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BETHEL UNIVERSITY
BETHEL SEMINARY, ST. PAUL

THE IMPACT OF IMAGO DEI ON THINKING ABOUT PORTRAIT
PHOTOGRAPHY

A THESIS PROJECT REPORT
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY
IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP

BY
NEIL CRAIGAN
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA
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Most of all I have to acknowledge the support of my wife Jenny Craigan who supported me throughout the course of this program. Without her encouragement, support, and commitment I would never have reached the finish line.

ABSTRACT

The problem this project addressed was the relationship between the *imago Dei* and the work of photographers in the field of portrait photography. This created a strong vocational emphasis for the project in light of which the researcher explored the theological and biblical data on the *imago Dei*, examined the connection between being an image bearer and an image creator of the image bearer, discussed the nature of photography, developing a philosophy and broad understanding of the portrait and the value people attach to it. The field research was qualitative in its approach and professional photographers were interviewed regarding their approach to portrait work with a view to understanding their philosophical and theological vision for their images.

The project concluded that the *imago Dei* should be the primary driver in any discussion of humanity. It was also noted that idolatry is an ever present threat to the work of a Christian photographer. This was seen as a two way danger in which, as participants in an act of creation, photographers need to be aware of the possibility of creating idols of their own selves.

The field research revealed four major themes in the work of Christian photographers these were humanity, reality, relationship and morality. These were seen as important for the Christian photographer to keep in mind as he works to create an image and strive to maintain the dignity of the subject as God's image bearer.

DEDICATION

This thesis project is dedicated to my father, Michael Craigan. On the evening I received the letter from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland stating that I had been accepted as a candidate for ordained ministry his eyes filled with tears and he uttered the words, "I am so proud of you." This project is in many ways the fulfillment of that moment for me. This is for my dad.

CHAPTER ONE

The Problem and Its Context

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed by this project is how our existence as the *imago Dei* impacts the manner in which we think of portrait photography in a digital world. The project addressed the idea that humanity, created in the image of God, is also an image creator. In response to this the researcher (a) explored the theological and biblical claim that humanity is created in God's image, (b) examined the connection between being an image bearer and an image creator of the image bearer, (c) discussed the nature of photography, developing a philosophy and broad understanding of the portrait and the value people attach to it, (d) interviewed photographers in regard to their approach to portrait work with a view to understanding the philosophical and theological vision they have of their work as it relates to the image of God, and (e) discerned some guiding thoughts to help Christians better reflect on what it means to capture an image bearer in a photographic portrait.

Definition of Terms

Portrait: this term has been given its broadest meaning in referring to any picture that contains an image of a person or persons.

Delimitations of the Problem

The research was limited to photographers using a digital format to capture their images.

The research was limited to photography and will not be examining other forms of portraiture such as painting or sculpture.

The research was limited to portraiture and will not be discussing other areas of photography as potentially representative of revealing the image of God.

The field research was limited to photographers who self-identify as being part of the Judeo- Christian tradition.

The research was limited to a Judeo-Christian understanding of the *imago Dei* drawn from biblical exegesis and the history and tradition of the church.

Assumptions

The first assumption was that the Bible is authoritative in the life of the Christian.

The second assumption was that photography is its own unique art form.

Setting of the Project

The modern world finds itself bombarded with portrait photography. From the billion dollar pornography industry to formal portrait photography or sports photography and other events to the quick “selfie” taken to show your friends your whereabouts our world is now full of digital portraits. Today every cell phone is equipped with a digital camera that allows for fairly high resolution pictures to be taken by almost anyone at anytime.

One of the largest photo sharing sites on the web is Instagram with a reported 60 million photos being posted daily. While not all of these are portraits, it is not hard to imagine that at least several million of these images contain pictures of people. Many more pictures are posted to Flickr, Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites. At no other time in history have so many pictures been accessible to the masses as there are today through the internet. Many of the people creating and posting images today would

strongly identify as part of the Judeo-Christian tradition with many of them highly invested in their faith community. Within the Judeo-Christian tradition there is a strong understanding that humanity has been created in the image of God. It is in the context of this tradition that the research will take place.

The specific setting for this project was photographers in the western world who self-identify as being part of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The reason for broadening the setting beyond a specifically Christian understanding was the reality that the concept of the humanity being created in God's image originates in the Hebrew Scriptures which are shared by both Jews and Christians. It is the hope of the researcher that the implications of this research have a broader reach than the Christian community.

The Importance of the Project

The Importance of the Project to the Researcher

As a pastor and photographer, the researcher was wrestling with the manner in which people are portrayed in photographs. Since people are created in the image of God the researcher believes that a photograph of a person should in some way reflect something of that image.

The researcher is fully aware that what he is capturing on the sensor is not the reality as the human eye sees it. The researcher, in taking a photograph, is distorting the reality that lies in front of him. He is making decisions on shutter speed which will impact the amount of ambient light hitting the sensor. He is making decisions on aperture that will affect the depth of field that will be forever fixed once the shutter is released. He is constantly making decisions on the point of focus and lighting that will be used. All of

this is to influence the output of the digital file that will require some further refining in Photoshop in order for it to be print ready.

In sports photography the researcher is often shooting a series of images, up to ten images per second, in order to capture the moment of action he is looking for. Seven of the eight frames will never make it out of Photoshop but will be deleted forever from the hard drive. The one shot that is kept will generally be the one that displays the greatest amount of skill and physicality. This gives rise to several questions including whether capturing and sharing this moment is creating an idol of the image? Other questions include whether it is representational of the real life moment or is it iconic in that it gives us something to look through and aspire to. Can it be all three at the same time?

As light reflects off a person and enters into the lens of a camera those reflected photons are grabbed by the sensor creating an electronic image of the individual. Reflecting on how that moment in time, from that particular angle, distorted through the glass of the lens has been “captured” can be awe inspiring. Something about the essence of that individual, the photons that bounced off their body have now been grabbed by the sensor of the camera. Is there a theological dimension to this? The researcher believes there is and he believes it is important to look into this topic because digital photography and manipulation is so highly prevalent today.

The Importance of the Project to the Immediate Ministry Context

The immediate ministry context is that of a local congregation with approximately 300 members. Many of the members utilize social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter on a regular basis and often post photographs that range from formal portrait settings to selfies taken at a variety of events.

This project provides content and context for helping people to reflect both on what it means for them to have been created in the image of God as well as considering what it means to create an appropriate photographic image of the image bearer.

The Importance of the Project to the Church at Large

In our world today there is almost unlimited access to images that distort the image bearer. At the extreme these include the pornographic industry and to a slightly lesser extreme the highly distorted images of models that appear in magazines and other advertising materials. This project will help clarify the boundaries for the appropriate portrayal of a human being in a photograph.

Almost everyone now has easy access to a camera. The most basic cell phone now has a camera that is better than any digital camera from a decade ago. With so many images being posted online and simple filtering software being readily available to change and manipulate those images this project will help people within the Judeo-Christian tradition think and reflect on what it is an appropriate use of portrait photography in our world today.

Project Overview

The first step in this project was to develop a biblical and theological understanding of the *imago Dei*. This was accomplished through a word study of the relevant Hebrew terms and an examination of the *imago Dei* utilizing both systematic and historical theology.

The second step in the research was to undertake a review of the literature related to the study. The research focused on the nature of photography and how it is

differentiated from other forms of art, the way in which people are portrayed in photographs and the ways in which image creation can potentially lead to idolatry.

The third step in the process was to collect qualitative information from photographers within the Judeo-Christian tradition on their perspective on portrait photography and the *imago Dei*. This was accomplished through conducting a series of digitally recorded interviews.

The fourth step in the research was to collect, organize, analyze and synthesize all the data gathered in order to gain a fuller understanding of the *imago Dei* and its importance for portrait photography.

The fifth step in the project was to take what was learned from the theological studies, the literature review, and the field research and discern some guiding thoughts to help Christians better reflect on what it means to capture an image bearer in a photographic portrait.

CHAPTER TWO

AN EXPLORATION OF THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE “IMAGO DEI”

Image and Likeness in the Hebrew Scriptures

Christians look to the Scriptures in order to develop a theological understanding of the meaning and purpose of creation within the Judeo-Christian narrative. Of particular importance is the narrative story of creation as it unfolds in the first chapter of Genesis over the course of six days. The reader is led from a world that is both formless and void to one that has form and is filled. The Scriptures record how on the sixth day “God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps along the ground of every kind” (Gen. 1:25).¹ However, this is not the end of the creation narrative as there is one additional work of creation to be spoken into existence on this sixth day.

This final act of creation is the creation of humanity. As God speaks humanity into being it is evident that humanity is different, set apart in a distinct way, from the rest of the created order. God states, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth” (Gen. 1:26). Humanity is part of the created order, spoken into existence by God, while at the same time humanity is given the command to

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are from *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, (Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, 1989).

rule over creation. The creation of humanity in Genesis 1 is distinct from the manner in which the other creatures come into existence. As Derek Kidner explains, “‘Let us make’ stands in tacit contrast with ‘Let the earth bring forth’; the note of self-communing and the impressive plural proclaim it a momentous step; and this done, the whole creation is complete.”²

This unique aspect of the creation of humanity is repeated in verse 27 as the writer of Genesis reiterates the words of God, “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen.1:27). What then does it mean for humanity to understand itself as being created in the image of God? Victor Hamilton comments “it is clear that v. 26 is not interested in defining what is the image of God in man. The verse simply states the fact, which is repeated in the following verse.”³ While Hamilton’s statement may indeed be true, it provides a less than satisfying answer to the question. Philosophers and theologians have wrestled with the question of what it means to be created in the image and likeness of God. Jurgen Moltmann notes, “A cow is only a cow. It does not ask, ‘What is a cow? Who am I?’ Only man asks such questions, and indeed clearly has to ask them about himself and his being.”⁴ So as humans, interested in understanding what it means to be human, the question is asked as to what it means to be created in the image of God. This chapter will argue that the image of God is to be found in all aspects of what it means to be human

² Derek Kidner, *Genesis*. Vol. 1 of *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 50.

³ Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis*. Vol. 1 of *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 137.

⁴ Jurgen Moltmann, *Christian Anthropology in the Conflicts of the Present*, trans. John Sturdy (London: SPCK, 1974), 1.

with a strong emphasis on demonstrating that the image of God is to be found in the physical as well as spiritual components of humanity. In order to demonstrate this, the chapter will explore the meaning of the words “image” and “likeness” in both the biblical and cultural context, highlighting the work of several major theological voices that represent the interpretation of the image of God through the historical timeline of the church in the West. Additional consideration will be given to a focus on the physical element of the image of God in humanity and how that may relate to idolatry.

Image and Likeness: A Word Study

While the concept of the image of God has become a key aspect in theological anthropology there are very few direct references to it within the Old Testament. As Berkouwer states, “If we examine the biblical witness regarding man It is indeed rather striking that the term is not used often at all, and that it is far less ‘central’ in the Bible than it has been in the history of Christian thought.”⁵

Apart from the already cited double mention in Genesis 1:26-27 there are only two other direct references in the Old Testament and both are found in Genesis. In Genesis 5:1 the author of the text mentions the creation of humanity in the image of God at the start of an ancestral list from Adam to Noah and his family where it is stated, “When God created humankind, he made them in the likeness of God.” The other reference is found in Genesis 9:6 where the penalty for taking someone’s life is given and the reason for the penalty is that “in his own image God made humankind.”

⁵ Gerrit C. Berkouwer, *Man – The Image of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 67.

Exploring the breadth of meaning of the two Hebrew words for “image,” *tselem*, and “likeness,” *demuth*, that occur in these references will help shed light on this central component of theological anthropology.

Tselem

Anthony Hoekema explains that while these two words are essentially synonyms there are some differences in their meaning that should be noted.⁶

The root from which the word *tselem* is derived has, at its core, the idea of carving out or cutting.⁷ In looking at the other occurrences of *tselem* within the Old Testament this root meaning can be affirmed. There are several places in which *tselem* is used to describe idols that are to be destroyed. The prophet Ezekiel speaks for God stating, “From their beautiful ornament, in which they took pride, they made their abominable images, their detestable things; therefore I will make of it an unclean thing for them” (Ezek. 7:20). In this instance, in contrast with humanity as the image of God, the images that are created are considered to be “abominable” yet the main point here is that they are physical images that have been made by the hands of people. The other occurrences (Num. 33:52, 2 Kings 11:18, 2 Chron. 23:17, Ezek. 16:17, Ezek. 23:14, Amos 5:26) all reflect this negative use of *tselem* relating to human made images that needed to be destroyed.

The one place, outside of Genesis, where the word *tselem* is used in a positive sense is in 1 Samuel. In 1 Samuel 6:5 and 11 *tselem* is used by the priests to describe the images of the mice and the tumors that they were to make to include with the ark as they

⁶ Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 13.

⁷ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2014), 853.

returned it to Israel. This is an important occurrence of *tselem* as it allows for the possibility that the creation of images is not always prohibited. That the creation of images is not expressly prohibited can be seen in the instructions Moses is given directly from God on how to construct the tabernacle (Exod.25ff). As Hillary Brand and Adrienne Chaplin note, “The Ark was to have two cherubim carved, one at each end, clearly a form of something in heaven.”⁸ The use of images in this context is something that has been directly commanded by God.

These previous occurrences in which *tselem* are used demonstrate that it involves a physical representation of the thing that has been made. In this instance it is images of mice and tumors. The question as to whether this applies to the creation of humanity in the image of God will be picked up a little later in the discussion on the theological interpretation of the image of God.

There are two other occurrences of *tselem* in the book of Psalms that help provide a fuller understanding of the full range of meaning of this word. The word appears in both Psalm 39:6 and 73:20. In these contexts it may appear to represent something that does not have a physical structure to it. In Psalm 39 *tselem* is translated as “shadow,” while in Psalm 73 it appears as “phantom.” In this context Hamilton argues that rather than having a concrete meaning which parallels the other texts outside of Genesis it may also have a use beyond conveying a physical representation of what is being imaged, to the extent of conveying an “idea of emptiness, unreality and unsubstantiality.”⁹

⁸ Hilary Brand and Adrienne Chaplin, *Art and Soul: Signposts for Christians in the Arts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Inter Varsity Press, 2007), 79.

⁹ Hamilton, *Genesis*, 135.

James Barr challenges whether *tselem* as it is used in the Psalms is the same word that is used in the Genesis text. His conclusion is that they are two distinct words here, one meaning “image” and the other meaning “darkness” or “obscurity.”¹⁰ Beth Tanner takes the opposite approach to Barr when she suggests that *tselem* should actually be left as “images” in Psalm 73:20. Tanner states her reason that “by using the more common meaning there is another possible implication, that their *images* are indeed ‘gods.’”¹¹ Whether Barr or Tanner is correct there is still a sense in which an image is indeed a “phantom” or a “shadow” of the original that it was created to represent. With that in mind the translation of *tselem* in the Psalms does not demand that the reader view the term “image” in a non-physical manner. Rather it may remind the reader of the reality that an image is but a shadow, a phantom of the original.

The dominant use of the word *tselem* is in describing the physical creation of images. However, *tselem* can also be used in relation to false images and phantoms, things that are not real and therefore it can apply, as Hamilton suggested, to the imaginary. Tanner sees the use of *tselem* in Psalm 73:20 as a place where the Psalmist “may be interjecting a pun on Gen. 1:27, where humans are made in God’s image – i.e., these wicked and wealthy are the anti-image.”¹²

¹⁰ James Barr, “The Image of God in the Book of Genesis.” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, vol. 51 (autumn 1968), 21.

¹¹ Nancy Walford, Nancy deClaisse, Rolf A. Jacobson and Beth Tanner, *The Book of Psalms. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 592.

¹² Walford, 588.

Demuth

The root of the Hebrew word *demuth* means “be like, resemble.”¹³ After first appearing in Genesis 1:26 it occurs again in Genesis 5:1 where the author reminds the reader once again that humanity has been created in the “likeness” of God. It is also found in relation to the birth of children when in Genesis 5:3 the author speaks of Adam having a son who is born in his “likeness” and “image.”

The major section of Scripture in which *demuth* is used is in the book of Ezekiel. As the prophet searches within himself to explain his visions he finds himself coming back time and again to this word as he tries to describe that which no one has seen with something that is tangible and real, something his readers could relate to and connect with (Ezek. 1:5, 10, 16, 22, 26, 28). As Ezekiel tried to describe the living creatures he saw in his vision he says they had “human form” (*demuth adam*) (Ezek. 1:5) yet they were not human. John Taylor writes, the “grotesque living creatures which supported the platform ... were basically human in form ... but they each had four faces looking in four different directions.”¹⁴ These creatures were clearly not human yet they had elements of human form (*demuth*).

These creatures were not the only thing Ezekiel saw that had human form. In verse 26 Ezekiel describes his initial sighting of God and describes God as having human form or likeness. Daniel Block suggests that God’s “condescending appearance in human form undoubtedly finds its basis in Genesis 1:26-27, which describes humankind created

¹³ Brown, Driver and Briggs, 197.

¹⁴ John B. Taylor, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Ezekiel* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1969), 54.

as the “image” (*tselem*) and “likeness” (*demuth*) of God.”¹⁵ Block suggests that Ezekiel’s use of *demuth* is deliberate as it is more abstract than *tselem* which may be too closely linked with idolatry.¹⁶

In this context *demuth* can be seen to be taking on a of meaning in which “likeness” now represents something that is similar and yet clearly different and distinct from that which it is “like.”

Demuth and Tselem Together

In looking at these two words together the first thing to note is that Genesis 1:26-27 represents the only place in Scripture that these two nouns appear together. Hamilton provides several possible ways to think about this combination of the two words in Genesis.¹⁷

The first possible way for interpreting this parallel usage is to see *tselem* as describing some structural aspect of humanity’s nature that remains intact even after the Fall. Whereas *demuth* is then used to refer to the moral character of humanity and serves as a reference to the aspect of humanity was what was lost in the Fall.¹⁸ Karl Barth challenges those who take such an approach by concluding that

it is obvious that their authors merely found the concept in the text and then proceeded to pure invention in accordance with the requirements of contemporary anthropology, so it is only by the standard of our own anthropology, and not according to the measure of its own anthropology and on exegetical grounds, that we can decide for our against them.¹⁹

¹⁵ Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 107.

¹⁶ Block, 108.

¹⁷ Hamilton, *Genesis*, 192.

¹⁸ Hamilton, 192.

¹⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol.III.1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 193.

John Kilner states clearly that there is no basis for separating these two terms, stating that “attempts to find significant differences between the terms have proven unsatisfactory. ... With such overwhelming evidence suggesting that humanity in God’s ‘likeness-image’ refers to a single concept, one may wonder why people throughout history have found two different concepts here.”²⁰

The second approach that Hamilton mentions is to take “image” as being the more important of the two words and in this context “likeness” is used to diffuse and limit the extent to which humanity can be said to be an exact copy of God.²¹ In this sense “likeness” becomes a moderating term to help avoid the notion that humanity is in reality a miniature god.²² This view can be contrasted with the idea that it is actually the opposite at work here and that “image” is used to moderate and tone down “likeness.” This in turn can be contrasted with the idea that use of both “image” and “likeness” rather than moderate for each other they create a stronger more potent image.²³ While each of these three ideas has some merit there is nothing in the text of Genesis 1:26-27 that would adequately allow the reader to make a definitive in favor of any one of these ideas. It is important to read the text carefully to avoid the pitfall that Norman Snaith raises when he says, “Many ‘orthodox’ theologians through the centuries have lifted the phrase ‘the

²⁰ John F. Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 126.

