it to your heart," and so on [Dt. 4:39]; and it says: "Know that the Lord He is God" [Ps. 100:3]. The Torah has made it clear that this ultimate worship to which we have drawn attention in this chapter can only be engaged in after apprehension has been achieved (GP III.51).²⁵

The fact that God is unknowable is, however, a consistent Maimonidean theme: Our knowledge of God consists only in 'our inability to attain the ultimate term in apprehending Him' (GP I.59). In other words, our greatest knowledge of God will only yield an understanding of God's incomprehensibility. The failings of human language to depict God inspired Maimonides' elaborate negative theology and his refusal to allow the predication of any attributes of God that can be predicated of the person.²⁶ He reluctantly allowed negative predications: The phrase 'God is powerful', for example, should be understood as 'God is not lacking in power'.²⁷ Maimonides' emphasis here is on the idea that God's power is incomparable to power as manifested in any created thing.²⁸ We cannot compare God's power in creating the universe and the human power to, for example, move a book from a shelf. Similarly God is not lacking life, unity, wisdom or will though none of these can be understood to relate to God in the way they are understood in terms of our human capacities.²⁹ In our effort towards the attainment of

²⁵ Isaac Husik disagrees: 'That the Pentateuchal law is solely concerned with practical conduct, religious, ceremonial and moral, needs not saying. It is so absolutely clear and evident that one wonders how so clear-sighted a thinker like Maimonides could have been misled by the authority of Aristotle and the intellectual atmosphere of the day to imagine otherwise.' *Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, p. 300.

²⁶ The Arabic-Islamic philosopher, Avicenna (980-1037), is an important influence on the thought of Maimonides and Aquinas in relation to the *via negativa* and the idea that God is the only being that exists by virtue of itself and nothing else. Robert Wisnovsky, 'Avicenna and the Avicennian Tradition', in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. by Peter Adamson, Richard C. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 92-137.

²⁷ Although Maimonides is taken as an exponent of the *via negativa*, it seems that, for him, this method was merely preferable to affirmation. As Josef Stern remarks: 'Negative attributes are "better" than affirmative ones. [Yet] negative divine attributes are still false and descriptions formed from them fail to represent the deity'. Stern, 'Maimonides' Epistemology', p. 125.

²⁸ Kenneth Seeskin writes that when 'we say that God is merciful, we should not think that God sits in a heavenly court passing judgement on people but that God has given the gift of existence to things that have no right to claim it on their own. If there is a comparison to be made, it is not between God and us but between the results of our actions and the results of God's. 'Metaphysics and its Transcendence', in *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides*, pp. 82-105 (p. 87).

²⁹ David Burrell notes how this aspect of Maimonides' philosophy would have been somewhat unwelcome to the religious-minded of his community: 'We must attribute all such perfections to God, of course, but

intellectual perfection, we need to come to an understanding of God's otherness, in philosophical terms, the fact that God exists in actuality not in potentiality (GP I.52). This – what Aquinas would later refer to as 'sheer actuality' – means that God can never be dependent upon external or additional powers to act as God does.³⁰ We will discuss Aquinas' engagement with Maimonides' *via negativa* further in the chapter. At this point we turn to Maimonides' understanding of the second Genesis creation account.

2.2.3 The Necessity for the Commandments

The intellectualist interpretation of *imago Dei* comes to prominence in Maimonides' allegorical interpretation of the second Genesis creation (GP II. 30).³¹ According to Maimonides' vision of the original human state, Adam was endowed with the capacity to distinguish truth and falsehood in perfection and integrity: 'For the intellect that God made overflow to man, and that is the latter's ultimate perfection was that which Adam was provided with before he disobeyed' (GP I.2). However, because Adam yielded to 'desires which had their source in his imagination and to the gratification of his bodily appetite [...] he was punished by the loss of part of that intellectual faculty which he had previously possessed' (GP I.2). It was at this point, according to Maimonides, that humankind was endowed with the capacity to distinguish between good and evil and the necessity for the commandments (GP II.30).

A brief digression back to Aristotle is important here, specifically his prioritisation of the theoretical intellect: 'For it is the activity of [the theoretical intellect] that constitutes complete human happiness [...] Nor ought we to obey these who enjoin that man should have human thoughts and a mortal the thoughts of morality' (1177b).³² In Aristotle's case, 'human thoughts' relate to the practical matters of life, matters that are deemed inferior to theoretical speculation. As Shlomo Pines explains, the 'practical

how God possesses them, and hence what they amount to in divinity, must escape us entirely. *Knowing the Unknowable God*, p. 55.

³⁰ Aquinas wrote that 'the very existence of matter is a being potential; whilst God as we have seen contains no potentiality, but is sheer actuality' (ST I.3.2). This idea of actuality is Aristotelian. He writes that the very being of the divine intellect 'is actuality. For always that which acts is of higher worth than that which is acted upon, the originative principle than the matter'. *De Anima* III 5.

³¹ Maimonides' interpretation of the Genesis account of the creation of the human person is discussed by Sara Klein-Braslavy in 'The Creation of the World and Maimonides' interpretation of Gen. I-V' in *Maimonides and Philosophy*, ed. by Shlomo Pines and Yirmiyahu Yovel (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986). Klein-Braslavy considers whether Maimonides interpreted the account of the creation of Adam literally. While Maimonides does attribute historical significance to the figure of Adam, he also takes 'Adam' to designate the human species. Then, 'according to their inner sense, the stories about "Adam" are a-historical or, to be more accurate, they represent a philosophical anthropology'. p. 71.

³² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X.1177b.

intellect pursues by its activity an ulterior object; its activity is not an end unto itself, as is that of the theoretical intellect'.³³ Maimonides interpretation of the second creation account is indebted to this Aristotelian distinction, in its prioritisation of the speculative intellect and its relegation of questions of morality to the realm of the practical intellect, though this is not a term that Maimonides himself uses. Practical and political matters are, for Maimonides, secondary to our contemplative end:

It is impossible that the end of man be that he eat or drink or engage in sexual intercourse or build a wall or become a king because [1] these activities are accidents in relation to him, they do not add to his substance; [2] moreover, all these activities are performed not only by him but also by some other species of animals.³⁴

This is a quite clear Aristotelian disassociation of our form – the intellect, what becomes the *imago Dei* – from the practical, the political ('become a king')³⁵, and the ethical: 'Through the intellect one distinguishes truth and falsehood, and that was found in [Adam] in its perfection and integrity. Fine and bad, on the other hand, belong to the things generally accepted as known, not to those cognized by the intellect' (GP I.2). In the perfect state, humankind had no faculty for the consideration of generally accepted things, i.e., good and bad: 'So among these generally accepted things even that which is most manifestly bad, namely, uncovering the genitals, was not bad according to him, and he did not apprehend that it was bad' (GP I.2).

Does this mean that the human person had no moral component in the original unfallen state? Considering the fact that it is our intellect that allows us to receive the commandments – 'for commandments are not given to beasts and beings devoid of intellect' (GP I.2) – it does not seem that Maimonides considered morality to have been

³³ Pines, 'Truth and Falsehood Versus Good and Evil: A Study in Jewish and General Philosophy in Connection with the Guide of the Perplexed 1,2', in *Studies in Maimonides*, ed. by Isadore Twersky (London: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 95-159. p. 98. Pines argues that Maimonides diverges a little from Aristotle with the extent of his distinction between good and evil, on the one hand, and truth and falsehood on the other. We should also note that while Aristotle, in *Nicomachean Ethics* closely associates ethics with politics (i.e. the practical) Maimonides' ethical treatise *Eight Chapters* has quite a contemplative orientation. Raymond L. Weiss writes that 'Ethics is intimately connected with metaphysics because training one's character is necessary to prepare oneself to attain knowledge of God.' *Maimonides' Ethics: The Encounter of Philosophic and Religious Morality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 15.

³⁴ Maimonides, *Eight Chapters*, in *Ethical Writings of Maimonides*, trans. and ed. by Raymond L. Weiss and Charles Butterworth, (New York: New York University Press, 1975), pp. 59-104.

³⁵ As Raymond Weiss explains, 'Political activity, then, does not enhance a man's substance; it does not concern what is truly "one's own" namely, intellection. Nor is it distinctive of human life, for some species of animals also have rulers ("kings")'. *Maimonides' Ethics*, p.19.

entirely absent from the original human state. Rather, since the original humans possessed the fullness of the *imago Dei*, morality was a more precise matter concerned with the discernment between truth and falsehood by means of reason. After the fall, morality was demoted to a status inferior to reason. As argued by Steven Schwarzschild, morality became a ‘matter of established social *mores* [...] with their aesthetic, proximate and mean qualities’.³⁶ It is not the case, therefore, that the human person was in a purely intellectual state before the fall. However, even if we accept that morality was not absent from the original state, it does seem that Maimonides’ assertion that morality was more concerned with truth and falsehood disassociates the *imago Dei* from ethical considerations. Does this mean that our creation in the image of God has nothing to do with goodness? To answer this question, it is necessary to consider, in greater detail, Maimonides’ idea of human perfection.

2.2.4 Maimonides’ Conception of the Nature of Human Perfection

Like Aristotle, Maimonides affirms the practice of contemplation leading to the knowledge of metaphysics as the ideal of human life (GP III.51). The highest perfection for a human person is ‘the conception of the intelligibles, which teach true opinions concerning divine things’ (GP III.54). The importance of intellectual perfection to Maimonides’ work is difficult to overstate. It manifests itself in many aspects of his theology, including his halakhic writings. God’s providence, for example, ‘follows upon the divine emanation’ from God, ‘the most perfect intellect’ (GP III.17). Providence is proportionate to intellectual attainment and not ‘equal in all men’ (GP III.18).³⁷ The nature of the life of the world to come is also dependent upon our intellectual attainment:

Hence, when the material portion of our being dissolves into its component elements, and the physical life perishes – since that only exists in association with the body and needs the body for its functions – this form of the Soul is not destroyed, as it does not require physical life for its activities. It knows and apprehends the Intelligences that exist without material substance.³⁸

³⁶ Schwarzschild, ‘Moral Radicalism and “Middlingness” in the Ethics of Maimonides’, in *The Pursuit of the Ideal: Jewish Writings of Steven Schwarzschild*, ed. by Menachem Kellner (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), pp. 137-161 (p. 147).

³⁷ Herbert Davidson writes that divine providence for Maimonides ‘is contingent on a person’s perfecting his intellect and establishing contact with the same emanation from the active intellect; in explaining how providence works, Maimonides makes no mention of a direct intervention by God in the lives of ordinary human beings [...]’ *Maimonides: The Man and his Works*, p. 377.

³⁸ *Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Foundation of the Torah* IV.9, trans. by Eliyahu Touger (New York: Moznaim, 1989). Subsequent references abbreviated as MT.

After death, the perfected intellect separates from the body and enjoys ‘enormous pleasure’ (GP III.27). As Herbert Davidson comments, ‘Maimonides’ rationalism outweighs any religious scruples. He writes that human immortality is the exclusive outcome of man’s intellectual development’.³⁹ Maimonides’ vision of the messianic period is similarly understood. He envisions the ideal human society where there will be no earthly problems such as famine or war. All will be free to engage in the divine law and its wisdom:

The entire world will be devoted solely to the attainment of knowledge of God. All Israel will be great sages, knowing the hidden matters and attaining knowledge of their Maker to the extent of human capacity, as it is stated “The world will be filled with the knowledge of God as the water covers the sea” (Isaiah 11:9).⁴⁰

In light of the most significant contribution that Maimonides made to the understanding of the laws that govern Jewish communal life, his emphasis on intellectual attainment can surprise some readers since, as Menachem Kellner writes, it goes against the grain of Rabbinic Judaism, ‘with its emphasis on perfection through observance of God’s commands and on purity of motive’.⁴¹ However, we should note that in all his emphasis on intellectual attainment, Maimonides, like Aristotle, also advocates the ideal of moral perfection, the life of ‘loving-kindness and righteousness’ (GP III.54).

Whether intellectual perfection or moral perfection constitutes the ideal of human life is something of a point of debate among Maimonides’ interpreters and for good reason: Maimonides, by his own admission, contradicts himself in the *Guide*, yet as Kellner writes, ‘rarely does he do it in so blatant a fashion as with the issue of human perfection.’⁴² In the first part of the *Guide*, for example, Maimonides writes that moral virtues are a preparation for the rational virtues which cannot be attained ‘unless it is by a man thoroughly trained in his morals and endowed with the qualities of tranquillity and quiet’ (GP I.34).⁴³ Then, in the penultimate paragraph of the *Guide*, Maimonides seems

³⁹ Herbert Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect*, p. 207.

⁴⁰ *MT, Kings and Wars XII.4-5*.

⁴¹ Kellner, ‘Maimonides on Human Perfection’, *Brown Judaic Studies*, 202 (1990), p. 3.

⁴² Kellner, ‘Maimonides on Human Perfection’, p.7. In the introduction to the *Guide*, Maimonides specifies seven possible contradictions that are found within, the fifth and seventh type being used intentionally. See Daniel Davies in *Method and Metaphysics in Maimonides’ Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 15-16 and Yair Lorberbaum, ‘On Contradictions, Rationality, Dialectics, and Esotericism in Maimonides’ “Guide of the Perplexed”’, *The Review of Metaphysics*, 4 (2002), pp. 711-750.

⁴³ This point is reiterated in the third part of the *Guide* where Maimonides discusses the idea of moral perfection: ‘Most of the commandments serve no other end than the attainment of this kind of perfection. But this kind of perfection is likewise a preparation for something else and not an end in itself [...]’ (GP III.54).

to favour the imitation of the actions of God as the goal of life. Having restated the idea of intellectual perfection as the goal of life, Maimonides writes:

The way of life of such an individual, after he has achieved this apprehension, will always have in view loving-kindness, righteousness and judgement, through assimilations to His actions, may He be exalted, just as we have explained several times in this Treatise (GP III. 54).

Can this statement be taken to indicate that the ultimate form of human perfection is, in fact, the imitation of the moral qualities of God? Such was the position taken by the German Jewish philosopher, Hermann Cohen (1842-1918), who suggested that a correct reading of the *Guide* must begin with this conclusion: 'Therein lies the key point in Maimonides' theory of divine attributes, that he reduces and confines the concept of divine attributes to the ethical attribute, and therewith the concept of God to the ethical concept of God.'⁴⁴ Of course Cohen, in his advocacy of 'ethical monotheism' and the universal potential of Jewish ethics, would have had reason to read Maimonides in this way.⁴⁵ Cohen's position is shared by Steven Schwarzschild, who writes that 'it has to be remembered that the deity "is" only negations – albeit negations and privations – except of the attributes of action. One cannot unite with *negative. Unio* with the deity can, therefore be brought about only through the positive, that is, actional attributes'.⁴⁶ According to Schwarzschild, the knowledge of God that is the goal of human life is, for Maimonides, only possible through knowledge of God's practice of grace, justice and righteousness in the world. Knowledge of God, therefore, is equivalent to the imitation of these practices throughout our lives. The perfection of the human person consists in the imitation of the actional attributes of God. The attribute of action is the only type of attribute that we can predicate of God because, Maimonides argues, an action is remote from the essence of a thing about which it is predicated. All of God's acts are carried out by means of God's essence and not, Maimonides holds, 'by means of a superadded notion' (GP I.53).⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Hermann Cohen, *Characteristics of Maimonides' Ethics*, trans. by A.S. Bruckstein (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004). See also Shlomo Pines, 'The Limitations of Human Knowledge according to al-Farabi, ibn Bajja, and Maimonides', *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. by Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1979).

⁴⁵ See David Novak, 'Universal Moral Law in the Theology of Hermann Cohen', *Modern Judaism*, 1 (1981), pp. 101-117.

⁴⁶ Schwarzschild, 'Moral Radicalism and "Middleness" in the Ethics of Maimonides', p. 144.

⁴⁷ Maimonides' treatment of the divine attributes in chapter 52 of the first part of the *Guide* is discussed by Joseph A. Bujis, 'The Negative Theology of Maimonides and Aquinas', *The Review of Metaphysics*, 4 (1988), 723-738.

As an alternative interpretation to that proposed by Schwarzschild, it should be considered whether Maimonides' final statement could be taken to reaffirm that apprehension of God is the goal of life which, once attained, leads to Godlike behaviour. In this case, the imitation of the moral qualities of God assumes secondary importance in comparison to the primacy of intellectual perfection. Although Maimonides argues that to the 'ultimate perfection there do not belong either actions or moral qualities' (GP III.27), the ultimate virtue consists in imitating the actions of God:

For the utmost virtue of man is to become like unto Him, may He be exalted, as far as he is able; which means that we should make our actions like unto His, as the sages made clear when interpreting the verse, *Ye shall be holy*. They said: He is gracious, so be you also gracious; He is merciful, so be you also merciful (GP I.55).

Although it is difficult to ascertain whether Maimonides viewed intellectual or moral perfection as the goal of life, it is possible to affirm that he viewed moral virtue as essential to intellectual perfection, and therefore essential to the realisation of the *imago Dei*. We should also remember that Maimonides interpreted the Law in terms of the two-fold nature of the person: our contemplative end and our political nature. The recognition that both natures were important to Maimonides helps the reader to overcome these seeming contradictions.⁴⁸ So although a clear answer to the question of the relevance of ethics to Maimonides' interpretation of *imago Dei* is quite difficult to attain for reasons just discussed, we can certainly say that Maimonides' idea of human perfection exhibited a deep concern for, and connection with, the ethical life.

2.2.5 The Attainment of the Ideal

Having established the importance of intellectual perfection for Maimonides' idea of *imago Dei*, the discussion will turn to the manner in which this perfection can be attained. What was Maimonides' perception of our capacity for the realisation of his vision?⁴⁹ If the *imago Dei* concerns the intellect *in actu*, does it hold any significance for those whose intellects remain in the state of potentiality? According to Yair Lorberbaum,

⁴⁸ Raymond L. Weiss discusses the importance of both aspects of human nature to Maimonides: 'To understand Maimonides, it is necessary to attend to which point of view dominates the discussion in a given context.' *Maimonides' Ethics*, p. 3.

⁴⁹ Whether Maimonides considered the state of intellectual perfection to be attainable is considered by Aviezer Ravitsky, 'To the Utmost of Human Capacity: Maimonides on the Days of the Messiah', in *Perspectives on Maimonides: Philosophical and Historical Studies*, ed. by Joel Kramer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 221-256.

Maimonides' conception of the *imago Dei* excludes the overwhelming majority of people from its remit:

For Maimonides, *Tzelem Elohim* is not the intellect as human potential but the intellect *in actu*. Only one whose intellect is 'in his most perfect and excellent state' is in God's image. In other words, only those who reach the highest level of philosophical apprehension are for Maimonides in the image of God.⁵⁰

Can any person attain intellectual perfection? For Maimonides, it seems not. He writes that 'these matters are only for a few solitary individuals of a very special sort, not for the multitude' (GP I.55). For this reason, they should be hidden from the beginner, and 'he should be prevented from taking them up, just as a small baby is prevented from taking coarse foods and from lifting heavy weights' (GP I.55).

Maimonides argues that the diverse nature of human species – whereby 'two persons may be so different from each other in every respect that they appear to belong to two different classes' – is a distinguishing factor between human beings and other animals (GP II.40). In recognition of our diversity, we are each given different abilities and we have been created to allow for the fact that some people are ruled by others. In order to counterbalance our diverse natures and bring order to society, the leader must 'complete every shortcoming, remove every excess, and prescribe for the conduct of all, so that the natural variety should be counterbalanced by the uniformity of legislation, and the order of society be well established' (GP II.40).

Ultimately, though, the pursuit of intellectual attainment is, for Maimonides, a solitary pursuit that pertains to the individual person alone (GP III.27). Though Maimonides emphasises the ceremonial acts that are essential to the life of every Jew – and was meticulous in their observance in his own life – he prioritises intellectual worship.⁵¹ Intellectual worship requires solitude and time apart from the practical affairs of family life. One should increase the time spent in diligent observation and study 'with God or striving to reach Him' and reduce the time spent 'with others and not striving to approach Him' (GP III.51). Perhaps Maimonides does not give due consideration to the fact that such solitude and study would not be possible for everybody to realise in equal measure. We are reminded of the famous saying of the second century Tanna, Simeon

⁵⁰ Yair Lorberbaum, 'Human Dignity in the Jewish Tradition', in *The Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by Marcus Düwell et al., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 135-147 (p. 141).

⁵¹ Herbert A. Davidson discusses examples of Maimonides' 'meticulous' observance of ceremonial practices. *Maimonides the Rationalist* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilisation, 2011), p. 296.

Ben Azzai: 'My soul is in love with the Torah; the world can be carried on by others'.⁵² It would not be unfair to suppose that this aspect of Maimonides' thought exhibits a certain elitism, as well as a somewhat deterministic view of what the 'multitude' is capable of understanding.

Tamar Rudavsky writes that what she identifies as intellectual elitism in Maimonides 'is grounded in a form of biological or psycho-physical determinism, according to which our intellectual abilities are already determined by our very bodily constitution'.⁵³ Rudavsky cites I.34 of the *Guide* as evidence of the fact that for Maimonides – in her words – 'the multitude cannot be taught the divine sciences'.⁵⁴ However, we should note that Maimonides does not write that the multitude cannot learn metaphysics but rather that 'instruction cannot begin with metaphysics' (GP I.34). He goes on to posit five reasons for this: (i) the difficulty of the subject; (ii) the initial insufficiency of the intelligence of the person; (iii) impatience of the person with the necessary preparatory studies; (iv) unsuitable temperament and (v) the necessary attention due to one's material needs and those of one's family. Everyone must, however, be taught about the unity and incorporeality of God.

These reasons, though perhaps a little deterministic and generalised, are not unrealistic. In fact, they illustrate a certain practical awareness of a thinker who did, after all, spend a decade relating the minutiae of Jewish law to the lived circumstances of the Jewish community in writing the *Mishneh Torah*. Maimonides recognised that the ultimate intellectual perfection can only be attained after the first perfection – the welfare of the body – has been attended to. We cannot attend to that which leads to our permanent preservation when, Maimonides acknowledges, we are hungry or thirsty or hot or cold (GP III.27). Maimonides writes of the 'two-fold perfection' at the heart of Mosaic Law: 'The true Law, I mean the Law of Moses inculcates this two-fold perfection, and even indicates that it is the design of the Law to lead men to the attainment of them' (GP

⁵² *BT Yebamoth* 63b, trans. by Israel W. Slotki, (London: The Soncino Press, 1984), p. 125. This saying arises in the course of a Talmudic exchange, referred to in Chapter One, relating to the importance of propagation for maintaining the *imago Dei*. Ben Azzai is defending his right to remain childless against the charge of R. Jacob and R. Eliezer that his actions are akin to bloodshed in diminishing the image (Genesis 9:6). Interestingly, Maimonides, against the grain of medieval jurists, ascribed normativity to Ben Azzai's position: 'When a person's soul desires Torah at all times and is obsessed with its [study] as was ben Azzai, and clings to it throughout his life, without marrying, he is not considered to have transgressed'. MT, *Laws of Marriage*, 15.3.

⁵³ T. M. Rudavsky, *Maimonides* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 25.

⁵⁴ Rudavsky, *Maimonides*, p. 25.

III.27).⁵⁵ Maimonides views the role of Mosaic as the prevention of injustice and the establishment of positive inter-human relations.⁵⁶ The Law, correctly observed, results in temperance, something for which we should strive, once our physical needs are met (GP III.33). A cooperative society allows for the realisation of bodily perfection, or physical health. This, in turn, is the medium through which intellectual perfection can be realised. Such perfection should be desirable to every person, since it opens the gate to prophecy, the highest form of moral and intellectual development and the closest we can come to achieving conjunction with the divine in this life. The true prophet stands at ‘the highest level and the ultimate perfection possible for his species’ (GP II.36).

2.2.6 Prophecy as a Cognitive Power

The prophet, Maimonides asserts, is one whose intellect is in tune with the emanation of the Active Intellect, whose source is God. The following passage illustrates the high standards Maimonides presumes for those upon whom the gift of prophecy is bestowed. Assuming that prophecy will come to the exceedingly wise person who is in perfect health, Maimonides continues as follows:

[This person] will, when studying esoterical philosophy and is attracted by those elevated issues and is of an appropriate temperament to understand and comprehend them, and sanctifies himself by moving away from anybody who concerns himself with ephemeral matters, and encourages himself not to have any thoughts about useless matters and its contrivances, have his thoughts permanently attuned to above, from under God’s Throne, to understand the pure and holy forms, and looks upon the wisdom of God in its entirety, from the first form till the centre of the Earth, and sees in them God’s greatness, and then prophecy will immediately come to him.⁵⁷

Maimonides goes on to describe the transformation of the person at the time when prophecy comes to them, a process David Blumenthal refers to as ‘intellectual mysticism’.⁵⁸ At that point, the person will rise above the level of other wise men and

⁵⁵ ‘Thus the godly community becomes pre-eminent, reaching a twofold perfection. By the first perfection I mean, man’s spending his life in his world under the most agreeable and congenial conditions. The second perfection would constitute the achievement of intellectual objectives, each in accordance with his native powers.’, *Epistle to Yemen in A Maimonidean Reader*, ed. by Isadore Twersky (New York: Behrman House, 1972), pp. 437-463 (p. 442-3).

⁵⁶ See Kellner, *Maimonides on Judaism and the Jewish People* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), pp. 71-73.

⁵⁷ *The Laws and Basic Principles of the Torah* 7.1, trans. by Immanuel M. O’Levy (1993), <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/rambam-yesodei-hatorah.txt> (accessed 1 May 2012).

⁵⁸ David Blumenthal describes the process as one of ‘corresponding evidences. The evidence of these senses is abstracted and compared with abstract ideas which are already in the mind. If the correspondence is complete, truth or knowledge or intellect *in actu* is established. These abstract ideas that are already in the

become like an angel. Maimonides advises caution in relation to the recognition of a true prophet who prophesises publicly.⁵⁹ In order to ascertain that the prophecy is genuine and not plagiarised, one looks to the character of the prophet, which should display a rejection of bodily pleasures (GP II.40). Having determined the character of the prophet, one then looks to the degrees of prophecy which Maimonides details. Maimonides' depiction of prophecy proceeds from the first degree, which is the receiving of divine assistance in order to perform a good or great act, to the eleventh degree, which is an encounter with an angel (GP II. 45). Different degrees of prophecy may be attained by those who possess the faculty at various times throughout their lives.⁶⁰ Though the prophecy of Moses is depicted as exceptional, there is a sense in Maimonides' writings that other forms prophecy are attainable, that they are something for which we should strive. Though ultimately subject to the will of God, for Maimonides, 'it is a natural thing for everyone who according to his natural disposition is fit for prophecy [...] to become a prophet' (GP II.32). The perfection of the intellect is key, as Herbert Davidson details:

The centrality of intellect for Maimonides and the attendant minimizing of a direct role of God in human affairs cannot be stressed too often or too strongly: Before a human being may hope for the gift of prophecy, he must perfect his intellect, for only then will he receive the emanation of the active intellect in the desired fashion; God limits his direct role to denying prophecy to some who would otherwise prophesy.⁶¹

However, although prophecy is a cognitive power, and thus almost a natural phenomenon, it opens the prophet to a realm that exceeds the power of speculation. There is a definite sense, in Maimonides' writings, that it is to prophecy we turn when we have reached the limits of philosophy and science.⁶² True prophecy is reliant on perfection in the intellect and the imagination. Emanation from the Active Intellect comes 'first to the rational faculty and then emanate upon the imaginative faculty' (GP II.36). As Leo Strauss explains:

mind, however, are not "innate" but are emanated to the human intellect from the divine intellect (that is, the Agent Intelligence). 'Maimonides' Intellectual Mysticism and the Superiority of the Prophecy of Moses', *Approaches to the Study of Medieval Judaism*, ed. by D. Blumenthal (Chico, Scholars Press: 1984), pp. 27-52.

⁵⁹ Maimonides' distinction between public and private prophecy is discussed by Howard Kreisel, *Maimonides' Political Thought: Studies in Ethics, Law and the Human Ideal* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 24-28.

⁶⁰ Maimonides derives each of the degrees of prophecy from scripture, Samson being held as an exemplar of the first degree and Abraham of the eleventh. Moses is depicted as being exceptional among the prophets since his mind remained 'connected to God, and God's glory never left him at all; light emanated from his face, and he was holy like an angel'. *The Laws and Basic Principles of the Torah*, 7.6.

⁶¹ Herbert Davidson, *Maimonides: The Man and his Works*, p. 377.

⁶² Marvin Fox, *Interpreting Maimonides*, p. 287.

Since in the case of prophecy, not only the intellect (as in the case of philosophical knowledge) but also the power of imagination is influenced by the Active Intellect, prophecy is [...] “the highest stage of man and the most extreme perfection that can be found in the human race”. Even on this ground, the prophet is unconditionally superior to the philosopher, and all the more to other men [...] He can know *directly* what other men can only know indirectly.⁶³

This, of course, makes prophecy most desirable. Interestingly, Abraham Heschel assumes that Maimonides himself greatly desired to transcend the limitations of his own intellect in order to solve those philosophical problems that troubled him, to ‘peep behind the veil’, as Heschel puts it: ‘Prophecy was considered by him a cognitive power, and whoever was master of that capacity could reach places where unaided reason faltered’.⁶⁴ Heschel does not have any direct Maimonidean statement to draw on since he did not make his ‘yearning for prophecy’ public. However, Heschel argues, Maimonides’ ‘secret’ comes forth ‘in hints scattered through his writings, slight in some places and fuller in others’.⁶⁵ Heschel concludes that if ‘such spiritual heroes existed in his generation, men worthy of having the divine spirit rest on them, it is certain that he counted himself among them’.⁶⁶

Before moving on to Aquinas’ treatment of *imago Dei*, we will draw together some of the insights gained through our consideration of Maimonides’ account of the concept. There is, for Maimonides, no higher ideal than the knowledge of God, that which is attained through the intellect *in actu*, the *imago Dei*. Maimonides writes that ‘nothing endures to all eternity save knowledge of the ruler of the universe.’⁶⁷ It is this truth, and our capacity for knowledge of God, that enables us to ‘walk in the paths of righteousness’. Much of Maimonides’ philosophy consists in the recognition of the limits of human knowledge, particularly as regards metaphysics, the ‘divine sciences’: we can have no positive knowledge of God. Religious practice and the observance of the commandments enable the attainment of the ideal religious life which, like the ideal philosophical life, is characterised by contemplation: ‘When you have arrived by way of intellectual research at a knowledge of God and His works, then commence to devote yourselves to Him, try to approach Him and strengthen the intellect, which is the link that

⁶³ Leo Strauss, *Philosophy and Law: Essays Towards the Understanding of Maimonides and his Predecessors*, (Philadelphia: JPS, 1987), p. 85.

⁶⁴ Abraham Heschel, ‘Did Maimonides Believe That He Had Attained the Rank of Prophet?’ in *Prophetic Inspiration after the Prophets: Maimonides and Other Medieval Authorities*, ed. by M. M. Faierstein (Hoboken: KTAV, 1996), pp. 69–126 (p. 70).

⁶⁵ Heschel, p. 79.

⁶⁶ Abraham Heschel, *Maimonides: A Biography*, trans. by Joachim Neugroschelp (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982), p. 21.

⁶⁷ MT *Laws of the Mezuzah*, 6:13.

joins you to Him' (GP III.51). Though acknowledging his tendency to prioritise the intellectually privileged, we should not dismiss Maimonides as elitist. Maimonides envisioned a just society attained through observance of the Law and he recognised, to some extent, that poverty restricts our ability to study and contemplate in order to progress towards intellectual attainment. However, we must conclude, Maimonides' idea of the realisation of *imago Dei* is not universal. Though every human person can, in theory, strive towards intellectual apprehension, Maimonides' concept of the *imago Dei* has an undeniable emphasis on the privileged few, those who attain intellectual apprehension.

2.3 *Imago Dei* in the Writings of Thomas Aquinas

The discussion will now turn to the understanding of the concept of *imago Dei* in the writings of Thomas Aquinas. Like Maimonides, Aquinas engages Aristotelian philosophy in the development of his dynamic theology of *imago Dei*, forming a synthesis between the philosophic concept of the soul and the Christian idea of deification – a growth in likeness to the Triune God – that he inherited from the Patristic era. As William Dunphy writes: 'Aquinas is following in the centuries-old footsteps of the great Augustine, who saw true philosophy and true religion as one – that is, as a love of wisdom in which faith seeks to understand what it believes'.⁶⁸ Aquinas, we will see, envisages a gradual and ascending realisation of the image of God within the person, enabling our participation in the divine life of the Trinity.

For Aquinas, the human being is composed of one substance in which two components – body and soul – can be distinguished. The soul is the substantial form of the body (ST I.76.1). This means that the soul is that by which the body is actualised as human. The body is the instrument of the soul, through which the soul acts. Therefore, 'it is clear that it is for the good of the soul to be united with a body' (ST I.89.1).⁶⁹ As the first principle of life, the soul is common to every animate creature. Although plants possess a nutritive soul, and animals possess a nutritive and sensory soul, the spiritual soul – comprised of nutritive, sensory and rational components – is particular to human beings. Together, these components, which make up the spiritual soul, constitute a single substantive form. The faculties of the soul can, however, be differentiated. Although the

⁶⁸ William Dunphy, 'Maimonides and Aquinas on Faith, Reason, and Beatitude', in *Studies in Thomistic Theology*, ed. by Paul Lockey (Houston: Centre for Thomistic Studies, 1995), pp. 301-316 (p.315).

⁶⁹ Idit Dobbs-Weinstein writes that it 'cannot be overemphasized that, for Aquinas, the unity of body and soul is substantial and hence, properly speaking, neither the soul nor the body is the principle of individuation, rather the very union is'. p. 130. *Maimonides and St. Thomas on the Limits of Reason* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

nutritive and sensitive powers of soul are destroyed with the body, the intellectual soul is self-subsistent and immaterial:

Therefore the intellectual principle which we call the mind or the intellect has an operation 'per se' apart from the body. Now only that which subsists can have an operation 'per se.' For nothing can operate but what is actual: for which reason we do not say that heat imparts heat, but that what is hot gives heat. We must conclude, therefore, that the human soul, which is called the intellect or the mind, is something incorporeal and subsistent' (ST I.75.2).⁷⁰

This is similar to Aristotle's idea of divine intellect discussed earlier: the intellectual and volitional powers are what actualises the soul and can therefore be thought of as somewhat independent of the union of the soul with the body. Aquinas refers to Aristotle on this point: 'And so the Philosopher says (De Anima iii) that the intellect is separate, because it is not the faculty of a corporeal organ' (ST I.76.1). Further ascertaining the independence of the intellectual faculties, Aquinas writes that the soul has 'an operation and a power in which corporeal matter has no share whatever. This power is called the intellect' (ST I.76.1).⁷¹

The intellectual component of the human soul was, for Aquinas, the distinguishing factor of human existence and thus essential to his understanding of the *imago Dei*. While all creatures bear some resemblance to God, a likeness of kind is required to constitute image: 'But things are likened to God, first and most generally in so far as they are; secondly in so far as they are alive; thirdly and lastly in so far as they have discernment and intelligence' (ST 1.93.2). However, simply equating the *imago Dei* with the capacity for rational activity fails to recognise the dynamism of Aquinas' vision of the *imago Dei*, located as it is at the interplay between nature, grace and glory.

⁷⁰Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 16 – 17. For Aquinas, Stump argues, 'the human soul has a double character. On the one hand, unlike the forms of other material things, it is created by God as an individual entity in its own right, able to exist by itself as do purely immaterial angels. On the other hand, like the form of any corporeal thing, it exists in the composite it configures, and it comes into existence only with that composite, not before it.'

⁷¹ The self-subsistence of the soul is an Avicennian idea, one that is not shared by Maimonides. For Maimonides, we recall, human souls are not intrinsically immortal; only the perfected intellectual faculty survives death. The Avicennian roots of self-subsistence are discussed by Herbert Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect*, p. 83, 106. See also Davidson, *Moses Maimonides: The Man and his Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.522.

2.3.1 Nature, Grace and Glory

Aquinas treats of nature, grace and glory separately in terms of their relation to the image. Like Maimonides, Aquinas understands the commandments – the ‘old law’ – as a remedy to the loss of the state of reason that characterised our original state, in which reason was ‘submissive to God, the lower powers to the reason, the body to the soul’ (ST 1.95.1), a state in which ‘man had all the virtues’ (ST I.95.3).¹ The original state of righteousness, reason under God, was not an entirely natural state but was in itself dependent upon ‘a gift of supernatural grace’ (ST I.95.1). The Law was given when ‘natural law began to be obscured by reason of the proliferation of sin’ (ST I.2.98). Aquinas illustrates a supersessionist conception of the relation between the ‘old law’ and the salvation that we attain through Christ. The Torah is given intermediary status ‘between the law of nature and the law of grace’ as that which ‘prepared the way for salvation which was to come through Christ’ (ST I-II.98.4).²

Aquinas elaborates Augustine’s idea of original sin, though he distances himself from ideas of hereditary guilt since ‘the fact of having a defect by the way of origin seems to exclude the notion of guilt, which is essentially something voluntary’ (ST I-II.81.1). He instead emphasises the common nature of all who are ‘born of Adam’, akin to the members of one’s body:

Hence the sin which is thus transmitted by the first parent to his descendants is called ‘original,’ just as the sin which flows from the soul into the bodily members is called ‘actual.’ And just as the actual sin that is committed by a member of the body, is not the sin of that member, except inasmuch as that member is a part of the man, for which reason it is called a ‘human sin’; so original sin is not the sin of this person, except inasmuch as this person receives his nature from his first parent [...] (ST I.2.81).

¹ ‘Now all that the virtues are is a set of perfections by which the reason is directed towards God and the lower powers are managed according to reason’ (ST Ia.95.3).

² See Matthew A. Tapie, *Aquinas on Israel and the Church: The Question of Supersessionism in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014). For a Jewish perspective on Aquinas’ supersessionism see Michael Wyschogrod, ‘A Jewish Reading of Thomas Aquinas’, in *Understanding Scripture: Explorations of Jewish and Christian Traditions of Interpretation* ed. by Clemens Thoma and Michael Wyschogrod (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987), pp. 125-38.

Though we do not bear individual responsibility for original sin, it is part of our nature, 'Christ alone excepted' (ST I.2.81).³ Our natural state, though fallen and corrupt, still possesses the aptitude for understanding and loving God. This aptitude, which Aquinas identifies with the *imago Dei*, is found in the mind, which is common to all human persons. Within the mind there is a natural desire to know God: 'For there resides in every man a natural desire to know the cause of any effect which he sees (ST I.12.1).⁴ Yet, since God is beyond the capacities of sensory experience, it is difficult to speak of the created human person 'knowing' the infinite God.⁵ Sin presents an obstacle to the realisation of this aptitude since it turns the soul 'to what is contrary to God's law' and 'prevents the reception of grace'.⁶ However, although sin diminishes the aptitude for grace, it never fully removes it. There is no state of ungraced nature in Aquinas' thought, something to be kept in mind in order to avoid presenting nature, grace and glory as entirely distinct stages of the realization of the image.⁷

The image of God is further realised in those who habitually know and love God, though imperfectly, through grace (ST I.93.4). Aquinas employs the Pauline parallelism between the sin of Adam and the grace of Christ:

Just as Adam's sin is transmitted to all who are born of Adam corporally, so is the grace of Christ transmitted to all that are begotten of Him spiritually, by faith and Baptism: and this, not only unto the removal of sin of their first parent, but also unto the removal of actual sins, and the obtaining of glory (ST I.2.81).

³ Timothy McDermott writes that this idea is 'dependent on a conception of man as all having one will in certain respects. The one will which Thomas identifies is the will of Adam reproducing a faulty nature, a will which runs through reproduced humanity. *St Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*, ed. by Timothy McDermott (London: Methuen, 1989), p. 223.

⁴The influence of Aristotle on Aquinas' idea of knowledge and knowing is discussed by Jan A. Aertsen, 'Aquinas' Philosophy in its Historical Setting' in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. by Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) pp. 12-38 (p. 31).

⁵ As Brian Davies explains, there is 'no form of God existing in matter which is raised to a level of meaning by its reception immaterially in the mind'. Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 251.

⁶Aquinas, *On Evil*, 11.11, trans. by Richard Regan, ed. by Brian Davies, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 135.

⁷Fergus Kerr notes that the Manichean denial of the goodness of creation was held, by Aquinas, as the deepest error to which his age was prone: 'Thomas knows of no instances of pure human nature, neither unfallen nor ungraced. No doubt he would have admitted the logical possibility of pure nature but there is no sign he was interested in any other possibility other than nature unfallen and always already graced (Adam) and nature fallen and always already *capax gratiae*'. *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 144.

The soul of the rational creature is given the capacity to receive grace, ‘and the grace received strengthens the soul to perform requisite acts’.⁸ The gift of grace ‘perfects the rational creature, putting him in a state not only of using the created gift but also of enjoying the divine person himself’ (ST I.43.3). The state of grace allows us to live a Christian life and also, as Jean-Pierre Torrell argues, equips us ‘for the highest mystical experience, the enjoyment of the divine Persons’.⁹ Yet even the realised intellect is limited: we can never comprehend God.¹⁰ Comprehension – the perfect knowledge of God – is not attainable for the created intellect. During the course of our earthly lives, the soul has its being in corporeal matter so it can only know that which has a form in matter. This means that we cannot see the essence of God in this life.

The fullest realisation of the image consists in the perfect knowledge and love of God, the image by likeness of glory. The blessed, who see God, are made ‘deiform’ or like to God, enjoying eternal life which consists in the vision of God. Likeness completes the image: It signifies the ‘expression and perfection of the image’ (ST I.93.9). The evolution of the person – creation, re-creation and likeness – is never beyond the love and grace of God, ever-present in our lives: ‘The light of glory is the same as grace in its consummate stage, the same grace energising us in the acts of our life.’¹¹

2.3.2 The Exclusive Realisation of the Image

The above offers an outline of Aquinas’ basic treatment of *imago Dei* in the *Summa Theologiae*, an easier task than with Maimonides whose treatment of the theme is more implicit and dispersed. From this brief survey, we see that Aquinas explicitly accords the *imago Dei* – at its basic level – to every human person, something that we do not find in Maimonides. However, we still see the potentiality/actuality distinction in Aquinas’ idea of *imago Dei*, which might mean that two thinkers have more in common than one might first assume. Further discussion is needed to ascertain how exactly Aquinas distinguishes between the potential and the actual stages of the realisation of the image. In what way

⁸ *On Evil*, 11.11, p. 135.

⁹ Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Vol 2 Spiritual Master*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), p. 97.

¹⁰ ‘But the thing known is in the knower according to the mode of the knower. Hence the knowledge of every knower is ruled according to its own nature. If therefore the mode of anything’s being exceeds the mode of the knower, it must result that the knowledge of that object is above the nature of the knower. Therefore the created intellect cannot see the essence of God’ (ST I.12.4).

¹¹ *Commentary on the Sentences* 3.23.2, discussed by Thomas F. O’Meara in *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), p. 150.

does intellectual capacity feature in his scheme? Does Aquinas share Maimonides' elitist tendencies?

