LIVING AND ACTING AS THE IMAGO DEI: 
INTERTWINING J. RICHARD MIDDLETON’S ROYAL-FUNCTIONAL IMAGE 
WITH KARL BARTH’S RELATIONAL ONTOLOGY

by

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ABSTRACT
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This thesis examines the perspectives of biblical scholarship and systematic theology regarding the definition of the imago Dei in the Genesis 1 creation narrative. In an effort to intertwine these models of interpretation, I focus first on the work of J. Richard Middleton, a prominent Old Testament scholar to demonstrate the strength of his argument for a royal-functional interpretation of Genesis 1. After explicating the accuracy of Middleton’s assessment of the context of Genesis 1 as an ideology critique of ancient Near Eastern Mesopotamian socio-political and religious ideals, I then examine how Middleton’s argument would benefit largely from interaction with the perspectives of systematic theology and a relational understanding of human personhood. For this purpose, I then move to outline the theological anthropology of Karl Barth, specifically the way in which he constructs his account of I-Thou dialogical personalism and the tertium comparationis between God and humanity. After demonstrating the benefits of Barth’s relational ontology, especially as it pertains to Christ as the paradigmatic human person and perfect image of God, I move to show how his theology falls short on three counts—namely, in his lack of engagement with Old Testament scholarship, his superimposition of contemporary categories of the “self” without proper context, and the false parallel which Barth draws between the order of relations in the Trinity and the male-female human relationship. Finally, I construct a synthesized account of a functional-relational interpretation of the imago Dei, arguing that the title of the image of God itself is not an ontological condition, but rather a functional calling and responsibility for humanity to live as divinely authorized agents and representatives of God. I contend, evidenced in both the creational and incarnational perspectives, that this vocational understanding of the imago Dei is fundamentally dependent upon a relational human ontology, wonderfully described in the I-Thou construction of Karl Barth and therefore categorized by mutual recognition, love, and gladness in the calling of humanity to live both with and for the Other, enabling the flourishing of all of creation.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction ................................................................................................................................................. 1

Chapter One: J. Richard Middleton’s Royal-Functional Paradigm as a Foundation for Understanding the *Imago Dei* .................................................................................................................. 5

  The Structure and Content of Middleton’s Royal-Functional Model .................................................. 7

  Room for Relationality in Middleton’s Royal-Functional Model ..................................................... 19

  Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................. 27

Chapter Two: Karl Barth’s Relational Ontology and a Modern Reimagining of the *Imago Dei* ..................................................................................................................................................... 29

  The Structure and Content of Barth’s Relational Ontology .......................................................... 31

  Relationality and a More Robust *Imago Dei* ................................................................................. 42

  Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................. 50

Chapter Three: Constructing a Synthesized Functional-Relational Model for Understanding the *Imago Dei* ........................................................................................................................................... 51

  A Functional Foundation .................................................................................................................. 53

  A Relational Necessity ...................................................................................................................... 60

  Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................. 67

Conclusion .................................................................................................................................................. 70

Bibliography ............................................................................................................................................ 76
INTRODUCTION

The foundation of theological anthropology must rest on the biblical designation of humanity as having been created in the image of God. The imago Dei, as the title given us by God in creation, is what establishes humanity in a special relationship with God and with the rest of creation. Thus, any biblically and theologically informed understanding of what it means to be human must take this designation seriously. There is a trend in theological anthropology to frame the possible meanings of the imago Dei within the boundaries of a specific interpretational paradigm. Most popular are the functional and relational models for understanding the image, which scholars tend to present as mutually exclusive of one another. The argument presented in the following pages will make central use of the functional model proposed by J. Richard Middleton—which takes creation as the primary point of departure for understanding the imago Dei—and the relational model of human ontology proposed by Karl Barth, which takes the incarnation as the primary point of departure for understanding the image in Genesis 1. However, I wish to go beyond Middleton and Barth in that, rather than adopting the perspective that one must choose between the functional and relational paradigms, I will place the two understandings into a dialogue and highlight the both/and nature of their relevance to the imago Dei. For this reason, this thesis will seek to demonstrate that the imago Dei can be understood more fully by crafting a model that incorporates both the functional understanding of the Genesis 1 creation account and a relational understanding of the incarnation.

My first chapter will focus on J. Richard Middleton’s argument for a royal-functional model of the imago Dei, using secondary sources to critique, analyze, and inform his paradigm. I will focus on Middleton because he is an Old Testament scholar, but one who has an eye
towards the theological construction of Genesis, rather than focusing solely on strict exegesis. Middleton’s functional paradigm takes shape around the comparison of the Genesis 1 creation account over and against other ancient Near Eastern creation myths to demonstrate that, in line with a vast number of Old Testament scholars, the language of Genesis indicates clearly that humanity’s existence in the image of God consists of a responsibility to function as divinely authorized representatives and agents of God here in the world. After establishing this to be the case via an explication of Middleton’s method and conclusions, I will demonstrate that he does not go far enough in addressing the relational context of humanity’s creation, as shown in the work of various theologians. Middleton’s paradigm, then, will be shown to be accurate, but altogether incomplete, thus necessitating the incorporation of some sort of relational understanding of humanity into the royal-functional model that he proposes.

After having evaluated J. Richard Middleton’s royal-functional interpretation of the *imago Dei*, and having demonstrated that it must be informed by an understanding of human relationality, I will move in the second chapter to focus on Karl Barth’s I-Thou dialogical personalism. Barth argues for a relationally constituted human ontology based in the paradigmatic person of Jesus Christ, thus he suggests that the creation account in Genesis can only be understood properly from the perspective of the incarnation. Aside from the insightful recognition of the importance of Christology for theological anthropology, Barth’s argument for the I-Thou relational constitution of human personhood was groundbreaking at its inception. However, Barth’s ontological understanding of a relational *imago Dei* failed to account in any significant way for the consensus that exists among Old Testament scholars that relationality is neither the focus nor the substance of the image of God text in Genesis 1. This lack of engagement with Old Testament scholarship, combined with Barth’s superimposition of
contemporary categories of the “self” and a serious misstep in paralleling the ontological order of trinitarian relations with the order of human creation, lead to the conclusion that Karl Barth’s interpretational paradigm is indeed helpful, but in and of itself incomplete. While there are scholars and theologians who concur with Barth regarding the idea that human relationality is indeed something that demands special attention within the task of theological anthropology, such relationality—informed primarily by the reality of the incarnation—cannot be isolated as the content of the *imago Dei*. Indeed, a proper understanding of human relationality must inform and be informed by the functional imperative present in the Genesis 1 creation account.

Thus, in my final chapter I will seek to construct a synthesized and more robust model of the *imago Dei* that intertwines the perspectives of J. Richard Middleton and Karl Barth. In constructing a functional-relational interpretational paradigm for the image of God, the functional imperative seen from the perspective of creation will be the foundation of the image. Then, with a functional foundation, the incarnational perspective which grants the revelation of relationality in Christ’s paradigmatic humanity will be shown as necessary for both humanity’s understanding and living out of their calling as God’s representatives and agents in the world. Here I will demonstrate that Barth’s I-Thou dialogical personalism is indeed a superb way to understand the ontological makeup of humanity, but that this I-Thou construction is not constitutive of the *imago Dei* itself. Rather, this relational ontology can be understood as integral to and necessary for the human vocation as the image of God. Once this is established, I will be able to demonstrate that J. Richard Middleton is correct in his argument for the primacy of functionality within the context of Genesis 1. And, as a purposeful critique of ancient Near Eastern socio-political and religious ideals, Genesis succeeds in democratizing the calling to be the image. However, Middleton’s functional model will be shown to properly account for the
fullness of human existence only when it informs and is informed by an understanding of relationally constituted human persons.
CHAPTER ONE

J. RICHARD MIDDLETON’S ROYAL-FUNCTIONAL PARADIGM AS A FOUNDATION FOR UNDERSTANDING THE IMAGO DEI

The issue of interpreting the *imago Dei* passage of the Genesis 1 creation narrative has been both a complicated hermeneutical task and a complex theological problem since the Old Testament was composed and compiled. When delving into the realm of theological anthropology, one finds a plethora of systematic scholars who assert the importance of understanding the image of God when constructing a theology of being human. And, yet, regardless of the numerous works that have been published on the subject, there seems to exist no substantial consensus on what it means to have been created in the image and likeness of God. J. Richard Middleton argues quite convincingly that the main interpretational roadblock for most theologians is their substantial lack of engagement with Old Testament scholarship, among which there *is* a substantial consensus.¹ Instead, many theologians lean on extrabiblical interpretational paradigms. The issue is not the bringing of one’s presuppositions to the text, as this is an inevitable element of biblical interpretation. Rather, the regrettable pitfall of simply ignoring the last century of Old Testament scholarship, in Middleton’s estimation, presents itself on various fronts. The most important of these is that Old Testament scholarship has reached a near consensus that the context of Genesis 1:1-2:3 paints the *imago Dei* passage with a distinctly *royal* flavor, and by treating these findings as unimportant, theologians are ignoring the vastly informative ancient Near Eastern context of the image of God.²

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² Ibid., 24-27.
For this reason, Middleton presents a contextually informed paradigm for the interpretation of the *imago Dei*—the royal-functional image. He argues that, when seen in light of Israel’s contemporaries in the ancient Near East, the Genesis text illuminates that the *imago Dei* “designates the royal office or calling of human beings as God’s representatives and agents in the world, granted authorized power to share in God’s rule or administration of the earth’s resources and creatures.”\(^3\) Through a markedly interdisciplinary approach, Middleton not only outlines how and why the Genesis text functions as an ideology-critique of the nations surrounding Israel, but he advocates for a liberating view of the democratization of the *imago Dei* in a way that points toward a renewed ethic of human activity. And yet, for all of Middleton’s groundbreaking work, he fails to go far enough in recognizing that, while theologians may largely ignore the work of Old Testament scholarship, he himself focuses so intensely on the linguistic and historical context surrounding Genesis 1:1-2:3 that he falls into the same trap of ignoring the work done by theologians like Karl Barth. Indeed, Barth’s relational ontology does not stand in total opposition to a royal-functional image, but rather provides a significant point of connection between Old and New Testament conceptions of the image of God. Thus, this chapter will demonstrate that while J. Richard Middleton offers a comprehensive and well-informed account of the *imago Dei* as a royal-functional responsibility of humanity, he does not go far enough in incorporating the vast importance of relationality as it is seen in the Genesis 1 creation account.

To make such an argument, I will focus the first section of this chapter on the elements of Middleton’s argument for a royal-functional interpretation of the *imago Dei* that are largely beneficial for the project of constructing a hybrid model of the image. This includes first the in-

\(^{3}\) Ibid., 27.
depth analysis and comparison that Middleton offers between the text of Genesis 1:1-2:3 and other ancient Near Eastern creation accounts, providing an interpretational paradigm that shows the Genesis narrative to be an ideology-critique of Mesopotamian culture and theology. Second, I will outline the ways in which Middleton demonstrates the responsibility of humanity to act as representatives and representations of God on earth. Finally, I will highlight the benefits of Middleton’s specific model of functionality, which stands over and against various contemporary and historical notions of dominionist or triumphalistic theology. In the second section of this chapter, I will focus on the ways in which Middleton’s argument may not account fully for the relational elements of the *imago Dei* text. I will then move to demonstrate the ways in which his account of the *imago Dei* seems to leave room for relationality, perhaps not as the very content of the image of God itself, but as a necessity within the structure of humanity. Indeed, the relationality of humanity is necessary for the proper performance of the functional responsibilities inherent to humanity’s existence as the image of God.

**The Structure and Content of Middleton’s Royal-Functional Model**

*Looking to the Immediate Context*

As theologians have worked to interpret the *imago Dei* and its implications for the human experience, Old Testament scholars have put forth the contention that such theological interpretations oftentimes ignore the larger symbolic and social contexts that surround the Genesis 1 text. There are various starting points for Old Testament scholars who are examining the text, the first of which is the immediate language describing humanity’s creation in the “image and likeness” of God. For this reason, Middleton begins his own work by constructing a twofold exegetical examination of the symbolic world of Genesis 1, as well as the sociopolitical context of the image of God. He engages Genesis 1:26-28 specifically, looking closely at the
The semantic range of the words *šelem* and *dēmūt*, or “image” and “likeness.” *Šelem*, the “image” in the *imago Dei*, occurs only seventeen times in the Hebrew Bible, while the qualifier *dēmūt* occurs twenty-five times; yet, word studies altogether have been inconclusive.² In the context of Genesis itself, *šelem* is used to describe various relationships—it describes humanity’s creation in 1:26-27 and 9:6, and in 5:3 it describes Seth’s relationship to his father, Adam. More than relationships, however, *šelem* occurs in Numbers 33:52, 2 Kings 11:18; 2 Chronicles 23:17; Ezra 7:20, 16:17; and Amos 5:26 in the context of describing physical cult statues of various gods. *Šelem* also describes representations that are not cult statues, as well as statues or impressions of kings erected in lands that had been conquered, but where the king could not be physically present, in order to represent the ruler’s sovereignty over the land. The Old Testament range of *šelem* thus appears to support Walter Kaiser’s conclusion that it denotes a “carved or hewn statue or copy”—something altogether physical and concrete.⁵ Middleton’s conclusion differs from Kaiser’s classical definition in that he suggests *šelem* simply means (visible) form (whether material or immaterial).⁶

*Dēmūt* is used to describe humans as the “likeness” of God in Genesis 1:26, 5:1; and again, with *šelem*, in 5:3 to describe Seth’s relationship with Adam, and the vast majority of occurrences make a general comparison between two things. Most of these references can be found in Ezekiel (1:5, 10, 13, 16, 22, 26, 28; 8:2; 10:1, 10, 21, 22) and are used, significantly, to qualify various elements of the prophet’s visions as non-literal. This leads many Old Testament scholars to conclude that the Genesis 1 occurrence of *dēmūt* with *šelem*, which places the words in reverse order to how they are typically written, uses *dēmūt* to qualify the nature of *šelem* and

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² Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 45. The seventeen occurrences of *šelem* do not include the Aramaic cognate found in Daniel 2-3.


prevent an overly materialistic understanding of the *imago Dei.*\textsuperscript{7} And, yet, while no uses of *dēmût* denote any cult statues, 2 Kings 16:10, 2 Chronicles 4:3, and Ezekiel 23:15 do use it to describe a concrete representation or copy of something.\textsuperscript{8} Middleton’s survey of the available research leads him to two preliminary conclusions: 1) neither *selem* nor *dēmût* is univocal in meaning, and while each has a wide range of meaning, the abstract/physical distinction between them is too varied to inform the content of the *imago Dei*; 2) even if the meaning of these two terms could be decided upon, it would not clarify fully the capacity in which humanity *is* the image of God.\textsuperscript{9} After recognizing that word studies of “image” and “likeness” are limited in granting any clarity to the *imago Dei,* Middleton makes three observations concerning the larger symbolic realm of the image: 1) the image is associated in Genesis 1:26-27 with the first-person plural; 2) the image is associated in 1:26 (and possibly in 1:28) with the exercise of human power over the nonhuman world; and 3) the image is associated in 1:27 with the creation of humanity as “male and female.”\textsuperscript{10} Thus, he moves to assess whether the specification of “male and female” grants any further clarity to the image.

