

“IMAGE OF GOD” THEOLOGY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERSHIP

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What is a human being? Christianity and its foundational texts offer a coherent response to the question within the framework of a Christian worldview. Christianity claims in its creeds that its answers to such questions come as revelation from the deity who created humans in his image and for his purposes. It also claims that this deity has acted in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, to provide a means by which humans damaged by evil forces can both see an example of the perfect image of God in human flesh and experience in themselves transformation into and restoration to God’s creation intent.

God’s project for human restoration enables humans once again to enjoy with the deity, namely Yahweh (including Jesus and the Holy Spirit), the relationship that he¹ originally intended and to live in ways compatible with Yahweh’s values and purposes. Yahweh accomplishes this restoration when humans respond sincerely to the gospel with confession, repentance and pleas for forgiveness. In response, the Holy Spirit takes up residence within humans, enabling them to change personally and form relational communities, expressing individually and collectively the image of God. Both the Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT) make these claims and declare it to be good news. Of course, other voices in society put forward alternative and competing answers to this question. As a result, Christians quickly experience resistance to their answer to the question, “What is a human being?”

Whenever NT writers express ideas about “the image of God” in their compositions, their essential, referential framework is Jewish theology, not Greek philosophy. However, early Christian leaders, such as Paul, may have chosen to use some Greek terminology and contextualized relevant Greek concepts in their explanations of the gospel when they explained these Christian ideas to Greco-Roman audiences, who did not have the advantage of deep knowledge regarding Jewish theology. For example, Paul asserted to the people in Athens that “the unknown God” worshipped by them has created all humans and quotes the Greek poet Aratus to support this proposition (Acts 17:22-34).

This brief paper demonstrates that the Christian understanding of “human being” ultimately derives meaning from the NT’s use and interpretation of the phrase “the image of God.” God’s act to create humans “in his image and likeness” sets human

¹ I use “he” to refer to Yahweh without any bias towards gender considerations. This is a grammatical usage for purposes of reference.

beings apart from other animated creatures. Yahweh subsequently has acted to repair Satan's efforts to destroy this "image" and to enable human beings to reflect once again the image of God as Yahweh originally intended. The residence of God's Spirit within transformed humans creates an eschatological trajectory for their lives that extends from this age into the next, from time into eternity. It is important for Christians and their leaders to understand this theology of "the image of God in humans," because when Christians apply this theological concept to the praxis of leadership, it produces healthy communities and remediates abusive and selfish leadership patterns that sometimes become operative in the church today.

Accordingly, this paper reviews key NT texts to discern:

- 1) how early Christian leaders understood Jesus as the image of God,
- 2) how they perceived the intent of God in Christ to enable humans to recover fully the image of God as one of the eschatological blessings of salvation experienced within the Kingdom of God,
- 3) and how they proclaimed that the risen Christ has already initiated the recovery of this image in the present age.

Although the concept of the image of God has many implications for human life, this paper concludes by suggesting some implications for the praxis of healthy Christian leadership by the people of God.

Reflections on Key NT Texts: Epistle and Johannine Literature

Humans created in the image of God

The initial chapters of Genesis (1-4) discuss the nature of a human being. The writer claims that the deity made humans "in our image, in our likeness," (ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ' εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ' ὁμοίωσιν [Gen. 1:26]).² This factor enables humans to fulfill the creation mandate to "exercise authority over the earth and rule" all the other creatures (κατακυριεύσατε αὐτῆς καὶ ἄρχετε....[Gen. 1:28]). According to this narrative, some time after this event a malevolent spirit beguiled the two initial humans, Adam and Eve, and led them to disobey Yahweh's strict command. As a result, the image of God (ὁ εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ "the image/representation/embodiment of God") became distorted in each iteration of this human creature. Theologians name the cause of this distortion "original sin," expressing the idea that all humans begin life under the influence of sin in all aspects of their being. Subsequently, humans live under curse, not blessing, and with

² Most scripture references are quoted from the New International Version.

hostility towards the deity. This reality mars their capacity to exercise the creation mandate.

The NT defines humans as “created in God’s likeness” once explicitly in Jam. 3:9, and also implicitly in Rom. 1:23. The writer of the letter of James³ addresses primarily a Jewish Christian audience in around 50 CE. In his discussion about the teaching office, he warns Christians that the human capacity for speech can bless or curse both God and “humans who stand produced in God’s likeness” (τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τοὺς καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν θεοῦ γεγονότας⁴ [my translation]).⁵ In this passage, the writer is not discussing anthropology per se, but rather the proper ethical use of the speech function for followers of the Messiah. As he says in v. 10, blessing and cursing should not flow from the same instrument of speech, i.e., “this should not be.” He grounds his ethical guidance in the assumed fact that God produced humans to be similar to himself. He does not define the nature of this ὁμοίωσις (“likeness, resemblance”), but probably does borrow the terminology from the Septuagint translation of Gen. 1:26. He assumes that this dictum bestows on all humans equally a worth and dignity that obligates the Messiah’s followers to teach and communicate with humans in ways that bless.

In Rom. 1:23, Paul discusses why “the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and wickedness (ἀδικίαν “injustice”) of people who suppress the truth by their wickedness (ἐν ἀδικίᾳ “in injustice”)” (v. 18). One reason for God’s response is that human action has “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being (ἤλλαξαν τὴν δόξαν τοῦ ἀφθάρτου θεοῦ ἐν ὁμοιώματι εἰκόνοσ φθαρτοῦ ἀνθρώπου....).” The relationship of the two nouns in the prepositional phrase ἐν ὁμοιώματι εἰκόνοσ is debated. The genitive εἰκόνοσ could be exegetical, i.e., “for a likeness, that is a copy/image of a corruptible human....” This terminology is similar to that used in the Greek translation of Gen. 1:26 (κατ’ εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν) to describe God’s creation of humanity. Plainly, Paul castigates idolatry in ways frequently found

³ Presumably, this “James” is the half-brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church once Peter has to leave the city.

⁴ This Greek perfect active participle can imply that these humans experience a state or condition of “likeness” in this age, enabled by a past action of the deity and continuing as a realized condition or status.