At first glance, Aquinas does not seem overly concerned with matters of intellectual attainment. Immediately following his outline of nature, grace and glory, Aquinas writes that the 'first stage of image is found in all men, the second only in the just, and the third only in the blessed' (ST I.93.4). This, Aquinas leaves undeveloped in *Summa* I.93, though it seems self-explanatory: The *imago Dei* is a universal concept, which we actualise through ethical action, and fully realise through the grace of Christ in the hereafter. However, if we read a little further, we see that Aquinas shares Maimonides' deterministic tendencies, since he distinguishes between male and female capacity to realise the *imago Dei*. This distinction relates not to the primary location of the image, which is the intelligent nature of the person, but to the actualisation and realisation of the image.

According to Aquinas' interpretation of Genesis 1:27, the 'male and female' clause does not define the *imago Dei*, but indicates rather the fact that 'the image of God is common to both sexes, being in the mind which has no distinction of sex' (ST I.93.2). Aquinas also remarks that 'if we consider the intellectual nature in which the image principally resides, the quality of image is found equally in man and woman' (ST I. 93.4). For Aquinas, this means that the gender distinction will not be relevant to the afterlife, the ultimate state.¹² This seems to indicate Aquinas' basic position but, like Augustine, he struggles to reconcile the egalitarianism of Genesis 1:27 with the hierarchical assumptions of 1 Corinthians 11:7-9. He writes, referencing the Corinthians text, that the secondary realisation of the image – the stages of grace and glory – is found only in men, 'for man is the beginning and end of woman, just as God is the beginning and end of all creation' (ST I.93.4). Thus, Aquinas derives from Paul the conviction that 'it is common to man and woman to be the image of God; but it is immediately characteristic of man to be the glory of God.'¹³

If we read these passages in conjunction with *Summa* I.92, where the role of the woman in creation is explored, we uncover a little of Aquinas' motivation for this stance,

¹² John Finnis writes that the 'starting-point is that the mind, the intellect and will, which make us images of the divine – our human kind of soul or spirit – belongs, *without* distinction or difference, to the males and females of the human species; it is found "as much in man as in woman".' *Aquinas: Moral, Political and Legal Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 171-2.

¹³ Aquinas, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. by Fabian Larcher, dhspriority.org/thomas/SS1Cor.htm. [Accessed 20 July 2014]. Aquinas' treatment of this text is discussed by Kari Elisabeth Børresen, 'God's Image. Is Woman Excluded? Medieval Interpretation of Gen. 1,27 and 1 Cor. 11,7' in *The Image of God: Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition*, (Oslo: Solum Forlag, 1995), pp. 210-36.

beyond his reading of Paul. Here, we find deterministic references to differing intellectual capacities, quite akin to Maimonides' assessment of 'the multitude'. Aquinas argues that men alone are destined for the 'nobler function of intellectual operation' (ST 1.92.1). Furthermore, because Aquinas holds that the exercise of reason is more characteristic of the man, it is natural that women should be subject to men.¹⁴ Aquinas' supposition that creation initiates a natural subjection of women to men, as well his famous reference to the woman as a defective male, are of course indebted to Aristotelian biology and shaped by Aquinas' cultural context.¹⁵

Though much more could be written about Aquinas' treatment of gender, and its reception in feminist literature, it is necessary to maintain our focus on Aquinas' intellectualist interpretation of *imago Dei*. From his references to gender, we can conclude that because women, as he perceived them, possessed inferior intellectual capacity, they did not share the ability of men to actualise and fully realise the *imago Dei*. However, Aquinas' reference to the fact that our redeemed selves will be ungendered indicates that it is the rational soul, that possessed by male and female, that survives death. This distinguishes Aquinas from Maimonides, who designates the perfected intellect as the immortal element. We will bring Maimonides and Aquinas into dialogue on this issue further in the discussion. Firstly, before moving on, we note that although his exclusion of women renders Aquinas' theology of *imago Dei* problematic in light of the insights of feminist theological anthropology, this should not eclipse his positive contribution to the evolution of the concept of *imago Dei*. The contemporary reader of Aquinas naturally takes an egalitarian approach to intellectual capacities. It is possible,

¹⁴ Anne E. Carr views the incorporation of Aquinas' anthropology with his Christology as particularly problematic with regard to women: 'The logic of Aquinas' Christological pattern rest on the notion of "headship," which in one sense is an organic model in which Christ is the head of the body of the faithful; when considered in another way it is a hierarchical and dominating model that is used to justify the subordination of women'. Anne E. Carr, *Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women's Experience* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 164. Another expression of the feminist critique is found in the work of Mary Aquin O'Neill who writes that 'Thomas Aquinas held quite clearly that the male sex was normative for humanity and that the female was the defective instance of human being. This anthropology underlies Aquinas' argument for forbidding priestly ordination to women as well as other considerations of her role in the church'. 'The Mystery of Being Human Together' in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. by Catherine Mowry LaCugna (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), pp. 139-160 (p. 148).

¹⁵ 'For the active power in the seed of the male tends to produce something like itself, perfect in masculinity; but the procreation of a female is the result either of the debility of the active power, or of some change effected by external influences, like the south wind, for example, which is damp, as we are told by Aristotle' (ST 1.92.1). In *De Generatione Animalium*, Aristotle writes that 'the woman is as it were an impotent male, for it is through a certain incapacity that the female is female, being incapable of concocting the nutriment in its last stage into semen'. 1.737A27 in *The Oxford Translation of Aristotle*. Vol. 5, ed. by Ross, W. D., trans. by Arthur Platt (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1912).

therefore, to contextualise and bracket Aquinas' view of women's potential to actualise the image, and apply his rich elaboration of the actualisation process to both sexes.¹⁶

2.3.3 Imaging God through Word and Love

Turning, at this point, to the actualisation process, we observe that although Aquinas shares Maimonides' intellectual emphasis, he also employs a Trinitarian scheme that is heavily indebted to the thought of Augustine. Following Augustine, Aquinas centres his Trinitarian interpretation on the active mind, which is the part of the person that he feels most closely resembles the divine. He argues that the image of God is realised when the soul approaches the portrayal of the divine Trinity, through the activity of the mind.¹⁷

If then we are to observe an image of the divine Trinity in the soul, it must be looked for principally at the point where the soul approaches most closely, in so far as this is possible at all, to a portrayal of the divine persons in kind [...] And so an image of the Trinity is to be looked for in the mind first and foremost in terms of activity, in so far as out of the awareness we have we form an internal word by thinking, and from this burst out into actual love' (ST I. 93.7).¹⁸

The image of the Trinity is first portrayed by activity in the mind – the mind as it is engaged in thinking – and from this 'actual love'. Aquinas draws an analogy between the Triune procession of Word and Love and our human activities of intelligence and love:

Given that the uncreated Trinity is distinguished according to the procession of the Word from the One who offers it and the procession of Love from both the one and the other [...] we may then state that in the rational creation, in whom are found the

¹⁶As regards contextualisation, John Finnis argues: 'The assumptions and social forms of his era, and his corroborating Aristotelian generalization about domination by emotion, provide a distorted image of the domestic partnership of man and women [...] Still Aquinas' principles, and even his particular conclusions taken as a whole, do not underwrite domination and exploitation of wives by husbands. For him, authority is always responsibility [...]' *Aquinas*, p. 174. Aquinas' view of marriage is also discussed by Colleen McClusky: 'Although he emphasizes its procreative aspects, he does not neglect what is surely one of the most obvious and valuable goods of marriage, the profound love that exists between spouses in the very best examples of its type.', 'An Unequal Relationship between Equals: Thomas Aquinas on Marriage', *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 1 (2007), 1-18 (p. 1).

¹⁷John P. O'Callaghan comments on the differing perspectives of Aquinas and Augustine regarding the mind: 'St. Thomas does not think that in one's knowledge of the mind one can engage in a fundamental separation from one's knowledge of material things to apprehend the mind in a kind of pristine clarity. In that case, there is no room for a robust methodological distinction between the "inner" and "outer" man.' 'Imago Dei: A Test Case for Aquinas' Augustinianism' in *Aquinas the Augustinian*, ed. by Michael Dauphinais, Barry David, Matthew Levering (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), pp. 100-145, (p. 110).

¹⁸Fergus Kerr comments on the importance of the Trinity to the dynamism of Aquinas' thought: 'Thomas has a very dynamic concept of the nature of the triune Godhead – very much as a triad of mutually related activities; so it is no surprise that the image of this God occurs at the "event" of a human being's actually knowing and loving.' *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002) pp. 127-8.

procession of the Word in the intelligence and the procession Love in the will, there is an image of the uncreated Trinity [...] (ST 1.93.6).

There are two processions here: knowing and loving. When the intellect knows something it forms a concept, an inner word. The will then embraces that which is known. Embracing that which is known as *good* constitutes the procession of love. Imaging God consists in the turning of the rational soul towards God. This leads to the imperfect imitation of the divine processions of the Triune God through our human acts of understanding and love.¹⁹

Such understanding is, however, greatly limited in this life due in part to the inability of human language to adequately express the reality of God. Like Maimonides, Aquinas employs the use of negative theology – ‘because concerning God we cannot know what he is, but what he is not’ – though his theological language is more favourably disposed towards analogical reasoning.²⁰ Aquinas proposes that the human person is related to God, as effect is related to cause (ST 1.13.5).²¹ Although we cannot know the essence of God, ‘we make use of his effects, either of nature or of grace, in place of a definition’ (ST 1.7.1). Here, he differs from Maimonides, who cannot admit of a relation of causation between creator and creature:

In this matter Rabbi Moses erred in many ways, for he wished to prove that there is no relation between God and the creature, because seeing that God is not a body he has no relation to time or place. Thus he considered only the relation which results from quantity and not that which arises from action and passion.²²

¹⁹This is just an analogy; Aquinas is not positing a likeness of substance for ‘whatever has an accidental existence in creatures, when considered as transferred to God, has a substantial existence; for there is no accident in God; for all in Him is His essence (ST 1.28.2). As Matthew Levering argues, the ‘interplay between Word and Spirit is far more mysterious than what we understand analogously from the human procession of the intellect and will’. *Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 159.

²⁰ ST 1.3 Introduction. ‘In this way some words are used neither univocally nor purely equivocally of God and creatures, but analogically, for we cannot speak of God at all except in the language we use of creatures, and so whatever is said both of God and creatures is said in virtue of the order that creatures have to God as their source and cause in which all perfections of things pre-exist transcendentally’ (ST 1.13.5).

²¹ See *De Potentia Dei* 7.7 and *Summa Contra Gentiles* 1.33. See Brian Davies, ‘Aquinas on What God is Not’ in *Thomas Aquinas: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. by Brian Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 227-243 and Kevin Hector, ‘Apophaticism in Thomas Aquinas: a re-formulation and recommendation’, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 4 (2007), 377-393. As regards the Aquinas/Maimonides divergence and interdependence see Neil A. Stubbens, ‘Naming God: Moses Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas’, *The Thomist*, 54 (1990), 229-267 and Mercedes Rubio, *Aquinas and Maimonides on the Possibility of Knowledge of God: An Examination of the Quaestio De Attributis* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006) and For other influences on Aquinas’s apophaticism, see Gregory P. Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God: Thomas Aquinas on the Interplay of Positive and Negative Theology* (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2004), pp. 3-27.

²²*De Potentia Dei*, 7.10.

Unlike relation, Aquinas argues, both quantity and quality are accidents residing in the subject. A relation does not reside within the subject but signifies something that passes from the subject to something outside of itself. According to Aquinas, we come to our imperfect, creaturely understanding of God 'through concepts appropriate to the perfections creatures receive from him' (ST I.13.2).²³ That which 'pre-exists in God in a simple and unified way is divided amongst creatures as many and varied perfections' (ST I.13.4). Perfections exist primarily in God and derivatively in creatures: 'When we say that God is good or wise we do not simply mean that he causes wisdom or goodness, but that he possesses these perfections transcendently' (ST I.13.7). Words such as 'good' and 'wise' can indeed signify what God really is, 'but they signify it imperfectly because creatures represent God imperfectly' (ST I.13.2).

Aquinas' approach to theological language seems more realistic, and certainly more religiously appealing than Maimonides' *via negativa*, a fact Aquinas himself recognised when he wrote, of Maimonides' aversion to the predication of positive attributes of God, that 'this is not what people want to say when they talk about God. When a man speaks of the "living God" he does not simply want to say that God is the cause of our lives or that he differs from a lifeless body' (ST I.13.3). As David Burrell argues, Aquinas recognises 'the elasticity which ordinary usage demands of certain terms'.²⁴ It should be possible, therefore, to say that God is good. Since we use the term 'good' to describe many different effects of God on earth, we can use the term to describe the cause of this goodness. In other words, as a feature of creation, certain terms used within creaturely language have a transcendent dimension.

The above establishes that knowing and loving are the two pillars of Aquinas' Trinitarian interpretation of *imago Dei* and that knowledge of God is restricted by the limits of both intellect and language. However, we have yet to elaborate what exactly Aquinas means when he refers to the process that actualises our capacity for knowing and love i.e., the turning of the rational soul towards God. Does the 'turning of the soul' denote a process of rational activity that necessarily excludes those lacking this capacity?

²³ Herbert McCabe writes that, for Aquinas, when we speak of God, 'although we know how to use our words, there is an important sense in which we do not know what they mean [...] We know how to talk about God, not because of any understanding of God, but because of what we know about his creatures'. *Summa Theologiae*, appendix 3, Vol. 3 (London: Blackfriars, 1964).

²⁴Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, p. 67.

2.3.4 Differing Rational Capacities

Aquinas' idea of *imago Dei* is universal, at least at its basic level, since it pertains to our intellectual nature. Our capacity to realise the image is, however, dependent upon rational capacity:

[I]t is also natural to the mind that it has the power of using reason to understand God, and it was in terms of such a power that we said that God's image remains always in the mind; *whether this image of God is so faint* – so shadowy, we might say – *that it is practically non-existent*, as in those who lack the use of reason; *or whether it is dim and disfigured*, as in sinners; *or whether it is bright and beautiful*, as in the just, as Augustine says (ST I.93.4).²⁵

This is an insightful paragraph, which contains three important points that are directly drawn from Augustine: (i) the image is ever-present in the mind; (ii) the image is disfigured through sin and (iii) the image is practically non-existent for those who lack the use of reason. We also see another reference to the 'just' as those who are most able to actualise the image.

As we will observe in the following chapters, contemporary interpreters, arguably more mindful of questions of inclusivity, tend to avoid the identification of *imago Dei* primarily in terms of reason on the grounds that could exclude those with profound intellectual disability. Indeed the phrase 'practically non-existent' does not seem to offer much hope for the status of such persons and their capacity to image God. However, Aquinas' ideas here are a little more complex than this Augustinian citation might indicate. We should also consider the following passage:

When it is said that there is no 'more' or 'less' in substance, it does not mean that one kind of substance cannot be more perfect than the other but that one and the same individual does not belong to its kind sometimes more and sometimes less. Nor do various individuals belong to their kind some more, some less (ST I.93.3).

This passage seems more hopeful; an individual cannot be 'more human' or 'less human'. Their humanity is not dependent upon rational activity but rather upon the possession of a rational soul, something Aquinas envisages for every human person as evidenced by the fact that he writes of the grace of sanctification received by the unborn child (ST I.68.11).²⁶ The rational powers are always present in the soul even though the person may

²⁵ This is drawn from Augustine: 'Whether this image be so worn out as to be almost none at all, or whether it be obscure and defaced, or bright and beautiful, certainly it always is' (Trin. XIV.4).

²⁶ Jean-Pierre Torrell argues that capacity for knowledge of God has 'nothing to do with intellectual resources, and Thomas sees it to be perfectly realisable for people otherwise deprived of all learned

lack the use of reason accidentally. In response to the question of whether practical reason is in all who have grace, Aquinas writes that baptised infants do in fact have practical reason, ‘as to disposition but not as to act, even as in the severely mentally impaired (*amentibus*)’ (ST II-II.47.14). This is not the same as the lack of reason in non-human animals, who do not possess an intellectual soul (ST III.68.12). Aquinas’ idea of *imago Dei* would not exclude those who cannot exercise their rational faculties. The capacity to make moral decisions is neither necessary nor sufficient for spiritual perfection. The human capacity to realise the *imago Dei* – imperfectly in this life – is dependent on grace. Furthermore, attaining our ultimate happiness, the beatific vision, is possible for every human person since ‘there is no created intellect of so low a degree in its nature that it cannot be raised to this vision’.²⁷

2.3.5 Likeness in Virtue

We mentioned above that while Maimonides strongly emphasised the intellectual perfection of Adam, for Aquinas, the original unfallen state was also characterised by the possession of ‘all the virtues’. Aquinas always emphasises human agency and participation in salvation, which is not an external good. Actualising the *imago Dei*, though ultimately dependent on God, is also a process within which we ourselves participate since it necessitates a Christian life, a life that is built on the love of virtue. It is through virtue that we express our likeness to God: ‘Love of the word, which is knowledge loved, belongs to the nature of “image”; but love of virtue belongs to “likeness”, as virtue itself belongs to likeness’ (ST I.93.9). Aquinas’ references to the ‘just’ – those who realise the image – can be understood in the context of virtue. It is also on account of virtue that Aquinas distinguishes our capacities for seeing God: He writes that ‘some are more virtuous, some less; and virtue is the way to happiness’.²⁸

For Aquinas, the virtues reside in the intellectual and appetitive powers of the soul. It is through these powers, the intellect and the will, that we know and love God and image the Triune God. In a departure from Maimonides, Aquinas assigns a relation between cognition and the appetitive faculty, envisaging the will as part of the self-

knowledge because “*this knowledge from which love springs is found abundantly among those who are fervent in their love of God*.” *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Vol 2, Spiritual Master*, trans. by Robert Royal (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), p. 98. See also Matthew Levering, ‘The *imago Dei* in David Novak and Thomas Aquinas: A Jewish Christian Dialogue’, *The Thomist* 72 (2008), 259-311 (p. 300).

²⁷ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3.57.

²⁸ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3.58.

subsisting intellective soul.²⁹ The will is oriented towards the good, just as the intellect is oriented towards truth: 'Hence it is evident that naught can lull man's will, save the universal good. This is to be found, not in any creature, but in God alone' (ST I-II.2.3). The will is not compelled towards its end (the good) but reaches it rather through participation in intellectual deliberation: '[J]ust as the intellect inheres in first principles, so the will necessarily inheres in the final end, which is beatitude; for the end functions in operations as principles in speculation' (ST I.82.1). While the original ontological state was characterised by the complete submission of the soul to reason, the fall disrupted the internal relations between the intellect and will. Consequently, there arose a need for greater divine assistance to overcome the barrier between the will and its final end. The virtues also assume a more central role in the perfection of our intellect and will.

The intellectual virtues (wisdom, knowledge and understanding) perfect the intellective part of the soul and the moral virtues (temperance, prudence, justice and courage) perfect the appetitive part. However, such 'natural' virtue, limited by human reason, can only get us so far:

The wisdom which the Philosopher (Ethic. vi, 3,7) reckons as an intellectual virtue [wisdom], considers Divine things so far as they are open to the research of human reason. Theological virtue, on the other hand, is about those same things so far as they surpass human reason (ST I-II.62.2).³⁰

The theological virtues (faith, hope and love) are also related to the intellect and the will: faith to the intellect and hope and love to the will (ST I-II.62.3). The knowledge of God that is brought about through faith, though still imperfect in this life, is superior to the knowledge attained by the philosopher since 'by faith we know certain things about God which are so sublime that reason cannot reach them by means of demonstration'.³¹ While

²⁹ Idit Dobbs-Weinstein writes that 'for Maimonides the appetitive faculty has no direct relation to cognition and hence must be compelled to act in accordance with right order, Aquinas not only argues that there is an intellective appetite distinct from the natural appetitive inclination towards an object, but also, in maintaining that this power is the volitional faculty, he is maintaining in fact that it originates in the soul itself independently of its composition with the body'. *Maimonides and St. Thomas on the Limits of Reason*, p. 136.

³⁰ Raymond L. Weiss compares the appropriation of the Aristotelian virtues in Aquinas and Maimonides. Maimonides, he writes, did not think of moral virtues as 'unalterably fixed; the realm of morality has a certain malleability that makes possible the adaptation of philosophic ethics to the Law and, alternatively, the accommodation of Jewish precepts to a framework that derives from philosophy [...] Aquinas argues that precisely the ones set forth there [*Nicomachean Ethics*] exhaust the account of the human virtues from the supranatural virtues of faith, hope, and charity. Maimonides, who remains completely upon a naturalistic plane, specifies only human virtues, but then takes into account the teachings of the Law in the way that he fashions them.' *Maimonides' Ethics*, p.2.

³¹ *Summa Contra Gentile* 3.40.

Aquinas distinguishes between natural and supernatural virtues, all virtues – intellectual, moral and theological – interpenetrate since ‘grace does not destroy, but perfects nature’ (ST I.1.8). All virtues, in conjunction with the corresponding gifts of the Holy Spirit, graciously initiate the dynamic process of divinisation. While Aquinas is directly reliant on the Aristotelian virtues, his account of human action is ultimately distinguished by its goal: *beatitudo* rather than the Aristotelian *eudaemonia*.³²

Now there is a twofold ultimate perfection of rational or of intellectual nature. The first is one which it can procure of its own natural power; and this is in a measure called beatitude or happiness. Hence Aristotle (Ethic. x) says that man’s ultimate happiness consists in his most perfect contemplation, whereby in this life he can behold the best intelligible object; and that is God. Above this happiness there is still another, which we look forward to in the future, whereby ‘we shall see God as He is.’ This is beyond the nature of every created intellect (ST I.62.1).

Ultimately, our soul is intended for union with the divine, *beatitudo*. Or, expressing the idea philosophically, Scott MacDonald writes that ‘the end, completion, or perfection of a natural substance is its having fully actualized its specifying capacity [or power], its actually performing the activity for which its form or nature provides the capacity’.³³ Through the union of the intellect with God, who is pure form and ‘sheer actuality’, we are informed with God’s form: ‘When a created intellect sees the essence of God, that very divine essence becomes the form through which the intellect understands’ (ST I.12.5). This is why we can never achieve perfect happiness in this life. Though we strive to attain a likeness in virtue in our earthly lives, the fullness of the *imago Dei* will be realised only when we attain the ultimate beatitude since, to cite 1 John, ‘when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is’ (1 John 3:2).

2.3.6 Departures from Aristotle and Maimonides on Intellectual Perfection

At the beginning of this chapter, we noted that Aristotle prioritised the speculative intellect as that which facilitates theoretical excellence, the goal of human life. Maimonides, in continuity, centred his understanding of the object of the intellect and of the *telos* of human life on the true. Matters of good and evil were relegated to the

³² *Eudaemonia*, for Aristotle, corresponds to the life well-lived. See J. O. Urmson, *Aristotle’s Ethics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p.11. See also Anthony Kenny, ‘Aquinas on Aristotelian Happiness’, in *Aquinas’ Moral Theory: Essays in Honor of Norman Kretzmann*, ed. by Scott MacDonald and Eleonore Stump (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 15-27.

³³ Scott MacDonald, ‘Introduction: The Relation Between Being and Goodness’, in *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, ed. Scott MacDonald, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 1-28 (p.5).

practical intellect, their relevance seen as consequential to the fall. Aquinas, by virtue of his twofold ontology – the good understood as both the first principle *and* the true final end – envisions the perfected intellect as oriented to the true and the good.³⁴ Thus, in Aquinas, we do not find the same emphasis on individual intellectual attainment that we have seen in Maimonides, a fact that is indicated by their respective views of prophecy.³⁵

We recall that while Maimonides proposes that it is essential that a person achieve intellectual excellence in order to be considered a prophet – ‘we hold that fools and ignorant people are unfit for this distinction’ (GP II.32) – Aquinas, however, believes that God could make a prophet of anybody. Aquinas accords a more central role to the will of God who ‘can transform the matter, however unfit, to the proper disposition which is needed for the perfection which He gives’.³⁶ God will give the prophet the dispositions that are necessary for prophecy and will remove what opposes its operation, such as strong passions of anger, sorrow or pleasure. However, although God can bestow the gift of prophecy on any person, the use of the gift is in the hands of the prophet.

Intellectual attainment, the perfection of the speculative intellect, does not define Aquinas’ interpretation of *imago Dei* in the way it that it does for Maimonides. Nor is Aquinas’ idea of human perfection so exclusive, since it places a far greater emphasis on moral perfection and virtue. To draw again from Idit Dobbs-Weinstein: ‘Whereas Maimonides’ ethics restricts the possibility of attaining true perfection to a very limited number of an intellectual elite, Aquinas’ ethics extends the possibility of perfection to the morally perfect ‘vulgar’ as well as to the intellectual elite’.³⁷ In examining the philosophical underpinning of this divergence, Dobbs-Weinstein suggests that ‘it may well be argued that Maimonides’ ambivalent attitude towards matter, at least in part, can account for his pessimism concerning the possibility of attaining moral perfection.’³⁸ Maimonides identified determinate matter as the source of the discontinuity between the sublunar and supralunar realms. This is why the speculative intellect alone, as that which bears least relation to matter, corresponds to the good. Aquinas, in contrast, does not understand matter to constitute a barrier to human perfection, seeing in it both potentiality and inherent goodness. All that is created, we recall, bears some degree of likeness to God (ST I.93.2).

³⁴ Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, *Maimonides and St. Thomas on the Limits of Reason*, p. 137.

³⁵ See Alexander Altmann, ‘Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas: Natural or Divine Prophecy?’ *AJS Review*, 3 (1978), 1-19.

³⁶ *De Veritate*, trans. by Robert W. Mulligan (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), 12.4.

³⁷ Dobbs-Weinstein, p. 114.

³⁸ Dobbs-Weinstein, p. 114.

Yes, Aquinas, like Maimonides, values intellectual attainment, brought about, to a certain extent through our own efforts at study and contemplation. However, he places far more emphasis on grace as that which glorifies – ‘lifts up’ – the intellect (ST I.12.4). The actualisation of the image is not an entirely natural process. This is because the created intellect cannot see the essence of God through its own natural power but only by God uniting Himself by grace to the created intellect. The natural intellect can thus be raised above its nature and illuminated through grace, constituting as Brian Davies terms it, ‘a deification of the knower’.³⁹ The comments of John Berkman provide an apt conclusion to this point:

[D]espite Aquinas being a person of towering intellect, he by no means attributes to the human intellect ultimate significance or importance. For the true perfection of the speculative intellect requires that one go beyond what any human being is capable of on their own, and by grace to receive, for example, the theological virtue of faith, and the gift of wisdom.⁴⁰

Aquinas envisions the evolution of *imago Dei* as a gradual growth in likeness to the Creator. Aquinas is quite close to Irenaeus in this respect, in his vision of what Jean-Pierre Torrell refers to as ‘boundless growth’:

It is a reality in the presence of becoming, present in human nature like a divine call. That is why, to suggest the evolving character of the image – another analogy of proportionality that rests on an indestructible ontological given – Thomas utilizes the notion of a gradually ascending approach that opens the way to boundless growth.⁴¹

We can thus understand Aquinas’ *imago Dei* as an infinitely circular movement that leads the whole of creation towards God.⁴² Drawing on Augustine’s insight into the orientation of the person towards God, Aquinas understands *imago Dei* as this orientation of the person towards the knowing and loving of God which only reaches its fulfilment in the vision of God in the world to come, the ultimate *beatitudo* of human life.

³⁹ Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, p. 252.

⁴⁰ John Berkman, ‘Are Persons with Profound Intellectual Disabilities Sacramental Icons of Heavenly Life? Aquinas on Impairment’, *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 26 (2013), 83 – 96 (p. 90).

⁴¹ Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, p. 88.

⁴² We can interpret the three degrees of conformity of the image to its model – nature, grace and glory – in terms of *exitus* and *reditus* as they occur in the creature. Torrell writes that ‘if the former, the image of creation, is the term of the “going out,” the second, the image of re-creation or according to grace, is that [term] by which the return begins, inaugurating the movement that will be completed in heaven along with the third, the image of glory, that is finally perfect resemblance’, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, p. 90.

2.4 Conclusion

To conclude this discussion of Maimonides and Aquinas, we note the shared centrality of the intellect to the interpretation of *imago Dei* in the work of both thinkers. Both Maimonides and Aquinas illustrated the potential for philosophical discourse to enrich and elaborate religious concepts and, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, the benefits of interfaith engagement regarding shared concepts. In their conviction that rational speculation can function within the parameters of religious faith to bring us towards an understanding of God, Maimonides and Aquinas were kindred spirits.⁴³ They both emphasise the actualisation of the intellect, which is the part of the soul on account of which we are said to be in the image of God.

Having discussed Maimonides' influence on Aquinas's apophatic thought, we recognised their divergence centring on Aquinas' positive view of analogical divine predication. This has allowed Aquinas to develop a more relational articulation of *imago Dei* that emphasises our human potential for growth in likeness to the goodness of the Creator. Through our creation in the image of God we have, Aquinas holds, the ability to resemble and express our likeness to the Creator through the imitation of God's self-understanding and love. Maimonides, it has been argued, placed a greater emphasis on individual intellectual attainment than Aquinas, as illustrated by their differing views of prophecy: self-attained ascension to divine truth for Maimonides and gracious beneficence for Aquinas. This, however, did not exclude the idea of growth in ethical perfection from Maimonides' thought. Maimonides' idea of *imitatio Dei* envisaged our growth in likeness to the ways of God in justice and righteousness. Contextualised by their concern towards a proper understanding of divinity, the understanding of *imago Dei* in both Maimonides and Aquinas has a strong ethical component.

Contemporary theology, we will see, generally regards the *imago Dei* as that which underpins dignity and equality, somewhat akin to what we have observed in Rabbinic discourse. We can safely conclude that this is not the chief meaning that either Aquinas or Maimonides derived from the concept. However, this is not to say that they did not believe in human worth, or that their wider theologies were unconcerned with general human welfare. On the contrary, both thinkers espoused a certain universalism.⁴⁴ The

⁴³ William Dunphy, 'Maimonides and Aquinas on Faith, Reason, and Beatitude', p. 316.

⁴⁴ Maimonides opposed the tendency of his day, most notable in the writings of Judah Halevi, to assume the innate superiority of Jews over non-Jews. As Menachem Kellner writes: 'In his eyes human beings are human beings; there are not different species of human beings. He is, perhaps, the most consistent universalist in medieval Judaism'. *Maimonides' Confrontation with Mysticism*, p. 220. See also John F. X.

point, rather, is that neither thinker particularly viewed the *imago Dei* as the vehicle to express such sentiment.

The enduring relevance of both thinkers' idea of *imago Dei* may be diminished by the deterministic tendencies that characterise their interpretations, Aquinas as regards women and Maimonides as regards 'the multitude'. Further, the extent to which both thinkers emphasise intellectual attainment strikes the contemporary reader – who is, in all likelihood, less enthralled by Aristotelian epistemology than were Aquinas and Maimonides – as insufficiently biblical, even perhaps unbiblical for those who take account of Jesus' words in Matthew: '[Y]ou have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants' (Matthew 11:25). However, we must also remember that beyond their shared philosophical influences and the commonality of the Hebrew Scriptures from which they derive *imago Dei*, the greatest similarity in the thought of Aquinas and Maimonides is the emphasis upon the need for divine assistance, whether through revelation, through Torah or through grace, to remedy the disruption to the original state that has left the person unable to perceive their true end unaided. Human reason is limited. Thus, Aquinas and Maimonides are chiefly concerned with the limits of our intellect and our inability to know God. As such their thought gives expression to the biblical appreciation of the ultimate mystery at the heart of our human experience, that which Job terms 'higher than heaven...deeper than Sheol' or the psalmists refer to as 'things too wonderful' surrounded by 'clouds and thick darkness'.⁴⁵

The distorting effects of sin on human reason present an even greater challenge to the theological anthropology of Karl Barth, the focus of Chapter Three. For Barth, since sin has obliterated the possibility of natural apprehension of divine truth, we have lost any capacity for God apart from God's act of self-revelation. Moving then from deification to justification, we turn to the modern period, to Barth's understanding of *imago Dei* as correspondence.

Knasas, *Thomism and Tolerance* (London: University of Scranton Press, 2011). Knasas argues that 'Aquinas natural law ethics grounds the ideal of tolerance that is so treasured in current Western democracies better than other ethical traditions'. p. 5.

⁴⁵ Job 11: 8 (JPS); Psalm 97:2 (NIV) and Psalm 131:1 (NIV).

CHAPTER THREE

THE *IMAGO DEI* AS CORRESPONDENCE: THE RELATIONAL INTERPRETATION OF KARL BARTH

This chapter turns to the theological anthropology of Karl Barth (1886-1968), which is characterised by constant attention to the doctrine of election, to Christology and to the meaning of the covenant between God and humanity. These are the fundamental emphases that permeate Barth's distinctively Christian theology, which is constantly disassociated from any generic understanding of 'human nature' in abstraction from the Word of God. In Barth, we see an interpretation of *imago Dei* that is radically different from that which has emerged in previous chapters. This distinction derives from the fact that Barth's theology marks a fundamental break from the metaphysical structure of classical theism as expressed in Aquinas and in the Fathers of the Church.¹ Though Barth expressed continuity with Aquinas' idea of God as *actus*, or sheer actuality (ST I.3.2), he radically reshaped its meaning in an incarnational light: 'In speaking of the essence of God we are concerned with an act which utterly surpasses the whole of the actuality that we have come to know as act, and compared with which all that we have come to know as act is no act at all'.² For according to Barth's doctrine of election, God's essence coincides with God's decision to become God-for-us: 'God is who he is in the act of his revelation' (CD II/1, p. 262).³ This is the christological statement that permeates every facet of Barth's theology, a statement which carries the implication that, for Barth, God

¹ Matthew Rose describes the central themes of classical theism: 'Developed through common effort over centuries, it came to endorse a number of interlocking theses: that God's essence is identical with his existence, that nature is governed by an act of divine intelligence and love, that rational beings find fulfilment in learning the truth about God, and that all knowledge is grounded in God's self-understanding'. 'Karl Barth's Failure', *First Things*, 6 (2014), 39-45 (p. 43).

² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, p. 263, ed. by Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas Forsyth Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957-1975). Subsequent references will be parenthetical, abbreviated as CD.

³ Our theology, Barth writes, should not derive from an abstract concept of God as a 'divine being-for-Himself' but rather from a God who 'wills to be and is nothing other than the God of man'. 'The Humanity of God', in *The Humanity of God*, trans. by John Newton Thomas (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1960), pp. 37-69 (p.45; p.37).

and God's revelation in Christ are one.⁴ Thus, in Barth's interpretation of *imago Dei* we will observe a firm rejection of the connection between the speculative intellect and God and a dissolution of the classical synthesis of faith and reason.⁵ We also see a rejection of the identification of *imago Dei* with any innate human capacity.

As a Reformed theologian, Barth was influenced by the thinking of Augustine and Augustine's interpretation in the subsequent Reformed tradition, particularly in relation to the concept of justification and the primacy of grace.⁶ Barth's theology was also notably shaped by his break from liberal theology. Liberalism, which defined Protestant theology since the time of Schleiermacher, emphasised the immanence of God and presupposed, as John Webster writes, that 'religion was an ingredient within human being and experience and therefore became something which could be described and, indeed cultivated, without immediate reference to the gracious, intervening activity of God himself'.⁷ Though this thinking formed a central part of his cultural and theological heritage, it gradually lost its appeal for Barth, decisively demonstrating its theological bankruptcy in 1914 when Barth witnessed the support of his former teachers for the war policy of Wilhelm II.⁸ To articulate a new theology, Barth turned to the objective Word of God, thus firmly

⁴ Barth writes that we develop our concept of God 'only as we conceive of Him in the determination and limitation that are peculiar to Him, which He has not taken upon Himself as something additional, in his relationship with the world or as an accommodation to it, but which are the characteristics of His presence and activity in the world because they are the determination and limitation proper to His own eternal being, so assuredly has he decided for them by the decree of His eternal will' (CD II/2, p. 50). As Bruce McCormack argues, for Barth 'there is no other being of God standing in [the] back of it, hidden in the shadows, so to speak [...] The eternal event in which God chose to be "God-for-us" is, at the same time, the eternal event in which God gave (and continues to give) to himself his own being'. 'The Actuality of God: Karl Barth in Conversation with Open Theism', in *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives*, ed. by B. McCormack (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2008), pp. 185-242 (p. 210).

⁵ For Matthew Rose, this constitutes the great error in Barth's theology: 'He simply could not allow that a genuinely philosophical understanding of God is demanded by the intellect's desire to know [...] Why did Barth fail to see the theological necessity of metaphysical inquiry? His *idée fixe*—that God is wholly identical with his self-enactment in history—stood in the way. There can be no *natural* knowledge of God, after all, if God lives in and through his self-revelation.' 'Karl Barth's Failure', p. 44.

⁶ Dominic Robinson writes that the reformation theologies of Luther and Calvin moved the point of reference of the *imago Dei* 'from asking the medieval philosophical and scientific questions about the nature of the human being per se and focussed instead first and foremost on the sovereignty of God [...] The emphasis shifts towards Christ's action in the life of the believer and away from the believer's growth and fulfilment as he finds his way back to God'. Robinson argues that because Barth was attached to a Lutheran interpretation of Augustine, he neglected that aspect of Augustine's thought in which 'humanity is envisaged on a journey back to God'. *Understanding the "Imago Dei": The Thought of Barth, von Balthasar and Moltmann* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), p. 21; p. 57.

⁷ John Webster, *Karl Barth* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 25.

⁸ 'One day in early August 1914 stands out in my personal memory as a black day. Ninety-three German intellectuals impressed public opinion by their proclamation in support of the war policy of Wilhelm II and his counsellors. Among these intellectuals I discovered to my horror almost all of my theological teachers whom I had greatly venerated. In despair over what this indicated about the signs of the time I suddenly realized that I could not any longer follow either their ethics and dogmatics or their understanding of the Bible and of history. For me at least, 19th century theology no longer held any future'. 'Evangelical Theology in the 19th Century', in *The Humanity of God*, pp. 11-33 (p. 12-13).

rejecting the personalism of liberal theology, with its potential to manipulate divine ‘will’ for human ends: Barth writes that ‘grace, which the theologians of the time described so beautifully as free, did not remain free for them. They claimed it as a right, a certainty, a possession of the Christian’.⁹ Barth thus turned from the ‘religionism, the anthropocentrism, the ill-fated humanism of the earlier theology’ back to the Word of God.¹⁰

The return to sources, the conviction that biblical revelation is centred on *God* and the emphasis that knowledge of *God* cannot be abstracted from revelation in Christ define Barth’s interpretation of the *imago Dei*, a concept inextricable from his doctrine of the Word of God. We will discuss Barth’s relational approach to *imago Dei*, in particular the manner in which he reconciles his idea of *imago Dei* as correspondence with his strident opposition to natural theology and the analogy of being. We will also explore how Barth’s theological anthropology – the understanding of the person as saved yet still fallen – informs his ethical thought and effects the wider relevance of his interpretation of *imago Dei*. We begin with Barth’s exegesis of Genesis 1:26-27.

3.1 Barth’s Relational Exegesis of Genesis 1:27

There is a significant distance – both chronological and theological – between the thought of Barth and that of Maimonides and Aquinas. The medieval interpretations of *imago Dei* – and much that came before – favoured the identification of *imago Dei* with the human intellect. Barth’s approach, in contrast, does not emphasise any capacity or potential inherent in the human person. The *imago Dei*, for Barth, pertains to the whole person and can never be identified with ‘anything that man is or does’ (CD III/I, p. 184). While further exploration of the wider concerns of Barth’s theology will shed light upon the particular motivation for his aversion to the intellectualist approach, we can, at this point, identify Barth’s interpretation of *imago Dei* as ‘relational’. However, as will be illustrated, the relationality of Barth’s approach results, in part, from an unusual and quite contested exegesis of Genesis 1:27.

According to Barth’s interpretation of Genesis 1:27 – ‘in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them’ – the second phrase revealed the meaning of the first:

⁹ Barth, ‘The Word in Theology from Schleiermacher to Ritschl’, in *Theology and Church*, (London: SCM, 1962), p. 216.

¹⁰ Barth, ‘The Humanity of God’, p. 44.

Could anything be more obvious than to conclude from this clear indication that the image and likeness of the being created by God signifies existence in confrontation, i.e., in this confrontation, in the juxtaposition and conjunction of man and man which is that of male and female [...] (CD III/1, p. 195)?

In accordance with the scholastic idea of the indivisibility of the works of the Trinity in creation (*opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*), Barth finds Trinitarian significance in the Genesis creation accounts.¹¹ The *imago Dei* is revealed, for Barth, in the fact that male and female exist in a relation that is analogical to the relation of the three persons of the Trinity: “‘In our image’ means to be created as a being which has its ground and possibility in the fact that in ‘us’, i.e., in God’s own sphere and being, there exists a divine and thus self-grounding prototype to which this being can correspond’ (CD III/1, p. 183). With an implicit dependence upon Buberian ontology, Barth argues that the I-Thou intradivine relationship of the Triune God is reflected, analogically, in the interhuman realm, a fact signified by the ‘male and female’ reference of Genesis 1:27 and the ‘let us make’ reference of 1:26.¹² The union and distinction of human as male and female is a reflection of the encounter and discovery of the Triune God:

The relationship between the summoning I in God’s being and the summoned divine Thou is reflected both in the relationship of God to the man whom He has created, and also in the relationship between the I and the Thou between male and female, in human existence itself (CD III/1, p. 196).

The question of analogy will be explored in greater depth further in the discussion. At this point, we can simply observe the problematic nature of Barth’s interpretation of Genesis 1:27 from the perspective of biblical scholarship. In Chapter One, we noted the views of Richard Middleton and Phyllis Bird as regards the implausibility of defining the *imago Dei* in terms of the ‘male and female’ clause. Such scholarship is largely directed at Barth’s reading of Genesis 1:27. The objection to his interpretation is expressed forcefully in the writings of James Barr, who suggests that Barth’s approach to the male-female reference represents a ‘particularly ill-judged and irresponsible piece of

¹¹ ‘The proposition that God the Father is the Creator, and God the Creator the Father can be defended only when we mean by “Father” the “Father with the Son and the Holy Spirit”’ (CD III/1, p. 49). Discussed by Oliver Crisp, *Retrieving Doctrine*, p. 29.

¹² The extent to which Martin Buber influenced this aspect of Barth’s thought is discussed by Mark J. McInroy, ‘Karl Barth and Personalist Philosophy: A Critical Appropriation’, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 1 (2011), 45-63.

exegesis'.¹³ Phyllis Bird concurs, writing that at its 'most fundamental level Barth's exegesis fails to understand the grammar of the sentences he so ingeniously manipulates'.¹⁴ Both Bird and Barr conclude that Barth's exegesis is, in relation to the male and female reference, unviable on linguistic and cultural grounds. There is no reason to suppose, linguistically, that the second clause explains the first. There is also nothing, given the cultural background to the passage, to lend credibility to Barth's interpretation. As Bird writes, Barth's 'distinctly modern concept of an "I-Thou" relationship' would have been entirely foreign to the ancient writer's thought and intentions'.¹⁵ To add to these concerns, we note that it is unlikely that the *imago Dei*, which pertains to humankind alone, could be identified with our gendered creation. There is nothing distinctively human in our creation as male and female.

