Jesus Christ, the *Imago Dei* Eternally and Incarnationally

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Introduction

The testimony of the Bible reveals an important connection between anthropology and Christology. The Old Testament (OT) opens with the account of creation, culminating in the creation of humanity created in God's own image (Gen 1:27). A great deal of ink has been spilled by individuals seeking to discern what constitutes this image through the centuries. Beyond two additional references within the book of Genesis, little is revealed within the OT about this reality that humanity is unique among God's creation because of being created in God's image and likeness. There is no explicit reference to Jesus' relationship to the *imago Dei* found in the OT. The New Testament (NT) affirms the creation of humanity in God's image while adding a wrinkle to the mystery. Jesus is clearly identified as *the* image of God (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15). Richard Middleton observes that in the NT, "only two texts speak of human *creation* in God's image (1 Corinthians 11:7 and James 3:9). The rest either exalt Christ as the paradigm (uncreated) image of God, or address the salvific renewal of the image in the church."[1] In addition, Marc Cortez points out: "The image of God has long been one of the primary ways in which theologians have connected Christology to

anthropology, viewing Jesus as the ultimate expression of this fundamental anthropological truth."[2] Essential to this connection between anthropology and Christology is the *imago Dei*.

Cortez's comments affirm the important connection between anthropology and Christology highlighting the *imago Dei* as central to that connection. Still, questions remain regarding similarities and distinctions between the image as it relates to Christ and as it relates to humanity. For example, is Christ the image of God because of the incarnation or is "image" something that has been identified with the second person of the Trinity eternally? Further, is the term "image" as it relates to the second person of the Trinity a description or a proper name? Additionally, if the Son is identified as "eternal image" then what is the relationship between the eternal image and the incarnational image? These are important questions when considering Christology, anthropology, and the *imago Dei*.

Several church fathers pick up on the NT truth that Jesus is the image of God and recognize the importance of addressing the above stated questions and other nascent questions. Irenaeus considered Jesus the perfect image of the Father. Though not explicitly stating that Jesus is the true and full image of God, he implies it writing, "the Father was shown forth through the Word Himself who had been made visible and palpable … for the Father is the invisible of the Son, but the Son the visible of the Father."[3] It becomes clear from Irenaeus's writings that he affirms the Son images the Father in the incarnation. He also establishes his belief that the second person of the Trinity is the eternal image of God. In Book II, writing in opposition to the Gnostics, Irenaeus uses the terms "Logos" and "Word" in reference to the Son, calling him "the eternal Word of God," reflecting a connection to the Gospel of John.[4] He returns in Book IV to this language stating, "the Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit, were always present, by whom and in whom he freely and spontaneously made all things — to whom he said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness' [Gen 1:26]."[5] It appears from these excerpts that Irenaeus understands the Son as the eternal image of the Father. Athanasius is more explicit in calling the Son the eternal image of the Father. Writing against the Arians, he takes a negative approach by showing that "if He be not Son, neither is He Image,"[6] implying positively that he is both Son and Image. Athanasius proceeds to make a case for the eternality of the Son and Image concluding, "since

He is not a creature, but the proper offspring of the Essence of that God who is worshipped, and His Son by nature … the Father is seen in Him."[7] Athanasius understands the Son as the eternal offspring of the Father and the express image of the Father's essence eternally. These, and other church fathers, begin to unpack the foundational importance of the second person of the Trinity as the image of God for revelation and redemption.[8] Through the centuries many have built upon or reacted against the insights provided by these giants of the faith revealing the ongoing need to mine the depths of the important connection between anthropology and Christology as revealed in the *imago Dei*.

This article will continue the pursuit of a biblically and historically grounded response to the relationship between these theological categories in light of the *imago Dei*, focusing on emphasizing that Jesus Christ is the eternal image of God who functions both as the ontological self-expression of the Father within the Trinity and as the archetype and destiny of humanity revealing the essential nature of embracing the Son as eternal image for both revelation and redemption.

To accomplish this thesis, I will begin by exploring several NT references that connect Christ and image of God language in hopes of establishing the Bible's presentation of the relationship of Jesus and the *imago Dei*. Next, I will look to the incarnation in which the second person of the Trinity assumed humanity created in the image of God and how the two images, eternal and incarnational, exist in the same person, as well as investigating the implications of this union. I will then proceed to explore the question of whether the image related to the second person of the Trinity should be understood as a description or a proper name by examining representative scholars from each camp and evaluating their position in relation to the biblical testimony. Finally, I will bring together the preceding sections, drawing conclusions from the material covered that specifically relate to revelation and redemption.

