

Created in God's Image: Humanity's Doxological Vocation

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SUMMARY

This paper examines worship from the perspective of humanity's creation in the image of God. It synthesizes several historical interpretations of the doctrine of the *imago Dei* and proposes a vocational understanding. This approach views humanity's created purpose as a calling to display and embody the glory of God. As believers understand their vocation as a life of worship, this transforms individual spiritual disciplines and corporate worship. The Holy Spirit works to spiritually form believers into the image of Christ, who is the glory and supreme image of the Father. Therefore, all corporate and private worship is at its core, Christ-centered. The paper concludes with several suggestions to transform public worship, including prayer, congregational song, Scripture reading, and the proclamation of the Word of God.

KEYWORDS: *imago Dei*, worship, liturgy, spiritual formation

IDENTITY AND THE IMAGO DEI

For millennia humanity has looked both without and within to provide answers to the greatest question of all – why are we here and what are we supposed to do? Early civilizations, keenly aware of their powerlessness over the natural elements, viewed themselves as mere pawns in the hands of their gods, who poured forth their blessings or withheld natural provisions, based solely upon how well the worshipers performed their cultic sacrifices. Identity was primarily a feature of the individual's relationship with the natural world and surrounding environment, and therefore limiting in what the individual could expect to achieve or become. The Enlightenment era in Western Europe brought with it a new concept of identity – one that was self-sufficient and not dependent upon outside circumstances. Humanity possessed the power to forge its own destiny through the powers of rationality and the scientific method. This radical concept began the far-reaching departure from thousands of years of cultural identity and led to the rise of the “modern man,” released from the shackles of the natural world, cultural expectations, and religious mandates. The venture's seeming promise proved fleeting as each successive generation brought this philosophical ideal to its logical conclusion. Today postmodern philosophers, informed by Darwinian evolution, the failure of the promise of humanistic progress, and the experience of a pluralistic society, deduce that human meaning is an illusion and therefore reject the concept of a universal metanarrative that provides a unifying understanding of the meaning of human life.

The Christian faith has a distinct and clear answer to the question of human existence. This answer resounds throughout the pages of both the Old and New Testaments, but it is

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seen most clearly in the first verse of Genesis, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”² Humanity’s story, like that of the entire universe, begins with the acknowledgment and proclamation that the God of the Christian faith is the Creator of all that exists. The message of the Scriptures is clear as it declares that the purpose of all creation is the proclamation of the surpassing glory of God. The Scriptures teach that all of humanity is created for the glory of God (Isa 43:6-7), the created universe declares the glory of God (Ps 19:1), the nation of Israel was called for God’s glory (Jer 13:11), Christian believers are a chosen people for His glory (Eph 1:4-6, 11-12), the passion of Jesus Christ was ultimately for the Father’s glory (John 12:27-28), believers are commanded to do everything for God’s glory (1 Cor 10:31), and the new creation will be filled with the glory of God (Rev 21:23). These are merely a small number of the numerous Scriptures that attest to the overarching priority and intense focus of God’s self-glorification. This intense single-mindedness upon the glory of God serves as the foundation for all discourse as to the particulars of biblical anthropology and the meaning of human existence.

Genesis 1:26-27 serves as the classic passage for the beginning of any biblical anthropology.

Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

The biblical doctrine of the *imago Dei* attempts to explain the way in which humanity is created in the image of God. Throughout historical theology, there have been four fundamental ways in which this doctrine has been interpreted: (1) the substantive view, (2) the functional view, (3) the relational view, and (4) the vocational view.³ The substantive, or sometimes structuralist, view dominated early Christian theology and identified the image of God as a subset of characteristics or qualities within humanity that were like God in some way, usually identified as intellect or reason. The functional view took its cue from the injunction of the Creation narrative for the first humans to have dominion over the rest of the creation. In this view, humanity served as a type of viceroy or appointed representative from Yahweh to exercise authority and dominion over creation on Yahweh’s behalf. The relational view sees the image depicted in the polarity of the genders and in the interpersonal relationships between the genders and with the Triune God. Finally, the vocational view attempts to synthesize parts of each of these perspectives and places the image as a God-given task or duty for which mankind is uniquely gifted and qualified to perform.⁴

Each of these understandings will play a role in the development of the idea of the *imago Dei* as an understanding of worship. Perhaps the most influential view towards this goal appears in the work of the Genevan reformer, John Calvin (1509-1564). Calvin’s

² Genesis 1:1, ESV. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the HOLY BIBLE ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION ®, Copyright © 2011 Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

³ For further discussion of the various views of the *imago Dei* from contemporary theologians, see Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*; Thomas C. Oden, *A Systematic Theology: Classic Christianity*; James Leo Garrett Jr., *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*; Michael Scott Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way*; John Frame, *The Doctrine of God*; and Daniel L. Akin, *A Theology for the Church*.

⁴ SANDS, Paul Francis, “The *Imago Dei* as Vocation,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 82, no. 1 (January 1, 2010): p. 36.

voluminous catalog of commentaries, sermons, and his monumental *Institutes of the Christian Religion* frequently refers to the image of God in humanity. His most common metaphor or description for the image of God is that of a mirror by which humanity reflects the glory of God: “But our definition of the image seems not to be complete until it appears more clearly what the faculties are in which man excels, and in which he is to be regarded as a mirror of the divine glory.”⁵ Elsewhere Calvin states, “Man, therefore, was created in the image of God, and in him the Creator was pleased to behold, as in a mirror, his own glory.”⁶ This consideration of the image of God as an active reflection of the glory of God will be fundamental to the overall thesis.