⁵ Socrates in Plato’s dialogue *Theaetatus* 176 b says “and to escape is to become like God, so far as this is possible; and to become like God is to become righteous and holy and wise” φυγή δὲ ὁμοίωσις θεῶν κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν· ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι). Note the similar phrasing, but with a different connotation than found in Jam. 3:9. Whether the writer of James or the translator of Genesis was conversant with Plato’s proposition is unknown.

in Jewish apologetic literature (OT prophets and Wisdom of Solomon). This includes Jewish failures as noted in the wording of Ps. 105:20 (LXX): “and they exchanged their glory for a likeness of a bull calf that eats grass” (καὶ ἠλλάξαντο τὴν δόξαν αὐτῶν ἐν ὁμοιώματι μόσχου ἔσθοντος χόρτον, [probably a reference to the Golden Calf episode in Exod. 32]), and Jer. 2:11: “will nations change their gods?...but my people have changed their glory” (εἰ ἀλλάξανται ἔθνη θεοὺς αὐτῶν;...ὁ δὲ λαὸς μου ἠλλάξαντο τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ). Paul connects the idea of humans created in the image of God with humans creating cultic images in their own, defective image and regarding them as ‘gods.’ In this way they attack and destroy God’s glory. The incorruptible/corruptible contrast highlights the absurdity of human efforts to construct their own religions and icons. The images they create reflect the nature of fallen, cursed humanity, not of the glorious God who created them.

These ideas are also referred to in 1 Cor. 11:7: “a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man” (ἀνὴρ μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ὀφείλει κατακαλύπτεσθαι τὴν κεφαλὴν εἰκὼν καὶ δόξα θεοῦ ὑπάρχων· ἡ γυνὴ δὲ δόξα ἀνδρός ἐστίν). In his argument about the proper ordering of human relationships, Paul refers to the creation sequence in which God created male, then female, and argues that this sequence has something to say about the mutual relations between husbands and wives, even as both male and female express God’s image and exercise together the creation mandate.

Outside of these texts, the concept of God’s creation of humans in his image might influence some texts implicitly, but no other NT texts use this Greek terminology from Septuagint Genesis explicitly in relation to human creation. They use the Genesis 1-4 narrative as the basis for ethical, relational, and religious practices.⁶

⁶ NT writers do not address directly whether humans’ bodies reflect in some manner “the image of God.” In the Genesis Creation accounts (Gen. 1-4), Yahweh creates animate bodies for all sorts of creatures and then climaxes this work with the creation of “the ‘Adam.’” אָדָם (*hadam*) is the Hebrew term for “human being” modified by the article. Proper names do not have articles in Hebrew and so this is not a name “Adam,” but the noun describing a “human being.” When Yahweh creates *hadam* with an animate body, he is doing nothing different than he has done with all other earthly creatures. They too require “breath” for animation, just as *hadam* does (compare the use of the phrase “living being” that describes “the ‘Adam’” in Gen. 2:7 and also describes created animals in Gen. 2:19. So in this respect, the fact that *hadam* has a physical body is not a reflection per se of the divine image. The shape of the human’s body may be related to the functions that Yahweh expects humans to fulfill, i.e., “rule the earth.” In other words, Yahweh designs the human body in such a way that humans can fulfill their intended role in creation. However, Yahweh does not have arms, hands, legs, etc., as the Hebrew Scriptures frequently state. The prohibition forbidding Israelites to make “images” of their deity probably reflects this reality. Such representations, whether humanoid or beastly, are blasphemous because they bear no relation to the divine reality.

The fact that Jesus has to set aside the “divine shape” in order to become human (Phil. 2:5-6) suggests that the human body in its shape does not represent the “shape” of the deity. However, when Jesus as the Son of God becomes fully human, he takes the human form. In his resurrection body he appears to humans in the human shape of Jesus that

Jesus as the image of God

The NT tells how God acted in Jesus to restore his relationship with his creatures and enable reconciliation to occur, powerfully transforming them and conforming them “to the image of his Son, Jesus” (συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνας τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Rom. 8:29; κατ’ εἰκόνα τοῦ κτίσαντος αὐτόν Col. 3:10 [see Col. 1:15-16]). He does this to fulfill his purpose for creation; i.e., to create a people for himself, a people who reflect his glory, his values, and his purposes. The death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, God-in-flesh, and the gift of his Holy Spirit enable humans to become God’s people under the terms of his new covenant. Eventually, God will reverse all elements of the curse and put his covenant people into a condition of favour/blessing both in this life and the next (cf. Eph. 4:20-22). This condition, which Paul calls “new creation” (καινὴ κτίσις 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15), has relational, ethical, and cultural implications for these transformed humans, because God’s Spirit now guides and resources them in their submission to Jesus.

Although these ideas are implicit in much of Jesus’ teaching (for example, Mk. 10:6-7, referencing Gen 1:27; 2:24), the actual terms (i.e., εἰκῶν (image), ὁμοίωμα (likeness)) are not found in his discourses as reported in the Synoptics. This absence may seem surprising given that the Gospel compositions postdate most of the Epistle literature. Some similar ideas may be discerned in John’s Gospel and Epistles written after the Synoptics.

Another series of NT texts use the language of “image” to describe Jesus in his unique relationship with God and his particular nature as divine and human concurrently. The earliest discussions occur in Paul’s correspondence with the Corinthian church.⁷

Paul discusses the nature of the believer’s resurrection experience and embodiment. He employs the contrast between Adam, through whom death came, and the Messiah, through whom resurrection from the dead has become available to humans (1 Cor. 15:20-22). The Adam connection naturally generates intertextual affinities

they identify, even though he has a “spiritual body” that is now suitable to the heavenly reality (1 Cor. 15:40-49). Jesus in his ascended glory has a “body” and fully reflects the deity through this “body.” Believers too will receive a spiritual, heavenly body in the resurrection and thus their “bodily form” or nature will be suitable for the heavenly realm. This is the ultimate outcome of the “new creation” that they have experienced in conversion. The manner in which Yahweh created humans as persons with bodies becomes part of the heavenly reality, but their heavenly bodies have a completely different nature.

⁷ This church has both Jewish and non-Jewish Christians. Paul establishes this congregation around 50 CE and he writes his letters to them probably around 50-53 CE.

with Genesis 1-5. In contrast to Adam, through whom death has cursed all humans, all humans who are in the Messiah “shall be made alive” (ζωοποιηθήσονται). Paul continues this contrast in 1 Cor. 15:42-49. He affirms that “just as we have borne the image of the earthly man (ἐφορέσαμεν τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ χοϊκοῦ) [i.e., Adam], so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man (φορέσομεν καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ ἐπουρανίου),” i.e., the image of the Messiah, the Son of God (v. 49). The term “image” again resonates with Gen. 1:26. The focus here is on life after the return of Christ and in the resurrected state. The “image of the heavenly person” indicates that believing humans, in this future situation, will be restored fully in their persons to the image of God after the Parousia. All deleterious effects of the Fall will be eradicated. Paul designates this restored image as expressing πνευματικός (consistent with the Spirit) existence (v. 46). The Messiah is able to do this restoration because he is “the last Adam, a life-giving Spirit” (ὁ ἔσχατος Ἀδάμ εἰς πνεῦμα ζωοποιοῦν, v. 45). The first Adam by contrast is only “a biologically living being” (εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν [my translation]). This will be the believers’ condition for eternity. Paul recognizes that in this present age all humans continue to experience the influence of Adam’s fall. He teaches that while some aspects of restoration to the image in which God originally formed humans are experienced in this current age, full restoration will occur for believers in the Messiah at the resurrection and this includes a “bodily dimension” that reflects the Messiah’s resurrected body. Believers should anticipate this full restoration as one of the blessings of their salvation in Christ. For Paul this forms the core of the Christian hope.