New Testament References to Christ, the Image of God

It is appropriate to begin this study of the second person of the Trinity, the living Word (John 1:1), by looking at the testimony of the written Word (2 Tim 4:15; Heb 4:12), specifically the NT, to understand the relationship of

the image of God and the Son. In this vein Stephen Wellum aptly observes: "God has revealed the identity of Jesus only in Scripture and through its structured storyline."[9] He notes additionally: "We must have the Bible's self-presentation of Jesus to know the real Jesus."[10] This conviction assumes that the written Word, the Bible, is the infallible, inerrant, authoritative revelation of God to humanity by which he is known. If this is true, and the author believes it is, then there is no better place to begin the search for clarity regarding the Son and the *imago Dei* than with the Scriptures.

Colossians 1:15

Paul writing to the believers at Colosse says of Jesus, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation" (Col 1:15, ESV). The brevity of this verse should not be grounds for dismissing the significance of what it contains. The verse is the fountainhead of a passage that F. F. Bruce calls "one of the great Christological passages of the NT."[11] Douglas Moo adds that this passage is "one of the christological high points of the New Testament."[12] As such, this verse will serve as the entry point for a biblical understanding of the Son and the image.

Verse 15 begins with the relative pronoun ὅς, "he", which begs the question, to whom is Paul referring? Given the shift of focus in the second half of 1:14 to "his beloved Son," one can safely conclude that the pronouns from this point through the end of 1:20 are referencing the Son, the second person of the Trinity. James Dunn notes that the switch from God to Christ "made it possible to attach the lengthy hymnic description of Christ."[13] It is appropriate, therefore, to insert "the Son" for "he" and conclude that the Son is the image. This "he," the Son, is the image, εἰκὼν. *Eikōn* has a range of meanings. The one that is fitting here is Arndt's second meaning of *eikōn* — "that which has the same form as something else, living image."[14] This meaning is suitable here and in 2 Corinthians 4:4 which will be examined later. Kenneth Wuest further develops the depth of this word, "*eikōn* (εἰκων) implies an archetype of which it is a copy. The *eikōn* (εἰκων) might be the result of direct imitation like the head of a sovereign on a coin, or it might be due to natural causes like the parental features in the child, but in any case, it was derived from its prototype." Wuest connects this understanding to the relationship of the Father and the Son: "The Lord Jesus is therefore the image of God in the sense that as the Son to the Father He is derived by eternal generation

in a birth that never took place because it always was." He concludes, "the Son is the exact reproduction of the Father, a derived image."[15] According to Wellum, here and later in 2 Corinthians 4:4, "the stress is on the Son as the perfect revelation of God."[16] And yet, according to Hughes, since this is an image of the invisible God "there can be no such thing as a pictorial copy."[17] Paul is looking into the mystery of the trinitarian being of God to reveal that the Son "authentically reveals the divine nature and gives effect to the divine will."[18] This includes the work of redemption accomplished through his incarnation as well as actualizing the divine will through creation (1:16), redemption (1:20), providential care and sustaining of creation (1:18), all of which are visible effects of the invisible nature of the eternally begotten Son who is the image of the invisible God.[19]

By using the term *eikōn*, Paul emphasizes that Jesus is both the representation and manifestation of God. Melick points out that in the Greek culture which Paul wrote, there were two nuances of meaning of *eikōn*. Representation was the first of these nuances. This connects back to the definition provided by Wuest that relates to "an image on a coin or a reflection in a mirror," representing or symbolizing what the object pictured or reflected.[20] The second nuance was that of manifestation in which "the symbol brought with it the actual presence of the object."[21] Melick believes that by manifesting God himself, the Son brings God "into the sphere of human understanding," through these effects.[22] Because the Son shares the same substance with the Father, he makes the invisible God visible. Regarding these two nuances, Melick observes that in Greek philosophy: "Both elements were always present, but one tended to dominate the other."[23] In the case of Colossians 1:15, Melick believes that manifestation is the dominant element. David Garland shares Melick's appreciation for the influence of Greek philosophy and the dominance of the nuance of manifestation in this case. As such, "the image has a share in the reality that it reveals and may be said to be the reality. An image was not considered something distinct from the object it represented, like a facsimile or reproduction."[24] As it relates to the Son being the image of the invisible God, Garland continues, "Christ is an exact, as well as a visible, representation of God (Col. 1:19; 2:9), illuminating God's essence."[25] Illuminating God's essence includes, in the words of John Calvin, his "righteousness, goodness, wisdom, power, in short, his entire self."[26] R.

Kent Hughes simply pronounces, "Jesus is literally the *exegesis* of God."[27] Ultimately, *eikōn* in Colossians 1:15 emphasizes the reality that in the Son one witnesses more than a mere reflection of God, the Son is God in all his fullness.

