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# The Image of God and Human Identity: An Explanation Informed by the Two Kinds of Righteousness

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**The Image of God and Human Identity:  
An Explanation Informed by the Two Kinds of Righteousness**

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**Seminar Paper for completion of Sacred Theology Master's degree**

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## **The Image of God and Human Identity: An Explanation Informed by the Two Kinds of Righteousness**

“Paul in Romans 3 [:28], ‘We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works,’ briefly sums up the definition of man, saying, ‘man is justified by faith.’ ” *Martin Luther: 1536 Disputation Concerning Man, Thesis 32*

### **Introduction**

For centuries discussion and debate over the image of God has engaged theologians of every tradition. What is the image of God? Of what does it consist? How does Scripture speak of this image? Does it relate to all human beings? Establishing answers and definitions to such questions is a difficult yet vitally important task. Significant to these discussions are the implications that such definitions will have upon the understanding of human identity and human existence.

Treatments on the image of God have a variety of definitions and interpretations depending on the individual theologian and their theological tradition. There are three basic approaches to understanding the image of God: ontological, relational, and functional. J.P. Moreland defines them in this way:

The first, which may be termed substantive or ontological, understands the image as a characteristic within the nature of the human being. The second sees the image as relational, that is, it is not defined in terms of some attribute of mankind, but in the relationships of man with God, with his fellow man, and even with other creatures. A third view... is the functional interpretation, which sees the image not in something that man is or in his relationships, but in the God given task for mankind to rule over creation.<sup>1</sup>

Though useful, these approaches can be seen to have important limitations and deficiencies. The intent of this essay will be to present another approach to examining the image of God where all three of these approaches are incorporated and used to illumine a fuller understanding of the image of God, which will also give a more complete understanding of human identity.

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<sup>1</sup> *Christian Perspectives on Being Human*, eds. J. P. Moreland, & David M. Cioocchi, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker House, 1993), 22.

Such an endeavor may seem to be too ambitious for the scope of this essay. It is acknowledged that the vast amount of opinions and discussions regarding the image of God and human identity could not possibly be represented here. Nonetheless, that can not stop one from addressing the importance of these topics to the contemporary American culture and the disciplines fostered within that culture.

Though this essay may not be a comprehensive representation of the many opinions regarding the image of God and human identity, it will be comprehensive in the opinion that it offers. The discussion that follows does represent a particular opinion, a distinctly Lutheran opinion. However, it is an opinion that will offer theological depth and cogency to the topics being discussed in a manner which may not have been previously considered or taken into account. It will offer a more complete understanding of the image of God and human identity (as compared to the above approaches), where, not only theologians become more informed, but Christians of secular disciplines might be afforded the ability to speak more appropriately as they interact with their faith and their discipline in regard to human existence.

The approach being offered will be seen to be a decidedly “Christological” approach where human identity and the image of God are defined in soteriological terms as they (the image of God and human identity) are illumined by the understanding of the two kinds of righteousness and the two simultaneous dimensions to human existence and reality. Ultimately, the image of God and true human identity will be seen to be defined by the grace that comes through faith in Jesus Christ as the Redeemer and Savior of human beings, where those individuals outside of faith lack the image of God and true human identity.



## What is Human Identity?

Human identity is understood by many to be a very important issue. In the modern American culture there are psychologists, anthropologists, biologists, ethicists, lawyers, doctors, and theologians who all claim to have a stake in defining human identity for one purpose or another.<sup>2</sup> All offer definitions of human identity consistent with their discipline. Indeed, each of these disciplines has contributed a great deal toward the understanding of human beings. They offer much in the way of observing and expressing the existence of human beings as they live in the condition and situation called life.

However, the trend of the modern American culture is to define humanity apart from God. That is to say, the modern American culture is atheistic and reflects that belief in many of the disciplines present in the culture. As a result, a Christian perspective (theologians) will see these disciplines to be incomplete in their definition of humanity. In his book *The Way of the (modern) world, Or, Why it's Tempting to Live as if God Doesn't Exist* Craig M. Gay makes the observation that the American culture and its disciplines are promoting a culture of practical atheism, which consequently, can only offer incomplete definitions of humanity:

[C]ontemporary society and culture so emphasize human potential and human agency and the immediate practical exigencies of the here and now, that we are for the most part tempted to go about our daily business in this world without giving God much thought. Indeed, we are tempted

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<sup>2</sup> Psychologists do so in order to better treat the human condition and better understand "the riddle of human behavior." *Psychology and Life*. Tenth Edition. ed. Philip G. Zinnardo, (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1979), 22. Anthropologists do so to define what it is that constitutes and characterizes the creatures that they are studying. See *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology: Humanity, Culture and Social Life*. ed. Tim Ingold, (New York: Routledge, 2000) 3. Biologists do so [among many reasons] to define at what point in the human biological development does a "new individual" human life begin. See William Larsen, *Human Embryology*, (New York: Churchill Livingstone, 1997), 1, 17. Ethicists do so [among many reasons] to determine the ethical correctness and appropriateness of human cloning. See James Q. Wilson, "The Paradox of Cloning" in *Ethics of Human Cloning*, (Washington D.C.: The AEI Press, 1998), 73. To determine the appropriateness of embryonic stem cell research and fetal tissue research. See Andrew Kimbrell, *The Human Body Shop*, (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing Co., 1997). To determine at what point life may or may not be worth living. See Stanley Hauerwas, "Memory, Community, and the Reasons for Living; Reflections on Suicide and Euthanasia" in *The Hauerwas Reader*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001, 577-595). Lawyers do so to uphold espoused rights regarding abortions and end of life issues and doctors do so in order to determine how they can uphold the Hippocratic Oath. Theologians do so [as will be shown] in order to clarify exactly what and who human being is in relation to God and the reality in which they live.

to live as though God did not exist, or at least as if his existence did not practically matter. In short, one of the most insidious temptations fostered within contemporary secular society and culture, a temptation rendered uniquely plausible by the ideas and assumptions embedded within modern institutional life, is the temptation to *practical atheism*.<sup>3</sup>

As Gay later explains, practical atheism affords for no religious understanding or any concept of revelation.<sup>4</sup> As a result, human beings are left to their own devices to create and establish what it means to be human. “Now that Nature, the gods, and even the God of the Bible are not permitted to tell us who we are any more, we are left to try to make sense of who we are only on the basis of our own accomplishments and in the light of our own historical striving.”<sup>5</sup> Gay makes it clear that he sees there is something missing in the contemporary American culture’s assessment of human existence, namely, the God of the Bible. Therefore, Gay argues “that our criticism and resistance to modern society and culture must be genuinely *theological*.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, by this “criticism” and “resistance” Gay is advocating for a truly theological assessment of human existence and human identity.

To some extent, it seems that what Gay is contending has been noted by Christians engaged in many disciplines. In an effort to put forth a more complete definition of human identity (as well as the image of God) Christians engaged in various disciplines are beginning to speak much more theologically.

This can be seen particularly in those Christians engaged in scientific disciplines who are now appealing to human beings’ relationship to God and the image of God in order to define human identity. Christian psychologists along with Christian anthropologists have come to the forefront as those who regularly invoke the image of God in defining human identity.

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<sup>3</sup> *The Way of the (modern) world, Or, Why it’s Tempting to Live as if God Doesn’t Exist.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Erdmans, 1998) 2.

<sup>4</sup> Gay, 11.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.



Christian psychologists hold that “Our basic identity will remain confused until we see ourselves as part of God’s creation.”<sup>7</sup> They assert that a proper theory of personality depends on maintaining a biblical perspective:

[W]e believe that our foray into theological and biblical anthropology will give us the essential foundation for a more true and more complete understanding of persons by giving us ‘control beliefs’ or presuppositions. These control beliefs are the ‘givens,’ the assumptions that control or shape all other thought. We can then use these control beliefs to build a theory or personality with greater Christian distinctiveness.<sup>8</sup>

Subsequently, the appeal to the image of God is done with the intent to see the individual or client as more of a whole person, where the image of God emerges “as a rich, multifaceted reality, comprising acts, relations, capacities, virtues, dispositions, and even emotions”<sup>9</sup> all for the purpose of better treating the reality of the human condition.

Christian anthropologists also acknowledge the need to speak theologically in their study of man. For them it is imperative that proper distinctions are made between theology and simple anthropology, yet at the same time they take seriously the atheistic perception of the human situation in explaining human existence. Wolfhart Pannenberg explains:

[There] is the danger that human beings doing the theology may be concerned only with themselves instead of with God and thus let the true subject matter of theology go by the board. Nonetheless, if theologians are not to succumb to self-deception regarding their proper activity, they must begin their reflection with a recognition of the fundamental importance of anthropology for all modern thought and for any present day claim of universal validity for religious statements. Otherwise they will, even if unintentionally, play into the hands of their atheistic critics, who reduce religion and theology to anthropology, that is, to human assumptions and illusions. By narrowly focusing on the question of human salvation (especially under the influence of pietism), theologians have undoubtedly forgotten in great measure that the Godness of God, and not the human religious experience, must have first place in theology. This is true at least for any theology that is mindful of the First Commandment and takes as its norm the message of Jesus: ‘Seek first the kingdom of God.’

Theologians will be able to defend the truth precisely of their talk about God only if they first respond to the atheistic critique of religion on the terrain of anthropology. Otherwise all their assertions, however impressive, about the primacy of the Godness of God will remain purely subjective assurances without any serious claim to universal validity.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Stanton L. Jones & Richard E. Butman, *Modern Psycho-Therapies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press 1991), 42.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>10</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg. *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*. Translated by Matthew J. O’Connell. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 16.

Consequently, the appeal to the image of God is made as a point of contact for “the attempted theological interpretation of the implications of non theological anthropological study,”<sup>11</sup> where the purpose of this anthropology is not to “argue from dogmatic data and presuppositions. Rather, it turns its attention directly to the phenomena of human existence as investigated in human biology, psychology, cultural anthropology, or sociology...”<sup>12</sup>

These Christians involved in scientific disciplines have contributed much toward the examination of human identity and human existence in relation to God. They take into account the purely human dimension of interaction and place it along side the divine. They describe and discuss human existence not only in terms of human interaction but in terms that acknowledge the existence of God, and even more, in terms that demonstrate God actually matters to human life, now and eternally.

However, even amid these attempts to counter the modern American culture’s hold on defining human existence, limitations toward the definition of human identity, specifically the image of God, still remain. This could be due to what Gay calls a lack of “theological depth.” In critiquing the Christian response to the modern American mindset he says:

Anything short of a genuinely theological critique of modernity, in other words, is simply not up to the task of restraining the intrinsically secular logic of modernity’s central institutions. Not only is faith needed to spread faith, but the acids of modernity will quickly corrode even Christian protest that does not demonstrate theological depth and integrity.<sup>13</sup>

Gay goes on to say that theological traditions must be prepared to reform themselves from within where there is need.<sup>14</sup> Thus his emphasis falls upon the theological tradition rather than on any “scientific” discipline. That is to say, his critique implies that the disciplines of science are not in and of themselves deficient, but rather that the theological traditions that adapt

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>13</sup>Gay, 265.



them become deficient when they allow the scientific discipline to drive their theology rather than the other way around. When this occurs he notes that reform is needed, not only for those Christians in scientific disciplines that may be attempting to speak theologically, but especially for theological traditions of the Church trying to speak scientifically.