According to 2 Cor. 4:4, the Messiah is εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ (“the image of God”).⁸ Unbelievers cannot see “the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ/Messiah (τὸν φωτισμὸν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τῆς δόξης τοῦ Χριστοῦ),” who is the image of God (ὅς ἐστὶν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ) because “the god of this age” (ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου) has blinded their cognitive functions. In this context, Paul is explaining why more Jewish people have not responded to the good news about Jesus. In some mysterious manner, Israel’s failure to respond is fulfilling God’s purposes. It is God who is responsible for making “his light shine in our hearts to give us the light⁹ of the knowledge of God’s glory in the face of Christ/Messiah)” (v.

⁸ Although the term εἰκὼν reflects one of those used in Gen 1:26-27 to describe the creation of humans, in this context Paul probably intends to communicate that the deity and the Messiah are perfect representations of each other, rather than reference the embodied reality of the human Jesus.

⁹ Paul may allude here to the theophany he experienced on the road to Damascus – the appearance of Jesus in bright light, as well as his ensuing blindness and healing.

6, emphasis mine). As God's image, Jesus Christ reveals God perfectly for those who have the spiritual eyes to see.

Paul's expressions in 2 Cor. 4:4-6 are complex, as the chains of genitives create exegetical challenges. Certainly, the good news is centred on the Messiah and the awesome facts that contribute to his glory. One reason for this glory is that he is the image of God and so radiates the glory of God. Paul also connects the themes of image and glory both to God and to the Messiah Jesus. Further, God is engaged directly in enabling his mission to the nations - he brings healing so that people can see and discern knowledge in Jesus the glory of God. It seems that Paul here is referring to the risen, ascended Christ in the main, but also is suggesting that elements of the Messiah's glory shine through the stories of miracles, teachings, and resurrection that form the substance of the good news that he proclaims.

Chronologically, the next discussion of this idea comes in Romans, written c. 54-56 CE. The Roman congregation contained Jewish and non-Jewish believers. Paul presents the major components that constitute the "good news from God" (my translation, Rom. 1:1). In Rom. 5:12-21, Paul employs the Adam-Christ contrast in a more elaborate manner to explain how it is that the Messiah can reverse the effects of sin and death that Adam's disobedience generated.

Paul plainly is dealing with the origin of sin question in Rom. 5: 12. As he argues in 3:23, all humans are sinners regardless of when they lived. The common human experience of death, that is sin's curse, demonstrates this. "Death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses" (v. 14). Adam is critical to this question because Adam "is a pattern of the one to come (τοῦ μέλλοντος)" (i.e., the Messiah). All humans then sin "in the likeness of this transgression" (my translation; ἐπὶ τῷ ὁμοιώματι τῆς παραβάσεως [v. 14]). In contrast, "the one man, Jesus Christ" (v. 15) has provided God's gift and favour, that includes the opportunity to recover innocence and be just/guiltless in God's eyes (vv. 16-17). This righteous/just status enables humans "to reign (βασιλεύω) in life through the one man, Jesus Christ (Messiah)" (v. 17). Note the "ruling" theme that resonates with Genesis 1:26 - rule over the creation¹⁰ - and they do so "alive." The Messiah's obedience enables many who repent to become just or innocent.

This comparison between the historical Adam and the historical Christ, both of whom in some sense are the image of God, explains the existence of hostility between humans and the deity and the reason for God's provision for reconciliation

¹⁰ The verb used in the Greek translation of Gen. 1:26-28 is ἄρχω.

and restoration. The voluntary, sacrificial death of Jesus provides remedy for the corruption of God's image in humans generated by Adam's disobedience. Those who receive this new gift from God will experience incorruption in the age to come and possess the glory of God expressed in a new bodily form, i.e., the full experience and reality of God's image that Adam forfeited. Jesus is the last or second Adam.

Paul summarizes the results of the Messiah's life, death and resurrection in Rom. 8:29. God enabled the Messiah through his sinless life, sacrificial death and miraculous resurrection to be "the first-born among many brothers and sisters." Just as Adam was the progenitor of fallen humanity, so God sends and resources the Messiah to be the spiritual progenitor of restored humanity through faith. What results is that the Messiah's people will receive a nature similar in form (σύμμορφος) to "the image of [God's] son" (τῆς εἰκόνης τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, v. 29). All humans have a nature similar to Adam's, in whom the image of God is now corrupted. God has created a pathway for humans to repossess a nature similar to the image of God that finds perfect expression in the sinless Messiah, Jesus, if they move into the sphere of his rule, his Spirit, and his grace. Paul references this transformation in Phil. 3:21, using the verb μετασχηματίζει ("he will transform; change the form of")¹¹ to describe how the Messiah will transform "the body of our humiliation" so that it is similar in form (σύμμορφον) to "the body of his glory" (τῷ σώματι τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ, v. 21). Here the idea of change into the form of the Messiah who is the image of God is implemented through resurrection in the age to come and includes the provision of new bodies for believers. The theme of glory continues a prominent connection with ideas of image (cf. 1 Cor 11:7).

A few years later when Paul is in prison in Rome, he pens several letters in which he employs this theme. He addresses the letter to the church at Philippi primarily to a non-Jewish Christian congregation. The general timeframe is perhaps about 60 CE. In the justly famous passage, Phil. 2:5-7, Paul explains how it is that the pre-existent son of God could willfully become human. This explanation is in service of an ethical concern, namely an encouragement to the Philippian believers to restrain their desires and responses, as the Messiah restrained his, to serve other believers and communicate the good news to the nations (Phil. 2:1-4).

Paul employs four different terms to describe two complex but significant themes. Firstly, he affirms that the Messiah Jesus existed prior to the incarnation in ἡ μορφὴ τοῦ θεοῦ; i.e., he possessed the form that was appropriate to the character and

¹¹ In Mk. 9:2 and Rom. 12:2 the verb describing transformation is μεταμορφώω. It means to transform from one kind of body to another. Zeus, for example, transforms people into swans.

nature of God himself (v. 6 my periphrastic translation). Paul then explains that this means he was “equal with/to God” (ἴσα θεῷ, v. 6). The Greek adjective *isos* (ἴσος) describes equivalence in number, size, quality. Presumably, here the focus is on quality; i.e., he is the same as God in all essential aspects of being.