It should be noted that since Colossians 1:15 speaks of the image of the invisible in a manner that dredges the depths of God's trinitarian being that, as Curtis Vaughn suggests, the phrase "image of God" as it relates to the Son, should not be limited at all. "Christ has always been, is, and always will be the image of God. His incarnation did not make him the image of God, but it did bring him, 'as being that Image, within our grasp.'"[28] In his pre-incarnate, incarnate, glorified, and post-ascension states Christ has been and will be the image of God. Jameison and his co-authors find support for the eternal image of the Son in the verb "is" contending: "Even before His incarnation He was the image of the invisible God, as the Word (Jn 1:1–3) by whom God created the worlds, and by whom God appeared to the patriarchs. Thus His *essential* character as *always* "the image of God," (1) before the incarnation, (2) in the days of His flesh, and (3) now in His glorified state, is, I think, contemplated here by the verb 'is.'"[29] There has never been a time, nor will there ever be time, when "the nature and being of God," have not been "perfectly revealed," in the Son.[30]

Another important highlight of the use of image in this passage is its connection back to the creation of humanity "in the image of God" in Genesis 1 and 2. Stephen Wellum notes: "While the first humans were created in the image of God, however, they were not the original *imago Dei*."[31] F. F. Bruce points out, it is clear from Genesis 1:26–27 that humanity, male and female, is created in God's own image. It is also clear from Genesis 3 that because of sin the divine image has been "defaced". Still, humanity is "the image and glory of God" (1 Cor 11:7). What becomes clear from this passage and the others to be discussed is that the image of God in humanity has always been "a copy or reflection of the archetypal image — that is to say, of God's beloved Son."[32] N. T. Wright draws out the connection to the eternal image: "Humanity was made as the climax of the first creation (Gen. 1:26–27): the true humanity of Jesus is the climax of the history of creation, and at the same time the starting-point of the new creation. From all eternity Jesus had, in his very nature, been the 'image of God,' reflecting perfectly the character and life of the Father."[33] The eternal Son, eternally the image, is the

archetype and humanity is the ectype. Though attention is taken back to creation using the word image here, Douglas Moo reminds the reader, "the focus is on Christ's revelation of God. He *is* the 'image' in accordance with which human beings are formed."[34]

Craig Keener points out an additional OT connection taking place as it relates to Christ as the archetypal image. He writes: "Here Paul describes Christ in terms Judaism reserved for divine Wisdom, which was portrayed as God's archetypal image by which he created the rest of the world. Philo describes God's Logos, his Word, as his image and firstborn son."[35] Several other scholars see "image of God" in this passage as identifying the image with wisdom or the word, which will be explored later. Some Jewish writings make this connection especially with relation to how God can be known, although the OT support is lacking.[36] This wisdom tradition appears to have influence throughout the hymnic passage and finds its starting point in Genesis 1. Moo cites Philo's regular connection of "image" to Genesis 1 while also identifying image with wisdom and word. He also draws connections between John 1 and Hebrews 1:3 drawing out an important question explored within Jewish theology and Greek philosophy, namely, where can God be seen? Considering this he posits: "We should probably conclude, therefore, that our hymn, similarly, alludes to both these traditions."[37] This further affirms the Son as the archetypal image. "In place of the Jewish tradition, which finds the image to be expressed in wisdom or the word, the hymn claims that the original image is to be found in the person of Jesus Christ, God's Son." Moo continues, "And this decision came via the early Christians' confrontation with the reality of the resurrected and glorified Christ, whom they recognized to be 'the perfect manifestation of the invisible God.'"[38] Hoehner, et. al. appear to confirm this understanding: "The focus is probably more on Jesus as the embodiment of God's Wisdom than on Jesus as essentially, ontologically being 'Wisdom.' In Jesus, the Wisdom of God, that revelatory reflection of God, was totally present."[39] The Son's manifestation as the revelatory reflection of God further reinforces Jesus as archetypal image.

It appears that from both the Adam-Christ and the Wisdom-Christ traditions connected to Colossians 1:15 and the surrounding context, that support can be garnered for Christ as the archetype of the "image" eternally.

2 Corinthians 4:4

In one of his many correspondences with the believers in the city of Corinth, Paul writes, "In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor 4:4). Paul concludes the verse with the same phrase examined in Colossians 1:15; ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ. As a result, many of the conclusions drawn from Colossians 1:15 are further reinforced by this verse. A few additional points continue to shed light on the Bible's revelation of what is meant by Jesus as the image of God.