WORSHIP AND THE GLORY OF GOD

The emphasis upon the elevation and celebration of the glory of God quickly leads to discussion about the nature of Christian worship. There is no lack of current scholarship within the field of worship in recent years, yet much of it centers upon secondary issues such as musical style, guiding churches through worship transition, and basic principles of worship design. A few notable exceptions have treated the study of biblical worship in a comprehensive theological manner.⁷ The overarching premise of this study is that the doctrine of the imago Dei has the potential to serve as a powerful metaphor and as a theological and philosophical basis for the study and practice of private and corporate worship. The fundamental approach to understanding the imago Dei is that humanity is called to “image” God by serving as an active reflection and representation of the glory of God. I propose that this duty of reflecting the glory of God on the part of humanity is nothing less than the biblical practice of worship.

Pastors, musicians, and worship leaders bear the responsibility of guiding their congregations in the worship of the Triune God. This responsibility demands that these leaders possess not only musical and oratorical skills, but also the theological insight and pastoral sensitivities to lead the flock of God in worship. This study aims to serve these leaders by providing them with a theological and philosophical framework from which they can equip and train their people in the practice of worship. There are many correlations between the historical understandings of the imago Dei and the commonly held definitions of Christian worship. While both topics have been explored in great detail, there have been few attempts to synthesize both concepts. The purpose of this work is to contribute to the ongoing conversation in the field of worship and liturgical studies, while being informed by the depth and wealth of theological insight of biblical anthropology. The result will be another metaphor or way of understanding that should enable individual believers and congregations to better fulfill their God-given task of serving as “images” through their worship practices.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE IMAGO DEI AS WORSHIP

I purport that a comprehensive understanding of the doctrine of the imago Dei views it as the vocation of the individual believer and the body of Christ collectively to serve as active reflections and representations of the glory of God. This “imaging” of the triune God is, at its

⁵ CALVIN, John, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1.15.4, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., Westminster Press: Phillipsburg, NJ, 1960.

⁶ CALVIN, *Institutes* 2.12.6

⁷ Such examples include Andrew Hill, *Enter His Courts with Praise: Old Testament Worship for the New Testament Church*; David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship*; Allen Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation*; James Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*; Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life*; and Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old & New*.

essence, a metaphor for the worship relationship between the creature and the Creator. The reflective nature of humanity is not optional, but in fact is inherent within each individual. In his book *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry*, G. K. Beale states:

God has made humans to reflect him but if they do not commit themselves to him, they will not reflect him but something else in creation. At the core of our beings we are imaging creatures. It is not possible to be neutral on this issue: we either reflect the Creator or something in creation.⁸

The Apostle Paul alludes to this central concept in his Epistle to the Romans, where he speaks of the replacement of the true worship of the Creator God with idolatry (Rom 1:21-25). This passage details the way non-believers rebel against their created purpose as worshipers and against the clear revelation of the knowledge of God in creation. Rather than joining the rest of the created order in declaring the surpassing glory of God, the unrighteous substitute false images as objects of worship. The Greek term translated “image,” **εἰκόνος**, refers to a representative image, such as a coin or statue, but also can serve as a natural reflection.⁹ With this term, Paul links the concepts of worship and image together in his rebuke against fallen humanity. Paul works from the assumption that humanity will either reflect the nature of the true God or will find false and corrupt images to reflect and glorify.

The Divine Call to Image God

The history of the doctrine of the *imago Dei* demonstrates how theologians adapted their understanding in light of prevailing philosophies of the day. Baptist theologian James Leo Garrett states, “some theologians have opted not for a single view of the image but for a composite of selected views, but normally they have done little toward the integration of the views placed in the composite.”¹⁰ The proposed view of the *imago* attempts to fill such a gap by demonstrating that the *imago* is precisely the union of humanity’s structure, capabilities, and relationships. Each of the preceding viewpoints provides a glimpse of the nature of the *imago* but vacillates in other respects. The substantive approach details the characteristic ways in which humanity mirrors God, but because of its reliance on the Old Testament texts, it fails to address the Triune nature of the God whom humanity images. Much historical evidence supports the understanding of the image as a function, yet it fails to address the New Testament ideas of a loving response and characterization of God. The relational approach logically addresses many of the philosophical questions regarding the image and society, but falters due to a lack of a clear biblical foundation.

The *imago* as the divine calling and profession embodies elements of each of these perspectives but identifies the primary aspect of biblical anthropology to be a lifestyle of worship that reflects the glory of the Creator and lovingly relates to the rest of creation. Jeremy Begbie describes this dynamic:

Understandably then, some refer to human beings as “priests of creation.” The phrase is apt, for it speaks of a double movement. On behalf of God, as God’s image bearers, humans are to mediate the presence of God to the world and in the world, representing his

⁸ BEALE, G. K., *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry*, IVP Academic: Downers Grove, IL, 2008, p. 16.

⁹ KLEINKNECHT, “εἰκών - The Greek Use of εἰκών,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, trans. G. W. Bromiley, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 1965, p. 388.