²¹ Victor P. Hamilton, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* Harris, Laird R. ed., (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), 192.

²² Hamilton, 192.

²³ Hamilton, 192.

image of God' (*imago Dei*) right out of its context, and, like Humpty-Dumpty, they have made the word mean just what they choose it to mean."²⁴

Another option provided by Hamilton is one which was previously noted. The two words, "image" and "likeness," are synonymous with one another and therefore interchangeable.²⁵ John Calvin notes in his commentary on Genesis, "As for myself, before I define the image of God, I would deny that it differs from his likeness."²⁶ In support of his assertion Calvin states that "When Moses afterwards repeats the same thing, he passes over the *likeness* and contents himself with mentioning the *image*."²⁷ LeRon Shults supports Calvin's assertion stating that "The parallelism of the concepts in the original context could not bear traditional exegetical interpretation that distinguished them. Calvin's intuition about the parallelism is here confirmed."²⁸

While the Septuagint normally translates *tselem* with the Greek *eikon* and *demuth* with *homoiosis* there is an exception in Genesis 5:1 where the word *eikon* is used to translate *demuth*. Kilner explains how in this instance it suggests that when either word "appears alone to describe humanity's creational status, either word is referring to the same single likeness-image concept."²⁹

²⁴ Norman Snaith, "The Image of God." *Expository Times* 86 (October, 1974), 24.

²⁵ Hamilton, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. 1, 192.

²⁶ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*. Vol. 1. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 93.

²⁷ Calvin, 94.

²⁸ LeRon F. Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 232.

²⁹ Kilner, 125.

Daniel Block and Louis Berkhof both note the synonymous nature of these two words. Berkhof affirms that the two words are “used synonymously and interchangeably, and therefore do not refer to two different things.”³⁰

Ancient Near Eastern Context

If, as the case appears to be, that *demuth* and *tselem* are in fact synonymous and if Victor Hamilton is right in his assertion that Genesis 1:26 is simply stating a fact rather than seeking to help define the *imago Dei* in humanity then it will be important to look beyond these two words and further examine the context in which we find the statement that humanity has been created in the image of God. The first place to look for greater insight is in the cultural environment in which the text was written.

The precise dating of Genesis is hotly debated with scholars who accept the Wellhausen hypothesis attributing the pericope related to humanity’s creation in God’s image to the priestly author. This would assign it a much later date than those scholars who attribute a single author for the text. Either way the general context for the thought of humanity being created in the image of God belongs to the cultural background of the Ancient Near East (ANE).

Richard Middleton notes four areas in which the ANE may have had an impact on the Genesis narrative in relation to the image of God. The first is that within the ANE the creation story of Genesis does not stand alone but rather finds parallels in other creation narratives that permeated the world of that time.³¹ These narratives include the Gilgamesh Epic in which Aruru creates Enkidu to be the image or mirror of Gilgamesh.

³⁰ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 203.

³¹ J. R. Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005), 95

While these narratives show certain parallels with the biblical story it is difficult to demonstrate whether they had a direct impact on the development of the Genesis account of creation.

The same can be said of the Egyptian wisdom literature that offers some parallels with the Genesis text. However, as Middleton notes, “Parallel ideas, however do not constitute historical influence. And without some sort of historical connection between Genesis 1 and either of these texts (or the ideas therein), it does not make sense to utilize them to interpret the biblical notion of *imago Dei*.”³² While Middleton may be correct in his assertion that the parallel ideas do not constitute influence it must be noted that the cultural background and framework of the ANE is common to all the people groups of that region. As John Walton explains, “It is to be expected that the Israelites held many concepts and perspectives in common with the rest of the ancient world. ... [W]e simply recognize the common conceptual worldview that existed in ancient times. We should therefore not speak of Israel being influenced by that world – they were part of that world.”³³

Another possible cultural parallel to the text of Genesis 1 is the ANE practice in which a king might set up a statue of himself, in a part of his kingdom in which he would not be physically present, for the purpose of demonstrating his rule and authority over these areas. This thought is supported by Walter Brueggemann when he asserts that while this analogy involves images that are “fixed” “it is now generally agreed that the image of God reflected in human persons is after the manner of a king who establishes statues of

³² Middleton, 102.

³³ John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2009), 12.

himself to assert his sovereign rule where the king himself cannot be present.”³⁴ This thought will be picked up in the next chapter in regard to portraits making people present in places, or times in which they are in fact not present.

The fourth element that Middleton suggests is that of a royal ideology. The important concept of the king being created in the image of a god and being given a position in which he serves as that god’s representative on earth can be found in the cultures of both Egypt and Mesopotamia.³⁵ The main difference between the Egyptian and the Mesopotamian views is that the Egyptians viewed their kings as divine while the Mesopotamians viewed the king as a mortal who was called to function as the representative of the god, thereby bearing the image of that god.³⁶

Certainly there are some elements here that resonate with the text of Genesis. This may well be expected as Genesis records the center of development for humanity within the region of Mesopotamia. Indeed the concept of a royal ideology and representation can be seen in the biblical text.

Biblical Context

In moving to look at the biblical context it is important that this discussion should not be separated from the discussion surrounding cultural context in which it was originally written and communicated. The fact that Genesis does not expand on what it means for humanity to be created in the image of God may suggest that the original audience already had a sense of what that meant.

³⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*. Vol. 1 of *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1982), 32.

³⁵ Middleton, 108ff.

³⁶ Middleton, 118.

Hoekema notes, “In what way man is like God is not specifically and explicitly stated in the creation account, although one may note that certain resemblances to God are implied there.”³⁷ What then are those resemblances to God? In the second part of Genesis 1:26 the reader is reminded that God has stated humanity should “have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth.” This thought is reiterated in verse 28: “God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’”

These statements coupled with an understanding of the cultural context of *demuth* and *tselem* provide a framework for understanding the image of God in humanity in terms of being God’s ruling representatives on earth. Genesis 1 indirectly indicates that God is a king who appoints the sun to govern or rule the day and the moon to govern or rule the night and later appoints humanity to rule the earth in the unique capacity as an image bearer, created as God’s *tselem*, which is one who is carved or given the shape that God has. This image bearer is not like the representative statues that a king in the ANE would set up to represent his authority but rather these new statues are living beings ruling on behalf of the king and are created in the image of the king.

John Walton views the creation narrative from a functional perspective rather than a material perspective, noting that to “create something (cause it to exist) in the ancient world means to give it a function, not material properties.”³⁸ By the time the text records

³⁷ Hoekema, 14.

³⁸ John Walton, 33.

the creation of animals and particularly humans Walton says, “God is not setting up functions as much as he is installing functionaries.”³⁹ At the pinnacle of those functionaries is humanity and, while there may be multiple functions for humanity, “probably the main one, is that people are delegated a godlike role (function) in the world where he places them.”⁴⁰

Walton’s comments on function seem to correlate with Middleton when he notes “the royal function or purpose of humanity in 1:26 is not a mere add-on to their creation in God’s image, separable in some way from their essence or nature. On the contrary, rule defines image as its ‘permanent implication.’”⁴¹ This royal interpretation of the image of God in humanity has dominated the academic field in recent years. The call of humanity to assume the responsibility to rule the earth as God’s representatives becomes a constitutive aspect of the creation of humanity in the image of God.

In the creation narrative of Genesis the first task God gives to the man, Adam, is the naming of the animals on the earth (Gen. 2:18-20). God has spoken creation into being and over the first three days has given form to the formless earth and over the second set of three days filled the empty earth with creatures. Humanity has been commanded to continue this work and to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28), thereby continuing the work that God began in the initial creation. In the naming of the animals the creative imagination of humanity is seen to be at work in the continuing process of bringing order and structure to creation.

³⁹ John Walton, 62.

⁴⁰ John Walton, 67.

⁴¹ Middleton, 54.

In order for this to be the case humanity must “be able to make decisions, to set goals, and to move in the direction of those goals. ... To be a person means, to use Leonard Verduin’s picturesque expression, to be a ‘creature of option.’”⁴² In order for people to name the animals they would need to have been created with an imagination by which they could process the available information and image new possibilities before making a decision. Andy Crouch notes that “these image bearers will become the kind of persons who can themselves say ‘Let there be’ and ‘Let us make,’ not just deputies or functionaries in a heavenly bureaucracy of command and control, but agents of creativity in a universe designed to create more and more power.”⁴³

The biblical narrative strongly suggests that a key aspect of humanity’s creation in the image of God is the capacity to create. Steve Turner states, “Creativity is part of that inherited image because God is a designer and maker. Our desire to create, our ability to make concepts tangible and our pleasure in making are all reflections of God’s original ‘let there be’ and ‘it was good.’”⁴⁴

Middleton suggests that the work of God in creation may be viewed as the work of an artisan. This can be accomplished without diminishing the royal ideology portraying God as king. Middleton notes that the creation narrative “evokes a creator-God carefully constructing an artful world according to a well-thought-out plan for the benefit of the creatures. This is a wise artisan, attentive to the details of his craft and

⁴² Hoekema, 5.

⁴³ Andy Crouch, *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power* (Downers Grove, IL: InverVarsity Press, 2013), 5.

⁴⁴ Steve Turner, *Imagine: A vision for Christians in the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2001), 66.

pleased with both the stages or process of fabrication and the overall outcome.”⁴⁵ It is this aspect of God’s image that is reflected in the reality that humans are in their own right creative.