Middleton rejects Karl Barth’s suggestion that “male and female” defines the content of the *imago Dei,* as well as Phyllis Trible’s notion that the inclusion of “male and female” in the creation narrative illuminates the feminine character of God, thus grounding “male and female” as equal holders of the image.\textsuperscript{11} These assertions, in Middleton’s estimation, err in that they try to socialize the biological fact of gender, and he argues instead that the image must be understood in the context of “rule.”\textsuperscript{12} Middleton argues further that the association between

\begin{footnotes}
\item[7] Ibid., 47.
\item[8] Ibid.
\item[9] Ibid., 48.
\item[10] Ibid.
\item[11] Ibid., 49-50.
\item[12] Ibid., 50.
\end{footnotes}
“image/likeness” on the one hand and “rule” on the other is grounded in both the occurrence of the words rādā (rule) and kābaš (subdue) in Genesis 1:28, as well as the “let us” speech in 1:26. The use of rādā and kābaš together suggests that the human task to rule over the earth and the animal kingdom “requires a significant exercise of communal power,” thus Middleton asserts that “the primacy of rādā paints the human vocation with a distinctly royal hue.”

Furthermore, Middleton argues over and against the arguments made by Augustine, and later by Barth, that “let us” in 1:26 refers to some nascent trinitarianism or plurality within the godhead, and he rejects as well the argument that the first-person plural is a remnant of pre-Israel polytheism. Instead, Middleton argues that “let us” should be read as indicative of Yahweh’s address to a heavenly court, furthering his notion of the presence of a royal metaphor in the background of the text.

The text’s distinctly royal hue, when coupled with the syntax of 1:26-28 specifically, demonstrates rather clearly that the task of humanity, by virtue of their existence as the imago Dei, should be understood as the exercise of significant power over the earth and its nonhuman creatures.

Looking to the Surrounding Context

Having established that strict grammatical examination will establish very little regarding the meaning of the imago Dei, Middleton argues for a distinctly Mesopotamian cultural background for Genesis 1:1-2:3. Unlike the aforementioned word studies, establishing this

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13 Ibid., 52. Middleton offers an intertextual reading of the terms, in which he demonstrates that rādā is often linked with kingship in the Old Testament, but a further clue towards its meaning for the imago Dei is its common link with shepherding, a common metaphor for kingship that is seen clearly in light of the various nonhuman creatures that humanity is called to rule over. Kābaš, which occurs in 1:28, is broader than rādā and seems to have a violent meaning, while not specifically royal in connotation. There is, however, no implication of violence in the way humans are to rule over nonhuman creation. Rather, kābaš in 1:28 seems to carry the meaning of cultivation or the bringing of something under one’s control.

14 Ibid., 55-60.

15 Ibid., 59.

16 Ibid., 60.
cultural background illuminates the function of the text as a purposeful ideology-critique of the Mesopotamian royal system. The Mesopotamian understanding of the king was that he was the very image of the god whom he served and represented; the king represents the god by virtue of his royal office and is portrayed as acting like the god in specific behavioral ways. Middleton concludes that, in accordance with this Mesopotamian royal context, the biblical concept of the imago Dei suggests that “humanity is dignified with a status and role vis-à-vis the nonhuman creation that is analogous to the status and role of kings in the ancient Near East vis-à-vis their subjects.” He continues that Genesis 1 “constitutes a genuine democratization of ancient Near Eastern royal ideology. As imago Dei, then, humanity in Genesis 1 is called to be the representative and intermediary of God’s power and blessing on earth.” In this way, the establishment of a specific cultural background for the composition of Genesis 1 does indeed demonstrates the likelihood of the text’s purpose. This is perhaps the strongest element of Middleton’s argument, as showing that Old Testament scholarship leads to such an ideology-critique of Mesopotamia also establishes the inherent functionality of the imago Dei.

There is vast syntactical and historical evidence that points to Mesopotamia as the most likely background for the Genesis primeval history. First is the linguistic parallel between the

17 Ibid., 126-29. While Middleton entertains the possibility that either Egypt or Mesopotamia could have had significant influence on the construction of the Genesis creation narrative, he ultimately supports the idea that Mesopotamian influence grants the text the most clarity—that is, Middleton grounds his assertion in the similarities found between the mīš pî ritual and the Genesis 2 creation story, thus making plausible a similar metaphor in Genesis 1. Regarding the mīš pî ritual, Middleton suggests that both the royal consecration and the resulting “transubstantiation” of Mesopotamian cult images provide a most apt parallel to the election, adoption, and installation of the Mesopotamian kings as the authorized intermediaries of the gods on earth.

18 Ibid., 121. Middleton demonstrates the evidence for this Mesopotamian royal-ideology: “This functional similarity of god and king, which is documented in many Mesopotamian texts, is vividly illustrated in a famous wall relief of King Ashurnasirpal that pictures the god Ashur suspended in a winged solar disc above the king. Both when Ashurnasirpal draws his bow and when he lets it fall, the god’s actions in heaven duplicate those of the king on earth.” This functional similarity between the gods and their royal representatives is what leads Middleton to the conclusion that Genesis 1 fits within the context of Mesopotamian royal-ideology, so long as Genesis is functioning as a critique of said ideology.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.
Hebrew *ṣelem* and its Akkadian cognate *ṣalmu*—that is, the various occurrences of *ṣalmu* also generally refer to material copies or representations—which, while inconclusive in and of itself, demonstrates significant contextual similarities. Middleton asserts that, even more important than the *ṣelem*/*ṣalmu* parallel, Werner Schmidt rightly observed that the image of God “seems to be a fixed technical term” in both Genesis and the Mesopotamian references. This fixed technicality can be seen most clearly in the Mesopotamian character of the primeval history in Genesis 1-11, particularly in the distinct focus on the creation of humanity. The Genesis creation narrative and its focus on God’s creation of the first humans parallels the prominent focus on humanity’s creation in the Babylonian *Enuma Elish*, and yet it is only one of several similarities. Another, perhaps more important, parallel is the immense similarity between the flood narrative in Genesis 6-9 and Mesopotamian flood traditions. As extensive as the parallels are between Babylonian and Genesis creation accounts, these similarities do not necessarily prove that the writer of the Genesis had access to any of those documents. However, the correspondence of ideas is telling of the social and political context in which they both were written. The aforementioned parallels, when combined with the Genesis references to various Mesopotamian geographical locations and personal names, the clear portrayal of human history beginning in Mesopotamia (as the Tigris and Euphrates are described as flowing out of Eden),

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21 Ibid., 130.
23 Middleton (*The Liberating Image*, 131) draws various parallels from Herman Gunkel’s analysis of Genesis and the *Enuma Elish* in *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895). Thus, Middleton notes: “The most notable similarities include the development of an ordered cosmos out of a watery beginning, cognate words used for the watery deep (Hebrew *tēhôm* in Genesis 1:2 and Akkadian *ti’āmat* in the Babylonian account), the threefold classification of land animals (domestic, wild, and crawling), the broad sequence of creative events (specifically, the order of firmament, dry land, luminaries, and humans), the theme of divine rest after creation, and the important place given to the creation of humanity.” He continues that the prominent focus on the creation of humanity is markedly Mesopotamian in nature, as, unlike the Egyptian creation accounts, the Mesopotamian accounts tend to include the creation of humans in the context of cosmic creation.
and the link between the tower of Babel episode that ends the primeval history and Mesopotamia, demonstrates the unmistakably Mesopotamian influence on the themes and ideas found in the pages of Genesis, none more vital to our present task than the Genesis understanding of humanity as the *imago Dei*.

All of the work that Middleton does to demonstrate the Mesopotamian background of the Genesis 1-11 primeval history leads him to assert that the Genesis *imago Dei* passage is a distinct and purposeful critique of Mesopotamian royal ideology, specifically as it pertains to the status and role of humanity over and against other ancient Near Eastern ideas. Middleton closely examines five Sumero-Akkadian creation accounts—namely the *Atrahasis Epic*, *Enki and Ninmah*, *Ewe and Wheat, KAR 4*, and *Enuma Elish*—and argues that, while each of these myths contain varying degrees of similarity, when seen as a combined account of the general Mesopotamian understanding of humanity and its relationship to the gods, they demonstrate how Mesopotamian creation myths legitimated the temple system. 

Mesopotamian city-states were constituted by various forms of social groups, and while each group shared in some of its traits with other groups, the most prominent parallels existed between those who worked in the temple and those who worked in the palace. Just as the deity resided in its shrine and was fed, clothed, and cared for appropriately by the temple staff, the king sat in the palace to be fed, clothed, and generally cared for by his subordinates. In the same way, the god, like the king, held court and was offered petitions for aid, settling lawsuits and even being carried through the temple courtyard on special occasions. Ultimately, the deity’s partaking of the daily sacrificial meal

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25 For Middleton’s detailed analysis and comparison of these Mesopotamian creation accounts, see *The Liberating Image*, 149-67.
26 Ibid., 168.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
grounded the entire temple system, as this was the central element of temple practice that cultic officials, artisans, and large numbers of serfs worked for; thus, as the functions of cult image and creation myths converged, they reinforced the entire temple system in painting the purpose of humanity to be service to and care for the gods who created them. Not only were these Sumero-Akkadian creation myths the legitimation of the temple system, but they were the foundation of Mesopotamian royal ideology. Indeed, the Mesopotamian worldview was not static, but underwent significant shifts. Most significant were the various periods when particular dynasties and rulers attempted to annex the temple estates and turn them into the personal property of the ruler. It was during these periods, when temple estates were coming under royal control, that a corresponding rise in the religious, cultic legitimation of power of the king was taking place. In the same way that the various Mesopotamian creation myths depicted humanity as created for the sole purpose of service to and degradation by the pantheon of gods, the concentration of royal and religious power under the king was legitimated by Mesopotamian creation theology. The elevation of the king to a social level on par with divinity thus functioned as an equally proportional demotion of the rest of humanity. It is against

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29 Ibid., 169.
30 Ibid., 170-71. Middleton points to Igor M. Diakonoff’s work, adding: “Diakonoff charts four periods in particular where temples came under royal control, which are correlated with the rise of what he calls ‘despotic kingship’ (that is, concentrations of royal power) in Mesopotamia. While the first such period consisted in a few short-lived annexation attempts during the third Early Dynastic period (under Mesanepanda of Ur, Ententarzi of Lagash, and Ur-Nanshi of Lagash), the second is represented by the accumulation of royal power in the dynasty of Sargon of Akkad (2334-2279 B.C.E.) self-proclaimed ‘King of the Four Quarters of the World,’ who first united all Mesopotamia under a single hegemonic state (during the twenty-fourth and twenty-third centuries). Following a diminution of royal power after the Sargonids the powerful third dynasty of Ur (twenty-second and twenty-first centuries), which later collapsed under the Amorites around 2000 B.C.E. Then followed four hundred years of the fluctuation of royal power, culminating in a massive concentration of power in the dynasty of Hammurapi of Babylon (1792-1750 B.C.E.), who united all Mesopotamia under the first (or Old) Babylonian Empire (which lasted until the early sixteenth century, when the Hittites sacked Babylon).” Middleton pulls from Igor M. Diakonoff, “The Rise of the Despotic State in Ancient Mesopotamia,” in Ancient Mesopotamia: Socio-Economic History: A Collection of Studies by Soviet Scholars, ed. by Igor M. Diakonoff (Moscow: Nauka Publishing House, 1969), 189-201.
31 Ibid., 171.
32 Ibid., 173.
this background of monopolized royal and religious power that Middleton argues for Genesis 1:1-2:3 to have been constructed, thus a democratization of the *imago Dei* idea would have turned the Mesopotamian understanding of humanity’s purpose on its head.

The final element from which Middleton draws to show the ideological function of Mesopotamian creation myths are the significance of humanity having been created from divine blood. Having already demonstrated the inherent devaluation of humanity within the royal system, Middleton makes a similar move to argue that in the cases of texts like *Enuma Elish*, the *Atrahasis Epic*, and *KAR 4*, the depiction of humanity having been created from the blood of slain gods was not something that gifted humans with any sort of special dignity.33 Rather, the status of humanity within the Mesopotamian world, wherein the sole purpose of existence was to serve and care for the gods (and, consequently, the king), shows the blood of slain gods to be an inherently devaluing characteristic.34 In a similar way, Middleton argues that the theme of *Chaoskampf* (“combat myth”) and its portrayal of violent dualism and redemptive violence stood as justification within the theological mindset of Mesopotamian society to endorse the imperialistic conquering and slaying of surrounding nations as a divinely directed ideal.35

Over and against the socio-political norms found in Babylon, Middleton asserts that “the starting point of the primeval history as critique of Mesopotamian ideology is the claim in Genesis 1 that God granted a royal-priestly identity as *imago Dei* to all humanity at creation.”36 He continues that “this democratization of Mesopotamian royal ideology serves to elevate and dignify the human race with a noble status in the world, analogous to that of royalty in the

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33 Ibid., 174-76.
34 Ibid., 176-77.
35 Ibid., 178.
36 Ibid., 204.
ancient Near East." By giving all of humanity the status of imago Dei, and by giving life through word and breath rather than through divine blood and violence, the Genesis 1:26-27 depiction of human creation is blatant in its rejection of the ideological world in which it was composed. But, the Genesis text does more than afford humanity a special status; it shows that, by virtue of being the image of God, humanity has an inherent responsibility, and such a responsibility cannot be monopolized by a single ruler or cult system. Given the immediate literary context of Genesis 1:26-27, the imago Dei can be seen as inherently and inextricably linked to the gift and responsibility of exercising stewardship over the earth. The democratization of the image of God “thus suggests an egalitarian conception of the exercise of power.” However, an egalitarian reading of the imago Dei text does more, however, than simply grant equal status and responsibility to all of humanity. Rather, as Middleton demonstrates, it actively and significantly delegitimizes the structure and power of the Mesopotamian ideological world. Both in the granting of equal access to God, and in the inherent critique of the ideology of cult-statues as mediators of the divine, the democratization of the image of God in Genesis depicts humans not as slaves to an angry deity, but as the only legitimate and authorized representations of God on earth. The text thus constitutes an implicit delegitimation of the entire ruling and priestly structure of Mesopotamian society.

Significantly, Middleton does reject the notion that the primeval history in Genesis follows the pattern of “creation-by-combat,” arguing instead that Genesis 1 should be read as an alternative to such ideas, functioning as a normative framework for reading and interpreting the rest of scripture. Middleton says of Genesis:

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37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., 205.
39 Ibid., 206-207.
Whereas the text’s anthropological alternative of humanity as the image of God functions as a distinctive answer to the question of human identity (‘who are we?’), the text’s theological or cosmological vision, which portrays an originally good creation, functions as a distinctive answer to the broader question of world or context (‘where are we?’). Both levels of the alternative vision of Genesis 1 are necessary to provide a genuine alternative to Mesopotamian ideology.\(^{40}\)

In essence, the *imago Dei* in Genesis stands over and against the structures of Mesopotamian society by offering an alternative, democratized account of humanity as egalitarian representations and representatives of God. In the same way that Genesis provides an alternative framework to Mesopotamian ideals, it also provides a framework for judging violence throughout the Old- and New Testaments, as well as violence in our contemporary world.\(^{41}\)

Indeed, if God’s power is disclosed in Genesis as the antithesis of any other gods, then one finds that the violence which permeates Mesopotamian creation accounts, as well as much of the violence found throughout scripture and the modern world, stands in direct contradiction to God’s power as it was disclosed in creation.\(^{42}\)

*On the Character of God and Humanity*

With the Genesis 1 creation narrative as an ideology critique of Mesopotamian society and theology, and as the notion of the text as a framework for interpreting the rest of scripture, what might be said of the actual content of God’s character that humanity is supposed to image? Middleton rejects outright the dominionist theology of modern reconstructionists like David Chilton, arguing that any reading of Genesis 1 that advocates for the violent imposition of human will on creation is inherently flawed, and he adds that triumphalistic language about “Christian

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 266.
\(^{41}\) Ibid., 269.
\(^{42}\) Ibid.
‘conquest’ of America in God’s name” does nothing more than disenfranchise anyone perceived to be an “other.” Rather than taking the command to rule over and subdue creation to indicate any directive to conquer, one should understand the commandment following the imago Dei passage to direct humanity to care for all of creation. Indeed, Middleton takes seriously the critiques of the Genesis passage from scholars like Lynn White Jr., who argues that nature is devalued in the text, and Sallie McFague, who takes ecological critiques even further and links them to the legitimation of violence against women. Instead of suggesting any sort of hierarchical dualism that places God and humanity over and against the earth and creation, Middleton uses the various literary patterns of the creation narrative to argue for an “incipient subjectivity or freedom granted to the cosmos by God,” which translates directly into both how the universe behaves on its own, as well as how humanity is directed to act as the imago Dei.