Barth's exegesis is also problematic when we consider the particularities of his view of lived male and female relationships. Despite the previously noted chronological and contextual distance between Aquinas and Barth, it is arguable that Barth's view of the relationship between the sexes did not advance very far beyond that of Aquinas. Although, for Barth, men and women are alike in dignity by virtue of their shared creation in the image of God, his idea of lived gender relations is hierarchical. Barth, evidently unmoved by the emerging feminism of his day, understands the relation between male and female as a 'natural supremacy of the I over the Thou' (CD III/2, p. 292).¹⁶ This point is further illustrated with reference to CD III/4:

Man and woman are not an A and a second A whose being and relationship can be described like two halves of an hour glass [...] Man and woman are an A and a B, and cannot, therefore, be equated. In inner dignity and right A has not the slightest advantage over B nor does it suffer the slightest disadvantage [...] A precedes B, and B follows A. Order means succession. It means preceding and following. It

¹³ James Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 160.

¹⁴ Phyllis Bird, "'Male and Female he Created them": Gen. 1:27b in the Context of the Priestly Account of Creation', *HTR*, 74 (1981), 129-159 (p. 132).

¹⁵ Bird, "'Male and Female he Created them'", p. 132.

¹⁶ See Katherine Sonderegger, 'Barth and Feminism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. by John Webster, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 258-274. Sonderegger writes that though 'comfortable in the presence of socialism, Barth was filled with misgivings about feminism. In the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth refers to feminism rarely, and then grudgingly'. p. 258. Sonderegger also remarks that although few feminists write on Barth, when examined 'more closely, the thought of Karl Barth echoes themes in contemporary feminist theory – in the understanding of the person and of humanity, in ethics and epistemology – that would make Barth attractive indeed.' Sonderegger draws a comparison, for example, between the distrust of the category of experience in the work of both Barth and the second generation feminists. p. 260.

means super- and sub-ordination. It does indeed reveal their inequality. But it does not do so without immediately confirming their equality (CD III/4, pp. 169-70).

Though words such as 'supremacy' and 'subordination' are difficult for the contemporary reader to accommodate, Barth, we must acknowledge, tempers this hierarchical vision with the idea that this supremacy is, in reality, played out in inversion: '[B]ecause he the first and stronger can only be one and strong in relationship to her, the second and weaker, as his first and stronger' (CD III/2, p. 292). Though men and women differ in function, they are equal before God in their creaturely existence. Barth also writes most positively of the loving mutuality of the marital relationship; 'because she is so utterly for him he must be utterly for her' (CD III/2, p. 292).¹⁷ However, Barth's continuity with Augustine and Aquinas as regards female subordination is obviously problematic in light of the insights of feminist theological anthropology. As Rosemary Radford Reuther writes:

The 'social roles of male headship and female subordination are construed as a divine created order. So for a woman to wish to step out of her place to do "masculine" things, such as becoming a minister or a political leader, is for Barth a violation of the will of God, who has laid down this fixed and unchangeable order of creation. It is in these terms that Barth denounces feminism in his *Church Dogmatics*'.¹⁸

While Chapter Five will offer a more substantial exploration of the issue of gender, at this point we simply note that Barth's view of lived gender relationships render his relational reading of Genesis 1:27 somewhat problematic. However, the relevance of gender to Barth's interpretation of *imago Dei* should not be overstated. Though the 'male and female' reference in Genesis 1:27 gives Barth the impetus for his relational reading of the text, the 'relation' in question is much broader and more complex than the lived male-female relationship.

The above offers a brief sketch of Barth's exegesis of Genesis 1:27 which is, we conclude, problematic from the perspective of biblical scholarship. However, it would be most inconsistent with the Barthian approach to scripture to give the final word to

¹⁷ This aspect of Barth's thought is discussed by Paul S. Fiddes in 'The Status of Woman in the Thought of Karl Barth', <http://www.womenpriests.org/theology/fiddes.asp> [Accessed June 14 2014]. 'In his discussion of Paul's sentence in 1 Corinthians 11.3, Barth makes the central point that Paul is not presenting a hierarchy of headship, as if there were a *chain* of subordination stretching from God the Father, to God the Son, to man and finally to woman (at the bottom of the pecking order) [...]. This is not a hierarchy at all, but a comparison of sets of relationships - God with Christ, Christ with humankind and man with woman.'

¹⁸ Rosemary Radford Reuther, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History* (London: SCM Press, 1998), pp. 181-2.

historical criticism. Though he was not ill-disposed to the insights of historical-critical methods of biblical interpretation, Barth's attentions were chiefly directed not at the acknowledged 'human word' of scripture, but rather at the Word of God.¹⁹ Barth's concern that 'today's theology does not stand with the prophets and the apostles [...] but rather with the modern reader and his prejudices' offers further context for his break with liberal theology.²⁰ While Barth recognises that the Bible consists of 'human speech uttered by specific men at specific times [...] with a specific intention', he regards scripture as that which bears witness to the 'event' of revelation, which precedes both proclamation and scripture (CD I/2, p. 464).²¹ Michael T. Dempsey explains that 'for Barth and much of the pre-modern tradition, understanding of God's Word in scripture can come only from God's Word and Spirit, which is received in faith and obedience'.²² In other words, God, for Barth, cannot be understood apart from Christ's saving work. Barth presents Christ not only at the centre of his theology but also as the ground and the limit of his theological anthropology. Therefore, as Barth writes, 'we must first enquire concerning this one man, and then on this basis concerning man in general' (III/2, p. 44). Thus, to fully understand the context and motivation for the particular exegesis employed by Barth, we turn to his distinctly Christological understanding of the relationship of correspondence between God and the human person.

¹⁹ 'I have nothing whatever to say against historical criticism. I recognize it, and once more state quite definitely that it is both necessary and justified'. It is, however, only a preliminary step. Barth admires Calvin's approach: 'how energetically Calvin, having first established what stands in the text, sets himself to re-think the whole material and to wrestle with it, till the walls which separate the sixteenth century from the first become transparent!' *Epistle to the Romans* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 6-7.

²⁰ This citation is from an early preface draft of Barth's Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. Referenced by Richard Burnett in his *Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis: The Hermeneutical Principles of the Römerbrief Period* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2004), p. 284. Elsewhere, Barth describes the change that resulted from his break from liberalism: 'We made a fresh attempt to learn our theological ABCs all over again. More reflectively than ever before, we began reading and expounding the writings of the Old and New Testaments. And behold, they began to speak to us – very differently than we had supposed we were obliged to hear them speak in the school of what was then called "modern theology"'. 'Concluding Unscientific Postscript on Schleiermacher', in *The Theology of Schleiermacher: Lectures at Göttingen, Winter Semester of 1923/24* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), pp. 261-279 (p. 264).

²¹ As Trevor Hunt remarks: 'Revelation, as Barth never tires of reminding his readers, is an event: it is something which happens, something which God does, and something in which we are actively involved. The habitual use of the noun form tends inevitably to direct our thinking instead towards the abstract, and to suggest some commodity (textual, historical or whatever) which represents the abiding deposit of a prior act of "revealing"'. 'Revelation' in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, pp. 37-57 (p. 45).

²² 'Biblical Hermeneutics and Spiritual Interpretation: The Revelatory Presence of God in Barth's Theology of Scripture'. *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 3 (2007), 120 – 131 (p. 122). Dempsey argues that Barth's view of revelation provides a resource for an 'historically informed theological interpretation of scripture so that scholarly interpretation and pastoral application may benefit from insights that come, ultimately from the intimate encounter with God in the life of the individual interpreter in the Church'. p. 122. Barth is similarly interpreted by Maico Michielin, 'Bridging the Gulf Between Biblical Scholars and Theologians: Can Barth and Wright Provide an Answer?', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 4 (2008), 420-434.

3.2 From Deification to Justification: The Barthian Idea of Correspondence

Although Barth is opposed to the identification of *imago Dei* with the attribute of reason, his interpretation of *imago Dei* is still reliant upon ideas of human distinctiveness. His distinction between the human person and other animals is theological and relational: the human person can be distinguished from the rest of creation in that it is the only creature that is *for* God.²³ This means ‘that it is for the divine deliverance and therefore for God’s own glory, for the freedom of God and therefore for the love of God’ (CD III/2, pp. 70-71). This brings us to the most important point in relation to Barth’s idea of personhood, which is the inseparability of anthropology from the context of the divine-human relationship. God’s act of self-revelation is the central premise of Barth’s theological anthropology: ‘That God the Creator is gracious to man his creature is the principle to which it must always return and the presupposition at which it must always start’ (CD III/2, p. 34).²⁴ The ‘real’ person, to whom Barth frequently refers, is neither self-initiating nor self-sustaining but can only be understood from above, from God in Christ.²⁵ The creature, as destined and equipped to be the covenant-partner of God, exists in preparedness for this reality.²⁶ Barth writes that the nature of the creature ‘is simply its equipment for grace’ (CD III/1, p. 231). God anticipated ‘that the goal and meaning of all His dealings with the as yet non-existent universe should be the fact that in His Son He would be gracious towards man, uniting Himself with him’ (CD II/2, p. 101).

Thus, Barth’s interpretation of *imago Dei* is entirely embedded within his doctrine of the Word of God, a fact which ultimately distinguishes his interpretation of *imago Dei*

²³ Barth is cautious regarding the idea that human beings are the only creatures that are capable of hearing God’s Word. What he does hold, however, is that the human person is unique in the cosmos since the vision and the concept of God within us is direct and immediate. Barth is open to the possibility that other creatures may have an indirect vision or concept of the Creator (CD III/2, p. 71).

²⁴ Although ‘a knowledge of man which is non-theological but genuine is not only possible but basically justified and necessary even from the standpoint of theological anthropology’, it does not yield to knowledge of ‘real man’, the person as knowable through divine illumination (CD III/2, p. 202). Thus, differentiation between scientific and theological pursuits in anthropology does not necessarily imply opposition for Barth. As long as it maintains restraint and openness, the ‘science of man’ is not the enemy of the Christian church. It only becomes this when it purports to offer a philosophy and world-view, ‘thus seeking to be exact science’ (CD III/2, p. 25).

²⁵ Theology, Barth writes, ‘cannot be fixed upon, consider, and put into words any truths which rest on or are moved by themselves – neither an abstract truth about God nor about man nor about the intercourse between God and man. It can never verify, reflect, or report in a monologue’. ‘The Humanity of God’, p. 57.

²⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar writes that, for Barth, ‘the whole of creation is as such polarized toward only one end of the magnet: toward grace. Creation cannot stand indifferent to grace but is positively oriented to it, because it is a parable whose final meaning is unlocked when it receives the truth of God’s gracious revelation’. *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. by Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), p. 125.

from that which we have observed in previous chapters. Although Barth condemns the intellectualist approach to *imago Dei* as unbiblical, his motivation for his opposition to this type of interpretation extends beyond his concern for fidelity to the Genesis text. We concluded our previous chapter with the argument that Maimonides and Aquinas were united in their conviction that fallen humanity cannot perceive their true end unaided. Barth, who was more sceptical of the powers of postlapsarian reason, took a much stronger approach to this human inability. For Barth, there is no innate capacity for God within the fallen human person: 'In this sense, as a possibility which is proper to man *qua* creature, the image of God is not just, as it is said destroyed apart from a few relics; it is totally annihilated' (CD I/1, p. 238).²⁷ What remains of the *imago Dei*, for Barth, is a "*recta natura*", or proper nature. This, however, does not infer moral uprightness in any way (CD I/1, p. 238):

No matter how it may be with his humanity and personality, man has completely lost the capacity for God. Hence we fail to see how there comes into view here any common basis of discussion for philosophical and theological anthropology, any occasion for the common exhibition of at least the possibility of enquiring about God (CD I/1, p. 238).

The *imago Dei* only retains its relevance, for Barth, in relation to the *rectitudo* through which Christ is raised from the dead. This is the 'real' point of contact between the person and the Word of God. There can be no cooperation between grace and nature in effecting salvation since, for Barth grace does not repair nature: it contradicts it. As George Hunsinger writes, grace, for Barth, is 'that miracle by which human reason in its radical fallenness is so contradicted, disrupted, and liberated that it provisionally grasps revelation'.²⁸ For Barth, the ideas that we can somehow participate in the being of God or grow into the likeness of Christ are fundamentally erroneous since they draw our understanding of justification away from the saving work of Christ. It was for this reason that Barth famously denounced the *analogia entis* as a 'conflict against grace' (CD II/1, p. 85).

The *analogia entis*, the analogy of being, refers to the idea that the relationship between God and the person can be discerned through human understanding apart from

²⁷ This aspect of Barth's thought is influenced by Calvin. After the fall, Calvin writes, the *imago Dei* 'was so corrupted that whatever remains is frightful deformity'. *Institutes of the True Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), I.15.4.

²⁸ Hunsinger 'The Mediator of Communion: Karl Barth's doctrine of the Holy Spirit', in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, pp. 177-195 (p. 184).

revelation and that our experience of the created world leads us to an awareness of God. The concept originated in the thought of Augustine and Aquinas and found detailed articulation in the writings Erich Przywara in the 1920s, who developed the concept around the idea of the orientation of the believer towards God and the implicitness of our knowledge of God.²⁹ Barth's opposition to the *analogia entis* is informed by his rejection of natural theology, which he defines as 'the doctrine of a unity of humanity with God existing outside God's revelation in Jesus Christ' (CD II/1, p. 168).³⁰ Barth, in opposition to the essentialist ontology that underpins natural theology, argues that knowledge of God is only possible through revelation and grace.

Though Barth rejects the Catholic idea of the *analogia entis*, he does find a place in his theology for the language of analogy since 'there can be no receiving of God's Word unless there is something common to the speaking God and the hearing man' (CD I/1, p. 238). What he proposes is an *analogia fidei*, where the connection between the creature and Creator is one of faith in Christ. The *analogia fidei* expresses the fact that all knowledge of God is derived from revelation, at the centre of which is God's self-revelation in Christ. The human person can only gain knowledge of God by surrender to God in faith which, for Barth, is the conformity of the person to God and 'an aptness to receive the Word of God' (CD I/1, p. 238).³¹ Faith – the capacity given to the incapable – raises us beyond our own limits to knowledge of the Word of God.³²

²⁹ Przywara wrote that 'such is the fundamental disposition of human knowledge of God: God nearer to me than all the world, God nearer to me than I am to myself; God more real than I am to myself: God all in all, *Deus meus et omnia!* But precisely out of the implicitness of this knowledge of God, out of this – shall we say, psychological immediacy to God – grows that disposition of awe-struck longing, that inextinguishable *Inquietum*, that never satisfied but always blessed infinite restlessness towards God, which is: *quaeritur inveniendus et invenitur quarendus*, I seek in order to find, and I find in order to seek'. 'Gottgeheimnis Der Welt', p. 230. Discussed by Keith L. Johnson in *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), p. 43.

³⁰ The rejection of the *analogia entis* is an aspect of Barth's thought that is central to his critique of Catholic theology: 'I regard the *analogia entis* as the invention of the Antichrist, and I think that because of it one cannot become Catholic. Whereupon I at the same time allow myself to regard all other possible reasons for not becoming Catholic, as shortsighted and lacking in seriousness' (CD I/1: x). However, as Stanley Hauerwas argues, the above passage 'does not reflect Barth's most considered judgements on the subject, which arrive only when he is able to separate the question of natural theology from its association with Protestant liberalism'. *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (London: SCM, 2002), p. 159. Barth's evolving approach to the *analogia entis* is also discussed by Keith L. Johnson. Johnson writes that, because of the ambiguity of Barth's position regarding the *analogia entis* throughout his career, 'many interpreters of his theology began to claim one of two positions: either that Barth *should* retract his earlier position [...] or that he already *had* retracted it in private without doing so publicly'. Johnson argues, however, that Barth did not revoke his view of Przywara's *analogia entis*. *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis*, p. 3.

³¹ Barth's rejection of the *analogia entis* emerges strongest in the context of his debate with Emil Brunner who, in his argument for a legitimate natural theology, seemed to present an idea of grace inherent in human nature based on the *analogia entis*. In his response to Brunner, Barth argues forcefully against an

It is in this sense, in terms of the analogical relationship between the grace of God and the faith of the 'real' person, that Barth understands correspondence. Correspondence, which is conformity in faith to God's word, is entirely distinct from ideas of mutuality, likeness of substance or intellectual assent. God is made known to us only on the basis of revelation, 'in a medium' and 'as an object' (CD II/1, p. 10). The quest to encounter God based upon the depiction of 'knowledge' as the union of the person with God is fundamentally misguided since it dissolves the distinction between the knower and the known. It is for this reason that Barth describes Augustine's account of the vision he shared with his mother at Ostia as 'one of the most beautiful but also most dangerous passages in the *Confessions*'.³³ The attempt to attain knowledge of God through human experience does not bring us to a higher plane, Barth argues, since we are seeking God in abstraction from the Word of God. Such attempts are misguided and also superfluous: Christ, Barth writes, 'is the Word spoken from the loftiest, most luminous transcendence and likewise the Word heard in the deepest, darkest immanence'.³⁴ We simply do not need anything else and if we regard ourselves as bound by God's word, 'we shall certainly find a deceptive appearance in that *ascendere* and *transcendere* so far as what happens there – whatever else it may be – claims knowledge of God' (CD II/1, p. 11).

Thus prayer, for Barth, is decisively identified with petition and strictly disassociated from the 'attempt to intensify and deepen ourselves, to purify and cleanse ourselves inwardly, to attain clarity and self-control' (CD III/2, p. 97). Other forms of

understanding of *imago Dei* that centres on a capacity for revelation or a capacity for God. 'No! Answer to Emil Brunner' in *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom*, ed. by Clifford Green, (London: Collins, 1989).

³² As Barth explains, this is distinct from an analogy of being: 'We certainly regard the analogy, similarity or equiformity between God and man which in fact requires asserting here, not as an *analogia entis*, as an analogy in a synthesis from the standpoint of an onlooker. Not a being which the creature should have in common with the Creator in spite of all the dissimilarity, but the action inaccessible to any mere theory, the human decision, in faith, amid all its dissimilarity, similar to the decision of the grace of God (CD I/1, p. 274). Barth also refers to an analogy of relationship, which posits a correspondence between the human-divine relationship and the prior intra-Trinitarian relationship: 'The correspondence and similarity of the two relationships consists in the fact that the freedom in which God posits Himself as the Father, is posited by Himself as the Son and confirms Himself as the Holy Ghost, is the same freedom as that in which He is the Creator of man, in which man may be His creature, and in which the Creator-creature relationship is established by the Creator' (CD III/2, p. 220).

³³ 'And when our conversation had brought us to the point where the very highest of physical sense and the most intense illumination of physical light seemed, in comparison with the sweetness of that life to come, not worthy of comparison, nor even of mention, we lifted ourselves with a more ardent love toward the Selfsame [Idipsum], and we gradually passed through all the levels of bodily objects, and even through the heaven itself, where the sun and moon and stars shine on the earth. Indeed, we soared higher yet by an inner musing, speaking and marveling at thy works'. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. by H. Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), IX, 10.

³⁴ Barth, 'The Humanity of God', p. 47.

prayer derive from the assumption that the person can ‘present something worthy to God’ (III/2, p. 97).³⁵ It is much better, Barth argues, to come to God with empty hands which can be ‘spread out before God and filled by Him’ (CD III/2, p. 97). In prayer, Barth argues, we have nothing to offer, but everything to ask. ‘A man prays because he is permitted to do so by God, because he may pray, and because this very permission has become a command’ (CD III/2, p. 91).

In Barth, therefore, the emphasis radically shifts from the idea of deification, envisioned in Irenaeus and Aquinas, to that of justification, as explicated by Augustine and Martin Luther.³⁶ Saved, yet still fallen, we cannot access God. The *imago Dei*, for Barth, becomes ‘real’ only in faith, i.e., through the grace of reconciliation. It appears, therefore, that Barth’s explication of *imago Dei* within the confines of the doctrine of the Word of God emphasises correspondence by faith alone at the expense of any idea of participation or human response apart from faith. This point needs to be drawn out further in the context of Barth’s view of sin.

3.3 Saved Yet Fallen: A Pessimistic Theology of Assurance?

Barth presents the person as a ‘betrayed of himself’ who stands in contradiction to God: ‘What is sinful and strives against God and himself is not just something in his qualities or achievements or defects, but his very being’ (CD III/2, p.26). Such an assessment of human personhood provides further context for Barth’s refusal to countenance an anthropology that takes ‘human nature’ as its starting point: ‘For what we recognise to be human nature is nothing other than the disgrace which covers his nature; his inhumanity, perversion and corruption’ (CD III/2, p. 24). According to Barth, we cannot come to a natural awareness of our sinfulness or of our justification in Christ:

Indeed, the Christian is *simul peccator et iustus*, and the surmounting of this irreconcilable contradiction does not lie in the Christian – not even in the most secret sanctum of his existence, nor does it happen in any of the hours of life’s

³⁵ Contrary to those who argue that petition is one among many forms of prayer, Barth, following Luther and Calvin, centres his understanding of prayer on petition. This, for Barth, is what prayer means and he reminds us that ‘the Lord’s Prayer, apart from the address and the doxology, consists exclusively of pure petitions’ (CD III/2, p. 97).

³⁶ Luther, in continuity with Augustine contra Pelagius, writes that ‘the person is justified and saved, not by works or laws, but by the Word of God, that is, by the promise of his grace, and by faith, that the glory may remain God’s who saved us not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by virtue of his mercy by the word of his grace when we believed’. *The Freedom of the Christian Man*, in *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings*, ed. by John Dillenberger (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1961),pp. 53-58 (p. 71).

journey, not even in those hours most moved and profound, of conversion and death – but it is the action of the Word of God, the action of Christ, who is always the One who makes him out to be a sinner, in order to make him, though a sinner, into a righteous man.³⁷

Our self-knowledge is clouded in self-deception and we easily excuse ourselves.³⁸

Barth is convinced, therefore, that the ‘various ways in which we try by our own powers of judgement to distil our true creaturely essence from the disgrace and infamy which now cover us can only be arbitrary and frustrating’ (CD III/2, p. 30).

This brings us to Barth’s understanding of original sin, which is defined as ‘the original and radical and therefore the comprehensive and total act of man, with the imprisonment of his existence in that circle of evil being and evil activity’ (CD IV/1, p. 500). Like Aquinas, Barth rejects the hereditary component of the classical Augustinian doctrine, the idea that sin passed from one man to all of his successors like a spiritual disease.³⁹ He argues that the idea of hereditary sin ‘which has come to man by propagation is an extremely unfortunate and mistaken one’ (CD IV/1, p. 500). It implies that the propagation of the human race is sinful and this, for Barth, is problematic: ‘Is it supposed to be sinful in itself, or because of its connexion with sexual sin, the one sin perhaps which is the basis of all others?’ (CD IV/1, p. 500). The idea of original sin becomes obscured, Barth holds, when one loses sight of the fact that such sin and imprisonment belongs to the person, that we make ourselves a prisoner. In other words, the idea of hereditary sin loses sight of human agency and responsibility. The term ‘hereditary sin’ has a ‘hopelessly naturalistic, deterministic and even fatalistic ring’ (CD IV/1, p. 500). The sin that the person inherits as the ‘heir of Adam’ can only loosely be regarded as his/her own act. The terms ‘heir’ and ‘sin’ simply cannot retain their meaning

³⁷ Barth, *The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life: The Theological Basis of Ethics*, trans. by R. Birch Hoyle (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 31.

³⁸ ‘This is revealed in the fact that he does not see beyond the natural inward contradiction of his existence, in the face of which he is capable of remorse and pity and melancholy, or even rueful irony, but not of genuine terror, in the face of which he can always quieten and excuse himself, remaining obstinately blind and deaf to the contradiction which is his guilt and the breach which is his need’ (CD IV/1, p. 361). Commenting on Barth’s refusal to allow for any natural knowledge of human sin, John Webster writes: Barth’s Christological determination of sin is not so much an attempt to dislocate ‘theological’ from ‘empirical’ reality, as an argument born of a sense that human persons are characteristically self-deceived. Human life is a sphere in which fantasy operates, in which human persons are not able to see themselves as they truly are. Webster, *Barth’s Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth’s Thought* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), p. 69.

³⁹ Barth attributes the idea of hereditary sin to Romans 5:12: ‘that by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin [...] for that all have sinned’, and to psalm 51:5: ‘Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me’ (CD IV/1, p. 500).

when they are used together. What, we then ask, is the connection between our inevitably corrupt nature which Barth allows – and emphasises – and the figure of Adam?

In answer to this question, we note that Barth does not propose an historical interpretation of Adam, instead reading the account of Adam as ‘saga which can tell us that he came into being in this way and existed as the one who came into being in this way – the first man’ (CD IV/1, p. 508). To read the account historically, comparing it ‘favourably or unfavourably to scientific palaeontology’, would be to miss the point (CD IV/1, p. 508). The point, according to Barth, is that world-history began with the pride and fall of the human person. The name ‘Adam’ points to the ‘staggering monotony’ of human history, to which humankind corresponds (CD IV/1, p. 508).⁴⁰ There never was a golden age. We are doomed to re-enact the scene in the Garden of Eden though not, as we have seen, because a disease has been passed on to us: ‘No one has to be Adam. We are so freely and on our responsibility’ (CD IV/1, p. 509).

This point uncovers the tension inherent in Barth’s theological anthropology. On the one hand, in divergence with Augustinian anthropology, he rejects any idea of inheritance in relation to sinfulness on the grounds that it is fatalistic and that it limits agency.⁴¹ Then, on the other hand, he himself posits an anthropology that emphasises the inevitability of human failure, the perversion and corruption of our nature.⁴² If we are Adam ‘freely and on our own responsibility’, then why does Barth argue for necessity in relation to our corruption? Barth is certainly adamant that the reality, as he sees it, has to be confronted:

If we try to deny this or tone it down, we have not yet understood the full import of the truth that for the reconciliation of man with God nothing more or less was needed than the death of the Son of God, and for the manifestation of this reconciliation nothing more or less than the resurrection of the Son of Man, Jesus Christ (CD III/2, p. 27).

⁴⁰ Barth does not believe that there can be any progress in human history: ‘In spite of all the movement in his historical forms and activities, man himself is not progressive. In respect of his capacity, incapacity, to live as *homo sapiens*, to make his being and being together tolerable and stable, he is remarkably stationary, his actions and reactions being only too similar to those of an unreasoning bullock plodding around a capstan.’ (CD IV/1, p. 507).

⁴¹ Darren Sumner writes that ‘Barth’s ontology is radically different from that of Augustine, such that the Fall need not be thought of as rendering an *essential* change to human being. Instead, men and women follow after Adam and stand guilty of their own stubborn contradiction of the will of God’. ‘Fallenness and Anhypostasis: A Way Forward in the Debate over Christ’s Humanity’, pp. 206-207.

⁴² Barth writes that the person is ‘the sinner who has covered his own creaturely being with shame’ (CD III/2, p. 27).

Barth is arguing here that the denial of the distortion of the person's very being is a failure to grasp the 'full import' of the death and resurrection of Christ. He is trying to bring the reader from despair at our own 'nature' to hope in God's grace. It seems, therefore, that Barth is emphasising the hopelessness of human nature in order to bring the fullness of redemption into focus, which is something that he denies in the opening volume of *Church Dogmatics*: 'We do not associate ourselves, therefore, with the common theological practice of depreciating human nature as much as possible in order to oppose to it the more effectively what may be made of man by divine grace' (CD III/2, p. 274). Here, Barth argues that if we see the person against the background of the person Jesus, we can assent to the existence of a human nature created by God that is good and not evil. Further, it is 'not by nature, but by its denial and misuse, that man is as alien and opposed to the grace of God as we see him to be in fact' (CD III/2, p. 274). However, lest we overemphasise the negative dimension of Barth's theology, we note that our corruption, in itself, cannot make evil the good work of God. For Barth, even the corrupted and distorted sinner is still 'real'. The only nature that matters is our 'creaturely nature' and this cannot be effaced. Though sin breaks the covenant, it does not dissolve it. Sin, therefore, takes place within the covenantal relationship. Even more positively, Barth asserts that 'the fact that he is a sinner is true only when seen in connection with the truth that he is the object of the grace of God' (CD III/2, p. 32).⁴³ We can only understand sin from the context of the doctrine of reconciliation and from the Word of atonement (CD III/2, p. 34).

Further, in spite of our different spheres of existence and our differing relationship to God, Barth forcefully emphasises the point that we share the same human nature with Christ. Though he is sometimes thought to place undue emphasis on the divinity of Christ, Barth certainly affirmed Christ's full humanity (CD III/1, p. 227).⁴⁴ The fullness of Christ's humanity extended to his assumption of our fallen nature. The Word became 'the bearer of our human essence, which is marked not only by its created and unlost

⁴³ This may account for the brevity of Barth's treatment of original sin. Suggesting that Barth is only interested in sin *post Christum*, John Webster writes that this 'means that Barth refuses to treat sin as other than a defeated reality, an 'impossible possibility'. *Barth's Moral Theology*, p. 67.

⁴⁴ Charles T. Waldrop presents the argument for Barth's emphasis on the divinity of Christ based Christology in *Karl Barth's Christology: Its Basic Alexandrian Character* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1984). A contrary position is taken by Paul Dafydd Jones in *The Humanity of Christ: Christology in Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics* (London: T&T Clark International, 2008) and also by George Hunsinger in 'Karl Barth's Christology', in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*. Hunsinger suggests that Barth follows the New Testament in its juxtaposition of the two natures of Christ: 'On the one hand, Jesus of Nazareth is depicted as the Son of God; and on the other, the Son of God is depicted as Jesus of Nazareth.' p. 139.

goodness but (in self-contradiction) by sin, so that it is a perverted essence and lost as such' (CD IV/2, p. 92). Yet, although Christ bore our sinful nature and shared in our corruption he 'bore them without sin' (CD IV/2, p. 92). There is nothing in the human nature of Christ that excludes the possibility of corruption. To suppose otherwise would be to minimise the agency and full humanity of Christ.⁴⁵ Christ was tempted as we are. The difference, however, is that Christ asserted Himself against temptation 'with the freedom and power with which God as Creator confronted chaos' (CD III/2, p. 51/52). Sinlessness was something that Christ imposed upon himself on account of his unique relationship with God. Barth writes that 'the reality of a sanctified life was a *fight*, not just a being. Jesus had to *obey*. But it was a fight that could not have another result.'⁴⁶ We observe in Barth's emphasis on Jesus' choice of a sanctified life a distinct divergence with Augustinian anthropology. Darren Sumner's comments regarding the distinction between sin as an essential or an actual possibility are instructive:

This displacement of the Augustinian notion of natural corruption allows Barth to suggest a way in which Jesus might be impeccable not by virtue of his metaphysical make-up but by virtue of his act, i.e. a distinction between sin as an essential possibility and sin as an actual possibility.⁴⁷

Barth's position seems to be that Christ's sin was a theoretical possibility but an actual impossibility. Yet throughout his discussion of the sinlessness of Christ, Barth's emphasis is not upon the fallen nature of Christ, or even the unfallen nature of Christ, but rather upon the communication of grace, and the direct union with God. This is in consistency with Barth's far-reaching aversion to essentialist or static ideas of 'nature' in all aspects of his theology. 'Relationship' is a more suitable point of reference: Christ is in a relationship with God in a way that we have never been, and will never be: the relationship 'is actualised in Him as the original and in us only as the copy' (CD III/2, p. 50). Yet it is through this relationship that we are reconciled to God, 'the rent is healed, the impure become pure and the enslaved is freed' (CD III/2, p. 48).⁴⁸

⁴⁵ This point is discussed by Paul Dafydd Jones in *The Humanity of Christ*: 'Christ humanly applies the decision for sinlessness throughout his life. This decision forms an elemental part of the decision that he enacts in gratitude and responsibility – and sometimes in struggle – in correspondence to God.' p. 175.

⁴⁶ Karl Barth, *Karl Barth's Table Talk* (Scottish Journal of Theology, Occasional Papers, 10), ed. John D. Godsey (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1963), p. 69.

⁴⁷ Darren Sumner, 'Falleness and anhypostasis', p. 207.

⁴⁸ 'In Him is the human nature created by God without the self-contradiction which afflicts us and without the self-deception by which we seek to escape from this our shame. In Him is human nature without the human sin. For as He the son of God becomes man, and therefore our nature becomes His, For although He becomes what we are, He does not do as we do, and so He is not what we are' (CD III/2, p.48).

This passage, which reveals the hopeful dimension of Barth's theology of the *imago Dei*, also indicates why Barth would not have considered his theology to be pessimistic. In spite of our nature, our depravity and our incapacity, God still takes the part of the person:

For with God and from God he has a future which has not been decided by his self-contradiction or the divine judgement which as the sinner guilty of this self-contradiction he must inevitably incur, but which by the faithfulness and mercy of God is definitely decided a very different way from what he deserves (CD III/2, p. 31).

This, Barth argues, has nothing to do with optimism regarding human nature for we are elected through God's grace alone. Neither can it be denied through a pessimistic judgement. It is a statement of fact:

On the basis of the eternal will of God we have to think of *every human being*, even the oddest, most villainous or miserable, as one to whom Jesus Christ is Brother and God is Father; and we have to deal with him on this assumption.⁴⁹

This is the only possible understanding of the human person that can be drawn from our understanding of the humanity of God. God does not reject the human so we should not undervalue our humanity. Thus in spite of the radically theocentric nature of his theology, he never loses sight of the human, a point we will elaborate with reference to Barth's ethical thought.

3.4 Ethical Implications of Barth's Idea of *Imago Dei*

Though one might assume that Barth's arguably pessimistic account of the person's sinful nature would colour his assessment of the worth of human moral action, he, in fact, devoted considerable attention to the ethical life. Interestingly, if we look to Luther, whose account of justification was similarly anti-Pelagian, we see a thoroughly altruistic account of human moral action. Since, as Luther argues, we cannot participate in our own justification, we are free to live out our faith for the other:

The Christian 'may serve and benefit others in all that he does, considering nothing except the need and the advantage of his neighbour [...]. Here faith is truly active through love, that is, it finds its expression in works of the freest service, cheerfully

⁴⁹ Barth, 'The Humanity of God', p. 53.

and lovingly done, with which a man willingly serves another without hope of reward'.⁵⁰

Similarly, though Barth firmly rules out the possibility of human co-operation in salvation, he envisions a life lived according to the command of God, not only in obedience but also, as Nigel Biggar writes, 'out of regard for our own best good, which this gracious God alone truly understands and which he intends with his heart'.⁵¹ Noting the limited – or late developing – scholarly attention given to Barth's ethical writings, Webster argues that 'conventional treatment of Barth often revolves around an anxiety that the sheer abundance of Barth's depiction of the saving work of God in Christ tends to identify real action with divine action, and leave little room for lengthy exploration of human moral thought and activity'.⁵² However, Barth's writings are not unconcerned with the goodness of human conduct and the Christian life. He understands that the person is absorbed in the actuality of human existence. Just as we think, we also live and act and suffer: 'As we will, we are; and what we do, we are' (CD I/2, p. 792). That the person is elected to be the covenant-partner of God is signalled by the fact that he/she is 'constituted, bound, and obligated as a fellow man'.⁵³ By nature, the person is 'determined for his fellow man, to be with him gladly' (CD III/2, p. 274). This determination as a being for others is what marks the similarity between the human person and the person Jesus. As Barth writes, 'to his being *for* others there must correspond as at least a minimum on our side the fact that our human being is at root a free being *with* others' (CD III/2, p. 274). Further, we live out our creation in the image of God through our relationships with other people: 'God is in relationship, and so too is the man created by Him. This is his divine likeness' (CD III/2, p. 323-24).

This understanding of the inter-human relationship as a reflection of the divine self-encounter informs Barth's treatment of ethics. Barth emphasises the importance of ethics to his theology. Without ethics, Barth writes, 'dogmatics incurs the grave suspicion of being now no more than an idle intellectual frivolity' (CD I/2, p. 787). Although the final word must be left to God, Barth understands ethical discourse as the preliminary word which is necessary to focus the person's 'wandering thoughts' on the Word of

⁵⁰ Luther, *The Pagan Servitude of the Church*, in *Martin Luther*, ed. by Dillenberger, p. 275.

⁵¹ Nigel Biggar, 'Barth's Trinitarian Ethics', in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, pp. 212-228 (p. 215).

⁵² Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology*, p. 1. For Webster's more explicit treatment of the role of human moral action in two of Barth's later texts, *Church Dogmatics IV/4* and *The Christian Life* see *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁵³ Barth, 'The Humanity of God', p. 53.

God.⁵⁴ Theology divorced from ethics would acquire the reputation of being aloof from life and of questionable value:

A reality which is conceived and presented in such a way that it does not affect or claim men or awaken them to responsibility or redeem them, i.e., a theoretical reality, cannot possibly be the reality of the Word, no matter how great may be the richness of its content or the profundity of its conception (CD I/2, p. 793).

Barth asserts that 'dogmatics in itself must be ethics and ethics can only be dogmatics' (CD I/2, p. 795). Therefore, though Barth values ethics, it is unsurprising that he rejects any attempt towards an independent treatment of ethics apart from dogmatics since 'Christians are found only in Christ, not independently' (CD I/2, p. 791). Any attempt to secure theological independence for ethics has obscured theology, 'transforming it into an ethical system with a Christian foundation, and then penetrating and controlling biblical exegesis and pastoral theology in the same way' (CD I/2, p. 782-3).⁵⁵ The acceptance of such a theology – which is really only an 'applied anthropology' – would subject the church to an alien sovereignty no longer identifiable with the Word of God (CD I/2, p. 783). Barth sees much evidence of this tendency towards independent ethical systems in Christian antiquity and the Middle Ages, though not in Aquinas' writings. Barth writes that it is 'certainly remarkable that although Thomas's ethics refer unmistakably to an independent basis it is not presented independently of his dogmatics, but in a subordinate position within it' (CD I/2, p. 783). The classic dogmatics of Reformation theology made the separation of theology and ethics impossible. It would be very difficult, Barth argues, to find passages in Luther or Calvin where 'faith or the object of faith is treated without regard to the conduct of the believer' (CD I/2, p. 783). It would be even more difficult to find references to ethics independent from dogmatics since the reformers could not lose sight of Jesus as the object of faith.⁵⁶ Barth identifies the failure of ethical systems that are removed from dogmatics as instrumental in his decision to break with liberal theology: 'Was it – this has played a decisive role for me personally – precisely the failure of the ethics of the modern theology of the time, with the outbreak of the First World War,

⁵⁴ Barth, 'The Gift of Freedom: Foundation of Evangelical Ethics', in *The Humanity of God*, p. 88.

⁵⁵ Barth is not, however, opposed to a literary or academic treatment of ethics that is outwardly distinct from dogmatics as long as the separation is merely technical in character and that ethics is maintained to be subordinate to dogmatics (CD I/2, p. 795).

⁵⁶ This is why the Reformers, Barth argues, did not make systematic use of an idea of natural law even though they agreed with the scholastics on the existence of the law of nature inborn in the person and prior to faith (CD I/2, p. 783).

which caused us to grow puzzled also about its exegesis, its treatment of history, or its dogmatics?’⁵⁷

Though some Christian thinkers might see the ideal form of Christian ethics in Barth’s thought,⁵⁸ it may be asked whether Barth’s radically christocentric approach, isolated from all other methods of inquiry into the nature of personhood, restricts the potential for dialogue with other faiths or discourses within the public sphere. As articulated by Richard Roberts, ‘[h]ow then does the supremely positive assertion embodied in the theology of Barth relate to a secularised view of reality which has dispensed with transcendence and grants no *Lebensraum* to revelation?’⁵⁹ Interestingly, given its extreme Christological persuasion, Barth’s work is valued in some contemporary Jewish theology. Michael Wyschogrod, for example, a self-described ‘Jewish Barthian’, appreciates the grounding of Barth’s theology in historical revelation:

Barth’s refusal to substitute ontological constructions, whether in the form of the “ground of being” or any other similar deflection of the God known by Israel, for the God who acts in Jewish history, cannot fail to meet with instinctive recognition by the Jewish reader that he has before him a biblical attuned thinker whose focus is on the God of Israel, even if, at a certain point, the Jewish story diverges from the Christian.⁶⁰

We also find admiration for Barth’s work in David Novak, whose work we will address in Chapter Four. Novak suggests that if Barth had been a Jew, he would have made a superb Talmudist: ‘Barth’s sustained efforts to ground Christian ethics in prescriptive biblical revelation (especially in the Old Testament as did Jesus and Paul) reminds some perceptive readers, especially of a traditionalist bent, of the way the Rabbis did theology.’⁶¹ Novak values the tenacity with which Barth maintains his views, contrasting this with the ‘assimilationism’ of some liberal Jews:

⁵⁷ Barth, ‘The Humanity of God’, p. 40.

⁵⁸ Stanley Hauerwas, for example, argues that ‘Barth shows the way that theology must be done’. *With a Grain of the Universe*, p. 145.

⁵⁹ Richard H. Roberts, *A Theology on its Way?*, p. 60. As J. Daryl Charles articulates the issue: ‘To be faithful to Christ’s lordship is not to deny the challenge – or the necessity – of communicating truth to the nonbeliever, whose worldview and language are devoid of biblical and Christological understanding’. *Retrieving the Natural Law: A Return to Moral First Things* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2008), p. 129.

⁶⁰ Michael Wyschogrod, *Abraham’s Promise: Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 215.

⁶¹ David Novak, ‘Defending Niebuhr from Hauerwas’, *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 40 (2012), 281-295 (p. 283).

Barth's opposition to the elites of his day is in refreshing contrast to the tendency of most liberal Jewish thinkers to accommodate themselves and their fellow Jews to currently popular ideologies, especially to the ideologies of the elites of the societies from which Jews have so desperately sought both full acceptance and full approval.⁶²

Novak feels theologically close to Barth on account of Barth's view of revelation which he applies by analogy to his own Jewish tradition. Novak, however, favours a natural law approach to ethics, unlike Barth, 'because it is more philosophically arguable in a secular society and culture, and because it is more politically effective there'.⁶³ From this perspective, Barth does not have much to offer. Nonetheless, Barth's theology, Novak writes, should offer inspiration to those Jewish theologians who wish to make Jewish ethical teaching known to the wider world but 'who seek ultimate approval for their representations of the tradition from the divinely revealed Torah alone'.⁶⁴

The views of Novak and Wyschogrod indicate that Barth's anthropology and ethics may have something of a transferable relevance to other traditions of revelation by analogy.⁶⁵ The difficulty, however, is much more obvious in relation to the relevance of Barth's ethics in a secular context. It must be acknowledged, however, that Barth presented his theology in full awareness of the wider social context. His insistence on the importance of Christian revelation for any type of ethical discourse persisted in spite of his recognition that such argument had the potential to be marginalised:

The idea of a Christianity which is automatically given and received with the rest of our inheritance has now become historically impossible, no matter how tenaciously it may linger on and even renew itself in various attempts at restoration by the Church and the world. The Christian West [...] no longer exists either in the city or in the peace of the remotest hamlet (CD IV/3, p. 524).

It was not the case, therefore, that Barth envisaged a future re-emergence of Christendom, a point that is further indicated by his comments on infant baptism:

The real reason for the persistent adherence to infant baptism is quite simply the fact that without it the church would suddenly be in a remarkably embarrassing position.

⁶² Novak, 'Defending Niebuhr from Hauerwas', p. 283.

⁶³ Novak, 'Defending Niebuhr from Hauerwas', p. 281.

⁶⁴ Novak, 'Defending Niebuhr from Hauerwas', p. 284.

⁶⁵ See also Glen A. Chestnutt, *Challenging the Stereotype: The Theology of Karl Barth as a Resource for Inter-religious Encounter in a European Context* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010).