This creative capacity is a requirement for the responsibility that God entrusts to humanity in calling them to both “fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28). Humanity can be responsible and held accountable only if there is a freedom to choose and imagine alternate options. As Nicholas Wolterstorff explains, “Nobody can be responsible unless he is capable of envisaging states of affairs distinct from those which his experience has led him to believe he can obtain.”⁴⁶ To imagine an alternate state of affairs requires that God, in creation, gave humans a creative imagination that allows them to be free to make choices.

In reading the creation narrative it can be seen that in looking at the image of God in humanity the representative ruler and the creative artisan appear to be strong aspects of the *imago Dei*.

Theological Interpretation through the Centuries

Recognizing that the Old Testament makes only a few references to humanity being created in the image of God it will be important to look briefly at how this doctrine has been interpreted by several theologians throughout the centuries. This will provide insight into the manner in which the doctrine of the *imago Dei* has developed over the history of Christian thought and show some of the extra-biblical influences that have

⁴⁵ Middleton, 77.

⁴⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 74.

impacted it. Each of the theologians selected represents a different era in the history of Christian thought.

Irenaeus

Irenaeus served as Bishop of Lyons in the latter part of the second century. As a church leader he found himself battling the heresy of Gnosticism and in his important work, *Against Heresies*, he develops his doctrine of the *imago Dei*. James Purves tells us that “for Irenaeus the key to understanding man as the image of God is unmistakably found in the person of Jesus Christ.”⁴⁷ This can be seen when Irenaeus writes, “by means of his resemblance to the Son, man might become precious to the Father. For in times long past, it was said that man was created after the image of God, but it was not [actually] shown; for the Word was as yet invisible, after whose image man was created.”⁴⁸

In Irenaeus’s writing he differentiates between the image of God and the likeness of God. For Irenaeus the image of God continues to be present in humanity after the fall while the likeness to God is lost to the Fall.⁴⁹ The likeness of God finds its restoration in the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.⁵⁰ Irenaeus’s differentiation between “image” and “likeness” has been challenged by the biblical study in which the two are clearly seen to be synonymous.

⁴⁷ James G. M. Purves, “The Spirit of God and the Imago Dei: Reviewing the Anthropology of Irenaeus of Lyons.” *The Evangelical Quarterly*. Vol. 68-2 (April – June 1996), 105.

⁴⁸ Irenaeus. *Against Heresies*, 5.16.2, in *Anti-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 544.

⁴⁹ Irenaeus, 532.

⁵⁰ Irenaeus, 533.

Being influenced by the Greek philosophy of his day in which the highest and most distinctive trait of humanity was to be found in reason Irenaeus came to view the image of God primarily in terms of the ability of humanity to think rationally.⁵¹ This also required humanity to retain the freedom to choose which Irenaeus also views as an important aspect of the image of God in humanity.⁵² This emphasis on rational thinking significantly influenced the how theologians thought about what it means for humanity to be created in the image of God.

Thomas Aquinas

Another important theological voice to consider is that of Thomas Aquinas. David Cairns states that “in all the Christian writers up to Thomas we find the image of God conceived as man’s power of reason.”⁵³ This is because Thomas continued to share, as William Dyrness puts it, “the dominant medieval worldview, which was still based on a Neoplatonic framework.”⁵⁴

Aquinas builds upon the framework of Irenaeus as he, “sharpened the Irenaean distinction between image and likeness.”⁵⁵ Aquinas locates the primary aspect of the image of God in humanity squarely in the intellect and capacity to reason. This is what differentiates humanity from the rest of creation. Aquinas explains this by saying “While in all creatures there is some kind of likeness to God, in the rational creature alone we find a likeness of ‘image’ Now the intellect or mind is that whereby the rational

⁵¹ Irenaeus, 544.

⁵² Irenaeus, 544.

⁵³ David Cairns, quoted in, Middleton, J. R. *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005), 110.

⁵⁴ William A. Dyrness, *Visual Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 43.

⁵⁵ Shults, 226.

creature excels other creatures; wherefore this image of God is not found even in the rational creature except in the mind.”⁵⁶ In this instance Aquinas appears to be more influenced by the philosophy of Aristotle and Plato than by the Scriptures. In examining the Scriptures the text does not provide a strong emphasis on the rational nature of humanity as the seat of the image of God. These two Greek philosophers came to view the human intellect as being divine in its own right and highest and most distinct characteristic of what it meant to be human. Aquinas came to share their view.

In Anthony Hoekema’s criticisms of the approach Aquinas took to understanding the image of God in humanity he states that “Thomas’s understanding of the image of God is an abstract, static conception, far removed from the dynamics of biblical language about man.”⁵⁷ In this regard Thomas’ view of the image of God runs the risk of minimizing the idea of a dynamic relationship based on love between God and humanity and between humanity as a whole.

John Calvin

John Calvin, more than the other reformers, writes about the manner in which humanity is created in the image of God. Calvin’s thoughts on the image of God appear to be driven by his understanding that “we cannot have a clear and complete knowledge of God unless it is accompanied by a corresponding knowledge of ourselves.”⁵⁸

Calvin steps away from the tradition of Irenaeus and Aquinas in separating “image” and “likeness” and makes it clear that “those who thus philosophize more subtly

⁵⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. I.93.6, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.FP_Q93_A6.html

⁵⁷ Hoekema, 40.

⁵⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles. Vol. I.15.1 (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), 183.

over these terms appear to be ridiculous.”⁵⁹ In this statement Calvin is reflecting the emerging consensus of biblical scholars. As John Kilner explains, “By the sixteenth century, biblical scholars had generally recognized the exegetical flaw in the seminal approach of Irenaeus.”⁶⁰ There was a new and growing consensus around the synonymous nature of “image” and “likeness” that Calvin embraced.

Calvin takes a major step away from locating the image of God in humanity within the intellect or ability to reason. Calvin makes a strong distinction between body and soul and locates the image of God within the soul stating, “For although God’s glory shines forth in the outer man, yet there is no doubt that the proper seat of his image is in the soul.”⁶¹ Calvin is certain that there is no room for the image of God within the body as he challenges his Lutheran contemporary Andreas Osiander by stating that Osiander’s “writings prove him to have been perversely ingenious in futile inventions, indiscriminately extending God’s image both to the body and to the soul, mingles heaven and earth.”⁶² However while holding this position Calvin also appears to concede that the image of God does to some extent extend to the physical nature of humanity as he notes “although the primary seat of the divine image was in the mind and heart, or in the soul and its powers, yet there was no part of man, not even the body itself, in which some sparks did not glow.”⁶³ Sinclair Ferguson recognizes the importance of this in his discussion on the image of God as it relates to the Anthropomorphite error noting that

⁵⁹ Calvin, I.15.3, 186.

⁶⁰ Kilner, 197.

⁶¹ Calvin, I.15.3, 186.

⁶² Calvin, 188.

⁶³ Calvin, 188.

“creation as a whole gives ‘visibility’ to the invisible God. In this sense, Reformed theologians have argued that even physically man reflects what God is, morally, spiritually, invisibly. Calvin asserts that even in man’s body ‘some sparks’ of God’s image glow.”⁶⁴

While Calvin acknowledges that much of the original image of God in humanity has been lost or depraved as a result of the fall he still declares that all of humanity still bears God’s image. Calvin argues that this should impact how a person would treat others. In discussing what it means to love our neighbor he states,

We are not to consider that men merit of themselves but to look upon the image of God in all men, to which we owe all honor and love. . . . Whatever man you meet who needs your aid, you have no reason to refuse to help him. Say, “He is a stranger”; but the Lord has given him a mark that ought to be familiar to you . . . Say, “He is contemptible and worthless”; but the Lord shows him to be one to whom he has deigned to give the beauty of his image. . . . Say that he does not deserve even your least effort for his sake; but the image of God, which recommends him to you, is worthy of your giving yourself and all your possessions.⁶⁵

Calvin pays careful attention to the biblical narrative in developing a “sober and responsible”⁶⁶ understanding of the image of God in which he names the soul as the center of that image yet allows it to permeate the body and calls us to see that image in all of humanity.

⁶⁴ Sinclair B. Ferguson, Image of God, in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1988), 328.

⁶⁵ Calvin, III.7.6, 696.

⁶⁶ Hoekema, 48.

Karl Barth

Barth adopts a relational understanding of the image of God, drawing heavily on the philosophy of Martin Buber and his concept of I-Thou.⁶⁷ Barth develops his understanding of the image of God around the *analogia relationis*, noting the importance of the statement in Genesis that God created humanity as both male and female.⁶⁸ For Barth this creates the relational confrontation in which the I-Thou relationship maintains itself not only between man and woman but also between man and man, humanity and God and within the trinity itself.⁶⁹

Stuart McLean explains that Barth “sees the I-Thou-ness of our humanity not only as a reflection of the inner Godhead, but also as a reflection of the I-Thou form of real man. Both I-Thou relationships are the *imago Dei* and because they are both images they are signs of one another.”⁷⁰ Just as there is a clear relationship within the Godhead there is, in the creation of humanity, that same element that allows for covenantal fellowship both with God and fellow humans.⁷¹ However, Berkouwer notes that just because the statement on the creation of humanity as male and female follows the statement on their creation in the image God “this does not necessarily mean that the second clause gives a definition of the first; it does not necessarily imply that the image of God lies in the relationship between man and woman.”⁷² This is an important observation that should be

⁶⁷ Shults, 118.

⁶⁸ Kilner, 222.

⁶⁹ Stuart McLean, *Humanity in the Thought of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1981), 37.

⁷⁰ McLean, 37.

⁷¹ McLean, 18.

⁷² Berkouwer, 73.

noted as it challenges Barth's central thought that the image of God is essentially a relational concept.