Secondly, Paul describes an action that alters the form of the Messiah so that he “takes the form of a slave” (μορφὴν δούλου, v. 7). Again, Paul provides more explanation, indicating entry into a new condition, i.e., “form/likeness of humans” (ὁμοίωμα ἀνθρώπων, v. 7). Paul seems to differentiate the “form of God” from the “likeness of humans.”¹² Paul elaborates further in v. 8 indicating that people “found/discovered [Jesus] in appearance as a human” (my translation; σχήματι εὑρεθείς ὡς ἄνθρωπος, v. 7). In his human condition, the Messiah still expresses the image of God, but in a sinless form that is congruent with the human context in this age.

The second half of the “poem” celebrates the reversal of these changes. Yahweh elevates the resurrected Messiah to the position of Lord and gives him his own name as validation of his sacrifice and status.

In another prison epistle, Colossians, that seems to address primarily non-Jewish Christians (Col. 1:15), Paul warns them not to succumb to inferior and powerless human philosophies and Jewish speculations (2:8). Paul celebrates Jesus Messiah as Lord of creation and redemption in a passage (1:15-20) reminiscent of Phil. 2:5-11. Paul gives thanks “to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light” (Col. 1:12). The following poetic segment describes how God did this – “he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves” (v. 13). This Son enables the Colossian believers to possess “deliverance from darkness and the forgiveness of sins” (v. 14). Paul then describes who this Son is (vv. 15-20) in relation to creation, redemption and the church.

Paul affirms that Jesus is “the image of the invisible God” (εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, v. 15). The human Jesus makes God visible to human perception in all his power and glory. As in Gen 1:26, the key noun εἰκὼν means “representation, embodiment, image, likeness.” Paul does not explain in this context how this is the case. However, this reality gives the Messiah a special status, i.e., he is “the firstborn over all creation” (v. 15). As firstborn son, he is responsible for creating everything. Through him, God in his triune nature decided to make humans in his image and likeness. Paul emphasizes the creation motif in v. 16. God the Son precedes

¹² This text also might suggest that the embodiment of Jesus has to do with his humanness and does not in itself reflect “the image of God.”

everything – chronologically and authoritatively – and sustains everything. In this, he is God. Paul uses the noun πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα (“all the fullness”) to explain how Jesus expresses the essence of God (v. 19). According to Col. 2:9, fullness refers to “the deity” (πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς “all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form”). Paul emphasizes that Jesus embodies Yahweh fully as he exists in his human form.

In addition, Paul affirms that Jesus is “head of the body, the assembly/church” (ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας, v. 18). Here we have the identity of Jesus as image of God corporately with the totality of the Messiah’s assembly. Collectively the assembly represents the image of God, i.e., the body of the Messiah (see 1 Cor. 12 and the similar use of this imagery). As the Messiah’s “body,” his assembly now expresses his likeness/image within human society.

The writer of Hebrews, a letter to Jewish Christians whose date of composition is uncertain, starts with a double expression (1:3) that defines the relationship of Jesus to Yahweh and explains why he has the power to sustain everything:

ἀπαύγασμα¹³ τῆς δόξης – “the radiance of his glory;”¹⁴

χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως – “the exact representation of his being/essence.”¹⁵

He does not employ the terminology found in Genesis 1-2, but all these expressions attempt to explain the superiority of Jesus as God’s Son and why he is the creator of everything (themes also expressed in Col. 1:15-21). He expresses the “brightness/radiance of God’s glory” or perhaps “the reflection of God’s glory.” The noun χαρακτήρ describes a “stamp, trade-mark, exact representation of something” and ὑπόστασις describes “the essence or reality of something.” The writer uses these terms to describe how Jesus, both in his incarnate existence and ascended state, gives full and complete expression to the essence of Yahweh. Paul affirms that Jesus is Yahweh’s appointed Messiah and Lord and is like the deity in every way.

¹³ This noun is related to the verb Paul uses in 2 Cor. 4:4 ἀυγάσαι “to see or shine forth” (BDAG, 149).

¹⁴ Wisd. 7:26 describes wisdom as “a reflection of eternal light (ἀπαύγασμα... φωτός)...a spotless mirror (ἔσοπτρον ἀκηλίδωτον) of the activity of God...an image (εἰκόν) of his goodness.”

¹⁵ In Philo’s treatise *Plant. 18* he describes λογικὴ ψυχὴ (“the reasonable soul”) within a human as “the seal of God, the stamp (χαρακτήρ) of which is the Eternal Word (ὁ ἀίδιος λόγος).” This is his interpretation of Gen. 1:26 and the “image of God” terminology.

The apostle John summarizes all these ideas well in Jn. 14:8-9 where Jesus tells Phillip that “he who has seen me has seen the Father” (ὁ ἑώρακὼς ἐμὲ ἑώρακεν τὸν πατέρα, see Jn. 1:18), because Jesus is μονογενῆς θεός (“who is himself God”).¹⁶

Humans recreated in the image of God

The third way in which the writers of the NT epistles use image of God language involves the theme of human restoration through the gospel and its anthropological and ethical implications. It is primarily Paul who uses this material for this purpose.

The first occurrence comes in 2 Cor. 3:18, a complex verse:

ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντες ἀνακεκαλυμμένῳ προσώπῳ [cf. Moses in Ex. 33-34] τὴν δόξαν κυρίου [reference to Yahweh = Lord, and the glory of the Lord = the image of God, i.e., the Messiah] κατοπτριζόμενοι [“look at something, contemplate”] τὴν αὐτῆν εἰκόνα [= Christ] μεταμορφούμεθα ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν καθάπερ ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος [cause or agency].

“And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into the same image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (my translation).

This complex text occurs in a context where Paul is explaining how Jesus’ followers have the same relationship with Yahweh that Moses experienced – viewing the glory of God, in the Messiah, with unveiled face. As Jesus’ followers experience this vision, namely the revelation of the gospel about Jesus Messiah, they are being transformed into the same image; i.e., in this age they are becoming more and more like the Messiah. This transformation is also assisted by the agency of the Lord, i.e., the Spirit. The main verb (“are being transformed” [μεταμορφούμεθα]) and the second participle (“contemplating” [κατοπτριζόμενοι]) are present tense forms, indicating the incompleteness of the action, some aspects of which occur in the present.¹⁷ Paul uses the term εἰκὼν along with δόξα, standard elements associated with Genesis 1:26 and discussions about the nature of God’s image in the human. The Messiah perfectly reflects the essence of the deity and he does so as a perfect expression of the human creature. When humans accept this truth, the Spirit of God

¹⁶ There are some textual variations in Jn. 1:18 that should be considered carefully.

¹⁷ See the use of the same verb in Rom. 12:2.

starts the restoration process within believers in this age, i.e., expressing the Messiah's glory.