Every individual would then have to decide whether he wanted to be a Christian. But how many Christians would there be in that case?⁶⁶

As Barth's comments on baptism indicate, he envisioned a Church that was alive and bold and not 'afraid to walk on the water' and proclaim the full 'reality' of the Christian message.⁶⁷ He even maintained this emphasis in work addressed to audiences outside of the Christian context. For example, in a lecture delivered in 1949 entitled 'The Christian Message and the New Humanism', Barth told the audience, which he described as 'an assembly of intellectuals of widely differing capabilities and interests', of the unavoidability of his commitment: 'We shall not be able to conceal the fact that with the Christian message it is not the case of a classical humanism nor of a new humanism which is to be rediscovered today, but rather of the humanism of God'.⁶⁸ The centrality of Christian revelation to ethics was simply the inescapable reality of Barth's doctrine of the Word of God.

The ethical life, we conclude, is central to Barth's interpretation of *imago Dei*, since we live out and express our creation in the image of God through our relationship with fellow humanity. Just as God is in relationship, so too is humankind. This is the only reference to divine likeness that Barth will allow. Though his ethics are potentially valuable to other traditions of revelation by analogy, the uncompromising dependence of Barth's ethics on dogmatics limits their viability outside of a religious context.

3.5 Conclusion

Barth's understanding of the concept of *imago Dei*, embedded within his doctrine of the Word of God, can only be understood in relation to the 'event' of revelation encountered in faith. As such, the meaning of the concept cannot be deduced from empirical observation or with reference to the ideals of ethical humanism but only through the event of revelation. Barth defines the *imago Dei* in terms of correspondence, which is described as conformity in faith to God's word. Though we cannot participate in the being of God, we express our likeness to God through our relationship with fellow humanity, a fact that gives Barth's interpretation of *imago Dei* a strong ethical dimension. Though Barth emphasised the corrupt and delusional nature of human personhood, the supposition that

⁶⁶ Barth, *The Heidelberg Catechism for Today*, trans. by Shirley Guthrie (John Knox Press, 1964), p. 104.

⁶⁷ *The Heidelberg Catechism for Today*, p. 104.

⁶⁸ Barth, 'The Christian Message and the New Humanism', in *Against the Storm: Shorter Post-War Writings 1946-52* (London: SCM, 1954), p. 190.

he held a 'negative' view of the human person would amount to a simplification of his thought. As we have seen, there are many examples to the contrary in his writings, most notably, his rejection of a fatalistic interpretation of sin. Barth favoured instead the idea of sin as an 'inconceivable revolt' which 'never loses the character of a crime, or becomes a kind of second natural state which is excusable as such' (CD III/2, p. 274). Yet although 'negativity' should not be associated with Barth's view of the person as such, it is perhaps appropriate to his view of human participation in redemption or of our capacity for relationship with God, both of which he stridently opposes by virtue of the christological starting-point of his theology: 'This is where the false propositions of Roman Catholicism and humanism arise, and we must be on our guard against them' (CD III/2, p. 274). Crucially, for Barth, we cannot encounter God apart from his act of self-revelation: 'There is no height or depth in which God can be God in any other way' (CD II/1, p. 77). This emphasis on the objectivity of the Word of God comes at the cost of any real sense of mutuality, something that is arguably very necessary for religious experience. This is not something that would have troubled Barth very much since the quest for religious experience contradicts the entire thrust of his theology. However, the lack of mutuality or participation apart from faith affects the enduring relevance of his interpretation of *imago Dei*.

It can seem that Barth accords an essentially passive role to the person with regard to our relationship to God in Christ, within which our election is akin to an exercise of divine lordship. In explaining our human destiny wholly in terms of the work of God taking place within us, Barth's theology can leave the reader with the sense that what we are is decided elsewhere since 'both the first and last word is spoken about us' (CD III/2, p. 50). However, though he prioritises grace, Barth does also assert our freedom, and even our independence, in relation to God as God's partner. Even in differentiation to God, the person 'can be a real partner; which is capable of action and responsibility in relation to Him' (CD III/1, p. 184-5).

Barth presents his approach as yielding a clear-sighted picture of 'real man' undistorted by any human images and ideologies. He was opposed to any system or ideology that promised to bring all human problems under control and that failed to recognise the relativity of our earthly actions. Barth saw it as the mission of the Church to stand in defiance against such ideologies because of his firmly-held conviction that 'man may generally mean and give a great deal to His fellows, but he cannot be their Deliverer or Saviour' (CD III/2, p. 222). Although Barth does not allow for human access to God in

this life, comfort can be drawn from Barth's assertion that it is not possible for the human person to be absolutely godless. In emphasising what God has done for us, Barth places the human person in a position of grace. The person is saved yet still fallen and apart from God. Though pessimistic with regard to human potential, in his realistic assessment of lived human experience, Barth's interpretation of *imago Dei* was also one of hope and faith: 'Man has not fallen lower than the depth to which God humbled Himself for him in Jesus Christ' (CD IV/3, p. 119).

Chapter Four will address the concept of *imago Dei* in the thought of the contemporary Jewish theologian, David Novak. Novak, as we have seen, valued Barth's emphasis on revealed wisdom, though his own theology adopts a favourable disposition towards natural law. This, therefore, lends Novak's interpretation of *imago Dei* greater flexibility in relation to dialogue outside of the Jewish context.

CHAPTER FOUR

BETWEEN REVEALED WISDOM AND NATURAL LAW: THE CONCEPT OF *IMAGO DEI* IN THE THEOLOGY OF DAVID NOVAK

This chapter will discuss the interpretation of *imago Dei* in the work of the contemporary Jewish theologian, David Novak, and the implications of the concept for Novak's commitment to dialogue. Like Karl Barth, Novak rejects the intellectualist approach to *imago Dei* that characterised earlier interpretations. He favours, instead, a relational understanding of the concept that emphasises the mutuality of the covenantal relationship. After examining Novak's explicit treatment of Genesis 1:26-27, the chapter will consider the way in which Novak's view of *imago Dei* functions in a dialogical context. There are two objectives to this exploration of dialogue: firstly, to establish the way in which Novak's covenantal, Torah-centred approach to *imago Dei* informs his understanding of the relation between Jews and non-Jews; and secondly, to explore the way in which the concept of *imago Dei* functions, for Novak, as the primary point of contrast between secular and religious understandings of personhood. It will be seen that Novak contrasts the sense of being commanded, inherent in the concept of *imago Dei*, with the self-legislating inclinations of a radical form of autonomy that characterises aspects of secular culture. The chapter will begin with a brief description of Novak's method and priorities as Jewish theologian, which will illustrate the centrality of dialogue to his work.

4.1 Theological Retrieval, Philosophical Imagination and Political Prudence

In his commitment to the interaction between the Jewish tradition and public moral discourse, Novak employs the threefold method of theological retrieval, philosophical imagination, and political prudence.¹ It is at this intersection between theology, philosophy and politics that Novak situates his understanding of the human person. Theological retrieval, to which Novak accords primacy, is centred firmly on Torah. The previous chapter noted Novak's response to Barth's christocentric approach to ethics. Novak, we have seen, values Barth's prioritisation of revelation and the tenacity with which he maintained his theological principles. He applies Barth's revelation-centred approach, by analogy, to his own tradition, contrasting it with what he views as the

¹ David Novak, *The Jewish Social Contract: An Essay in Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. xiii.

tendencies of liberal Jewish theology to divorce ethics from the context of Jewish revelation. In contrast to Barth, however, Novak emphasises the importance of context. The degree to which he invokes revelation is, therefore, dependent upon his conversation partner. This type of approach is described by the modern Christian theologian, Paul Tillich, as follows:

He is a philosopher even if he is a theologian and although his ultimate concern is dependent on the subject matter of his theological work [...] But as an ethicist he does not bring his theological assertions into arguments about the nature of the moral imperative.²

This quotation aptly summarises Novak's stance as a Jewish theologian in engagement with wider ethical discourse.

For Novak, loyalty to covenantal life and the Torah is more important than loyalty to any secular community to which one belongs. His understanding of Torah encompasses both Scripture and the normative tradition of the oral Torah. Although halakhic deliberation is the most important component of Jewish ethical thought, the input of science, philosophy and history is also deemed important to the analysis of issues pertaining to human life. Therefore, philosophical imagination and political prudence are both essential to Novak's commitment to dialogue in the public square, where Jews are called to speak and act in a world beyond the 'four cubits of the law'.³ Novak's long-standing concern regarding how Jews, and Christians perhaps, can participate in a liberal democracy in good faith influences the direction of his theological work, although the 'democratic polity is neither one's original nor ultimate destination in the world'.⁴ Novak recognises that, in the secular sphere, argument cannot be justified according to Jewish revelation but must be answerable to more universal criteria. Therefore, in contrast to Barth, Novak favours an approach derived from natural law in dealing with questions pertaining to the inter-human realm. As we will see, this does not minimise Novak's commitment to the distinctiveness and importance of Jewish revelation.⁵ It does,

² Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 267.

³ *B. Berakhot* 8a, discussed by Novak in *Covenantal Rights: A Study in Jewish Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. xiv.

⁴ Novak, *Covenantal Rights*, p. 28.

⁵ In commenting on Novak's commitment to Jewish-Christian dialogue, Stephen Haynes writes that 'Novak's desire to dialogue with Christians does not tempt him to downplay theological differences between the communities or compromise Jewish revelatory claims. On the contrary, his tendency to identify Jewish distinctiveness in election and covenant makes him an attractive dialogue partner for Christians who also view the divine-human relationship through these biblical lenses.', 'Review of *Talking With*

however, increase the effectiveness of his contribution to dialogue in the public square. Having observed Novak's method and priorities as a theologian, we now turn directly to his interpretation of *imago Dei*, which is derived from the doctrine of creation.

4.2 The *Imago Dei* as Active Mutuality

How, Novak asks, can our view of personhood be 'extended so as to include those who do not act well for me or for anyone else, and even those who cannot act at all for anyone else, even themselves'?⁶ In convergence with Barth, Novak argues that this question cannot be answered by any ethics that attempts to constitute an ontology or a philosophical anthropology out of its own operations. Such ethical methods, Novak argues, inevitably reduce human existence to our action in the world. This question can, however, be answered with reference to the doctrine of creation, 'specifically the creation of the human person as the *image of God*'.⁷ The disassociation from any idea of self-creation on the part of the human person is a consistent feature of Novak's theology, and a facet of his thought that has strong affinity with Barth's idea of the 'real' person. Any attempt to reduce the human person to some worldly category results, Novak holds, in a distortion of the truth.

As noted earlier, Novak's approach to *imago Dei* can be regarded as 'relational', and is, as such, radically divergent from the reason-centred approach observed earlier in Maimonides' writings, for example.⁸ This divergence is to be expected given the significant difference in the historical and philosophical contexts within which Novak and Maimonides were writing. As Novak insightfully remarks, it is 'a mistake of many current followers of Maimonides to think they can conduct the search for truth using the same tools he used'.⁹ Novak holds a different view of the covenantal relationship, which

Christians: Musings of a Jewish Theologian, *Reviews in Religion & Theology*, 14 (2007), 75-77 (p.76). This, Haynes argues, makes Novak a natural conversation partner of Christians of a more orthodox persuasion.

⁶ Novak, 'Persons in the Image of God (1998)', in *Tradition in the Public Square: A David Novak Reader*, ed. by R. Rashkover and M. Kavka (London: SCM Press, 2008), p. 148.

⁷ Novak, 'Persons in the Image of God', p. 148.

⁸ Nevertheless, Novak was particularly influenced by Maimonides' understanding of the commandments and natural law. He describes himself as a disciple of Maimonides in the foreword to Matthew Levering's *Jewish Christian Dialogue and the Life of Wisdom: Engagements with the Theology of David Novak* (London: Continuum, 2010), p. xi.

⁹ Novak, 'The Mind of Maimonides', *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*, 90 (1999), p. 27. Novak remarks that 'just as Maimonides himself reworked scriptural and rabbinic materials, finding implications in them that their original authors would not or could not develop, I intend to do the same here with the implications of Maimonides's own theory'. *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Jewish Justification*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 68.

for Maimonides is a ‘relation to a God who seems too closely to resemble the God of Aristotle’.¹⁰ There is, Novak holds, an absence of reciprocity in Maimonides’ conception of the divine-human relationship. ‘All concern is in one direction: from man to God. Maimonides in no way ever attempts to constitute a truly responsive role for God. There is no real reciprocity here.’¹¹ Covenant, Novak holds, must retain that element of mutuality, a constant transaction between God and Israel. Israel must act *with* God in response to God’s action for Israel. Even where scripture depicts God’s active saving of Israel, Israel is not merely the passive recipient.¹²

The divine-human relationship, as Novak envisages it, is such that God can make claims upon the human person to which the person can freely respond. Novak writes that in order ‘for this response to be possible, God must relinquish some of his own space, as it were, to allow his human creatures a place on which to stand before him – but never successfully against him’.¹³ This ‘place on which to stand’ signifies the particular status of the human person. This special status and ability to respond to the claim of God, is what Novak intends by his use of the concept of *imago Dei*.¹⁴ This special status is universal. Novak counts as persons all those born of human parents. While the capacity for reason is valued as an attribute to be developed by humans to whatever extent they can, an anthropology solely based on reason would be ‘insufficient to ground an ethics that embraces all of humankind so defined’.¹⁵ Whether personhood should be defined according to rationality is not merely an academic question, Novak argues, since this anthropology has been invoked as grounds for dehumanising those on the margins of human life:

In our day especially, when essential humanness is denied by some to those at the edges of human life – the unborn, the permanently and severely retarded, the irrevocably comatose – such an ontology and its anthropology are inconsistent with the whole thrust of the Jewish tradition on the issue of human personhood.¹⁶

This point undergirds Novak’s treatment of many ethical and social issues pertaining to human life, as will be discussed further.

¹⁰ *Natural Law in Judaism*, p. 135.

¹¹ Novak, *Natural Law in Judaism*, p. 135.

¹² Novak, *Natural Law in Judaism*, p. 136.

¹³ Novak, *Covenantal Rights*, p. 40.

¹⁴ Novak, *Covenantal Rights*, p. 40.

¹⁵ Novak, ‘Persons in the Image of God’, p. 149.

¹⁶ Novak, ‘Persons in the Image of God’, p. 149.

Novak's opposition to the intellectualist interpretation of *imago Dei* can be further illustrated with reference to his understanding of divine election. The *imago Dei* 'is not a quality humans have any more than election of Israel is due to a quality she has'.¹⁷ Any view of Jewish particularity that is not based on the covenant – for example 'Jewish genius' or 'Jewish peoplehood' – is ethically inauthentic. 'Particularism of this kind, unlike the transcendence of the general world by the singularity of the Jewish covenant with God, can be presented only as ethnocentricity or chauvinism'.¹⁸ Similarly, as regards the *imago Dei*, the problem with the centralisation of particular human attributes, such as rationality or will, is that such human attributes can be constituted phenomenologically without reference to God. Central to Novak's understanding of the concept of *imago Dei* is the conviction that 'humans *are* more than they can ever *do* or *make* of themselves'.¹⁹ The intellectualist interpretation also loses the intimacy of the human-divine relationship as depicted in Genesis: 'the only way one can constitute the intimacy of the relationship with God, which Scripture suggests is a possibility *for* humans from the very beginning and continually thereafter, is to see the "image of God" as that which God *and* humans share in what they do *together*'.²⁰

Novak employs Maimonides' *via negativa* to construct an anthropology that looks beyond the human. As with Maimonides' use of the *via negativa* in relation to God, this method moves from what the human person is not in order to arrive at an understanding of what the person is. Novak notes that the word for image, *tselem*, can be argued to be derived from the noun *tsel*, meaning shadow. While image reflects what is being 'imaged', a shadow 'only indicates that something lies behind the blank form that is cast'.²¹ Novak suggests that this approach prevents our assumption that what is within us comes from ourselves. It also means that any of our conclusions about the shadow are tentative until the presence behind the shadow becomes known to us. The idea also functions in natural law terms since it can be apprehended, prior to revelation, that the human person cannot be categorised according to the things of the world:

For if the human person is the "shadow of God", then even before God presents himself to us in revelation, we still have some apprehension of why the human

¹⁷Novak, *The Election of Israel, The Idea of the Chosen People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 121.

¹⁸ Novak, *Jewish Social Ethics*, p. 9.

¹⁹ 'Persons in the Image of God', p. 148.

²⁰ *Covenantal Rights*, p. 40.

²¹ Novak, 'Persons in the Image of God', p. 150.

person cannot be definitely categorised by any category by which we determine the nature of the things of the world.²²

Any reductive categorisation, such as that of the *animal rationale*, is a distortion of the true being of the human person. 'No matter how much humans might share with the other creatures in the world, they are always *in* the world, but never truly *of* it.'²³

According to Novak, the human person is distinguished from other animals as the only being that is answerable to God and responsible for other persons and for the rest of creation. 'The image of God does not designate a substance or attribute conveyed by God to humans. Instead it is a relational capacity for what pertains *between* God and all humans.'²⁴ In this sense, Novak's interpretation of *imago Dei* is covenantal. It envisages an 'active mutuality' which can only be possible between God and the person.²⁵ Though the capacity for this covenantal relationship is inherent in every human person, the commandments constitute the content of the *imago Dei*.

4.3 The Content of the *Imago Dei*

For Novak, the capacity to enter into a normative, covenantal relationship with the source of our existence is not dependent upon historical revelation but it is, rather, inherent in every human person. In his concern for the ability of a religious anthropology to be brought into philosophical and political discussion, Novak does not ground his argument pertaining to personhood in terms of Jewish revelation, but rather in our common human dignity. He argues that the Jewish understanding of the human person can be made intelligible in the secular sphere since aspects of the God-human relationship have their correlates in the inter-human relationship. However, while Novak – in contrast to Barth – holds that we have a natural awareness of our particular status, it is only through revelation that the truth of our election is brought to conscious mutual relationality. 'Although felt inchoately by desire in advance, the meaning of this capacity only comes to knowledge/experience when her desideratum presently reveals himself to her'.²⁶ The Torah brings 'the meaning of being created in the image of God to human awareness and action'.²⁷ The Torah reveals what Novak views as the 'content' of the *imago Dei*: 'the

²² Novak, 'Persons in the Image of God', p. 151.

²³ 'Persons in the Image of God', p. 151.

²⁴ *The Jewish Social Contract*, p. 17.

²⁵ *Covenantal Rights*, p. 41.

²⁶ Novak, *The Election of Israel*, p. 121.

²⁷ Novak, *The Election of Israel*, p. 121

normative relationship when humans recognise that the moral law, which is consistent with their nature, is rooted in the commandment of God.²⁸

The commandments are, therefore, central to this covenantal life of divine-human active mutuality: ‘Human dignity is affirmed by the teaching that all human beings are either the subjects or the objects of God’s commandments’.²⁹ It is only with the ‘indignity of death’ that we are free from the commandments.³⁰ This sense of a shared covenantal life is depicted in Rabbinic teaching, where God is imagined to observe the positive commands of the Torah.³¹ We have been given the means, through the commandments, of living according to our nature. When we are attuned to the sense of being commanded, we understand that the purpose of our earthly lives is not derived from the world or from ourselves but from the covenantal relationship with God. The centrality of Torah brings the discussion to the relation between the status of the Jew and non-Jew as regards the *imago Dei*. If the commandments of the Torah are identified as the content of the *imago Dei*, how does Novak’s theology view the non-Jew in relation to the image?

4.4 Judaism and the Religious Other

Given his commitment to many forms of dialogue, it is unsurprising that Novak has given the question of the relation between Jews and non-Jews considerable attention. Novak regrets that Jewish moral teaching can appear to be particularistic – even discriminatory – and applicable only to the Jewish community. ‘The charge is that the Jewish tradition teaches Jews to act toward their fellow Jews in one way and to act toward gentiles in another way and that these two ways of acting are opposed to each other.’³² This view found particular expression in Immanuel Kant’s argument that the ‘*Jewish faith*, as originally established, was only a collection of merely statutory laws supporting a political state’.³³ The moral content of Judaism was, according to Kant, a subsequent addition that did not belong to Judaism as such. Judaism, he wrote, excluded all other peoples from its communion and was hostile towards them. Novak finds an early

²⁸ *Covenantal Rights*, p. 42.

²⁹ *Covenantal Rights*, p. 43.

³⁰ *Covenantal Rights*, p. 43.

³¹ Novak refers to *YT. Rosh Hashanah* 1.3/57b and *Vayiqra Rabbah* 35.5, *Covenantal Rights*, p. 42.

³² Novak, ‘The Universality of Jewish Ethics: A Rejoinder to Secular Critics’, *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 2 (2008), 181 – 211, (p. 181). Novak remarks that, today, Christian ethics can appear to be equally particularistic.

³³ Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, trans. by A. Wood and G. Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998), pp. 130-131.

expression of this view in the Gospel of Matthew: ‘You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy”’ (Matt: 5:43).³⁴ This well-known passage goes on to cast Christian ethics in a more universalistic light: ‘But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you’ (Matt: 5:44).

The dismissal of Jewish ethics as particularistic forgets that at the heart of biblical and Rabbinic writings we find ideas of equality of moral status and human worth, as well as the imperative to aid and protect the poor and defenceless. It is interesting to note the views of the Jewish theologian, Ruth Langer, on this point. Langer argues that Judaism, since it pertains to the relationship of God to a specific group of people, is better placed than Christianity to appreciate the theological status of the religious other. Langer writes that ‘Judaism makes universalist claims only about the existence of God, the Creator, and God's fundamental demands of humanity as expressed in the Noahide laws.’³⁵ These are the seven commandments of Noah which are pre-Mosaic in origin and universally applicable since all of humankind is considered to be a descendent of Noah. Since Judaism does not make any further universalistic claims, Langer argues that it is well placed to appreciate the paths of other faiths. Langer contrasts this aspect of Judaism with the Christian teaching that Christ is the universal path to salvation. Such an assertion, Langer argues, ‘is actually a limitation on God’s omnipotence, a suggestion that God can only operate in a single way in the world. Judaism can understand other religions, and especially Christianity and Islam, also to be God’s communications of divine will to the world.’³⁶ While it could be argued that Langer does not give sufficient attention to those changes in Christian teaching that have heightened the appreciation of other faiths, her point regarding the stance of Judaism is interesting, as is her account of the Noahide laws.³⁷ Langer writes that, in Rabbinic terms, Noahide law ‘is a functional equivalent to

³⁴ Novak, ‘The Universality of Jewish Ethics’, p. 182.

³⁵ Ruth Langer, ‘Jewish Understandings of the Religious Other’, *Theological Studies*, 64 (2003), 255-277 (p. 276-7).

³⁶ Langer, ‘Jewish Understandings of the Religious Other’, p. 276.

³⁷ The Vatican II document, *Nostra Aetate* (1965), marked the beginning of a change in Catholic attitude towards other faiths: ‘The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.’ http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat_ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html [accessed July 20 2013], par. 2. In continuity with Vatican II, Pope John Paul II wrote that ‘though the routes taken may be different, there is but a single goal to which is directed the deepest aspiration of the human spirit as expressed in its quest for God and also in its quest, through its tending towards God, for the full dimension of its humanity, or in other words for the full meaning of human life’, *Redemptor hominis*, (1979), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis_en.html [Accessed 16 July 2014], par. 11.

the Christian assertion that all people, even if they do not know it, are saved only through Christ – Christianity’s fundamental theological category’.³⁸

Noahide law is also central to Novak’s view of religious diversity. Since the idea that Jewish ethics are particularistic runs contrary to his appeal to the wider relevance of Jewish moral wisdom, it is essential that Novak can illustrate the universal dimension of Jewish ethics. The Noahide laws are a good starting point since they indicate that Judaism has long been concerned with the prescription of norms for human life and not just for Jewish life. Where the religious traditions teach normative practices which are universally applicable, these prescriptions must be justified according to reason as well as through the authority of the tradition. Novak holds that ‘in order to be truly universal and thus rationally persuasive, these normative practices have to be *universalizable*; in other words they must have a reason *for which* they were enacted, a reason that could easily be accepted by *any* rational person’.³⁹

Novak, therefore, considers all questions regarding the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish life in the context of Noahide law which provides the justification for natural law. This is the law of God as it applies to all of humankind, discoverable by every rational person but discovered by the Jewish tradition in the Noahide laws. Novak presents the Noahide laws as a Rabbinic creation.⁴⁰ They find their earliest articulation in the *Tosefta*, a late second century text:

Seven commandments were the sons of Noah commanded: (1) concerning adjudication, (2) and concerning idolatry, (3) and concerning blasphemy, (4) and concerning sexual immorality, (5) and concerning bloodshed, (6) and concerning robbery, (7) and concerning a limb torn from a living animal.⁴¹

The Noahide laws contain the universal ethical teaching of Judaism, the minimum standard of morality for all nations. They were considered to have been binding for Jews prior to the revelation at Sinai. Jews began as Noahides. The laws were regarded by the rabbis as prescriptive for all of humankind, unlike the 613 commandments of the Torah which were applicable to Jews alone. They provide, as Dan Cohn-Sherbok terms it,

³⁸ Ruth Langer, ‘Jewish Understandings of the Religious Other’, p. 267.

³⁹ Novak, ‘The Universality of Jewish Ethics’, p. 183.

⁴⁰ Novak presents an extended study of the Noahide laws in *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism: The Idea of Noahide Law*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Littman, 2011). Here, he considers alternative views of earlier scholars with regard to where Noahide law found its first expression – in the Torah, among Hittite scholars or during the Maccabean era – and concludes that the Noahide laws are a rabbinic creation. Although they find their theological origin in the Torah, they did not find an historical starting point prior to the destruction of the Second Temple when the question of Jewish relation to non-Jews became more relevant., pp. 12-35.

⁴¹ *Tosefta* AZ 8.4, discussed by Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism*, p. 11.

evidence of ‘Rabbinic inclusivism’ with regard to other faiths. Gentile nations that abided by Noahide law were considered righteous. Contrary to biblical exclusivism which ridiculed the gods of other nations, the rabbis accepted that, while Israel worshipped God directly, other nations worshipped through intermediaries with a symbolic function.⁴² Gentiles could only be deemed guilty of violating the prohibition of idolatry if they believe that such symbols have a divine nature.⁴³ There are, therefore, two ways of speaking of the ‘Noahide’, presently as co-Judaic and historically as pre-Judaic.⁴⁴

For Novak, the primary significance of the Noahide laws lies in the fact that they indicate a primary point of authority which is required for the ordering of human life. For Novak, ‘it follows that any rejection of God’s norms presupposes the substitution of God’s authority by the authority of one who is not-God being made into God’.⁴⁵ Since, however, the Noahide laws mostly consist in prohibitions, they are indicative of a relationship between the Creator and creature that is essentially negative. For a positive relationship to be sustained, ‘there must be the discovery of positive reasons by humans *within* themselves for them to want to accept and maintain this relationship’.⁴⁶ The person must have a desire for good.

4.5 Natural Law

If, according to the Rabbinic tradition, the Noahide laws are universally binding, what is the extent of their dependence on Jewish revelation? How are they discoverable to non-Jews? This is the point at which, for Novak, Noahide law leads to the idea of natural law. Novak argues that the Noahide laws contain an expression of those ethical norms that are universally knowable. It is a very positive thing, therefore, that these ethical norms find their parallels in many other cultures. Novak writes that ‘the image of God is not a peculiarly Jewish domain. Jews can accept the fact that other cultures enable their members to function as the image of God’.⁴⁷ Natural law, for Novak, is the rational

⁴² Dan Cohn-Sherbok writes that, according to the rabbis, ‘pagans should be understood as polytheists in practice but monotheists in theory if they worship the One God through the adoration of nature and reverence for the symbols which their culture has developed’. *Judaism and Other Faiths* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), p. 30.

⁴³ Cohn-Sherbok finds evidence that other nations were permitted to worship the heavenly bodies in the following text: ‘And lest you lift up your eyes to the heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars – all the heavenly host, and you be swept away and you worship them, which the Lord has allotted to all the peoples under the heaven’ (Deuteronomy 4:19).

⁴⁴ Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, p. 26.

⁴⁵ Novak, *The Election of Israel*, p. 118.

⁴⁶ Novak, *The Election of Israel*, p. 119.

⁴⁷ *The Jewish Social Contract*, p. 17.

discovery of what is required in order for us to live in the world according to God's image: 'Conscious and free human participation in that divine project is how humans make their own worldly projects an imitation of God's project *for* the world, a project coming *from* the Only One who is beyond the world.'⁴⁸ This, for Novak, is practical faith and it begins with the rational discovery of the way in which we can reflect God's benevolence in the world. Natural law can, therefore, be seen as a preparation for revealed law rather than its replacement; it places within us the desire for covenant. Natural law, in itself, does not constitute the direct relationship with God that humans need. For Jews, this direct relationship is initiated through the covenant at Sinai and finds fulfilment in the eschatological redemption which only God can bring about. It is Novak's aim to produce a minimal natural law theory which is inextricable from revelation and positive law, and from covenantal life. Natural law is the minimal normative conditions necessary for the survival of human communities. It is the structure which protects life since it is inspired 'by a sense of urgency about assaults on the inherent dignity of people and of human community'.⁴⁹

In considering Novak's use of the Noahide laws to ground his natural law theory, it is important not to over-emphasise the specific content of the laws. The Jewish theologian, Elliot Dorff, finds issue with Novak's suggestion that the three prohibitions that Jews may never violate – idolatry, killing of innocent life and sexual immorality – are the strongest evidence of commonality between Jews and other gentile communities.⁵⁰ Dorff suggests that while these are indeed important in the Jewish faith, their universal prominence cannot be presumed. Even if they are prohibited, they may be viewed in a different way in other traditions or they may not share the same degree of prominence. Dorff considers, for example, the debate and variance of opinion regarding homosexuality, a divisive issue in different Jewish and Christian groups and hardly grounds for interfaith, or even intrafaith, commonality. For Dorff, Novak is reading his own faith into other faiths instead of trying to understand the other faith as it understands itself, something which is an important accepted principle of interfaith dialogue.⁵¹

Dorff's point regarding the diversity of interpretation is certainly valid, raising the issue of cultural pluralism, which is a challenge to the viability of natural law. What is

⁴⁸ Novak, 'The Universality of Jewish Ethics', p. 199.

⁴⁹ *Natural Law in Judaism*, p. 192.

⁵⁰ Elliot N. Dorff, 'Another Jewish View of Ethics, Christian and Jewish', in *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), pp. 127-135 (p. 133).

⁵¹ Dorff, 'Another Jewish View of Ethics, Christian and Jewish', p. 133.

included within the remit of natural law and who decides? It is easy to read our own customs as 'natural', a prescient concern considering perspectives of previous chapters regarding the natural subordination of women. However, we must remember that Novak uses the three prohibitions of idolatry, murder and sexual immorality as illustrative of a common law of God that applies to all of humankind, discoverable by every rational person through reason. While it is true that the prohibitions are interpreted differently in the two traditions, Novak is not concerned as much with the positive content of natural law as he is with the fact of human ability to discover the law of God. Natural law is neither the content nor the *telos* of the law but is the limit of the law, establishing the normative criteria that positive law, both Jewish and non-Jewish, must adhere to in order to be considered just. Again, natural law is inextricable from revelation and covenantal life.

Like Dorff, the Christian theologian, Stanley Hauerwas, suggests that the Jewish and Christian traditions may understand obedience to the same commandment in different ways. It is important for Hauerwas that all commonalities between the two traditions exist only as analogies: 'Both Jews and Christians gather to worship God on the Sabbath. However, that we do not gather for worship on the same day of the week is an important aspect not only of our differing understandings of worship but also of our differing understandings of "ethics"'.⁵² Hauerwas argues that Novak may read too much into Christian observance of the Noahide commandments. He also holds that the proposition of a Christian-Jewish ethic based on natural law is problematic since this would entail the separation of ethics from the theological assumptions and practices of both traditions, which is something that Hauerwas cannot allow. We need only recall Hauerwas' identification of the ideal form of Christian ethics with Barth's theology to see how problematic this would be for him. We have already noted Novak's prioritisation of revelation and the centrality of Torah to this theology. Natural law is, as he consistently maintains, merely a minimal ethical standard. It is, however, indispensable to Novak's contribution to dialogue on many issues pertaining to human life.

⁵² Stanley Hauerwas, 'Christian Ethics in Jewish Terms: A Response to David Novak', in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, pp. 135-141 (p. 140).

4.6 The Sanctity of Human Life

For Novak, human life begins at conception. Though acknowledging the arguments of other ethicists that life begins at a particular stage of prenatal development, Novak suggests that this type of reasoning presents a moral dilemma. What if life really begins earlier than this? Therefore, Novak argues, in cases of doubt, the presumption must be in favour of life. This issue, for a Jewish theologian, is somewhat complicated by the existence of some Rabbinic precedent for the differentiation between the stages of prenatal life in relation to personhood. Most significantly, there exists a Talmudic passage that assumes a lesser status for the embryo before forty days after conception, referring to the embryo as 'mere water'.¹ In response to this passage, Novak argues that the rabbis were influenced by the scientific thinking of the time which has since been disproven. The 'mere water' argument is not a legal fiat but a scientific judgement, a statement of fact, and as such must be open to analysis regarding its truth. Since current scientific opinion would not find any human properties lacking in an embryo before forty days, we must discount this as a well-intentioned error on the part of the rabbis.

Here, Novak invokes Maimonides' distinction between reasoning when used to consider ritual or religious questions and reasoning pertaining to moral questions in the inter-human realm.² Scientific evidence is only relevant to a subject to which universal reason pertains. It would not be relevant in matters regarding, for example, kosher food unless it happened that the eating of the food would endanger human life. In matters of Jewish ritual and religious practice, traditional authority is normatively sufficient and, if it were the case that the 'mere water' principle pertained to a particularly Jewish cultural practice, it would be binding. However, the authority of the Jewish tradition cannot outweigh the input of universal human reason regarding matters pertaining to universal human relevance. The discovery of DNA has lent scientific credibility to the belief in the continuity of life between the different stages of pre-natal development. Novak, therefore, challenges his fellow Jewish ethicists to recognise the sanctity of human life in all its stages: 'Does our reverence for human life as the image of God not require that we treat

¹ Babylonian Talmud *Yevamot* 69b, discussed in *The Sanctity of Human Life*, p. 52.

² Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah: Shehitah*, 10.12-13 (New York: E. Grossman, 1957), discussed by Novak, *The Sanctity of Human Life*, p. 65.

every human life, even the minuscule human life of the newly conceived embryo, with what the tradition calls “human dignity” (*kvod ha-beriyot*)?’³

Novak’s ethical positions, however, cannot be simply deduced from the principles outlined above:

In the context of the Jewish normative tradition no one can simply say “Based on my theological principles, this is the only ethical course of action.” When legal precedent already exists, one can use his or her theological principles only to exercise judgement and attempt to persuade others.⁴

Novak is referring here to the somewhat casuistic nature of halakhic deliberation, focusing as it does upon paradigmatic cases rather than on ethical principles.⁵ It is illustrated very well by the former Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, Immanuel Jakobovits, in the following passage. In commenting on the possibility of overlap between the Christian and Jewish approaches to abortion, Jakobovits writes that in ‘Jewish law, the right to destroy a human fruit before birth is entirely unrelated to theological considerations. Neither the question of the entry of the soul before birth nor the claim to salvation after death have any practical bearing on the subject.’⁶ There is nothing in halakhah, Jakobovits holds, which guarantees the ‘human inviolability’ of the fetus.

Although it is difficult to imagine any ethical issue being, for Novak, ‘entirely unrelated to theological considerations’, he also takes full account of halakhic precedent. Novak’s position as regards abortion – unacceptable except in the case of a threat to the life of the mother – illustrates the halakhic nature of his thinking.⁷ Novak refers to a *Mishnah Oholot* text, which gives the life of the mother in difficult labour priority over

³ *The Sanctity of Human Life*, p. 68.

⁴ *Jewish Social Ethics*, p. 235.

⁵ Dena S. Davis emphasises the importance of casuistic reasoning in halakhic approaches to abortion in ‘Abortion in Jewish Thought: A Study in Casuistry’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 2 (1992), 313-324.

⁶ Immanuel Jakobovits, *Jewish Medical Ethics: A Comparative and Historical Study of the Jewish Religious Attitude to Medicine and its Practice* (New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1975), p. 182. In commenting on the methodological difference between Jewish and Catholic ethical approaches, Aaron Mackler notes that differences are less clear cut than they seem: ‘Although Jewish ethics has long focused on tradition and halakhah, reason and experience have always been part of the process as well; although Catholic ethics has focused on natural law and reason, tradition has been recognised as an important source of authority. *Introduction to Jewish and Christian Bioethics: A Comparative Analysis* (Washington, D.C., Georgetown University Press, 2003), p. 212.

⁷ Novak’s argument is reliant upon Exodus 21:22-23, *Mishnah, Ohalot* 7:6, and *Babylonian Talmud, Arakhin* 7a-b.

the life of the fetus, who can be killed to save the mother's life.⁸ It is not the case here that the fetus or the mother possess superior human life. Rather, the text allows for the possibility of saving one life when only one can be saved. The priority is given to the one at closest proximity to the rescuer, in this case, the mother. The fetus is regarded, in a Talmudic text, as akin to a pursuer (*rodef*) against whom self-defence is permitted: 'If someone comes to kill you, kill him first.'⁹ In these uncommon cases, the burden of proof is on the party seeking the abortion: the prenatal right to life is a *prima facie* right. Abortion is also prohibited, in natural law terms, on the grounds that it amounts to the taking of innocent human life. An assault on human life, created in the image of God, is an assault on God (Gen 9:5). Although Novak recognises the importance of halakhic deliberation, the question of abortion is, for him, 'ultimately ontological'.¹⁰ It pertains to one's definition of human personhood.¹¹

The issue of abortion is controversial within the Jewish tradition, with radical intra-faith divergence as regards the permissibility of the practice. The following citation records the opposition of the Reform Rabbi, David Ellenson, to the American Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003: 'This law as it has been enacted unquestionably diminishes the inviolable status and worth that ought to be granted women as moral agents created in the image of God.'¹² It is interesting that Ellenson invokes the concept of *imago Dei* in his argument in favour of abortion. Ellenson expresses his concern that the view of the 'religious right' should become overly dominant in the debate. A different religious approach to the issue is possible, he argues. It is unlikely that Ellenson would find agreement with his position in Novak. Indeed, Novak is particularly critical of any Jewish sanctioning of abortion: 'Jews, especially, who have been the most tragic victims of the contempt for life, should be the last people in the world to support legislation that would give *carte blanche* and moral sanction to abortion.'¹³

Novak's ethical thinking is informed by his belief in the sanctity of human life. He believes that the phrase, 'sanctity of life', can be used cogently in theological,

⁸ M. Ohalot, 7.6., discussed in *The Sanctity of Human Life*, p.43.

⁹ BT Berakhot 62b, discussed in *The Sanctity of Human Life*, p. 47.

¹⁰ *Jewish Social Ethics*, p. 235.

¹¹ Novak also considers embryonic stem cell research under the rubric of abortion. His opposition to the practice is necessitated by his belief in the sanctity of human life from the moment of conception. The destruction of the embryo would also violate the norm that 'one life is not to be set aside for the other' (M. Ohalot, 7.6). Novak evokes this principle in the case of embryonic stem cell research, even likening the practice to human sacrifice. *The Sanctity of Human Life*, pp. 1-72.

¹² David Ellenson, 'Abortion Ban Degrades and Devalues and Women', *The Forward*, 21 November 2003.

¹³ Novak, 'A Jewish View of Abortion' in *Tradition in the Public Square*, p. 274.

philosophical and political contexts and is thus translatable from religious language to philosophical and secular vocabulary. By 'sanctity' Novak means that the human person is a metaphysical being whose existence points to something beyond the world.¹⁴ Human nature, our own and that of the other person, is the measure of human action. Ethics, however, cannot be simply deduced from our metaphysical view of human nature:

We do not have a metaphysical view of human nature and then put it into practice. We are already acting in a certain way: doing *this* but not doing *that*, consciously and wilfully. When we reflect on why we are doing *this* but not *that*, we see retrospectively that we act this way because of the way we regard both our own nature and the nature of those with whom we interact – a nature that is freely affirmed or denied by the way we act.¹⁵

Our human nature is relational, manifesting itself in the claims that others makes on us, and us on them. A metaphysical understanding of human nature must point to God, since those human attributes that correspond to personhood and distinguish us from other animals, are transcended by the One who has them in greater measure.

Exhibiting a negative view of secular ethics, Novak adopts a critical stance towards those who regard their morality as being without metaphysical foundations, arguing that this results in legalism, a blind obedience to a law without concern for who made it. 'The question of whether that law is made by someone as benevolent as Ghandi or as malevolent as Hitler cannot make any real difference'.¹⁶ Aside from reward or punishment, those who cannot admit a metaphysical foundation for morality cannot give a metaphysically cogent reason for obedience to anyone. This seems an unfair appraisal of those who adhere to non-religious ethical systems, those for whom the intentions of the lawmaker and the effects of the law certainly *do* make a real difference. Yet, for Novak, 'these agnostics have reduced ethics to power politics instead of regarding the political realm as the primary context for a person to act ethically according to his or her metaphysically constituted human nature.'¹⁷ For Novak, ethics must be validated by a higher order.¹⁸ At this point, one might wonder what effect Novak's opposition to ethics without a metaphysical foundation has upon his aim to make the sanctity of human life

¹⁴ Novak, *The Sanctity of Human Life*, p. 6.

¹⁵ *The Sanctity of Human Life*, p. 8.

¹⁶ *The Sanctity of Human Life*, p. 8.

¹⁷ *The Sanctity of Human Life*, p. 9.

¹⁸ *Jewish Social Ethics*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 17.

cogent by means of ‘worldly reason’ in the public square.¹⁹ How does Novak understand the interaction between secular and religious perspectives of the human person?

4.7 Revealed Wisdom in the Public Square

We turn, firstly, to Novak’s understanding of the interaction between society and the religious communities. Modern civil society is pluralistic, composed as it is of various communities that interact contractually with one another in order to be functional. Novak argues that civil society should be a secular space that does not give official standing to any one religion over others. The community and society are distinguished from one another respectively as the original human association and the contractual human association.²⁰ The social contract is established through the protection of the prior communal rights and the acceptance of subsequent social duties. The society is the ‘invented realm’, distinct from the sacred space, within which the primal communities can interact with one another.²¹

All religious communities, Novak argues, have a right to bring the wisdom of their tradition to wider public discussion in the democratic society. This is one of the ways in which Novak understands the concept of religious liberty. He writes that ‘one can speak of religious liberty as the freedom of a religious community to bring its own moral wisdom into the world, especially the moral wisdom it regards as being available to everyone precisely because that wisdom can be presented with cogency by means of worldly reason.’²² The aim to present moral wisdom with ‘cogency by means of worldly reason’ is, of course, what makes natural law discourse so central to Novak’s work. Although, for Jews and for Christians, questions relating to human nature and society will still involve theology, they should be framed according to worldly reason. Novak recognises that the voice of the religious communities may be resisted and that they may be accused of imposing their convictions upon others. He is convinced, however, that this form of religious liberty is exercised for the sake of the world.

Novak appeals to his own religious community – what he terms “traditionalist”, Judaism – to bring its voice to democratic society:

¹⁹ Novak, *In Defence of Religious Liberty* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2009), p. x.

²⁰ Novak argues that ‘a democratic polity is neither one’s original nor ultimate destination in the world, and that those who think it is, originally or ultimately, inevitably come to deprive their democratic polity of the very limitations that essentially make it the democracy it is meant to be’. *The Jewish Social Contract*, p. i.