To draw out the full implications of this verse, it is critical to recognize its connection to 2 Corinthians 3:18. Here Paul proclaims, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18). Mark Seifrid connects these two verses as evidence that, in both, Paul's understanding of "image of God" and the glory of Lord come together to identify Christ with God and vice versa to show "the glory of Christ, God's image, is the glory of God found in Jesus."[40] Harris agrees that, "Given passages such as Phil. 2:6; Col. 1:19; 2:9, we may safely assume that for Paul εἰκών here, as in Col. 1:15, signifies that Christ is an exact representation as well as a visible expression of God." He continues, "ἐστιν is a timeless present, indicating that Christ is eternally the perfect reflection of God or at least that in his glorified corporeality Christ remains forever God's visible expression."[41] Keener sees in this verse additional support for the connection of "image" with Jewish wisdom tradition and Jesus. "Christ is the complete revelation of God's glory (cf. 3:18). Christ thus fills the place assigned to preexistent, divine Wisdom in Jewish tradition."[42] Colin Kruse sees a connection to creation and to Jewish wisdom literature in Paul's choice of terminology in this passage. Bringing both together, Kruse believes that "for Paul Christ is the likeness of God after the fashion of Adam as far as his humanity is concerned, and after the fashion of Wisdom as far as his transcendence is concerned."[43] Further, Garland believes that this verse reveals that: "As the image of God, Christ brings clarity to our hazy notions of the immortal, invisible God who lives in unapproachable light (1 Tim 1:17; 6:16)."[44]

Paul's words to the Corinthian church in 2 Corinthians 4:4 confirms and reinforces the message about Christ, the image of God, found

in Colossians 1:15 attesting to the Christ's acts of representation and manifestation of the Father.

Hebrews 1:3

The unknown author of the book of Hebrews opens the letter by declaring the superiority of Jesus over everything and everyone. Within this declaration the author pronounces of Jesus: "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature," (Heb 1:3a). As was the case in the Colossians passage, some scholars believe this to be part of a more ancient hymn that predates the writing of Hebrews, still others see it as a confession of faith.[45] Regardless where scholars land in this debate, there is agreement that the message presented here is parallel to the one found in Colossians and 2 Corinthians, though the terms used are not the same. These terms will provide corroboration and additional insights regarding the understanding of Jesus as the image of God.

The term used in this verse Χαρακτήρ, [*charaktēr*] "exact representation," is different than that used in Colossians 1:15 and 2 Corinthians 4:4, however, it is still believed to be "a stronger equivalent of ἀπαύγασμα, and of εἰκών."[46] Its meaning is similar to that of *eikōn*. In classical Greek it is used "of an engraver, one who mints coins, a graving tool, a die, a stamp, a branding iron, a mark engraved, an impress, a stamp on coins and seals."[47] Metaphorically it meant "a distinctive mark or token impressed on a person or thing, by which it is known from others, a characteristic, the character of."[48] It was a Greek idiom for a person's features and used of the type or character regarded as shared with others. It meant also an impress or an image. One can recognize with a fair amount of ease the similarities in the definitions of these two words and how they are used. Ellingsworth concludes, "In the present verse, χαρακτὴρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ reinforces ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης in describing the essential unity and exact resemblance between God and his Son."[49] Wellum, citing David Wells, points out: "This language so strongly affirms the full deity of the Son that in church history the Arians refused to recognize the authenticity of Hebrews on the basis of this text alone."[50] The two phrases that make up the beginning of this verse "present the incarnate Son as the one who makes visible the very glory of God himself, which is obviously something only God can do (cf. John 1:14–18)."[51]

Whether or not one holds the Apostle Paul as the author of this letter, it is difficult to deny the consistency between the message of this passage with the message found in Colossians 1:15 and 2 Corinthians 4:4. Though the terms are different and perhaps the author is different as well, the message is the same. Donald Guthrie summarizes the message of the passage: "This statement itself contains a deep truth, for the exact resemblance relates to God's nature (*hypostaseōs*). The statement is not unimportant to the theological thinker, for it supports the view that Jesus was of the same nature as God. If so, no difference can be made between the nature of the Father and the nature of the Son."[52] Ellingsworth's conclusion is even more explicit pointing out that this verse "describes what the Son is and has done."[53] He "*Is the exact likeness of God's own being* may be expressed most satisfactorily in a number of languages as 'is just like God,' or 'is the same as God,' or 'what God is like is what he is like,' or 'what is true about God is true about his Son.'"[54] The entire content of this verse presents the relationship between the Son and the Father as one of "timeless eternity"[55] "the Son reveals in his person, not merely in his words, what God is really like."[56] David Allen writes, "Each word pulsates with deity."[57] To which Guthrie adds: "To reflect the glory of God in this way presupposes that the Son shares the same essence as the Father, not just his likeness."[58] Vincent hearkens back to the coin or stamp imagery indicated in the verse: "Here the essential being of God is conceived as setting its distinctive stamp upon Christ, coming into definite and characteristic expression in his person, so that the Son bears the exact impress of the divine nature and character."[59] Author after author affirms the powerful and unmistakable message of this opening passage of Hebrews. The author begins with a bold declaration regarding the relationship of the Father and the Son in which he "reminds his readers that nowhere has the glory of God been more perfectly manifest than in the person of God's Son. In Christ all the majesty of God's splendour is fully revealed."[60] Both oneness and distinctness are stressed through the language of this verse. Allen explains: "Jesus is the effulgence of God's glory because he shares the same divine nature as the Father, yet he is distinct from the Father in his person."[61] Perhaps more compellingly than in any of the verses explored, this verse announces the meaning and implications of the declaration that the second person of the Trinity is the image of God.