A second series of texts occurs in the prison letters (Col. 3:9-10; Eph. 4:22-24) with significant similarities in language.

Col. 3:9-10 μὴ ψεύδεσθε εἰς ἀλλήλους, ἀπεκδυσάμενοι **τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον** σὺν ταῖς πράξεσιν αὐτοῦ [10] καὶ ἐνδυσάμενοι **τὸν νέον** τὸν ἀνακαινούμενον εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν κατ' εἰκόνα τοῦ κτίσαντος αὐτόν,...

“Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off **your old self** with its practices [10] and have put on **the new self**, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”

Eph. 4:22-24 ἀποθέσθαι ὑμᾶς κατὰ τὴν προτέραν ἀναστροφὴν **τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον** τὸν φθειρόμενον κατὰ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας τῆς ἀπάτης, [23] ἀνανεοῦσθαι δὲ τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ νοῦς ὑμῶν [24] καὶ ἐνδύσασθαι **τὸν καινὸν ἄνθρωπον** τὸν κατὰ θεὸν κτισθέντα ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ καὶ ὁσιότητι τῆς ἀληθείας.

With regard to your former way of life to put off **your old self**, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; [23] to be made new in the attitude of your minds; [24] and to put on **the new self**, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

There are at least five elements in these texts that deserve detailed discussion. Firstly, in both cases Paul is discussing ethical issues in the larger context, and he bends these ideas about change and creation to reinforce his instruction to Jesus's followers about certain behaviours. Their new relationship with the Messiah and engagement with the Holy Spirit must result in transformed living because this is one of the ways by which they radiate the Messiah's glory within this age. Being transformed into the image of God revealed in the Messiah results in ethical change.

Secondly, Paul sets up the contrast between the old self and the new self. This language sounds similar to the Adam-Christ contrast found in Rom. 5, that also has ethical implications. Paul uses the metaphor of changing clothes to describe what this looks like. Believers now express in some limited but real fashion the “image of God,” i.e., the Messiah himself.

Thirdly, Paul expresses this reclothing activity as aorist infinitives and these tense forms usually express a completed idea. In other words, for believers this has happened. What occurs for the rest of their lives is the “renewing of their mind by the Spirit,” and this generates continuing, ethical change.

Fourthly, there is deliberate reference to the actions of the Creator who is responsible for this transformation. Paul describes the “new person” as something “that has been created in accordance with God’s purpose,” and the aorist passive participle has an implied agent and indicates a completed action. This description resonates with the first creation narrative in Gen. 1. As well, it agrees with other references in Paul’s letters to new creation: e.g., Gal. 6:15 “what really matters is new creation (καινή κτίσις)” and 2 Cor. 5:17 “If anyone is in Christ he is new creation (καινή κτίσις); the old has passed; the new has come (τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρήλθεν, ἰδοῦ γέγονεν καινά).”

Finally, Paul locates this change in humans in the cognitive sphere – the mind, real knowledge (Rom. 12:1-2). The transformation in this age is in the inner person, not the external body. In the age to come, the transformation will also include the body, as the full restoration of the Messiah’s image is completed. It enables God’s people to live righteously and piously in harmony with God’s truth in this age.

Due to space, only one other text will be explored, namely 1 Jn. 3:2. The writer instructs his audience about the implications of being “the offspring of God” (3:2). This new status causes opposition from the social context and requires pure living because the Messiah is pure (3:1, 3). Accordingly, the writer points forward to what is coming for these believers:

οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἐὰν φανερωθῆ ὅμοιοι αὐτῷ ἐσόμεθα, ὅτι ὁψόμεθα αὐτὸν, καθὼς ἐστίν.

But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (my translation)

The text assumes that significant, additional change occurs when the Messiah returns a second time. It is uncertain when this event will occur (contingent third class condition (ἐὰν φανερωθῆ)) and its exact nature is unclear (3:2a). Smalley indicates that ὅμοιοι αὐτῷ “implies spiritual unity,” not deification.¹⁸ We are now “offspring” (τέκνα) of God and this likeness to the Son of God should find limited, and primarily ethical, expression in this age (2:6). However, this transformation will only be complete at the return of the Messiah. While it is possible that the second ὅτι clause could modify the initial verb “know,” as an object clause, the position of the clause makes this less likely. Rather, the writer confirms that the vision of the risen Lord results in this final transformation (2 Cor. 3:18). The “real Jesus” is the risen, ruling God who became flesh. Of course, “seeing God/Jesus” is a primary theme and promise in Jn. 17:24. The following verse indicates that John is not promoting

¹⁸ Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John. Word Book Commentary*. Vol. 51, (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), 146.

mysticism, but rather providing rationale for ethical change in the lives of Christians in this age.

Summary

To conclude this brief survey about the use of the idea of the image of God by early Christian leaders, we can summarize the primary features and uses of this motif in the epistolary writings. Firstly, these uses, except for those in the Johannine corpus, predate the Gospel narratives. These ideas resonate particularly within the context of Jewish theological speculations, expressed both in the OT and in Second Temple documents. Apart from Hebrews, whose usage of the motif has apologetic purposes regarding the supremacy of Jesus as Messiah,¹⁹ the writers employ these ideas in service of other concepts they are discussing. Most of these other concepts have to do with ethical issues that affect Christians in this age or presage eschatological developments at the Messiah's Second Coming.

Secondly, there are at least five implications of Jesus as image of God for understanding Jesus' person, position, and mission.

1. Believers gain insight into his "god-ness" – pre-existence, incarnation, and post-resurrection.
2. They discern the extent to which and the manner in which God reveals himself in human nature.
3. The image of God, Jesus, both replicates the condition of the first human and lives in perfection, contrary to the first human's sinfulness.
4. When Jesus returns, he will be seen in his glory, presenting the full and complete image of God.
5. Finally, his ability to reverse the consequences of Adam's sin is at the heart of the salvation that the Son of God provides for humans.

Thirdly, in the case of humans as believers, there are three key foci. Firstly, in this age, transformation into God's image can occur, with some measure of restoration of "the image of God" that original sin has perverted. In this age, this restoration primarily has to do with the internal person and cognitive processes. However, miracles of healing and exorcism can also give visible expression to some aspects of this restoration. This change demonstrates itself primarily in ethical behaviour – life in the Spirit. This transformation occurs through "the vision" of God in Christ (a cognitive function) that results in individual conversion, and the work of the resident Spirit.²⁰ Secondly, complete transformation will occur at the Parousia, primarily in

¹⁹ Colossians 1 may have similar purpose.