²¹ *The Jewish Social Contract*, p.8

²² Novak, *In Defence of Religious Liberty* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2009), p. x.

It should be emphasized that if traditionalist Jews refuse to participate in dialogue, then on the political issues in which they cannot help but have an interest – issues such as abortion, homosexuality, war, and so on – Jews far less committed to the authority of the Torah will be “Judaism’s spokespersons” by default.²³

This passage is indicative of Novak’s attitude to non-traditionalist forms of Judaism. In relation to Jewish participation in the social contract of the modern polity, Novak privileges – in the theoretical if not the practical sense – traditionalist or Orthodox Jews. Novak holds that Reform, Reconstructionist and Conservative Judaism, which are theologically indistinguishable from one another, have disengaged from the Jewish community in their ‘antinomianism’. Antinomianism is defined by Novak as ‘self-chosen religious doctrines that are contrary to the dogmas of traditional Judaism.’²⁴ Novak believes that the term ‘antinomian’ is justified since these forms of Judaism have rejected the three dogmas of traditional Judaism which are: (i) the Torah as the direct word of God (ii) the Oral Torah as the normative application of the Torah and (iii) the final redemption and the resurrection of the dead as the fulfilment of the destiny of the Jewish people. It is his contention that the contribution of the ‘antinomian’ forms of Judaism to public discourse is rarely distinguishable from that of secularism.²⁵ However, although he regrets their lack of conformity with the covenantal tradition, Novak does not go as far as to dissociate ‘liberal Judaisms’ from Judaism altogether. Their Judaism may be inadequate, according to Novak, with regard to revelation, tradition and redemption, but they are still practicing Jews. He holds that liberal Judaism may have saved other Jews, who were not ready for full conformance with traditionalist Judaism, from apostasy or assimilation.

For a theologian who is so committed to dialogue, Novak’s view of Jewish religious diversity is quite surprising. In this context, Novak’s willingness to understand the religious other in their own terms is less apparent than it is in his contribution to Jewish-Christian dialogue, for example. This is not to dismiss the differences that Novak

²³ Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, p. 9.

²⁴ *Covenantal Rights*, p. 202; *The Jewish Social Contract*, p. 27.

²⁵ There are interesting parallels in John Paul II’s *Veritatis Splendor*: ‘Some people, however, disregarding the dependence of human reason on Divine Wisdom and the need, given the present state of fallen nature, for Divine Revelation as an effective means for knowing moral truths, even those of the natural order, have actually posited a *complete sovereignty of reason* in the domain of moral norms regarding the right ordering of life in this world. Such norms would constitute the boundaries for a merely “human” morality; they would be the expression of a law which man in an autonomous manner lays down for himself and which has its source exclusively in human reason’.

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor_en.html [accessed July 13 2013], par. 36.

highlights between the various forms of Judaism. These differences are certainly significant, particularly with regard to halakhah. However, for Novak to emphasise them as he does raises the possibility that, because of his attitude to revelation, he may find his views in greater alignment with some Christians who accord the same importance to scripture and tradition, than with some of his fellow Jews. This is a point that emerges in Allan Arkush's response to Novak's political theology. Arkush holds that Novak's 'reasoning can be fully persuasive to only a small sector of the Jewish people. For Novak, a self-described traditionalist Jew, bases most of his positive recommendations on dogmatic premises that less traditional Jews simply cannot accept.'²⁶ Arkush, however, still cites Novak as the most important twenty-first century political thinker in the Jewish tradition.²⁷

Having noted Arkush's concern, we now turn to the extent to which the 'dogmatic premises' of Novak's theology are invoked in his contribution to matters of public concern. If, as Arkush argues, Novak's theology can only be persuasive for a minority of the Jewish people, how does his reasoning function in the secular context? Novak's discussion of the issue of same-sex marriage provides a useful example.²⁸ In consistency with the principles outlined earlier, Novak does not invoke the authority of revelation to ground his opposition to same-sex marriage. In response to advocates of same-sex marriage, Novak writes that 'neither of us claims morality as being exclusively his or hers. Were that the case, we could only condemn each other rather than engage in a civil and reasonable debate'.²⁹ In the context of that debate, Novak argues that he does not deduce his moral positions from 'authoritative theological propositions'.³⁰ Rather, he states that his moral positions are theologically influenced, though this does not, in itself, lend his arguments more philosophical weight. Novak's argument, therefore, turns to other sources to justify his position. He analyses the question of equality, assessing its appropriateness in the context of marriage, and he also discusses the relationship between

²⁶ Allan Arkush, 'Drawing up the Jewish Social Contract', *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 2 (2008), 255-271 (p. 256). Arkush holds that Novak's method has 'excluded all but traditionalist and Orthodox Jews from the ranks of his potential disciples. Novak no doubt is well aware of this exclusion but unbothered by it, or perhaps consoled by the fact that he has a much larger potential audience among the millions of Christians who share his faith in biblical revelation and who might therefore find his political thought 'appropriable.'', p. 258-9.

²⁷ Arkush writes that with 'his customary display of vast erudition and incisive thinking Novak has made an impressive endeavor ... to formulate distinctively Jewish but broadly applicable answers to some of the age-old questions of political philosophy.', 'Drawing up the Jewish Social Contract', p. 255.

²⁸ Novak, 'Response to Martha Nussbaum's "A Right to Marry?"', *California Law Review*, 98 (2010), 709-720.

²⁹ Novak, 'Response to Martha Nussbaum's "A Right to Marry?"', p. 710.

³⁰ 'Response to Martha Nussbaum's "A Right to Marry?"', p. 710.

marriage and the raising of children. Though his arguments are still contestable, the universally accessible language he employs allows Novak to defend the rational validity of 'traditional' marriage, without drawing on the authority of the tradition. It enables Novak to enter the dialogue and to exercise religious liberty as he sees it. It is worth noting that Novak's theological work invokes other forms of argument in its opposition to homosexual relationships, at times using a type of language that could only compromise the reception of his contribution to public discourse. He argues, for example, for the continuity between homosexuality and idolatry, which 'perverts human existence' and 'leads men to assume the identity of women and women the identity of man'.³¹

This brief example of Novak's view of same-sex marriage illustrates the importance of context for the extent to which Novak invokes the authority of revelation. However, the fact that Novak does not refer to revelation does not mean that he is 'bracketing' his ultimate theological concerns:

When these metaphysical or theological concerns are purposely bracketed, secularist criteria of human nature and society must inevitably become the basis of common discussion. And, as we have learned more and more of late, these secularist criteria contradict the views of human nature and society and their consequent values advocated by both Jewish and Christian traditions [...] When the faithful remain silent, secularism wins by default.³²

Here, Novak emphasises the commonality between the Jewish and Christian views of human nature which, he feels, are contradicted by secularist criteria. The passage presents a somewhat negative view of the secularist perspective of human nature. Though it is important, of course, for religious communities to participate in public discussion, the way in which Novak places the religious and secularist views at opposite ends of the spectrum – and his reference to winning – seems to exacerbate the division. Further, in the following quotation, the religious understanding of the person created in the image of God is depicted as the most foundational point of conflict between the secular and religious understandings of the human person:

³¹ 'Idolatry perverts human existence as a whole (the soul) by substituting no gods for the One God. When human existence as a whole has been so spiritually perverted, it follows that there is nothing to prevent the immanent relationship of the whole human self with its body from succumbing to its own perversion as well. After God, we are most intimately related to our own bodies. That is why idolatry leads men to assume the identity of women and women the identity of men.' *Talking With Christians: Musings of a Jewish Theologian*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), p. 118.

³² Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, p. 7.

Thus, for example, the assertion of both Jewish faith and Christian faith that the human person is the image of God directly contradicts secularist notions that the human person belongs to itself (autonomy) or to some larger human or nonhuman whole (heteronomy), even though Jews and Christians can certainly live in peace with those who hold these notions.³³

The concept of *imago Dei* is here depicted as a unifying force between Jews and Christians which, by the same token, defines what Novak sees as a radical difference in self-understanding between religious and secularist thinking. The concept of autonomy also has the negative connotation of something that directly contradicts the human self-understanding as *imago Dei*. Does the understanding of the person as *imago Dei* necessitate a negative view of human autonomy?

4.8 Novak's Opposition to Foundational Autonomy

A brief explanation of the Kantian concept of autonomy will help to uncover Novak's opposition to a modern conception of autonomy that he sees as an extension and distortion of the Kantian idea. According to Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), the rational being is 'free as regards all laws of nature, and obeying only those laws which he himself gives.'³⁴ Autonomy is strongly emphasised as 'the sole principle of all moral laws and of the duties in keeping with them [...] the moral law expresses nothing other than the autonomy of pure practical reason, that is, freedom'.³⁵ Practical reason, alone, is the source of moral law since any reliance on extrinsic sources constitutes heteronomy. Although Kant includes religious sources among those that constitute heteronomy, he posits belief in God as a postulate of practical reason: 'The moral law commands me to make the highest possible good in a world the final object of all my conduct. But I cannot hope to produce this except by the harmony of my will with that of a holy and beneficent author of the world [...]'³⁶

³³ Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, p. 8.

³⁴ Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by Thomas K. Abbott, ed. by Lara Denis (Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2005), p. 93 (435).

³⁵ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. by Mary Gregor (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 30.

³⁶ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 108.

According to Kant, the rational being is given the privilege of being an end in itself, and can legislate in the possible 'kingdom of ends'.³⁷ Both our human will and the will of God are governed by moral law in the kingdom of ends. As J.B. Schneewind writes:

His astonishing claim is that God and we can share membership in a single moral community only if we all equally legislate the law we are to obey. The mature Kant does not hesitate to make an explicit comparison between human agents and God. When we try to bring about a harmonious totality of all ends, a totality made possible and governed by the moral law, we may think of ourselves as "analogous to the divinity".³⁸

Unlike God, however, the human person is an imperfectly rational being who has the ability to act on principle and to choose which action to pursue, but who can, by nature of imperfection, act contrary to reason. For this reason, the human person needs imperatives, which are commands presented by rational principles, to which reason obligates obedience. The rational being, then, must act so that he can will that his maxim, the principle of will, should become a universal law. This is the categorical imperative, the supreme principle of morality.³⁹ 'Categorical' here is contrasted with the hypothetical imperative, which commands rational beings to undertake the means towards achieving ends that they themselves have chosen, commands pertaining to the pursuit of happiness, for example. The hypothetical imperative is contingent since the agent may choose to abandon the end. The categorical imperative, on the other hand, pertains to morality and is necessary for every rational being, independent of any other desires or goals. The categorical imperative is formulated in different ways by Kant, but in its earliest statement it appears as follows: 'Act only on that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.'⁴⁰ For Kant, universality is the most important property of law.

This idea, Kant's conception of autonomy as universal, is something that Novak welcomes. Novak sees in this aspect of Kant's thought a sociality that views other members of society as 'similarly autonomous persons'.⁴¹ Kant's view, as Novak sees it, is that any act that did not treat the other person as an end-in-itself, or was not something

³⁷ Kant, *Groundwork*, p. 93 (435).

³⁸ J. P. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 512.

³⁹ *Groundwork*, p. 62 (401).

⁴⁰ *Groundwork*, p. 62 (401).

⁴¹ Novak, *The Sanctity of Human Life*, p. 145.

that everyone in a similar situation could do, was not autonomy but licentiousness.⁴² Kant also accepted the correlation of moral rights and duties, according primacy to the latter. Ultimately, however, Novak is critical of the Kantian idea of autonomy on account of its assumption that, as ethical subjects, we are our own law-givers. 'There is, of course, the need to reject Kant's ethical theory on theological grounds because of its insistence that the rational human subject is the source of its own law'.⁴³ This, Novak holds, entails a contradiction of natural law and revealed law, since both of these testify to trans-human grounding of the law. Novak argues, however, that 'if we shift his specific denotation of person as end-in-itself from the human *subject* of moral action to the human *object* of moral action, something quite helpful emerges for us theologically'.⁴⁴ This would allow a very different idea of human mutuality since 'both the source and end of my action are one and the same by the very act of the other person *presenting* himself or herself to me, without my prior permission'.⁴⁵

The Kantian idea of autonomy is central to the divergence between secular and Jewish or Christian views of personhood, as Novak sees it. He writes that 'human beings *qua imago Dei* are unlike the autonomous members of Kant's moral universe who create themselves by the exercise of their autonomy and who can only recognize those who are able to exercise this same capacity'.⁴⁶ It is, however, the contemporary divergence from Kant, that which Novak terms 'foundational autonomy', which particularly evokes his criticism.⁴⁷ This type of radical autonomy can manifest itself in certain kinds of human rights discourse and seems, to Novak, to be 'concerned with rights only as necessary preconditions for the advancement of individual projects', thereby sharply diverging from Kant.⁴⁸ Novak finds this type of autonomy, which he views as a strand of modern liberalism, problematic for the advancement of the community in democratic society. It is this type of autonomy that Novak has in mind when he contrasted the concepts of autonomy and the *imago Dei*. For Novak, it is the concept of 'theonomy' that aptly depicts the appropriate comingling of autonomy and heteronomy:

⁴² *The Sanctity of Human Life*, p. 145.

⁴³ *Natural Law in Judaism*, p. 166.

⁴⁴ 'Persons in the Image of God', p. 147.

⁴⁵ 'Persons in the Image of God', p. 147.

⁴⁶ Novak, 'The Universality of Jewish Ethics', p. 203.

⁴⁷ *The Sanctity of Human Life*, p. 145.

⁴⁸ *Covenantal Rights*, p. 14.

Rather the solution is theonomy – a realization that our dependence upon the Ground of being, our object of ultimate concern [...] includes both autonomy and heteronomy. Being prior to them both, it harmonizes them and integrates them in a person's existence so that their tensions become creative rather than destructive.⁴⁹

We see from this citation that it is not autonomy that Novak rejects, but rather a foundational form of autonomy that does not hold due regard for our communal existence, a form of autonomy that 'asserts that in the most fundamental practical sense, I am alone'.⁵⁰ We should also recall that Novak envisaged the commandments of God as the content of the *imago Dei*. In this context, the idea of the person as a self-legislator can certainly contradict the sense of being commanded that is so central to Novak's Jewish theology. It remains to be seen whether Novak's work, with its strong emphasis on the community, has due regard for personal autonomy and the rights of the individual. This question necessitates a brief discussion of Novak's theory of covenantal rights.

4.9 The Individual and the Covenantal Community

In his treatment of human rights, Novak acknowledges the apparent difficulty in accommodating rights discourse within the confines of a duty-based covenantal and communal faith. Certainly, the language of duty and commandment is more traditional to Jewish theology than rights. Novak holds, however, that there is nothing contradictory between the idea of rights and the fulfilment of the duty of the covenant:

[O]nce it is shown that all duties presuppose correlative rights, including duties owed to God or the community, and that individual rights as claims are as valid as those of God or the community, this erroneous dismissal of a Jewish rights theory can be refuted, for it is based on the mistake of assuming that Judaism is nothing but a system of heteronomous duties for their own sake.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Novak, 'Theonomous Ethics: A Defence and Critique of Tillich', *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 4, (1986), 436-463 (p. 453). The concept of theonomy is drawn from Paul Tillich. See *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 250 and 'The Conquest of the Concept of Religion in the Philosophy of Religion' in *What is Religion?*, ed. by James Luther Adams (London: Harper & Row, 1969) pp 122-155 (p. 151). Tillich does not intend theonomy to indicate 'the subjection of a culture to divine laws, imposed from outside and mediated by a church' as this would constitute heteronomy. He envisions rather a culture that is 'Spirit-determined and Spirit-directed'. *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, p. 249-50.

⁵⁰ Novak, 'Privacy', in *Natural Law and Contemporary Public Policy*, ed. by David F. Forte, pp. 13-28 (p. 16).

⁵¹ Novak, *Covenantal Rights*, p. 31.

As an advocate of human rights within the Jewish context, it is important for Novak to ascertain that all duties pertaining to the inter-human realm have specific reasons in addition to their role as fulfilment of God's will and are not, therefore, a system of heteronomous duties for their own sake. Commandments can be distinguished from one another as those whose object is God and those whose object is another human person.

It is Novak's contention that unless we stand before God with others, we are less than our fully human selves. Since the covenant with Israel is permanent, Jewish survival is a claim on God.⁵² This means that the people of Israel will survive as long as the earth itself. Even the individual relationship with God is really a relationship between God and the members of the covenantal community. If Novak's theory of rights gives priority to the covenantal community, then what protection is given to the individual within – or even against – that community? Is Novak advocating a form of 'group rights' that gives inadequate protection to the members of the community?⁵³

Novak admits that there is no explicit scriptural evidence for the rights of the individual against the power of the community, though he does refer to some relevant Talmudic passages on this subject of private property. Novak records the shock with which the rabbis reacted to the proposal that private property could be taken for public roads.⁵⁴ The rabbis' reaction seems to provide some basis for the right to private property. Although he finds in the Jewish tradition the explicit prioritising of communal over individual needs, Novak argues that this does not amount to a denial of individual needs. He simply asserts that the needs of the community are greater and this is why the rabbis traditionally legislated for common or usual human circumstances rather than individual cases. The Jewish community cannot satisfy every human need. Such fulfilment cannot occur until the final redemption. It seems here that Novak only allows for the rights of the individual over the community when they do not conflict with prior social duties.

It is certain that, for Novak, covenantal rights can never be grounded in personal autonomy. As Novak argues, with regard to the ritualistic aspects of Jewish law, 'one's

⁵² Novak prefers the term 'claim' to 'right' though he is concerned that the 'ubiquity of the term "rights" in modern political discourse makes any elimination of the term risk elimination from the discourse altogether'. *Covenantal Rights*, p. 11.

⁵³ The notion of group rights can be controversial when it is felt that individual human rights are being diminished. Scepticism regarding the idea can be found in the work of George Kateb who argues that 'under some versions of this concept, a group has rights that are not translatable into each members' individual rights, but rather are a sort of corporate rights that may abridge members' individual rights'. George Kateb, *Human Dignity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011) p. 11.

⁵⁴ 'When the public choose a road for themselves, what they chose is considered to have been lawfully chosen'. *BT, Baba Batra* 100a, discussed by Novak, *Covenantal Rights*, p. 210.

autonomy is going to come into conflict with the covenant inasmuch as it includes practices that seem to be absurd in themselves.⁵⁵ Novak illustrates the relevance of this point with reference to the contentious issue of the participation of women in public ritual. Novak is critical of the egalitarianism adopted by the Reform, Reconstructionist and Conservative movements in North American Jewry. For Novak, the suggestion that there is no functional difference between men and women is at odds with both scripture and the Jewish tradition which establish deep gender differences. A lack of connection to the normative tradition is a serious deficiency, according to Novak:

Since individual rights have meaning only in a communal context anyway, this total disregard for the normative tradition will, sooner or later, make the practice of these new religious rights a hollow exercise, for it quickly calls into question everything the tradition has ever bequeathed, including the monopoly of heterosexuality.⁵⁶

Using the example of the Jewish feminist theologian Judith Plaskow, whose work will be discussed in Chapter Five, Novak is critical of the kind of Jewish feminism that substitutes the continuity of the community with a new ideological vision that in his view is based neither on revelation or reason. Novak does, however, allow for a certain inventiveness in halakhic life to allow for the greater inclusion of women. In relation to women's participation in the synagogue, Novak argues that legitimate Jewish feminism allows for the following:

[W]oman may pray at the same regular times as men do, individually or in groups, as long as they do not assume the roles originally assigned to men, such as being counted in a male quorum (*minyan*) needed for traditional public worship, or acting as the leader (*sheliah tsibbur*) of any such quorum.⁵⁷

This example is interesting in its indication of Novak's position regarding the role of women in Judaism, an issue to which we will return in Chapter Five. Beyond this, though, it reveals two important aspects of Novak's theology that relate to this discussion and will be noted now by way of conclusion to this point. Firstly, his opposition to the egalitarian feminist view indicates that while he acknowledges the place of personal autonomy, Novak cannot support any view that places the autonomy of the individual over the community. Secondly, it is the normative structure of the tradition that guarantees the continuity of the community, something for which personal autonomy cannot provide a substitute: 'The tradition represents the majority opinion of the

⁵⁵ Novak, *Covenantal Rights*, p. 201.

⁵⁶ Novak, *Covenantal Rights*, p. 202.

⁵⁷ *Covenantal Rights*, p. 203.

normative Jewish community throughout history, even though that same tradition has not predetermined every possible future practice.’⁵⁸ The continuity of the community would be jeopardised by any movement that seeks to contradict any existing traditional and communal norms. From this we deduce Novak’s reticence towards both the gender egalitarianism as well as the non-halakhic forms of Judaism.

4.10 Conclusion

The concept of *imago Dei* is understood, by Novak, to pertain to the special status granted to every human person at the moment of creation. This universal status enables a covenantal relationship between God and the human person which Novak envisages as a relationship of active mutuality. Although we can gain a sense of our particular status through reason, the *imago Dei* comes to full awareness and action through revelation. For the Jewish community, revelation communicates the content of the *imago Dei*, which is the moral law rooted in the commandments of God. The fullness of the *imago Dei* comes about through fulfilment of the covenantal obligation.

Novak emphasises the commonality between Jewish and Christian ideas of *imago Dei* as they define human personhood. He presents the concept of *imago Dei* as a unifying force between the two faiths that contradicts the secularist view of ‘self-creation’ and autonomy. Novak is particularly critical of a modern liberal conception of autonomy that goes beyond Kant, which he terms ‘foundational autonomy’. This form of autonomy, Novak argues, espouses the view that we are our own creators, in a realm within which the subject is the only member. Having discussed the manner in which Novak opposes the *imago Dei* and the concept of autonomy, we conclude that this is only appropriate in relation to this radical form of autonomy. Autonomy, in itself, does not wholly contradict the *imago Dei* since a certain degree of autonomy is necessary for the realisation of the image. Further, not every secular worldview regards the individual as an isolated subject in a manner contradictory to Novak’s conception of *imago Dei*. Novak, perhaps, does not give enough regard to the fact that secular views of the human person can also be relational. There is, in his thought, an undue emphasis on the negativity of ‘worldly categories’. Human beings are necessarily worldly; we are formed from the earth (Gen 2:7) and – recalling Irenaeus – we retain the earth as part of ourselves. Though the

⁵⁸ *Covenantal Rights*, p. 204.

concept of *imago Dei* loses its meaning in a non-theistic context, secular ideas of personhood do not always contradict every facet or implication of the *imago Dei*. The concept of *imago Dei* can find itself in alignment with the idea of human dignity in affirming the worth of the human person in relationship.

The issue of autonomy lies at the heart of the tension between Jewish religious existence and Western culture that is inherent in Novak's work. This is a tension that Novak retains, refusing to sacrifice the Jewish tradition to the world, or the world to the Jewish tradition. Novak resists, therefore, the dichotomy between revelation and reason. It is possible, he believes, to bridge the gap between secular and theological modes of reasoning. This is achieved through a retrieval of natural law thought from the classical Jewish sources. This allows Novak to bring his commitment to the irreducible sanctity of human life to a wider audience and to exercise religious liberty as he sees it. Novak challenges his fellow Jewish ethicists to see this sanctity as extending to all stages of the life of the human person. The worth of every person is affirmed because of the belief that we are all objects of God's concern. To understand the human person as anything less than the object of this concern is, Novak believes, a denial of the true intention of our existence.

Chapter Five will turn to question of sexual difference in relation to our creation in the image of God, drawing upon Jewish and Christian feminist theologies which find in Genesis 1:27 a resource for an egalitarian theological anthropology. As Novak's opposition to the egalitarianism espoused by more liberal forms of Judaism indicates, the meaning of sexual difference is a contentious and potentially divisive issue within the Jewish and Christian traditions. Novak's aversion to egalitarianism seems to stem from an opposition to an anthropology of 'sameness', an opposition which has ample correlation in contemporary Roman Catholic teaching. However, as we will discuss, it is possible to reconcile gender egalitarianism with the view that sexual difference has theological meaning and that such difference has something to say about the way in which we live out our creation in the image of God as male and female.

CHAPTER FIVE

***IMAGO DEI* AND SEXUAL DIFFERENCE: BETWEEN DETERMINISM AND APOPHATICISM**

The significance of gender for the understanding of the concept of *imago Dei* can be inferred from the primary location of the concept of *imago Dei* in Genesis 1:27. Here we read that ‘God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.’ This apparent connection between *imago Dei* and sexual difference has carried substantial weight in the interpretive tradition. For Karl Barth, for example, this text intends the identification of the *imago Dei* precisely in terms of sexual difference. Henceforth, we ‘cannot say man without having to say male or female and also male and female. Man exists in this differentiation, in this duality’.⁵⁹ In Chapter One, we drew upon the work of Phyllis Bird and J. Richard Middleton to conclude that the suggestion – in Barth, for example – that the ‘male and female’ clause defines the *imago Dei* is simply not plausible from the perspective of biblical scholarship. However, although sexual difference, something that we share with other animals, is not the primary implication of *imago Dei*, it is certain that our gendered life affects the way in which we image God.

The clause concerning our creation as male and female, situated in Genesis 1:27 in connection with the *imago Dei*, has become a key reference point for feminist theology, establishing the equality of men and women in creation and their equal capacities to image God. Thinking theologically about gender is not, however, unique to contemporary thought, as illustrated by our encounter with thinkers such as Augustine, Aquinas and Barth and their conception of the relationship between male and female. We have observed, through engagement with these thinkers, an often hierarchical categorisation of men and women, which has obscured the dignity of women as created in the image of God. The equality envisioned in feminist thought is put forth in response to the gender hierarchy that has characterised Christian and Jewish theology.

⁵⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III.2, p. 286. The identification of *imago Dei* with sexual distinction is also prominent in the feminist biblical scholarship of Phyllis Trible: ‘God creates, in the image of God, male and female. To describe male and female, then, is to perceive the image of God’. *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 21.

Equality, we should note, does not imply sameness; neither does the appreciation of the significance of sexual difference necessarily endanger gender equality.⁶⁰ Though their conclusions may substantially diverge, all of the thinkers that we will encounter in this chapter strongly acknowledge the importance of the distinction between male and female, that which the Orthodox rabbi, Steven Greenberg, refers to as the ‘difference of all differences’:

Human existence, being and unbeing, ecstasy and pain, union and separation are all tied to the great difference of all differences, the male-female divide and the mystery of sexual union that is the foundation of ongoing life’.⁶¹

The parameters of the chapter present something of a challenge, because as an intercultural, multi-faith and global endeavour, feminist theology represents a wide array of methodologies and opinions and is marked as much by internal diversity, within the Christian and Jewish traditions, as it is by consensus.⁶² Nevertheless, we can say that there is a commonality in the outlook of feminist theology, that which Serene Jones terms ‘feminist theology’s imaginative landscape’, and a common aim that centres on the flourishing of women.⁶³

Drawing on Jewish and Christian, primarily Roman Catholic, voices in a manner that seeks to honour their diversity of context and theological outlook, this chapter will analyse the central questions of the theological study of gender: Is sexual difference a theological as well as a biological fact? Who decides its significance? How important is our gendered existence – our creation as male and female – to our capacity to image God? And, of course, for Christians, how relevant is our gender to our capacity to image Christ? In advance of the direct engagement with these, the focal questions of this chapter, it will

⁶⁰ Lisa Sowle Cahill writes that the commitment to equality that is espoused by feminist theology does not ‘mean that the sexes have no innate differences; it does mean such differences – whatever they may be – will not be accepted as warrants for social systems which grant men in general authority and power over women in general’. *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 2.

⁶¹ Steven Greenberg, *Wrestling with God and Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition* (Madison: Wisconsin Press, 2004), p. 41-2.

⁶² As Tamar Ross articulates it: ‘Feminism is old, rich and variegated enough to be spoken of as having a history with identifiable stages and trends (which are labelled in confusing and inconsistent ways). Feminism also has a future that is still developing and undetermined. Not all feminists think alike’. Tamar Ross, *Expanding the Palace of Torah: Orthodoxy and Feminism* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2004), p.3.

⁶³ Having acknowledged the great diversity of thought among feminist theologians, Serene Jones writes that ‘there are similar directions in which our thinking tends to move, things we have grown accustomed to focusing on, plays of mind that structure the questions we ask and the answers we seek’. ‘Feminist Theology and the Global Imagination’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology*, ed. by Mary McClintock Fulkerson and Sheila Briggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 23-51 (p. 26).

be necessary to clarify the use of the term 'gender'. The chapter will begin, therefore, with a brief account of some important concepts of mainstream feminist theory that have been most influential in theological engagement with gender.

5.1 Contemporary Approaches to Gender

We begin with the distinction between 'sex' and 'gender', the former referring to the physiological differences between men and women and the latter to socially constructed aspects of those differences. Serene Jones explains the use of the term 'gender' in feminist theology as follows:

Invoking 'gender' points to the fact that what we often think of as natural, given, or universal features – what's usually referred to as the 'sexed basis' – of women's experience are, in reality, socially constructed 'gender' stories about masculinity and femininity that have been mapped onto human bodies as if they were self-evident descriptions of universal, biologically stable phenomena.⁶⁴

This dual understanding of sexual difference – biological and social – challenged the view that social expectations with regard to male and female roles were 'natural' and, as such, impervious to change.⁶⁵ The sex/gender distinction was a mark of early feminist thought which did not remain unchallenged in subsequent feminist writings.⁶⁶ Challenges to this position emerged on the grounds that the complete distinction between sex and gender tended to homogenize the situations of women. Linda Nicholson, for example, writes that 'the idea that the body provided certain constants in women's experience led to theories depicting women's situation as fundamentally similar across history and culture'.⁶⁷ The dichotomous understanding of the terms 'sex' and 'gender' has come to be regarded as an over simplification of the complexity of human identity.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Serene Jones, 'Feminist Theology and the Global Imagination', p. 27.

⁶⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, renowned for the idea that 'one is not born but becomes a woman', was particularly influential in this regard. *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 267.

⁶⁶ Christine E. Gudorf writes that 'in terms of both the data on human sexuality today and the choices that are made by human societies about sex, it is no longer correct to distinguish sex and gender by saying that sex refers to our biological given-ness as male or female and gender refers to the traits and roles that a particular society and individuals construct for male and female persons'. 'The Erosion of Sexual Dimorphism: Challenges to Religion and Religious Ethics', in *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection*, ed. by Marvin M. Ellison and Kelly Brown Douglas (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), pp. 141-165 (p. 143).

⁶⁷ Linda Nicholson, 'Gender', in *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, ed. by Alison M. Jaggar and Iris Marion Young (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 289-298 (p. 291).

⁶⁸ Rachel Muers writes that the sex/gender split is itself 'based on a "nature/culture" or "matter/spirit" division that is itself gendered – in that women and femaleness have been traditionally associated with nature and matter, as opposed to the masculine realms of culture and spirit'. 'Feminism, Gender and

As feminist scholarship evolved, the focus changed to the idea of essentialism, which posits the existence of particular attributes that are universal – or ‘essential’ – to being female. Thus, as Diana Fuss writes, femininity is defined according to women’s ‘transhistorical, eternal, immutable essences’.⁶⁹ Essentialist thinking is prevalent in everyday remarks about what women or men generally think or how they generally behave. The question of essentialism is also most significant in relation to the theological idea of gender and can manifest itself in ways that both elevate and demote women. Those who are reliant upon essentialist thinking may argue, for example, that women embody an innate and unique capacity to love, nurture and live for the other, while men are more naturally disposed towards leadership and authority.

The critique of essentialism found one of its most forceful expressions in the work of Judith Butler. Notable for her concept of gender performativity, Butler strongly critiqued the idea of any unified meaning to the concept of ‘woman’. Butler’s work emphasises the socially constructed nature of gender and the culturally conditioned nature of our perception of female identity. According to Butler, there is ‘no gender identity behind the expressions of gender’.⁷⁰ Our gender identity is ‘performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results’.⁷¹ Gender, for Butler is ‘a kind of doing, an incessant activity performed’.⁷² We enact our gender through the repetition of those acts that conform to dominant conventions.

Although essentialist claims relating to the innate nature of women are generally regarded as unhelpful in the effort towards equality and the emancipation of women, feminist thought does not universally reject essentialist thinking. There is often an openness to accommodate some form of essentialism in recognition of the fact that its complete rejection runs the risk of obscuring any type of commonality among women,

Theology’, in *The Modern Theologians*, ed. by David F. Ford (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 431–451 (p. 435).

⁶⁹ Fuss *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. xi.

⁷⁰ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 1. Moya Lloyd writes that through her ‘theorization of gender as performative and her advocacy of a political practice based on subverting compulsory heterosexuality, Butler not only offers a radical critique of sex as natural and innate, she also contests the viability of women as a unitary category’. In this respect, Butler’s work represented a great challenge to feminist thought. *Judith Butler: From Norms to Politics* (Malden: Polity Press, 2007), p. 25. Ellen T. Armour and Susan M. St. Ville survey the impact of Butler’s work on feminist theory, noting the positive and negative responses to Butler’s work in this context. ‘Judith Butler – in Theory’, in *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler* ed. by Armour and St. Ville (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 1–15 (p. 8).

⁷¹ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, p. 1.

⁷² Butler, *Undoing Gender*, p. 1.

thus leaving feminism without a political subject.⁷³ In order to celebrate feminine distinctiveness and the idea that women have something unique to offer in every walk of life, there is an increasing willingness, as Diana Fuss terms it, ‘to “risk” or to “dare” essentialism’.⁷⁴ In fact, some of the most radical forms of feminism can be heavily reliant upon essentialist thinking. Mary Daly, for example, exemplifies a type of biological essentialism in her association of female selfhood with the particularity of the female body.⁷⁵ Some feminist thought is marked by its adherence to what can be termed ‘strategic essentialism’, which is the valuing of essentialist claims according to their ability to empower women.⁷⁶

This debate regarding essentialism and constructivism has helped to shape the development of feminist theology and its engagement with gender. The quest for equality of access to education and for equality in the home and in broader societal contexts has been extended, through feminist theology, to include religious structures. Feminist theologians, together with the broader women’s movement, have had to choose whether their goal centred on equality of access to existing male-dominated structures or the transformation of structures to make something new.⁷⁷ In these issues, feminist theology has, to some extent, mirrored the evolution of feminist theory. The quest to find some unifying goal for feminist theology rests uneasily with the awareness that all generalisations can be seen as purporting an homogenised idea of ‘women’s experience’. In recent decades, consequently, feminist theology has broadened its horizons to facilitate the awareness of varying cultural contexts and geographic locations. This diversity has been marked by the emergence, in the late twentieth century, of alternative terms to ‘feminism’. The term ‘womanist’, for example, represents the theology that has evolved around the experience and lived faith of African American women, while ‘mujerista’ is the

⁷³ Linda Nicholson, ‘Gender’, p. 294.

⁷⁴ Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking*, p. xi.

⁷⁵ Daly, whose writings depict female ‘be-ing’ participating in the ultimate ‘Be-ing’, redefines essentialism as a feminist concept: ‘Believing that they are “persons first, not just women,” women befuddled by false universalization yearn to belong to the thrusting throng that thrives on defacing, erasing, replacing female be-ing’. *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), p. 325.

⁷⁶ Nancy Dallavalle advances the case for strategic essentialism in ‘Neither Idolatry nor Iconoclasm: A Critical Essentialism for Catholic Feminist Theology’, *Horizons*, 25 (1998) 23–42. See also Donna Teevan, ‘Challenges to the Role of Theological Anthropology in Feminist Theologies’, *Theological Studies*, 64 (2003), 582–97, (p. 582).

⁷⁷ Rachel Adler writes that equality of access integrates women into structures that have been created by men. ‘If, however, transformation is the goal, the very content of prayer, study, and praxis must be reconsidered. Judaism itself must be studied and practiced differently’. ‘Judaism’, in *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, 245–253 p. 247,

term favoured by some North American Latina women theologians.⁷⁸ This issue of inclusivity and representation is also coming to prominence in the Jewish context, as Melissa Raphael describes:

Jewish feminist theology has been dominated by middle-class, privileged Reform and Reconstructionist Ashkenazic women of European background who have yet to attend to and learn from non-Ashkenazic Mizrahi (Middle Eastern and North African) and central Asian Jewish women's voices within and outside the State of Israel.⁷⁹

Notwithstanding the considerable internal diversity, it is generally held that there are three facets to the method of feminist theology for those thinkers that work within the Jewish or Christian traditions: (i) the critique of patriarchal ideology within texts and traditions; (ii) the retrieval of alternative sources within the tradition; and (iii) the reconstruction of theological constructs while attending, in particular, to the lived experience of women.⁸⁰ Each facet of feminist theology – critique, retrieval and reconstruction – can draw upon the Jewish and Christian scriptures in a significant way.⁸¹ An account of *imago Dei* in terms of gender must begin with the text itself. At this point, therefore, we return briefly to the book of Genesis, in order to consider the effects of reading the egalitarian Genesis 1:27 text in conjunction with the more controversial Genesis 2-3 text.

⁷⁸ Diana L. Hayes explains the important impact of her African American identity on her theology: 'It "colors," quite simply, our concept of God, our faith in Jesus Christ, our existence in the Holy Spirit, our total understanding of what it means to be "truly black" and authentically Catholic'. *Standing in the Shoes My Mother Made: A Womanist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), p. 28. The mujerista theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz writes that 'the fact that the word 'woman' refers only to middle- and upper-strata white woman shows who decides what is normative. All the rest of us, in order not to be totally invisible, have to add adjectives to the word: *poor* women, *Black* women, *Hispanic* women'. Isasi-Díaz and Yolanda Tarango, *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), p. 97. See also, for an Asian perspective, Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

⁷⁹ Melissa Raphael, 'Feminist Theology and the Jewish Tradition', in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology*, ed. by Mary McClintock Fulkerson and Sheila Briggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) pp. 51-73 (p. 68).

⁸⁰ Though recognisable in the Jewish feminist theologies that will be referred to in the chapter, this distinction is, in general, more suited to Christian feminist theology. Rachel Adler notes that while the Christian theological tradition is highly systematized, 'the nature and boundaries of the Jewish feminist project have been more amorphous'. The nature and methodology of theology are, she writes, more 'open questions' in Judaism., 'Judaism', p. 245.

⁸¹ Esther Fuchs surveys the trends in feminist engagement with the Hebrew Bible in 'Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible', in *The Hebrew Bible: New Insights and Scholarship*, ed. by Frederick E. Greenspahn (New York: New York University Press, 2008), pp. 76-99. Fuchs writes that 'feminist criticism is often misunderstood as "negative" or "rejectionist"; however, the feminist critic does not reject the Bible, though she may criticize it'. p. 79.

5.2 Creation as Male and Female

It is likely that those readers interpreting scripture prior to the advancement of the historical-critical method would have read the two accounts of the creation of humankind as one continuous text, thus identifying the male and female of Genesis 1 as Adam and Eve of Genesis 2. While an egalitarian meaning can be drawn from the first account, the second is more problematic. When the two creation accounts are read together, the egalitarian meaning of the first text can be lost. The second creation account has been interpreted to justify the subordination of women to men and the idea that the creation of women was enacted as a concession to a male need: 'Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner' (Gen. 2:18). The text can invite the idea that the woman was created in order to support the more godlike male from whom she was created: 'And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken."' (Gen 2:22-23). Commenting on the designation of man as the physical source of woman, Rosemary Radford Reuther writes that '[h]is priority and her derivative origin from him locate her as both an extension of him and a partner to aid him in procreation and family life. She is "of him" and "for him" in a way that disallows the possibility that she can be "for herself" as he can be for himself'.⁸²

However, although a subordinationist reading of Genesis 2-3 has been common, acquiring almost, as Phyllis Trible describes it, 'a status of canonicity', such a reading is by no means inevitable.⁸³ According to Trible's seminal reinterpretation of Genesis 2-3, the misogynistic reading of the creation account – 'woman as the "temptress" and troublemaker who is dependent upon and dominated by her husband' – violates the rhetoric of the text itself.⁸⁴ Trible's reading of the text reinterprets Adam as the 'sexually undifferentiated earth creature', thereby refuting the interpretation that sees man as the physical source of woman. Genesis 2:21-24, Trible argues, depicts the creation of sexuality which 'will alter radically the nature of *hā-ādām* and bring about new creatures

⁸² Rosemary Radford Reuther, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History* (London: SCM, 1998), p. 26. Reuther examines the early exegesis of the Genesis creation accounts noting that 'some commentaries assume the shared image of God in both men and women, while others move to a subordinationist and a misogynist reading of these texts'. Early Jewish interpretations of the second creation account are discussed by Anders Hultgård in 'God and Image of Woman in Early Jewish Religion' in *The Image of God: Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition*, ed. by Kari Elisabeth Børresen (Oslo: Solum Forlag, 1991), pp. 29-50.

⁸³ Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 73.

⁸⁴ Trible, p. 73.

so that female and male together become the one flesh [...].⁸⁵ Tribble's work has been significant to the extent that it raises critical awareness of the possibility for interpreters to impose meaning upon a text and of the difficulty of extracting the original text from centuries of such imposition. Her influence is evident on subsequent interpretations that strive towards an egalitarian reading of the text.⁸⁶

The 'male and female' clause of Genesis 1:27 and the Eden narrative of Genesis 2 and 3 both influenced the sexual anthropology of the subsequent Jewish and Christian religious traditions, particularly its heteronormative character.⁸⁷ The normative significance of the marital union was drawn from the biblical depiction of creation, since the female was brought into being in order to facilitate the heterosexual union. The creation accounts, therefore, ground the 'sexual dimorphism' that characterises Jewish and Christian understandings of gender. As Christine E. Gudorf explains: 'Throughout all three sets of sacred texts, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim, males and females are distinguished from each other again and again in terms of social function, worth and relation to each other and to God, that is, in terms of religious norms.'⁸⁸ This has given rise to the idea of gender complementarity, the assumption that humans are naturally divided into males and females and find dual unity in one another, each possessing unique characteristics from which the other is excluded. We will now consider the way in which gender complementarity functions within contemporary religious tradition, using as examples the contexts of Orthodox Judaism and Roman Catholicism.

5.3 Halakhic Feminism

With its emphasis on innate male and female roles, gender complementarity is particularly

⁸⁵ Tribble, p. 94. Interestingly, Tribble's interpretation echoes that found in *Genesis Rabbah*: 'R. Jeremiah b. Leazar said: "When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the first adam, He created it with both male and female sexual organs, as it was written, *'Male and female He created them, and He called their name adam'*" (Gen. 5:2). R. Schmu'el bar Nachman said, "When the Holy One, bless be He, created the first adam, He created him with two faces, then split him and made two backs – a back for each side." *Genesis Rabbah* 8:1.

⁸⁶ That of Alistair McFayden, for example: 'Woman's creation out of man in the second creation story does not signify her subordination but her equality with man as his fitting co-human partner. That Eve's creation takes place while Adam is made to sleep is surely a sign that it is God's and not Adam's work. Her creation from one of her ribs is a sign of their common nature, of their interdependence, and not of her subordination.' *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 35.

⁸⁷ Such anthropology, Joel Kaminsky argues, corresponds to the biblical worldview. The second creation account, Kaminsky writes, 'even more so than, for example, the Sodom story or the few laws in Leviticus, presents a much more serious challenge to those in church and synagogue who argue that Judaism and Christianity can fully embrace those maintaining a homosexual lifestyle. This is so because [...] the Bible's worldview is hetero-normative'. 'The Theology of Genesis', p. 632.