¹⁰ GARRET JR., James Leo, *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*, vol. I, 2nd ed., BIBAL Press: North Richland Hills, TX, 2000, p. 462.

wise and loving rule. But this is so that on behalf of creation humans may gather and focus creation's worship, offering it back to God, voicing creation's praise.¹¹

The beauty of the vocational approach is that it elevates Christ as the true Image of God and the *telos* to which redeemed humanity strives. In His infinite wisdom, God's plan to have a loving counterpart in relationship with Him, who was like Him and reflected Him, was not thwarted by the rejection of sin. "But the free gift [of salvation] is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many" (Rom 5:15). The "image of the invisible God" enters into creation in the form of the "fallen image" and restores the relationship between God and man.

The restoration of the vocational image through the work of Christ is the purpose of the covenant between God and humanity and is expressed in the loving relationship of worship.¹² The effectual calling to image God is expressed both in the private life and communal life of the community of faith. The magnification of Christ and the Gospel-centricity of the missional call serve as the foundation for the practice of worship.

The essence of biblical worship is God's calling upon humanity to image Him and the subsequent reflection and display of the glory of God in response to this divine mandate. As believers reflect and mirror the nature, relationships, and actions of God in their lives, they serve as priests of creation and offer worship on its behalf. The task of imaging consists of two primary aspects: depicting or reflecting God accurately and enacting or realizing His presence and kingdom priorities within the world. Consequently, the response to the call to image God can be considered worship for several reasons: (1) true imaging of God is supremely God-centered and not anthropocentric; (2) by restoring the relationship between God and humanity to its original purposes, the communion of worship between the creation and Creator is reestablished; (3) accurate imaging of God celebrates the Gospel because it does not ignore the implications of the Fall, rather it shows God's mercy and grace through fallen, yet redeemed humanity; (4) vocational imaging anticipates the coming kingdom of God by realizing God's reign in the present; and (5) like true worship, this understanding of the *imago Dei* finds its definitive expression in the work of Christ on the cross and in His ultimate glorification.

The vocational understanding of the *imago Dei* expresses the nature of worship because it is centered upon the character and nature of God and not upon the qualities, needs, or wants of humanity. One of the greatest challenges to true worship renewal is the proclivity of many believers to reduce worship to a matter of taste and the fulfillment of their own needs. The vocational *imago* remedies this situation because it reorients worship as a verb and emphasizes the way in which believers reflect the glory of God. The goal of true worship is the celebration of the surpassing worth of God and God's salvific actions wrought by Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. This celebration of the glory of God occurs as worshipers proclaim the supreme worth of God's being and His work of redemption. At its core, worship is the re-telling of God's grand narrative that begins with His desire to communicate Himself and concludes with the glorious recapitulation of the new creation, in which redeemed humanity and creation again join to proclaim His praises. As believers reposition their focus on God's glory, they become its active reflection and conduits of His grace throughout creation. The ongoing restoration and transformation of the image of God in believers result

¹¹ BEGBIE, Jeremy S., *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music*, Engaging Culture, Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, p. 203.

¹² BERKOUWER, G.C., *Man: The Image of God*, trans. Dirk W. Jellema, Studies in Dogmatics, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing: Grand Rapids, MI, 1962, p. 54.

in good works that consequently glorify the Father (Matt 5:16). In this way, true worship has both doxological and ethical implications for the life of the believer.

Secondly, the response to the call to image God can be considered worship because it is the expression of the intimate communion between humanity and God. As God's counterpart and reflection, man exists to be in relationship with God and all creation. In Romans 12:1 Paul instructs believers "by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." Here Paul calls upon believers not to perform merely an act of dutiful sacrifice, but rather to become a living sacrifice as they image God in creation. This act of worship does not occur independently, but rather requires close communion between humanity and God as believers are "transformed by the renewal" of their minds through the Word of God. Redeemed image bearers serve as living icons of God's creative purposes and demonstrate and realize the intimate communion between God and man.

The *imago Dei* celebrates the Gospel because all believers intimately display God's redemptive work. All of life is wracked by the implications of the Fall, and it is only through the work of Christ on the cross that believers become new creations and the restoration of the original purposes of creation occurs. Paul states in Ephesians 1:12 that the restoration of the image of God in believers is worship because God purposed that those "who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory." As the Spirit works in believers as new creations and radically repurposes their lives, they become living and active depictions of God's abounding mercy and displays of God's grace on the cross.

Worship occurs through the imaging of God because redeemed life exists in the tension between the already and the not yet. Believers image God in the world and proclaim God's reign throughout creation even as we "groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom 8:23). The corporate gathering of believers in worship mirrors the heavenly worship that continually exists before the throne of God and serves as a sign and foretaste of the future Marriage Supper between the Lamb and His bride, the church (Rev 19). The daily imaging of God in the individual lives of believers embodies the opening petition of the Lord's prayer for the hallowing of God's name, the coming of His kingdom, and the establishment of His will on earth as it is in heaven (Matt 6:9-10).

Lastly, the response to the divine mandate to image God is worship because it is focused on the person of Christ. In several passages the New Testament authors describe Jesus as the true "image of God" and the pattern by which God originally created humanity and the ideal to which the Spirit conforms redeemed believers. The *imago Dei* captures the essential nature of worship because it exalts Christ and serves to depict the "mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:9-10).