L. Gregory Jones in his essay *The Psychological Captivity of the Church in the United States* notes the extent to which the whole Church has become deficient in its theological proclamation of the human condition. He notes:

The church's captivity to therapy is not just a reflection of the influence of James Dobson or of M. Scott Peck or any version of the self-help/codependent/twelve-step recovery programs. Our deeper problem is that psychological language and practices have become more powerful than the language and practices of the gospel, not only in the culture but within the church. As a result, we have translated and reduced the gospel into psychological categories. Such reduction has altered and distorted the practices of the church. We have allowed it to become captive to psychology and psychological accounts of God, the world, and the nature and purpose of human life.<sup>15</sup>

Jones also recounts a 1993 article in *Time* magazine that dramatically emphasizes Gay's point that theology must remain the preeminent character of the Church and its adherents (theological traditions):

In the *Time* story, David, F. Wells warns that biblical truth "is being edged out by the small and tawdry interest of the self in itself." The Christian gospel is becoming "indistinguishable from any host of alternative self-help doctrines." The *Time* reporter then adds that "some of today's most influential religious figures are no longer theologians but therapists."<sup>16</sup>

Consequently, when such language governs theological understanding the language then employed to define human existence and the image of God becomes questionable in its integrity. In particular are the above examples of Christian psychology and Christian anthropology. Though each do indeed acknowledge the existence and importance of God, their contributions become limited when they allow the study of their discipline to direct how theological language is employed.

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<sup>14</sup> Gay, 265.

<sup>15</sup> Found in *Either Or The Gospel or Neopaganism*, eds. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, (Grand Rapids, MI: Erdmans 1995), 97-98.

Thus when Christian psychologists make the broad statement that the image of God is said to serve “as a rich, multifaceted reality, comprising acts, relations, capacities, virtues, dispositions, and even emotions”<sup>17</sup> in order to view the client as more fully human, the theological depth and integrity of such a statement must be examined. Likewise, when a Christian anthropologist invokes the image of God, where the purpose of such anthropology is not to argue from dogmatic data and presuppositions but rather to turn “its attention directly to the phenomena of human existence as investigated in human biology, psychology, cultural anthropology, or sociology...”<sup>18</sup> the theological depth and integrity of such assessments must be evaluated.

The purpose of this essay is not to decry any particular discipline of study per se, but rather to emphasize the necessity for genuine theological depth and integrity in addressing human identity and the image of God in the modern American culture. Consequently, the disciplines of psychology and anthropology can not be the only ones held responsible for any deficient or incomplete understanding of the image of God or human identity. Very often they are only reflecting the vast differences in theological opinion. As such, a return to a biblical theology that offers depth, reliability, and integrity is called for so that clarity and completeness might be offered to all disciplines who aspire to speak about human existence in a reality where God exists and where God matters.

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<sup>16</sup> *Either Or The Gospel or Neopaganism*, 97. See also “The Generation that Forgot God.” *Time*, (April 5, 1993), 43.

<sup>17</sup> Jones & Butman, *Modern Psycho-Therapies*, 40 (see n. 8).

<sup>18</sup> Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, 16, 20 (see n. 10 and 11).



### Framework of Examination

The definition of human identity for each of the above disciplines (psychologists, anthropologists, biologists, ethicists, lawyers, doctors, and theologians) runs the spectrum. However, there is a commonality between them all, namely, that each definition is derived from and through the relational aspect of human being. That is to say, human beings are defined by the above disciplines in terms of what or to whom they are in relation. Yet, the object of the relation is decidedly distinct in each profession.

The understanding of human identity for all the above is qualified by the “thing” they define as that to which human beings are in relation. In other words, who or what human beings are standing before determines how their identity will be defined. By simplifying the relational aspect to the lowest common denominator one can identify three basic but distinct objects of which they assert human beings stand in relation. They are: God – *coram Deo*, other human beings – *coram hominibus*, and the rest of creation – *coram mundo*. This observation can be simplified further noting that these objects of relation basically exist in two separate dimensions of human life. There is the vertical dimension, the human relationship to God; and there is the horizontal dimension, the human relationships to the world and its inhabitants.

As Gay observed, within the contemporary atheistic American culture many of these disciplines define human identity and human existence entirely apart from God. That is to say, they base their definition upon the horizontal dimension of human life omitting any comprehension of the vertical dimension. However, theology is unique as it overtly addresses the simultaneity of these dimensions to human life. That is to say, it speaks of human existence and human identity as it is lived in the reality of these two dimensions. It offers biblical depth to the reality that people live in and speaks with biblical integrity regarding human existence.

As already noted, an increasing number of individuals within other disciplines (i.e. Christian psychologists and Christian anthropologists) are also attempting to address human identity from both dimensions. Though these are needed and welcomed efforts, some are lacking a theological depth that would offer more clarity to what it is they are trying to define. Rather than speaking theologically and allowing biblical theology to shape their language, certain disciplines synthesize theology into language that fits their area of study and clarifies only what their particular discipline is addressing. For example, some so-called “Christian psychologists” see the person as a fundamental unity where they deny “the possibility of the self existing apart from the body after death.”<sup>19</sup>

Such a view results from what Meier et al. identify as the “psychology integrates Christianity” approach to psychology and theology.<sup>20</sup> In their analysis of four possible ways in which psychology and theology are integrated,<sup>21</sup> they observe that “there is a danger in adopting this model uncritically. Integration can easily become syncretism, a mixing of paganism and Christianity to produce a sub-Christian, compromising faith.”<sup>22</sup> In short, such a view becomes dangerous as it compromises the integrity of a truly biblical theological assessment and limits the definitions of human existence offered therein.

Another example comes from so-called “Christian anthropologists.” In his book *Christian Anthropology: A Meaning for Human Life* John F. O’Grady makes some very dangerous assertions regarding science and theology. He asserts that the “theory of evolution has clear consequences that affect Christian anthropology.” He says, “Theologians must respect

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<sup>19</sup> Paul Meier et al. *Introduction to Psychology and Counseling: Christian Perspectives and Applications*. (Second Edition, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 29.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., Such an analysis follows after Niebuhr’s “analysis of history” 26. “The first position is the Christianity against psychology position...A second position is the psychology against Christianity position...A third perspective may be described as the Christianity and psychology viewpoint, which affirms the two disciplines as separate but equal ways of finding truth...The final approach is the psychology integrates Christianity view” 26-29.



these findings of science and preserve the affirmations of Christian Scripture and tradition. Only if the contemporary theologian can maintain a relationship between science and theology has he fulfilled his responsibility.”<sup>23</sup> O’Grady’s intention is to emphasize that Scripture must be made subject to science and that science ultimately governs how one speaks theologically about creation and the origins of human existence:

The author of Genesis was not interested in presenting a theory opposed to, or in favor of, evolution. What he wanted to do was to teach something about the meaning of human life and used ideas of his own time to express his thoughts. Scientific affirmations about the origin of the world or the origin of the human race are matters for science and not for faith. Whether man was created from organic or inorganic matter, whether he arose monogenistically or polygenistically are questions for science and not for the Bible. Evolution in Scripture, its presence or absence, is an open question to which Scripture can make no response.<sup>24</sup>

After this assertion O’Grady goes on to state, “Although earthly,” implying man’s evolutionary ascent, “man has a special relationship to God. Other creatures receive their blessing but man alone is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27).”<sup>25</sup> However, he leaves unanswered how this image came to be a part of “man” offering only the notion that “Man in creation,” however that evolutionary creation took place, “is constituted with a special possibility with God.”<sup>26</sup> Again, such so-called “Christian” views are dangerous as they compromise the integrity of any theological assessments, challenging the validity of the Bible as authoritative and true, and limit the definitions of human existence offered therein.

Pannenberg appears to be no different when he asserts what seems to be a similar view in his book *Theological Anthropology*. For him it seems the creation account of Genesis is a “myth” and can not be taken seriously in light of the “scientific” findings of evolution:

As a historical claim about the beginnings of human history, the idea that there was an original union of humankind with God which was lost through a fall into sin is incompatible with our currently available scientific knowledge about the historical beginnings of the race. This being the

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<sup>22</sup> Meier et al., 29.

<sup>23</sup> John F. O’Grady, *Christian Anthropology: A Meaning for Human Life*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), 99.

<sup>24</sup> O’Grady., 97.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

case we should renounce artificial attempts to rescue traditional theological formulas; one such attempt is the idea of an origin that is supposedly nonhistorical.<sup>27</sup>

From this he canvasses and integrates a number of theologians regarding the “image of God” who maintain ontological and relational approaches driven by an anthropocentric understanding of reality. In the general sense he seems to imply that the image of God is used to connote human destination to communion with God (74). This he observes was based upon notion that the image of God was no longer regarded “as a perfection of the original state that was lost by the fall, but regarded it... as the destiny that human beings still have to attain” (54); He substantiates this further with the understanding that, “Since human beings themselves are involved in the question of their human destination, it is not possible that this destination, though grounded in the divine creative intention, should remain purely external to them; rather, their being must be understood as constituted by the divine creative intention” (60). As with O’Grady, Pannenberg seems to fail taking seriously the truth of the creation account recorded in Scripture on the grounds that a scientific discipline has the edge to understanding human existence. Consequently, the integrity of any theological assertions made is compromised and they offer more dangers than truths.

As a result, one of the primary goals of this paper will be to speak clear theological language that articulates a reliable biblical understanding of human identity and the image of God, where clarity is given to the condition of human being in such a way that may benefit all disciplines examining human existence and directs how one speaks of human existence.

One of the means to doing this will be to show how the first object of relation – God – is the crucial and significant object that not only defines true human identity, but also (one would think obvious) the image of God. The other two objects of relation (the world and its

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<sup>27</sup> Pannenberg, 57.



inhabitants) will be explained in terms of out-workings or expressions of that relationship to God and identity given by God.

### Reality

Gay notes that, "Where there is no God, it has truly been said, there is no *human being* either."<sup>28</sup> His emphasis is on the reality that humans have there being in relation to God whether they are aware of it or not. He is making the point that apart from God there can be no true humanity, no truly human existence. He is speaking with the understanding that there are two dimensions to human life. He is declaring the human relationship to God to be that which defines human existence. Likewise, the intent of this essay is to explicate in clear theological language how human identity, as well as the image of God, is determined by God and the two dimensional reality in which humans exist.

The central figure of this two dimensional reality is, as Gay identified, God. However, the more specific theological term/language that can be employed to define this God centered reality is a "theocentric reality." Yet, this language may not even be specific enough given the current state of the modern American culture.

Though Gay articulates the atheistic state of the America culture, Carl E. Braaten explains the modern American culture, not in atheistic terms, but in "neopagan" terms. In his essay *The Gospel for a Neopagan Culture* Braaten defines neopaganism as the "modern variations of the ancient belief of pre-Christian mystery religions that a divine spark or seed is innate in the individual human soul."<sup>29</sup> Here, "Salvation consists of liberating the divine essence

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<sup>28</sup> Gay, 16.

<sup>29</sup> *Either Or The Gospel or Neopaganism*, 7.

from all that prevents its true self-expression. The way of salvation is to turn inward and ‘to get in touch with oneself,’ as people say today.”<sup>30</sup>

Braaten emphasizes that the pluralism of the American culture allows for a religious nature to the culture, but this nature is vague and undefined where almost anything can be deified:

Let us be clear about this. Neopaganism does not mean no religion at all. It means a different religion – a “different gospel.” And usually it appears not in naked form but quite often dressed in Christian symbols that fool the masses. Even Christ is welcome in the Gnostic pantheon, but not necessarily as Jesus, only as an empty vessel into which each age pours its own ideal and values.<sup>31</sup>

In either case, both Gay and Braaten observe that the God of the Bible is notably absent from the reality espoused by much of the modern American culture. However, Braaten forces theologians to be even more specific in the language that is employed when speaking about the (two-dimensional) reality in which humans have their being. If the modern American culture has deified nearly anything and everything, a “theocentric reality” might not be specific enough in explicating what kind of reality humans live. Braaten recognizes that a god or a deity may indeed have a presence in the thought of contemporary American culture. Therefore any assertion of a theocentric reality may not properly distinguish the one true God from the gods of a neopagan culture.