⁸⁸ Christine E. Gudorf, 'The Erosion of Sexual Dimorphism', p. 143.

embedded into the tradition of Orthodox Judaism, where halakhah governs every aspect of daily life for men and women. Jewish feminist thought, as we will see, varies greatly in its attitude to the sustainability of traditional gender roles. Sometimes, in the context of Orthodox Judaism, what is identified as 'feminism' is simply concerned with the provision of a forum for a female voice to explain a woman-specific commandment.⁸⁹ While non-halakhic Jewish feminist thought would object to the fact that women-specific commandments were authored exclusively by men, some contemporary Orthodox women strive to foster an intra-feminine space for the appropriation of female halakhic obligations.⁹⁰ Feminism, in this context, promotes the obedience to *Torah* that lies at the heart of Orthodoxy while offering an alternative rationale for those commandments that appear to be at odds with contemporary sensibility.

A good example of this tendency is the response to the laws of *niddah* in the writings of contemporary Orthodox feminists. The laws of *niddah* – euphemistically referred to as the family purity laws – require a period of separation between husband and wife lasting twelve days each month, after which the post-menstrual woman performs a ritual immersion in water to restore purity (*mikveh*). For non-halakhic feminists, this practice is irredeemably misogynistic – or 'gynophobic' as Melissa Raphael terms it – and indicative of the negative view of the female body in halakhic thought.⁹¹ However, those defenders of the sustaining relevance of the family purity laws argue that *niddah* enables women to attend to their own needs rather than the needs of their husbands. 'This rationale transforms a system of prohibitions and obligations into a psychosocial strategy of emotional sustenance and marital health. It gives women the feeling that they are in control of their sexual lives.'⁹² Some female Orthodox writers refer to the family purity laws and the lack of female participation in communal life in positive terms, as that which

⁸⁹ While women are exempt from all time-bound commandments and are discouraged from participation in acts of communal worship and Torah study, they are obliged to perform three women-specific commandments: the laws of family purity (*niddah*); the lighting of Shabbat and festival candles (*nerot*) and the baking of the Shabbat bread and the removal and burning of a small portion of the dough (*hafrashat khallah*).

⁹⁰ This is the approach taken by Tamar Frankiel in *The Voice of Sarah: Feminist Spirituality and Traditional Judaism* (New York: Biblio Press, 1990).

⁹¹ Raphael, *Judaism and the Visual Image: A Jewish Theology of Art* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 72. Rachel Adler, for example, writes that the 'worlds reflected in such rules are not worlds we inhabit. Neither should we seek to replicate such worlds. They are unjust'. "'In Your Blood, Live": Re-Visions of a Theology of Purity', in *Lifecycles: Jewish Women on Biblical Themes in Contemporary Life*, ed. by Debra Orenstein and Jane Rachel Litman, (Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 1997), Vol. 2, pp. 197-207 (p. 205).

⁹² Jody Myers and Jane Rachel Litman draw together various female Orthodox perspectives on women-specific commandments in 'The Secret of Jewish Femininity: Hiddenness, Power and Physicality in the Theology of Orthodox Women in the Contemporary World', in *Gender and Judaism: The Transformation of Tradition*, ed. by Tamar Rudavsky (New York: NYU Press, 1995), p. 59.

guarantees the ‘hiddenness’ – thereby increasing the perceived worth – of women.⁹³ Hariva Ner-David writes of the potential benefits that the together/apart cycle inherent in *niddah* may bring to the marital relationship. However, she writes, ‘it is our responsibility as women to reclaim this ritual and reinterpret it, express what it means for us in the 21st century’.⁹⁴ Blu Greenberg, one of the leading voices of Orthodox feminism, holds that the laws of *niddah* constitute ‘an attempt to attach some measure of holiness to a primal urge’.⁹⁵ Although the practice of this law may have accumulated some nuances that have been less honourable to women, Greenberg argues that it falls to ‘this generation of women, Jewish women with a new sense of self, to restore that element of holiness to our bodies, our selves’.⁹⁶

The particular challenge of accommodating feminist thinking within the framework of halakhic Judaism requires a certain measure of halakhic inventiveness or, as the Modern Orthodox feminist Tamar Ross terms it, an ‘expansion’ of the realm of Torah.⁹⁷ We turn to Ross’ work here to illustrate the point that self-identification as a ‘feminist’ does not necessitate a rejection of the halakhic way of life or, indeed, a rejection of the sustaining viability of many of what are regarded as traditionally feminine roles.⁹⁸ Recalling the distinction between essentialism and constructionism, we note that Ross describes her view as ‘somewhere in the middle’.⁹⁹ Ross accepts the truths of both constructivism and essentialism in some measure and explores, in her work, how the two overlap and interact. One does not, Ross argues, have to subscribe to biological essentialism in order to support the maintenance of culturally created gender differences:

Even though the wishes and expectations men and women have of each other may be culturally induced and not an inevitable aspect of human nature, and even if they may have served the interests of male hegemony for thousands of years, we may still be left with a variety of very good reasons for remaining with the way things

⁹³ Myers and Litman, ‘The Secret of Jewish Femininity’, p. 59.

⁹⁴ Hariva Ner-David, ‘Reclaiming Nidah and Mikveh Through Ideological and Practical Reinterpretation’, in *The Passionate Torah: Sex and Judaism*, ed. by Danya Ruttenberg, (New York: New York University Press, 2009), pp. 116-136 (p. 116).

⁹⁵ Blu Greenberg, *On Women and Judaism: A View from Tradition* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1981), p. 120.

⁹⁶ Blu Greenberg, *On Women and Judaism*, p. 120.

⁹⁷ Tamar Ross, *Expanding the Palace of Torah*, p. xv.

⁹⁸ Melissa Raphael writes of the sharp distinction between Orthodox and more liberal forms of Jewish feminism: ‘Orthodox feminism focuses on halakhah as a necessary and sufficient locus of revelation that has made it far less concerned with theology as an engine of reform than feminists from the less traditionalist denominations’. Such dependence on a conservative legal framework, Raphael suggests, means that Orthodox feminism ‘limits its will to change to interpretations allowable by the male rabbinic establishment [...]’. ‘Feminist Theology and the Jewish Tradition’, p. 52.

⁹⁹ Ross, ‘The View From Here: Gender Theory and Gendered Realities, An Exchange Between Tamar Ross and Judith Plascow’, *Nashim*, 13 (2007), 207-251, (p. 219).

are.¹⁰⁰

Certain standards of behaviour may be socially necessary, it is argued, even if they are not biologically programmed. Ross notes, for example, the role that the gender binary has played in encouraging stable familial structures. Orthodox feminists, Ross argues, do not generally share the view that heterosexuality is a tool of male oppression and, in their everyday experience, 'they still find conventional sex roles satisfying'.¹⁰¹ Further, in terms of their religious life, some of the so-called male depictions of God could be valuable to women since they would enhance our sense of the otherness of God: 'The vision of God as outside us may be crucial to the experience of prayer as a dialogic activity'.¹⁰² Ross writes that 'the notion of a God who stands over and above the created universe may be valuable in imaging a God who is more than the projection of our subjective desires'.¹⁰³ Such association of maleness with the fact that God is 'over and above' the universe would be unacceptable to most feminists on the grounds that it reinforces a hierarchical relationship between the sexes.

Ross' work provides an interesting insight into the workings of feminist discourse within the context of Modern Orthodoxy. She acknowledges the anxiety and discomfort that the very mention of feminism can cause in Orthodox circles and she cautions her readers from outside of Orthodoxy against simplifying the importance of divergence from traditional practice.¹⁰⁴ Questions which may appear to be trivial – whether, for example, a woman can conduct the ceremonial blessing of her Sabbath meal – are not necessarily regarded as such within the tradition:

Even the slightest symbolic changes in ritual create a dissonance with primeval memories, associations, and traditional patterns of worship that have nurtured the spiritual self-image of Jewish women for centuries [...] The changes suggested often relate to moral sensibilities that are pivotal to human experience, touching upon religious attitudes and principles that define our total vision of ourselves, the nature of human sexuality, the family, and society at large.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Ross, 'The View From Here', p. 219.

¹⁰¹ Ross, 'The View From Here', p. 221.

¹⁰² Ross, 'The View From Here', p. 222.

¹⁰³ Ross, 'The View From Here', p. 222.

¹⁰⁴ While acknowledging the multiple forms of both feminism and Modern Orthodoxy, Tova Hartman writes that 'most strands of Modernity, define their Modernity, and their Orthodoxy, in a way that makes it very difficult for feminism to enter into its bloodstream, much less to exert a religious claim'. *Feminism Encounters Traditional Judaism: Resistance and Accommodation* (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2007), p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ Ross, *Expanding the Palace of Torah*, p. xiv-xv.

Changing the halakhic status of women constitutes an upheaval of the foundations of the Jewish tradition. Yet, for Ross, feminism is a challenge rather than a threat to traditional Judaism and, as such, it should be faced with faith and not with fear. Feminist theology can be filtered through the prism of tradition in a constructive manner.¹⁰⁶

In her development of a feminist theology for the 'community of the halakhically committed', Ross' method centres upon the idea of 'cumulative revelation'.¹⁰⁷ Revelation, for Ross, is not a static legacy impervious to 'the developing moral intuitions of the faith community'.¹⁰⁸ Rather, the meaning of Torah is revealed through the dialectic between the original revelation at Sinai and the progressive unfolding of history and human understanding. God is revealed in each generation through the dynamic interaction between the sacred text, official interpretation and the consensus of the community. In contrast to more liberal forms of Jewish feminism, Ross' cumulative approach does not discredit earlier patriarchal engagements with revelation, since these too reflect the community consensus of the day. Further, once feminist insights gain consensus from the halakhic community, they can also be deemed revelatory of God's will. Elizabeth Shanks Alexander comments on the importance of the idea of cumulative revelation in Ross' thought:

Ross's conjoining of the patriarchal past with a feminist future in the single unfolding process of divine revelation is an unprecedented and, I would suggest, brilliant move in the world of Jewish feminism [...]. To the extent that she posits continuity between sacred texts of the past and the feminist vision of the future, it is continuity with a past that has been creatively reconstructed to reflect contemporary feminist ideals.¹⁰⁹

Ross sees her approach as expanding, as opposed to undermining, the religious tradition. The resources for the advancement of women can be found *within* the boundaries of the living, dynamic entity that is halakhah. Despite the antihalakhic attitude of much of its discourse, Ross acknowledges the insight of Jewish feminism in relation to the male bias

¹⁰⁶ Taking a similar approach to Ross, Blu Greenberg writes that she does not feel 'threatened when addressing the question of the new needs of women in Judaism nor in admitting the limitations of *halakhah* in this area.' Indeed, she writes, 'it is my very faith in *halakhic* Judaism that makes me believe we can search within it for a new level of perfection, as Jews have been doing for three thousand years'. 'The Theoretical Basis of Women's Equality in Judaism', in *Contemporary Jewish Ethics and Morality: A Reader*, ed. by Elliot N. Dorff and Louis E. Newman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 315-327 (p. 316).

¹⁰⁷ Ross, *Expanding the Palace of Torah*, p. 156, 164.

¹⁰⁸ Ross, *Expanding the Palace of Torah*, p. 164.

¹⁰⁹ Elizabeth Shanks Alexander, 'Review of *Expanding the Palace of Torah*', *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*, 10 (2006), 243-249 (244).

in the Jewish tradition and she articulates the implications for her halakhic feminism as follows:

This observation does not in itself entail a negation of the general concept of respect for the sages (*kevod hakhamim*) or a rejection of my previously held conviction that the leading and reputable Rabbinic authorities try their best to be objective and disinterested in rendering the law as they see it. Nevertheless, I believe there is a significance to the fact that halakhah has been molded primarily by men, and I believe we should be willing to explore that significance.¹¹⁰

Many of the issues that arise in Ross' work find resonance in the work of feminism within the Christian tradition. The concern, expressed in the above quotation, that halakhah has been moulded by men, certainly has its correlation in Christian feminist theology. This is a prevalent issue within the Roman Catholic tradition, where many feminists question the absence of female input into official teachings that pertain to women. The following section will discuss theological reflection on gender roles within the Roman Catholic tradition, with particular emphasis upon the concept of complementarity.

5.4 Ontologically Determined: Complementarity in the Roman Catholic Tradition

The idea of gender complementarity has been central to the definition of Roman Catholic teaching regarding sexual difference. A theological anthropology derived from ontological difference underpins official Church teaching on all aspects of gendered identity, most notably the contentious issue of ordination and governance. The function of gender complementarity in Catholic teaching can be illustrated with reference to the 2004 *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World*, a document that is representative of contemporary Catholic teaching on gender.

We begin with the explicitly gendered account of the *imago Dei* that is presented within the document: 'From the very beginning therefore, humanity is described as articulated in the male-female relationship. This is the humanity, sexually differentiated,

¹¹⁰ Tamar Ross, 'Modern Orthodoxy and the Challenge of Feminism', p. 4.

which is explicitly declared “the image of God.”¹¹¹ The situation of the ‘male and female’ clause within Genesis 1:27 is therefore a fact of great consequence to Catholic teaching, since it justifies the stance that sexual differentiation is a definitive facet of both creation and redemption, revealed ‘*belonging ontologically to creation and destined therefore to outlast the present time, evidently in a transfigured form*’.¹¹² In other words, the Genesis text underpins the assumption in Catholic teaching that men and women are ontologically different. This means that gender belongs to our essential nature and is thus imbued with infinite significance. Our maleness or femaleness – our essential difference – extends to the depths of our being, in this life and the next.

While the letter draws the idea of ontological difference from Genesis 1:27, which it describes as ‘the immutable basis of all Christian anthropology’, it derives the relational implications of this difference from the second creation account, which ‘confirms in a definitive way the importance of sexual difference’.¹¹³ The second creation account underpins the Catholic assumption that the ‘nuptial attribute’ of gender was present from the very beginning, thereby grounding the heteronormative paradigm that lies at the heart of Catholic teaching.¹¹⁴ Although the celibate life is depicted as closer to our eventual experience of ‘face-to-face encounter with God’, the letter is highly affirmative of the married state of life, seeing it as the perfect realisation and enactment of ontological gender complementarity.¹¹⁵ The equal dignity of men and women, which the letter derives from the *imago Dei*, is ‘realized as physical, psychological and ontological complementarity, giving rise to a harmonious relationship of “uni-duality” and psychophysical completion’.¹¹⁶ The vocation of motherhood, through which women realise their life-giving potential, is strongly emphasised. On account of her capacity for motherhood, ‘woman, in her deepest and original being, exists “for the other”’.¹¹⁷ In anticipation of the feminist critique perhaps, when the letter extols the virtue of motherhood, the ‘reality that structures the female personality in a profound way’, it

¹¹¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World* (2004), www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations [accessed June 19 2013] par. 5.

¹¹² 2004 Letter, par. 12. Emphasis in original.

¹¹³ 2004 Letter, par. 5; 2004 Letter, par. 6.

¹¹⁴ 2004 Letter, par. 6.

¹¹⁵ 2004 Letter, par. 12. Since the marital relationship will not extend to our heavenly state, those who currently live the life of celibacy ‘for the sake of the kingdom’ provide us with a prophecy of our future as male and female. The idea that the married state is exclusive to earthly life is likely inferred from an interaction, depicted in the synoptic gospels, between Jesus and the Sadducees in which Jesus states that there will be no marriage in the afterlife (Mark 12:25; Matthew 22:30; Luke 20:36).

¹¹⁶ 2004 Letter, par. 8.

¹¹⁷ 2004 Letter, par. 6.

condemns the tendency to ‘enclose women in mere biological destiny’.¹¹⁸

Complementarity also functions to determine the roles of men and women in the church. While priestly ordination is reserved to men, ‘this does not hamper in any way women’s access to the heart of Christian life’.¹¹⁹ Women embody the Marian principle of the Church since they, in ‘particular intensity and naturalness’, live the Marian ‘dispositions of listening, welcoming, humility, faithfulness, praise and waiting’, though, on this point, the letter disassociates itself from the promotion of a passivity that derives from an ‘outdated conception of femininity’.¹²⁰ Thus, the role of women in Church consists in ‘recalling these dispositions to all the baptized and contributing in a unique way to showing the true face of the Church, spouse of Christ and mother of believers’.¹²¹

The above represents a brief outline of the appeal to ontological difference and gender complementarity in contemporary Catholic teaching. We will now turn to the manner in which Catholic feminist theology critically engages with this thinking. We should first note that Catholic feminism is a broad area of theological work that encompasses great diversity of perspective. It is an ecumenical movement which thus shares the work of Christian feminism – and indeed aspects of Jewish feminism – in its critique of biblical sources and the retrieval of neglected strands of the tradition and also in advocating correct speech about God. However, it also engages with the specifically Catholic context, and thereby extends its critique to philosophy and language such as that contained within the document referred to above. Our discussion of theological responses to complementarity within the Catholic tradition will mainly draw upon those thinkers who, while deeply committed to the tradition, are compelled to articulate an alternate vision of our gendered relationality to that proposed in Catholic teaching. Their struggle – within the tradition – for theological and ecclesial change lends their work the label ‘transformationist’ feminism.¹²²

The assumption that men and women are ontologically different is particularly problematic, from the perspective of Catholic feminist theology, where it lends weight to naturalistic assumptions of gender identity and to deterministic ideas of the role of women

¹¹⁸ 2004 Letter, par. 13.

¹¹⁹ 2004 Letter, par. 16.

¹²⁰ 2004 Letter, par. 16.

¹²¹ 2004 Letter, par. 16.

¹²² Ethna Regan writes that the ‘negotiation of contested territory and the acceptance of disciplinary limits because of loving fidelity to a tradition that is richer than any polity of the present are characteristic of many theologians operating in this strand of feminism’. ‘Women, Theology and the Church: Whose Expertise?’, *Doctrine and Life*, 7 (2011), 4-17 (8).

in the church.¹²³ Since this is, in fact, the way in which the appeal to ontological difference functions in Church teaching, Catholic feminists seek to offer an alternative to the dualistic anthropology of ontological complementarity with its tendency to predetermine male and female roles. To its critics, complementarity is viewed as deeply essentialist, a philosophy that holds insufficient regard for the light that feminist theory has shone upon the socially constructed manner of many male and female characteristics. As Colleen Griffith writes: ‘Can we really give the chromosomal difference of sex so much ontological meaning?’¹²⁴ For Griffith, the narrow focus on the mechanics of the heterosexual experience inherent in the idea of complementarity ‘privileges an important but limited dimension of bodily existence’.¹²⁵ The opposition to complementarity is often rooted in an aversion to the reduction of theological anthropology to biology and the consequent over-identification of women with motherhood. As Mary Catherine Hilkert writes, while ‘women’s bodily experience and female sexuality provide appropriate images and metaphors for the divine, the way women image God or the destiny and vocation of women cannot be extrapolated solely from biology’.¹²⁶ The imagery of Catholic teaching, which implicitly reinforces the stereotypical view of the active male and passive female, can serve as a prescriptive model for gender roles, specifically the inference that all women follow their exemplar, Mary, in obedience, self-giving, receptivity and acceptance.¹²⁷ The identification of women with these character traits can undermine their full subjectivity. As Elizabeth Johnson argues:

¹²³ Naturalism refers to the fact that essentialist claims about men and women traditionally appeal to nature, or the natural state of things. Determinism relates to the belief that the natural characteristics that make up the essence of a woman determine what that woman can become. See Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 27.

¹²⁴ Colleen M. Griffith, ‘Human Bodiliness: Sameness as Starting Point’, in *The Church Women Want: Catholic Women in Dialogue*, ed. by Elizabeth Johnson (New York: Crossroad, 2002), pp. 60-69 (p. 63).

¹²⁵ Griffith, p. 62.

¹²⁶ Mary Catherine Hilkert, ‘Cry Beloved Image: Rethinking the Image of God’, in *In the Embrace of God: Feminist Approaches to Theological Anthropology*, ed. by Ann Elizabeth O’Hara Graff (Maryknoll, Orbis, 1995), p. 199.

¹²⁷ Pope John Paul II writes that ‘*The Church sees in Mary the highest expression of the “feminine genius”* and she finds in her a source of constant inspiration. Mary called herself the “handmaid of the Lord” (Lk 1:38). Through obedience to the Word of God she accepted her lofty yet not easy vocation as wife and mother in the family of Nazareth. Putting herself at God’s service, she also put herself at the service of others: a service of love. Precisely through this service Mary was able to experience in her life a mysterious, but authentic “reign”. *Letter of John Paul II to Women* (1995), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/documents/hf_jp-ii LET_29061995_women_en.html, [accessed June 14 2013], par. 10. Discussed by Susan A. Ross in ‘The Bridegroom and the Bride: The Theological Anthropology of John Paul II and its Relation to the Bible and Homosexuality’, in *Sexual Diversity and Catholicism* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2001), ed. by Patricia Beattie Jung and Joseph Andrew Coray, pp. 39-60 (p. 40).

Much of women's negative reaction to this image of Mary stems from the realization that this feminine ideal functions as an obstacle to personal growth, preventing the development of a critical intellect, capacity for righteous anger, and other characteristics of a mature personality. Living "femininely" can even be dangerous to one's health and life, inculcating passivity in abusive and violent situations.¹²⁸

Gender complementarity emphasises the biological at the expense of the personal and, in some aspects of the moral teaching that is derived from this anthropology, 'the teaching appears more important than the people for whom it is intended'.¹²⁹

To its critics, therefore, an anthropology based upon gender complementarity is insufficient for contemporary relational situations. Relationships that do not enjoy reproductive complementarity do not necessarily exclude the potential for personal complementarity. The merit of Catholic feminism in dealing with such questions lies in the value that is often placed upon human experience as a legitimate source of moral insight. Such perspective recognises that the question of personal complementarity – as regards same-sex relationships – can only be fully confronted with reference to the lived reality of loving, committed, same-sex couples. Margaret Farley, for example, draws our attention to the existence of 'some clear and profound testimonies – written, spoken, visibly lived – to the life-enhancing possibilities of same-sex relationships and the integrating possibilities of sexual activity within these relationships'.¹³⁰ For Farley, 'given the arguable inconclusiveness of Scripture, tradition, and secular disciplines, concrete experience becomes a determining source on the issue'.¹³¹ Such experience, Farley argues, provides the strongest indication of the potential for the embodiment of Christian love through same-sex relationships.

While complementarity is, in Catholic teaching, primarily realised in the marital union, it is also realised in the roles of men and women within the Church. The feminist critique, therefore, also extends to the appeal to 'the "iconic" complementarity' of these

¹²⁸ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, (New York: Crossroad, 2007), p. 320.

¹²⁹ Catherina J.M. Halkes, *New Creation: Christian Feminism and the Renewal of the Earth* (London: SPCK, 1991), p. 136.

¹³⁰ Margaret Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2006), p. 286.

¹³¹ Farley, *Just Love*, p. 286. Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler draw similar conclusions in *The Sexual Person: Toward a Renewed Catholic Anthropology* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2008). 'On the basis of the Magisterium's own recognition of sexual orientation, and the scientific research and anecdotal testimonies that affirm the personal complementarity experienced by homosexual couples, we suggest that the complementarity defended in John Paul's theology of the body needs to be reconstructed to include orientation complementarity'. p. 89.

roles.¹³² The defence of the reservation of priestly ordination to men is made on ontological grounds, appealing to our determined nature, our unchanging essence and the two 'essential dimensions' of the Church: the feminine Marian principle and the masculine Apostolic-Petrine principle.¹³³ The argument for restricting ordination to men on account of their natural resemblance to Christ is particularly explicit in Pope Paul VI's 1975 declaration *Inter Insigniores*:

Christ is of course the firstborn of all humanity, of women as well as men [...] *Nevertheless, the incarnation of the Word took place according to the male sex*: this is indeed a question of fact, and this fact, while not implying an alleged natural superiority of man over woman, cannot be disassociated from the economy of salvation [...].¹³⁴

The position expressed within this passage, which has been consolidated in subsequent pontificates, establishes the centrality of gender to the salvific role of Christ, thereby dissociating women from the potential to act as *imago Christi*.¹³⁵ This attitude has traditionally been reinforced by what Elizabeth Johnson terms a 'naïve physicalism that collapses the totality of the Christ into the bodily form of Jesus'.¹³⁶ While many feminists can accept without difficulty the fact that Jesus' maleness was part of his historical identity, they strongly object to the insistence on the male character of salvation as it has come to dominate Christian thought. Within the 'multipolar' anthropology favoured by Johnson, Jesus' maleness is viewed as an intrinsically important attribute for his own historical identity but not as theologically consequential for the redeeming role of Christ.¹³⁷ In questioning the validity of the assumption that gender roles in the church are ontologically determined, feminist theology emphasises instead our unity in Christ, that inferred in Paul's message that 'there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one

¹³² *Letter of John Paul II to Women*, par 11.

¹³³ *Letter of John Paul II to Women*, par 11.

¹³⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores* (1976), www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19761015_inter-insigniores_en.html [accessed July 14 2013] par. 28. This document is discussed by Catherine Mowry LaCugna in 'Women's ordination', *Commonweal*, 121 (1994), 10-13.

¹³⁵ John Paul II restates this thinking in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (1994), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19940522_ordinatio-sacerdotalis_en.html [accessed July 22 2014].

¹³⁶ Johnson, *She Who Is*, p. 72.

¹³⁷ Interestingly, Johnson finds a positive meaning – an 'appropriateness' – in Jesus' maleness for feminist thought: 'If in a patriarchal culture, a woman had preached compassionate love and enacted a style of authority that serves, she would most certainly have been greeted with a colossal shrug. Is this not what women are supposed to do by nature? But from a social position of male privilege, Jesus preached and acted this way and herein lies the summons.' *She Who Is*, p. 160.

in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:27-28).¹³⁸ Janet Martin Soskice, for example, suggests that the idea of ontological difference is theologically problematic and potentially at odds with ‘Scripture itself if it suggests that a woman cannot say that “in every sense, Christ is like me except without sin”. It is for this reason that we must insist that, Christologically speaking, men and women *cannot* be different’.¹³⁹ Thinkers such as Soskice who challenge the Catholic tenet of ontological difference are not purporting an ideology of sameness. Instead they consider sexual difference in a way that asserts that, at our fundamental level we are of one nature, an argument that is well supported by the scholastic distinction between essence and existence. Though men and women may differ existentially, in essence they are the same.¹⁴⁰

Much feminist theology in the Catholic context has been written in response to the exclusion of women from ordination and, because of the link between governance and ordination, their exclusion from leadership.¹⁴¹ Regarding what she terms the ecclesial and theological invisibility of women, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza writes that women ‘are not only the ‘silent majority’ but we are also the ‘silenced majority’ in the Roman Catholic Church’.¹⁴² There is much criticism of the fact that Church teaching is formulated without any apparent female contribution.¹⁴³ There is no evidence of any

¹³⁸ The 2004 Letter arrives at a different interpretation of this passage. It argues that when Paul writes that there is ‘neither male nor female’ (Gal. 3:27-28) he does not intend to erase the difference between the sexes. What he means, the Letter holds, is that the enmity and violence between male and female can be overcome in Christ. ‘In this sense, the distinction between man and woman is reaffirmed more than ever; indeed, it is present in biblical revelation up to the very end.’ par. 12.

¹³⁹ Soskice, ‘*Imago Dei* and Sexual Difference: Towards an Eschatological Anthropology’, in *Rethinking Human Nature: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, ed. by Malcolm Jeeves (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2011), pp. 295-309 (p. 304).

¹⁴⁰ This point is discussed by Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, in ‘Ordaining Women: Two Views’, *First Things*, 1 (2007), <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2007/01/ordaining-women-two-views> [accessed 24 April 2014]. She argues that Jesus’ statement that ‘in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven’ (Matthew 22:30) is not, Wilson writes, ‘a heretical denial of incarnational life or a plug for interchangeability, but an anticipation of the reunion that his own life already inaugurates’.

¹⁴¹ In an address to clergy in 2006, Pope Benedict XVI responded as follows to the issue of the absence of women from the government of the church: ‘[T]he priestly ministry of the Lord, as we know, is reserved to men, since the priestly ministry [...] governs the Church. It is not the man who does something, but the priest governs, faithful to his mission, in the sense that it is the Sacrament, that is, through the Sacrament it is Christ himself who governs, both through the Eucharist and in the other Sacraments, and thus Christ always presides.’ Address to the clergy of Rome on 2 March 2006: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/cardkasdocs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20060605_kasper-bishops_en.html [accessed 1 May 2013].

¹⁴² Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ‘Breaking the Silence – Becoming Visible’, in *The Power of Naming*, ed. by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), pp. 161-62.

¹⁴³ Ivy A. Helman writes that, in the future, ‘it seems that official Vatican teachings need to include more women’s voices. After all, women are the topic of discussion, and it makes sense that they become a central part of that discussion as well as recognized in a more official capacity [...]. Who knows how the Roman Catholic theology of womanhood would evolve when women are empowered to speak for and about

meaningful engagement with the voices of those Catholic feminists who articulate these concerns. The evidence suggests that Rosemary Radford Reuther's observation in the late 1990s, that 'hierarchical Catholicism views feminist theology with deepest suspicion', still stands.¹⁴⁴ Certainly, the 2004 letter referred to above contrasts the 'demands' of the feminist movement with the humility and living for the other that characterises the Church's vision of femininity: 'Although a certain type of feminist rhetoric makes demands "for ourselves", women preserve the deep intuition of the goodness in their lives of those actions which elicit life, and contribute to the growth and protection of the other'.¹⁴⁵ Pope Francis, in his call for a 'more profound theology of women', takes little account of the pre-existing body of work that constitutes feminist theology.¹⁴⁶

Pope Francis' call echoes John Paul II's challenge to women, expressed in his 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, to promote a new feminism which 'rejects the temptation of imitating models of "male domination", in order to acknowledge and affirm the true genius of women'.¹⁴⁷ This call has been answered in the form of 'New Feminism', a recently emerged perspective that seeks, according to one of its leading proponents Michele Schumacher, to articulate a dynamic Christian anthropology that insists upon 'the right and responsibility of each woman to realize herself in perfect Christian freedom'.¹⁴⁸ New Feminism gives expression to Catholic teaching regarding ontological difference and gender complementarity, employing much of the theological and philosophical anthropology of Pope John Paul II. Unfortunately, New Feminism has also inherited the negative attitude to other forms of feminism inherent in Catholic teaching.¹⁴⁹ There is a sense, in much of the writings of New Feminism, that traditional forms of feminism have

themselves?' *Women and the Vatican: An Exploration of Official Documents* (New York: Orbis, 2012), p. 252.

¹⁴⁴ Rosemary Radford Reuther, *Women and Redemption*, p. 190.

¹⁴⁵ Letter, par. 13.

¹⁴⁶ Pope Francis' comments were made during a press conference in Rio de Janeiro in July 2013. They are discussed by Kathleen Sprows Cummings in 'A Promising Path: Building 'a profound theology of womanhood' for the 21st century', *America*, 28 October 2013, <http://americamagazine.org/issue/promising-path> [accessed on 16 April 2014].

¹⁴⁷ *Evangelium Vitae*, par. 99.

¹⁴⁸ Michele M. Schumacher, 'An Introduction to New Feminism', in *Women in Christ: Towards a New Feminism*, ed. by M. Schumacher (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. ix-xvi (p.xii).

¹⁴⁹ Beatriz Vollmer Coles attests to the 'great failure' of twentieth century feminism marked as it is by largely unrealised goals. She advises that, within the realm of New Feminism, "gender-neutrality," "liberation," and other confrontational terms implied in feminist discourse should be concepts of the past'. 'New Feminism: A Sex-Gender Reunion', in *Women In Christ*, pp. 52-66 (p. 62, 66). Mary Rousseau, similarly, writes that feminism, in its traditional sense, is an 'egocentric urge to desire and dominate other persons instead of finding communion with them in self-giving love. For too many feminists [...] freedom translates into the right to be egocentric, to define our fulfilment as we see fit, and to seek it without interference from anyone. If that search means abandoning husband and children, so be it. 'John Paul II's Teaching on Women', *The Catholic Woman*, 3 (1990), 11-31.

failed in their goals, due in large part to the minimisation of the importance of sexual difference, illustrating, as Tina Beattie writes, that ‘many Christian women, far from being converted by feminism, are actually alienated by its claims and concerns’.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, just as the increased understanding of the cultural diversity of women has highlighted the false universalism of the early feminist movement, it must now be acknowledged that transformationist Catholic feminism cannot, when it voices dissatisfaction with the role of women in the church, speak for all Catholic women.¹⁵¹

However, the concerns raised by transformationist Catholic feminism – which are shared by many Roman Catholics, male and female – are still unresolved, even unacknowledged. Although Catholic teaching shows evidence of genuine respect for and appreciation of women, the extent of the frustration relating to the contentious issues of female ordination and Church governance may mean that the ways in which Church teaching seeks to promote the rights of women in society and family go unappreciated. In the words of Tina Beattie:

Until women are recognized as full and equal participants in the life of faith, until we are acknowledged as persons graced with the image of God, capable of representing Christ to the world as fully and effectively as men do, the Church herself will continue to be a spiritual desert where men’s fears and fantasies lead them to refuse the grace that female sacramentality might bring to Catholic liturgical and institutional life.¹⁵²

The appeal to ontological difference to justify roles within the Church – and the denial

¹⁵⁰ Beattie, p. 23. This attitude can also be observed in the writings of Hans Urs von Balthasar, a key influence in New Feminist writings: ‘The assault of ‘feminism’ is in a fatal predicament, because it is fighting for equal rights for women in predominantly male-oriented, technological civilization. Thus it either takes up the front against this civilization, which can scarcely be done without an unnatural masculinization of woman or a levelling of the difference between the sexes.’ *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, Vol. II: The Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans. by Graham Harrison, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), p. 365.

¹⁵¹ Tina Beattie writes that although she does not believe that ‘neo-Orthodox Catholicism, informed by the theology of Balthasar and John Paul II but also manifesting the kind of social and sexual ideologies that are a feature of contemporary American politics, holds the key to [...] feminist revival’, New Feminism does have a contribution to make to feminist theology since it stimulates close critical engagement with the Catholic tradition ‘in a way that might liberate new meanings and possibilities for feminist theological reflection’. Tina Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism: Theology and Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 3. Similarly, Rosemary Radford Reuther writes that ‘dialogue is not well promoted by either stereotyping a “bad old” feminism that has failed, or by dismissing this particular brand of “new feminism” as merely “old femininity.” A respectful recognition that both groups share a desire for common values of justice, peace, and male-female relations of loving mutuality is needed’. ‘Review of Women in Christ: Towards a New Feminism’, *Theological Studies*, 3 (2005), 687-689.

¹⁵² Tina Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, p. 2.

that the teaching is prejudicial to women – makes this aspect of church teaching difficult to counter, a situation exacerbated by the fact that the ordination of women is, in the words of Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*, ‘not a question open to discussion’.¹⁵³ As Rosemary Radford Ruether writes, although the Church affirms equality in terms of nature and secular society, ‘eucharistic and priestly matters are removed to a second super-natural sphere unconnected with gender equality in creation’.¹⁵⁴ Yet the move towards a prohibition of even speaking about the issue, which is also a prohibition of discussion about the capacity of women to act as *imago Christi*, constitutes a contraction of feminist theological discourse.

To return to the document with which we began this section, the 2004 letter states that ‘only the woman, created from the same “flesh” and cloaked in the same mystery, can give a future to the life of the man’.¹⁵⁵ This simple phrase – ‘cloaked in the same mystery’ – is of arguably greater value to women than any of the affirmations of their self-giving nature that permeate Catholic teaching, expressed by John Paul II as the ‘true genius of women’. This is not only because these affirmations insufficiently acknowledge the self-giving attributes of men, but also because they exemplify the limiting determinism – for both men and women – that characterises ontological complementarity. Thus feminism seeks to move from the determinism that derives from ontological complementarity back to this sense of mystery inherent in Genesis 1:27. This brings us to one of the most significant areas of feminist theological discourse: the mystery of God. The effects of a theological anthropology that derives from ontological difference and gender complementarity are far reaching, underpinning the Catholic understanding of the inter-human and the divine-human relationship. Much of the feminist response to gender complementarity has inspired an increased sensitivity to the implications of the language that we use to depict both of these relationships and, importantly, the language that we use to describe God. We thus turn to feminist reflection on God-language, an insightful area of theological discourse, in order to elaborate the assumption that an appreciation of the mystery of God has potentially positive implications for our understanding of the person created in the image of God.

¹⁵³ ‘The reservation of the priesthood to males, as a sign of Christ the Spouse who gives himself in the Eucharist, is not a question open to discussion, but it can prove especially divisive if sacramental power is too closely identified with power in general.’ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, par. 104

¹⁵⁴ Rosemary Radford Ruether, ‘*Imago Dei*: Christian Tradition and Feminist Hermeneutics’, in *The Image of God*, ed. by Kari Elisabeth Børresen, pp. 267-291 (p. 269).

¹⁵⁵ 2004 Letter, par. 6.

5.5 Reflecting the Mystery of God

One of the defining dimensions of feminist theology since its emergence has been its critique and its creativity in relation to language about God. This work has increased awareness of the fact that if our concept of God is exclusively reliant upon male imagery, it follows that our picture of the *imago Dei* within the person will suffer distortion, to the detriment of both women and men.¹⁵⁶ The interrelation between our image of God and our understanding of the person as *imago Dei* is most famously summarized in the radical feminist perspective of Mary Daly: '[I]f God is male, then male is God'.¹⁵⁷ The failure to recognise some degree of femininity in God creates an obstacle to the realisation of the woman as the image of God. Feminist theology has drawn attention to the fact that an identification of God as male helps to hold structures of oppression in place since it implies and supports the natural authority of men over women. The type of reasoning that feminist writings have opposed is rarely stated as explicitly in contemporary theology as it is in the writings of the Calvinist theologian, John M. Frame. Frame argues that the reason that scripture contains so much male imagery for God is that scripture wants us to think of God as Lord, and 'lordship, in Scripture, always connotes authority.' There is, therefore, an 'awkwardness' in speaking of God in female terms since women are subject to male authority in the home and in church. Frame concludes that the use of female language is misguided, from a biblical point of view, and unhelpful for cultivating our image of God as Lord, which is, Frame believes, very necessary for contemporary religious experience.¹⁵⁸

At this point, we should pause to appreciate the wisdom of Aquinas and Maimonides and to consider the value of their conception of the unknowable God, entirely beyond the limitations of human language. It is only when confronted with sentiments such as that expressed by Frame, that we see that apophaticism – though at times seeming inflexible – is motivated by the desire to protect the mystery of God. A rediscovery of apophaticism, as Catherine Keller writes, a theology 'between mystical

¹⁵⁶ Ann Loades writes that, arguably, 'men as well as women suffer spiritual and other forms of damage when the symbolism is false or mistaken'. The 'theological task' of feminist interpretation proceeds, Loades argues, 'on the assumption that all stand to gain by it, not just women'. 'Feminist Interpretation', in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by John Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.81-95 (p. 82).

¹⁵⁷ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon, 1973), p. 19.

¹⁵⁸ Frame, 'Men and Women in the Image of God', in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. by John Piper and Wayne Gruden (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), pp. 225-233 (p. 228).

disclosure and prophetic iconoclasm', liberates theological language from the illusion of certainty.¹⁵⁹ Thus, the multitude of scriptural images that depict the divine heightens the expression of the incomprehensibility of God. The many names for God should be positively regarded as both an expression of, and a safeguard for, the mystery of God, an idea strikingly captured in the sixth century by Dionysius, one of the most influential proponents of negative theology, as the 'darkness so far above light'.¹⁶⁰

The challenge to confront and embrace mystery is what makes the theology of unknowing appealing for feminist theological discourse in its quest to overcome the certainty of determinism. Elizabeth Johnson, for example, values the apophatic tendencies of Maimonides and Aquinas, recognising the potential of analogical language – the movement from negation to mystery – for contemporary theology:

In this sense analogical language is more akin to the reverential abstinence from the use of God's name that characterizes later Judaism, than to any exaggeration of divine aloofness from the world. At the end of the process the mystery of the living God is evoked while the human thinker ends up, intellectually and existentially, in religious awe and adoration.¹⁶¹

Johnson regrets that this negating power of analogy was forgotten in the subsequent onset of an 'ecclesiastical desire to make simple, positive and authoritative statements about the divine.'¹⁶² Recognising the damage that the overuse of literal male imagery has done to our sense of the mystery of God, feminist theological discourse has conducted a retrieval of female images of God from within the scriptures which has helped to correct the imbalance.¹⁶³ Such work does not, however, aspire to the complete replacement of male with female images since this would still obscure the mystery of God and would also

¹⁵⁹ Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 201.

¹⁶⁰ *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (Mahwah, NY: Paulist Press, 1987), p. 138.

¹⁶¹ Johnson, *She Who Is*, p. 115. Johnson finds much value in Aquinas' thought for her efforts towards a re-articulation of the mystery of God. In fact, the title of the book '*She Who Is*' is drawn from Aquinas' idea that, since divine essence is identical with divine existence, 'HE WHO IS' is the most appropriate name for God (ST I.13.11). p. 242.

¹⁶² Johnson, *She Who Is*, p. 242.

¹⁶³ Catherine Keller argues that since Genesis 1:26 confers equality, women must take the opportunity to correct the imbalance in terms of the language we use to depict God: Women would seem therefore to be as entitled as men to make God-signs in our image – to mirror as men have always done our sense of our own cosmic significance. So why can we not correct the systematic oversight of two thousand years or so and invest a few female metaphors with their overdue holiness? 'Christianity', in *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, pp. 225-236 (p. 226). This theology of retrieval has even led Rosemary Radford Ruether to the renaming of the divine: 'When discussing the fuller divinity to which this theology points, I use the term God/ess, a written symbol intended to combine both the masculine and feminine forms of the word for the divine while preserving the Judeo-Christian affirmation that divinity is one. The term is unpronounceable and inadequate. It is not intended as a language for worship'. *Sexism and God-talk: Towards a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), p. 46.

alienate men. The issue, from a feminist point of view, is not with the use of male metaphors for God but, as Johnson writes, with the use of these metaphors 'exclusively, literally, and patriarchally'.¹⁶⁴

Though the re-emphasis on the unknowability of God is an important aspect of much feminist theology, this does not mean that our image of God has to be purified of all gendered language. The Jewish theologian, Rachel Adler, presents a very convincing case in favour of gendered God language. Adler notes the impossibility of presenting the divine Other in neutered language, since Hebrew does not have a neuter gender. In any case, even in English, neutered language is often taken to refer to males, which is why we often feel the need to add appendages, such as for example, a *female* rabbi. Though God can be compared to non-human aspects of creation such as rock, sea or fire, all anthropomorphic language implies gender. Adler suggests that anthropomorphism is a necessary part of God language, particularly to the language of prayer. Though often very beautiful, non-anthropomorphic images alone are not sufficient to signify the human-divine relationship. As humans, we need story and so, 'God must cloth Godself in metaphor, and especially in anthropomorphic metaphor, because the most powerful language of God's *engagement* with us is our human language of relationship'.¹⁶⁵ Gender is an essential part of this relatedness; for example, 'mother' or 'father' is much more personal than 'parent'. Adler sees our gendered existence as significant for our understanding of God. She regards the sexual distinction depicted in Genesis 1 as a metaphor for the divine nature:

Something in God seeks to restate itself in flesh and blood. Perhaps it is God's creativity, or delight, or the ingrained yearning for communion with the other that serves as impetus for creation and for covenant. But something in God, in seeking its human mirror, reveals itself as both infinitely varied and utterly whole. That something is, as it were, God's sexuality, which our own sexuality was created to reflect.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Johnson writes that the 'first expression of the unknowability of God is the proliferation of names, images and concepts, each of which provides a different perspective onto divine excellent [...]. Each symbol has a unique intelligibility that adds its own significance to the small store of collected human wisdom about the divine. In addition, as a concrete term balances an abstract one, and so forth, each operates as a corrective to any other that would pretend to completeness'. *She Who Is*, p. 33.