True worship then is captivated with the radiance of the glory of God in the person of Christ and transforms the believer into that same image through the work of the Spirit. What does this have to do with the *imago Dei*? The call to reflect the glory of the Father can only be accomplished as believers are transformed into the Son's image by " beholding the glory of the Lord" (2 Cor 3:18). In order to truly become the *imago Dei*, redeemed humanity must realize the eschatological hope of the *imago Christi* in the present. Through the intimate fellowship of worship, believers gradually grow in sanctification and actualize their true purpose and find meaning in their lives. In order for this transformation to occur in the life of the believer, corporate worship services must enable one to "behold" the glory of Christ in every liturgical element. Leaders within the church must view this as a discipleship issue and make decisions concerning worship accordingly.

CHRIST-CENTERED WORSHIP

If worship is to be captivated with the glory of God in Christ, then it must be (1) oriented by the Gospel, (2) founded upon the Word of God, (3) empowered by the Spirit, and (4) carried by the song of the people. Each of these elements is critical to enable believers to become image bearers and conformed to Christ's image through corporate worship. Because God the Father has given His Son a name that is above all other names, Christ must be the central focus of Christian worship, both in the present and the eschatological future (Phil 2:9-11).

Christ-centered worship is not merely that which is directed toward Christ as the object of worship, but it is actually empowered and realized through Christ's own substitutionary work of atonement and reconciliation. As seen above, the authors of the Gospels and Epistles demonstrate the worship of Christ as God throughout the New Testament. Likewise, as the true image of God, Christ is worthy of worship offered by individuals in the assembly of believers. The author of Hebrews describes Jesus as the object of the worship of the heavenly host, "After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs" (Heb 1:1-4). These verses demonstrate the Christocentric nature of worship and His exceeding worthiness of worship, because He is the Creator of all that exists (v. 2), He is the radiance of the glory of God (v. 3), He accomplished the Father's plan of redemption (v. 3), and the Father Himself has magnified and elevated Christ to the place of worship (v. 4). Worship that images God must exalt the person and work of Christ.

Christ is also the means by which believers offer their praises to the heavenly Father. Again the author of Hebrews describes Christ as the great High Priest who makes a way for salvation.

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God (Heb 9:11-14).

Christ's mediatorial role as High Priest echoes the relationship He enjoys as the true image of God with the created image bearers. As the "greater and more perfect" image of God, He alone can restore the relationship between fallen humanity and its Creator. The purifying work of Christ enables the redeemed to once again "serve [Gk. **λατρεύειν**, often translated as worship] the living God" (v. 14). In this way Christ completes and fulfills both Old and New Testament worship and enables believers to experience the reality of the worship of the coming kingdom of God.

Christ's mission was not only to redeem fallen humanity but also to restore man's lost calling to image the Father. In Romans 5:2 Paul declares, "Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Colossians 1:27 affirms this mission by connecting the glorification of the Father with the indwelling of Christ - "Christ in you, the hope of glory." James Torrance articulates these ideas masterfully in *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*:

Christian worship is, therefore, our participation through the Spirit in the Son's communion with the Father, in his vicarious life of worship and intercession. It is our response to our Father for all that he has done for us in Christ. It is our self-offering in

body, mind and spirit, in response to the one true offering made for us in Christ, our response of gratitude (*eucharistia*) to God's grace (*charis*), our sharing by grace in the heavenly intercession of Christ.¹³

This vicarious participation with the divine Trinitarian relationship allows individual believers to worship through the Spirit and in Truth. The acceptability of the individual's image bearing is not found in human merits; but instead finds its only value in the substitutionary work of Christ. Just as spiritual formation seeks to realize the believer's position "in Christ," it also orients the doxological life of the believer "in" and "through" Christ. True worship then is focused upon Christ, in response to Christ's work on the cross, and achieved through His mediatorial intercession as the great High Priest before the throne of God.

Worship Oriented by the Gospel of Jesus Christ

To say that worship is oriented by the Gospel of Jesus Christ means that the direction and movement of worship is guided by the *kerygma* of the Gospel – the God-Man Jesus died on the cross to be the substitutionary atonement for all who will believe and have faith in His finished work of salvation. The Gospel gives meaning to the search for the lost *imago Dei* in humanity because it is not the mere means to salvation but is the guiding principle for all of life. Worship oriented by the Gospel proclaims and enacts the story of salvation from the Garden of Eden to the future Garden of the Glory of Christ. The Gospel of Christ is proclaimed through worship as believers sing to the Lord, publically read and hear the Word of God, and enact the Gospel through the celebration of the ordinances. This pattern of the Gospel-oriented life carries the believer throughout the remainder of his or her life. Calvin notes:

Observe, that the design of the gospel is this – that the image of God, which had been effaced by sin, may be stamped anew upon us, and that the advancement of this restoration may be continually going forward in us during our whole life, because God makes his glory shine forth in us by little and little.¹⁴

Worship services should continually rehearse the Gospel week by week so that the congregation can be shaped by the message proclaimed in word, action, and symbol. Harold Best notes, "The rescue, redemption, restoration and Christ-centered schooling of the *imago Dei*, in its countless human paraphrases, is as much the core of the gospel as anything."¹⁵ Therefore the church fulfills the Great Commission not just through evangelism but also through the faithful proclamation of the Gospel in and through the worship of the congregation.