The Scriptures state that God does indeed seek to live in a covenantal relationship with humanity and that humanity is called to live in relationship within itself. The question is whether this is a constitutive element of what it means for humanity to be created in the image of God. Hoekema states the inadequacy of Barth's position when he notes that the same I-Thou position could be assigned to Satan and the demons. Hoekema also states an important thought that the I-Thou relationship that Barth develops is "an aspect of our likeness to God" but "that likeness must surely show itself in concrete actions and attitudes, and not just in formal similarity of capacity."⁷³

Kilner also presents a significant critique to Barth's approach to the I-Thou relationship as Barth develops it in relation to the male and female distinction. If the I-Thou relationship pertains to the male and female then God's image cannot be fully seen in either the male or the female. Only in the male-female relationship would we find the true image of God.⁷⁴ This in turn has implications for those who would chose a monastic life as they would be separated from those of the opposite gender and this would preclude them from fully embracing the image of God.⁷⁵

Barth's approach to the image of God serves as a contrasting view to the earlier emphasis on the image being contained solely in the rational or spiritual side of humanity.

⁷³ Hoekema, 52.

⁷⁴ Kilner, 223.

⁷⁵ Kilner, 23

John Kilner

While there are many contemporary scholars addressing the question of the image of God in humanity John Kilner represents an important voice in this conversation. Kilner begins his work by discussing the importance of the church making sure it has a correct understanding of the image of God. He cites a number of examples where getting this wrong had devastating consequences. One example he uses is that of racism in the United States as he discusses Charles Carroll's book, *The Negro a Beast or In the Image of God* in which Carroll argues that "if the White was created in the image of God, then the negro was made after some other model."⁷⁶

Having established his case for the importance of a biblical doctrine of the image of God Kilner builds his thesis around the idea of dignity and destiny and connects these with the two concepts of connection and reflection.

Kilner builds his case from the historical record and Bible arguing that the image of God in humanity is not lost or damaged as a result of the fall. He states that "There is ample discussion [on] ... the destructive impact of sin on people. Yet at the same time there is every indication that people remain in 'in God's image' – that no harm has been done to this status or to the image on which it is based."⁷⁷ This provides all people with a sense of dignity and connectedness to God irrespective of any other criteria. This, Kilner explains, has "profound implications for communicating with those who are not Christians. They are still fully in the image of Adam, subject to the sinfulness of the 'old humanity.' As also in God's image, they are connected to God and warrant great respect

⁷⁶ Kilner, 25.

⁷⁷ Kilner, 134.

in any interaction with them.”⁷⁸ This in turn has implications for evangelism which begins with recognition that all people have dignity and are created in the image of God. As a result of this Kilner notes “God has created them to fulfill the divine intention for that image, there is reason to think that at least some of them are capable of understanding and responding to the gospel with the help of the Holy Spirit.”⁷⁹

While all of humanity has dignity based on being created in the image of God Kilner also discusses their destiny and does so in terms of reflection. He explains that only those who are in Christ “are in the process of conforming to the image of God in Christ, to the increasing glory of God.”⁸⁰

Kilner is clear in his thinking on the physical attribute of God’s image when he states that “People are God’s image - they have a connection with God and are intended to be a reflection of God – as embodied beings and not apart from their bodies.”⁸¹ Kilner offers a holistic view of the image of God that maintains human dignity and encourages a relationship with Christ in which the person can be restored to more perfectly reflect God’s image as her destiny.

Conclusion

Several conclusions can be drawn from the work of these five representative theologians. First it is clear that the influence of extra-biblical thought primarily in the

⁷⁸ Kilner, 322.

⁷⁹ Kilner, 323.

⁸⁰ Kilner, 322.

⁸¹ Kilner, 309.

form of philosophical thought has had a profound influence in shaping the theological concept of the image of God.

It can be seen that over time there has been a closing of the gap between seeing “image” and “likeness” as distinct terms and that there is now almost unanimous agreement of the synonymous nature of these two words within the theological community.

Intellect, reason, the soul and relationship are, at some level, all aspects of what it means to be created in the image of God. However no single aspect should be pulled out and made the one thing that defines the image of God in humanity. A degree of care is required as “cultural influences have always made certain views of God’s image more intuitively appealing than other views for a while.”⁸²

Physicality of the Image of God

Is there a physical element to humanity being created in the image of God? As it was noted in the discussion on John Calvin’s approach to the image of God he does appear to allow for the image of God to extend to the body noting “there was no part of man, not even the body itself, in which some sparks did not glow.”⁸³ This idea is supported in the work of Louis Berkhof in his discussion on the biblical basis for the doctrine of the image of God. In relation to the specific question of whether the body is part of the image of God in humanity he states “it would seem that this question should be answered in the affirmative. The Bible says that man, not merely the soul of man, was

⁸² Kilner, 220.

⁸³ Calvin, I.XV.3, 188.

created in the image of God, and man, the ‘living soul,’ is not complete without the body.”⁸⁴

Having looked at Irenaeus’ approach to the image of God and the way he makes it clear that it is in the ability of humanity to think rationally that the image is found it might be surprising to discover that Irenaeus states in *Against Heresies* that among the things the heretics fail to comprehend is that “there are three things out of which ... the complete man is composed – flesh, soul and spirit.”⁸⁵ This being the case it would be the “complete man” who would be created in the image and likeness of God. The best reason for understanding Irenaeus’s denial of this would be from the perspective of the Neoplatonic philosophical basis he employs in his reasoning.⁸⁶ N. T. Wright explains, “The residual Platonism that has infected whole swaths of Christian thinking and has misled people into supposing that Christians are meant to devalue this present world and our present bodies and regard them as shabby or shameful.”⁸⁷ Yet these are the same bodies and the same world that God looked at and declared to be very good in the creation story.

John Piper asserts the physicality of the image of God in humanity stating “the image of God means that man as a whole person, both physically and spiritually, is in some sense like his Maker.”⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Berkhof, 205.

⁸⁵ Irenaeus, 534.

⁸⁶ Hoekema, 34.

⁸⁷ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2008), 18.

⁸⁸ John Piper, “The Image of God: An Approach from Systematic and Biblical Theology”, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-image-of-god> (accessed October 7, 2015).

While theologians from Irenaeus to Barth deny or significantly downplay the physical aspect of humanity being created in God's image it is difficult to deny the physical aspect of *tselem*. As James Barr notes, "I begin from the fact that *tselem*, 'image,' can be used for a physical representation, like a statue of a deity."⁸⁹ Recognizing that the root of this word implies a cutting out or carving there appears to be a clear physical presence to it. This may be further corroborated in looking at the ANE idea of a king setting up an image in an area in which he was not physically present to represent his rule. The image serves the function of representing the presence of the king, in the same way humanity in its physical existence has been given the function to represent God in the world. Even as Walton seeks to attribute the narrative of Genesis 1 to a functional role he still notes, "Of course something must have physical properties before it can be given its function."⁹⁰

Randy Alcorn identifies the physicality of humanity with the image of God when he explains that "nephesh" has a much deeper meaning than "soul" but rather speaks to humanity as beings fully alive in which "the essence of humanity is not just spirit, but spirit joined with body." He goes on to say, "Your body does not merely house the real you – it is as much a part of who you are as your spirit it."⁹¹

Artist Edward Knippers explains the centrality of the human body in his work,

The human body is at the center of my artistic imagination because the body is an essential element in the Christian doctrines of Creation, Incarnation and Resurrection. Unfortunately too many Americans may be orthodox in theology

⁸⁹ James Barr, 15.

⁹⁰ John H. Walton, 25.

⁹¹ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2004), 110.

but emotionally they are Gnostic. As Christians we must rethink the physicality of life – develop a decent theology of the body.⁹²

In his work Knippers powerfully challenges the reader to rethink the centrality of the body in relation to the image of God. That the body is an “essential element” in the creation of humanity in the image of God is seen in the physicality of the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of God in Jesus Christ.⁹³ At the last supper, as Jesus gave us the sacrament of communion, he gave his body and his blood to the disciples as the means of salvation (Matt. 26:28). In examining the resurrection of Jesus Christ it is to be seen as a physical resurrection and not merely a resurrection of the soul or spirit. Christ’s resurrection body was a physical body indeed Jesus offers the disciples an opportunity to touch his body and he eats fish with them indicating the physical body he had after the resurrection. (Luke 24:39-43). A physical resurrection is spoken of by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 and affirmed in the Apostle’s Creed, “I believe in ... the resurrection of the body.”

While humanity is often talked about in terms of its constituent parts, mind, body, soul, the reality is that a person should be seen in the unity of these elements and not in their separation. It is, as Rob Moll points out that “Spirit and flesh ... are intimately intertwined.”⁹⁴ Therefore it should be concluded that, “the *imago Dei* encompasses the embodied human person as a whole.”⁹⁵

⁹² Knippers, 76.

⁹³ Knippers, 79.

⁹⁴ Rob Moll, *What Your Body Knows About God* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2014), 16.

⁹⁵ Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London, England: T&T Clark, 2010), 40.

Image Creation and Idolatry

While the Scriptures record the beautiful statement that humanity has been created in the image of God there is also a clear condemnation of the creation of false images, “You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God” (Exod. 20:4-5).

A cursory reading of the Scriptures will reveal that the prohibition on making images is not a prohibition against the making of all images. Rather it refers to taking images and turning them into idols that become objects of worship. Therefore providing a definition of idolatry will help provide a framework for understanding the appropriate use of portraits.

What is Idolatry?

Walter Kaiser explains that “the OT is replete with synonyms and words (there are fourteen) for idols and images,”⁹⁶ and that the word *pesel* found in Exodus 20:4 and typically translate as “idol” refers directly to the idea of creating a physical statue the accompanying word, *temunah*, which the NRSV translates as “form,” refers “to real or imagined pictorial representations.”⁹⁷ Therefore the making of idols of any form, even within the imagination, is strictly prohibited in the Scriptures. As Brand and Chaplin make clear it was “not the making of images that was forbidden, but the making of *idols* – something that would be worshipped as a symbol of allegiance to anything or anyone

⁹⁶ Walter Kaiser Jr., *The Expositors Bible Commentary*. Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 422.