Middleton’s argument demonstrates the Mesopotamian background in the composition of Genesis 1:1-2:3 in order to posit his understanding that the creation narrative was written as a critique of Mesopotamian ideology. He then moves to illuminate the aspects of the text that indicate how the imago Dei is a vocational calling for humanity to act as tangible representatives and representations of God. In that most of the content of Middleton’s research has been established to support this final thesis, he finally moves to assert that a careful inspection of Genesis 1:1-2:3 depicts God actively sharing both God’s creativity and governing power with creatures, thus indicating the content of humanity’s vocation to contribute to their calling by participating in God’s generous character.

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43 Ibid., 259.
46 Ibid., 289.
clear that the creaturely contribution to the harmony and beauty of the world is most decisive in the case of humans, who are designated the very image of God.\textsuperscript{47} Thus, as the text itself shows God’s rule to be paradigmatic for how humans are to act as the \textit{imago Dei}, Middleton suggests “that the sort of power or rule that humans are to exercise is generous, loving power.”\textsuperscript{48} He continues that “it is power used to nurture, enhance, and empower others, noncoercively, for \textit{their} benefit, not for the self-aggrandizement of the one exercising power.”\textsuperscript{49} This reading of Genesis is not simply an alternative to years of dominionist theological interpretation of Genesis, and it is more than an artistic way of white-washing the ethical problems faced by Old Testament scholars. Instead, Middleton’s reading, based in what he calls “a hermeneutic of love,” offers a renewed Christian ethic that is “characterized fundamentally by power \textit{with} rather than power over.”\textsuperscript{50} This is what Middleton finds so liberating about the \textit{imago Dei}, that God gave generously out of Godself and called humanity to image that same generous rule over the rest of creation.

**Room for Relationality in Middleton’s Royal-Functional Model**

A large number of Old Testament scholars have, for the most part, endorsed J. Richard Middleton’s work since it was published, as his extensive and insightful study of the social, religious, and historical context of the \textit{imago Dei} passage of Genesis has stood as a bastion of biblical interpretation since its publication. While Middleton’s work is comprehensive, efficient, and convincing, he has fallen into the same trap that he accused systematic theologians like Karl Barth of falling victim to. Indeed, just as Middleton suggests that the pitfall of many systematic

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 295.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 297.
theologians is their refusal to engage with Old Testament scholarship, it seems as though Middleton’s linguistic and historical argument ignores many of the valid points made by theologians, especially as it pertains to relationality as an inherent aspect of the imago Dei in Genesis 1:26-27. Thus, Middleton’s royal-functional model of the image of God is accurate, but incomplete, insofar as it does not sufficiently incorporate relationality as a necessity for either human personhood or human vocation. Thus, in the following section I will interact with a selection of Old Testament scholars, as well as systematic theologians, who take the functional model to be insightful, but altogether lacking in its completeness.

Middleton is not the first Old Testament scholar to take on the royal ideology of Israel’s Mesopotamian neighbors, nor is he the first to advocate for a specific sort of functionality—that is, representation in a royal-functional model—as the very content of the imago Dei. One of the first major scholars to advocate for such a view was D. J. A. Clines, and his argument informs Middleton’s assessment of the issue. Clines wrote, amidst the mid-twentieth-century debate concerning the occurrence of ṣelem and dēmût in tandem, that the meaning of “image and likeness” mattered less than the very fact that those terms appear in Genesis 1:26 together. In Clines’ estimation, it was the connection of the two ideas—the tangible and intangible realities of both terms—that meant “the image is to be understood not so much ontologically as existentially: it comes to expression not in the nature of man so much as in his activity and function. This function is to represent God’s lordship to the lower orders of creation.”

Others came after Clines that debated the true force of theological meaning behind the imago Dei, but a majority of Old Testament scholars have come to the consensus in modern times that the Genesis text was written as a counter-narrative to the theological claims of Israel’s ancient Near Eastern

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contemporaries, therefore being indicative of a royal-functional reality rather than a substantialistic or relational one for the nature of the *imago Dei*.

While perhaps some theologians would concede to the analysis offered by Old Testament scholars regarding functionality in the Genesis text, there is a tendency to argue that this is not exhaustive of the *imago Dei*. Important to this area of study is Stanley Grenz, who somewhat endorses a representational understanding of the *imago Dei*, at least in that it applies to all of humanity and comes to fruition fully in Christ in the New Testament.\(^{52}\) Rather than a strictly functional understanding, however, Grenz argues for a more relational, or social, understanding of the image of God. Grenz identifies male and female sexuality as truly indicative of how humanity is supposed to image God on earth, but not in a physical sense as much as a spiritual union between others in social bonding, fulfilled most supremely in Christ’s incarnation and, ultimately, in the eschatological reunification of God and humanity.\(^{53}\) Grenz would undoubtedly reject the assertion that the main impetus of the *imago Dei* is grounded in functionality, as he insists that the designation of “male and female” tells us more about the text’s intention, but he describes relationality itself as a functional purpose. And, while Middleton would simultaneously reject the Barthian relationality underlying Grenz’s argument, it is my contention that Middleton’s assessment actually leaves room for relationality as a necessary element of his functional model. Middleton is right to call the socialization of “male and female” into modern categories altogether exegetically inappropriate. Yet, it is a bridge too far to suggest that the specified designation tells the reader nothing of a certain relational character to the living out of the *imago Dei* calling, as well as the commands of God following the creation of humanity.


\(^{53}\) Ibid., 211, 294.
What Grenz takes issue with most seriously, regarding the assertions of Old Testament scholars, is the concept of the “democratization” of the image of God. He argues that Genesis 1:26-27 does not refer to individuals as individuals, but rather “the statements in the text have in view humankind, as is evident by the corporate term adam, and perhaps humans-in-relationship, as is suggested by the reference to male and female in verse 27.”

Unlike Middleton, who would argue for a democratization of the image of God based upon the Mesopotamian ideological context, Grenz finds evidence of relationality within the functional elements of the imago Dei narrative, and thus asserts that “universalizing” would be a more appropriate description. That is, while there is surely something to be said of the Genesis ascription of the imago Dei to all human persons, Grenz finds it to be less of a democratization of authority, and more of a universalization of the image to apply to all human persons. He describes such a universalization as the equal application of the imago Dei to all of humanity, over and against the democratization of any specific authority. Moreover, while Grenz admits to the royal flavor of the text endorsed by Old Testament scholars, he argues: “Genesis 1:26-28 is not merely—or even primarily—a critique of the ancient Near Eastern concepts that gave it birth. This text stands within a narrative structure, and within that structure it functions as a prologue to all that follows, rather than as an ontological declaration about human nature.”

In this way, Middleton’s argument for reading Genesis as a normative interpretational framework for the rest of scripture finds solace in Grenz’s argument, though they may disagree on the purpose of such a hermeneutic. What becomes Grenz’s argument for a relational, trinitarian model of the imago Dei, is then founded in the functional paradigm found within the Genesis creation narrative—

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54 Ibid., 201.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
namely, the living out of interpersonal relations as the image of God. As Grenz demonstrates, there is plenty of room within that narrative structure for the relationality of human persons as they live out their vocation as the image of God. Indeed, while Grenz may focus too much on the sexual distinctions of human persons, his recognition of the distinctly relational character of both God and humanity helps to illuminate its importance for acting as representatives of God.

This is not to say that Middleton erred in his assertion that the Genesis text says less about the nature of the *imago Dei* than it does about the vocational calling of humanity, and there is no lack of historical-critical biblical scholarship that endorses this royal-functional model. Rather, in that Middleton aptly accounts for a reading of Genesis that critiques damaging Mesopotamian ideologies, his resulting model does not go far enough in accounting for the relational elements of the humanity, distinctly and specifically detailed in the Genesis 1:1-2:3 creation narrative. Indeed, he lends credence to the importance of the designation “male and female,” but he does little more with it than dismiss Phyllis Trible’s notion of the *imago Dei* as universally applicable to both sexes by virtue of the revealed feminine nature of God.

Interestingly, while Middleton admits that Karl Barth’s insights into human relationality are valuable, he similarly casts any focus on relationality aside because of his understanding that Genesis 1:27 does not specify anything regarding the nature of the image of God in preceding verses. This seems to be an inappropriate, or at least an unnecessary, move on his part, as the “male and female” distinction may apply both to God’s commands after creation, while simultaneously influencing how exactly humanity as a plurality of gendered persons is supposed to act on their vocational calling to represent God in creation.

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59 Ibid., 49-50.
Even granting that Middleton’s royal-functional model ends up with a certain “liberating” flavor to it, at least in the anthropological sense that humanity has an inherent dignity by virtue of the democratized imago Dei, the ethical implications of such a model do not pay enough attention to the obvious signs that “male and female” in 1:27 indicate something about how the human vocation is to be lived out. A helpful interpretational insight and a legitimate point of critique against Middleton’s royal-functional model can be found in Paul Sands’ argument for the image of God as vocation. Sands suggests that understanding the image of God as vocation “subsumes the legitimate insights” of other models into a singular faithful perspective, which would allow more than enough room for relationality in the living out of the imago Dei, while remaining faithful to Old Testament scholarship. Without having expressed its explicit relational connotations, Sands’ argument does a much better job at outlining the ethical implications of a functional model. He asserts that, by virtue of humanity’s creation as the image of God, and in that being the image of God is a vocational calling, there are four distinct implications to be found: 1) human beings possess an inalienable dignity that must be respected; 2) human beings must value and protect human life; 3) human beings must resist ideologies of power; 4) human beings must care for the earth and non-human life.

What seems to be taken for granted in the ethical assertions of Sands’ vocational model is the recognition that they are all inherently relational functions of humanity; yet, like Middleton, the ethical implications that Sands posits all indicate the importance of human relationality. In that all human beings possess an inalienable dignity, there exists a vocational impetus to respect the “other”; whether that “other” is differently gendered, economically disenfranchised, or if that one is an enemy, the way in which human persons behave towards one another is under a

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60 Sands, “Imago Dei as Vocation,” 41.
61 Ibid., 39-41.
mandate granted by the *imago Dei* that concerns how humans behave in their relationships. In that human beings are called to value and protect human life, there is an obligation to live out interpersonal relationships in a way that enables human flourishing. Furthermore, in the vocational calling to resist ideologies of power and care for the whole of creation, each element of the human function as *imago Dei* both depends upon and mandates relationality, at least a relationality that is shaped by what Middleton would call God’s “primal generosity.”

Much of the work done since 2005 in the study of the *imago Dei* cites Middleton as the contemporary foundation of their assertions. While his claim stands true that much of Old Testament scholarship has reached a consensus regarding a general functional model of the image, there are plenty who take issue with such a strict anthropological argument. J. Gordon McConville, for example, bases much of his reading of Genesis on Middleton’s work, but expands his hermeneutical lens to include the rest of the Old Testament. McConville, in his own attempt at developing a more robust theology of being human, identifies Psalm 8:4[5] as the best ideal question to ask of human nature: “What is the human being, that you pay attention to them?” It is his search for the answer to this question that leads him to accept fully that a functional model is present in the Genesis 1:1-2:3 creation narrative, while simultaneously expressing the importance of right human relations found in the rest of scripture. By bringing together an understanding of the *imago Dei* as representation with an understanding of the *imago Dei* as relationality, he suggests three answers to the question of “What is the image of God?”

These are: 1) the image implies the presence of God within the creation through humanity, in a

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62 Ibid., 40.
63 Ibid.
way that affirms God’s ongoing intimate involvement with it; 2) the image depicts humanity in a relationship of freedom with God, as well as within intrahuman relationships; 3) the image draws on the dimension of the nature of humanity’s presence within the creation. In this way, one finds that “the idea of relationality enables an approach that affirms both godlikeness in itself and a dimension of actualizing this in human living.” Thus, one finds that Middleton’s argument for a liberating image based in an ancient Near Eastern counter-narrative is valid, but incomplete, as the *imago Dei* indeed says something of the nature and purpose of human relationality, at least in that such relationality is a necessary part of actualizing the functional calling gifted to humanity in their creation as the image of God.

It would be incorrect to suggest that Middleton’s anthropology is based *solely* in the Genesis 1:1-2:3 creation narrative as he suggests that the text, and subsequently the entire primeval history, should truly be read as a prelude to the whole of the bible. That is to say that he supports the argument that the *imago Dei* is undoubtedly important to understanding the human condition through the eyes of ancient Israel, but he also understands that a comprehensive understanding of the meaning of the *imago Dei* does not begin and end in Genesis. Moreover, in his effort to take the literary structure and context of the Genesis 1:1-2:3 creation narrative on its own account, he has consequently left ample room for interpretation throughout the rest of the Old Testament for humanity’s role and function as the image of God. Indeed, it is less appropriate to argue that Middleton failed in any way to account for the content of the *imago Dei* than it is to suggest that the Old Testament as a whole, when seen through the lens of the

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66 Ibid., 25.
67 Ibid. McConville goes on to suggest that human creativity, far from being optional recreation for enthusiasts, has roots in the nature of the human person as made in the *imago Dei*. He argues that, just as God delights in God’s creation, so humans are invited to share in this delight by also thinking and acting in creative ways. This may be good, but it can be evil as well. Thus, *human potentiality*, much like the human person, remains suspended between glory and corruption. Nonetheless, enacting the functional calling inherent to the *imago Dei* can only take place within the context of relationality. See: *Being Human*, 187-88.
primeval history, points to more than simple function as the reason for humanity having been created in the image of God. Thus, Middleton’s account of the image of God is accurate, but it is altogether incomplete.

What one finds in Genesis 1:1-2:3 is that there is a proper way to be human—that is, being human is itself an inherent call to live and act as the image of God—and doing so requires and necessitates a specific type of human relationality that enables the flourishing of others. Middleton’s assertion is that the imago Dei, when taken in light of the context of ancient Mesopotamian ideology, “designates the royal office or calling of human beings as God’s representatives and agents in the world, granted authorized power to share in God’s rule or administration of the earth’s resources and creatures.”68 Within his interpretational framework, the imago Dei is a royal-functional calling, but holds no bearing on human relationality. It is my contention, however, that his argument not only leaves room for, but also requires an explication of human relationality. Insofar as human persons are called to be God’s representatives, the imago Dei indicates something substantial about the ways in which humans relate to one another and the world. These relations, while perhaps not entirely constitutive of the imago Dei, are nonetheless a prerequisite for existing as a human person in the image of God.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has moved to demonstrate that, while J. Richard Middleton develops an incredibly well-informed and comprehensive account of the imago Dei as a functional reality, he does not go far enough in incorporating or accounting for the vivid reality of human relationality that exists within the context of the Genesis 1:1-2:3 creation account. This relationality can be found within the pluralistic creation of humanity as a unified, yet differentiated “male and

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female,” inherently social creation, but also within the incarnational revelation found in Christ that demonstrates the necessity of right relationships in order for human persons to live out their existence as the image of God. Thus, a more coherent approach to understanding the *imago Dei* would intertwine the Old Testament account of the image as a functional calling of humanity with the New Testament revelation found in Jesus, who is the “true image of God.”