Worship Founded upon the Word of God

If the congregation is to behold the glory of the Lord, then the public reading, proclamation, and teaching of the Word of God must take prominence in the service. The reading of Scripture anchors worship in the Gospel and serves as a guard against the ever-surging tide of culture. The Scriptures should be the basis of all of the congregational

¹³ TORRANCE, James B., *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, IVP Academic: Downers Grove, IL, 1996, p. 15.

¹⁴ CALVIN, John, *The Commentaries of John Calvin on the Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. John Pringle, Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 20, Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI, 2003, p. 187.

¹⁵ BEST, Harold, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts*, InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL, 2003, p. 88.

elements including songs, prayers, and liturgical actions. The setting forth of the Word of God enables believers to see themselves as they truly are – in desperate need of the continual transformation of the Spirit – and God in all of His magnificence and glory. In his commentary on 2 Corinthians, John Calvin compares the preaching of the Word of God with a mirror:

The ministry of the word, I say, is like a looking-glass for the angels have no need of preaching, or other inferior helps, nor of sacraments, for they enjoy a vision of God of another kind; but openly manifests himself as present with them. We, who have not as yet reached that great height, behold the image of God as it is presented before us in the word, in the sacraments, and, in fine, in the whole of the service of the Church.¹⁶

Worship grounded in the Word of God will always be Christ-centered because Jesus is the living *Logos* of the Father (Jn 1:1). The transforming power of the proclaimed Word is the means by which the Spirit transforms the church into the *imago Christi*.

Worship Empowered by the Spirit

In 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, Paul connects the work of the Spirit of God with the ongoing transformation of believers into the image of Christ. In order for worship services to form spiritually their participants, the Spirit must permeate each worship action. While true of all humanity throughout the world, the Western church especially has to fight against the rugged individualism that shades all human endeavors, including spiritual growth. We must continually ask ourselves Paul’s question to the Galatians, “Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” (Gal 3:3).

Galatians describes the manifestation of the image of Christ in believers as the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22). In order for our worship to form these Christ-like attributes, the Spirit must be at work from beginning to end in the worship service. Reacting perhaps to the extremes of the charismatic worship practices and the rigid liturgical dryness of some congregations, many evangelical churches have lost the rich vocabulary of the invocation of the Spirit in worship. Many worship services are functionally unitarian, or at best, binitarian, and regularly make no mention of the Holy Spirit. Worship must celebrate the indwelling presence of the Spirit within the individual believer and emphasize the unique expression of His presence in the gathered body in worship.

Worship Carried by the Song of the People

The words of worship, specifically those found in congregational song, are crucial elements in the process of formation. Historically, believers have affirmed their faith through clear doctrinal statements expressed poetically in hymns and songs. These hymns have served as pedagogical tools, passing on the truths of the faith and the history of God’s faithfulness to new generations of believers. Songs declaring God’s attributes provide musical models for spiritual formation.

As believers join together to express their adoration and praise corporately to the Triune God, the actions of worship and congregational singing help shape them into that image. Another function of song in formation is that of exhortation. Believers often encourage one another to live sanctified lives despite trials and temptations. Perseverance and strength of character can be encouraged through the frequent exhortations of corporate singing. When

¹⁶ CALVIN, *The Commentaries of John Calvin on the Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, 20, p. 430.

songs are eventually committed to memory, the individual believer and community as a whole create a “collective memory” from which they can draw throughout the developmental process.

Lastly, congregational singing connects the emotional aspects of life with the spiritual and intellectual pursuit of godly lives. As believers sing together and experience the wide gamut of emotion in worship, they stir up religious affections that lead to spiritual growth.

Worship evokes particular religious affections. Even as worship evokes particular affections, it also shapes them individually and orders them by establishing relationships between the affections that assure that they comprise a coherent constellation rather than merely an aggregation. Worship gives us the opportunity to express these well-ordered affections. Worship sustains our religious affections. Finally, worship directs our religious affections toward God in such a way that we are brought into fitting relationships with other creatures.¹⁷

With each song that is sung, believers become living stones that “are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). Through their words and actions believers realize Calvin’s metaphor and serve as mirrors that reflect the glory of God throughout the world. This is the very heart of spiritual formation.

THE IMAGO DEI FULFILLED IN LITURGICAL LIFE OF THE CHURCH

The premise of this study has been that the theological concept of the imago Dei is the call to depict and enact the glory of God on the earth and that this identity and task equate to the biblical definition of worship. Recent theological developments in biblical anthropology and Trinitarian theology inform the synthesis of this position and help establish a biblical foundation for many of the conclusions already posited. Theology without praxis is incomplete, however, because imaging God involves both being and doing.