²⁰ Paul's insistence that this spiritual transformation must find expression in moral/ethical behavior contrasts with Graeco-Roman religions that disconnect religious activity and principles from moral implications.

reference to the experience of resurrection when the complete person, including body, is made new (new creation) in the image of the Messiah. This final transformation reflects the eschatological transition from this age to the age to come, in which believers participate. The focus generally is on the individual, but there are some indications that restoration of the image has corporate implications for the Messiah's assembly (his body). Thirdly, the new humanity that results reflects the glory of God, which is another way of describing this transformation. It involves the entire Trinity in its accomplishment.

The Image of God in the Teachings of Jesus: Synoptic Gospels

All the texts examined up to this point occur in the Epistle literature produced prior to the Gospels or Johannine materials, produced after the other Gospels. There are no texts from the Gospels-Acts. This raises the question of whether these ideas find their source in Jesus' discourses and/or his actions. Does Jesus use these ideas, and if so, in what contexts, and with what language? If these ideas are not found in Jesus' teaching, from what source did the early Christian leaders take them? What justification did they have for incorporating them into their understanding of humans and Jesus, if Jesus himself does not employ these ideas and terms?

Jesus' discussion of the image of God

Several of these ideas are implicit in Jesus' insistence that God/Yahweh is our Father. In Mt. 5:45, Jesus describes humans as "children of your Father in heaven," whether they are "evil or good." Children in some sense express their parents' form and essence. God providentially cares for "the righteous and the unrighteous." Similarly, Jesus uses this notion of God as Father to give confidence to people to seek him. God will not reject them (7:7-11) and he gives good gifts to those who ask him. According to Mk. 7:14-23, what comes from a person's interior decisions and attitudes is what "defiles" them. This depravity that affects every human prevents an appropriate relationship with God sounds like the concept of original sin. In Mk. 10:5, where Jesus is in controversy with the Pharisees regarding divorce, he affirms that "at the beginning of creation God made them male and female," quoting from Gen. 1:27 and then (vv. 7-8) from Gen. 2:24.²¹

Jesus' use of the image of God motif to explain himself

As has been seen, other sections of the NT apply the image of God concept to Jesus in two different ways. Firstly, Jesus is defined in some sense as "the wisdom of God."

²¹ Some suggest that Mk. 12:13-17, where Jesus discusses "the image of Caesar" on coins, might also in some sense reference the idea of humans as the image of God. As such, humans rightly owe loyalty and service to God their creator.

In Jewish theology of the Second Temple Period there is considerable discussion about the role of wisdom in creation, etc. (cf. Wisd. 7; Prov. 8). The terms used to describe wisdom in these Jewish writings are similar to those found in the Epistles to connect Jesus with image of God ideas. Similarly, in Mt. 11:25-28 Jesus links himself with wisdom and in Mt. 7:24-27 the “wise person” is the one who heeds the words of Jesus.

Secondly, as God’s Son, Jesus is the pure, perfect and complete “image of God” (e.g., Mk. 1:1, 11; Mt. 11:27; Lk. 1:32, 35). This connects in one sense with the teaching about the virgin birth, where Mary is empowered by the Holy Spirit to conceive the Son of God (Lk. 1:29-38; cf. Lk. 3:37 – son of Adam, Son of God). The Transfiguration experience also implies that Jesus is God and has a unique relationship with God (Mk. 9:2-8). Within the Gospels, Jesus has the authority to do what God does - he forgives sins, discerns humans’ thoughts, creates food, commands the weather, heals the sick, raises the dead, and opposes Satan. In his character, he is sinless and compassionate. The title “Emmanuel” may have implications for this reality.²²

Thirdly, as a human, Jesus is the image of God, in a manner similar to Adam, the first human God created, prior to the Fall. The “Son of Man” terminology might have echoes of this idea (Dan. 7; Ps. 8). In the OT, this phrase often describes the human in contrast to the divine order, as in Psalm 8. Also, the title “Son of David” reminds of Jesus’ human ancestry, that in one sense qualifies him to fulfill God’s covenant promise to David. Therefore, the genealogies, particularly the one in Lk. 3, might convey some elements of this idea. Jesus’ possession of the Spirit to a unique degree also has potential reference to this theme, but the Gospel writers do not seem to take advantage of it. We know that the first Adam enjoyed an intimate relationship with Yahweh and so a text such as Mt. 11:25-27 may intersect with this idea. The Father has intimate conversations with the Son and shares revelations with him that he does not share with others. When Jesus “walks on the water” (Mt. 14:24), the disciples realize “it is the Lord.”

Jesus employs the “image of God motif” to talk about the transformation of his followers in this age and the age to come.

Jesus indicates that life in the Kingdom of God will involve some form of transformation. Firstly, in Mt. 5:48 Jesus challenges the audience “to be perfect...as your heavenly Father is perfect (τέλειοι...τέλειος).” This implies that humans have

²² Jesus’ interaction with Satan in the temptation stories in Lk. 3 and Mt. 3 reflects some conceptual relationship with the Fall narrative in Gen. 3. It may express the idea that Jesus is the last Adam who does not succumb to even greater temptations than those experienced by the first humans. Also, there may be ideas associated with the figure of the Messiah in Second Temple Judaism - his person, role and status - that might ground this teaching.

some capacity in this age to reflect, at least morally, the person of Yahweh. In the Beatitudes (Mt. 5:8-9), Jesus promises his followers that “they shall see God” and “they shall be called ‘sons of God.’” In some of the NT texts that have been examined, the vision of God is transformative (e.g., 2 Corinthians 3-4 and Exodus 33-34 and Moses). Further, the opportunity to “see God” implies some kind of human transformation that has addressed the issue of impurity and uncleanness due to the effects of original sin (2 Corinthians 4). The language of new birth used in John 3 implies essential transformation of humans by divine agency.

Secondly, in discussion with the crowd Jesus announces that “whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Mt. 12:50). Jesus assumes some change can occur in human beings to enable them to do God’s will and thus to be regarded as the siblings of the Son of God.

Thirdly, the theme of righteousness is important in Matthew’s Gospel. Humans do not possess the necessary righteousness to please God, yet without righteousness they cannot enter the kingdom. Jesus addresses the question of what righteousness entails and how people become righteous so that they can enter the kingdom (5:20; 25:34-35).” He indicates that a relationship with him will enable this status. This status connects with the announcements by Jesus that the Son of Man will return “in the glory of the Father” and that in some way his followers at that time will also share that glory (Mt. 24:30; 16:27-28). This transformation in glory connects with the idea of human accountability before God, as well as with the promise of resurrection and enjoying the kingdom with the Messiah (Mk. 14.25).

Although there is little explicit use of the image of God language in the Gospels’ accounts of Jesus’ teaching, as in the earlier epistle literature, various elements have implicit connection or some resonance with this motif.