Furthermore, having established quite extensively the legitimacy of Middleton’s argument that the Genesis text is concerned with humanity’s functional responsibility by virtue of their creation in the image of God, as well as having shown the ways in which Middleton’s argument may fall short of fully accounting for relationality as a necessary component of the human experience, I suggest that by incorporating Karl Barth’s dialectical account of I-Thou encounter with Middleton’s royal-functional model, a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of the *imago Dei* will be attained. It is the benefits and shortcomings of Karl Barth’s argument for I-Thou encounter as constitutive of human personhood to which the next chapter will be devoted.
CHAPTER TWO

KARL BARTH’S RELATIONAL ONTOLOGY AND A MODERN REIMAGINING OF THE IMAGO DEI

Having focused in the first chapter of this work on an Old Testament perspective of a royal-functional model of the imago Dei, and after having demonstrated that such a model of interpretation would benefit from intersection with a relational interpretation of the Genesis 1 creation narrative, the following chapter will move to explicate Karl Barth’s relational conception of the image of God. Systematic theologians have long debated the content and significance of the imago Dei passage of Genesis, and the field of theological anthropology remains divided as to whether humanity’s having been created in the image of God should be the foundation for understanding human personhood and the human experience. Old Testament scholars have often critiqued the works of theologians in this area of study, accusing them of regularly ignoring or rejecting the exegetical work of biblical scholars in favor of extrabiblical interpretational paradigms.

This chapter will focus on explicating the theological-anthropology of Karl Barth, in order to demonstrate both the importance and the inherent shortcomings of his interpretational model of the imago Dei. The groundbreaking work compiled in his Church Dogmatics set the stage for much of contemporary systematics, and his anthropological construction of human personhood and the imago Dei offers perhaps the greatest point of intersection with functional models of the image. More specifically, Barth develops his understanding of an I-Thou dialogical personalism across three major sections of the third volume of his Church Dogmatics, “The Doctrine of Creation.”¹ Thus, through an exposition of Barth’s theology I will demonstrate

the promise of his relational understanding of humanity in the *imago Dei* while laying the foundation for its intertwining with a functional interpretation.

Barth, while basing his analysis of the *imago Dei* in an exegesis of Genesis 1, begins his anthropology with Christ and the incarnation rather than with Genesis itself. In Barth’s estimation, theologians cannot and should not embark on the path of anthropology without first looking to Christology, as Christ is the truest form of humanity and therefore determinative of all other human beings. The person of Jesus Christ is described as the very image of God in Colossians 4:4, thus the New Testament becomes the lens through which Genesis is to be interpreted. For this reason, Barth identifies Christ as the paradigmatic human person. And, in the way that Christ exists as “man for His fellows,” Barth identifies the basis of his I-Thou dialectic.\(^2\) This specific type of relational encounter, he argues, is what constitutes human personhood and serves as the *tertium comparationis* between humanity and God. Thus, through an in-depth exegetical and theological examination he suggests that this I-Thou encounter is what is being portrayed in the Genesis creation accounts.

Karl Barth’s I-Thou dialectic has certainly been controversial—at least in that it is grounded in the creation of male and female persons and then used as a way for Barth to construct a theology of marriage and the ordering of human relationships. This chapter will focus primarily on the benefits of Barth’s understanding of the *imago Dei*—namely, the content and structure of his argument for I-Thou encounter as constitutive of human personhood—and then I will move to demonstrate some of the problems with his interpretation of the Genesis creation texts. In this way, I will suggest that Barth’s relational model of the image of God is


\(^2\)Barth, *CD* 3.2, 222.
lacking in dialogue with Old Testament scholarship concerning the functionality of the image, but that Barth’s relational understanding of I-Thou encounter, founded in Christ’s incarnation, would actually support and bolster the functional model proposed by J. Richard Middleton. I will then demonstrate that Barth’s superimposition of the modern category of the “self” onto the Genesis text is not inherently problematic, but that it requires engagement with the original context of the narrative. Finally, I will expose the logical missteps in parallels Barth presents between the order of relations within the Trinity and the order of relations between male and female. In this way, encounter will take precedence over gendered relations, and Barth’s ontology will become helpful in the task of crafting a contemporary, reimagined *imago Dei*. This chapter will therefore serve to establish that, for the proper functioning of humanity as the *imago Dei*, human persons must exist in relational encounter—that is, I-Thou encounter. Moreover, it will demonstrate that Karl Barth’s anthropology, while certainly deserving of critique, is inherently helpful in that regard.

**The Structure and Content of Barth’s Relational Ontology**

*Regarding “Creation as the External Basis of the Covenant”*

Before delving into his exegetical analysis of the Genesis 1 creation account, Barth posits his understanding of creaturely existence. He suggests that a creature is not a creature unto or for itself, thus a creature is neither self-existent nor self-determined. He therefore labels “creation” as a reality distinct from God, which is both freely willed and freely executed. The will of God

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3 Barth, *CD* 3.1, 95. Before going any further into an explication of Barth’s thought, it is important to note that any exclusively masculine language is being quoted from Barth himself. While I seek to apply contemporary standards of gender inclusivity, *Church Dogmatics* contains dated, androcentric language to refer to male persons in some cases, as well as male and female persons together in others. For this reason, in any areas referencing Barth that are not quoted explicitly, I will use gender inclusive terms.

4 Ibid.
in creating was not the satisfaction of filling a divine need, nor does God’s creating of this external reality indicate a limit to God’s very being, but rather creation shows that God is free in God’s love—that is, God’s positing of this external reality is itself a work of love.\(^5\) Creation, therefore, entails a presupposition of the divine purpose of love, fully realized in relation to the creature.\(^6\) An important distinction for Barth’s ontology is that, while creation exists as God’s expression of divine love, the way in which the creature realizes this love for itself is fundamentally different than the way it is expressed by the divine. Within the creaturely sphere, “the one who is loved has its existence and being independent of the one who loves. Here the one comes upon the other and loves it for the sake of its being and nature.”\(^7\) This becomes the first indication of Barth’s relational ontology, as the relationship of loving encounter constitutes the creature in relation to both God and other creatures.

Genesis 1, in Barth’s estimation, depicts the external dynamic of the covenant between God and humanity as resting solely on creation, thus in virtue of its being and nature, the creature is both destined and designed to be a partner of the covenant; therefore, “the creature will always have to do exclusively with its Creator on God’s side, and exclusively with its own God-given nature on its own.”\(^8\) This will become the foundation of the I-Thou dialect later on in Barth’s work, at least in that his argument establishes the fact that creation was established out of God’s divine love, thus suggesting the entirety of human existence to be directed and disposed ultimately to God as the Other.

In his exegesis of the text itself, Barth paints the first creation story as that which established humanity in a paradigm of divine-human superiority and subordination. The nature

\(^{\text{5}}\) Ibid.
\(^{\text{6}}\) Ibid., 96.
\(^{\text{7}}\) Ibid.
\(^{\text{8}}\) Ibid., 97.
of humanity is therefore incapable of serving any purpose other than that of the covenant.\textsuperscript{9} Regarding the nature of humanity, Barth argues that God’s creating through speech indicates humanity to have been created \emph{by} God, rather than coming \emph{from} any emanation of divine essence; thus, humanity is neither divine nor anti-godly, but instead was created in harmony with God as both an object of God’s joy and a participant in this joy.\textsuperscript{10} Concerning the creation of the earth as a dwelling place for creatures, Barth finds patterns of the delineation of boundaries within the separation of light and darkness in Genesis 1:6-8, as well as within the creation of opposites like land and sea, field and sky in 1:9-13.\textsuperscript{11} This delineation of boundaries is, for Barth, the laying of a foundation for the freedom of creatures, as they are free from the primordial chaos that is being brought into order. The sum of all of the creation acts points toward the goal of humanity’s creation, and he suggests regarding the entire sphere of human life that God “wills to fashion and does fashion it as a dwelling-place for the man who can recognize God and himself and his fellow-creatures, and who in gratitude and recognition of what is and occurs can be grateful and express his gratitude.”\textsuperscript{12} While the humanity is inseparable from fellow creatures, the Genesis narrative illustrates creation’s purpose as the place wherein humanity can function in relation to God and one another, without rejecting the rest of created beings as anything less than companions to be cared for generously.

This leads to the climax of Genesis 1: the creation of humanity as the \textit{imago Dei}. Barth suggests that the expressed desire and intention to make humanity “‘in our image’ means to be created as a being which has its ground and possibility in that fact that ‘us,’ i.e., in God’s own sphere and being, there exists a divine and therefore self-grounded prototype to which this being

\begin{footnotes}
\item[9] Ibid., 99.
\item[10] Ibid., 102, 110.
\item[11] Ibid., 143-44.
\item[12] Ibid., 157.
\end{footnotes}
can correspond.” Here, in the moment in the narrative when God speaks humanity into existence, Barth identifies explicitly the basis of an I-Thou dialectic. For only in the sudden appearance of humanity does God find a real Other, a true counterpart, within creation. Barth suggests that “in our likeness” is a qualifier showing humanity to have been created by God, but without a new nature, at least not to the extent that human nature patterns after God’s own nature, but rather it stands in correspondence to God’s nature. From here Barth argues that the specification that “He created them male and female” is qualified by “God created man,” thus he asserts that “man is the first and only one to be created in genuine confrontation with God and as a genuine counterpart to his fellows, it is he first and alone who is created ‘in the image’ and ‘after the likeness’ of God.” Barth’s identification of the superiority of male persons in the order of creation indeed carries with it problematic implications for gender relations, but the basis of his I-Thou dialogical personalism is this:

But the divine form of life, repeated in the man created by Him, consists in that which is the obvious aim of the ‘Let us.’ In God’s own being and sphere there is a counterpart: a genuine but harmonious self-encounter and self-discovery; a free co-existence and co-operation; an open confrontation and reciprocity. Man is the repetition of this divine form of life; its copy and reflection...Thus the tertium comparationis, the analogy between God and man, is simply the existence of the I and the Thou in confrontation. This is first constitutive for God, and then for man created by God.

In identifying this analogy, Barth paints the ultimate goal of humanity’s existence in and acting out of their identity as the imago Dei—that is, in the confrontation of differentiation within I-

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13 Ibid., 183.
14 Ibid., 184.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., 185. Here it is especially important to note that the Barth’s reference to “man” as the repetition of the divine form is not male-exclusive, but rather refers to all of humankind. This carries throughout the quoted passage and thus provides a solid foundation for retaining Barth’s relational ontology without maintaining his superimposition of male/female subordination. This theme will be carried out more fully in later sections of this chapter.
Thou encounter—as the eschatological participation of all humanity in Jesus Christ and His Church.\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{Regarding “The Basic Form of Humanity”}

In that Barth’s understanding of the \textit{imago Dei} in humanity is based in the \textit{tertium comparationis} between God and humanity, he grounds the revelation of this analogy in Jesus Christ as the perfect image of God. He asserts that Jesus is “man for His fellows,” and therefore exists as the \textit{imago Dei} in a way that is ultimately unattainable for the rest of humanity.\textsuperscript{18} Jesus is thus the only human person who can be described as “a genuine I” that is entirely from and to the fellow-human.\textsuperscript{19} Barth suggests that, because there is similarity between Jesus and other humans, there must be a similarity between God and humanity generally. It is in the necessary correspondence and similarity to Jesus’ humanity that it becomes possible for the covenant relationship between God and all of humanity to be reconciled fully in the eschaton.\textsuperscript{20} This correspondence makes profound the necessity of fellow humans, as a “man without his fellows” is fundamentally alien to Jesus as a human person, and thus such a person could not have Christ as Savior.\textsuperscript{21} Relationality is thus a necessity not only for the very humanity of a person, but also for their salvation and the ultimate eschatological reconciliation of the Church in Christ.

Barth identifies three specific terms for the definition of humanity. First, he asserts, “We describe humanity as a determination of being.”\textsuperscript{22} The human being is a wholly definite being, created by God for God, and “humanity” is the type of being that corresponds to this nature.\textsuperscript{23}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[17] Ibid., 191.
\item[18] Barth, \textit{CD} 3.2, 222.
\item[19] Ibid.
\item[20] Ibid., 225.
\item[21] Ibid., 224.
\item[22] Ibid., 243.
\item[23] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
He continues in his second term, “We describe humanity as a being of man with others.”

This both describes humanity and distinguishes humanity in general with the humanity of Jesus—that is, Barth specifies that only the humanity of Jesus can be described as a being for humankind, while the correspondence between Jesus’ humanity and humanity in general is humanity as the being of the one with the other. There is a certain extent to which humanity in general is for the other, but in his third term Barth reemphasizes, “We describe humanity as a being of the one man with the other.”

Thus, most fundamentally, he contends that humanity cannot exist in isolation, and the plurality of humanity is constituted inherently by a duality—that is, for Barth, male and female distinction. Relationality, therefore, is not only necessary for the living out of the covenant with and for God, but is indeed constitutive of the human person as an “I.”

The “I,” Barth argues, is also revealing of the inherent plurality and relationality of humanity, as labeling oneself as an “I” distinguishes the speaker as an object unto itself, wholly different than the one to whom the “I” is addressing. Thus, in calling oneself an “I,” the “Thou” is being addressed implicitly. “I” is not a self-sufficient being, but rather necessitates a “Thou” in order for it to recognize itself. It is from this distinction that Barth moves to suggest: “Being with means encounter. Hence being with the other man means encounter with him. Hence humanity is the determination of our being as a being in encounter with the other man.”