As seen above, imaging the glory of God is not merely an individual mandate, but also a call given to the collective body of Christ. This directive of worship shapes the entire schema of the church’s ministry and has the potential to re-envision many of its practices. Individually and communally, image bearers glorify God as they become more like Christ (*imago Christi*) and participate and share in the love of the Trinity (*imago Trinitas*). These dual tasks find expression in the doxological, ethical, and missiological functions of the church, as Grenz notes:

Our conclusion that the existence of the church is to glorify God has far-reaching significance for the life of the church in the world, both in its universal and its local expressions. It means that the ultimate motivation for all church planning, goals, and actions must center solely on our desire to bring glory to God. We must direct all that we say and do as the eschatological covenant community toward this ultimate purpose, namely, that God be glorified through us. Because this is our ultimate goal, we must carefully monitor the various dimensions of church life, seeking to bring everything under this one priority.¹⁸

Grenz’s instructional words demonstrate the necessity of orienting all the tasks of the church under the God-glorifying framework of the imago Dei. As the church displays God’s glory throughout the world, it will in turn realize the kingdom of God on earth through the power of

¹⁷ HOTZ, Kendra G. and MATTHEWS, Matthew T., *Worship and the Religious Affections: Shaping the Christian Life*, Westminster/John Knox Press: Louisville, KY, 2006, p. 73.

¹⁸ GRENZ, Stanley J., *Theology for the Community of God*, Broadman & Holman: Nashville, TN, 1994, p. 488.

the Spirit. It is critical that pastors and other leaders within the body of Christ develop programs and ministries that flow from this crucial, identity-forging task rather than placating vocal factions within their congregations or attempting to appeal to unbelievers through earthly means. The shepherds of God's flock possess a responsibility to lead boldly from a sound biblical framework and philosophy. The following discussion seeks to offer practical ways in which ministry can flow from this doxological approach to biblical anthropology.

The liturgical life of the church is the source from which all other ministry flows because it is this aspect of ecclesial life that orients the individual and congregation Godward and provides focus on the glory of God. The totality of the worship experience flows from this divine mandate to reflect the glory of God and realize His dominion on the earth.

By its very nature, worship images or reflects the glory of God. The regular gathering of the body of Christ in worship enables individuals to develop an awareness of their task to continue in the act of worship throughout life. Catherine LaCugna explains the way in which the repeated actions of worship come to shape the believer and inform his or her theology:

Rendering praise to God does not mean simply directing piously exaggerated words toward God in heaven; the act of praise involves us in the very life of God-with-us. Words and gestures are “performative”; their utterance makes actual the glory of God to which they refer and which they intend. By naming God as recipient of our praise, we are directed away from ourselves toward God, which is why doxology can be described as a kenotic or self-emptying act. In praise giving, the “I” or the “we” of a people or congregation becomes other-centered, not self-centered.¹⁹

Similarly James White states, “Practice often forms the basis of reflection; reflecting frequently shapes practice.”²⁰ The rhythm of the liturgy trains believers to attune their lives to the priorities of the kingdom of God and to set their minds on things that are above (Col 3:2).

Just as the imaging of God does not merely involve actions, but consists also of the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual faculties of the individual, worship concerns both actions and affections. The liturgy provides outward expression to the inward realities that are cultivated through the regular practice of worship. John Piper connects the task of reflecting God's glory with this vital accompaniment of affections toward God.

Worship is the way of gladly reflecting back to God the radiance of his worth. It is not a mere act of willpower by which we perform outward acts. Without the engagement of the heart, we do not really worship. The engagement of the heart in worship is the coming alive of the feelings and emotions and affections of the heart.²¹

While many of the liturgical acts and practices regularly employed in the church demonstrate the divine calling of image bearing, we will focus upon four: (1) the arts, (2) prayer, (3) the public reading of Scripture, and (4) the proclamation of the Word of God.

Imaging God through the Arts

One of God's greatest gifts to the church is the artistic expression of His people. While music is the dominant art form utilized in most corporate worship services, recent decades have shown a renewal of many of the arts in worship. The arts help fulfill the *imago Dei*

¹⁹ LACUGNA, Catherine Mowry, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, HarperSanFrancisco: San Francisco, CA, 1992, p. 339.

²⁰ WHITE, James F., *The Sacraments in Protestant Practice and Faith*, Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN, 1999, p. 52.

²¹ PIPER, John, *Desiring God*, Multnomah: Sisters, OR, 2003, p. 81.

because the celebration of beauty reflects upon the glory of the Creator and humanity demonstrates God's nature through acts of creativity.

The study of aesthetics deals specifically with the nature of beauty and the ways in which humanity interacts with beautiful things. Some elevate art to an almost religious state by proposing that art exists for its own benefit; others see it as a mere tool for the manipulation of emotions and actions. For the believer, art always functions to reflect and draw attention to the glory of God. Any other purpose, such as artistic expression or sociological statement, is secondary to this ultimate calling. Harold Best describes the way the beauty of works of art, when employed liturgically, have a way of captivating the mind and spirit of the worshiper and focusing them upon the supreme worth of the Creator.

God wills that all of us worship him. Behind all of these secondary moving – music, art, drama, dance, architecture, atmosphere, and environment – is the primary mover, whose most quiet call and gentlest reminder speak louder than our most elaborate art pieces.²²

Like all of God's gracious gifts to humanity, there is danger in glorifying the beautiful gift of the arts in place of the Sovereign Creator. Many of the so-called worship wars elevate a particular style or artistic expression as the central focus of the worship experience and replace God as the object of veneration. Beauty must always point to something outside of itself if it is to not become idolatry. D. A. Carson states, "What ought to make worship delightful to us is not, in the first instance, its novelty or its aesthetic beauty, but its object: God himself is delightfully wonderful, and we learn to delight in him."²³ The perversion of beauty as an object of worship parallels the corruption of the *imago Dei* through sin. When humanity exalts itself as the supreme end of all things, it fails to serve as an icon of the Trinity. The judicious and purposeful use of the arts in worship encourages an awareness of the divine mandate to glory only in God and to see all things, beautiful or mundane, as reflections of the Creator.