In order to be absolutely clear of the God and the reality being referenced, Braaten encourages the more precise theological term of a “Christocentric”<sup>32</sup> reality (a Christ centered reality) as that which is to be used in order to describe the existence in which humans have their being. To be even more precise, Braaten establishes that this Christocentric reality (or Christology) is the distinct story of Jesus Christ where the historical, kerygmatic, and dogmatic

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<sup>30</sup> Braaten, 7.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 19

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 9.

components of this Gospel message are present.<sup>33</sup> He notes that such a specification is necessary for a “counteroffensive” against the neopagan tendencies of the American culture because the “historical, kerygmatic, and dogmatic components of the gospel equip the church to stake its entire life on Christ, leaving no place for any other love or loyalty. This and nothing else will immunize the church against anthropocentric theologies of experience.”<sup>34</sup>

Braaten and Gay note the absence of the God of the Bible from contemporary American culture and illumine the necessity for clear theological language that carries the depth of true biblical theology where the reality of human existence is conveyed in unequivocal and unambiguous terms. Using such language guards against any misconstructions or limited explanations that might be put forth by anthropocentric or one dimensional disciplines. It also sets out a corrective to those Christian disciplines who synthesize theology into anthropocentric language that fits their field of study rather than letting theology guide their study and the way they speak.

### **Methodology**

Given the above, one can see the need to be biblically and theologically precise in explicating any definition of human identity or the image of God. That is to say, theology and Scripture must drive how one speaks of human identity and the image of God in order to preserve a proper, more complete, and truthful explanation of human existence. Very often human identity is considered to be an empirical scientific field of study that is guided by

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<sup>33</sup> Braaten, 8-15.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 20.



anthropology. However, the Christocentric reality being dealt with by anthropology (whether they know it or not) transcends the scientific and the empirical.

As such, the purpose of this paper is not anthropological per se. Yes, it is anthropological in that it deals with “human” identity, however empirical anthropocentric assertions are not what drive the assertions made in this essay. The assertions made are driven by Scripture and the theological language and doctrine that expounds upon Scripture. Nor, to be clear, is this approach theological anthropology as the dangers of theological anthropology were illuminated above. The goal of the essay is simply theological.

The intent is to maintain a Christocentric underpinning to all that is examined for the purpose of establishing a lucid and specific understanding of the image of God and human identity that is communicated in clear theological language. A Christocentric foundation can only be properly understood through faith. Empirical (atheistic) anthropology is unable to fully understand this reality and is therefore limited in defining human identity properly understood from a two dimensional reality and extremely deficient in examining the image of God.

Theological anthropology attempts to fix the inadequacies of empirical (atheistic) anthropology by combining theology and anthropology in order to render a proper understanding of a Christocentric reality. However, (as noted to above) the nature of any anthropology is that it is man-centered. In other words, its primary emphasis falls upon the examination of man from man’s perspective. This type of examination is limited in that the tendency of anthropology (atheistic and even some so-called Christian anthropologies) is to ask too many anthropocentric questions that focus on empirical observations and metaphysical quandaries.

Atheistic anthropology offers no theological depth as it is emphasizing the horizontal dimension independent of the vertical dimension. Theological anthropology offers little



theological depth when it subverts the vertical dimension of life to the horizontal understanding of life as it is gained independent of the vertical. In the end, anthropocentric questions only yield anthropocentric answers and do not reveal the nature of reality that comes through faith, a faith that is Christocentric rather than anthropocentric, and flows from the Word of God.

To be sure, there is a definite place for anthropology and all the other “sciences” (i.e. those disciplines named above), but they are to be used in a manner that serves the faith of a Christocentric reality rather than in a manner that usurps or establishes what the Scriptures of that faith state. The former use of all such scientific disciplines is understood to be a ministerial use of reason as they serve the Scriptures and the Christocentric reality proclaimed by those Scriptures. The latter use would be considered a magisterial use of reason as they assume complete authority in the defining of reality based upon the horizontal dimension of human life.

This reality is then incomplete when both dimensions are not accounted for. Any definition asserted by an anthropocentric discipline may be true and even useful from the empirical human and worldly dimension, but it does not understand human beings as they stand before God – *coram Deo*. The ultimate Christocentric reality in which humans exist must be accounted for if one hopes to have a complete definition of human identity. Therefore, again, the approach of this paper is decidedly theological in nature.

### **Theological Approach**

Braaten’s above emphasis upon the “historical, kerygmatic, and dogmatic components of the gospel” in order to “equip the church to stake its entire life on Christ, leaving no place for any other love or loyalty” is the starting and ending point for a complete theological examination of human existence. As already noted, using Christology to examine human being offers the

most complete understanding toward the human condition. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and his purpose as the Savior and Redeemer of human beings offers the utmost clarity and depth to any theological explication of human identity and human existence.

Particularly significant to the topic at hand, is Article IV, *Justification* – of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession from the confessional Lutheran *Book of Concord*. This article is a principal tenet of the Lutheran theological tradition that emphasizes the point that Braaten makes regarding the preeminence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in defining human existence. Here the confession is made that “All Scripture should be divided into these two chief doctrines, the law and the promises.”<sup>35</sup> Such discernment sets the stage for all theological thinking and offers deeper insight into the Word of God. It will be the driving force of this essay.

This distinct Law and Gospel approach to the reading Scripture is the hallmark of the Lutheran theological tradition. Chapter one will demonstrate how this approach can offer a distinct advantage to understanding human identity in a Christocentric reality while chapter two will demonstrate how this approach offers a distinct advantage to understanding the image of God as it appears in Scripture.

The works of Martin Luther, the 16<sup>th</sup> century church Reformer and Confessional founder, also gives great theological clarity and depth to the topics at hand and must be examined. Special attention is given to his works on the two kinds of righteousness as they offer significant contributions toward understanding the image of God and human identity.

### **Purpose**

Using Braaten’s concept of a Christology and these confessional tools as a framework for this study will offer, as Gay calls for, a “genuine” theological depth and integrity in addressing



human identity and the image of God in the modern American culture. Human identity will be explained in terms of the two dimensions of human life, where humans have an identity before God – *coram Deo* (the vertical dimension) and another identity before man – *coram hominibus* and the rest of the world – *coram mundo* (the horizontal dimension). It will also demonstrate how the image of God parallels true human identity, and consequently, how true human identity and the image of God are by divine design a matter of salvation that must be defined in soteriological terms. It will at the same time lay out the distinctions of human existence and human identity in terms of the horizontal dimension of human life, rendering a more complete analysis of human being.

### **Chapter One: A Christocentric Human Identity vs. An Anthropocentric Human Identity**

The introduction established the approach that this paper assumes, namely, a Christological reality. It also articulated two dimensions to this approach. The ability to perceive these two dimensions is essential to a Christological approach. This is so because the truth of each of these dimensions can only be perceived through the reality that Jesus Christ came to redeem human beings from sin and death and to give eternal life. This perception is identified through faith. Thus, a Christ centered reality is a reality of faith that centers on Him for the meaning of life. It is a reality determined by its creator – God. It is a reality where human identity is defined by God for both dimensions of life.

An anthropocentric approach, on the other hand, operates on quite a different premise.

The ability to detect two dimensions to human life is rather limited.<sup>35</sup> Human beings remain the

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<sup>35</sup> Ap. IV, 5; *The Book of Concord*. trans. by Theodore G. Tappert, (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1959), 108.

<sup>36</sup> It should be noted that close friend to Luther and fellow church reformer Philip Melanchthon offers unique insight into such limited understanding of the vertical dimension by anthropocentric disciplines. In his examination of Natural Law in his 1543 *Loci Communes* Melanchthon observes that even pagan philosophers had a faint natural

center of reality and determine reality from their own perspective. Empirical observations and metaphysical assertions are the limit of their ability. Therefore in an anthropocentric reality, reality is as reality is perceived. Consequently, human identity becomes subject to a one dimensional definition that is incomplete and devoid of eternal meaning.

### **The Two Dimensional life explained by Luther**

The identification of the two dimensions to human life is a significant theological contribution offered by Martin Luther to the understanding of human identity. A comprehensive explanation and elaboration of these dimensions will accentuate the Christocentric reality that defines human identity. It will offer theological depth and perspective to any discipline endeavoring to speak of human existence in both dimensions.

The two dimensional reality to human life was drawn out by Luther through his development and exposition of the two kinds of righteousness. In 1519 Luther began to understand that there were two kinds of righteousness: "The first is alien righteousness, that is the righteousness of another, instilled from without. This is the righteousness of Christ by which he justifies through faith... This righteousness, then, is given to men in baptism and whenever they are truly repentant... The second kind of righteousness is our proper righteousness... That is the manner of life spent profitably in good works..."<sup>37</sup> Luther would continue to expound and refine this understanding coming to call this "alien righteousness" a passive righteousness and this "proper righteousness" an active righteousness.

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knowledge of the vertical dimension where there was even a general recognition of the first table of the law present in the thought of such philosophers as Xenophon and Cicero. (translated by J.A.O. Preus. St. Louis MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 70-71.



In the preface to his 1535 commentary on Galatians Luther writes:

This is our theology, by which we teach a precise distinction between these two kinds of righteousness, the active and the passive, so that morality and faith, works and grace, secular society and religion may not be confused. Both are necessary, but both must be kept within their limits. Christian righteousness applies to the new man, and the righteousness of the Law applies to the old man, who is born of flesh and blood.<sup>38</sup>

Robert Kolb observes that Luther had come to the realization that there needed to be a distinction between what made a person genuinely right – truly human – in God’s sight and what made a person truly human – genuinely right – in relationship to other creatures of God.<sup>39</sup> Kolb asserts that this distinction is what he labeled “our theology.”

Accordingly, this understanding afforded for a radical new way of examining the life and reality in which human beings live. It was a life that had two worlds or two dimensions to it:

We set forth two worlds, as it were, one of them heavenly and the other earthly. Into these we place these two kinds of righteousness, which are distinct and separated from each other. The righteousness of the law is earthly and deals with earthly things; by it we perform good works. But as the earth does not bring forth fruit unless it has first been watered and made fruitful from heaven above – for the earth cannot judge, renew, and rule the heavens, but the heavens judge, renew, rule, and fructify the earth, so that it may do what the Lord has commanded – so also by the righteousness of the law we do nothing even when we do much; we do not fulfill the law even when we fulfill it. Without any merit or work of our own, we must first be justified by Christian righteousness, which has nothing to do with the righteousness of the law or with earthly and active righteousness. But this righteousness is heavenly and passive. We do not have it of ourselves; we receive it from heaven. We do not perform it; we accept it by faith, through which we ascend beyond all laws and works. “As, therefore, we have borne the image of the earthly Adam,” as Paul says, “let us bear the image of the heavenly one” (1 Cor. 15:49), who is a new man in a new world, where there is no Law, no sin, no conscience, no death, but perfect joy, righteousness, grace, peace, life, salvation, and glory.<sup>40</sup>

In short, this distinction revealed the reality that human beings exist in two different dimensions simultaneously. These dimensions correspond to the previously observed vertical and horizontal dimensions of human life. To review, the vertical dimension is where human

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<sup>37</sup> *Luther’s Work’s*, “The Two Kinds of Righteousness” American Edition Volume 31: 297, 299; hereafter all Luther’s Works citations will be denoted by “AE” followed by the volume number and page number(s), year and title of work..

<sup>38</sup> AE 26:7; *1535 Lectures on Galatians*.

<sup>39</sup> Robert Kolb, “Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness; Reflections on His Two Dimensional Definition of Humanity at the Heart of His theology.” *Lutheran Quarterly* (Vol. XIII, 449-466, 1999) 451.