The basic formula for such an encounter consists in the statement: “I am as Thou art.” This is not the encounter of two static entities, but rather the entire complex human being encounters its fellow’s being, and their dynamic encounter with one another is essential to the concept of

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24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., emphasis added.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., 244.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., 247-48.
30 Ibid., 248.
human personhood. \textsuperscript{31} Ontologically, Barth argues, “I am as Thou art” tells us that “we have to do with real man only when his existence takes places in this encounter, only in the form of man with his fellow man.” \textsuperscript{32}

Barth defines humanity as being in encounter, and he characterizes being in encounter as consisting in: 1) a being in which one person looks the other in the eye; 2) the fact that there is mutual speech and hearing; 3) the fact that we render mutual assistance in the act of being; and 4) the fact that all the occurrence described thus far as the basic form of humanity is done on both sides of the encounter with gladness. \textsuperscript{33} While these categories define the I-Thou encounter, they do not develop fully the implications for humanity itself; thus, Barth goes on to devote specific attention to some of the consequences of his guidelines for humanity as being in encounter. Humanity, he argues, fundamentally requires freedom for the realization of the inherent togetherness of unique human persons. \textsuperscript{34} This “togetherness” itself requires human freedom because, if being in encounter requires “mutual assistance in the act of being” and an acceptance of the Other marked by “gladness,” then neither person in I-Thou encounter can see themselves as slave or master, but rather both must be “companions, associates, comrades, fellows and helpmates.” \textsuperscript{35} The decisive point to be grasped, in Barth’s estimation, is that in order to embrace human nature as such, and as created and given by God, we must recognize that “man is determined to be with his fellow-man gladly, in the indicated freedom of the heart.” \textsuperscript{36} This is the foundation of Barth’s relational model of the imago Dei, that humanity is designed

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 249.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 250, 252, 260, 265.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 269.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 260, 265, 271.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 273.
with a likeness and correspondence to God, most profoundly in Jesus Christ, that is rooted in the necessity of being with and subsequently for the Other.\footnote{While my usage of the term “Other” in this sense is a rather generalized term which functions as an all-encompassing label for all human persons, my understanding of the category of “otherness” has been influenced heavily by the theology of Miroslav Volf, especially his monograph \textit{Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation} (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996). In the scope of this present work, “Other” will be used consistently as a purposeful and gender-inclusive summarization of any and every human person—that is, to appropriate the gist of Karl Barth’s theology in our contemporary context—however, the implications of my usage of the term carry with them the connotations of Volf’s work. In Volf’s estimation, Otherness as a generalized category describes the reasons behind much of modernity’s culture clashes, resulting in exclusive social spaces and, ultimately, the breakdown of humanity’s ability to work cooperatively towards the common good. In this way, such political connotations play into the ultimate goal of this work, as I will develop in later sections a more robust understanding of the \textit{imago Dei} which serves as a functional calling on a relationally constituted humanity. Therefore, the \textit{imago Dei} carries with it an ethical imperative towards the group effort required of all humanity, enabling the flourishing of one another and the rest of the created world.}

\textit{Regarding “Man and Woman”}

The climax of Barth’s relational ontology and thus his model for understanding the \textit{imago Dei} comes in his examination of the importance of humanity having been created as “male and female.” Up until this point, Barth’s argument has done very little with the theological implications of human gender and sexuality; thus, Barth’s opening epithet to this section reads:

\begin{quote}
As God the Creator calls man to Himself, He also directs him to his fellow-man. The divine command affirms in particular that in the encounter of man and woman, in the relationship between parents and children and outwards from near to distant neighbors, many may affirm, honour and enjoy the other with himself and himself with the other.\footnote{Barth, \textit{CD} 3.4, 116.}
\end{quote}

Barth recognizes the vast array of differentiated human relationships, but he argues explicitly that the entirety of human relationships “rests on a structural and functional distinction”—that is, male and female.\footnote{Ibid., 117.}

Barth’s \textit{imago Dei} is tied up intimately with gendered human existence, as he asserts that the description of the first humans in both creation stories points to the importance of
differentiation and relationship. In Genesis 1:27 specifically, Barth argues that the fact that God created them “male and female” corresponds to the fact that God in Godself exists in relationship and not isolation. He also highlights the ethical importance of examining human gender in the context of marriage, as the Old Testament uses marriage as a corresponding metaphor for the relationship between God and God’s people, and the New Testament uses marriage to describe the relationship between Christ and the Church. Marriage, seen in light of the “divine command,” becomes the lens through which Barth illustrates human relationality—namely, the I-Thou encounter.

Human persons do not exist as such, but rather they necessarily exist as a human male or a human female, and for this reason Barth specifies further that a human person is necessarily and totally man or woman, and consequentially they are equally man and woman. Marriage, as seen in light of the “divine command”—God’s direction of the human person to their fellow-person—requires humanity to affirm this natural dualism and to express this dualism in their existence; doing so is an act of obedience, taking control of this gendered sphere of humanity. Now, marriage is the way in which Barth illuminates the particulars of human relationality, and while it functions metaphorically in scripture to depict relationships with God, Barth makes clear the notion of “limitation” that qualifies the encounter of man and woman. Indeed, the entire relationship between man and woman is manifest in its creatureliness, thus the limits of human sexuality must not become blurred. Barth contends that sexuality should not be seen as a

\[\text{\footnotesize{40 Ibid.}}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize{41 Ibid.}}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize{42 Ibid.}}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize{43 Ibid., 118.}}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize{44 Ibid., 121. Barth specifies that the “divine command” is to fulfill the responsibility of humanity to be free before God and for Him. The ordination of humanity as covenant partner of God means that God’s command to humanity is simply “to be what [they are]”—being in encounter, in freedom, and in the vocation of the covenant which calls us to freedom in fellowship with others (CD 3.4, 116).}}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize{45 Ibid., 129.}}\]
subject unto itself, but rather the whole realm of sexuality takes place in the context of partners in encounter and co-existence; “man and his fellow, Thou and I as man and woman.” This is not to say that sexuality is limited to the physical nature of human persons, but rather Barth paints sexuality as a part of the whole person. Having sexuality within the humanity, and in the necessity and desire to be with the Other, human persons seek the body as well as the “spirit-impelled soul” of the body. Physical sex thus only exists in the context of the whole human person.

Having already established his paradigm for I-Thou encounter, and with an understanding of “male and female” as a foundation for all of human relationality, Barth identifies marriage as the “telos, goal and centre” of the relationship between man and woman. Following his model of I-Thou encounter, then, Barth defines marriage as an encounter characterized by freedom, mutuality, and harmonious love between a particular man and woman who enter together into an exclusive and life-long union. Whether individual human persons actually enter into marriage, Barth argues that marriage itself is connected to the whole sphere of human existence and relationality. This is because God, having created humanity as male and female, willed that humanity exist in and embrace this duality. There can be no male without female and no female without male, thus Barth labels male and female being as the “prototype of all I and Thou, of all the individuality in which man and man differ from and yet belong to each other.” And it is this relationality that Barth sees as the correspondence humanity has with God—that is, the

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46 Ibid., 131.
47 Ibid., 132.
48 Ibid., 140.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid., 149-50.
existence with and for the Other, knowing them in I-Thou encounter, is the imago Dei in humanity.

Barth does identify an order of relations in the existence of man and woman, which he locates in the fact that there can be no self-contained or self-sufficient male or female life, but rather the life of the man is ordered, related, and directed to the woman, while the life of the woman is ordered, related, and directed to the man. Still, while he depicts male and female persons as ontologically equal, he argues that man and woman have their own proper places according to created order. Thus, even as woman does not come short of man in any way, Barth nevertheless locates woman as secondary to man, and therefore as inherently subordinate. He does argue that the order of relations does not necessitate any lower state of being, and he maintains that the mark of proper relations is freedom, with each partner embracing their position in the relationship as a source of freely-assumed pride. This is qualified, of course, by the commanded orientation of the sexes toward one another: “[1] They are to consider one another, [2] to hear the question which each puts to the other and [3] to make responsible answer to one another.” In this way, then, Barth suggests that, regardless of any order of relations, I-Thou encounter between man and woman should nonetheless be marked by a certain mutuality of seeing, hearing, recognizing, and understanding. Freedom and mutual love are thus the marks of a rightly established relationship (either marital or non-marital), and all of relationality is founded in I-Thou encounter. In this way, as human persons exist in I-Thou encounter, so do

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51 Ibid., 163.
52 Ibid., 169, 171.
53 Ibid., 171.
54 Ibid., 167.
they image God. Thus, Barth’s argument that “the *tertium comparisonis*, the analogy between God and man, is simply the existence of the I and the Thou in confrontation.”

**Relationality and a More Robust *Imago Dei***

*The Importance of Engaging with Old Testament Scholarship*

Karl Barth grounds his entire construction of I-Thou dialogical personalism in his own exegesis of Genesis—at least, Barth *claims* to ground his work in the Old Testament. However, the entire shape of Barth’s anthropology flows from Christ and the incarnation backwards to the Genesis narrative, as Christ is the true human and the only lens through which Barth finds meaning in our own humanity. This argumentative structure need not be a problem, save the fact that Barth would have had access to and knowledge of the plethora of Old Testament scholarship that had already been written, explicitly rejecting the claims he makes. J. Richard Middleton argues that the main issue with theological interpretation of the *imago Dei* is the tendency of systematic theologians to ignore the work of biblical scholars in favor of extrabiblical resources, and of that Karl Barth is surely guilty. Indeed, the argument for relationality as the meaning of the *imago Dei* in Genesis is an example of a contemporary category of the human experience that is being read into the creation story, but this does not indicate that all such moves are totally flawed. Surely, relationality and the complex nexus of human socialization is a quality that finds unique profundity in humanity, thus one can safely assume that it has something to add to the discussion of essential humanity.

The text of Genesis 1 does not indicate that God created human beings out of God’s own loneliness or incompleteness, and Karl Barth agrees, arguing that creation is simply the positing

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55 Barth, *CD* 3.1, 185.
of a reality entirely distinct from God, brought into existence out of an expression of God’s
divine love.\textsuperscript{57} What the text does indicate, according to a plethora of biblical scholars, is a
functional imperative with a distinctly royal hue.\textsuperscript{58} This is not to say that Barth’s concept of
relationality as essential to understanding the human being as \textit{imago Dei} is entirely flawed or has
no value to the project, but rather it demonstrates that Barth’s lack of engagement with Old
Testament scholarship does a disservice to his theological framework. Indeed, if a royal-
functional paradigm for interpreting the image of God tells us something of how humans are to
behave as God’s representatives, and if representing God takes place in the context of
“dominion” over the earth (as the Genesis text seems to posit), then one can see such a function
as an entirely relational element of the human experience. Marsha Wilfong argues that, having
been created in God’s image, “humankind stands in the place of God in relation to the rest of
creation.”\textsuperscript{59} And such a special relationality, when seen in light of the findings of scholars who
have examined the ancient Near Eastern context, seems to coincide with the vast array of
evidence regarding the socio-political context of Genesis 1. Certainly, like the “earthly rulers
who set up statues of themselves to assert their sovereignty in places where they were not
present, so humankind is set upon the earth to assert and to carry out God’s sovereign rule over
creation.”\textsuperscript{60}

While Barth does not engage with the sources which indicate such an ancient Near
Eastern context, and though he does not interact with much of the Old Testament scholarship that
has concluded the \textit{imago Dei} to be a functional calling for humanity, what Barth does succeed in

\textsuperscript{57} Ray S. Anderson, \textit{On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology} (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock,
2010), 69; Barth, \textit{CD} 3.2, 222.
\textsuperscript{58} Middleton, \textit{The Liberating Image}, 27.
\textsuperscript{59} Marsha M. Wilfong, “Human Creation in Canonical Context: Genesis 1:26-31 and Beyond,” in \textit{God Who
Eerdmans, 2000), 45.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
doing initially is grounding his anthropological pursuit in the New Testament and the perspectives granted to us in Jesus Christ. This insight is key to Christian theological anthropology, for, while the Old Testament must surely be understood first on its own terms, the revelation of Jesus Christ and the installment of a new humanity necessitates a reimagining of the *imago Dei* as the *imago Christi*. There are many modern biblical scholars who assert the importance of an incarnational perspective, although many follow J. Richard Middleton’s contention that the socio-political context of the ancient Near East should maintain interpretational primacy. Marc Cortez, for example, asserts the following areas of general consensus amongst biblical scholars regarding the *imago Dei*: to “image” God means to “reflect” God in creation; “image” and “likeness” are largely or entirely synonymous; the image in the New Testament is a Christological concept; and the image of God is largely teleological. Cortez agrees with those like Middleton that the cultural identifiers in the language of Genesis indicate a functional interpretation of the image of God, but he identifies the benefits of Barth’s Christological lens for illuminating the depths of how human beings are to be representatives, or *incarnations*, of that which they image in creation. Similarly, Stanley Grenz asserts:

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61 Stanley J. Grenz, “Jesus as the *Imago Dei*: Image-of-God Christology and the Non-Linear Linearity of Theology,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 4 (2004): 623. While Karl Barth and Stanley Grenz are far from the only theologians who have worked to refocus the construction of a comprehensive anthropology around Christology, perhaps the greatest contemporary example of a theologian whose work centers around the importance of Christology for any systematic theological pursuit is Kathryn Tanner. See especially, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), wherein Tanner demonstrates the centrality of Jesus Christ for all of Christian thought and life. Tanners work is complex, but her analytical approach to tracing the development of Christology throughout the Christian faith leads to some incredibly beneficial conclusions regarding the essence of humanity as *imago Dei*. Pertinent to this work, though it is limited in scope, is her understanding of Christ as the key to recognizing the pattern that organizes the whole of human existence. As humanity and divinity are united in Christ, Tanner recognizes the power of Christ and the ability of the human person to undergo radical transformation. Tanner argues that the theological importance of human nature lies in its lack of definition, thus the inherent malleability of human character is where we might find our ability to be formed according to the divine will and grace of God.


63 Ibid., 21-24.
Christology informs the doctrine of God, for we cannot know who God truly is except through Jesus who as the true \textit{imago} Dei is the revelation of God. Christology is crucial for the doctrine of creation, insofar as we cannot see God’s purposes for creation except in relationship to Jesus who as the \textit{imago} Dei in fulfillment of the human vocation is the cosmic Christ. And Christology informs the doctrine of humankind, for we cannot know what it means to be human without looking to Jesus, who as the \textit{imago} Dei embodying the divine purpose for humankind is the true human.\footnote{Grenz, “Jesus as the \textit{Imago} Dei,” 627. For a detailed categorization of the development of Grenz’s conclusions about the \textit{imago} Dei, see Jason S. Sexton, “The \textit{Imago} Dei Once Again: Stanley Grenz’s Journey toward a Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1:26-27,” \textit{Journal of Theological Interpretation} 4, no. 2 (2010): 187-206. Sexton’s work is immensely informative for anyone wanting to understand the systematic theology of Stanley Grenz.}

Thus, the task of theological anthropology tends to stand in tension between the evidence brought by Old Testament scholars arguing for a contextual reading of Genesis and the knowledge that the revelation of Jesus in the incarnation is an absolute necessity for understanding our own humanity.

Indeed, Barth’s Christological anthropology maintains that Jesus is “man for His fellows,” and that from the beginning Christ was directed towards fellow humanity—that is, Christ was to them, with them, and for them.\footnote{Lisa P. Stephenson, “Empowered by the Spirit: A Pneumatological Revision of Karl Barth’s Theological Anthropology” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Cleveland, TN, March 9, 2018), 4.} As the true image of God, and as the true human person, the essence of all of humanity is predicated by the person of Christ, set apart from the rest of creation by this relationship. This is why Barth argues that humanity is essentially co-humanity and human being is being-in-relationship, because the basis of human personhood is grounded in the encounter of “I” and “Thou,” exemplified and revealed in Jesus. Yet, Barth also understands that no direct equation exists between Jesus and the rest of humanity, for while he asserts that Jesus’ human nature is the same in “constitution,” he also suggests it is different in “status.”\footnote{Ibid.; Barth, \textit{CD} 3.2, 47-54.} In this way, one finds that relationality surely has something to add to the project of...
identifying the meaning of humanity as the *imago Dei*. However, the point remains that it is necessary to engage the work done by Old Testament scholars in order to maintain an accurate interpretation of what the Genesis 1 creation narrative has to tell us of being human. Had his work been intertwined with the evidence of an ancient Near Eastern socio-political context, Barth’s anthropology and his account of the *imago Dei* would be much more robust and accurate.