These three verses serve as a representation of what the NT has to say about the second person of the Trinity and his relationship to the *imago Dei*. Jesus's own words in John 14:9, serve as his personal summation and testimony: "The one who has seen me [Jesus] has seen the Father." The verses examined show that in contrast to the OT use of image of God, in the NT it is primarily Christ who is described as "the image of God."[62] The "image of God" in reference to the Son reveals that he "did not become the image of God at the incarnation, but has been that from all eternity."[63] "Image" in the NT carries with it an Adam-Christ connection as well as a Wisdom-Christ connection. Kruse observes both: "Christ is the likeness of God after the fashion of Adam as far as his humanity is concerned, and after the fashion of Wisdom as far as his transcendence is concerned."[64] Christology and anthropology come together in the *imago Dei* revealing that Jesus is both the eternal image and the incarnational image.

The Eternal Image and the Incarnational Image

The *imago Dei* in relation to the Son is to be understood eternally and incarnationally. The eternal image of God refers to the Son's pre-incarnate existence in which the image of God is eternally reflecting God's nature. The incarnational image is the Son's human form fully embodying God's nature in human form. Since Jesus is both the eternal image and the incarnational image one must ask, what is the relationship between the two images in the one person? Understanding each in relation to the other provides valuable insights into Christology and anthropology.

It has already been established through the study of Colossians 1:15 and Hebrews 1:3 that Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, is the eternal image (*eikōn*) of God the Father, perfectly and eternally reflecting the nature and glory of God. Further support for this conclusion is found in John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This eternal image is ontological, meaning that the Son shares fully in God's intratrinitarian nature. This eternal image is also relational, distinguishing the Son from the Father.[65] As a result, the Son eternally "images" the Father within the Godhead. Since the days of the Early Church this has been understood as Nicene Trinitarianism.[66] As noted earlier the doctrine of eternal generation illuminates and informs a

biblical understanding of the eternal image. The Nicene Creed says of the Son that he is "begotten of the Father before all ages," and "of one substance with the Father."[67] In these phrases the Early Church testified that the Son possesses the same divine nature, being, and attributes as the Father. His is an eternal generation within God which is timeless so that the Son's identity is not susceptible to duration or succession of moments. Because the Son is eternally begotten of the Father's essence, He perfectly expresses the Father's being and character. He is the perfect image and representation of the Father's nature or essence. Athanasius writing in defense of the Son's begottenness through eternal generation supports this, writing, "He is the unchanging Image of His own Father. For men, composed of parts and made out of nothing, have their discourse composite and divisible. But God possesses true existence and is not composite, wherefore His Word also has true Existence and is not composite, but is the one and only-begotten God."[68] Because of the simple nature of God, in the generation of the Son, the Father had to give his entire nature so that "the eternal generation of the Son entails the total equality of nature between the Father and Son in God."[69] Aquinas's attribution and development of "image" as a personal name for the Son within the Trinity supports this as well and will be further developed later in the paper.[70] Gregory of Nyssa in arguing against the Anomoeans contends for the eternal image as well.[71] Commenting on Gregory of Nyssa's understanding of the relationship of the Father and the Son within the Trinity, The Center for Baptist Renewal writes, "The Son is the 'only of only,' yet is not alone since he has a Father; he is God of God, yet he is not God the Father; he is begotten but in a way whereby he partakes in the Father's invisibility, incorruptibility, immortality, and eternality. As such, the Son subsists as everything that it is to *be* God without introducing division or temporality to the divine nature."[72] The testimony of these Early Church Fathers is firmly rooted to the insights gleaned from Colossians, 2 Corinthians, and Hebrews further revealing the nature of Jesus as the eternal image.