⁹⁷ Kaiser, 422

other than the One Almighty God.”⁹⁸ Kilner explains that “idolatry is doubly damaging to God’s glory. Not only are counterfeit gods receiving the praise and worship that belong to God, but also those intended to be God’s own images, whom God created for God’s glory, are the very ones undermining that glory and thereby forfeiting their own.”⁹⁹ While it is widely accepted that idolatry refers to worshiping or giving undue reverence to gods other than the one true God the whole question of idolatry is more complex. G. K. Beale discusses the relationship between an idol and the god it represents within the context of both the Old Testament and the ANE. In this context the image or idol is not merely representational of the presence of the god but rather the idol itself contains the presence of the particular god that the idol represents.¹⁰⁰ While the presence of the god is not limited to the idol, the god is thought to be truly present within it.¹⁰¹

Beale provides three reasons why the creation of an image was forbidden for those who worshipped the God of Israel.¹⁰² The first reason is that God never showed Himself to take on any particular form to the people of Israel.¹⁰³ Therefore creating an image to portray God and thereby hold some of God’s presence would be to “misrepresent” God and in doing so they would be committing idolatry. The second reason given by Beale is the ongoing need to maintain a differentiation between the

⁹⁸ Hilary Brand and Adrienne Chaplin, *Art and Soul: Signposts for Christians in the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1999), 79.

⁹⁹ Kilner, 156.

¹⁰⁰ G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2008), 17.

¹⁰¹ Beale, 17.

¹⁰² Beale, 18.

¹⁰³ Beale, 18.

Creator and the creation.¹⁰⁴ There is to be a clear separation between the created order and the Creator as this significantly reduces the possibility of the people slipping into pantheism or panentheism in their approach to worship. It maintains the position of God as the wholly other. Beale quotes Cassuto to show the depth of separation between God and creation which “cannot even remotely accord with the absolute, transcendental character of the God of Israel.”¹⁰⁵ The third reason provided by Beale is that the prohibition of images of God existed in order to maintain a fundamental distinction between the God they worshipped and the gods of the surrounding nations.¹⁰⁶ This third point receives support from Peter Enns as he notes that this commandment against idolatry “set Israel on a collision course with its neighbors: they all had multiple gods, and the worship of gods by means of idols was as common as going to church on Sunday is for us today.”¹⁰⁷

A fourth reason could be listed: God has already established His image in creation and that image is to be found in humanity. Looking for the image of God outside of the creation of humanity then becomes an act of idolatry. While other biblical texts state that nature itself reveals aspects of God it is only in the statements of humanity that we see God being imaged.

¹⁰⁴ Beale, 18.

¹⁰⁵ Beale, 18.

¹⁰⁶ Beale, 19.

¹⁰⁷ Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 58.

Kilner states there are two ways in which an image can usurp the position of God in people's lives. The first is someone other than God can make the image and the second is that the image can direct worship toward something other than God.¹⁰⁸

Idolatry can be summarized here as being the worship of or allegiance to anything or anyone other than the one true God or any attempt to constrain the one true God's presence to a particular aspect of creation, whether real or imagined.

Symbol or Idol?

What is the difference between an object that has symbolic representation as opposed to that object being an idol? Craig Barnes comments that "there is a very thin line between symbols and idols. It takes a poet to know the difference."¹⁰⁹ On occasion symbols can become idols and it should be noted that all symbols maintain the possibility of being transformed into an idol.

One example of this is the bronze snake that Moses made. During the wilderness wanderings, the Israelites often complained about the lack of good food and water and suggested that both God and Moses have brought them there to die. On one occasion, recorded in Numbers 21, the Lord sends poisonous snakes among the people and after many people have been bitten and died they come to Moses and confess their sin. When Moses prays to God he is instructed to create a bronze snake that will be lifted up before the people and if anyone has been bitten and looks upon this snake they shall live. The snake was designed to be a symbol of the healing power of God. Timothy Ashley explains, "In both the command and the fulfillment, healing must be accompanied by an

¹⁰⁸ Kilner, 154.

¹⁰⁹ Craig Barnes, *The Pastor as Minor Poet* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 68.

act of obedience to Yahweh: looking at the image of the snake.”¹¹⁰ It is only in the people being obedient to God that the healing takes place.

Israel, like all people, was prone to fall into idolatry. This symbol of the bronze snake would move across the thin line from symbol to idol. When the bronze snake is next encountered in the Scriptures it is during the reign of Hezekiah and by then the people of Israel had forgotten or lost sight of its symbolic function and “the people of Israel had made offerings to it” (2 Kings 18:4). Rather than a symbol pointing to God it was being venerated as a god in its own right, as Kilner notes, “Even images supposedly connected with God can focus on themselves rather than on God.”¹¹¹

In coming to worship the bronze snake the Israelites illustrate all three of Beale’s reasons for the prohibition of creating an image of God. They were worshiping an object that had form, the snake, when God had never given Himself a form for the people to worship. They were worshiping a created object and thereby blurring the lines between creation and creator and in worshiping this idol they failed to distinguish themselves from the nations around them. Therefore Hezekiah “did what was right in the sight of the Lord” (2 Kings 18:3) and destroyed the idol.

Conclusion/Summary

Scripture is clear that humanity has been created in the image of God. The challenge is to sort through the evidence and figure out what lies behind the statement. In examining the Hebrew words, *tselem* and *demuth* it becomes evident that they are synonymous and that while they are clear in giving us a picture of humanity created in

¹¹⁰ Timothy R. Ashley, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 405-6.

¹¹¹ Kilner, 155.

God's image they do not provide a great deal of theological insight into what that looks like. So the ANE context becomes important in further developing our picture of the *imago Dei*.

The ANE provides a cultural and historical context for understanding the image of God. As kings place statues to represent their presence in areas of their kingdom where they are absent so God has placed humanity on earth as His representative rulers. This was shown to be the case in the examination of the broader biblical context where it was also noted that creativity is an essential element of being human.

In looking at the work of theologians on this topic it quickly became clear that there is little theological consensus and that contemporary philosophical ideas have greatly influenced the thinking of prominent theologians. In particular the philosophical basis of these theologians has often, incorrectly, steered them away from understanding the physicality of creation as being part of the image of God.

In Christ the true image of God is to be found as the second person of the trinity adopts flesh and becomes human. This true image is found in the whole person of Christ. This allows, perhaps even demands, that the image of God in humanity should be seen to encompass the whole person, mind, body and spirit. Image bearers are then to reflect the true image of God as revealed in Jesus.

This then becomes a sort of litmus test for idolatry. Is the symbol, whether a person, a bronze snake or anything else pointing through itself to the one true God. Alternatively, is it distracting and causing people to create false gods, if so it is idolatry. It is also idolatry if the worshipper is trying to constrain God's presence to a particular image.

The world is a physical and visual place in which images matter. How we create, treat, and use those images matters a great deal for there is a fine line between symbol and idol. In the next chapter questions around photography of the image bearer will be addressed.

CHAPTER THREE

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter will address the issue of photography as a means of image creation and the manner in which photography portrays humanity. It will also examine the ways in which that image can be distorted thereby creating an image that runs the risk of becoming idolatrous.

The chapter will be divided into three main sections. The first section will examine the nature of photography looking at literature that informs an understanding of photography as a discipline in its own right and the manner in which photography is perceived to be a representation of reality. The second section will focus directly on the issue of portrait photography with a focus on two main areas of discussion. The first will be to examine the literature that helps to provide an understanding of what a portrait is and the second will be a discussion on why people attach value to portraits. The third section will focus the discussion on literature that addresses ways in which portraits can be distorted and thereby create a false image or idol.

The Nature of Photography

Compared with other forms of art, photography is a relatively new way of recording images. As Richard Howells and Joaquim Negreiros note, “Rock painting in southern Africa can be dated to about 25,000 BC, while the first surviving photograph (painting with light) was made only in about 1827.”¹ Since that first photograph was

¹ Richard Howells and Joaquim Negreiros, *Visual Culture* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012), 184.

made by Joseph Nicephore Niepce in 1827 there have been numerous significant developments in the photographic process that have brought us into the digital age but one constant remains, the need for light and a means to capture that light.

Light and Visual Perception: How an Image is Captured

In the beginning of the biblical narrative the first words spoken by God are “Let there be light” (Gen. 1:3). The creation of light helped bring form to the world as the distinct textures and color became visible and then reflected back into the world the wavelengths of color that the objects rejected. The objects themselves do not put out any light or color rather their color becomes evident only in terms of the light that reflects from them. Victor Finlay explains,

The best way I’ve found of understanding this is to think not so much of something “being” a color but of it “doing” a color. The atoms in a ripe tomato are busy shivering... in such a way that when light falls on them they absorb most the blue and yellow light and they reject the red – meaning paradoxically that the “red” tomato is actually one that contains every wavelength except red.²

This creation of light and the manner in which it reflects off objects eventually allowed humanity to develop a physical and chemical process in which the energy from the reflected photons could be captured in such a way as to preserve the image and photography was born. Krystyna Sanderson quotes John Szarkowski as he explains that “Toward the beginning of the 19th Century it occurred to an undetermined number of curious minds that it might be possible to fix the enchanting, fugitive image on the

² Victoria Finlay, *Color: A Natural History of the Palette* (New York, NY: Random House, 2004), 6.

ground glass of the camera not by drawing it, but by causing the energy of the light itself to make a print on a sensitive ground.”³

This capturing of light sets photography apart from other forms of depicting reality. Susan Sontag writes, “While a painting, even one that meets photographic standards of resemblance, is never more than the stating of an interpretation, a photograph is never less than the registering of an emanation (light waves reflected by objects) – a material vestige of its subject in a way that no painting can be.”⁴ Echoing the thoughts of Sontag, Roland Barthes would write that “the photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here.”⁵

In regard to this capturing of reflected light and transferring it to a photograph Felix Nadar discusses Honore Balzac’s theory that

all physical bodies are made up entirely of layers of ghostlike images, an infinite number of leaflike skins laid one on top of the other. ... he concluded that every time someone had his photograph taken, one of the spectral layers was removed from the body and transferred to the photograph. Repeated exposures entailed the unavoidable loss of subsequent ghostly layers, that is, the very essence of life.⁶

While Balzac’s position does not reflect what is today understood to be a scientific understanding of physiology his position does reflect the way in which “primitive people

³ Krystyna Sanderson, *It Was Good: Making Art to the Glory of God*, ed. Ned Bustard (Baltimore, MD: Square Halo Books, 2006), 216.