**Concerning the Relational Self and the Order of Relations**

Barth aptly identifies the implications of Christ and the incarnation for understanding the *imago Dei*. Indeed, he provides I-Thou relationality as the seeming categorical distinction offered to our interpretational paradigm. However, one must reckon carefully with the knowledge that Barth’s reading of a relational human personhood into the pages of Genesis is a postmodern category that he is superimposing onto an ancient understanding of humanity. It is important to affirm that establishing the essence of humanity is necessary for understanding the eschatological redemption of a sinful humanity, and the *imago Dei* seems to be the biblically identified essential humanity, even amidst our “fallen” nature.67 Furthermore, in order to intertwine the New Testament label of Christ as the “true image of God” with the Old Testament description of all human persons as the “image and likeness of God,” there must be some sort of continuity between the two biblical descriptions. Thus, Barth’s identification of relationality as the distinct revelation granted to humanity by Christ’s incarnation seems fitting, but defining relationality as constitutive of the self is still a relatively recent move on the part of theologians and philosophers that must be reconciled with the context of Genesis itself.68

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68 For an overview of the history of the category of the “self,” see Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), especially chapter 3, wherein Grenz traces the evolution of thought surrounding the definition of the “self,” which finds its apex in Postmodernity and the supposed “death of self.” It is the “postmodern self,” Grenz argues, that identifies the “self” as a cultural artefact—that is, as a nexus, a bundle of relationships, in which the “postmodern self” looks to relationships for identity (*The Social God and the Relational Self*, 136). In this excerpt Grenz is relying heavily on
This is not to say that the recognition of a modern idea being read onto an ancient text should lead to the total dismissal of an argument. Indeed, interpretational presuppositions are inevitable and only become problematic when the evolution of such a contemporary mode of thought leads to a total overshadowing of any original context surrounding a text.\(^6^9\) When a renewed understanding of the text is brought about by the later revelation of Jesus Christ and the incarnation, it is certainly necessary to reevaluate the conclusions surrounding the *imago Dei.* But Barth completely ignores any of the original intentions of the text. Genesis 1 was not written as a nascent trinitarian theology or as an argument for a relational human ontology, but rather it sat in the context of ancient Near Eastern pagan theology and formed a purposeful critique of Mesopotamian royal ideology.\(^7^0\) Indeed, the function of humanity as the *imago Dei* must be revisited in light of Christ, and in this regard Barth’s anthropology is helpful, but his understanding of a relational “self” needs to inform rather than override any interpretation of the image of God.

In the same way that Barth deals in contemporary categories of the self to the exclusion of original context, he also makes an unnecessary move to locate the *imago Dei* specifically within the I-Thou relationship of male and female persons. Certainly, the specification in Genesis 1 of humanity being created “male and female” has spurred centuries of theological debate, and some scholars argue that Barth was the first major theologian to make the explicit move in identifying the image as being made male *and* female.\(^7^1\) However influential to theological anthropology, the consequences of Barth’s male/female dialectic remain damaging

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\(^7^0\) Ibid., 126-29.

\(^7^1\) Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 23-33.
both to the task of anthropology and the substance of the *imago Dei*. Lisa Stephenson contends that Barth’s error is in his “allowing a static order to constitute the personhood of male and female, rather than the experience of encounter as he himself suggests.” Regarding how this issue might be resolved, she suggests:

> Once this is realized, and the interpersonal relation of male and female is governed by the four principles that Barth purports characterize a genuine I-Thou encounter, then Barth’s move of locating the *imago Dei* in the relationality of humans can be maintained without being burdened with an unnecessary sexual hierarchy. The interpersonal relationship of male and female can now be characterized by mutuality.

It is important to note that Barth understands that humans are not created to *be* the image of God, but rather to *correspond* with it in what he calls an *analogia relationis*. Thus, when Barth parallels the order of trinitarian relations with the order of male/female relations based upon the order of creation, he is taking a logical misstep that does little more than call sexual hierarchy foundational to the human experience.

The problem arises in that, for the Trinity, the order in modes of being is an order of relations which arises in the origin of relations, and therefore is constitutive of the distinct modes of being in the Trinity. Unlike the Trinity, however, such an order cannot be applied to male/female relations because the origin of male/female relation does not constitute the personhood for either male or female persons—indeed, Barth himself states explicitly that

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72 G. C. Berkouwer says of Barth’s argument: “He is right in pointing to the unique importance of the man-woman relation in creation; but he is wrong in further concluding that this relation is the specific content of the image of God, and all the more so in that declarations concerning the image make no direct reference to this relation.” *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 73-74.


74 Ibid.

75 Barth, *CD* 3.1, 185.

personhood is constituted simply in encounter with the Other.\textsuperscript{77} Regarding this fundamental contradiction in Barth’s ontology, Ray Anderson makes an argument similar to Stephenson’s that relationship is not the distinctive aspect of the \textit{imago Dei}, but rather it is merely “a functional possibility and necessity” of the image.\textsuperscript{78} Anderson insists that encounter “is more fundamental to the imago than relation.”\textsuperscript{79} In essence, it is Barth’s “superimposition of the concept of order within the Trinity onto the interpersonal relation of male and female” that causes this logical conflict.\textsuperscript{80} And, like the aforementioned potential problems with imposing modern categories of “self” onto the Genesis text without engaging its context, Barth’s attempt to make encounter constitutive of human personhood while simultaneously maintaining some sort of sexual hierarchy is inherently flawed. If encounter with the Other is constitutive of the self, then it can truly be said that “the genuine I-Thou encounter is not to be understood as the priority of the male, but rather as the priority of the other.”\textsuperscript{81} Moreover, in that Barth characterizes I-Thou encounter in terms of seeing “eye to eye,” mutual speaking and hearing, mutual assistance, all of which are done with gladness, then encounter with the Other becomes a definitive guideline for how human beings are to act—that is, \textit{function}—in creation.\textsuperscript{82} Thus, without the unnecessary definition of male and female humanity, Barth’s relational ontology could inform an interpretation of the \textit{imago Dei} without giving way to sexual hierarchy.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 446.; Barth, \textit{CD} 3.2, 248.
\textsuperscript{78} Anderson, \textit{On Being Human}, 74.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{80} Stephenson, “Directed, Ordered and Related,” 449.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 446.
\textsuperscript{82} Barth, \textit{CD} 3.2, 250-67.
Conclusion

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that Karl Barth’s Christological anthropology, which is the foundation of his relational ontology, has much to add to the interpretation of the *imago Dei*, but that it cannot do so of its own accord. Rather, Barth’s lack of engagement with Old Testament scholarship, his superimposition of modern categories of the “self,” and his creation of a dualistic sexual hierarchy prevent his I-Thou dialogical personalism from appropriately defining the image of God. In that Barth grounds the revelation of true humanity in Christ and the incarnation, he creates a way to reimagine the meaning of the image in Genesis 1, but this reimagining must not ignore the consensus amongst those like J. Richard Middleton that Genesis 1:26-27 depicts a functional calling for humanity that carries with it a royal implication. It is therefore my contention that the *imago Dei* itself is not defined ontologically as human relationality, but indeed as a function of humanity itself. However, this function—this vocational calling that defines how human beings are to exist with and for one another and the rest of creation—can only be understood rightly when a relational ontology of I-Thou encounter comes to define that which is constitutive of human personhood. As human beings, then, our being is determined by our being with the Other, and in being with the Other there is a responsibility to act rightly. Thus, the following chapter will move to construct a theological anthropology of the *imago Dei* that intertwines the Old Testament scholarship of J. Richard Middleton and the theology of Karl Barth in a way that paints the image of God as both a *functional* and *relational* reality.
CHAPTER THREE

CONSTRUCTING A SYNTHESIZED FUNCTIONAL-RELATIONAL MODEL FOR UNDERSTANDING THE *IMAGO DEI*

Within the first and second chapters of this thesis I have sought to establish two major points. In chapter one, I explicated J. Richard Middleton’s argument for the embrace of a royal-functional interpretational paradigm of the *imago Dei* in Genesis 1. By examining the various levels of contextual analysis that Middleton posits, I concluded that, in light of comparison with other Old Testament scholars and systematic theologians, Middleton’s model of the image of God is altogether accurate, but incomplete. While he aptly identifies the context that surrounds the content of Genesis 1, Middleton seemingly ignores the validity of observations and additional insights into the text supported by various theologians. Middleton also does not engage with the implications of the incarnational revelation given to us through Christ within the New Testament. Having been labeled the true image of God, Jesus Christ’s life, death, and resurrection must spur us to embrace a relational notion of humanity and therefore cause us to reassess what it means for humanity to be called to function as the *imago Dei*. Middleton’s royal-functional understanding of the image will thus serve as the foundation of my own position, but it requires interlocution with the New Testament and a relational understanding of human personhood.

For this reason, in chapter two I suggested that Karl Barth’s conception of I-Thou dialogical personalism is perhaps the best theological insight into the ontological meaning and implications of the Genesis 1 creation narrative. Barth’s exposition of Genesis and his insights from the perspective of Christ’s incarnation thus serve as a beneficial dialogue partner with Middleton’s Old Testament paradigm, but Barth himself fails to account fully for the content of the *imago Dei*. I put forth the argument that Barth’s failure to engage with legitimate Old
Testament scholars, his superimposition of a post-modern conception of the relational self onto the text without any regard for the ancient Near Eastern context, and his drawing of a false parallel between the order of trinitarian relations and the created order of male and female persons all function to hold back his model of I-Thou encounter from encapsulating the fullness of the image of God in humanity. In this way, I suggested that Barth’s argument is altogether helpful, but can only serve to illuminate the *imago Dei* when it is engaged with a royal-functional interpretational paradigm.

The history of the interpretation of the *imago Dei* has always consisted of an either/or mentality, at least with regard to specific paradigms for understanding its meaning. The image of God has been considered largely either a vocational calling or a relational structure for humanity—fellowship or function. The question I am putting to the text is simply, “Why can it not be *both*?” Indeed, the text of Genesis 1 appears to give some indication of both. If this were not the case, then neither understanding of the *imago Dei* would have been held to so strongly. Functionality and relationality need not be bifurcated. In this way, J. Richard Middleton is correct—the image of God is indeed indicative of a function of humanity, and it does reflect an ideology critique of the ancient Near Eastern, Mesopotamian royal system; however, that functional model itself is inherently dependent on a relational ontology like the one constructed by Karl Barth. The key to understanding the *imago Dei*, then, is that these two ideas must be mutually informative, rather than independently crafted. Both Middleton and Barth develop their interpretational paradigms in one direction, but it is both possible and necessary for these two ideas to work together alongside one another.

Thus, in this final chapter I will seek to construct a synthesized functional-relational model for interpreting the content and implications of the *imago Dei* as it is presented in Genesis
1 and subsequently elaborated in the New Testament. By crafting a mutually informative dialogue between a foundational Old Testament (functional) perspective and a revelational New Testament (relational) perspective, I will establish the *imago Dei* to be a functional calling for humanity that requires relationally constituted human persons and a proper understanding thereof. That is, I will argue that the *imago Dei* itself, as a special designation or title, is a functional calling for humanity that does not constitute our personhood in and of itself, but which certainly necessitates our relational constitution for the living out of God’s intended vocation for all of humanity. In that we are relational beings, and insofar as humanity persists in a sinful or fallen state, the revelation of Christ as the true image of God thus provides for us a model of both *how* and *why* we are to live both *with* and *for* the Other. By virtue of humanity’s designation as the very *imago Dei*, our calling is therefore to enable the flourishing of all of creation as we act as representatives and agents of God here on earth.

**A Functional Foundation**

The way in which the Genesis 1 creation narrative delineates the exact meaning of the *imago Dei* is ambiguous at best. In God’s creation of humanity, God makes clear a unique intention for the persons being crafted, which seemingly sets them apart from the rest of the created beings. The first indication of humanity’s unique status comes from their creation on the final day of God’s creative work, thus making humanity the climax of the narrative—this is not to say that humanity is inherently the climactic element of creation, but rather that humanity’s creation forms the focal point of the narrative itself. The second indication comes from the unique speech of God who plans to make humanity “in our image and likeness” (Genesis 1:26). After making clear the intention for humanity to rule over the rest of creation, God finally establishes humanity as male and female, in God’s image, and then commands them to “be
fruitful and multiply” (1:28a) as well as to “fill the earth and subdue it” (1:28b). Humanity’s position in the created order, their pluralistic existence as male and female, and the command to both fill and exercise dominion over the earth have all functioned as different points of interpreting the *imago Dei* itself, and each individual interpretational focus has brought along with it a plethora of ethical and theological problems.

To focus *solely* on the distinction between male and female persons as that which constitutes the *imago Dei* not only ignores the fact that this is not a uniquely defining factor for humanity, but it has tended historically to subjugate female persons to a place of secondary authority. In practice, dualistic ontologies tend to lead to hierarchical social paradigms. Besides the issue of gender distinctions and the ontological order of humanity, an individualized focus on the duality of gender in the Genesis text also ignores what may be a more important point. Indeed, the existence of humanity as multi-gendered is not what sets them apart from the rest of the created beings, but rather it ties them to their procreative abilities, something humanity shares in common with the rest of creation.¹ This also highlights the fact that humanity remains ontologically distinct and lesser than God. In the same way, such a realization illuminates further the reasons why the divine command to procreate and fill the earth cannot be that which

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¹ For an interesting approach to addressing the “ontological gap” between humans and animals, see Celia Deane-Drummond, “God’s Image and Likeness in Humans and Other Animals: Performative Soul-Making and Graced Nature,” *Zygon* 47, no. 4 (2012): 934-48. In an effort to integrate an affirmation of human evolution with the concept of divine image-bearing, Celia Deane-Drummond looks to Thomas Aquinas in order to uncover the influence of Aristotelian thought regarding the rational soul. While not exactly pertinent to this current work, Deane-Drummond’s conclusion marks an insightful point of contact between the uniqueness of humanity and the similarities shared between species in the animal kingdom in accordance with the evidence of evolution. Deane-Drummond works through the history of Roman Catholic theology to establish the church’s embrace of human evolution, while simultaneously maintaining a legitimate interpretation of the “ontological gap” between humans and other animals. She concludes, in accordance with Aquinas, that even animals bear the likeness of God, but that humanity alone bears the divine image. In this way, her work suggests that religious transformation via divine grace is what maintains the distinction of image-bearing for humanity. What is additionally helpful is the ethical imperative with which Deane-Drummond ends her paper. Indeed, the higher capacity that assures humanity their status as the *Imago Dei* is not meant to function as a denigration of other species, but rather it functions as a calling of humanity to a shared responsibility to make room for and enable the flourishing of the animals with which we share our world.
constitutes the image of God in humanity either. Indeed, the divine edict to “be fruitful and multiply” was also given to the sea-creatures, all of the living things in the waters, and all of the birds. Thus, neither the procreative power of human sexuality nor the biological distinctions between the sexes can constitute exclusively the meaning of the *imago Dei*. Sexuality, however, is not an entirely fruitless insight into the image of God—on the contrary, it may be our best insight into how the *imago Dei* must be realized via human relationality—but merely that sexuality is not the image itself.

What sets apart the divine command given to humanity, therefore, is not that humanity was directed to fill the earth, but rather that humanity was set forth to exercise dominion over it. The idea of “dominion” has also carried severe theological and ethical concerns, as, especially within the contemporary western world, dominion has often been conflated with domination. Hyper-conservative scholars and theologians have put forth ideas that the earth exists for the enjoyment of humanity, that its resources are merely ours for the taking, and that an eschatological expectation of a new earth removes from us any responsibility for the well-being of our temporal home. The idea that the human exercise of power over creation can be done without regard for the flourishing of that which we were tasked with caring for not only creates an ethical dilemma surrounding the character of humanity, but if such domination is the *imago Dei* in humanity, then God’s character also comes into question.\(^2\) Thus, the benefit of J. Richard Middleton’s textual argument for a royal-functional image of God finds its place to shine especially in that it highlights how the character of the text reflects the character of God and those who bear God’s image on earth.