The eternal image is an ontological reality, that could only be known through a mirror dimly (1 Cor 13:12) in humanity if it had not been for the incarnation. In the incarnation, the Son supremely imaged God. In it, the eternal Son takes on humanity and manifests the image of God in visible, bodily, historical form. He is the embodiment of God. John 1:14 provides a

glimpse into this reality as does Philippians 2:6–8, and 2 Corinthians 4:4–6. The timeless eternally generated Son, in the incarnation, images God in life, actions, and sacrificial love for humanity in time. This is a functional and relational image contrasted with the first Adam who failed to fulfill what God intended for him as created in God's image, thus Christ is considered the last Adam (Rom 5:12–20; 1 Cor 15:21).

David Mathis comments on the significance of the incarnational image and the relationship of the *imago Dei* in humanity and of Christ: "The man Christ Jesus — not merely as God the Son, but as God the Son *become man* — is the great answer to Scripture's previously unsolved riddle of what it means, at bottom, to be '*in* God's image.' Humans are *in* God's image; Jesus *is* God's image. He is the full and complete embodiment of what it means for God himself to enter into his created world as a creature." Mathis makes the connection more explicit: "Which means that God created the first man and woman in Genesis 1 and 2 in view of what he himself would be as a creature ('in his image'), when he would enter in as man in the person of his Son."[73] Hoekema agrees pointing out: "It was only because man had been created in the image of God that the Second Person of the Trinity could assume human nature."[74] The Son is the eternal archetype of the image of God from which the ectype is found in humanity so that the Son was able to assume the ectypal image in order to reveal the invisible image of God perfectly embodied in space and time to God's creation while also redeeming the image of God in humanity through his substitutionary atoning work. It is therefore understood that the Son (*logos*) is the eternal image who assumed the incarnational image as Jesus of Nazareth, God the Son incarnate.

The eternal image is the image from eternity while the incarnational image is assumed at the point of the incarnation and remains from Jesus' earthly ministry forward into eternity. The function of reflecting the Father proceeds from the eternal image while the function of revelation and restoration proceeds from the incarnational image. The eternal image "necessarily implies natural Sonship by way of eternal generation," grounding Sonship and speaking of the relational distinction and full equality of the Father and the Son.[75] The incarnational image is the means of redemption and renewed image for humanity. The only one who could perfectly reveal God and restore the image of God had to be God. This helps to reveal the relationship

between the eternal image and the incarnational image. To reiterate, there could be no incarnational image without the eternal image. Wellum provides a thoughtful summation of the relationship of the eternal image and the incarnational image: "Through Jesus's own words and works — both implicit and explicit — he knowingly and intentionally identified himself as the divine Son of God and the eternal *imago Dei*. In the same way, he also identified himself as the incarnational *imago Dei* and the man who would fulfill all of God's covenant promises as his true Son-King and the last Adam."[76] Wellum then concludes:

> So, while we were created in God's image, we are not the original image since the eternal Son is the archetype image and humans are the ectype, obviously allowing for the Creator-creature distinction. The Son, then, from eternity is the pattern by which we are created, which makes sense of why the divine Son assumed our human nature (and not the nature of another creature) to redeem us. By being made in the image of God as a man, God the Son has become the incarnate Son, the last Adam, and the first man of the new creation, to restore what Adam lost in his sin.[77]

Distinguishing in this manner between the eternal image, the incarnational image, and the anthropological image, provides a depth of insight into the person and work of Christ that draws this researcher to reflect and rejoice in the words of Philippians 2, "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:9 – 11).

Description or Proper Name?

The question of whether the term "image" is to be considered a description or a proper name as it relates to Jesus remains to be investigated. For the purposes of this paper, description relates to role or function and proper name relates broadly to relation and origin.[78] It appears scholars are divided regarding this question with both camps providing compelling points to support their preferred conclusion. Representatives of each supposition will

be summarized and then the material will be compared to draw a conclusion in light of what has been presented to this point.