Likewise, the exercise of the creative gifts bestowed to humanity by its Creator reflects His glory throughout the world. The structuralist viewpoint of the *imago Dei* teaches that humanity shares certain communicable attributes or capabilities with the Creator, albeit on a far different scale and level of quality. Society long has recognized the arts as a "spark of the divine" and one of the most important distinguishing characteristics of humanity. The exercise of dominion over music, art, dance, and language, for example, fulfills the creation directive to subdue the earth. Calvin Johansson connects this exercise of dominion with the *imago Dei*:

We have said that in the creation mandate everyone, regenerate or not, is given the responsibility to assist in God's ongoing creation, *creatio continua*. We are endowed with the tools for this task via the broad sense of the *imago Dei*, and create because it is part of our nature. Further, in the narrow sense of the *imago Dei*, Christians face the prospect that through their actions (including their music) *God is made known*. Church music is testimony, and in worship believers use cultural expressions, such as music, to show what God has done, what he means, and who he is.²⁴

²² BEST, Harold M., *Music through the Eyes of Faith*, Through the Eyes of Faith Series, HarperSanFrancisco: San Francisco, CA, 1993, p.155.

²³ CARSON, D. A., "Worship under the Word," in *Worship by the Book*, ed. D. A. Carson, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 30.

²⁴ JOHANNSON, Calvin M., *Music & Ministry: A Biblical Counterpoint*, 2nd ed., Hendrickson: Peabody, MA, 1998, p. 36.

Jeremy Begbie describes how believers, through the use of the creative arts in worship, fulfill their calling to serve as priests of creation, “to make music in the midst of creation’s own music, to voice creation’s praise Our privilege is to extend and elaborate the praise that creation already offers to the Creator.”²⁵ The arts serve as signposts that point to the Creator as the source and ultimate end for all worship and enable believers to express the godly affections through tangible actions.

Imaging God through Prayer

Prayer serves as an icon of the nature and glory of God because it reflects the divine economy of the Trinity and allows the congregation to act out this reality. Believers direct their prayers to the Father, through the interceding work of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit. This divine pattern demonstrates God’s redemptive plan, and as believers regularly pray together their lives take a similar form. Corporate prayer provides a sense of identity and solidarity within the body of Christ as the worship leader voices a prayer aloud while the members pray silently and then offer their affirming amen at the conclusion. This response to God’s revelation in prayer is a reminder of humanity’s task to reflect the glory of God. Our nature and task are responses to God’s self-revelation, as David Peterson explains, “Acceptable worship under both covenants is a matter of responding to God’s initiative and revelation, and doing so in the way that he requires.”²⁶ This rhythm of revelation and response in prayer corresponds to humanity’s creation in the image of God and a life lived out in response to God’s self-communication.

In addition, prayer images God because it is the means through which God works and accomplishes His kingdom purposes. Christ taught His disciples to pray and ask that God’s kingdom would enter into earthly affairs and that God’s will be accomplished on the earth (Matt 6:10). James teaches that prayer is a powerful means through which God reverses the effects of the Fall and demonstrates His redeeming power (Jas 5:16). Many other passages demonstrate prayer’s ability to conform the heart of the believer toward God’s will. If the congregation is to fulfill God’s desire to expand His kingdom throughout the earth, prayer must be a regular discipline whereby individuals learn to submit themselves to God through the Spirit.

Imaging God through Corporate Scripture Reading

One of the few New Testament instructions for corporate worship is the public reading of Scripture (1 Tim 5:13). For many years Baptists have neglected this crucial element of corporate worship, with the possible exception of the reading of the sermon passage by the pastor at the beginning of his message. The proclamation of the Gospel through the reading of Scripture publicly is a necessity for imaging God in worship. In stark relief to the vain worship practices of other religions, the Triune God has chosen to reveal Himself primarily through His Word. The opening chapters of Genesis record God speaking the creation into existence through the utterance of His Word. The prologue to John’s Gospel identifies Christ as the *Logos*, the Divine Word of the Father. It is this Word that is the source of the believer’s identity – the source of the *imago Dei*. Barth emphatically reveals the vital relationship between the Word of God and man created in the image of that Word.

²⁵ BEGBIE, *Resounding Truth*, p. 237.

²⁶ PETERSON, David, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship*, InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL, 2002, p. 19.

For man is the creature to whom, according to His own Word, God has turned in the work of creation with its centre in the covenant of grace. And it is very man that God Himself has become in the perfect and definitive revelation of this Word of His. Who and what man is, is no less specifically and emphatically declared by the Word of God than who and what God is.²⁷

The human bearers of the image of God discover the form from which they were cast and to which they will one day become through the sanctifying power of the Spirit. As the Word of God took upon human flesh, the Triune God forged a permanent bond between Himself and the church based upon His revealed Word.