¹⁶⁵ Rachel Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1998), p. 96.

¹⁶⁶ Adler, p. 117.

Adler infers this point from the placement of the idea of sexual difference at the climax of a passage that is devoted to the establishment of human similarity to God. Just like God, who is referred to in the singular and the plural in Genesis, humankind encompasses both singularity and plurality through sexual diversion. Our sexual diversion is, for Adler, ‘a metaphor for the infinitude and unity of God’.¹⁶⁷ It is our sexuality that turns us towards to the other and, as Adler writes, this ‘capacity to create intersubjective space, which we and God share, is what makes covenant possible’.¹⁶⁸ The feminist dilemma will not be overcome by rejecting those stories where God is metaphorically clothed in a male body but by writing new stories, or by rediscovering hidden ones.

The work of Melissa Raphael is a good example of what Adler is advising.¹⁶⁹ In *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz*, Raphael presents a theological response to the Holocaust based on the experience of those in the death camps, whose embodied and relational care of one another made the presence of God possible. While acknowledging the problematic nature of reading women’s memoir literature in the light of contemporary feminist thought and the danger of idealising female relationships, Raphael constructs a theology of presence arguing that ‘each gesture of care retrieved a spark of the humanity/divinity that had been trodden into the mud’.¹⁷⁰ Raphael argues that it was not God-in-God-self but rather the patriarchal model of God that failed Israel during the Holocaust. While Raphael largely draws on the memoirs of women, the gestures of care around which she bases her discussion are not exclusively expressed by women. She also describes the ‘maternal attitude’ of some Hassidic rabbis, who offered not only religious teaching, but also ‘calming words, counsel, consolation and a practical support’.¹⁷¹ This is consistent with Raphael’s conclusion in her earlier work that patriarchal values are not limited to the biologically male, just as biological femaleness is ‘not always a precondition of female sacrality’.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ Adler, p. 118.

¹⁶⁸ Adler, p. 119.

¹⁶⁹ Melissa Raphael describes the liberal Jewish feminism, within which her and Adler’s work is situated, as follows: ‘Less bound by halakhic judgements and obligations than Orthodox feminists, and, indeed, sometimes indifferent to halakhic precedent, feminist scholars of the broadly liberal traditions [...] have conjoined the tradition’s inherent prophetic self-criticism and self-revision with the humanistic values of modern Judaism to address (and sometimes move beyond) the classic theological framework of Judaism: God, Torah, and the people Israel’, ‘Feminist Theology and the Jewish Tradition’, p. 53.

¹⁷⁰ Melissa Raphael, *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz: A Jewish Feminist Theology of the Holocaust*, (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 151.

¹⁷¹ Raphael, p. 123.

¹⁷² Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment: The Post-Patriarchal Reconstruction of Female Sacrality*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), p. 16.

Raphael's idea of *imago Dei* is central to this argument. The Shoah represents a radical disruption in our understanding of God and also in our understanding of the human person as *imago Dei*. In Auschwitz, where the image of God was almost lost from view and, for some, rendered invisible, each feminine gesture of care which even momentarily restored the dignity of the person made in the image of God, helped to restore God's image in the world. 'In Auschwitz, women's humanity was completed by the restoration of God's image in their own face, just as God's female face was restored by taking on the suffering of women. Perhaps God created humanity in her own image so as to bear some of its burdens.'¹⁷³ Raphael's emphasis on embodiment seeks to celebrate the immanent divinity of the female body and to renegotiate the meaning of female sacrality – those qualities of femaleness that mediate the sacred – as a 'structure by which we can imagine how the divine is immanent in the world through female embodiment and in 'female' modes of being and doing'.¹⁷⁴ As such, Raphael's theology celebrates the manifestation of divine presence in the ordinary, rather than through any particularly sanctified objects which are set above daily life.¹⁷⁵ She argues that 'immanentism breaks down the traditional binary oppositions of spirit and flesh, heaven and earth, sacred and profane, where the value of one element in the duality – the transcendent – is secured at the expense of the other – the immanent'.¹⁷⁶

Raphael explores an image of the relational God of the feminine experience, the *Shekhinah*, a manifestation of God defined by her presence. In the Talmud, the term *Shekhinah*, coined by rabbis from the root of the verb 'to dwell' (*shakhan*), denotes the personification of the presence of God in a particular location.¹⁷⁷ Where the term *Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu* (The Holy One, Blessed Be He) describes God's hidden persona and transcendence, *Shekhinah* describes the nearness and presence of the immanent God.¹⁷⁸ In Auschwitz, the depth of evil into which the *Shekhinah* was placed made her presence almost imperceptible just as the personhood of the women became less perceptible. The

¹⁷³ Raphael, *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz*, p. 149.

¹⁷⁴ Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, p. 8.

¹⁷⁵ Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, p. 23.

¹⁷⁶ Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*. Immanentism, according to Raphael, overcomes the practice of attaching transcendent value to the spirit at the expense of the flesh, which was common in the tradition of Western theology: 'To be of "flesh" in traditional Christianity is to have been born of woman, profaned by her blood, distracted by her embodiment and generally in a state of rebellion against God'. p. 23-24.

¹⁷⁷ The *Shekhinah* is regarded to be present in, for example, acts of public prayer: 'Whenever ten are gathered for prayer, there the *Shekhinah* rests', *Talmud Sanhedrin* 39a.

¹⁷⁸ David Ariel, *Kabbalah: The Mystic Quest in Judaism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), p.95. The use of the *Shekhinah* in rabbinic literature and the targums is discussed by Martin McNamara in *Targum and Testament Revisited: Aramaic Paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 148-153.

Shekhinah, as depicted by Raphael, suffers with her people but not *for* her people, as with the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation.

Drawing on the mystical Kabbalist Isaac Luria, Raphael can find some meaning in seemingly insignificant acts of kindness within the camps, interpreting them as traces of transcendence, forming part of *tikkun*, the redemptive struggle. 'Here, women's holding, pulling, and pushing the Other from death back into the slender possibility of life – so often the very substance of their memoir – were means of carrying God into Auschwitz under a torn shelter: an improvised Tent of Meeting in which women could meet God in the face-to-face relation'.¹⁷⁹ Thus, we observe a meeting of theological anthropology and ethics in Raphael's conception of *imago Dei*. The redemption that is envisaged by Raphael is performative and gradual, as with the Hasidic concept *kimah himah*, bit by bit. It is this point that marks the distinction between Raphael's theology and other Holocaust theologies such as that of Richard Rubenstein.¹⁸⁰ Raphael argues that the expectation of an Exodus-type deliverance from the Holocaust is a patriarchal projection of power that justifies domination and abuse onto the idea of the omnipotent God, contributing to the problem that created the conditions for the Holocaust in the first place. Of the patriarchal God, Raphael writes: 'Auschwitz was *his place* insofar as the conditions of numinous horror were graphic illustrations of his threats to bring punitive disaster upon the house of Israel.'¹⁸¹ Raphael attributes patriarchy to an alienation from the divine and the worship of the masculine numen in its place. Raphael suggests, however, that this sin of patriarchy is redeemable. When the female divine image is honoured, and the conception of God is re-imagined in terms of presence, Jewry will be engaged in *tikkun*.

Thus, Raphael's work has brought our reflection on God language from mystery to immanence. Feminist theological discourse celebrates the possibilities inherent in worshipping the unknowable God, seeing in apophatic counter-discourse a potential corrective for what Johnson terms the 'idolatry' of the literal, exclusive and patriarchal male imagery that has dominated religious discourse. Such an approach enhances the capacity to recognise the theomorphic potential of women while also destabilising the assumption that human gender hierarchies naturally mirror the relation between the male

¹⁷⁹ Raphael, 'Feminist Theology and the Jewish Tradition', p. 64.

¹⁸⁰ Richard Rubenstein argued for the unsustainability of the traditional Jewish belief in an omnipotent, beneficent deity after the Holocaust. Such tradition 'has interpreted every major catastrophe in Jewish history as God's punishment of a sinful Israel. I fail to see how this position can be maintained without regarding Hitler and the SS as instruments of God's will'. *After Auschwitz* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1966), p. 153.

¹⁸¹ Raphael, *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz*, p. 51.

God and his human subjects. To draw again from Keller, ‘when the dominological deity is destabilized, so are the coercive practices of His representatives’, a point that strongly resonates with Raphael’s thesis.¹⁸² However, in this celebration of mystery, we must also affirm the personal dimension of the covenantal relationship, that which is depicted in Raphael’s theology of presence. This is why, once we ascent to the otherness and non-corporeality of God, we can make space in our theology and worship for, as Adler advocates, God language that is clothed in gendered metaphor. To bring these insights together, it is interesting to note Tina Beattie’s advocacy of a ‘gendered apophaticism’ in order to reflect the fact that ‘woman’s unknowing of God may be different from man’s unknowing of God’. This shows the importance of broadening the discourse of theology to create space for the female voice to articulate our imperfect understanding of God.¹⁸³ However, such gendered apophaticism is also intended to reflect the mystery of woman’s own being, the self ‘hidden in the mystery of God’, thus illustrating the anthropological relevance of refocusing on mystery.¹⁸⁴

The idea of anthropological apophaticism, briefly referred to in the context of Roman Catholic teaching, bears particular relevance for our understanding of *imago Dei*. As Janet Martin Soskice argues:

Some Orthodox theologians suggest, to my mind convincingly, that to say “man is in the image of God” is to say that “man is mystery” because God is mystery. On this reading, attractively, we do not know who or what we are – positively as well as negatively. “Know thyself” is, after all, a pagan injunction, and St. Paul’s psychological realism Romans 7:19 – “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” – is instantly familiar.¹⁸⁵

There is significant grounding in the tradition for this anthropological apophaticism. The sense of mystery relates not just to our ultimate state – ‘what we will be has not been revealed’ (1 John 3:2) – but also to our earthly existence. Soskice’s argument finds direct grounding in Gregory of Nyssa, for example, who writes that ‘since one of the attributes we contemplate in the Divine nature is incomprehensibility of essence, it is

¹⁸² Keller, *Face of the Deep*, p. 204.

¹⁸³ Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, p. 66.

¹⁸⁴ Beattie, p. 66.

¹⁸⁵ Janet Martin Soskice, ‘*Imago Dei* and Sexual Difference: Towards an Eschatological Anthropology’, pp. 297-298 (p. 298). Linda Woodhead writes that ‘since human nature is fulfilled through participation in God, it shares the *mystery of God* – and can never be pinned down’. ‘Apophatic Anthropology’, in *God and Human Dignity*, ed. by R. Kendall Soulen and Linda Woodhead (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), pp. 233-247 (p. 233).

clearly necessary that in this point the image should be able to show its imitation of the archetype'.¹⁸⁶ It is appropriate for Gregory that just as God (the archetype) transcends human comprehension, the nature of our mind (the image) 'evades our knowledge'.¹⁸⁷ Human mystery is also a significant theme in Augustine, for whom the human person was 'a great deep' whose nature 'is more investigated than comprehended'.¹⁸⁸ We should also recall Novak's idea of the *imago Dei* as shadow and his assertion that any of our conclusions about the shadow are tentative until the presence behind the shadow becomes known to us.¹⁸⁹ Our theology of *imago Dei* should retain the focus on the limits of human self-understanding and thus heed the words of Abraham Heschel when he writes that the *imago Dei* refers to mystery, and thus becomes distorted when taken as a 'matter-of-fact description'. The concept becomes caricatured 'when transposed into categories of pedestrian thinking'.¹⁹⁰

There is certainly liberating potential in apophatic anthropology to act as a counter-discourse to the deterministic and prescriptive anthropologies that have eclipsed the potential of women to image God. Our understanding of the concept of *imago Dei* – as male and female – must retain something of the mystery and hesitance that should characterise our statements about God. With this hesitance in mind, we will now draw together some concluding remarks as regards our capacity to image God as male and female.

5.6 Conclusion: Imaging God as Male and Female

At this point, it is apparent that the weight that should be accorded to the corporeal distinction between man and woman remains uncertain. The complexity of the issue at hand, and its relation to Christian theology, is articulated by Janet Martin Soskice as follows:

We must say that, Christologically speaking, women and men cannot be different, for "all will bear the image of the man of heaven". But we must also say that sexual difference is not, or should not be, a matter of theological indifference. Genesis 1

¹⁸⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 5, ed. by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1893), XI.3.

¹⁸⁷ *On the Making of Man*, XI.3.

¹⁸⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, 4:22.

¹⁸⁹ Novak, 'Persons in the Image of God', p. 150.

¹⁹⁰ Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1953), p. 65.

suggests that sexual difference has something to tell us.¹⁹¹

Indeed, the idea that sexual difference is not a matter of theological indifference may be one of the only points of commonality shared by all the thinkers encountered in this chapter. Though divergences emerged in the definition of its meaning, the argument for the importance of sexual difference has remained consistent. Our creation as male and female has implications for the understanding of personhood beyond the reproductive capacities of men and women.

In addition to its efforts towards the discovery and promotion of richer and more diverse language for divinity, feminist theology aims to correct the imbalance in the traditional reason-centred interpretation of *imago Dei* by emphasising the fact that the human body, male and female, also images God. The emphasis on embodiment emerged, as we have seen, in response to the feminist appraisal of dualistic views of personhood in theological texts that denigrated the female body.¹⁹² Feminist thought has uncovered an anthropology that associated women, as Rachel Muers writes, ‘with “the flesh” understood negatively, with matter rather than form, with chaotic emotion rather than divine reason’.¹⁹³ In response to this anthropology, it is argued that ‘women image the divine in the embodied reality of their daily lives including the bodily changes and processes that patriarchal religion has found so difficult to deal with – menstruation, birth, sexual activity, menopause, ageing and death’.¹⁹⁴ In drawing our attention to the dualistic tendencies within the tradition, feminist theologies have worked to recover the sacrality of the female body created in the image of God. We have observed this rediscovery of female sacrality in halakhic feminism, in its efforts to create an intra-feminine space to rearticulate the meaning of *niddah* in order to, as Blu Greenberg writes, restore the ‘element of holiness to our bodies’.¹⁹⁵ We have also seen an effort to renegotiate female

¹⁹¹ Soskice, ‘*Imago Dei* and Sexual Difference’, p. 302.

¹⁹² Ruth Mantin, ‘Theological Reflections on Embodiment’, *Feminist Theology*, 12 (2004), 212-227.

¹⁹³ Rachel Muers, ‘Feminism, Gender and Theology’, p. 435. Francis Martin is critical of this reading of the Christian tradition. Martin concedes that feminism is justified in their opposition to the objectification of women. However: ‘Their attempt to locate the impetus for this degradation within Christianity, however, is one more example of a selective reading of history, based on the myth of total oppression, and filtered through the crystallization process of the Enlightenment. Only an unsparingly unsympathetic reading, determined to avoid all evidence to the contrary, could project upon Christianity itself the fundamentally pagan antipathy toward to body and sexuality that reemerged in the thought of the late Renaissance and Enlightenment.’, Francis Martin, *The Feminist Question: Feminist Theology in the Light of Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 280.

¹⁹⁴ *Introducing Body Theology*, ed. by Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), p. 79.

¹⁹⁵ Greenberg, *On Women and Judaism*, p. 120.

sacrality in the liberal Jewish perspective of Melissa Raphael, in her celebration of the immanent divinity of the female body, the divine made manifest in female 'modes of being and doing', most especially in the face of the Shoah.¹⁹⁶ Feminists within the Roman Catholic tradition, in calling for greater female inclusion in the Church, are also concerned with what Tina Beattie articulates as the 'sacramental significance' of the female body created in the image of God with the capacity to act as *imago Christi*. The female body, according to Beattie, is ordained towards procreation but also, more importantly, to worship, devotion and prayer. 'Only then might we begin to explore the mystery and wonder of our own being, as beings made in the image of God who is also a mystery and wonder'.¹⁹⁷ Beattie's comments point us to the fact that feminist theology, in both the Jewish and Christian contexts, should not lose sight of the object of theology. Thinking theologically about the *imago Dei* entails a broadening of focus beyond, as Judith Plaskow writes, the fruits of gender discrimination.¹⁹⁸

The great complexity of the question of gender necessitates an openness to dialogue on the part of religious communities, an ability to listen, as the Jewish theologian Tamar Ross writes, with faith rather than fear. Regrettably, the lack of openness that we have observed in some cases results, at least in part, from fear. Proponents of gender complementarity adopt an ambivalent stance towards contemporary theories of gender, which they often regard as contradictory to the biblical vision of men and women seeking their reciprocity and complementarity in one another.¹⁹⁹ As articulated by the Calvinist theologian, John Piper, contemporary theories of gender have the potential to destabilize the biblical view of man and woman and, do not, in themselves offer a concrete replacement for this vision:

¹⁹⁶ Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, p. 8.

¹⁹⁷ Tina Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, p. 15.

¹⁹⁸ Noting the largely practical, rather than theological, emphasis of Jewish feminism as it has developed, Plaskow writes: 'If the Jewish women's movement addresses itself only to the fruits but not to the basis of discrimination, it is apt to settle for too little in the way of change. It may find that the full participation of women in Jewish life – should it come – will only bring to light deeper contradictions in Jewish imagery and symbolism'. 'The Right Question is Theological', in *On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader*, ed. by Susannah Heschel (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), pp. 223-234 (p. 224). A similar argument is found in the work of Susan Frank Parsons in 'Accounting for Hope: Feminist Theology as Fundamental Theology', in *Challenging Women's Orthodoxies in the Context of Faith*, ed. by Susan Frank Parsons (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 1-21 (p. 18).

¹⁹⁹ Luis Correa Lima, 'The Language of Creation and Gender', trans. by Francis McDonagh, *Concilium*, 4 (2012), 46-56 (p. 50). 'The conflict between the language of creation and gender theory sets up an opposition between, on the one hand, those who believe in nature as the bearer of a creative reason and in union between man and woman in matrimony as the sacrament of creation and, on the other, those who rebel against gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality, and reject any ontology that gives them a theoretical underpinning'.

A lot of energy is being expended today minimizing the distinctions of manhood and womanhood. But we do not hear very often what manhood and womanhood *should* incline us to do. We are adrift in a sea of confusion over sexual roles. And life is not the better for it.²⁰⁰

There is, perhaps, some truth to this idea that engagement with gender theory unsteadies the certainty with which we can claim knowledge of what manhood and womanhood mean. However, many feminist theologies question the truth of traditionally held ideas of manhood and womanhood and their consistency with the life-giving mission of Christianity and Judaism. Such theologies are also seeking the true meaning of our gendered existence, guided by the vision of our equal capacity to image God. In questioning the rigidity of existing ideas of gender, feminist theology seeks to extend boundaries and to encourage greater inclusion. As Luis Correa Lima writes:

[L]ocal churches, apostolic initiatives and theological reflection can go further and create a church environment favourable to greater change in the future. We should never lose sight of the freedom of the sons and daughters of God and of Jesus' offer of a yoke that is easy and a burden that is light.²⁰¹

The specific identification of *imago Dei* with gender is potentially exclusivist where marriage is regarded as the sole paradigm for male-female relations, since it can cast other relationships in a subordinate light. To draw again from Soskice, 'sexual difference is not just instrumental to marriage or even to the family. It is a good in itself'.²⁰² Though the creation narratives accord a particular status to procreative unions, this status should be understood as a blessing bestowed upon humankind as a species – rather than upon an individual – so that it may continue through generation. This reading of the *imago Dei*, as Alistair McFadyen writes, 'provides no basis for the exclusion of the homosexual, the single and the variously infertile from the image'.²⁰³

The idea of inclusion, so characteristic of feminist engagement with *imago Dei*, is already present within the Jewish and Christian traditions. Feminist theology, through its

²⁰⁰ John Piper, 'A Vision of Biblical Complementarity', in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, pp. 31-60 (p. 33).

²⁰¹ Luis Correa Lima, 'The Language of Creation and Gender', p. 54.

²⁰² Soskice writes that 'sexual difference is a primordial difference, a template for the fruitfulness that can come not when two are the same, but when they are different. For human creatures, as for sea and dry land, light and dark, fecundity is in the interval. *Imago Dei* and Sexual Difference', p. 306.

²⁰³ Alistair McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 38.

work in reclaiming and re-imagining neglected strands of the tradition, heightens the existing Jewish and Christian challenge to embrace the equal dignity of every human person. It thereby critically engages with the wisdom of these traditions which, while contributing to the hierarchical view of the relation between men and women, has also 'sustained generations of foremothers and foresisters in the faith'.²⁰⁴ Jewish and Christian feminist engagement with *imago Dei* reveals the liberating and inclusive character of the concept. Such an approach to *imago Dei* directs us away from the speculative abstraction that has, in the past, justified discrimination, towards an ethic of inclusion that embraces the lived reality of the embodied human person created in the image of God, both immanent and transcendent.

The immanent presence of God, who as Raphael writes, suffers with humankind, is made manifest through our relational embodied existence, particularly through gestures of care. Through appreciation of God's transcendent otherness, we understand, by analogy, the mystery of our own gendered personhood and, ultimately, our capacity for self-transcendence. We are, again, aided by the Patristic language of deification, which envisions a gradual growth in likeness to God, an insight which has been overwhelmed by deterministic anthropologies and obscured by a reductive physicalism. What we are and what we will become cannot be reduced to our corporeality. A theology of sexual difference, while celebrating the goodness of creation, including the good of sexuality, ultimately looks beyond the physical to the mystery of God. Deification implies that we grow into something unknown to ourselves, not into something already possessed. We therefore need to remain hesitant as regards the meaning of sexual difference, resisting the temptation to define and delimit female and male nature, so that we may aid, not impede, our capacity to flourish as men and women created in the image of God. The relationship of sexual difference to human being as *imago Dei* is negotiated in the tension between determinism and apophaticism, between that which has been made known to us and our growth into the unknown. We will carry this insight, and those of the previous chapters, to Chapter Six, which will offer a reflection on the enduring relevance of the concept of *imago Dei* in the context of contemporary theology.

²⁰⁴ Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is*, p. 9.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS:

THE ENDURING RELEVANCE OF THE CONCEPT OF *IMAGO DEI*

Paul Ricoeur remarks that when ‘the theologians of the sacerdotal school elaborated the doctrine of man that is summarized in the startling expression of the first chapter of Genesis – “Let us make man in our image and likeness” – they certainly did not master at once all its implicit wealth and meaning’.¹ Ricoeur’s remark provides us with an appropriate opening for our conclusion, implying as it does the gradual, dynamic character of scriptural interpretation and the possibility that interpreters of a text can uncover meaning that may not have been evident to its original authors. Our analysis of the evolution of the concept of *imago Dei* at some key moments of its theological development has indeed illustrated the wealth and meaning inherent in this powerful symbol. This concluding chapter will survey the central themes that have emerged from previous chapters while also reflecting upon the enduring relevance of the concept of *imago Dei* for contemporary theology. We will begin with a brief survey of our findings in each of the chapters of this thesis.

6.1 Survey of Findings

Drawing upon contemporary Jewish and Christian biblical scholarship, Chapter One explored the scriptural origins of *imago Dei*, primarily Genesis 1:26-27. While acknowledging the interdependence between texts of neighbouring cultures, we identified the theological distinctiveness of the Genesis account of the creation of the person, a distinctiveness that is best served with use of the term ‘democratization’. While parallel literature attests to the theomorphic potential of kings, the Genesis *tselem* ‘Elohim is egalitarian, applying to every human person. The distinctness of Genesis was further illuminated with reference to inter-Biblical contextual material: Israel’s countercultural aniconism, illustrated by the wider biblical use of *tselem* and *demut* to reinforce the prohibition of idolatry, means that the designation of the person as the image of God

¹ Paul Ricoeur, *History and Truth*, trans. by Charles A. Kelbley (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), p. 110.

represents, to draw again from Brueggemann, a 'striking proclamation about God and about humanness'.² Turning then to the text itself, we discussed the tendency in contemporary biblical scholarship to favour the functional interpretation of *imago Dei*, that is, the interpretation that defines the concept according to the explicit biblical commission to rule the created world, thus emphasising the task rather than the gift.

Chapter One also addressed some formative Jewish and Christian interpretations of *imago Dei*, beginning with early Rabbinic writings which alluded to the iconic significance of *imago Dei* and the immanence of God. Such writings emphasised the physical dimension of likeness to God and the consequent importance of respect and care for the body. The writings of Paul constituted the most significant influence upon Christian interpretations of *imago Dei*, offering the framework around which subsequent Christian theology would develop: i) the universal image granted at creation but lost through the sin of Adam; (ii) our growth in likeness through a life modelled on Christ, the true image of God; and (iii) the restoration of humankind to the fullness of the image after death in Christ. Irenaeus and Augustine drew out the implications of the Pauline structure, offering creative theological explorations of the manner in which the human person can image Christ. In both thinkers, we observed the identification of rational capacity as the distinguishing factor of human existence and that which, in purer form, characterised the original ontological state. Though both Irenaeus and Augustine emphasised the goodness of creation, Irenaeus' inclusion of the body in his interpretation of *imago Dei* was, for Augustine, a 'debased and empty' idea (Trin. XII.7.12). Augustine emphasised the fallen nature of humankind, the *massa damnata*, utterly powerless and dependent upon salvation in Christ. Though Irenaeus shared Augustine's idea of dependence on Christ, he developed a more positive theological anthropology based on his idea of likeness as a dynamic moral force that orients us on the pilgrimage of life towards God. Both Irenaeus and Augustine emphasised self-mastery in order to bring ourselves closer to the original state, thus placing in opposition the light of reason and the enslavement to lust (AH V.6.1). Much of what the concept of *imago Dei* would come to mean was already present in the formative Jewish and Christian interpretations surveyed in Chapter One.

The centrality of reason was further emphasised in Chapter Two, which discussed the interpretation of *imago Dei* in the medieval philosophy of Maimonides and Aquinas.

² Brueggemann, *Genesis: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), p. 32.

Illustrating their significant dependence upon Aristotelian epistemology, as well as the fecundity of interfaith engagement on shared concepts, Maimonides and Aquinas both emphasised human intellectual capacities as reflective of the *imago Dei*. Maimonides' conception of *imago Dei* corresponded to the intellect *in actu*, the intellect 'in his most perfect and excellent state', that which survives death. While Maimonides limited the *imago Dei* to those who actualise their intellects, Aquinas developed a tripartite scheme that accorded the image – at its basic level – to every human person. Echoing Irenaeus' process of deification, Aquinas envisioned the development, through grace, of our natural intellectual capacity to know and love God, thus constituting an imperfect reflection of the image of God. This imperfect reflection anticipates the perfect knowledge and love of God and the full reflection of the image in glory. Aquinas' view of actualisation of the image, though ultimately dependent upon grace, also emphasised intellectual perfection, thus resulting in a regrettable exclusion of women from this earthly reflection of the image, the 'stage of grace'. However, like Augustine – and unlike Maimonides – Aquinas envisions the rational soul, our intellectual nature, as the immortal element of our person, which means that his lapse regarding female intellectual capacities was not 'ultimately' consequential. Both Maimonides and Aquinas emphasised the difficulty of attaining the *telos* of human life – knowledge of, and union with, the divine – because of the loss of the perfect reason that characterised the original ontological state and the consequent need for divine assistance, through Torah and through grace.

The loss of the human capacity for God and our complete dependence upon grace are the central ideas around which Karl Barth developed his theology of *imago Dei* in the twentieth century. The idea that we can encounter God through our own abilities – an idea present to different degrees in Aquinas and Maimonides – was anathematic to Barth. Chapter Three explored Barth's relational anthropology and his rejection of natural theology, his scepticism regarding post-lapsarian reason intensified by his experience of post-Enlightenment thought, specifically the deficiencies of 'humanized' and 'idealized' visions of nature as he saw them.³ Barth drew the impetus for his relational understanding of *imago Dei* from his exegesis of Genesis 1:27, though his definition of *imago Dei* in terms of 'male and female' has been contested by contemporary biblical scholars. Though we designated Barth's account of *imago Dei* as 'relational', the relation in question was highly analogical. Our relationship with fellow-humanity places us in a position of

³ Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History*, rev. ed. (London: SCM, 2001), p. 45.

‘similarity-in-dissimilarity’ to Christ to the extent that we can imperfectly reflect the way in which Christ alone is *for* humankind through our efforts at being for other people. For Barth, the only possible relationship between God and humankind referred to the relationship that Christ has formed through his saving work. Barth’s rich reformulation of the concept of *imago Dei* in Christ was hopeful and potentially universal. However, his inability to allow for any form of participation in the being of God in this life – beyond faith in salvation – seems somewhat rigid and contrary to the experience of those who attest to their capacity to encounter God beyond the inter-human realm, through prayer, for example. To recall what Aquinas wrote of Maimonides’ *via negativa*: ‘This is not what people want to say when they talk about God’ (ST I.13.3). Barth’s refusal to consider the implications of *imago Dei* beyond its revelatory context also creates difficulties for those who wish to bring theology, particularly theological anthropology, into dialogue with other faiths and with secular discourse, a priority for David Novak, the subject of Chapter Four.

Though he shares Barth’s prioritisation of revelation, Novak developed his theology around a natural law framework, to increase its effectiveness in dialogical contexts where arguments must be justified according to more universal criteria. Novak’s covenantal interpretation of *imago Dei* attested to the universality of the theomorphic potential of the person, a universality that is also grounded, for Jews, in the Noahide laws. Novak envisioned a relationship of active mutuality between Creator and creature, thereby providing counter-discourse to the arguably problematic lack of reciprocity in the Barthian idea of correspondence. For Novak, human distinctiveness consisted in the fact that we, alone, are addressed by God. God makes claims upon us and we, in a relationship of true correspondence, can make claims upon God. We are active collaborators, not passive recipients. Novak valued the potential inherent in the concept for Jewish-Christian dialogue, though like Barth, he espoused a somewhat negative view of the secular. This overshadowed his ability to appreciate shared concerns, relating to humanity and the common good, between religious communities and secular society.

Chapter Five considered the gendered dimension of our capacity to image God based upon the egalitarianism established in Genesis 1:27. We observed echoes, particularly in Jewish feminist theology, of the Rabbinic idea of the iconic significance of the body, in this case with particular emphasis upon the sacrality and theomorphic potential of the *female* body. We also noted the great diversity of perspectives as regards the theological meaning of sexual difference, drawing in particular upon the insights of

Roman Catholic feminist theology to guide us away from the complementarity model of sexual difference, with its tendency to predetermine male and female roles. Such reinterpretation of the gendered meaning of *imago Dei* centred on a rediscovery of the language of mystery, an apophaticism that translates to anthropology, to help to counter deterministic accounts of gender that have limited the theomorphic potential of women.

This survey has illustrated the theological richness encountered in our exploration of the evolution of *imago Dei*. While these interpretations have extended the boundaries of Genesis 1:26-27, they have, nonetheless, drawn out what Ricoeur refers to as the ‘implicit wealth and meaning’ of the concept of *imago Dei*. Notwithstanding the considerable diversity of interpretation and the differing historical and religious contexts considered, central themes have emerged and recurred throughout this analysis, themes which merit further reflection in the context of contemporary Jewish and Christian theology.

6.2 The Whole Person as the Image of God

Contemporary theology generally attests to the integral unity of the person and the theological relevance of the embodied self, perhaps in reaction to the perception that, as David Fergusson observes, the ‘tradition has been haunted by the notion that the human being is really a “deficient angel” whose destiny is to transcend the physical limitation of other creatures’.⁴ For much of the history of theology, the *imago Dei* was primarily identified with reason. This view of human nature, which we have observed in our account of Patristic and medieval interpretations of *imago Dei*, presupposes an analogy of being and some form of ontological link between God and the human person. Its proponents place the emphasis upon the individual human mind/soul in relation to God, an idea that finds particular resonance in Maimonides who identified the actualised intellect as the immortal facet of human personhood: ‘whereas the thing that after death is separate from matter is the thing that has become actual and not the soul that also comes into being’ (GP I.70).

It is important to note that the proponents of the intellectualist interpretation of *imago Dei* do not develop their view of the concept in abstraction from their understanding of God. Their emphasis on intellect is not akin to an Enlightenment exaltation of human reason, but is rather, as Anna Williams writes, a celebration of ‘the

⁴ David Fergusson, ‘Humans Created According to the *Imago Dei*: An Alternative Proposal’, *Zygon*, 2 (2013), 439 - 453 (442).

beauty of divine Mind, reflected in creation'.⁵ For Maimonides, the intellect was that through which we have the capacity for unity with God (GP III.52). Both Augustine and Aquinas attested to our ultimate dependence on grace to 'lift up' or 'illuminate' the intellect, the need for the mind – in Augustine's words – to be 'enlightened by light from outside itself'.⁶ Though Aquinas emphasises rational capacity, he tempers this idea with his conviction that the 'ultimate goal of the rational creature exceeds the capacity of its own nature'.⁷ Although the *imago Dei* is identified with the intellective soul in these interpretations, it is actually the case that thinkers such as Augustine, Aquinas and Maimonides each interpret human nature in terms which include the person's rational faculties but which also, as Reinhold Niebuhr puts it, 'suggest something beyond them'.⁸ We do not reflect the image of God through our own efforts, but through the grace of God. This point is eloquently summarized in the writings of John Chrysostom: 'Humans possess dignity of rational nature, but this comes to them as a gift, not as something they have earned. Hence there is no natural pre-eminence amongst us, for no good thing is naturally our own.'⁹

Contemporary theology, we have noted, generally resists the division of personhood into body and spirit and the identification of the image with the 'higher' qualities of the person. The Jewish theologian Michael Wyschogrod remarks that the restriction of the person's resemblance to God to rationality or some other non-corporeal aspect of the human person 'would be neither biblical nor Rabbinic'.¹⁰ Wyschogrod writes that the person 'is created by God as a physical being and if there is a human resemblance to God then his body also resembles God'.¹¹ These comments echo the idea of the physical dimension of our likeness to God in early Rabbinic writings and also the

⁵ A. N. Williams, *The Divine Sense: The Intellect in Patristic Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 4.

⁶ Aquinas, ST I.12.4; Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. by H. Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) IV.15.25.

⁷ Aquinas, *Compendium Theologiae*, trans. by Cyril Vollert, (St. Louis & London: Herder, 1947), 144.

⁸ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*, vol. 1, (New York: Cross Road, 1942)

pp. 161-162. Niebuhr's work is illustrative of the fact that questions of rationality were not entirely removed from the interpretation of *imago Dei* in the modern period. Niebuhr retains the centrality of reason but he extends his interpretation of reason to include the idea of self-transcendence, a particularly human capacity brought about through the use of reason. Niebuhr holds that the person 'is something which reaches beyond itself – namely that he is more than a rational creature'. *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. 1, p. 162.

⁹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Philippians 7*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1, vol. 13, trans. by John A. Broadus, ed. by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1889), p.213.

¹⁰ Michael Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise: Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. by R. Kendall Soulen (London: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 171.

¹¹ Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise*, p.171.

emphasis upon the sacrality of the female body in contemporary feminist theology. We can appreciate the theomorphic potential of the body without lapsing into an anthropomorphic idea of God, an idea abhorrent to Maimonides and highly problematic for feminist theologians such as Elizabeth Johnson, who critiqued the over-reliance upon male imagery in our God language. A disembodied account of *imago Dei*, that associates the concept exclusively with particular human attributes such as rationality, is ethically problematic on account of the potential implication that some humans exemplify God's image more than others, or even that some may be excluded entirely. Such exclusivity characterised previous interpretations: Augustine and Aquinas, in their association of women with the lower functions of the human mind, identified the capacity to reflect the image of God as characteristically male.¹² However, although a contemporary theology of *imago Dei* should resist the definition of the concept exclusively in terms of the human intellect, we can still view our intellectual capacities as a part of what it means to image God. There is enduring relevance to the emphasis that Augustine, Aquinas and Maimonides place upon our human efforts to perfect our intellects. Such insights carry implications for our capacity to encounter God through our contemplative efforts, which – in conjunction with *imitatio Dei* – bring us closer to God. Though ultimately dependent upon God, our struggle to experience the presence of the divine also requires effort and – as envisaged by Maimonides' account of intellectual perfection – a certain degree of mental training.

Thus, our intellectual capacity, the beauty of the divine mind reflected in our human mind, is rightly understood as one important facet of our status as *imago Dei*, rather than as the single defining feature. Our human identity is complex and cannot be solely defined according to a single facet of our existence. As David Fergusson argues, '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'.¹³ We must narrate our theological account of human existence rather than defining it according to a single property. Therefore, Fergusson argues, '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'.¹⁴ The concept signifies that humans have a distinctive

¹² Aquinas, ST I.93.4; Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, XI.

¹³ David Fergusson, 'Humans Created According to the *Imago Dei*', p. 440.

¹⁴ Fergusson, 'Humans Created According to the *Imago Dei*', p. 446.

place in the story of divine encounter that follows. It signifies, as identified in the relational interpretations of Karl Barth and David Novak, our identity as the covenant-partners of God, an identity fully explored in subsequent narrative and in relation to God and one another. As Barth writes: ‘God lives in togetherness with Himself, then God lives in togetherness with man, then men live in togetherness with one another’.¹⁵ Relational accounts of *imago Dei*, in Christian theology, often appeal to the doctrine of the Trinity, envisaging the Triune God as reflected in human relation and interaction. Triune interpretations are viewed as dynamic, remedying the static substantive interpretations. This point is illustrated by Richard Middleton as follows: ‘If, however, the God whom human being images is not a simple, single individual with certain internal attributes, but is more like a community of Persons, then it would seem more adequate to conceive of the image in relational terms’.¹⁶ Jewish relational interpretations emphasise the covenantal dimension of the human-divine encounter, envisioned in Novak’s theology as a relationship of active mutuality.

The primacy accorded to rationality for almost all thinkers until the time of Aquinas and Maimonides was motivated by the desire to establish both some similarity or connection between God and the human soul and some distinction between the human person and the rest of creation. Though the appeal to rationality as the defining element of human nature is uncharacteristic in contemporary theology because of the emphasis placed upon the whole person as *imago Dei*, the question of human distinctiveness remains a most pertinent question in establishing the meaning of the concept.

6.3 Articulating a Theocentric Distinctiveness

Today, the idea of human distinctiveness – and certainly the idea of human dominion over the created world – has unmistakably negative connotations. History attests to the fact that humankind is perhaps best distinguished by the unique capacity for destruction of the

¹⁵ Karl Barth, *Table Talk*, ed. by John D. Godsey (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1962), p. 57.

¹⁶ J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, p. 31. David Fergusson suggests that the Trinitarian reading, while advantageous in its avoidance of the potentially hierarchical reason-centred definition of the *imago Dei*, is problematic: ‘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 trinity of God therefore had to be carefully distinguished from creaturely notions of both unity and plurality. The doctrine of the trinity was never intended to be an anthropological construction.’ ‘Humans Created According to the *Imago Dei*’, p. 444.

created world and by the propensity to inflict harm upon fellow humans.¹⁷ Michael Welker articulates this issue as follows: ‘Is the connection between the *imago Dei* and *dominium terrae* in Genesis 1 about nothing other than the sad and brutal truth of the human species, which asserts its strength to prevail biologically and culturally?’¹⁸ The denigration of the created world is identified, in some feminist scholarship, as symptomatic of patriarchy. Welker writes that the ‘long-standing anthropocentrism of our cultures has become manifest as scarcely veiled androcentrism. Ecological concerns and feminist consciousness have brought to an end the naïve or self-satisfied assumption of the preeminent position of “man”’.¹⁹ Although the ecological crisis is a problem to which both sexes contribute, feminist thought has certainly heightened our perception of our connectedness to the created world. Sallie McFague, for example, proposes an ‘ecological anthropology’ that embraces our interdependency and connection to all other living things.²⁰ McFague argues that we should no longer see ourselves as the measure of all things but, rather, as the measurer. We are the ones that can admire and take care of all the rest of creation: ‘What our peculiar distinction has led us to see is that, given our present numbers and power, we have the ability to be either for or against the rest of nature. We are not the only ones who matter, but we are the ones who are increasingly responsible for the others in creation.’²¹ McFague rejects the anthropocentrism that measures other creatures according to their similarity to human beings. All creatures are distinctive. We must therefore move beyond the individualistic anthropology that has characterised the last three centuries, in order to embrace our connectedness to the created world. The following passage from Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s theological exposition of Genesis 1-3 supports McFague’s argument, though she would probably resist the use of the term ‘rule’:

[T]his freedom to rule includes being bound to the creatures who are ruled. The

¹⁷ Douglas John Hall discusses the negative implications of the interpretation of *imago Dei* in terms of human distinctiveness and dominion in *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 21-26.

¹⁸ Michael Welker, *Creation and Reality* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1999), p. 69.

¹⁹ Welker, *Creation and Reality*, p. 60.

²⁰ McFague, *A New Climate for Theology*, p. 48.

²¹ Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), p. 47. Rosemary Radford Ruether, also a proponent of ecofeminism, writes that it is only ‘by understanding how the web of life works can we also learn to sustain it rather than destroy it. This is not simply a task of intellectual understanding, but of *metanoia*, in the fullest sense of the word: of conversion of our spirit and culture, of our technology and social relations, so that the human species exists within nature in a life-sustaining way.’ *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), p. 304.

ground and the animals over which I am lord constitute the world in which I live, without which I cease to be. It is my world, my earth over which I rule [. . .] in my whole being, in my creatureliness, I belong wholly to this world; it bears me, nurtures me, holds me.²²

Should we now move away from a language of human distinctiveness towards that which emphasises our commonality with other creatures?²³ Does this necessitate a weakening of the ontological status of the human person? At this point, we should refer back to the insights of contemporary biblical scholarship as regards the meaning of the *imago Dei*. Such scholarship established that dominion is rightly understood as a theocentric construct, contextualised with reference to the care and stewardship that are inherent in the ideas of divine and royal dominion. Just as divine dominion is characterised by ‘righteousness and justice’ (Ps 89:15) and just as the king should be like ‘rain that falls upon a mown field’ (Ps 72:6-7), the human person should exercise care for the created world on behalf of God, the true owner of the land. Though contemporary theology distances itself from the language of dominion in favour of the more palatable language of ‘stewardship’, the idea of dominion as depicted in Genesis does not imply the denigration of the rest of creation.²⁴ Furthermore, while the Genesis creation account portrays human distinctiveness, it does not neglect our commonality with other creatures. While humankind alone is given dominion over the earth, non-human actors also take their appointed place in this story. Both humans and animals are, for example, formed from the earth and dependent upon it (Gen. 1:30). Similarly, both are commanded to reproduce

²² Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), p. 66.