<sup>40</sup> AE 26:8; *1535 Lectures on Galatians*.

beings exist before, and have a relationship to God (*coram Deo*) as he is above and below them as their Creator and Redeemer. The horizontal dimension is where human beings exist before, and have a relationship with fellow human beings (*coram hominibus*) as well as the with the rest of creation (*coram mundo*).

Significant to this realization is how these dimensions direct and shape human identity. As the introduction noted, the majority of secular disciplines are anthropocentric and base human identity upon the understanding of the horizontal dimension.<sup>41</sup> Theology is the only discipline that completely addresses the simultaneity of the two dimensions in human life and must therefore lead the way in defining human identity. Properly addressing the simultaneity of these two dimensions is vital for theologians to clarify human identity as well as the image of God. It will also offer theological depth and integrity to those Christians in scientific disciplines who are attempting to address both dimensions of human life.

In view of this, Luther's thought becomes crucial. His understanding on the two kinds of righteousness provides insight into the human life that was previously not possible. Kolb is particularly helpful in elaborating on the significance of Luther:

In developing this contrast between passive righteousness – which expresses itself in faith – and active righteousness – which expresses itself in performing the deeds of God's place for human life – Luther was bringing to light a fundamental distinction that had escaped articulation by most theologians since the time of the apostles. This distinction recognizes and rests upon Christ's observation that human life consists of two kinds of relationship, one with the author and creator of life, the other with all other creatures (Matt. 22:37-39).<sup>42</sup>

From this emerges the reality that human identity is seen differently in each dimension, though it ultimately comes from the same origin:

God's human creatures are right – really human – in their vertical relationship because their faith embraces the God who loves them through Jesus Christ with the reckless trust of total dependence and reliance on him which constitutes identity. They are right – really human – in their horizontal

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<sup>41</sup> Again, it is noted that anthropocentric disciplines may have a faint knowledge of the vertical dimensions based upon Natural Law however, this is still an incomplete and deficient understanding of the reality in which humans have their being.

<sup>42</sup> Kolb, 452.



relationship with God's other creatures when they live a life which is active in reflecting his love through the deeds that deliver his care and concern. Two spheres and kinds of relationship demand two different ways of being right or righteous.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, true human identity comes from God and rests in God's declaration of forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ. This is the passive righteousness imparted to human beings that restores the original humanity that humans were created with in the Garden of Eden. However, this identity can only be perceived through faith and is therefore known only through the vertical dimension. Yet, the outworking of this human identity does manifest itself through active righteousness, the good works that a person does in the horizontal dimension.

When one operates with a Christological approach that utilizes the two kinds of righteousness one can recognize that true human identity comes from God. A person can understand that what makes a person truly human cannot be determined empirically or anthropocentrically. True human identity rests upon the righteousness of Christ while the outworking of that identity, which could be observed empirically, is the Christian's care for the neighbor. However, care for the neighbor can occur apart from faith and apart from the righteousness of Christ. This is why Luther distinguished between the two kinds of righteousness. Where there is the lack of passive righteousness there is also the lack of true human identity.

In sum, the empirical or anthropocentric (atheistic and even so-called "Christian") disciplines do not completely grasp this Christocentric understanding and so continue to define human identity from a limited anthropocentric definition of reality. A Christological reality is able to distinguish between the two dimensions of human life and discern what makes one truly

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<sup>43</sup> Kolb, 453.

human in both dimensions, namely, a right relationship to God through faith in Jesus Christ, where the expression of that identity is seen in the care of neighbor.

The image of God will be seen to follow the same pattern. It will be demonstrated to be invariably bound up with the defining factor of true human identity. A Christological reality recognizes that the image of God exists solely *coram Deo* – in the vertical dimension. This parallels true human identity, as it can only be seen through faith. Both human identity and the image of God come from God and are restored through the righteousness of Christ.

However, as was the case with human identity, those so-called “Christian” disciplines attempting to address both dimensions of human life from an anthropocentric reality very often incorrectly define the image of God as a characteristic of all human beings that is identifiable to all human beings. What this does is cast the image of God into the wrong dimension of human existence on account of the inability to properly understand these dimensions of human life. Thus, a corrective must be given so that the image of God might be properly defined theologically and Christians working within the various disciplines of the American culture might therefore be accurately informed and therefore properly invoke the image of God.<sup>44</sup>

## Chapter 2: The Image of God in Scripture

Before any further explanation of the image of God can be given the Scriptural texts which reference the image of God must be identified. Though a detailed exegetical treatment of

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<sup>44</sup>Here the argument may be raised that asserting genuine humanity and the image of God as something that does not apply to all human beings might cause evil men to treat such people inhumanely. However, that such an event would occur can not be blamed upon the truth of what a Christocentric reality makes clear and should not keep one from proclaiming the truth of a Christocentric reality. Furthermore, any appeal to treat any person inhumanely on the basis of the theological definition of human being would fly in the face of and contradict the Christocentric reality being used as the basis for the assertion. The Gospel message declares the value of each and every person and calls believers to love their neighbor as themselves. Further yet, making an appeal to the image of God in an attempt to detour evil human beings will generally not have an impact on someone who does not believe in God in



each text is warranted, the scope of this paper will not permit any kind of extensive handling of that many texts. Rather what will be given are relatively simple, yet succinct assessments of the particular texts. It will become readily apparent that the hermeneutic being employed is that which has been informed by the New Testament and the message of Jesus Christ as Savior. Subsequently, and in accord with the Lutheran tradition, all texts will be read with an eye to discerning the law and Gospel present in each. Therefore, to be consistent in using this approach the New Testament texts must first be examined as they illumine and inform the meaning of the Old Testament texts.

### **New Testament Texts**

The Christological reality and the soteriological nature of the Scriptures, understood through the distinction of law and Gospel, will bring to light the understanding that the image of God should also be thought of in soteriological terms as it occurs in these verses. The New Testament passages where the image or likeness of God is referenced or alluded to in some manner follows:

*Romans 8:29: For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

*1 Cor. 11:7-9: A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.*

*1 Cor. 15:48-49: As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.*

*2 Cor. 3:18: And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

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the first place. When the full Christocentric reality of human existence is confessed and not distorted there can be no basis for treating people inhumanely.

2 Cor. 4:4-5: *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.*

Eph. 4:22-24: *You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

Col. 1:13-15: *For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.*

Col. 3:9-10: *Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

Hebrews 1:3: *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven*

James 3:9 *With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness.*

Eight of the ten references expressing a likeness or image (Romans 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:48-49; 2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Cor. 4:4-5; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 1:13-15; Col. 3:9-10; Hebrews 1:3) deal with Christ and the new life that the person has wrought through faith in him. Seven of these eight references are all explanations written by the same author, the Apostle Paul.<sup>45</sup> This would add credibility to their commonly shared meaning, namely, that these verses clearly demonstrate a soteriological nature to the likeness and image being expressed.

There is a distinction between the former likeness or image (the sinful state) that the individual maintains apart from Christ: "likeness of earthly man" (1 Cor. 15:48-49), unbelievers" (2 Cor. 4:4-5), "old self" (Eph. 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10), "darkness" (Col. 1:3-15), "sins" (Hebrews 1:3); and the new image or likeness (the state of salvation) that comes through faith in Christ: "conformed to the likeness of his Son"(Rom. 8:29), "so shall we bear the likeness of the man



from heaven” (1 Cor. 15:48-49), “we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness” (2 Cor. 3:18), “kingdom of the Son... the forgiveness of sins... the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:3-15), “new self” (Eph. 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10), “purification for sins”(Hebrews 1:3).

The principal emphasis of these verses can be summed up in this: Sin is the state of the former or fallen image and salvation is the state (of grace) bearing Christ's image who himself is the very image of God. Thus, these texts would indicate that the image or likeness of God as it was given at creation had indeed been lost at the fall, and accordingly, absent from human beings on account of their sinful state. However, the image is restored by grace through faith in Christ, the very image of God who takes away their sin. Though it is not yet perfected, as in the original state of human beings, the image of God is present through faith and will be made manifest in the eschaton. Thus, these verses present the image of God in soteriological terms.

However, Anthony Hoekema's take on the above verses has a different emphasis:

Both Romans 8:29 and 2 Corinthians 3:18 teach that the goal of the redemption of God's people is that they shall be fully conformed to the image of Christ. But whereas in the Romans text this conformity to the image of Christ is treated as the goal for which God predestined us, in the passage from 2 Corinthians the emphasis falls on the *progressive* character of this transformation throughout the present life and on the fact that this transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit. Both passages, however, clearly assert that we who are victims of the Fall need to be more and more conformed or transformed into the image of Christ, who is the perfect image of God (italics added).<sup>46</sup>

It becomes apparent that Hoekema is stressing the horizontal dimension, or active righteousness, over that of the vertical dimension, or passive righteousness, present in these verses. These passages of Scripture definitely address the life and actions that a Christian lives out by the power of the Holy Spirit, however Christians in and of themselves contribute nothing to the transformation that has already taken place, a fact that Hoekema fails to emphasize.

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<sup>45</sup> Hebrews could also be his work but there are too many questions surrounding Pauline authorship, so he is omitted as the author of that book for simplicity's sake.

<sup>46</sup> Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Erdmans, 1986), 24.

Hoekema emphasizes a “progressive” nature to this transformation, but for what purpose? Has the Christian not already been “predestined to be conformed to the likeness” (Rom. 8:29) of Christ by the presence of the faith in them? It appears that Hoekema is advocating that the goal of these verses is to be understood only in terms of active righteousness, human interaction with one another, where redemption is achieved through a process rather than resulting from the passive righteousness achieved by Christ’s death and resurrection and imparted through faith.

This becomes especially clear in his treatment of Colossians 3:10 and Ephesians 4:22-24:

The fact that the new self is said to be progressively renewed after the image of its Creator implies that man through his fall into sin has so corrupted the original image that is must be restored in the *process of redemption*. But the goal of redemption is to raise man to a higher level than he was before the Fall – a level in which sin or unbelief will be impossible. The goal of redemption is that, in knowledge as well as in other aspects of their lives, God’s people will be totally and flawlessly image-bearers of God (italics added).<sup>47</sup>

Here again, the emphasis is placed upon the active righteousness of the person rather than the passive righteousness imparted by faith in Christ. What is more, Hoekema, by his “process of redemption” comes dangerously close to promoting a sanative view of redemption where Christ is made out to be only partial Savior. To be sure, active righteousness is a necessary outworking and expression of redemption, but it must remain clear that it is not the cause of redemption.

Put simply, the above assertion promotes a confusion of active and passive righteousness. *Corem Deo* Christians are transformed instantly through Christ’s righteousness. *Coram hominibus* they continue to imitate Christ in this life. Their imitation of Christ will not add to their salvation or help transform them to be saved. It is because they have Christ’s righteousness that they are saved. Imitating Christ does not “transform” people, “get” them more of God’s image, or more of his righteousness; that comes through faith alone.

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<sup>47</sup> Hoekema, 26.



Hoekema's explanation of the image of God comes dangerously close to making active righteousness out to be the cause of redemption. It lends itself very nicely to the so-called "Christian psychologists" who integrate psychology and theology in order to promote a self help therapy that, as L. Gregory Jones asserts, becomes a "substitute for the Gospel."<sup>48</sup> Therefore to avoid such dangers the image of God is more properly and more fully understood in soteriological terms, where the emphasis falls upon passive righteousness.

There are still two remaining verses that may seem to pose a problem to a soteriological understanding of the image of God. 1 Cor. 11:7-9 "*A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.*"

Here it would appear that Paul is talking about the current state of man's being when he says man "is the image and glory of God." But, if that is the case, he is excluding women from the image of glory of God when he says "but the woman is the glory of man."