Many scholars interpret the passages that have been explored as supporting an understanding of "image" as a descriptive title rather than a proper name. They consider *eikōn* in Colossians 1:15, to mean representation. In 2 Corinthians 4:4 the image is the means through which believers are transformed and thereby a description of the work of Christ, and in Hebrews 1:3, *charaktēr* is considered parallel to *eikōn* in Colossians and thus carrying the same meaning of representation. James Dunn provides an example of this approach as can be seen in his comments on these verses earlier in the paper. In addition to Dunn, N. T. Wright holds this view. He connects the image of God in humanity to their vocation. He writes, "they are God's agents, God's appointed stewards over creation. This is what it means to be 'in God's image': to reflect God's wise, fruitful ordering into creation, and to reflect creation's praise back to the creator. Humans are the creatures through whom God had intended to tend his world, to make the garden fruitful, to name the animals, to reflect his glory into the whole creation."[79] This was their "vocation," but they failed "to play their part in that larger divine purpose."[80] He considers the image of God as a title, though not proper name, reflecting the theological reality of the incarnation. Christ both fulfills His own role, and the role God intended for humanity by "reflecting perfectly the character and life of the Father." He continues, "it is only in Jesus Christ that we understand what 'divinity' and 'humanity' really mean: without him, we lapse into sub-Christian, or even pagan, categories of thought."[81] Wright repeatedly references the work and role of Jesus in eternity and the incarnation, understanding "image" as a description of what Jesus does rather than who he is. Wright traces a triple narrative through Scripture within this framework ultimately highlighting Jesus as the answer to the failure of Adam and Israel in fulfilling their vocation. Jesus does for humanity "what they could not do for themselves."[82] In doing so, Wright gives a descriptive attribution to the "image" in Jesus.

Augustine builds the case for "image" as a descriptive term based on a trinitarian approach. Stephen Wellum provides a helpful overview of Augustine's argument. He notes that it seems like a stretch to call "image" a name for the Son, given Augustine's convincing point that the image of God refers to the entire Trinity rather than simply the eternally begotten Son.

Elaborating on the creation of humanity in God's image in Genesis 1:26–27, Augustine writes, "'Our,' being plural in number, could not be right in this place if man were made to the image of one person, whether of the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit, but because in fact he was made in the image of the trinity, it is said *to our image*."[83] Wellum shows how Herman Bavinck took up Augustine's position and further clarified while acknowledging that one must be cautious if choosing to apply the image to only the Son: "It is not stated that man was created only in terms of some attributes, or in terms of only one person in the divine being," he then continues, "the meaning of the image of God is further explicated to us by the Son, who in an entirely unique sense is called the Word (*logos*); the Son (*huios*); the image (*eikōn*), or imprint (*charaktēr*), of God (John 1:1, 14; 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3); and the one to whom we must be conformed (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; Phil 3:21; Eph 4:23f.; 1 John 3:2)."[84]

Each of these individuals maintains the significance of the NT declaration the Jesus is the image of God but sees this significance rooted in the descriptive nature of the term rather than as a proper name for the second person of the Trinity.

Perhaps the most well-known of the theologians espousing the proper name position is Thomas Aquinas. In his *Summa Theologica*, Thomas addresses the question of "whether the name of Image is proper to the Son."[85] Aquinas adopts a broad understanding of name in which image is a name uniquely attributed to the Son, distinguishing him from the Father and the Holy Spirit, thereby it is "proper to the Son." Elsewhere Aquinas summarized: "Christ is the most perfect image of God. For in order that something be perfectly an image of something, three things are necessary … First, a likeness; second origin; third, perfect equality." He continues, "Therefore, since those three are present in Christ, the Son of God, because namely his is similar to the Father, arises from the Father and is equal to the Father, he is in the highest degree and perfectly called the image of God."[86] Thomas lists three objections to considering "image" a proper name for the Son before proceeding to develop his response in the *Summa*. These objections relate to the plural "let us make," in Genesis 1:26 in reference to the creation of humanity in God's image leading to the conclusion that the "image" encompasses the Trinity and "image" is used in relation to humanity as well as the Son so therefore must be a descriptive term. In this case since

"image" is not used exclusively of the Son but also describes humanity in places like Genesis 1:26 it must not be considered a proper name. However, the Bible's use of the term with the Son is unique given that humanity is created *in*, *according to*, or *as* the image of God, whereas Jesus *is* the image of God. Aquinas makes a clear distinction of the Son within the Trinity and with humanity, allowing for the Son to possess the term "image" as a name proper to him not simply a description. Hughes comments, "We must understand that the incarnation of the Son is not the identification of us with him who *is* the Image but his identification with us who are made *in* the image. We may say that as man, living *in* or *according to* the image, the incarnate Son conformed to himself who, as God, *is* the eternal image."[87] Aquinas further responds by pointing out the distinction between Greek and Latin doctors. The former, using image in reference to the Trinity, and the latter in reference to the Son alone. In reference to the Trinity, Thomas does not deny that humanity is created in the image of the Trinity, drawing parallels between the Holy Spirit and humanity. Yet he also shows the "image" is used differently for the Son than for humanity so that "image" truly can be a name proper to the Son. Aquinas writes,