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The most important interpretational insight offered by a contextual analysis of Genesis 1 creation narrative is the indication that the *imago Dei* designates a sort of royal office or calling given by God to humanity. Indeed, humanity is tasked with being God’s representatives and agents in the world, authorized to share in God’s exercise of rule over the earth’s resources and all living creatures. The extrabiblical literature is heavily indicative of a Mesopotamian cultural influence over the construction of the narrative, and it is within this ancient Near Eastern socio-political and religious context that the author of Genesis finds the language to describe key differences between Yahweh and the pagan gods. In this way, Genesis 1 can be seen as a clear and concise ideology critique of the entire Mesopotamian royal system. And, while the text of Genesis itself may offer very little towards a clear understanding of the *imago Dei*, understanding the narrative as an ideology critique shows Genesis 1 to be a democratization of the image of God concept—a familiar idea in the ancient Near East. The necessity of such an ideology critique on the part of the author of Genesis thus stems from the fact that the Mesopotamian royal system saw the king and king alone as the sole representative of the gods, with all authority and power over the lives of those who found themselves under his rule. The entire political system was based upon this notion and thus the king as the image of a god functioned as a legitimation of the subservience of the masses. The Genesis text, however, in calling all of humanity the *imago Dei*, flips this notion upside down. In theologizing a democratization of God’s image in human beings, the author of Genesis gave words to the inherent dignity, and therefore the inherent authority and responsibility, of all human persons.

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4 Ibid., 126-29.
5 Ibid., 121.
In establishing the *imago Dei* as a democratized repurposing of a Mesopotamian idea, the concept gains a sudden lucidity. This title—the status afforded to us at the foundation of our being—is not that which constitutes us ontologically. Rather, having been labeled as those who bear the image of God, humanity thus bears the responsibilities that come with such a vocational position in creation. It is not the image of God that constitutes our human being, but instead the *imago Dei* is the push and the purpose that defines our responsibility as humans. And along with such a title comes the flavor of royalty in both why and how we are to live and act as the *imago Dei*. The importance in recognizing the royal hue with which the image of God passage is painted should not be seen to establish an authoritarian position over and above the rest of the created world. Instead, recognizing the royal context of Genesis 1 provides a justification for why God would empower humanity to bear God’s image, as well as granting to us an example in Godself of how such a claim to power should be enacted in the world. Thus, humanity finds itself bearing not only God’s image, but the responsibility to act with God and on God’s behalf to enable creatively the flourishing of those things with which we share the created world. As God shares power *with* humanity, rather than exercises power *over* humanity, so is humanity called to act in a way that depicts God’s own primal generosity.\(^6\)

But this perspective cannot be taken on its own and in only one direction. This is not to say that, within the concept of the *imago Dei*, there is no room for any understanding of relationality, but rather to suggest that this model for understanding the image is incomplete in and of itself. While the insights into the construction of the Genesis 1 narrative offered in an Old Testament perspective are illuminating, we simply cannot ignore the perspectives offered by the New Testament and theology. To do so would be to miss entirely the relationality so crucial to

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\(^6\) Ibid., 271.
our human experience. The *imago Dei* may revolve around the functional imperative spoken by God, but the inclusion in the text of a biological distinction between male and female in the unity of human being points to at least a specific relational context for the enacting of the image of God.

While the impact of the presence of relationality in an interpretational paradigm will be expounded upon later in this chapter, it must first be made clear the ways in which the function of the image of God might pertain to the *relationality* of humanity. First and foremost, that the specification of “let us make humanity in our image” is given only to humanity is indicative of humanity’s special relationship to God. Only in humanity did God grant permission to a created being to participate in the very nature of Godself by acting as God’s representatives and agents on earth. Prior to any delineation of human being as pluralistic, the establishment of humanity in God’s image enabled a unique dignity and role to be lived out by human persons in the world. However, the inclusion of a specified and purposeful duality in the creation of male and female, together, as humanity, is certainly indicative of a distinct context wherein the function of the *imago Dei* is to be lived out. Moreover, while the design and intention of procreativity is not unique to humanity, and while the command to “be fruitful and multiply” actually ties humanity to the rest of created beings, the specification of “male and female” stands as an idiosyncratic detail that pertains only to human persons. This sets the scene for how and where we are to function on God’s behalf and at God’s behest—that is, humanity is told to be God’s image in relation to the Other.

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7 For work regarding the concept of “Otherness” in the Old Testament, see Ananda Geyser-Fouche and Carli Fourie, “Inclusivity in the Old Testament,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73, no. 4 (2017): https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i4.4761. While my consistent usage of the term “Other” as a gender inclusive term concerning a generalized account of human persons, it does not stand as an isolated addition of modern theology, but rather as a possibility within the Old Testament itself. The work done by Geyser-Fouche and Fourie addresses the theological tension between Israel as an exclusive community and inclusivity in the language of the Old Testament. While much of the exclusive language with which Israel is described can perhaps be explained as a
In that J. Richard Middleton’s work demonstrates a royal connotation in this interpretational model, the *imago Dei* is thus further indicative of a special relationship between humanity and the rest of creation. As royal emissaries, as agents acting as representatives of God and God’s desires for the created world, humanity finds itself with the responsibility of caring for the created world, both ensuring and enabling its flourishing. And, in the same way that we are called to care for the earth in participation with God’s power, love, and creativity, we can infer that the function of the image of God is indicative of a certain way of relating to fellow human persons as well. Indeed, two opposing forces cannot adequately act in the best interest of a third party unless the two relate to one another in a loving and caring way. This leads to yet another way that the functionality of the image of God may inform human relationality—that is to say that the command to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth, although not a command unique to humans, when taken in conjunction with the command to exercise dominion over the earth, is indicative of a sort of cooperative effort that is required for our caring for creation. According to the content and the context surrounding the construction of the Genesis 1 creation narrative then, we find the *imago Dei* to be a distinctive notion of humanity’s created purpose. The purpose is then the embodiment of God’s creativity and care for the world as representatives and agents of the divine will and power of God. And furthermore, when the arguments of Old Testament scholars for the functionality of the *imago Dei* are taken in tandem with the relational perspectives of systematic theologians, we find that representing God on earth is indeed a command to embody God’s very relationship to and with the entire created world.

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byproduct of the Israelites’ fears of losing their identity, Geyser-Fouche and Fourie contend that, not only is it possible to interpret openness to the “Other” in many Old Testament passages (most notably, in their argument, is the Book of Ruth), but they also suggest that humanity faces an ethical imperative to learn our own identities as Israel did, through acting as ambassadors of inclusivity. Indeed, much of the Old Testament outside of the primeval history finds a marked conviction throughout Israel’s history that God is concerned with the proper treatment of the “stranger,” a theme that I would contend finds its roots in the creation narrative itself wherein, per Barth’s incarnational observations, we find indications of a relationally constituted human ontology.
A Relational Necessity

The benefits of embracing a functional model of the *imago Dei* are not altogether outweighed by such a unidirectional approach. Indeed, while the ancient Near Eastern context sheds light on the purpose of the Genesis 1 creation narrative, there is room for understanding human relationality. That a functional interpretation hinges upon an ethical imperative—one that brings liberation through a democratization of God’s divinely granted authority and responsibility—demonstrates the possibility of incorporating other mutually informative theological interpretations. Thus, we find an avenue wherein to approach the complexities of a relational ontology which stands as the correspondence between humanity and the God whose image they bear. Like a singular Old Testament perspective for interpreting the *imago Dei*, however, it cannot be that we argue only for an incarnational understanding of a relational image, based upon a view of Christ as the paradigmatic human person and perfect image of God.

With the concept of dominion as the interpretational insight that informs what it means to function as the *imago Dei*, let us now move to the other detail that is unique to humanity in the Genesis 1 creation narrative—that is, the distinct account of the simultaneous creation of male and female as the full humanity. The fact remains that gender is not what ties humanity to God, thus neither sexuality nor procreativity can be constitutive of what makes humanity the *imago Dei*, but the specification of male and female is only given to humanity and thus it must tell us something of the human experience and calling. Here we find that Karl Barth’s insights become invaluable, albeit somewhat incomplete in and of themselves. In the previous chapter, I levied three critiques against Karl Barth’s theological paradigm for the *imago Dei*: 1) that Barth’s failure to engage the plethora of available Old Testament scholarship concerning the Genesis 1 creation narrative was a disservice to the completeness of his argument; 2) that, combined with a
lack of engagement in the appropriate scholarship, Barth’s superimposition of contemporary philosophical categories of the “self” was not helpful in broaching the context of the text; and 3) that Barth’s paralleling of the order of trinitarian relations with the order of human creation leads to an unnecessary and damaging ontological hierarchy amongst human persons. As it stands, each of these criticisms of Barth builds off of the previous. And, while I believe these points should be taken seriously, I also believe the resolution to these issues consists in taking them to task through an intertwining of Old Testament scholarship and Barth’s theology. In this way, if the Old Testament research informs Barth’s own, then these critiques cease to be problematic because they can be addressed by the Genesis text itself. When Barth’s argument is taken as both informative of proper Old Testament exegesis, and when Barth’s paradigm for a relational ontology is informed itself by the text of Genesis 1, then the two models of the *imago Dei* may function together as a robust, distinctly Christian understanding of what it means for humanity.

It can be argued that any theological anthropology must begin with the incarnation—with Christ as the foundation for understanding all humanity—but, such a position presupposes a specific interpretation of the creation narrative in Genesis 1. The example of Christ as paradigmatic human—a human person for his fellow humans—is thus modeled at the creation of the world, as the climax of creation rests upon the creation of humanity as an external reality, directed and disposed ultimately to God as the Other. This creation event, wherein humanity becomes the embodiment of God’s externally directed desires, then, establishes humanity in a specific environment, wrapped up in covenant with the creator. Humanity is the partner of God in covenant, but humanity’s salvation will be reflected inevitably in the well-being of the creatures with whom we share the earth.⁸ In this way, as an attendant of the covenant between

⁸ Barth, *CD* 3.1, 178.
God and humanity, the rest of creation will participate with humanity in the covenant, sharing in both the promise and the curse which shadows the promise.⁹ This is a vastly important point, as it demonstrates that the rest of the created world is wrapped up in the covenant between God and humanity, as well as that by virtue of the interconnectedness of the world, humanity bears a certain responsibility as the image of God. Caution must be taken, however, against any extreme interpretation of humanity’s granted dominion over the created world. Humanity is not the Creator, thus humanity does not possess the power and authority over the life and death of the world.¹⁰ Herein lies another point of interlocution between an incarnational understanding of the imago Dei and an Old Testament refutation of triumphalistic interpretations of humanity’s call to rule over and subdue the rest of creation.¹¹ In a paradigm that centers around an understanding of Christ, the interconnectedness of all created things precedes the actual event of humanity’s creation, and thus provides the foundation for the relational analogy between God and humanity. In this way, while not explicit, such a theological interpretation of the creation event leans rather obviously on an inherent function of humanity as the imago Dei.

⁹ Ibid.
¹⁰ Ibid., 187.
¹¹ Middleton, The Liberating Image, 259. For more work concerning the complaint against Christianity regarding the destruction and abuse of the environment, see Adrian E.V. Langdon, “Embedded Existence: Bonhoeffer, Barth, and Ecological Anthropology,” Didaskalia 25 (2015): 59-77. Langdon’s main concern is with the argument for a Christian root to the modern ecological crisis as offered by Lynn White Jr. in his article “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis,” in Western Man and Environmental Ethics: Attitudes Toward Nature and Technology, ed. Ian Barbour (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1973), 25. White’s charges against Christianity are that it stands as the most anthropocentric religion in the world, and that theology developed from the Genesis creation stories have led to overt human domination of the environment. Langdon responds to these and other criticisms of Christianity by constructing a fuller political theology of nature via the theological interpretations of Genesis 1 and 2 in the works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth. His constructive response is guided by an understanding of the “community of creation” as it is posited by Richard Bauckham, The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 64. Through this in-depth and well-researched paper affirms what I have argued concerning the interconnectedness of all of creation, thus Langdon’s anthropological eco-theology can be seen as bolstering an understanding of the imago Dei that is inherently a function of humanity, but one that precludes the relational ontology of humanity. In this way, one finds more evidence pointing towards an ethical imperative within the concept of humanity bearing the divine image—one wherein humanity is called to embody the image by enabling the flourishing of the Other.
It can be understood, then, that the perspectives of the Old Testament and creation do not stand in total opposition to those of the New Testament and the incarnation. Indeed, the usage of the specific title of “image of God” holds vast cultural significance and parallels Mesopotamian royal ideology. In this way, the ancient Near Eastern context thus provides the evidence needed to recognize that the democratization of the *imago Dei* as a status provided inherently to all of humanity is a theological proposition for humanity’s special covenantal relationship with God and the rest of creation. In the Old Testament, we find that humanity is given express authority by the divine to act as representatives and agents in the world, *partnering* with God in creative and caring authority to ensure the flourishing of the world. In the New Testament, Christ shows us that humanity is the repetition of the divine form of life, first in that humanity is a counterpart to God, and also in that humanity persists with one another in coexistence and cooperation, developing their sense of self in confrontation with the Other. Thus, these two major interpretational paradigms—understanding I-Thou dialogical personalism as the *tertium comparationis* between God and humanity, and understanding humanity as divinely authorized representatives and partners—stand not in opposition, but in cooperation to describe how it is humanity is called to function as the *imago Dei*. In this way, when a relational ontology is informed by Old Testament scholarship, and when the theological assertions therein are taken seriously by that same body of research, we gain a more robust understanding of the image of God in humanity.

The story must not end with a mutually informed account of Genesis 1, however, and the New Testament perspective of Christ still needs to be fleshed out in accordance with what the Genesis narrative was written to demonstrate. It was mentioned above that Christ is the paradigmatic human person—Christ is a human who exists for his fellow humans. In Christ’s
perfect human being, then, the designation granted to him as the perfect image of God necessitates a second look at the implications of a functional *imago Dei* through the lens of the incarnation. It follows that the incarnation is what allows humanity to recognize fully its ontological constitution, which can be seen as a distinctly relational type of being-in-encounter. This *tertium comparationis*, the analogy between God and humanity, is simply the I and the Thou in confrontation, which is constitutive first for God and then for humanity as God created them, and it is Christ who is paradigmatic of this idea.\(^{12}\) Therefore, Jesus Christ exists as a human person for his fellows, as a perfect “I,” and as the being in whom the relationship between God and humanity might be fully reconciled in the eschaton.\(^{13}\) This logical move is important to understanding the *imago Dei*, because Christ’s perfect existence as a human for his fellows *necessitates* that the rest of humanity cannot exist without their fellow humans. Ontologically, then, human personhood—the self—is constituted by the mutual recognition and awareness that comes when the I encounters the Thou. This encounter, characterized by mutuality, recognition, and acceptance of the totality of the Other, applies to the relationship of God in Godself, then to the relationship between God and humanity, and finally to humanity’s relationship amongst itself.