From the above examination of the texts by the same author, it quickly becomes clear that Paul is not here meaning women are excluded from the image of God. The context of these verses indicates that he is indeed referencing creation and the state of human beings at creation (Genesis 1), which includes both man and women as created in the image of God. He does this for the specific reason of recalling the order of creation.<sup>49</sup> Paul is not here making an ontological statement like those above, which addressed a state of sin and state of salvation. He is addressing a matter of order and propriety in worship.

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<sup>48</sup> *Gospel or Neopaganism*, 102.

<sup>49</sup> Gregory Lockwood. *Concordia Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. (St. Louis MO: Concordia 2000), 371.

Paul feels that the particular issue he is addressing with the Corinthian congregations (the covering of the women's head in worship) can best be answered by an appeal to the orders of creation. Therefore, "Paul is not denying that she too, like man, was created in God's image (Gen. 1:27), but his focus is at this point on her relationship to the man as one who derives her being from him and exists to bring glory to him as her head."<sup>50</sup> His emphasis is not on man's or women's state as they exist *coram Deo* but rather as they exist *coram hominibus* – as they exist as husband and wife. Therefore, his appeal to creation was for the purpose of recognizing the order of creation rather than making any ontological statement about all human beings or the image of God.

The other verse is James 3:9 "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness." This text can prove to be a little bit more challenging to define.<sup>51</sup> Nonetheless, a careful law/Gospel examination of the text will aid to resolve the apparent difficulty of the text.

The "likeness" that James wants people to recognize is the likeness which humans were once created in as the distinct human creatures of God. As will be demonstrated below, this verse parallels Genesis 9:6 because it too calls for people to recognize exactly what kind of creature the human being is – one that God had created in his own image. Though that image is no longer present apart from faith, as the above texts demonstrated, humans are still not to curse

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<sup>50</sup> Lockwood, 372.

<sup>51</sup> R.C.H. Lenski explains this likeness as the "*imago generalis* and not the *imago specialis* in the narrow sense of holiness and righteousness." Thus it would appear that Lenski sees a general image and a special or specific *imago* (image) of God. That is, he sees the likeness being spoken of as the likeness of God via certain attributes of man. As such, he would support the position of Hoekema, especially when he states the following in reference to James 3:9: "These human beings still bear much of the divine stamp with which God created man: each is an immortal spirit, a person who has will, self-consciousness, knowledge, dominion. These are damaged but not destroyed, conscience still binds man to the right and condemns the wrong. The point of this reference to the likeness of God is the close connection existing between God and men." However, such an explanation does not offer theological clarity regarding the image of God and is not a complete or favorable assessment. *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James*. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1946) 611.



(James 3:9) or kill (Genesis 9:6) other human beings because they are beings to whom God cares enough about to crucify his own Son to restore them to a state of grace. As such, God's law calls His distinct creatures to love their neighbors as themselves (Lev. 19:18, Matt. 22:39) recognizing this distinct value in them.

In short, the law is given to ensure human care for one another in the horizontal dimension – human relationships *coram hominibus*. It has an implicit (natural law and law written on men's hearts - Romans 2) and explicit (revealed Word) nature that is designed to give temporal care to God's distinct human creatures. The Gospel, on the other hand, is given to ensure God's eternal care for his distinct human creatures – human relationship *coram Deo*.

Unique to these two verses is that they are both using the law (thou shalt not...) and the Gospel (expressed in terms of the image and likeness of God) to emphasize the value of human beings as the distinct and special creatures of God.

### **Old Testament Texts**

With the insights gained from the New Testament regarding the image of God, the same law and Gospel approach will be taken in examining the Old Testament references to the image of God. To begin, the first and most familiar text comes at the very beginning of Scripture in Genesis 1:26-27. *Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

It is duly noted that discrepancies exist in regard to the precise meaning of “image” and “likeness.”<sup>52</sup> However, Anthony Hoekema makes the favorable observation that the Hebrew does not afford for different meanings in the words: “The word translated as *image* is *tselem*; the word rendered as *likeness* is *demūth*. In the Hebrew there is no conjunction between the two expressions; the text says simply ‘let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’ Both the Septuagint and the Vulgate insert an *and* between the two expressions, giving the impression that ‘image’ and ‘likeness’ refer to different things. The Hebrew text however, makes it clear that there is no essential difference between the two: ‘after our likeness’ is only a different way of saying ‘in our image.’”<sup>53</sup> Simply put, at creation man and woman were created with the “image” of God. It was not added to their nature, but it was a part of their original created nature as human beings. As to what this original “image” consists of will be the focus of coming chapters. Nonetheless, having been informed by the New Testament it can at least be said that the image corresponds to the state of grace in which human beings were created.

The next two references to the image of God, and the only other two in the Old Testament also come in Genesis. Genesis 5:1-3 and 9:6.

<sup>52</sup> Trying to determine if there is any actual difference in the literal meaning of these words seems to be complex. *Brown Driver Briggs* (853) has for their definitions of תְּצַלֵּם : “*image, likeness, of resemblance*” citing Genesis 1:26. For דְּמוּת they have (198): “*likeness, similitude, resemblance.*” Brown, Francis. S.R. Driver, Charles Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997). Further, “no distinction is to be sought between these two words. They are totally interchangeable” “*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament Vol. 1.* eds. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L Archer Jr., Bruce K. Waltke, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press. 1982), 192. Thus some would say that there is no difference in meaning. However the roots of each word do offer some difference. צַלַּם means “to cut off,” while דָּמָה means “to be like or resemble.” Thus, some authors note that these two words “cannot be expounded upon with complete un-ambiguity because of their shades of meaning and the prepositions preceding them (in our...according to our)”. *Selem* (‘image’) means predominantly an actual plastic work, a duplicate, sometimes an idol (1 Sam. 6:5; Num. 33:52; 2 Kings 11;18; a painting, Ezek. 23:14); only on occasion does it mean a duplicate in the diminished sense of semblance when compared with the original (Ps. 39:6). *Dēmut* (‘likeness’) is a verbal abstraction and means predominantly something abstract: ‘appearance,’ ‘similarly,’ ‘analogy’ (Ezek. 1;5,10,26,28, but also ‘the copy’ 2 Kings 16:10)” Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 57.

<sup>53</sup> Hoekema, 13.



Genesis 5:1-3: *This is the written account of Adam's line. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them "man." When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth.*

A plain reading of the text indicates that Seth was born in the "likeness" and "image" of Adam. This is cast as distinct and separate from the "likeness" of God in which Adam was created. Understanding what had occurred in chapter 3 (that Fall into sin) the verses are now in fact highlighting the differences between the "likeness" of 1:26 and the "likeness" and "image" that appear here in 5:1-3.

Following the sequence of word order will help to see how the author of Genesis (Moses) is setting up the contrasts found in these two sets of verses. Genesis 1:26-27 is recalled in 5:1 "*When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female*" and then juxtaposed to a different "likeness" and "image" in 5:3 "*When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth.*" H. C. Leopold notes that, "Here, now with emphasis: Seth was essentially being like *Adam*" rather than in the "likeness" and "image" of God.<sup>54</sup>

However, some contend that such an assertion makes the text out to say something it is not. Hoekema, who approaches the image of God with a functional and ontological (or structural) view,<sup>55</sup> asserts that, "Some believe that at the time of man's fall into sin he lost the image of God, and can therefore no longer be called God's image bearer. But there is no hint of this in Genesis 5:1. This statement, occurring after the narrative of the Fall (chapt. 3), still speaks of Adam as someone who was made in the likeness of God. There would be no point in

<sup>54</sup> H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*. (Columbus, OH: Wartburg, 1942) 235.

<sup>55</sup> Hoekema, ix.

saying this if by this time the divine likeness had completely disappeared. We may indeed think of the image of God as having been tarnished through man's fall into sin, but to affirm that man had by this time completely lost the image of God is to affirm something that the sacred text does not say."<sup>56</sup>

Yet this may be too simple of an assertion in light of the Hebrew text in the latter half of verse one: ביום ברא אלהים אדם בדמות אלהים עשה אתו

This section of the verse is recounting Genesis 1:26-27. The preposition followed by the infinitive construct, ביום ברא, would indicate a temporal clause,<sup>57</sup> which is then followed by the Qal perfect עשה. This would simply seem to indicate that the verse is referring back to the specific day (completed action) when man and woman were created and not indicative of any ongoing state of being. Yet, if Hoekema's assertion is the case, what purpose would there be for the writer of Genesis (Moses) to point out this change of "likeness"?

Further, this disagreement opens itself up to the danger that comes with theological inconsistency. Without a clear agreed upon definition those disciplines attempting to address both dimensions to human life, as demonstrated by Meier et al. and seen in O'Grady and Pannenberg, can take whatever they find appealing and synthesize it to their manner of thinking regardless of its biblical accuracy or theological integrity. This in turn opens itself up for all kinds of problems and deficiencies to understanding the reality in which human beings live.

Take for example the doctrine of original sin. The reality of original sin and its depraving effects upon human beings can become minimized through this promulgation by Hoekema. Individuals like O'Grady and Pannenberg can use this to demonstrate that the creation account of Genesis is historically unimportant and really only pertains to human being

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<sup>56</sup> Hoekema, 15.



on a superficial level. When the image of God is invoked as something ontologically present in all people, it allows for the dangerous understanding that human beings are inherently good (as they have God's image) rather than sinful and evil and that they are capable of contributing to the "destiny" that they still have to attain.<sup>58</sup> This is why a proper theological definition of the image of God must be established.

That being said, the final OT reference may be perceived as one that substantiates Hoekema's position. Genesis 9:6 states: *Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.*

The question must be asked, is this verse a contradiction of 5:1-3? What is to be made of this statement by God to Noah? Is the image of God to be thought of something that is ontologically present in all people? This brings to light the question that this paper intends to answer. Here, reading the Scriptures with a discerning eye, dividing law and Gospel, will aid in settling these seemingly contradictory verses.

Luther, ever mindful of such law /Gospel distinctions, lays out this passage in terms of law and Gospel. In his lecture on Genesis 9:6 he has this to say: "This is the outstanding reason why He does not want a human being killed on the strength of individual discretion: man is the noblest creature, not created like the rest of the animals but according to God's image. Even though man has lost the image through sin... his condition is nevertheless such that it can be restored through the Word and the Holy Spirit. God wants us to show respect for this image in one another; He does not want us to shed blood in a tyrannical manner."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Andrew Bartelt. *Fundamental Biblical Hebrew*. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Academic Press, 2000) 142.

<sup>58</sup> Pannenberg, 54, 60 (see also page 12 above).

<sup>59</sup> AE 2:141; 1536-7 *Lectures on Genesis*.

Luther is remaining consistent with his earlier lectures of Genesis one (which will be examined later) that identifies the image of God with the gospel – a state of grace. Though sin destroys that state of grace and causes the image of God to be lost, the Word and Holy Spirit (the Gospel) restores that state of grace and the image of God. Killing an individual would not only violate God’s law, but also fail to recognize the distinct creature that human beings are – those who can be restored to the image of God through grace. Even though every individual may not be in a state of grace by faith, it does not give license to kill them. This understanding is consistent with the larger context of Genesis 9.