> The image of a thing may be found in something in two ways. In one way it is found in something of the same specific nature; as the image of the king is found in his son. In another way it is found in something of a different nature, as the king's image on the coin. In the first sense the Son is the Image of the Father; in the second sense man is called the image of God; and therefore in order to express the imperfect character of the divine image in man, man is not simply called the image, but "to the image," whereby is expressed a certain movement of tendency to perfection. But it cannot be said that the Son of God is "to the image," because He is the perfect Image of the Father.[88]

From the foundation that Aquinas developed others have continued to argue for considering image a proper name for the Son. Returning to the NT for support Hammett believes: "The context in Colossians 1 and Hebrews 1 suggests that calling Christ the "image of God" and "exact expression of his being" are ontological claims, claims of deity."[89] Moo also sees the terms used in Colossians 1:15–16 as titles. "Christ is presented as God's intermediary in creation (v. 16), and he is given titles that were often

connected with wisdom/word: especially "image" and "firstborn" in v. 15."[90] David Allen makes a similar case from Hebrews 1:3. "That both of these clauses are coordinated by *kai* and introduced by the present participle ōn indicates that the author was speaking ontologically and eternally, not functionally, for in the latter case the sonship was by adoption rather than by nature."[91]

Aquinas appears to make the strongest case for the term "image" being considered a proper name for the second person of the Trinity. Biblically, the only place that the image can possibly be understood as used to reference the Trinity is in the Genesis account at the point of humanity's creation in which the plural "let us" is found (Gen 1:26). The NT attributes "image" primarily to Jesus in a manner that declares him *the* image of God. Theologically, Aquinas' explanation of image applied to the Trinity, and specifically to why the Holy Spirit cannot be called the Image, because "by His procession, He receives the nature of the Father, as the Son also receives it, nevertheless is not said to be 'born;' so, although He receives the likeness of the Father, He is not called the Image,"[92] provides a compelling case for the fact that image applied to the Son goes beyond descriptive title to proper name.

Conclusion

I have sought to demonstrate the biblical and theological evidence of the relationship between the theological categories of Christology and anthropology in light of the *imago Dei*, revealing an emphasis on Jesus Christ as the image of God who functions both as the eternal ontological self-expression of the Father within the Trinity and as the archetype and destiny of humanity as the incarnational image who reveals and redeems.

One implication for revelation includes humanity's ability to truly understand oneself. Wellum notes, "historic Christianity teaches that we cannot fully understand who we are apart from the identity of Christ as the Son and the true image of God."[93] Another implication is as the Image He also reveals the Father, aptly captured by Athanasius. "Whence, lest this should be so, being good, he gives them a share in his own image, our Lord Jesus Christ, and makes them after his own image and after his likeness: so that by such grace perceiving the image, that is, the Word of the Father, they may be able through him to get an idea of the Father, and, knowing

their maker, live the happy and truly blessed life."[94] Ironically, the image in humanity is the means by which the incarnation is made plausible as Wellum points out, "apart from the Bible's teaching regarding humans as image-bearers, it is difficult to make coherent and plausible the very idea of an incarnation."[95] Later he adds, "the *imago Dei* in humanity also grounds the logical plausibility of the very idea of an incarnation."[96] Erickson elaborates the point: "What he did instead was to become united with a specimen of the one creature that had been made in his own image and likeness. In other words, there was a natural likeness or affinity between God and the human person in whom he became incarnate. There was a type of fit of the one for the other."[97] The Son, the eternal and incarnational image, is central to the divine work of revelation.

The image is also central to the divine work of redemption. Utilizing the image-son-Adam typology, Wellum shows the relationship of the *imago* to redemption. He writes, "the image-son-Adam typology shows us that this righteous rule of God must come through a righteous obedient man. This typological trajectory that begins in creation ends in Christ."[98] He continues, "the first part of the biblical metanarrative gives us a determinative typology for understanding the identity of Christ: he is the true image-Son and last Adam. In short, the reign of Christ will be righteous because he is the exact image of God, the obedient Son of God, and the faithful Adam of a new humanity."[99] This connection is vitally important because, as Athanasius noted, "none other could create anew the likeness of God's image for men, save the image of the Father."[100] Ultimately, the incarnational image secured redemption for those who place their faith in Him. "Through Jesus's own words and works — both implicit and explicit — he knowingly and intentionally identified himself as the divine Son of God and the eternal *imago Dei*. In the same way, he also identified himself as the incarnational *imago Dei* and the man who would fulfill all of God's covenant promises as his true Son-King and the last Adam."[101]

It is hard, if not impossible, to overstate the glorious truths that are unlocked through mining the depths of "the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15), "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature" (Heb 1:3). Jesus Christ is the ultimate expression of the *imago Dei*. He is central to gaining an adequate understanding of the *imago Dei* both eternally and incarnationally.

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