⁴ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York, NY: Picador, 2001), 154.

⁵ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1981), 80.

⁶ Felix Nadar, Felix, Gaspard Felix Tournachon and Thomas Repensek. “My Life as a Photographer,” *October*, vol. 5 (Summer, 1978): 9.

fear that the camera will rob them of some part of their being.”⁷ While it is true that the modern digital sensor absorbs the energy from the reflected light emanating from the subject and returns it to the universe with a new set of reflections the precise manner in which a photograph may be said to rob a subject of some part of their being will be further examined in the section on why people value portraits.

Unlike the traditional artist who is cognizant of every aspect of the image she is creating the photographer exercises less control over her art “and this is one of the charms of photography – that the operator himself discovers upon examination, perhaps long afterwards, that he has depicted many things he had no notion of at the time.”⁸

Photography Is Not Neutral

Neil Postman states that “embedded in every tool is an ideological bias, a predisposition to construct the world as one thing rather than another.”⁹ Photography is no exception as there is a language that surrounds photography that is different from other forms of art and it expresses an ideological bias of the art form. This language includes words such as capture and shoot. Sontag explains that these terms indicate, “There is an aggression implicit in every use of the camera.”¹⁰ Indeed Sontag develops her argument further suggesting that “although the camera is an observation station, the act of photographing is more than passive observing. Like sexual voyeurism, it is a way of at least tacitly, often explicitly, encouraging whatever is going on to keep on

⁷ Sontag, 158.

⁸ Robin Kelsey and Blake Stimson. *The Meaning of Photography* (North Adams, MA: Yale University Press, 2008), 23.

⁹ Neil Postman, *Technopoly* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1999), 13.

¹⁰ Sontag, 7.

happening.”¹¹ As Sontag continues, “The camera doesn’t rape, or even possess, though it may presume, intrude, trespass, distort, exploit, and, at the farthest reach of the metaphor, assassinate – all activities that ... can be conducted from a distance, and with some detachment.”¹²

That this is the case should serve as a reminder that photography is not morally neutral in that “photographs cannot create a moral position, but they can reinforce one – and can help build a nascent one.”¹³ Photographic images are neither morally neutral nor theologically neutral. As James Romaine explains in relation to the work of Hans Rookmaker, “there was no theologically neutral content in art. All content, whether dressed in ‘religious’ subject matter or not, was measured in terms of its biblical truthfulness.”¹⁴

An example of this can be seen in a photograph taken by Kevin Carter that won the Pulitzer Prize in 1993. It is an image of a young girl in Sudan trying to crawl toward a feeding station during the famine. There are no other people in the picture, only a single vulture standing a few feet away from this starving child. “Careful not to disturb the bird, he positioned himself for the best possible image. He would later say he waited about 20 minutes, hoping the vulture would spread its wings. It did not, and after he took his photographs, he chased the bird away and watched as the little girl resumed her struggle.”¹⁵ In analyzing this case Laurie Cassidy poses several questions that arose at the

¹¹Sontag, 12.

¹² Sontag, 13.

¹³ Sontag, 17.

¹⁴ James Romaine, *Art as Spiritual Perception* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 36.

¹⁵ Scott MacLeod, "The life and death of Kevin Carter." *Time* 144, no. 11 (September 12, 1994): 70. *Business Source Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed May 14, 2015).

time. These include questions about what Carter did after he took the photograph, whether the photograph should be considered posed, why did Carter not do more to protect and save the girl? “Few photographs of suffering,” writes Cassidy, “so explicitly reveal the multiple layers of interdependence between the suffering subject, the photographer and the viewer as does Kevin Carter’s photo of this Sudanese child.”¹⁶

Cassidy explains that “the insights of visual cultural studies to analyze the image ... demonstrate that images like this are not morally neutral in regard to the person or persons suffering.”¹⁷ This is one of the reasons that World Vision has developed a set of protocols for how they photograph and publish images. Jon Warren, Photo Director at World Vision, explains, “I’ve helped write protocols for the way we photograph and publish images at World Vision. The beginning of the document – the premise the policy is based on – says, “We are advocates for the people we photograph They trust us to depict them truthfully and with respect.”¹⁸ This is not a form of neutral reporting; this is advocacy for the poor.

Photography and Reality

Photography depicts a certain perspective of the world as the photographer adopts a specific perspective of the world and captures it in the particular manner of the photographer’s choosing which, even prior to processing, is dependent on factors such as focal length of the lens and depth of field. Sontag explains that “to photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the

¹⁶ Laurie Cassidy, “Picturing Suffering: The Moral Dilemmas in Gazing a Photographs of Human Anguish,” *Horizons*, vol. 37 no. 2 (September 2010): 209.

¹⁷ Cassidy, 213.

¹⁸ Jon Warren, “One Word, Burundi,” *World Vision Magazine*, (June 9, 2014): <http://worldvisionmagazine.org/node/1036#.VS1EtvnF-Sp> (accessed 4/7/2015).

world that feels like knowledge – and, therefore, like power.”¹⁹ In this section the relationship between photography and reality will be examined.

In her thesis “Photography as Spiritual Technique,” Laura Elizabeth Garza-Meza argues that “although a photograph exists on a piece of paper, the moment that is believed to be contained in the picture has been separated from space-time.”²⁰ This separation of time and space will be an important consideration in the discussion on the way in which a photograph can become an idol. Garza-Meza explains the role of the photographer in capturing the image noting that “although the camera sees all, the photographers must re-examine the value of their own vision for the purpose of reconsidering the moment. . . . photographers must re-examine the expression of the real image and the nature of the symbols.”²¹

Before the advent of photography the visual arts consisted largely of painting, drawing and sculpture in which “the artist is an intermediary between the world and the picture.”²² This approach to the creation of an image allows for a clear separation between the image created and original that it represented. As Kendall Walton explains concerning the medium of paint versus photography, “We do not see Henry VIII when we look at his portrait; we see only a representation of him. There is a sharp break, a difference of kind, between painting and photography.”²³ While James Elkin’s comment

¹⁹ Sontag, 4.

²⁰ Laura Elizabeth Garza-Meza, “Photography as a Spiritual Technique” (EdD, Pepperdine University, 2013), 18.

²¹ Garza-Meza, 18.

²² James Elkins, *What Photography Is* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011). 23.

²³ Kendall L. Walton, “Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 11, No. 2 (December, 1984), 253.

has a degree of validity in differentiating photographic portraiture from the other arts Richard Brilliant challenges this as he explains that “there is great difficulty in thinking about pictures, even portraits by great artists, as art and not thinking about them primarily as something else, the person represented.”²⁴

The photograph usually being thought of as an accurate portrayal of reality has led to what Rosalind Krauss refers to as the “its” response.²⁵ The concept is that people so connect the photograph with the thing it represents that they actually refer to the image as if it is the reality itself, that is, the observer looks at a photograph and says, “*it’s* Abraham Lincoln,” “*it’s* a BMW,” “*it’s* my mother.” When a person has looked at a photograph, as Howells and Negreiros note, it can be said to have “had an authenticity which fine art could never accomplish. Photography, indeed, had a special relationship with reality, which persuaded people that when they looked at a photograph, they were looking at reality itself.”²⁶ Barthes concurs with this thought as he states that “painting can feign reality without having seen it. ... In Photography I can never deny *that the thing has been there.*”²⁷

Andre Bazin addresses the relationship between reality and photography. On the one hand Bazin argues that “the photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it.”²⁸ This is an interesting observation by Bazin as it suggests that it might be possible for the object to exist in some way

²⁴ Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 23.

²⁵ Rosalind Krauss, *Overexposed*, ed. Carol Squiers. (New York, NY: The New Press, 1999), 171.

²⁶ Howells and Negreiros, 190.

²⁷ Barthes, 76.

²⁸ Andre Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967), 14.

outside of the conditions of time and space in which all physical matters exists within. The manner in which this becomes possible is that the photograph, according to Bazin, is like a “fingerprint.” “The photograph as such and the object in itself, share a common being after the fashion of a fingerprint.”²⁹ The fingerprint not being the finger itself but most definitely and identifiably being made by the finger, so a photograph while not being the object itself is still a part of the thing and is clearly identifiable as such.

Barthes’ assumption that a person cannot deny the reality of the object in a photograph or Bazin’s conclusion that a photograph is the “object itself” does not imply that a photograph is simply a mirror of the world. Sontag notes that “photographs are as much an interpretation of the world as paintings and drawings are.”³⁰ Walton develops this argument as he explains the idea that “photography is a supremely realistic medium may be the commonsense view, but ... it is by no means universal. Dissenters note how unlike reality a photograph is and how unlikely we are to confuse the one with the other.”³¹ While it should be noted that not all the literature agrees that a photograph is a “realistic medium,” the conclusion of this researcher is that photography is dependent upon there being a physical source for light to be reflected off as a starting point for the creation of the image. Therefore, a photograph is an image that at some level reflects reality. Specific questions related to the manipulation of photographic images as a means of distorting reality will be addressed in a later section.