When Genesis 9 is closely examined, parallels to the creation account of Genesis 1 become apparent and prove insightful to the meaning of the image of God used in this verse. Verse one of chapter nine comes on the heels of Yahweh delivering Noah, his family, and the animals on the ark, from the flood that destroyed the earth. By grace Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord (Genesis 6:8). By grace, Noah and his family were spared. Thus, having spared Noah through grace Yahweh gives the command to Noah and his family to *"Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth."* This command parallels Genesis 1:28a where after creating man and woman in his image, placing them in a state of grace, Yahweh commands them to *"Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it."*

Genesis 9:2 reads: *"The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands."* This parallels Genesis 1:28b where Yahweh commands Adam and Eve to *"Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."*



Genesis 9:3 reads: *“Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.”* This parallels Genesis 1:29, however here Yahweh is doing something new for his human creatures. In 1:29 Yahweh gives only the seed bearing plants for food: *“Then God said, ‘I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.’”* Now, after the flood, Yahweh is giving all the animals along with the seed bearing plants as food.

This is the crucial factor to understanding the use of the “image of God” within this text. Yahweh is now giving his human creatures the animals as food. However, he has prescriptions for them to follow if they wish to eat the animals. Yahweh establishes the law that they are not to eat meat that still has lifeblood in it (9:4). Further, they are to discern between the life blood of animals and the life blood of human beings (9:5). For this reason, Yahweh then declares as part of his law: *“Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man”* (9:6). It is in this context that what is meant by the image of God comes clear. Here the structure and sequence of the verse seems to suggest that it is a reference back to the original creation of man rather than a statement denoting any present condition.

This chapter begins with Yahweh recalling the creation of human beings through the parallel command to be fruitful and fill the earth. As the first human beings were created in the image of God, placed in a state of grace, and told to fill the earth and subdue it, so Noah was now saved by grace, was the recipient of God’s covenant of grace (9:9), and was told to fill the earth and subdue it. God grants human beings a new privilege in the eating of meat, but they are to be discerning about how they eat it. They are to distinguish it from human life blood on account of the distinct creatures that they are, namely, the ones who were created in the image of God.

Thus, one can understand the use of the image of God is meant to recall the distinctness of who they (human beings) are as the very special creatures of God. They were not to be indifferent to the shedding of human blood. In fact, to show how serious he was about this Yahweh gave an added warning to his law that anyone who would willfully kill a human being must then also forfeit their life. This law is established because murder strikes up against the very majesty of God.<sup>60</sup> That is to say, since God's divine image was lost at the Fall, as Genesis 5:1-3 attests, and can be regained only through faith during a person's life time, to end a human beings life "means to cut off his time of grace and, if he has not regained God's image, to doom him to an eternity of separation from God."<sup>61</sup> Therefore, Yahweh declares that it is no small thing to kill a human being.

Thus this verse is not in contradiction to Genesis 5:3 "*When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth.*" In fact 9:6 stands to amplify 5:3 as Yahweh just finished destroying all but eight of the human beings who were in the fallen (evil and sinful) image and likeness of Adam. Had they all been in the image of God it would seem rather odd for God to bring his wrath so vehemently against his own image.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, the distinction of law and Gospel allows one to see the manner in which this verse invokes the image of God.

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<sup>60</sup> John C. Jeske. *Genesis: Peoples' Bible Commentary*. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 95.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Again, the argument could be raised that this point really moves one to the brink of simply dehumanizing unbelievers, precisely to remove them from the protection of Gen. 9:6. The notion that it was o.k. for God to kill unbelievers since they were not in his image anyway might then be construed as reason to kill unbelievers and enemies of the Gospel today. However, though this perversion could be asserted it would only fly in the face of what Genesis 9:6 (as well as the entire Gospel) was stating. Further, God must be left to being God. We can not hold him accountable for acting the way he does. After all he is God. We can not do anything about his killing of who he wants to kill and his saving of who he wants to save. However, we can and must obey what he instructs his people to do and Genesis 9:6 specifically prohibits the killing of human beings because of the special "creatures" that they are, namely, the ones who were originally created in the image of God and can be restored to that image by grace through faith.



The Gospel of this verse, as well as the entire chapter, is the state of grace (deliverance from the flood) and the covenant (the rainbow that promises Yahweh will never again destroy the earth or its inhabitants) that Yahweh establishes with Noah. Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord and by faith he remained in a state of grace. The law of this verse is given on account of the fall from grace. It gives protection to human beings from one another as they are in a fallen state yet remain the special creatures of God.

In that state of grace Yahweh gives his law to help order human life. In explaining that law, Yahweh prohibits the killing of fellow human beings as they are distinct from all the other animals. This distinction is drawn out and enhanced precisely by the Gospel, the original state of grace – the image of God – that was alluded to and illumined by the parallelism between Genesis 1 and Genesis 9. As already observed, it is with this understanding (the state of grace and the state of sin) that the image of God is also explained by the New Testament writers.

In sum, a law/Gospel approach to examining the texts that reference the image or likeness of God show that the image of God parallels a human being's state of salvation. That is to say, it is a soteriological issue. Thus a parallel between the image of God and human identity can be seen.

### **Chapter 3: A Confessional approach to the Image of God**

As identified in the introduction, treatments on the image of God have a variety of definitions and interpretations depending on the individual theologian and their theological tradition.

To this point it would appear that this essay is taking the relational approach, however it will in fact address all three of these approaches in one overarching approach. The confessional framework and the two dimensions to human life afford an examination of all three approaches that will show the most complete approach to defining the image of God is a soteriological or the Christological approach.

To enunciate this soteriological or Christological approach, attention is again turned to the preeminence of the Gospel message of Jesus Christ as Savior. The Lutheran article of Justification - Article IV of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (referenced in the Introduction) will offer enormous insight in explicating this Christological approach. This Article of faith will give greater theological depth and reveal the nature of human identity while also establishing a proper Christological framework to approach the image of God in soteriological terms.

### **The Confessional Appeal**

Justification – Article IV of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession is the most profound soteriological and Christological article within the Lutheran tradition. It defines who and what human beings are. This article examines a human being's standing before God – *coram Deo*. It is a doctrine that deals with humans specifically and only in the vertical dimension. It is the article that confesses the identity of humans before God. It makes clear that salvation and eternal life is by grace through faith in Christ:

“Faith alone justifies because we receive the forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit by faith alone. The reconciled are accounted righteous children of God not on account of their own purity but by mercy on account of Christ, if they grasp this mercy by faith. Thus the Scriptures testify that we are accounted righteous by faith. We shall therefore add clear testimonies stating that faith is the very righteousness by which we are accounted righteous before God. This is not because it is a work worthy in itself, but because it receives God's promise that for Christ's sake he wishes to be



propitious to believers in Christ and because it believes that 'God made Christ our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption' (1 Cor. 1:30)."<sup>63</sup>

All those who do not have faith in Christ and try to earn their righteousness are not worthy and stand apart from God having no salvation or eternal life:

"This faith makes the difference between those who are saved and those who are not. Faith makes the difference between the worthy and the unworthy because eternal life is promised to the justified and it is faith that justifies."<sup>64</sup>

As Article IV is elaborated, it acknowledges the distinct difference between the righteousness of faith and the righteousness of works. It is operating with Luther's distinction of the two kinds of righteousness, for it makes clear that the righteousness of faith (passive righteousness) does not and can not equal the righteousness of reason [works] (active righteousness).

This understanding becomes significant for maintaining a proper definition of human identity and the image of God. Justification is the anchor point for true human identity. Luther espoused this in his explanation of the two kinds of righteousness and maintains it as the foundation for all of his theology. He holds that the "definition" of all mankind is predicated on justification by faith apart from works.<sup>65</sup> It confesses a Christocentric reality.

When human existence is thought of in this way there will be no confusion or confounding of human identity *coram Deo* or *coram hominibus*. The identity coming in justification can only come from God. This does not mean that the identity of human beings *coram hominibus* does not also come from God, rather is simply emphasizing that the article of justification deals with the vertical relationship.

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<sup>63</sup> Ap. IV, 86, Tappert, 119.

<sup>64</sup> Ap. IV, 347, Tappert, 160.

<sup>65</sup> AE 34:139 (1536) *Disputation Concerning Man*.

Passive righteousness received through faith puts man in worthy standing before God – he is justified, put in a state of grace. Passive righteousness is his identity as a child of God, a true human. Apart from this passive righteousness he is unworthy as he stands before God. That is to say, he lacks true humanity as God intended his human creatures to have it. Here he is in a state of eternal sin and his identity is of one who is condemned for eternity. Active righteousness, gained by works, makes man righteous in the sight of men. His identity is then one who is virtuous or honorable. Without these works his identity might be one of vice or shame.

Thus, spoken of this way, each righteousness or lack thereof, grants an identity to human beings as they stand in relation to the objects of each respective dimension. However, these identities of righteousness remain distinct only within their respective dimensions. This is to say, faith can only understand passive righteousness and empirical observation can only understand active righteousness.

It is understood that a Christocentric reality accounts for the simultaneity of these dimensions, where care for the neighbor (good works) is an expression of true human identity as it is given by God. However, what are being illumined at this point are the means used to understand this identity in each respective dimension, namely, faith for the vertical dimension, and empirical observation for the horizontal dimension. The point is that these means can only understand the specific righteousness that correlates to the dimension that they represent. Therefore the statement can then be made that outside of their respective dimensions, each kind of righteousness has no bearing on human identity.

Explained another way, in a Christocentric reality there is a distinction between identity and performance as they correlate to the distinction of passive and active righteousness.



Consequently, simple performance (active righteousness) does not constitute true human identity to a person as they stand in relation to God – *coram Deo*. However, in an anthropocentric reality there is no distinction between identity and performance, so performance grants identity. This reality carries no understanding of faith. Consequently, one's identity as a true human (given by passive righteousness) will not grant a person any identity as they stand in relation to other people.

The image of God most properly understood corresponds to passive righteousness. It is an identity that God gave to mark his creatures as distinct. As the Scriptural texts in chapter two demonstrated, it is a gift given by God and cannot be an identity that is earned. It denotes a state of grace and favor as one of God's redeemed children. It is not an image that can be observed by the horizontal dimension, it is gift imparted by God and understood through faith. It is parallel to God restoring true human identity through faith in Christ. It is a matter of the vertical dimension.

This is not meant to take away from the importance of the expression of that image as it is made manifest through active righteousness. Though the image of God can only be understood through faith, the expression of that image can be seen in the life of the Christian as they care for their neighbor and the rest of the world. One could simply say that the image of God is understood through righteousness however, one must understand the order and role of each kind of righteousness in the image of God. Therefore a proper distinction of the two kinds of righteousness must be maintained.

Charles Arand makes the observation that the two dimensions of human life are greatly enhanced when the doctrine of justification is explained in terms of the two kinds of

righteousness. He states that, "This distinction between two kinds of human righteousness provides a more comprehensive theological framework than the distinction between law and gospel for understanding the coherence of the Apology's confession of the gospel. More specifically it offers a more comprehensive framework to speak positively about life in this world while not undermining the doctrine of justification."<sup>66</sup>

Arand is affirming the role of active righteousness in the world while maintaining the preeminence of passive righteousness. In effect, he allows one to affirm the disciplines of the world (those that deal solely with the horizontal dimension) as useful means to talk about life in the world while maintaining the supremacy of a Christological reality. In other words, the empirical observations that these scientific disciplines make are indeed good things as they exist in the horizontal dimension, but they do not trump the reality of life revealed by the vertical dimension of life.

This becomes informative in addressing the image of God. As seen with O'Grady and Pannenberg, and demonstrated by Meier et al., many Christians in scientific disciplines (Christian psychologists, theological anthropologists) define human identity based upon their scientific discipline. They allow their scientific field of study to govern how they speak theologically. When this is the case, any definition of the image of God espoused by these individuals also becomes dependent upon their anthropocentric discipline rather than on a Christocentric reality.

As the image of God corresponds to true human identity, such assertions must be reformed. The following chapter will give a definitive account that will be offered as a corrective for the theological deficiencies and dangers of these proposals and theories.