²³ Alan M.W. Porter offers an interesting analysis of human distinctiveness and non-human capacity to experience God in ‘Do Animals Have Souls? An Evolutionary Perspective’, *The Heythrop Journal*, 4 (2013), 533–542. ‘The work of ethologists suggests that the origin of human moral sense stretches far back in evolutionary history and that the distinction between humans and animals in this respect needs to be much more nuanced than it has been in traditional theological thinking.’ Porter writes that ‘octopuses have an intelligence comparable to chimpanzees, evidence of consciousness, short-term memory, observational learning and abilities in tool-making and communication. Dolphins, crows and black bears also show ingenious behaviour patterns which have aroused the interest of ethologists. By a process of convergent evolution these cephalopods, cetaceans, corvids and ursus seem to possess brains and nervous systems of comparable complexity, if different, to those of higher vertebrates. It is reasonable to ascribe consciousness, awareness and sensory pleasure to them and to other animals and thus the potentiality for ensoulment’. p. 536. See also Celia Deane-Drummond, ‘God’s Image and Likeness in Humans and Other Animals: Performative Soul-Making and Graced Nature’, *Zygon*, 4 (2012), 934-948. George Kateb discusses the issue of ‘speciesism’ in *Human Dignity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011). Though he finds in the ‘speciesist’ argument an appropriate warning against excessive pride in our human identity, it is Kateb’s belief that ‘praiseworthy considerations outweigh those that deflate or shame the human race and that sometimes even make a few thinkers imagine that they wish for its extinction.’, p.viii.

²⁴ R.J. Berry writes that the term ‘stewardship’ is often used as ‘little more than a formal response to environmental situations, without teeth or depth’. *Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspectives – Past and Present*, ed. by R. J. Berry, (London: T&T Clark, 2006), p. 10.

(Gen. 1:22). As we attempt to balance ideas of distinction and connectedness, we can refer back to the elaborate conceptions of the soul that we discussed in Augustine and Aquinas. For Augustine, we recall, all creatures participate in the likeness of God, though likeness increases according to status.²⁵ Though the human person alone possesses a rational soul, the animal soul is ‘admirable and praiseworthy after its own fashion’.²⁶ All creatures, Augustine writes, ‘attain a beauty appropriate to its own kind’.²⁷ Aquinas’s hierarchical view of being also allowed for some form of continuity between human life and the highest form of animal life as well as a relatively high ontological status for animals:

Not only in the apprehensive powers but also in the appetitive there is something which belongs to the sensitive soul in accordance with its own nature and something else according as it has some measure of participation in reason, coming into contact at its highest level of activity with reason at its lowest.²⁸

Human faculties such as memory, Aquinas writes, ‘are not so very different from those in animals only they are heightened’ (ST I.78.4). Though Aquinas views animals as inferior to human beings, and ultimately created for human benefit, they are nonetheless ‘capable of participating in divine goodness in a more eminent way than other inferior things’.²⁹

If we maintain this theocentric idea of distinctiveness, we can reconcile the biblically instituted task of dominion, understood as stewardship, with the urgency of the need to care for the created world without reducing our ontological status. There are good reasons to maintain our distinctiveness, as Robert Jenson writes:

As we destroy crippled horses, so we kill born and unborn children whose mothers for whatever reason do not think they should raise them, or elders who have lost hope and burden the system or their families, or trauma victims in disheartening comas, or persons simply in pain they do not wish to endure or we do not wish to see them enduring. And there is no reason why we should not, if there is no ontological difference between humans and other animals.³⁰

For Jenson, no idea of human uniqueness apart from our uniqueness in relation to God is,

²⁵ Augustine, *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, LI.2.

²⁶ Augustine, *On Free Will*, XXIII.69.

²⁷ Augustine, *On Free Will*, XXIII.69.

²⁸ Aquinas, *On Truth*, trans. by R. Mulligan, B. McGlynn and R. Schmidt (Chicago: Regnery, 1952-54), 25.2.

²⁹ Aquinas, *On Truth*, 2.3. Aquinas’ attitude to animals is discussed by Celia E. Deane-Drummond in *The Ethics of Nature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 65-77.

³⁰ Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 58.

in the long term, sustainable. This is an important point which unifies many of the diverse interpretations considered in this thesis. The quest to articulate this idea of theocentric distinctiveness has manifested itself in different ways throughout our discussion. For covenantal interpretations, such as that of Novak, distinctiveness is identified with the fact that we are addressed by God's moral word and enabled to respond. For Barth, the human creature is distinct from animals only in the theological sense, in that it is the only creature that is *for* God (CD III/2, pp. 70-71). Even where interpreters emphasised our superior human intellectual abilities, they did so in the conviction that such faculties, which exceed the needs of human survival, are intended to lead us to our *telos*, which is apprehension of the divine. Interestingly, Jenson's idea of human uniqueness centres on prayer. The person can be classified as 'the praying animal'.³¹ Further, the 'word that created us human itself establishes our connectedness, and therefore we can respond only *together*; prayer is foundationally corporate'.³² The *imago Dei* is not an individual possession but, rather, a signifier of our connectedness.

The dual understanding of the person, distinct yet connected, characterises the functional approach to the *imago Dei* which, as noted earlier, is the interpretation favoured by most exegetes. This means that the *imago Dei* becomes manifest in our actions as God's representatives on earth. This approach to the concept fosters a sense of human vocation, emphasising, as we have drawn from Gerhard von Rad, the task rather than the gift itself.³³ Theological interpretations, which can legitimately draw out meaning beyond what we learn from biblical scholarship regarding authorial intentions, are not limited to this interpretation.³⁴ As with our appreciation of the insights of the intellectualist approach of the Patristic and medieval thinkers, we can regard our human vocation to care for the created world as another important dimension of the multi-faceted concept of *imago Dei*. Though the ethical dimension of the concept – the task – is important, theologians also need to elaborate the meaning of the gift itself, our innate ontological status. We have discussed in previous chapters the treatment of these two dimensions of the *imago Dei*, ethical and ontological, and the great complexity that the

³¹ Jenson, p. 59.

³² Jenson, p. 59.

³³ Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 58.

³⁴ While it is important to draw of the wisdom of historical criticism, the site of inspiration is not the original author but, rather, the text itself. As Joshua Moritz writes, 'a theological understanding of Scripture as a continuous narrative of salvation history is not even possible if one is to cede hermeneutical primacy to a given text's original intent and primary cultural and historical context'. 'Why Theologians Should Take Biblical Studies Seriously, but not Too Seriously', *Dialog*, 3 (2013), 170-174 (p. 171).

interpretation of the second creation account has brought to the reconciliation of these two facets. The question of the loss of the image has arisen in each interpretation considered in this thesis and will now be discussed in relation to contemporary theology.

6.4 The Corruption of the Image

A central theme in our discussion of the *imago Dei* has been the extent to which our corruption and sin has distorted the image and likeness of God within the person. Even in the earliest interpretations of the concept, we see systematic attempts to come to terms with the paradox of the sinful person imaging God. The interpretation of Genesis 1:26-27 in conjunction with Genesis 2-3 motivated Irenaeus' influential distinction between the terms 'image' and 'likeness'. That which Irenaeus, in continuity with Paul, interpreted as the 'fall' resulted in the loss of our likeness to God, while the image assumed ontological status and a permanency of sorts (AH III.22.4; III.23.5). This distinction was developed in Aquinas, who placed the two terms within the Aristotelian categories of substance and accident. For Aquinas, 'image' referred to our essential rational nature and the 'likeness' to the supernatural gift of righteousness. With similar emphasis upon intellectual attainment, Maimonides proposed that intellectual perfection had been lost through the fall, leaving humankind in need of greater moral instruction (GP I.2). In each of these perspectives, we have observed a clear distinction between the original state of humankind and the fallen state. The negative anthropological implications of the latter have been most definitively articulated by Calvin, who wrote that nothing remains of the *imago Dei* after the fall except what is 'confused, mutilated, and disease-ridden'.³⁵ Barth, in continuity with Calvin, and in the context of his absolute prioritisation of faith, also emphasised the self-contradiction and depravity inherent in human identity, the tension between our reality as the covenant-partner of God and our sinful tendency.³⁶

Arguably, the question of the *imago Dei* has been greatly complicated by speculation as to the actual difference between humankind before the fall (*homo creatus*) and humankind after the fall (*homo peccator*), particularly given the questionable exegetical grounding for such in the Hebrew Scriptures. Chapter One established the fact

³⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.15.4, p. 190.

³⁶ We concluded, as regards Barth, that his pessimism regarding human potential for access to God is best understood in the context of his absolute prioritisation of faith. He firmly believes that any contact between God and the person is impossible outside of the domain of faith. Grace, for Barth, has complete priority over nature. Hence, for Barth, 'one can only speak theologically and not both theologically and also philosophically of this point of contact, as of all else that is real in faith, i.e., through the grace of reconciliation'. *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, p. 239.

that the ‘fall of man’ interpretation of Genesis 2-3 is contested in much contemporary biblical scholarship. As J. Wentzel van Huyssteen writes, the ‘exegesis of these texts shows that the text does *not* even hint at the so-called loss of the image and likeness of God. Moreover, there is no hint even of any distortion of that image’.³⁷ We must ask whether the theological significance of the second creation account has been affected by what we now know about human origins. As David Fergusson argues:

[B]elief 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.³⁸

This type of concern is not unique to contemporary theology, nor even to post-Darwinian thought. We may take the following passage as Augustine’s endorsement of the continuing need for dialogue with the sciences:

It is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics [pertaining to science]; and we should take all means to prevent such an embarrassing situation, in which people show up vast ignorance in a Christian and laugh it to scorn.³⁹

How, Augustine asks, will Christians achieve credibility on matters concerning, for example, the resurrection of the dead if people believe that ‘their pages are full of falsehoods on facts which they themselves have learnt from experience and the light of reason?’⁴⁰ We know that Augustine, working within the parameters of the scientific knowledge of his day, offered an interpretation of the book of Genesis that was open to symbolic or allegorical interpretation and we can only assume that, were he writing today, he would confront the full reality of scientific findings.⁴¹ We are reminded at this point of Novak’s comments regarding Maimonides, that it is ‘a mistake of many current followers of Maimonides to think they can conduct the search for truth using the same tools he

³⁷ J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, *Alone in the World? Human Uniqueness in Science and Theology* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006), p. 135.

³⁸ David Fergusson, ‘Humans Created According to the *Imago Dei*’, p. 441.

³⁹ Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 1:19.

⁴⁰ Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 1:19.

⁴¹ Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 1.19. Discussed by F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 206-8.

used'.⁴² Augustine, and indeed many other thinkers that we have encountered in the preceding chapters, certainly had different tools at their disposal than those that we have today. So, rather than investing in the entirety of what Augustine said, we must instead do as he did in the engagement of contemporary scientific knowledge.

It is interesting to refer to Augustine at this point, since it is his writings that are most renowned for the establishment of a connection between the fall of Adam and the sin of succeeding generations. We discussed, in Chapter One, the attention that modern scholarship has brought to Augustine's reliance upon a mistranslation of the Paul's Greek in the Latin vulgate which rendered 'because all' have sinned (NRSV) as 'in whom [Adam]' all have sinned (Rom 5:12). We have also observed Irenaeus' alternative – though less well-known – interpretation of Genesis 2-3 and his argument against the original perfection of Adam and Eve. For Irenaeus, Adam and Eve were infantile in relation to God. Their perfection, even if it had been granted, would not have been sustainable (AH IV.38.2). It was, however, Augustine's interpretation that enjoyed greater influence.

Original sin, with its connotations of hereditary guilt, is a challenging concept. How did subsequent generations come to bear the sin of Adam? The problematic nature of such 'inheritance', drawn from Augustine (influenced by Ambrose), has been recognised in other thinkers encountered in previous chapters. Both Aquinas and Barth distanced their theologies from the hereditary component of the doctrine on the grounds that it minimises agency. Hereditary guilt, Aquinas wrote, is problematic since 'the fact of having a defect by the way of origin seems to exclude the notion of guilt, which is essentially something voluntary' (ST I-II.81.1). For Barth it has a 'hopelessly naturalistic, deterministic and even fatalistic ring' (CD IV/1, p. 500). Original sin, for Barth, is 'part of the voluntary and responsible life of man' (CD IV/1, pp. 500f.). However, both Aquinas and Barth recognised the fact that the key insight of the doctrine centres upon our need for grace. This led Aquinas to develop the idea that baptism effects the remission of original sin, influential for subsequent Catholic teaching.⁴³

⁴² Novak, 'The Mind of Maimonides', *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*, 90 (1999), p. 27.

⁴³ Aquinas writes that 'by Baptism He takes away from man forthwith the guilt of original sin and the punishment of being deprived of the heavenly vision. But the penalties of the present life, such as death, hunger, thirst, and the like, pertain to the nature, from the principles of which they arise, inasmuch as it is deprived of original justice. Therefore these defects will not be taken away until the ultimate restoration of nature through the glorious resurrection' (ST III.69.3). This thinking manifests in Catholic teaching: 'Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ's grace, erases original sin and turns a man back towards God, but the consequences for nature, weakened and inclined to evil, persist in man and summon him to spiritual

Contemporary theology can develop its concept of human sinfulness without recourse to a literal understanding of the fall that is reliant upon the righteousness of the original 'prelapsarian' state or upon our inheritance of sin from the primordial disobedience of Adam and Eve. Although we may de-emphasise these aspects of the traditional justification for the idea of original sin, the creation accounts still have something of value to teach us about our human existence. A. M. Allchin remarks that although the Fathers would not have the same awareness of the distinction between historical truth and saga that we have today, they would have advised that the significance of biblical stories such as that of Adam and Eve 'lay in what it told us about men, about mankind as a whole, rather than in what it told us of an original pair, historically considered'.⁴⁴ The comments of Richard Swinburne are useful in helping the contemporary reader to take the same approach:

At some stage in the history of the world, there appeared the first creature with hominoid body who had some understanding of the difference between the morally obligatory, the morally permissible (i.e. right), and the morally wrong; and an ability freely to choose the morally right. So much is obvious; since on modern evolutionary views, as well as on all views held in Christian tradition, once upon a time there were no such creatures and now there are some, there must have been a first one. It seems reasonable to consider such a creature the first man; and we may follow biblical tradition and call him "Adam".⁴⁵

What we can take from the second creation account is the same as what we see and know through our own experience, that sin is a reality of human life. As Benedict XVI writes, 'it is enough to think of the daily news of injustice, violence, falsehood and lust. We see it every day. It is a fact'.⁴⁶ This reality of sin is indeed an undeniable fact of human life and a constant biblical theme. Abraham Heschel remarks that 'sentimentality and unreality

battle'. *Catechism*, 405. Barth, in keeping with Calvin, did not envision the remission of original sin through Baptism. He also questioned the practice of infant baptism since baptism, as biblically portrayed, has 'the character of an action in which there is a common affirmation by the candidates of the Gospel preached and received, which involves their conscious and voluntary participation [...] (CD IV.4, pp. 179-80).

⁴⁴ A. M. Allchin, 'The Doctrine of Man – An Eastern Perspective', in *Man: Fallen and Free*, pp. 142-158 (p. 146).

⁴⁵ Richard Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 141.

⁴⁶ The concrete, visible dimension of original sin is well explained by Benedict XVI: 'The empirical fact is that a contradiction exists in our being. On the one hand every person knows that he must do good and intimately wants to do it. Yet at the same time he also feels the other impulse to do the contrary, to follow the path of selfishness and violence, to do only what pleases him, while also knowing that in this way he is acting against the good, against God and against his neighbour'. *General Audience*, 3 December 2008, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/audiences/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20081203_en.htm [accessed 10 July 2014].

have often been considered a distinctly Biblical attitude, while in truth the Bible constantly reminds us of man's frailty and unreliability'.⁴⁷ Heschel cites, for example, Isaiah's 'distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish' (8:22) and Rabbi Hanina's prayer for the welfare of the government as 'were it not for fear thereof, men would swallow each other alive'.⁴⁸ As Paul timelessly describes the self-contradiction at the heart of our nature, 'I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want' (Rom 7:18-19). It is still possible, and arguably very important, for contemporary theology to remain able to speak of a universal disposition towards sinfulness. Further, following the interdisciplinary leanings of contemporary theology, we can begin to draw upon the findings of other disciplines, such as psychology and anthropology, in doing so.⁴⁹ These can be taken into account without sacrificing or minimizing the transcendent intention of theological anthropology. In this, caution is required, as well as clarity as to what 'sin' actually means.

Distinct from a general understanding of wrongdoing, sin is constituted by a violation of the command of God. Sin is a religious category which, when removed from the context of the human-divine relationship, loses its meaning. In comments reminiscent of David Novak's view of religious inclusion in public discourse, Alasdair McFadyen writes that 'if God-talk merely appends itself to an analysis already in place, then renaming as sin that which secular thought identifies as pathological is no more than a rhetorical flourish'.⁵⁰ Certainly, our understanding of sin must be specifically theological if it is to have anything to offer secular discourse: 'It adds precisely nothing at the level of explanation and understanding to baptise and bless conclusions arrived at by secular means for secular reasons'.⁵¹

The theocentric nature of the concept may account for the fact that the language of sin is experiencing something of a decline in some Jewish and Christian contexts. Today, ideas of sin, atonement and sacrifice can be viewed as 'remote, metaphysical abstractions,

⁴⁷ Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence* (New York: Schocken, 1972), p. 146.

⁴⁸ *Abodah Zarah*, 3b-4a, discussed by Heschel, *The Insecurity of Human Existence*, p. 147.

⁴⁹ Jerry D. Korschmeier explores the interaction between original sin and evolutionary science in *Evolution and Eden: Balancing Original Sin and Contemporary Science* (Mawah: Paulist Press, 1998). See also Kenneth Miller, *Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999) and Nicolas Olkovich, 'Reinterpreting Original Sin: Integrating Insights From Sociology and the Evolutionary Sciences', *The Heythrop Journal*, 5 (2013), 715-731 (p. 715). Olkovich recommends an interpretation of original sin and grace that draws upon a synthesis of theological, sociological and sociobiological insights.

⁵⁰ Alasdair McFadyen, *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 11.

⁵¹ McFadyen, *Bound to Sin*, p.11.

and for contemporary interdisciplinary theology are often like pieces in a museum for the history of theological ideas'.⁵² Michael Wyschogrod regrets the disappearance of the category of sin from the context of liberal Judaism:

The reality of sin is therefore a function of the sense of dependence on God. Where this dependence is weakened either because of a loss of belief in the reality of God or because of the growth of the conviction that moral values can be autonomously justified without reference to God, the very concept of sin tends to disappear from discourse.⁵³

These comments are equally applicable to the Christian context. It is interesting to observe the emphasis on sin in Wyschogrod's work, given the fact that Jewish theology is often regarded as less concerned than Christian theology with such questions. This, as Jon Levenson argues, is a misperception:

If the point is that Judaism is optimistic about human nature, regarding the impulse to sin as unrooted in our innate constitution, then the observation is altogether in error and fails to reckon not only with the theological anthropology of the Hebrew Bible but also with the pervasive Rabbinic idea of the *yetzer ha-ra*, or "evil inclination".⁵⁴

Though perhaps clothed in a different culture and language, ideas of human sinfulness are present in Judaism as they are in Christianity. Certainly, given the long history of persecution to which it has been subjected, the Jewish community has particular reason to be mindful of human capacity for evil. While the Augustinian 'original sin' would not be fitting in the Jewish context, Steven Kepnes suggests the word '*galut*' to denote the conditions into which life falls after the sin of Adam. Meaning 'exile', *galut* suggests the limit placed upon our ability to be in free contact with God.⁵⁵ Kepnes argues for the affinity between the Jewish and Christian concepts: 'Like original sin, *galut* cannot be overcome by human will alone; exile will end only when God intervenes to make it

⁵² J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, *Alone in the World?*, p. 117.

⁵³ Michael Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. by R. Kendall Soulen (London: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 60.

⁵⁴ Jon Levenson, 'Did God Forgive Adam? An Exercise in Comparative Midrash', in *Jews and Christians: People of God*, ed. by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 148-171 (p. 164).

⁵⁵ Steven Kepnes, 'Original Sin, Atonement and Redemption in Jewish Terms' in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, ed. by Tikva Frymer-Kensky, David Novak, Peter Ochs, D. Fox Sandmel, and M.A. Signer (Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), p. 295.

end.’⁵⁶

The Rabbinic exegesis of the expulsion from Eden describes the exile of the divine presence (*Shekhinah*) because of Adam’s sin, resulting in an upheaval of the divine and cosmic reality.⁵⁷ While the traditional understanding of exile relates to the separation of the Jewish people from the Land of Israel, the Jewish sources also reveal a different meaning of exile, applicable to every human person. In this sense, exile does not necessarily refer to separation from a geographical place but as Yehoyada Amir writes, ‘a sense of helplessness in the face of external forces over which one has no control and one is powerless to direct.’⁵⁸ Amir sees in the Holocaust the ‘the cruelest and most definitive sense of exile in the widest sense’.⁵⁹ The language of human sinfulness in Judaism offers some interesting resources for Christian theology in its efforts to address the difficult question of original sin.

To conclude this point regarding the loss of the image, we maintain that, as an ethical concept, both the fulfilment and the distortion of the image remain, to some extent, within our reach. The *imago Dei* is both an ontological and an ethical structure which points both to what we are and what we have been commissioned to do. It has a present reality within the human person but also a future potentiality. This dual understanding of the *imago Dei* justifies the retention of the traditional distinction between ‘image’ and ‘likeness’. In contemporary discourse, we might regard ‘image’ as an absolute term and ‘likeness’ as qualitative.⁶⁰ While every human person has been born in the image of God, each one had the potential to grow into the ‘likeness’ of God and, conversely, to diminish this likeness through sin. It stands to reason that the evil we choose distorts God’s image within us. However distorted, though, the image cannot be lost. In Augustine’s words: ‘Whether this image be so worn out as to be almost none at all, or whether it be obscure

⁵⁶ Kepnes, ‘Original Sin, Atonement and Redemption in Jewish Terms’, p. 296. Exile is a central concept in Judaism, both in the Torah and in the rabbinic period in the attempt to reconstruct Judaism after the destruction of the Temple. Exile and the desire for redemption pervade the entirety of the Jewish liturgy. See also Richard L. Rubenstein, ‘The Human Condition in Jewish Thought and Experience’ in *The Human Condition in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. by Frederick E. Greenspahn, (Hobokon: KTAV Publishing House, 1986), p. 5.

⁵⁷ *Midrash Rabbah*, *Genesis*, 19.8.

⁵⁸ Yehoyada Amir, ‘The Concept of Exile as a Model for Dealing with the Holocaust’, in *Wrestling with God: Jewish Responses During and After the Holocaust*, ed. by Steven T. Katz, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 305-318 (p. 310).

⁵⁹ ‘It places humanity in an impotent position within a horror deriving from the fact that that which is good and represents the beautiful has been completely nullified, that fundamental values are shattered, and that within the world of the Holy One blessed be He, God is not even left with the four cubits of the *Halakhah* intact’. ‘The Concept of Exile as a Model for Dealing with the Holocaust’. p. 316.

⁶⁰ Fraser Watts, ‘Human Dignity: Concepts and Experiences’, in *God and Human Dignity*, ed. by R. Kendall Soulen and Linda Woodhead (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), pp. 247-263 (p. 253).

and defaced, or bright and beautiful, certainly it always is' (Trin. XIV.4).

A contemporary account of original sin in Christian theology can abandon the idea of hereditary guilt while retaining its component elements which are, firstly, the universal nature of concupiscence and, secondly, the need for sanctifying grace. Interestingly, both of these find strong parallels in Jewish theology. To draw again from Novak, 'it can be asserted that both Judaism and Christianity are convinced that humans are doomed if basically left to their own devices; that grace is a necessity for the human condition. The difference between them, one that is even more crucial than the imaginary one just mentioned, is whether one is connected to the grace of God by the Torah or by Christ'.⁶¹ Thus the question of Christ's restoration of the image is an obvious distinguishing factor between Jewish and Christian theological engagement with the concept of *imago Dei*. The discussion will now proceed to the function of the *imago Dei* as a Jewish and Christian concept and the effect that the Christological appropriation of the image may have upon the sense of commonality inherent in the concept.

6.5 Christological Appropriation: Jewish Reflections

Christian theology, we have discussed, associates the fullness of the image of God with the person of Christ. In Chapter One, we noted the New Testament passages that identify Christ as the true image (*eikon*) of God, Colossians 1:15; 1 Corinthians 15:49; 2 Corinthians 4:4 and Hebrews 1:3. These passages infer that we receive the fullness of the image as we are raised to new life in Christ. The concept of *imago Dei* works as a systematic principle, as a unifying force in some Christian theology, expressed particularly neatly in Jürgen Moltmann's concepts of the created image, the messianic image and the eschatological image.⁶²

Though important for Christian theology, the Christological appropriation of the image does not need to obscure the commonality of the concept of *imago Dei* as found in the Hebrew Scriptures. It is possible to understand Paul's identification of the image with

⁶¹ Novak, *Natural Law in Judaism*, p. 31.

⁶² See Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), pp. 215-243. Moltmann, an exponent of the eschatological approach to *imago Dei*, writes that 'the image of God is the whole person, the embodied person, the person in his community with other people, because in the messianic fellowship of Jesus, people become whole, embodied and social human beings, whom death no longer divides into soul and body, and whom death no longer divides from God and from one another'.⁶² Being human, for Moltmann, means becoming human. Though this process of becoming will only be completed after death, we already live, here and now, in the process of resurrection. For Moltmann, the likeness to God is revealed not at the beginning of God's history with humankind, but at the end. *God in Creation*, pp. 225-27.

Christ as a distinct use of image language in order to commute an eschatological idea, quite distinct from the original use of the concept in Genesis. Paul's use of image language intends to portray the idea that we are transformed in Christ and elevated to the state that God intends. It is possible to understand the two uses – Hebrew Bible and New Testament – quite distinctly.⁶³ This helps us to avoid an overemphasis on the fact that Jesus restored what was lost in the Garden of Eden and the need for parallelism between the historical Jesus and the unhistorical Adam.⁶⁴ Christian theology should also be sensitive to the salvific claims of Judaism. Jon Levenson's comments regarding the Pauline view that sin reigned unchallenged from Adam to Jesus – 'Abraham's faith and Moses' Torah notwithstanding' – are instructive:

The good news, to put it directly, is that Jesus saves. The bad news is that everything else damns, since there was no forgiveness before his great reversal of universal sin. To any reader of the Scriptures (as Paul would call the book that Christians would later term the "Old Testament"), this is, to be sure, a puzzling claim. For Paul's Scriptures offer abundant evidence that their God is, in the words of Exodus 34:6-7, "a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity, continuing his kindness for a thousand generations, and forgiving wickedness and crime and sin".⁶⁵

For Jews, the Torah, the commanded word of God, and for Christians, Christ the Word made flesh, are both answers to the same question, articulated by Meir Soloveichik as follows: 'How does finite, physical, fallible man relate to an infinite, immaterial and infallible God?'⁶⁶

Though the Incarnation is the defining doctrine of the Christian faith, it should not be isolated from its Jewish context, specifically, God's indwelling in Israel. Joel Kaminsky argues for this contextual dependence, also alluding to the contentious issue of the claim to the land of Israel:

The promise of the land receives tremendous emphasis within the biblical text and rightly remains a central theme in postbiblical Jewish theological reception. While some contemporary Christians remain uncomfortable with this emphasis, one needs to recognize that incarnational ideas so prevalent in Christianity grew out of and only make sense in relation to the theology of the land and other location oriented

⁶³ Regarding the New Testament use of image language, James Barr writes that it is 'difficult or impossible, however, to say that these terms, though verbally almost identical, refer directly to the same image of God in which humanity was, according to Genesis, created'. *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 164.

⁶⁴ David Fergusson, 'Humans Created According to the *Imago Dei*', p. 447.

⁶⁵ Jon D. Levenson, 'Did God Forgive Adam?', p.160.

⁶⁶ Meir Soloveichik, 'Torah and Incarnation', *First Things*, 206 (2010), 44-48 (p. 45).

theological streams like those that surround the temple.⁶⁷

While Christians need to recognise this contextual dependence, the connection between the Incarnation and God's indwelling in Israel can also encourage Jewish reflection on possible areas of commonality as regards such distinctively Christian or Jewish concepts. Michael Wyschogrod's work is exemplary in this regard: 'The doctrine of the incarnation thus separates Jews and Christians but, properly understood, also sheds light on incarnational elements in Judaism which are more diffuse than the Christian version but nevertheless very real'.⁶⁸ Wyschogrod argues that the 'Christian teaching of the incarnation of God in Jesus is the intensification of the teaching of the indwelling of God in Israel by concentrating that indwelling in one Jew rather than leaving it diffused in the people of Jesus as a whole'.⁶⁹ Ultimately, however, for Wyschogrod, 'such a severing of any Jew from his people is a mistake because, biblically, God's covenant partner is always the people of Israel and not an individual Jew'.⁷⁰ Wyschogrod's willingness to uncover some hospitality for incarnational ideas in Judaism is a positive example of the progress being made in Jewish-Christian theological dialogue, as is his recognition of the vast differences between the faiths on this matter. Wyschogrod emphasises the commonality inherent in the *imago Dei*. He writes that the 'image of God that is impressed on all human beings, Jew and gentile, is the first and possibly most fundamental sign of God's love of man'.⁷¹ David Novak's comments regarding Jewish-Christian dialogue accord well with Wyschogrod's approach:

Some Jews and Christians are now able to recognize the otherness of the other community as something to be respected rather than feared. And they are now able to recognize enough commonality in terms of common past origins, common present concerns, and common hopes for the future to enable a genuinely mutual relationship to take root and grow.⁷²

A further example of the shift from the context of polemic to one of dialogue in Jewish-

⁶⁷ Kaminsky, 'The Theology of Genesis', p. 348.

⁶⁸ Michael Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise*, p. 178.

⁶⁹ Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise*, p. 178. James Barr also suggests that the Incarnation could only have emerged from its Jewish context, where God and the human counterpart were held apart from one another by a long tradition of divine transcendence. *Old and New in Interpretation: A Study of Two Testaments* (London: SCM, 1982), pp. 34-64.

⁷⁰ Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise*, p. 178.

⁷¹ Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise*, p. 171.

⁷² David Novak, 'When Jews are Christians', in *Talking With Christians: Musings of a Jewish Theologian* (London: Eerdmans, 2006), pp. 218-229 (p. 218).

Christian theological relations is exemplified in the work of Alon Goshen-Gottstein, who attempts to extract the Incarnation from its doctrinal content in order to uncover the wider religious sense inherent in the belief. He argues that the Incarnation is dependent upon the shared Jewish and Christian belief in the goodness of human life, the humility of God, the presence of God and most importantly, the love of God:

The incarnation expresses a relation that, by the Christian's account, is grounded in love. I would therefore postulate that until I, as a Jew, am able to hear in the talk of the incarnation the ground of love from which it springs, I have not yet heard what the Christian is attempting to say.⁷³

Like Wyschogrod, Goshen-Gottstein also regards the Torah and Israel as signifying an incarnating presence for Judaism.

The suggestion of some degree of openness to incarnational ideas in Judaism is not intended to minimise the serious objections many Jewish theologians hold to the idea of the Incarnation. As Goshen-Gottstein argues, for many Jewish thinkers, the Incarnation represents an obstacle 'to Jews' re-owning Jesus as a teacher of their own tradition, for it casts Jesus in a light that is not only foreign but also discontinuous and removed from his own Jewish roots'.⁷⁴ Meir Soloveichik argues that even though Christianity has been traditionally regarded as the 'spiritual' religion in contrast to the perceived carnality of Judaism, the practice of Eucharist suggests otherwise: 'Those who partake of the Eucharist enter into communion with what they believe to be God's physical body. Jews reject the notion that God might take bodily form and instead seek to commune with they believe to be his infinite mind'.⁷⁵ There is a radical difference and, for Soloveichik, a great incompatibility between Jewish theology and the Christian understanding of Eucharist:

For Christians [through the Eucharist] the gap between finite man and infinite God is thereby bridged; for Jews, Christians are succumbing to the temptation that Deuteronomy warns against: seeking to bridge to gap between man and God through finite means.⁷⁶

Such differences are significant and, for the present, irreconcilable. This should not,

⁷³ Alon Goshen-Gottstein, 'Judaisms and Incarnational Theologies: Mapping out the Parameters of Dialogue', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 3 (2002), 219-240 (p. 224).

⁷⁴ Goshen-Gottstein, 'Judaisms and Incarnational Thinking', p.240.

⁷⁵ Meir Soloveichik, 'Torah and Incarnation', p. 48.

⁷⁶ Meir Soloveichik, 'Torah and Incarnation', p. 48.

however, reduce the significance of the commonality in Jewish and Christian views of personhood. Both share the common belief in the irreducible sanctity of human life by virtue of our creation in God's image. This belief tempers any particularistic tendencies of both faiths, reminding us that for Jews and for Christians, the *imago Dei* is a universal concept that relates to every human person. We recall the original context of the biblical concept of *imago Dei*, in particular the countercultural universalism, the democratization of status and dignity. Therefore the *imago Dei*, properly understood, institutes a strong sense of unity, unity as a prelude to the multiplicity and as the context for the diverse cultures that would subsequently emerge. Thus we address our final point: Can Jews and Christians relate the *imago Dei* to the multiplicity? Does the concept have any relevance in a non-religious context?

6.6 *Imago Dei* and Human Dignity: Seeking a Broader Application

With the insights of Novak's theology particularly in mind, this chapter will conclude with a brief discussion of the universal relevance of the concept of *imago Dei*. What contribution can the concept of *imago Dei* and the biblical view of the person make towards a multi-disciplinary appraisal of human nature? As Joel B. Green asks, when 'neurobiology speaks not only to the issues of memory and circadian rhythms, but also to topics formerly reserved for theology, like free will and responsibility, personal identity and religious experience, or empathy and altruism, what space is left for the biblical theologian?'⁷⁷

Green's question aptly articulates our concern, though its phrasing is somewhat unfortunate. Theology should not be restricted to the 'space that is left', those areas that are not yet occupied by the natural sciences. As discussed in the context of human disposition to sinfulness, theology and the sciences may investigate some of the same questions, though they may do so in different and, one would hope, equally valid ways. Each perspective is of potential value. This only becomes problematic when, as Green argues, 'theological studies masquerade as empirical science, or when empirical science confuses its physical findings with metaphysical accounts'.⁷⁸ Theological reflection has the potential to be enriched through engagement with the sciences as regards, for example, the point of human distinctiveness from other creatures. J. Wentzel van Huyssteen writes

⁷⁷ Joel B. Green, 'Humanity – Created, Restored, Transformed, Embodied' in *Rethinking Human Nature, A Multidisciplinary Approach*, ed. by Malcolm Jeeves (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2011), pp. 271-294 (p. 272).

⁷⁸ Green, 'Humanity – Created, Restored, Transformed, Embodied', p. 272.

that 'it is precisely in contemporary palaeoanthropological notions of human uniqueness that theology may find a transversal link to a revisioned notion of an embodied *imago Dei*'.⁷⁹ Interestingly, Van Huyssteen argues that the quest for meaning and even the quest 'for "religious fulfilment"' certainly plays a crucial role in the way paleoanthropologists today are arguing for human uniqueness as revealed in the complex history of *Homo sapiens*.⁸⁰

Our view of human distinctiveness has been, and continues to be, affected by the findings of science. However, the general acceptance of Darwinism, which presupposes that the human being, as descended from other primates, exists in continuity with other species and is likely to illustrate this continuity through certain dispositions or behaviours, does not need to threaten the importance that we attach to the idea of human dignity.⁸¹ Fraser Watts argues that such a sense of threat arises from a confusion between absolute and qualitative forms of dignity. Darwinism is seen as an absolute statement about dignity: because we are descended from animals, we *are* animals. For Watts, this is mistaken:

The conclusions that can properly be drawn about human beings from such premises are qualitative ones, not absolute ones. Our genes, our neurons, our basic instincts, and so on affect how we *function* qualitatively as human beings, but they do not yield absolute, ontological conclusions about what we *are*.⁸²

In this citation, Watts is getting to the heart of what a theological account of human nature has to contribute. We recall, at this point, Barth's firm resistance of any form of reductive anthropology and suggest that this is perhaps the particular contribution that a theology of personhood can make in an inter-disciplinary account of human nature. This contribution is, however, necessarily limited since the *imago Dei* loses its meaning when removed from its theological context. It is interesting to note Alistair McFadyen's observation, as regards the *imago Dei*, that it is 'surprising how speedily functioning and active reference

⁷⁹ J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, *Alone in the World?*, p. 149. Van Huyssteen also writes that 'scientific notions of human distinctiveness may help us ground theological notions of human uniqueness in the reality of flesh-and-blood, real-life experiences, and in this way help protect theological reflection from esoteric and exotically baroque abstractions when trying to revision the notion of *imago Dei*.' p. 113.

⁸⁰ Van Huyssteen, *Alone in the World?*, p. 141.

⁸¹ Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (London: Harper Press, 2011). See also Jon H. Roberts, 'Religious Reactions to Darwinism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Science and Religion*, ed. by Peter Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 80-103. For a discussion of the Jewish context, see *Jewish Tradition and the Challenge of Darwinism*, ed. by Geoffrey Cantor and Marc Swetlitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

⁸² Fraser Watts, 'Human Dignity: Concepts and Experiences' p. 253.

to God can effectively be evacuated even from a term that includes explicit verbal inflexion referring to God'.⁸³ There are, however, contexts where the concept of human dignity provides us with a more useful point of reference. Though the *imago Dei* does not directly translate or correspond to the idea of human dignity, it does provide its philosophical grounding for Jewish and Christian theology. Theologically speaking, human dignity is derivative, not foundational and its invocation is not an attempt to secularise the *imago Dei*.⁸⁴

Although a theological account of human nature should certainly contribute to the protection of life, it is not alone in doing so. Not all non-theological anthropologies lead to what Robert Jenson terms 'anthropological nihilism'.⁸⁵ Nor does the *imago Dei*, as Novak has argued, directly contradict all secularist notions of personhood. While a theological anthropology offers distinct ideas as regards our origins and our ultimate destination, religious and secular anthropologies are not necessarily contradictory as regards esteem for life or ethical obligation. George Kateb's philosophy, for example, consciously abstracted from any theological underpinning, emphasises the value of human life:

[H]uman beings have an incomparably higher dignity. They matter more because of what they are: members of the human species, with the unique and incomparable traits and attributes of the species. In being partly and commendably nonnatural, a human being has an incomparably higher status than any animal. If human beings matter more, their suffering matters more.⁸⁶

There are, of course, countless examples of secular initiatives that fulfil the practical implications of this statement and we also note that human dignity is the foundational principle of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.⁸⁷ Certainly, human dignity,

⁸³ Alistair McFadyen, 'Imaging God: A Theological Answer to an Anthropological Question', *Zygon*, 4 (2012), 918–933 (p. 919).

⁸⁴ Maureen Junker-Kenny, 'Does Dignity Need a Theological Foundation?', in *The Discourse of Human Dignity*, ed. by Regina Ammicht-Quinn, Maureen Junker-Kenny, Elsa Tamez, (London: SCM Press, 2003).

⁸⁵ Jenson describes in the dangers of 'anthropological nihilism' in the context of the Holocaust: 'The Nazis' genetic estimates were bizarrely mistaken. But suppose they had not been, suppose they were established with the sort of certainty appropriate to relevant science that Jews – or Norwegians or Bantus – or the inhabitants of some island – are on average inferior in intellectual and cultural capability, as any relatively self-contained strain of *homo sapiens* of course might very well be, would the Nazi program then be justified? Perhaps if it were less cruelly managed than by the Nazis? Perhaps if the undesirable strain were simply prevented from reproducing?' *Systematic Theology*, p.57.

⁸⁶ Kateb, *Human Dignity*, p. 23.

⁸⁷ This is established in the preamble to the Declaration where it is written that 'recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world'. The 'disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in

where invoked in relation to the vindication of human rights, must have the capacity to transcend religious difference. Therefore, the absence of an explicit dependence upon any particular revelation in a secular account of dignity maximises the potential for the universal acceptance of the concept. Given the urgent nature of the universal acceptance of this common bond, it is important for Jews and for Christians to work in partnership with those for whom the worth of human life is a priority. Jews and Christians undertake this work in the knowledge that every person is worthwhile on account of being, as Heschel phrases it, a 'disclosure of the divine'.⁸⁸ Or, as Barth writes, we need to think of 'every human being, even the oddest, most villainous or miserable, as one to whom Jesus Christ is Brother and God is Father; and we have to deal with him on this assumption'.⁸⁹ This is an appropriate point of conclusion since it brings to focus the core meaning of the concept of *imago Dei* which transcends the diversity of interpretations considered in this thesis. The concept of *imago Dei* points us to God since it implies a reflection of the mystery of God in humankind. The concept thus implies human worth, human relatedness and human vocation.

6.7 Final Reflection

In this concluding chapter, we have surveyed the insights of the previous chapters and also reflected on the central themes of the thesis in the context of contemporary theology. As stated in the Introduction, there are many significant voices whose inclusion would have extended and enriched the narrative presented in this thesis. Theological concepts have also emerged that merit further reflection beyond this study. We have, for example, touched upon interesting themes that could enrich Jewish-Christian theological dialogue: original sin and its parallels in Jewish theology; interaction between incarnational theology and Jewish ideas of Divine Indwelling; the compatibility of philosophy and revealed wisdom; and commonalities and divergences regarding the concept of grace. Further, while our conclusions regarding the theological meaning of sexual difference were tentative and intentionally uncertain, there is much that is yet to be explored as

barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people'. <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/> [accessed 11 July 2014].

⁸⁸ 'A person is not just a specimen of the species called *Homo sapiens* [...] The human is a disclosure of the divine, and all men are in one God's care for man. Many things on earth are precious, some are holy, humanity is the holy of holies. To meet a human being is an opportunity to sense the image of God, the presence of God.' *No Religion is an Island: Abraham Joshua Heschel and Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. by H. Kasimow and B. Sherwin (New York: Orbis, 1991), p. 7f.

⁸⁹ Barth, 'The Humanity of God', p. 53.

regards the meaning of our gendered creation in the image of God. There is a need to further elaborate the truth that the fullness of divine life and creativity is reflected in our gendered human life, that which Janet Soskice refers to as the 'as yet unsung glory of Genesis 1:26-7'.⁹⁰ The question of the ontological status of the person within, yet apart from, the created world is also a potentially fruitful area of further inquiry. So too is the quest to further articulate the meaning of theocentric distinctiveness in a manner that is grounded in revealed wisdom, but whose language also has the capacity to function in an interreligious and non-religious context. It would also be worthwhile to consider, in greater depth, the challenge that radical disruptions pose to ontological and ethical approaches to *imago Dei*, a question that emerged in our discussion of Raphael's engagement with the Shoah.

This thesis has taken a narrative approach, proceeding from the assumption that the wisdom and value that is inherent in the biblical concept of *imago Dei* has been drawn out, shaped and re-shaped, through centuries of intellectual engagement in the Jewish and Christian religious traditions. While each of the perspectives considered in this thesis have been shaped by their particular historical and religious contexts, we have engaged with them as living voices that still have the potential to enrich contemporary theology. The diversity of perspective that we have encountered has illustrated that there are many ways to articulate the mystery of our creation in the image of God: our stewardship and creativity; our intellectual capacities; our sexuality and our bond with our fellow humans; our capacity for union with God. Like the many names and images for God, the varying interpretation of *imago Dei* in the Jewish and Christian traditions can be positively regarded as a range of resources from which to draw in our articulation of a contemporary theological anthropology. We must narrate our theological account of human existence rather than defining it according to a single property, thus remaining open to the dimension of mystery inherent in human personhood. A contemporary account of the *imago Dei* should thus include its relational, functional and practical elements, while avoiding the over-determination of meaning that has characterised some previous interpretations. It should also attest to the dual intention of the concept, ontological and ethical, thus reflecting our status, our vocation and our ultimate destination.

⁹⁰ Soskice, '*Imago Dei* and Sexual Difference', p. 304.

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