Implications of the NT teaching about the “image of God” for the understanding and praxis of Christian leadership.²³

²³ All Christians become the Messiah’s assistants or agents (διάκονοι) as an expression of their Christian vocation (a corollary of the redemptive mandate). Through the resident Spirit they become competent as God’s agents (διδάκονοι 2 Cor. 3:4-6). The Messiah expects his agents to influence others in order to advance his mission. In this role, they function as kingdom leaders in and through all of their relationships and activities. The apostle Peter indicates that believers function as priests, offer sacrifices, and form part of God’s “Temple” (1 Pet. 2:4-6). Both Paul (1 Cor. 12) and Peter (1 Pet. 4:10-11) present all members of the body of Christ as holding important functions in the kingdom/body of Christ. The use of military analogies in passages such as 1 Pet. 4:1-3 and Eph. 6:10-18 would support this perspective. In some sense, this is how Jesus’s followers, assisted by the Holy Spirit, fulfill their Gen. 1:26 creation mandate within the framework of the redemptive mandate.

It is also the case that some believers in their Christian vocation become recognized by the faith community as specially gifted to provide caring, protective, and organizational helps to enable local congregations fulfill their divine mission. However, when these Christians express kingdom leadership in this way, their primary function is help other believers to discern their vocation and become the kingdom leaders God has saved them to be (Eph. 4:11-16).

All believers fulfill their creation mandate within the framework of the redemptive mandate and thus have leadership responsibilities.

The essence of Christian leadership is the capacity to influence others to pursue a mission collectively for the glory of God. In the context of the creation mandate (Gen. 1:26), Yahweh creates humans with the explicit intent that they will be responsible, individually and collectively, to exercise lordship and to steward or manage this creation under divine delegation and thus aid him in achieving his purposes. These responsibilities imply that the image of God in humans equips humans, regardless of gender, to exercise leadership and organizational functions in the created order so that God fulfills his intentions for his creation, assisted by humans. The finite capacity as humans to do so reflects in small measure God's infinite capacity to lead and organize for good. Further, this capacity in some sense is inherent in all humans, both male and female. However, male and female cannot express the image of God in their leadership as God intended unless both genders express their leadership in a harmonious manner. The narrative of the Fall and its implications for humans indicates that the distortion of sin in particular reduces the ability of humans as male and female to find ways to lead together harmoniously and thus to manage the creation as God intends.

In the NT, Paul particularly uses the concept of new creation/creature to describe the consequences of human salvation. This concept implies to some degree that in Christ, aided by the Holy Spirit, humans recover to some degree the capacity to organize and steward creation, including human society, as God originally intended. In the case of the Messianic assembly, his "body," this restored leadership must then serve to enable the community to express collectively the essence of a society under God's rule, a kingdom culture. The Christian leadership that every Jesus follower exercises in some form expresses their restored image of God and, as practiced, reflects the values, capacities and purposes that are essential to God's leadership.

New capacities for the good and care of the Messianic assembly

As God's image emerges partially restored in all disciples, they exercise these newfound capacities for the good and care of the newly created Messianic assembly (Mt. 16:18). Their restoration, resourced by the Spirit, enables them to create good

Further, their leadership does not deny or reduce the leadership role that all believers have because of their vocation in Christ as his agents. The 'organizing work' entailed in the leadership of a congregation is merely one expression of the varied "dominion" work that all believers engage as the Messiah's agents.

This perspective about Christian leadership will be controversial, but I believe the data provided in the NT documents supports it. Essentially all of Jesus's followers become leaders/agents in his kingdom mission and fulfill their Spirit-led vocations in many different ways as parents, market-place influencers, friends, organizational leaders in the faith community, mentors, etc. The values that all believers are responsible to embrace become especially significant for those whom congregations entrust with specific leadership roles.

order, just relationships, and truth-filled interactions defined by love. As the new Messianic community displays this reality through its organizational and communal life, it bears witness to the gospel and the glory of the Son of God, i.e., the image of Jesus as his body (Mt.16:19; 18:15-20; Mk. 10:43-45). This dynamic kingdom culture demonstrates proleptically the essential nature of kingdom life that believers will experience fully and perfectly in the age to come.

Some specifically gifted Christians, entrusted by other Christians with the care of a local Messianic assembly/kingdom community, give attention to the organizational life of the community so that it reflects the image of the Messiah in all its worship and work. They accomplish this in various ways, including modelling Christian discipleship, truth-telling, and caring (e.g., 1 Thess. 5:11-15). However, it remains the case that all believers must partner together as they fulfill their leadership roles. No believer fulfills their leadership vocation perfectly and so other believers must exercise patience as together they work to “grow the body” and give valid expression to the “image of God.”

Enhanced leadership motivations

Specific Christian leaders exercise their gifts in a responsible way because they value the Messiah’s community and recognize that each participant is a “holy one” and a Messianic agent. Paul uses the categories of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor/teacher (Eph. 4:11-12) and also superintending manager (*episkopoi*, 1 Tim. 3:1-2; Tit. 1:5-6), stewards of divine resources (*oikonomoi*, 1 Cor. 4:1-2), to describe such leaders. Those entrusted with these specialized leadership roles endeavour to encourage, train, and model kingdom character, commitment, and coherence, in order to restore disciples who fulfill their roles as agents. The way they lead contrasts at every level with secular leadership patterns modelled by non-Christian leaders. Non-Christian leaders may from time to time reflect divine values because of common grace, but for the most part such leaders indicate no awareness of God’s values, purpose, or presence. Through kingdom leadership the family of God in this age becomes a new people, a new race, a new, holy nation, an expression of kingdom culture, able to display the virtues of God himself (1 Pet 2:9-10). All parts of the body generate the growth of the body (Eph. 4:16) through their nurturing.

Displaying the image of God

Specific Christian leaders function as members of the Messianic assembly. Along with all other disciples, they are being transformed into the image of God’s son. This process is just as challenging for them as it is for any other member of church. It requires humility because they serve to help all other believers become great in the kingdom (Mt. 18:1-6). Given the strong ethical connection between this transformation and a leader’s behaviour, specialized leaders must give special

attention to how they radiate the glory of this new image in and through their leadership. One significant way this works personally in the leader is the “renewing of their mind.” Leaders must learn how to think in God’s ways, not their ways.

Leading others to contemplate the image of God

If the goal of redemption is “new creation,” a primary responsibility of appointed Christian leaders is to enable all believers in the community to “contemplate this very image, i.e., the glory of God in Jesus Christ.” Specialized Christian leaders teach, mentor, and care for all believers so that they can express as fully as possible the image of Jesus in all aspects of their lives.

Specialized Christian leaders are essentially worship leaders in that their leadership in all its diverse elements seeks to help believers become transformed through their vision of the risen Christ, and to praise God behaviorally as his authorized agents. Rom. 12:1-2 encapsulates what this looks like. Contextualizing this reality into Canadian church life requires considerable prayer, wisdom, and discernment.