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<sup>66</sup> Charles Arand, "Two kinds of Righteousness as a framework for Law and Gospel in the Apology." *Lutheran Quarterly* (Vol. XV, 2001 417-439), 418.



In sum, the appeal to the doctrine of Justification ultimately defined human beings in soteriological terms that accentuate a Christocentric reality. When the two kinds of righteousness are used as the back drop for justification, human identity is pushed to its utmost clarity and the two dimensions of human life are made clear and distinct. Consequently, as the image of God parallels human identity, a proper soteriological approach has been established so that the image of God can also be conclusively defined.

#### **Chapter 4: A Soteriological Approach to the Image of God**

##### **The Image of God Defined by Grace**

Attention is now turned back to the verses that contain references to the image of God. Genesis 1:26-27 established that human beings were created in the image of God. This was part of their being the special creature of God who lived in a open relationship with Him. Luther makes this clear in his 1536 lectures on Genesis as he elaborated on Adam and Eve being the special creatures of God who were created in His image. He notes that inherent to the image was Adam's knowledge of God, obedience to God, worship of God, and his state of righteousness and holiness before God. As God's objects of grace, who had His image, there would be no need for instruction about God, for knowledge of God and His will would be a part of his nature.<sup>67</sup>

Thus, having a sure knowledge of God and his will would allow for complete obedience and worship of God, that is, a *right* relationship with God. As Luther points out, God gave "Adam Word, worship, and religion in its barest, and purest, and simplest form, in which there was nothing laborious, nothing elaborate...Only this, that he praise God, thank Him, that he rejoice in the Lord, and that he obey Him by not eating from the forbidden tree."<sup>68</sup> Thus, as the

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<sup>67</sup> AE 1:64 (1535 -1536 lectures on Genesis).

<sup>68</sup> AE 1:106.

object of God's grace who had His image, Adam was considered "righteous, truthful, and upright not only in body but especially in soul, that he knew God, that he obeyed God with the utmost joy, and that he understood the works of God even without prompting."<sup>69</sup>

At this point it becomes clear as to how a Christocentric understanding of the image of God incorporates all three approaches to the image of God. It includes an ontological nature to the Image of God as it was a part of the very being of Adam and Eve. As Luther states, "Therefore my understanding of the image of God is this: that Adam had it in his being and the he not only knew God and believed that He was good, but that he also lived in a life that was wholly godly, that is, he was without fear of death or of any danger, and was content with God's favor."<sup>70</sup> It includes a relational nature as Adam and Eve were set in a relationship: to God, where they knew God, obeyed God with the utmost joy, and understood the works of God even without prompting; to each other, where they would cleave to and care for one another; and to the rest of creation, where they had been given dominion over charged to care for all creation. It would also entail functional aspects as Adam and Eve expressed that image in care of the Garden and for one another.

However, the effects of the Fall caused that image to be lost. As Genesis 5:1-3 recorded, man was now born into the "likeness and image" of Adam. "This image includes original sin and the punishment of eternal death, which was inflicted on Adam on account of his sin."<sup>71</sup> Man's original identity, his humanness, *coram Deo* had now been lost. The consequences of the fall were horrific.

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<sup>69</sup> AE 1: 113 (1535 -1536 lectures on Genesis).

<sup>70</sup> AE 1:63.

<sup>71</sup> AE 1:340 (1535-1536 lectures on Genesis).



Man had fallen from his relationship with God. He now stood condemned before God. He had fallen from the favor of God. From a life of righteousness, immortality, and communion with God man had now fallen to a life of sin and separation from God. In short, his human identity – what it meant to be truly human – had been destroyed. He was no longer human as God intended him to be.

However, God gave the promise of a seed and sent his Son to redeem man by His life, death, and resurrection. He alone redeems man from his sinful state, restores mankind's humanity and relationship to God, and grants righteousness and everlasting life to all who believe. This is what Article IV of the Apology makes clear:

“We are renewed, as Paul says (Col. 3:10; II Cor. 3:18), ‘in knowledge,’ and ‘beholding the glory of the Lord, we are changed into his likeness’; that is, we acquire the true knowledge of God, enabling us truly to fear him and to trust that he cares for us and hears us. This rebirth is, so to speak, the beginning of eternal life, as Paul says (Rom. 8:10), ‘If Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness.’”<sup>72</sup>

It is here that the soteriological nature of the image of God comes clear. It is also at this point that the connection between Article IV and the image of God becomes especially clear. The above quotation uses two of the previously noted New Testament verses that reference the image of God. Apology IV uses these verses to demonstrate how it is by grace through faith in Christ that the sinner's relationship with God is restored through a rebirth that changes the sinner into the “likeness” of Christ, bestowing upon him Christ's righteousness, which is the essence of true humanity.

As noted in chapter two, eight of the ten New Testament verses referencing the image or likeness of God are referring to Christ and the new life that the believer has in Him. The remaining two verses ended up posing no problem when they were examined in their full context discerning the law and Gospel present in the text.

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<sup>72</sup> Ap. IV 351, Tappert 161.

Consequently, it becomes apparent that Christ can not be separated from the image of God. To say it another way, grace cannot be separated from the image of God. Yet, the supreme connection of Christ to the image of God is the Trinitarian “let us” of Genesis 1:26-27. It establishes Christ’s connection to the image before the Fall, emphasizing again the importance of a Christocentric understanding of reality. Thus it is clear that the image of God is inseparably identified with the grace of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, this recognition demonstrates the sole soteriological nature and vertical dimension of the image of God. The incarnate Christ’s sole purpose was to *save* mankind, restoring his humanity and returning him to the grace and favor of God. As Luther, always ready to emphasize the grace of God, states:

Grace means the favor by which God accepts us, forgiving sins and justifying freely through Jesus Christ... The forgiveness of sins depends simply on the promise which faith accepts – not on our works or merits, but on the fact that by the sting of the Law God graciously calls us back to Himself so that we might acknowledge Him to be the giver of Grace.<sup>73</sup>

Luther then not only establishes what grace is for the sinner, but what it was before the Fall, namely, the favor which man was held in by God. Thus, when Luther says, “God graciously calls us back to himself” he is acknowledging the state of grace that man lived in before the fall and is stating the desire that God has to draw us back into his favor through his Son Jesus Christ. Consequently, one must understand the significance of grace as it “signifies that favor of God which wishes us well and justifies us. That is, it freely grants us the faith which alone justifies us.”<sup>74</sup> Said another way, it restores the human identity *coram Deo*. Thus, as the grace of God goes, so does the image of God.

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<sup>73</sup> AE 12:376-377 (Luther’s 1532 lectures of the Psalms).

<sup>74</sup> WA 11:302 (1523) Defense of Justification by faith alone. By way of *What Luther Says: A Practical In Home Anthology for the Active Christian*, ed. Ewald M. Plass, (St. Louis, MO: Concordia 1959), 603.



Subsequently, grace grants faith as a gift from God. It is a faith that grasps God himself. Therefore this is not just any gift, but it is the gift of God himself, for “in His grace and in His regard of us He gives His very Self...we receive his heart, mind, and will.”<sup>75</sup> Thus, we have been “gifted” by God, that is, we have been given the means to receive the gift while at the same time actually receiving the gift itself.<sup>76</sup> This gift is then the key to all things. It makes clear that the grace of God in Jesus Christ, and that alone, has made right human beings’ relationship with God and restored their identity *coram Deo*, which includes a restoration of the image of God. There is no progression or process as Hoekema asserts. A person’s standing before God is made right through Christ’s death and resurrection and is appropriated immediately and completely upon the bestowal of faith by the Holy Spirit to the individual.

### **The Image of God Apart From Grace**

However, numerous theological traditions continue to speak of the image of God remaining in the fallen unregenerate man.<sup>77</sup> In his book *Created in God’s Image* Hoekema is emphatic about all human beings, believing and unbelieving, retaining the image of God as he has defined it in ontological and functional terms: “We must still see fallen man as an image-bearer of God, but as one who by nature, apart from the regeneration and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, images God in a distorted way.”<sup>78</sup> As previously noted his emphasis lies in the active righteousness of human being and denotes this to be what the image of God entails. Aside from his espoused “progression” of redemption examined early, his aim seems to promote that

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<sup>75</sup> AE 21:324 (1521 Exposition of Luke [1:49]).

<sup>76</sup> AE 2:267 (Luther’s 1537 lectures on Genesis) AE 23:23 (1530-1532 sermons on the Gospel of John).

<sup>77</sup> It is noted that the Lutheran position is in the minority as any number of Reformed and Catholic theologians will assert the image of God can still be found in the unregenerate human being. Individuals examined in this study include but are not limited to Augustine, Rene Le Troquer, Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Anthony Hoekema, Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, Wolfhart Pannenberg, etc. See **Secondary Sources** in the Bibliography.

<sup>78</sup> Hoekema, 31.

all human beings, irrespective of faith, have the same standing as all are made in the image of God. However, all human beings are not in the same standing before God. Belief (faith) and unbelief distinguish between individuals' standing before God. Hoekema misses this reality when he places the image of God in the horizontal dimension.

Another such ontological and functional proponent is Philip Edcumbe Hughes, he states:

“Nothing is more basic than the recognition that being constituted in the image of God is of the very essence of and absolutely central to the humanness of man. It is the key that unlocks the meaning of his authentic humanity. Apart from this reality he cannot exist truly as a man, since for man to deny God and the divine image stamped upon his being and to assert his own independent self-sufficiency is to deny his own constitution and thus to dehumanize himself.”<sup>79</sup>

In both cases the distinction between the horizontal and vertical dimensions of human life will be of great use. The above quote by Hughes would seem to reveal that Hughes has it right on. As demonstrated above, the image of God, as it is a part of the grace of God, is indeed the center and essence of the “humanness of man” *coram Deo*. With this understanding, the assertion that “apart from this reality he cannot exist truly as a man” is properly made. For, to deny God (Christ) and assert one's own independent self sufficiency (active righteousness) does in fact deny one's own constitution and does dehumanize one's self. Without God (Christ) human beings are lost and condemned creatures and are not human in the sense that God created (or Christ redeemed) them to be.

However, this is not the understanding that Hughes is presenting. His contention is that to deny the image of God in human beings, whether they deny God or not, is to dehumanize human beings. He says, “The unity of man is seen in this...that he cannot cease to be what he is by constitution, namely, a creature formed in the divine image.”<sup>80</sup> Basically, what he is saying is that if one is simply a human being then they automatically have the image of God. Hughes

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<sup>79</sup> Hughes, Philip Edcumbe. *True Image: The origin and destiny of man in Christ*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Erdmans 1989), 4.

<sup>80</sup> Hughes, 69.



places the image of God in the horizontal dimension as something that can be observed. He is placing all people in the same standing before God.

What he, Hoekema, and many others seem to be lacking, at least in part, is the understanding that true human identity comes solely from God and not from man. As established above, a definition of what it is to be truly human can not come from the horizontal dimension nor reside in that dimension, but it must be defined by and exist in the vertical dimension, as God was the one who created humanity. As Apology IV makes clear, human beings are lost, condemned, and dead apart from Christ.

Thus, to make the assertion that simply being human means one has the image of God runs the danger of placing something that belongs in the vertical dimension into the horizontal dimension. That is to say, it places the image of God in man, apart from grace, simply because one exists as a human being and is defined as a human being by another human being. This definition of being human does not properly reflect what God established at creation or restored in redemption. It is an anthropocentric definition that may indeed represent the creatureliness of being human, but it is nonetheless deficient in conveying the truth of the Christocentric reality of sin and grace.

Such a definition is incomplete and detrimental to properly understanding human existence. It not only obscures the doctrine of the image of God, but it can end up softening the doctrine of original sin, lessening the total depravity of the fallen human nature, and take away from Christ's role as total Savior.