In order for humanity to fulfill its task to reflect and reveal the glory of God, the celebration of Scripture must hold a prominent place in the assembly of believers. It is within this divine narrative of God that redeemed believers find their place and discover the individual paths that God has chosen for them, as they seek to fulfill His divine mandate of image bearing. Just as the icon points to the truth and identity beyond the physical, Scripture reading reorients worship by emphasizing that it is God's story that is celebrated, not our own. Albert Mohler describes the centrality of Scripture in worship, "God is most beautifully praised when his people hear his word, love his word, and obey his word."²⁸ The powerful, active nature of Scripture (2 Tim 3:16) forms the body of Christ into the image of Christ as worshipers hear it read regularly and systematically in worship. The divine command to reflect the image of the glory of God must celebrate the vehicle through which God has chosen to reveal Himself most completely.

Imaging God through Proclamation

Closely aligned with the public reading of Scripture is the proclamation of the Gospel and teaching of the Word of God. Michael Quicke notes, "One breakthrough issue in preaching over the last three decades has been the emphasis that Scripture not only says things but also does things – that it not only has focus but also function."²⁹ The dual nature of the *imago Dei* – to depict and enact – is seen clearly in this description of the effects of the preached Word. The proclamation of the Word of God in worship assists faithful image bearing in two primary ways. First, the preaching of the Word sets forth God's requirements and mission for His image bearers. Second, the expository preaching of Scripture shapes the identity of both the individual and congregation through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

As image bearers of God, believers have the duty to declare faithfully who God is, to magnify the surpassing worth of His character, and to proclaim His authority and dominion through the physical and spiritual realms. The proclamation of the Word of God from the pulpit in corporate worship serves as a model for image bearing on the part of individuals in the congregation. As the Spirit gives insight into the preached Word, the congregation takes the shape of the true *Imago*, Jesus Christ. As a result of careful study, Spirit-guided exegesis, and coherent transmission, the preaching of the Word of God reveals to the congregation their true roles as image bearers. The public reading of Scripture and the clear instruction and call to obey this Word go hand in hand. In the former, the Spirit works in the hearts of the

²⁷ BARTH, Karl, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, vol. 3, Study ed., T&T Clark: New York, 2009, III/II/13.

²⁸ MOHLER JR., R. Albert, "Expository Preaching: Center of Christian Worship," in *Give Praise to God: A Vision for Reforming Worship*, ed. Philip Graham Ryken, Derek W. H. Thomas, and J. Ligon Duncan III, Paperback ed., P & R Publishing: Phillipsburg, NJ, 2001, p. 121.

²⁹ QUICKE, Michael J., *Preaching as Worship: An Integrative Approach to Formation in Your Church*, Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 46–47.

listeners causing them to respond individually to the inspired writing of Scripture. In the latter, the Spirit is again at work, but now through the God-ordained gift of the pastor-teacher (Eph 4:11). The Spirit uses the gifts within the congregation itself to shape and mold it into the bride of Christ.

Along with faithfully declaring God's story and placing the individual believer within that story, the proclamation of God's Word stirs up the body of Christ to image God by calling for specific action and transformation. In 1 Corinthians 1:21, Paul states that God is pleased to accomplish salvation through the "folly" of preaching. Faith itself is a gift of God (Eph 2:8), but comes through the hearing of the preached Word of God (Rom 10:17). Because of this fact, the exposition of the Word of God, and not mere moral object lessons or timely stories, is absolutely critical for the body of Christ to succeed in its task of imaging the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

THE IMAGO DEI AND THE PROMISES AND CHALLENGES OF THE FUTURE

To be the image of God means to display the glory of God and proclaim His kingdom on the earth. We are to serve as mirrors in which God can reflect the surpassing worth of His nature to the entire creation. Worship is not about us at all; it is supremely focused upon the Father, Son, and Spirit and His work of redemption. In *Engaging with God*, David Peterson posits, "The whole point of creation is that God should have a reflection in which he reflects himself and in which the image of God as the Creator is revealed, so that through it God is attested, confirmed and proclaimed."³⁰ John Piper echoes this calling of worship in *Desiring God*:

But since God made man like himself, man's dominion over the world and his filling the world is a display – an imaging forth – of God. God's aim, therefore, was that man would so act that he mirror forth God, who has ultimate dominion. Man is given the exalted status as image-bearer not so he would become arrogant and autonomous (as he tried to do in the Fall), but so he would reflect the glory of His Maker whose image he bears. God's purpose in creation, therefore, was to fill the earth with his own glory.³¹

To image God is to worship Him, as the redeemed image bearer conforms to the original Imago Dei and reflects the Trinity in his or her sphere of relationships. The imago Dei is the calling to reflect the glory of God and the enactment of this reality upon the earth.

While it will always be necessary to contend for the truth of the faith, it will be the image bearers whose lives most clearly reflect the glory of God and extend His kingdom into this world who will have the most impact on the postmodern society. Fulfilling the destiny of the imago Dei, redeemed believers tell the grand story of God's plan from before the foundation of the world and proclaim to a world devoid of meaning and hope that true identity can be found in relationship with the Creator. The questions of identity and self-actualization can only be answered in a responsible loving relationship between man and his Creator. An individual finds true meaning only as he or she serves as a mirror in which the glory of God is displayed. As the worshiper magnifies the Triune God, celebrates His magnificent story of redemption, and lives as a sign of the kingdom to come, then he or she truly becomes imago Dei.

³⁰ PETERSON, David, *Engaging with God*, p. 170.

³¹ PIPER, John, *Desiring God*, p. 256.