Understanding Christ as the one who informs us of our relational ontology is an accurate and insightful proposition, but as it stands it is incomplete. For, granting that Christ is the paradigmatic human person, and recognizing that Christ is the perfect example of this relationality, simultaneously ignores that Christ’s paradigmatic being is more than ontological. Indeed, Christ as the paradigm for being human should lead us first to recognize our humanity as

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\(^{12}\) Barth, *CD* 3.1, 185.  
\(^{13}\) Ibid., 225.
a being of humanity with others, but then also to recognize Christ as a human for the Other.\textsuperscript{14} The distinction here is subtle, but informative. Indeed, humanity, from its own genesis, is constituted in its being by encounter, but humanity has also been given a duty and responsibility as the image of God. In Christ’s incarnation, the revelation of our inherent relational ontology is highlighted and confirmed, but Christ gives us more than a paradigm for what defines our being. Rather, what Christ offers is also a paradigm for how we are supposed to act in accordance with our being, which is none other than as the image of God—the representatives and authorized agents of the divine on earth. The incarnational insight, then, is that Christ is the paradigm for our being, but the interpretational misstep is ignoring the fact that Christ is also the exemplar of what we are called to do by virtue of our designation as the \textit{imago Dei}.

At this point it may seem less like Karl Barth’s theology is informative of Old Testament scholarship and more like it is merely lacking such a perspective. However, there is a unique element of Barth’s construction of an I-Thou dialogical personalism that has much to offer the work of J. Richard Middleton. As stated earlier, Middleton’s research is somewhat unidirectional in his approach to a royal-functional interpretational paradigm, but Middleton does succeed in leaving room for theological insights. For this, then, I suggest that we look to the characteristics with which Barth defines our relational ontology, allowing these same guidelines to dictate \textit{how} we go about functioning as the image of God both to one another and to the rest of the created world.

The first characteristic of humanity as being in encounter is that encounter happens when one person looks the other in the eye.\textsuperscript{15} The importance of ontological-eye-contact here is not in the physical act of seeing, but in the event of recognition. Indeed, to see an Other is to be seen

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 243.  
\textsuperscript{15} Barth, \textit{CD} 3.2, 250.
by an Other, and to immediately recognize the being which ties us together, as well as the things which differentiate us. It is this recognition that leads to acceptance. The second characteristic of being in encounter consists in the event of mutual speech and hearing.\(^{16}\) This mutuality is the humility with which humanity is to act, both allowing the Other to speak by listening with open ears, and in the ability to speak with and to the Other without selfish motivations. A third characteristic of being in encounter consists in the fact that we render “mutual assistance in the act of being.”\(^{17}\) Here we find that our own being is always dependent on the Other, and that the Other’s being is always dependent upon us. And the final characteristic of being in encounter consists in the fact that all of the aforementioned occurrences take place “under the sign that it is done on both sides with gladness.”\(^{18}\) Here we find the crux of what defines the fullness of humanity: if encounter does not stand under the sign of mutual gladness, then both parties in encounter are being robbed of the full potential of their own being. When even one party enters into encounter without a desire to be both with and for the Other, then neither I nor Thou come away as our full selves.

In the same way that these characteristics define I-Thou encounter, they should define how humanity lives out the calling of being the \textit{imago Dei}. Firstly, acting as representatives of God on earth requires the recognition of the value of the rest of the created world. Now, it is true that, at least initially, it seems selfish to love creation out of recognition that we actually need it to thrive ourselves. We should care for creation because we need it in order to continue living. However, in that our humanity is constituted by our relations to the Other, and as we are to be motivated by a desire to enable the Other’s flourishing, we find that the rest of creation is

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 252.
\(^{17}\) Ibid., 260.
\(^{18}\) Ibid., 265.
invaluable to the well-being of our fellows. And, in that creation is necessary for the well-being of our fellows, creation gains its own inherent dignity and importance. By seeing all of creation as dignified and valuable by virtue of its very existence, then we begin to see the world as God sees it: through loving eyes that desire the flourishing of the world. Our motivation cannot be a selfish desire to survive, but rather a selfless desire to enable all of creation to thrive. Secondly, we are to, with humility, both hear and speak with mutuality to the rest of creation. In hearing the needs of those beings around us, and in voicing our own, we find a cooperative effort towards the flourishing of all creation to be entirely possible. Then, of course, in the rendering of mutual assistance in the act of being, we find an obvious point of contact with our calling to function as the imago Dei. We need the rest of creation, and the rest of creation needs us. Barth recognizes the interconnectedness between all things and that the fate of the world is wrapped up in the fate of humanity, and in this we find the creation narrative of Genesis 1 to be fully alive. This is not to suggest that our humanity is ontologically dependent on an encounter with nature, but rather that we need to enable the flourishing of creation on its own accord in order for our humanity to operate fully as intended. Indeed, God’s creative acts demonstrate the communal nature of our existence and the importance of the living out of our humanity as God’s image. And finally, in the necessity of gladness, we find the imperative to care for and enable the flourishing of those around us. Without gladness as a mark of our being the imago Dei, then true flourishing is not possible. For only when care is administered gladly, and only when care is accepted gladly, do both parties participate in the fullness of their being and calling.

**Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter I have sought to construct a synthesized theological anthropology of the imago Dei that intertwines the royal-functional interpretation of J. Richard
Middleton with the relational ontology crafted by Karl Barth. For much of the history of the interpretation of Genesis 1, the arguments for the meaning of the *imago Dei* have stood in bifurcation, as either/or, with only one possibility in the minds of scholars. What this chapter has worked towards is a renewed understanding that paints the image of God in humanity as a both/and idea. Within the socio-political and religious context that surrounds the construction of Genesis 1, there indeed seems to exist a theological critique of Mesopotamian ideals, thus providing humanity with a democratized vision of God’s image, but through the revelation of Christ’s incarnation we find the relationality so inherent to the essence of humanity. And, when taken in tandem as mutually informative rather than exclusive models for viewing God’s purpose for humanity, we may begin to recognize that the *imago Dei* is both functional and relational simultaneously.

The *imago Dei* itself is not that which constitutes our being. On that front, Barth’s I-Thou dialogical personalism stands as an excellent interpretation of the incarnation and creation events in tandem. Rather, the *imago Dei* designates our purpose, our calling, and our responsibility as relationally constituted beings. Indeed, a functional understanding of the image of God even necessitates a relational constitution, for if being human was not inherently a being *with* the Other, then humanity could not exist *for* the Other. What we find in the story of creation in Genesis 1, then, is a theological critique of ancient Near Eastern ideas regarding the worthlessness of humanity compared to the image of the gods—the king—and this critique rejects that as reality, positing instead that God’s intention for humanity is that all would share in the designation as God’s representatives. We find in the incarnation that, from the beginning, such a functionality fundamentally requires a right understanding of our relational constitution and the paradigm of Christ. While humanity may persist in a state of brokenness or sin, and
while the world may not exemplify the created intention for humanity to care for creation and one another, Christ demonstrates that such an ideal is still entirely attainable and fundamentally necessary.
CONCLUSION

The question as to what should constitute the basis of a Christian theological anthropology is not as clear-cut as this project has perhaps made it seem. Indeed, the concept of the *imago Dei* stands as a vaguely established idea in the primeval history of Genesis. And while the notion of divine image-bearing is picked up again in the New Testament, there are a plethora of other passages in scripture that speak to our humanity. I remain convinced, however, that the basis of any rightly constructed Christian theological anthropology must be the foundation of the *imago Dei* with which humanity has been tasked to bear. There are many reasons for this suggestion, but the main crux of my reasoning lies in the canonicity of scripture and a desire for faithfulness to tradition. It is no small matter that the story of creation sits at the opening of the entire canon, and it should be taken seriously that the establishment of the Christian faith rests on the ideas laid out in the Hebrew Bible. For this reason, the theological underpinnings of the Genesis 1 creation narrative should be taken as informative in the task of all biblical interpretation, and how Christians understand the nature of their humanity should rest primarily on the knowledge that all of humanity has been labeled as the very image of God. In the same way, Christianity is a faith based in Jesus the Christ, and the reality of the incarnation should spur us to continuously reassess and readjust to the idea that we are all crafted in the image of God with Christ as the perfect embodiment of this reality.

For this reason, in this work I have sought to demonstrate that the *imago Dei* is a multifaceted idea that must be taken as informative of both our behavior and our ontological constitution. Thus, in the first chapter I worked through the arguments of J. Richard Middleton for a royal-functional understanding of the *imago Dei*, based in the socio-political and religious context of Mesopotamian cultural ideals in the ancient Near East. Through a variety of in-depth
word studies, an incorporative hermeneutical approach to understanding extrabiblical sources, and a theological approach to understanding the ethical implications, Middleton’s argument shows quite clearly that the *imago Dei* should be seen as a function of our humanity. In that the notion of the image of God is democratized to all of humanity in Genesis 1, Middleton demonstrates that as bearers of the divine image we are all called to act as authorized representatives and agents of the divine will on earth. Thus, in participation with God, we find a reflection of God’s character and willingness to share power *with* humanity rather than exercise power *over* humanity. In the same way, we find an example of how to behave towards one another and the rest of creation. Middleton’s argument, however, was shown to be altogether unidirectional in its scope. So while his argument is strong and accurate, it stands incomplete in and of itself. In his move to focus solely on the context of Genesis, then, Middleton falls guilty of the same misstep of which he accuses many systematic theologians—that is, his argument needs to interact with the legitimate insights found in the work of other scholars.

The best point of contact with Middleton’s Old Testament, creational perspective of the *imago Dei*, I suggest, is found in the theology of Karl Barth. For this reason, in the second chapter of this work I explicated Barth’s theological anthropology and his understanding of the image of God, most notably in Barth’s construction of I-Thou dialogical personalism. Through his own exegetical examination of the Genesis 1 creation narrative, Barth finds evidence of a relational ontology which constitutes human personhood, thus also constituting the *tertium comparisonis*—the analogy between God and humanity—that ties humanity to God as we correspond to God’s image. The foundation of Barth’s analysis, however, is not in the creation narrative, but in the incarnation of Christ Jesus. And, while Barth finds evidence of relationally constituted human personhood in Genesis 1, it is Christ who stands as both the paradigmatic
human person and the perfect image of God. In that Christ is perfect humanity, he exists as a human person for his fellow human persons, perfectly imaging the divine which exists both with and for the ultimate Other. Therefore, in the person of Christ humanity is gifted with the vision of their own correspondence to God as Jesus shows that the essence of humanity is the existence of I and Thou in encounter, making the plurality of humanity inherently necessary for the existence of human personhood. This relationality, Barth argues, is fully manifest in the creation of male and female, as the two exist in a true I-Thou encounter just as humanity exists in encounter with God. The encounter with which our personhood is constituted, then, must be characterized by mutuality, love, and gladness, or else we suffer the consequences of depriving ourselves and our fellows of their full humanity.

Like Middleton, however, Barth’s argument may be strong, but it is fundamentally incomplete, thus partially flawed in its conclusions. I suggested that Barth’s mistake was threefold: 1) in his failure to interact with Old Testament scholarship, Barth ignores the context in which Genesis 1 was written, thus robbing his paradigm of complete legitimacy; 2) compounded by his lack of Old Testament scholarship, Barth’s superimposition of contemporary notions of the “self” onto the Old Testament text fails to account fully for the indications of a functional imago Dei; and 3) Barth makes the logical misstep of paralleling the order of relations within the immanent Trinity—which constitutes the personhood of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—with the order of creation of male and female in Genesis 2, thus falsely concluding that male persons are ontologically higher than female persons as they are the imago Dei first, followed by female persons. Each of these missteps in argumentation, I argued, could be resolved if Barth’s theology and Middleton’s interpretational paradigm function as mutually informative elements of the image of God in humanity.
Thus, in the final chapter, I moved to construct a synthesized functional-relational model for understanding the reality of humanity as the *imago Dei*. The foundation of the image of God, and that which constitutes the title granted to humanity, is primarily a functional reality. The *imago Dei*, then, is indicative of a vocational calling on all of humanity to bear God’s image by acting out the responsibility of being divinely authorized agents and representatives of God in the world. This functional calling, however, is inherently dependent on the relational ontology which constitutes our personhood—the basis of Barth’s I-Thou dialogical personhood found evidenced by the incarnation of Christ. What the Old Testament, creational perspective of the *imago Dei* tells us of the New Testament, incarnational perspective is that any relational ontology, which is indicative of how we are to relate to one another as fellow humans, necessarily involves the function with which we have been tasked fundamentally. We find, then, that the *imago Dei* informs how we view Christ as paradigmatic of our constitution and our behavior towards one another and the rest of the created world. By virtue of our special relationship with God, humanity has the responsibility to enable the flourishing of the Other. In the same way, what the incarnational perspective of Christ’s paradigmatic humanity tells us of the creational perspective of our calling is that, as we function as the *imago Dei* we are to emulate Christ in all things. For, not only is Christ paradigmatic of our ontology as a perfect human person who is for his fellow persons, but Christ is also paradigmatic of how we are to behave. Christ perfectly embodies the characteristics of I-Thou encounter which Barth lays out, living a life marked by mutuality, love, and a desire to enable the flourishing of all of creation. The *imago Dei*, then, is indicative of both what we are as human persons and how we are to embody our humanity in the world. It is a title, indicative of our responsibility, and it is tied up intimately with the relationality that makes us human.
This must not be the end of the interpretational road, however, and there is much work yet to be done regarding the implications of such an understanding of the *imago Dei* in humanity. Admittedly, my interest in this project was not an altruistic desire to examine the *imago Dei*, as there is a plethora of work on the topic already, but rather my interest in delineating a more robust understanding of the image of God was spurred by my desire to broach the topic of the ethical dilemmas which currently face most understandings of the *imago Dei*.¹ Most notable and relevant for our times, I would argue, are the ethical implications surrounding human embodiment, gender, and sexuality. The stipulations placed on the human body by Christian beliefs have long been based in the *imago Dei*, leading many to theological arguments for the primacy of maleness and justification of patriarchal social structures. Along with gender hierarchies, many theological anthropologies have been used as justification for a rejection of the Other—that is, those who do not exist in a perfectly male or female body (as this relationship has been used often to define the image of God) or those who exist in contested spaces of identity and sexuality. Therefore, there is further work to be done, and future research in theological anthropology must dedicate much effort to understanding the ethical implications of our existence as the *imago Dei* and how it might determine a renewed Christian ethic of gender, sexuality, and the body.

¹ Much of my interest in the ethical implications with which any argument concerning the *imago Dei* is surrounded was sparked by the work of Megan K. DeFranza in her book *Sex Difference in Christian Theology: Male, Female, and Intersex in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015). Working from the perspective of persons who do not fit neatly into categories of male or female, DeFranza intertwines the science of gender and sexuality with the anthropological perspectives of various systematic theologians in order to construct a more inclusive theology of humanity and the *imago Dei*. Especially helpful in this present project were DeFranza’s critiques of the relational paradigms of Stanley J. Grenz, Karl Barth, and Pope John Paul II, all of which functioned to inform my own argument for the relational ontological constitution of human personhood in a way that does not inherently create an atmosphere of exclusivity. In the same way that DeFranza influenced my theological argument, it was the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza who influenced a more critical reading of the language of the Old Testament. In her book *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza offers an analysis of the androcentricity of much of scripture, pushing therein for a recognition of this reality for the purposes of addressing the patriarchal biases of biblical interpretation.
This is why I found it so necessary to take seriously the perspectives of Old Testament scholars like J. Richard Middleton who have shown so clearly that the *imago Dei* itself is not wrapped up in our *gendered* bodies. With the *imago Dei* as a functional reality instead of a physical trait, how humanity is to behave in our bodies can be determined not by our bodies themselves, but rather by the responsibilities inherent to our calling to act as God’s representative in the world. Appropriately, it is Christ in whom we live and breathe and have our being, and it is in Christ that we find both a paradigm of our humanity and an exemplar for our actions, as Christ demonstrates that the persistent sinful state of the world did not remove from humanity the title and responsibility given to us at our genesis.
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