The dangers of these assertions have already been demonstrated by so-called "Christian anthropologists" and "Christian Psychologists." What is more, L. Gregory Jones made alarmingly clear the influence that the therapeutic world is also having upon the clergy.

Consequently, in a culture where “the Christian gospel is ‘becoming indistinguishable from any of host of alternative self-help doctrines’” and “religious figures are no longer theologians but therapists”<sup>81</sup> and human existence continues to be shaped by anthropocentric assertions, the demand for genuinely theological assessments of the human condition grows more urgent.

When a definition like that of Hughes or Hoekema is advocated for, a confounding of God’s image takes place. What has been done is to take human beings as they exist *coram hominibus* and replace them with human beings as they, by grace, rightly exist *coram Deo*. To put it in simple terms, the temporal creature, (fallen man) has been replaced with the redeemed eternal human being (child of God) on account of his creatureliness rather than on account of God’s grace.

This is where the distinction between the dimensions of human life must be made clear. To be a human being in the eyes of men is not the same as being a human being in the eyes of God. To be sure, human beings have a common unity but it is not to be found in the image of God. On the contrary, the image of God as it is linked to grace and salvation and is received by faith, divides human beings as they exist *coram Deo* into temporal creatures and eternal human beings. Those who have faith in Christ have the promise of the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and eternal life. Those who deny the faith are lost and condemned creatures who only have eternal death.

Therefore, the image of God must be understood from a Christological framework that uses a soteriological approach and explains things in soteriological terms. When this does not take place, the true image of God, seen only from the vertical dimension, is replaced with creatureliness perceived by the horizontal dimension and called divine based upon an

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<sup>81</sup> *Either Or: The Gospel or Neopaganism*, 97



anthropocentric observation. A soteriological approach is therefore mandated in order to maintain a proper Christocentric understanding of reality, human identity, and the image of God.

## Chapter 5: The unity and division of human beings

### Unity of human beings *coram Deo*

The appeal to the image of God is often made by theologians or the Christians of other disciplines in an effort to promote the equal value of all human beings. However, this is a deficient theology and an unnecessary appeal. Using the image of God to divinize people via the anthropocentric reality of the horizontal realm only creates idolatry and is akin to the neopagan religion that Braaten observed to be present in the modern American culture.<sup>82</sup>

As pointed out in the Scriptural texts of chapter two, as by Luther, human beings are united as one in that they are all the special creatures of God. Regardless if they are aware of the Christocentric reality, all human beings stand before God as his creatures. They are distinct from all other creatures of the earth precisely because they *were* created in the image of God and *were* meant to be in relationship to Him.

Though the Fall destroyed the relationship and image that God created man to exist in, it did not destroy the creatureliness of man, that is to say, the substance of his humanness. It is in this way that man continues to stand in unity before God. The Fall stripped man of his true human nature, his original righteousness, immortality, knowledge of God, relationship with God, and image of God, yet it did not remove the substance of his human nature, that is, his body and soul. Though they now exist as corrupt and tainted temporal remnants of what they once were, they are nonetheless the fallen substance of human nature that unites all human beings.

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<sup>82</sup> *Either Or The Gospel or Neopanganismi*, 7.

Martin Chemnitz, in his *Two Natures of Christ*, makes an invaluable contribution to understanding this unity of human beings. By examining the incarnation of Christ he is able to make a clear distinction of what is and is not part of the human nature, specifically, as it is understood *coram Deo* and in accord with the original creation of human nature:

But the properties of the human nature are constitutive because it consists of body and soul. The soul is created spirit, rational and immortal, an essential part of human nature. The body is created, consisting of flesh, blood, skin, bones, nerves, with all the members arranged in a symmetrical order.<sup>83</sup>

This makes clear the substance (not the complete essence) of human nature. It draws out the fact that the human nature continued to remain distinct even after the Fall. Apart from faith, an assessment like this can not be made from the horizontal dimension of life as it is restricted to the confinements of time and human observation. On its own, the horizontal dimension can only offer what it can perceive by itself. Consequently, the understanding of a human soul can only be maintained *coram Deo*. It is in this regard that human beings remain united as one. They stand before God in body and soul.

Chemnitz further elaborates noting that in Christ's assumption of the human nature he only assumed those things that were truly part of the human nature, that is to say, the complete essence of humanity. However, he still allowed himself to be subject to the penalties of sin inflicted upon that human nature in order to redeem mankind:

We also call accidental properties those infirmities which because of sin have been imposed upon the human nature, which Christ willingly assumed in his state of humiliation, not because of the necessity of the nature but in order that he might become the victim for us, yet without sin...<sup>84</sup>

Paul intends in Romans 8:3 through the word *omoioima* [*likeness*] to explain the fact that in our nature as we derive it from Adam, corrupted and vitiated by sin, those infirmities which accompany it are the necessary penalty of sin and are present because of sin. But because Christ was conceived by the Holy Ghost, He assumed a human nature without sin and incorrupt. Therefore, those infirmities which are the consequent penalties of sin were not to be in the flesh of Christ by the necessity of his condition, but His body could be free from these weaknesses and

<sup>83</sup> Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures in Christ* translated by J.A.O. Preus. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1971) 34.

<sup>84</sup> Chemnitz, 35.



need not be subject to them. For it was not the flesh of sin, and yet He was true man, just as Adam before the Fall was a true man, although without these penalizing infirmities (so to speak). But for us and for our salvation the incarnate Christ willingly assumed the infirmities by which our nature was burdened as a necessary condition because of sin, in order that He might commend to us His love, that He thereby might take away from us the penalty which fell upon himself and free us from it, and thus be made the victim for our sins...<sup>85</sup>

In examining the assumption of the human nature by Christ, a positive definition of humanity and human nature is once again set forth. True human nature is understood to consist of a body and soul with their capacities, standing in a right relationship to God, where there is no wickedness, sin, infirmities, or death. As such, this definition points back to the original intention God had in mind when he created man.

Subsequently, Chemnitz, speaking in terms of the vertical dimension, establishes the understanding that mankind has lost his humanity in the Fall. Though the body and soul remain, they are distorted and afflicted by sin and are separated from God by sin. Thus, it becomes significant to note that Christ assumed the *original* humanity given at creation. He did not assume sin, as that was not a part of created humanity. As a result, Christ would not be subject to the infirmities of sin, yet he willingly assumed those infirmities to pay the price man could not, in order that human beings true humanity, their sinless state and right relationship with God, might be restored. The understanding of Apology IV then becomes readily apparent throughout Chemnitz's examination of Christ's human nature.

In sum, all human beings are fallen and stand before God in unity as they exist with a corrupted body and soul. They remain the special creatures of God in their distinct creatureliness, lacking true humanity and the image of God. As Gay, Braaten, Apology IV, Luther, Kolb, and now Chemnitz all stress, what it means to be truly human can only be known

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<sup>85</sup> Chemnitz, 53.

in the vertical dimension *coram Deo*. True humanity was lost in the Fall and is restored through faith in Christ, subsequently the image of God corresponds to that humanity.

This last point is so often over looked regarding the concept of the image of God. Humanity and the image of God can not be separated. How can it be possible for man to have no true humanity yet exist in the image of God? Theologians so anxious to promote the worth of human beings *coram hominibus* forget to promote how human beings become worthy *coram Deo*. As a result, they fail to realize that there is a division of human beings *coram Deo* and allow an anthropocentric reality to define who and what a human being is.

It must be understood that this is never meant as a license to discriminate against a non-believer, rather it is simply speaking in proper theological terms that result from an examination of the Christological reality in which all human beings exist.

### **Division of human beings coram Deo**

As noted above, to be a human being in the eyes of men is not the same as being a human being in the eyes of God. The preceding section discussed the unity that human beings exist in before God – *coram Deo*. Little remains to be illumined regarding the division of human beings *coram Deo*. Nonetheless, this section will examine that division.

The image of God as it is linked to grace, divides human beings, through faith, into two separate categories as they exist *coram Deo*. This division can be explained in terms of humanity and lack of humanity. Those who have faith in Christ have the promise of the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and eternal life – they have true humanity – and



stand in a right relationship to God. Those who deny the faith are lost and condemned creatures who have eternal death – they have no true humanity – they are at enmity with God.

Put in simple terms, this division of human beings corresponds to those who are in Christ and those who deny Christ. It is a division that exists only in the vertical dimension *coram Deo*. Apart from faith, it does not visibly exist *coram hominibus* because those who are in Christ, having a passive righteousness, cannot be understood in a dimension that defines humanity on the principle of active righteousness. Thus, as human beings exist in a unity *coram Deo* they also exist in a division *coram Deo*.

These statements can seem to be very harsh. However, when confessing the Christocentric reality of sin and death, and life and grace, one can not get around the harsh reality that those who die outside of faith will suffer Hell. But it must be emphasized that this cannot be the determining factor for how human beings are to treat and value one another. A Christocentric reality affirms the value and worth of every single one of the special creatures God called human.

In short, the Gospel message of the Christocentric reality of human existence is that of John 3:16-18: *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.* As Kolb made clear, the identity given by the Gospel is expressed in the care and concern for the neighbor. God's judgment upon the unbeliever at death must be left to Him; yet the knowledge of that ultimate judgment does not alleviate Christians from the care they are called to provide for their neighbor through the Gospel.

The alarm that comes with the statement that unbelievers have no true humanity stems from Gay's observation of human beings acting as if there is no God. When there is no God to understand what it means to be truly human, human identity is left to be defined by anthropocentric standards. When an anthropocentric identity is the basis for understanding all human existence, any assertion that a particular group of people have no true humanity will be received with great alarm and consternation, and can consequently be abused by evil people. Yet that will not take away from the Christocentric reality that it confesses. What is being confessed is theologically correct and should not be altered on account of offending unbelievers. Rather to make the message of a Christocentric reality clear and complete Gay's admonition that "our criticism and resistance to modern society and culture must be genuinely *theological*"<sup>86</sup> should be observed so that abuses of these theological explanations will not be so easily incurred.

### Conclusion

Crucial to understanding the existence of human beings is the realization of the reality in which they exist. That reality is Christocentric. Within that reality there exists two dimensions to human life. The vertical dimension *coram Deo* and the horizontal dimension *coram hominibus* and *coram mundo*. Understanding the two kinds of righteousness affords for this realization. When used as a back drop to examine the Lutheran doctrine of justification it also provides a unique opportunity to conclusively identify human beings' identity and existence as it resides simultaneously in the two dimensions of human life. True human identity rests upon the righteousness of Christ (passive righteousness) while the outworking of that identity is the Christians' care for the neighbor (active righteousness). Such an examination reveals that this

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<sup>86</sup> Gay, 264.



identity is disclosed invariably in soteriological terms. By maintaining a proper distinction of these two dimensions it also allows for a proper understanding of the image of God as it parallels true human identity and is also disclosed in soteriological terms.

The intent of this essay was to articulate a clear and more complete theological understanding of the image of God and human identity. Doing so would afford for various disciplines to draw upon and add theological depth and integrity to their understanding of human existence. However, understanding the image of God invariably becomes complicated and confounded when proper distinctions between the dimensions of human life are not made. When this occurs anthropocentric definitions obscure and misguide theologians as well as so-called “Christian” scientific disciplines. Accordingly, the image of God is repeatedly defined by anthropocentric assertions rather than Christocentric assertions. This in turn promotes an inadequate theology of man lessening his depraved and fallen state which can take away from the total and complete saving action of Christ.

Therefore the confessional method of Scriptural interpretation and the Christological/soteriological approach to the image of God and human identity set forth in this essay has been offered as a more complete analysis where the image of God and human identity might be properly theologically defined, understood, and invoked.

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