Also, one of the primary responsibilities of specialized Christian leaders is to enable every Jesus follower to discover their new creation leadership potential. This means enabling every believer to embrace their leadership responsibilities, to appreciate the resources the Holy Spirit provides to equip them, and then to find ways to express their leadership responsibilities in the various dimensions of their lives, whether as single person, spouse, parent, worker, friend, church ministry participant, steward of divine resources, etc. (Eph 4:1-16).

The Eschatological Character of Leadership

All of life’s activities, including work, have an eschatological character. Appointed Christian leaders are accountable to God. They live as leaders to demonstrate God’s righteous image. They anticipate Christ’s return, the joy of resurrection, and the full realization of the image. They enjoy the blessing of the Spirit’s presence within. While they live in this age, they know they are moving towards “the age to come.”

The image of God expressed together

Appointed Christian leaders know that they do not reflect the complete image of God in themselves. However, as they work together in harmony with other believers, they corporately express and reflect this image more completely and more effectively. The unity or oneness of the Messiah’s assembly, built out of the tremendous diversity of humans, radiates the glory of God, his image and becomes the most effective validation of the gospel’s truth.

The image of God can only be realized in this age in the lives of believers as they live together in community in obedience to Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Such a vision for Christian leadership implies that local churches have to focus upon developing mature disciples, because every one of Jesus’ followers has some role as a kingdom leader. As individual believers discern and express their vocations in Christ, they develop the capacity to express the image of Jesus in their corporate life.

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Appendix A: Lexical Terms in the NT Related to the Theology of the “Image of God.”

Greek Term	Meaning	Application in the NT
εἶδος	Something visible, figure/form, appearance.	The Holy Spirit appears in “bodily form” like a dove (Lk. 3:22). Jesus’ appearance changes in the Transfiguration (Lk. 9:29). We walk in the circumstances of faith, not in the circumstances of sight (2 Cor. 5:7).
εἰδέα/ιδέα	Outward look or appearance; form, kind.	No one has seen God’s “form” (Jn 5:37) The physical form of the angel at the tomb (Mt 28:3).
εἶδωλον	Image, copy (normal Greek word for cultic image is ἄγαλμα – glory, honour, statue). In pre-Christian Jewish apologetic it means “unreal things.”	In NT it refers to pagan gods and their images (Acts 7:41; 15:20; Rom. 2:22; 1 Cor. 8:4, 7; 10:19; 12:2; 2 Cor. 6:16; 1 Thess. 1:9; 1 Jn. 5:21; Rev. 9:20. [Cf. Gal. 4:8; Rom. 1:23; Deut. 32:17; 1 Cor. 10:19])
εἰδωλολάτρης, εἰδωλολατρία	Worship of idols	1 Cor. 5:10, 11; 6:9; 10:7; Eph. 5:5; Rev. 21:8; 22:15.

		1 Cor. 10:14; Gal. 5:20; Col. 3:5; 1 Pet 4:3.
εἰκόν (τύπος Acts 7:43; χάραγμα Acts 17:29)	Image, likeness, artistic representation; mental image; embodiment.	The figure of Caesar on coins (Mk. 12:16). The image of the beast (Rev. 13:14; 14:9, 11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4.) Christ as “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15). The original is always present in the image (Heb. 10:1; Rom. 1:23 [“the copy of the figure of men and animals”]). Humans are the image of God (1 Cor. 11:7; 1 Cor. 15:49 [Adam and Christ]; Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10). In Plato’s cosmology it refers to the visible world as the image of the deity; used as an epithet in Hellenistic ruler cults in Egypt (Rosetta Stone).
ἴσος	Equal with	Jesus as “equal with God” (Jn. 5:18 [cf. Phil. 2:6]).
μορφή	Form proper to a being, appearance. Similar in meaning to εἶδος, ιδέα, σχῆμα.	Resurrection form of a person (Mk. 16:12; Lk. 24:13ff). Transfiguration (Mk. 9:2ff). Jesus is the μορφή θεοῦ (Phil. 2:6) and takes on μορφή δούλου (Phil. 2:7). Demonstration of restraint for the good of others (Jn. 17:5).
μορφώω	Form, fashion	Christ must become incarnate in the lives of believers (Gal. 4:19; 2:20; Rom. 8:10; Eph. 3:17).
μεταμορφοῦσθαι	Change into another form	Transfiguration (Mk. 9:2; Mt. 17:2; see 1 Cor. 15:51f). Transformation in Christians (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:2).
σύμμορφος	That which has a similar nature	Eschatological goal (Rom. 8:29; Phil. 3:21).
συμμορφίζομαι	To share in having the same likeness/nature.	Phil. 3:10.
σχῆμα	The outward form perceptible to the senses; bearing; form, appearance.	Christ demonstrated his humanity by his earthly form. Jesus is perceived by human sense as human in every sense (Phil 2:7). The form of the world (1 Cor. 7:31).

μετασχηματίζω	Transform, alter, change the outward appearance of something.	Transfiguration of bodies in the resurrection as eschatological goal. Connected to concept of glory (Phil. 3:21). Judaizing agitators are lying apostles who transform themselves into apostles of the Messiah (2 Cor. 11:13-15). To express something in another form than what is expected (1Cor. 4:6).
ὁμοίωμα	What is made similar, copy	Equivalent to εἰκὼν in many cases. In Plato it describes an earthly copy of a heavenly prototype. It focuses on the idea of similarity. Used in this sense - “forms of locusts” (Rev. 9:7). Related to idols (Rom. 1:23); baptism / resurrection (Rom. 6:5); Adam’s sin (Rom. (5:14); Christ in the form of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3); Christ in the likeness of humans (Phil. 2:7).
ὁμοιόω	To be made like	Christ make like his brothers in experiencing suffering (Heb. 2:17). See ὁμοιότης “likeness, correspondence” (Heb. 4:15).
ὁμοίωσις	Making similar or like; being like	Humans are created according to the likeness of God (Jam. 3:9 referencing Gen. 1:26).
τύπος	Image Type	OT quote in Acts 7:43. Adam as a “type of the coming one” (Rom. 5:14).
καινός	new	-The “new man” created in Christ (Eph. 2:15; 4:24). New creation (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15).
καινότης	newness	Living “in newness of life” (Rom 6:4) We serve God “in newness of Spirit” (Rom. 7:6).
ἀνακαίνωσις	Cause something to become new	The mind of a believer (Rom. 12:2; see Eph. 4:23; Tit. 3:5). ἀνακαίνω (Col. 3:10; see 2 Cor. 4:16).
ὑπόστασις	Essential structure/nature, essence, reality	Jesus as exact representation of God’s being (Heb. 1:3).

Selected Resources

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