²⁹ Bazin, 15.

³⁰ Sontag, 7.

³¹ Kendall L. Walton, 247.

Portraying People in Photographs

This leads to the specific question of portrait photography and the creation of images of people who are themselves created in the image of God. What does it mean to create an image of a person who is already the image of God? As is the case in sculpting and painting when a photograph is taken of a person it is known as a portrait. The first part of this section will focus on a definition of a portrait before examining literature that discusses why people place value photographic portraits.

What is a Portrait?

In this section the research will focus on literature addressing a definition of portraiture. Graham Clarke describes the multiple elements of a photographic portrait stating that it is “the site of a complex series of interactions – aesthetic, cultural, ideological, sociological, and psychological.”³² This helps differentiate a portrait from a snapshot. Jim Goldstein explains the difference between a snapshot and a photograph stating that “a ‘snapshot’ can be taken of anything and of varying quality Usually a ‘snapshot’ is a quick rough capture to document a scene or event. A ‘photograph’ on the other hand is a well thought, composed, exposed and executed art form.”³³

That there are multiple facets to a portrait is supported by Cynthia Freeland in her examination of portraiture where she posits four criteria which she views as being a central part of what is required for an image to be considered a portrait. She states, “Initially, we can say that portraits are images of persons that fulfill one or more of the

³² Graham Clarke, *The Photograph* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 102.

³³ Jim Goldstein, “Philosophy of Photography: Photograph versus a snapshot,” <http://www.jmg-galleries.com/blog/2007/05/01/philosophy-of-photography-photograph-versus-a-snapshot/> (accessed 5/13/2015)

following features. They are likenesses, psychological characterizations, proofs of presence or ‘contact’ and manifestations of a person’s ‘essence’ or ‘air’.”³⁴

When Freeland discusses “likenesses” she is saying that a portrait must be of a “recognizable physical body.”³⁵ This definition, Freeland notes, raises the question as to whom this physical body needs to be recognizable, to which she concludes “recognizability means that a living being can be seen and re-identified ‘by the general human viewer of portraits.’”³⁶ Richard Brilliant also explains the importance of likeness quoting Walker as stating, “A most important requisite of a good portrait is that it shall be a correct likeness of the original.”³⁷ However the challenge with likeness is, as West notes, that, “likeness is not a stable concept.”³⁸ Therefore it can be a challenge to and somewhat subjective as to whether or not the likeness of the subject is correct.

West explains that the quest for likeness in portraiture needs to be “balanced against the limitations of representation which can only offer a partial, abstracted, generic, or idealized view of any sitter.”³⁹ Brilliant adds to this conversation in noting that “the degree of resemblance sufficient to establish a likeness is open to dispute. ... The degree of likeness required of a portrait may vary greatly, affected by changing

³⁴ Cynthia Freeland, *Portraits and Persons* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 49.

³⁵ Freeland, 5.

³⁶ Freeland, 7.

³⁷ Brilliant, 25.

³⁸ Shearer West, *Portraiture* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004), 22.

³⁹ West, 24.

views about what constitutes ‘resemblance’ and whether it can be measured on an objective basis.”⁴⁰

Freeland’s second characteristic of a portrait, “psychological characterizations,” begins to take the question of portraiture beyond the level of a simple image. Freeland explains that this criterion is about the subject of the portrait having some sort of “an inner life i.e. some sort of character and/or psychological or mental states.”⁴¹ This is concept in portraiture that the image should reflect some aspect of the person’s psychological state was an idea that took time to make its way into portraiture becoming “common only after nineteenth-century Romanticism fuelled the idea of a personality cult.”⁴²

While this may be a suitable criterion for a portrait of a living person it should be noted that the origin of portraiture can be found, as Freeland explains, “from a desire to preserve the likeness of the dead. . . . Some of the earliest portraits known to exist are funerary portraits from ancient Roman Egypt, which were probably done with the aid of wax death-masks.”⁴³ In regard to photography Freeland states that in the 1800s and even up to World War Two photographs often “showed bodies that were dead . . . often ghoulishly, riddled with bullets or disfigured by disease.”⁴⁴

In delving into Freeland’s third criterion, “proofs of presence or ‘contact’” the definition of a portrait begins to become a two-way process in its creation. This is the

⁴⁰ Brilliant, 25, 26.

⁴¹ Freeland, 5.

⁴² West, 29.

⁴³ Freeland, 46.

⁴⁴ Freeland, 70.

process by which the subject in the portrait presents an aspect of themselves that will be portrayed in the final piece of artwork. Freeland explains that this third criterion is “the stipulation that both participants are aware of the process.”⁴⁵ West concurs with this in explaining that in defining portraiture it is important “to take account of the unique interrelationship of artists, sitters, patrons and viewers that characterizes this genre.”⁴⁶

Barthes examines this aspect of portraiture in his discussion on posing and the impact that the camera lens has on him: “Once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of ‘posing,’ I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image.”⁴⁷ This is a difficult challenge for Barthes who notes, “I experience it with the anguish of an uncertain filiation: an image – my image – will be generated. ... If only I could ‘come out’ on paper as on a classical canvas, endowed with a noble expression – thoughtful, intelligent, etc.!”⁴⁸

This third criterion posited by Freeland is a critical element in formal portraiture in which the subject understands they are posing for the camera. Photographer Paul Fuqua explains:

A portrait can be a taxing type of photograph to make. That’s not because they present any particularly difficult technical challenges. Rather, the difficulties are almost always to be found in the human side of things. If you’re going to take a good portrait of me, you have to be able to communicate with me. No communication, no portrait. Nice quality “pictures,” yes – portraits, no.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Freeland, 17.

⁴⁶ West, 37.

⁴⁷ Barthes, 10.

⁴⁸ Barthes, 11.

⁴⁹ Paul Fuqua and Steven Biver, *Faces: Photography and the Art of Portraiture*. (China: Elsevier, 2010), 151.

While this may be the case with formal portraits there is a large field of photography in which people are photographed in a much less formal manner including journalistic, street and candid photography in which the direct engagement of people with the camera may be secondary. In these instances the photographer is the one waiting for the moment when the person reveals who they are and takes the shot capturing the presence of the person and making contact with their subject's self without the direct cooperation of the subject.

The fourth element that Freeland discusses, the person's "essence" or "air," is that aspect of a person that allows us to look at a photograph and make the statement that the image really captures the person. Freeland writes of looking through some photographs of her late grandmother and her mother's response to one of the images being, "Isn't this one just really *her*?"⁵⁰

This concept of "air" originates in the work of Barthes where he explains that "the air is that exorbitant thing which induces from body to soul."⁵¹ As he looks at a photograph of his late mother he explains, "All the photographs of my mother which I was looking through were a little like so many masks; at the last, suddenly the mask vanished: there remained a soul, ageless but not timeless, since this air was the person I used to see, consubstantial with her face, each day of her long life."⁵²

Barthes would also attach a moral quality to the air of a person stating, "Perhaps the air is ultimately something moral, mysteriously contributing to the face the reflection

⁵⁰ Freeland, 42.

⁵¹ Barthes, 109.

⁵² Barthes, 109.

of a life value.”⁵³ Freeland picks up on this aspect of a portrait noting how this aspect of portrait is what captures “‘who someone is’ in the sense of describing for us what kind of person they are, rather than simply showing us that they are a queen, mother, horseman.”⁵⁴ In the best portraits a person’s inner qualities and moral values can be seen to be reflected to some level in their face.

In reflecting on the literature discussing portraiture it can be concluded that for a photograph to be considered a portrait it needs to communicate something of the person to the viewer that goes beyond the mere physical likeness of the person being photographed. After examining the literature the researcher believes that capturing the air of the individual in a photograph, that part of the person that others recognize as the person behind the mask, is the key to appreciating a good portrait photograph. This resonates with Kilner’s thoughts on people being created in the image of God where he notes that “people are God’s image - they have a connection with God and are intended to be a reflection of God – as embodied beings and not apart from their bodies.”⁵⁵ Therefore, a portrait should reflect and capture the reflection of the image of God in the individual being photographed.

Why People Value Portraits

In this section the researcher will examine the reasons as to why people place value on a portrait. In examining this question it will also help to shed light on the issues that will be addressed in the final section of this chapter relating to the ways in which

⁵³ Barthes, 110.

⁵⁴ Freeland, 116.

⁵⁵ Kilner, 309.

photography can verge on idolatry.

It has already been noted by Brilliant that people tend to have a challenging time viewing portraits as art because they tend to view a portrait as being “the person represented.”⁵⁶ One of the primary reasons people often place great value on a portrait is to keep the memories alive of a loved one who has died. “The practice of displaying photographs of the deceased beloved ones keeps them in a live stasis.”⁵⁷ This allows for the living to maintain a relationship with those who have passed as it gives the dead “a kind of ongoing life.”⁵⁸

The value in portraits is found in the relationship between the image, the person the image represents and the person viewing and placing the value on the image. As Bazin explains,

The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it. No matter how fuzzy, distorted, or discolored, no matter how lacking in documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it is the model.⁵⁹

Here Bazin articulates the relationship between the photograph and the original subject and goes on to explain “the charm of family albums. Those grey or sepia shadows, phantmlike and almost undecipherable, are no longer traditional family portraits but rather the disturbing presence of lives halted at a set moment in their

⁵⁶ Brilliant, 23.

⁵⁷ Sabine T. Kriebel, *Photography Theory*, ed. James Elkins. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), 34.

⁵⁸ Freeland, 46.

⁵⁹ Andre Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967), 14.

duration, freed from their destiny.”⁶⁰ The photograph locks the image of a person to a specific point in the timeline of their lives.

While Freeland and Elkins suggest that a portrait helps provide a sense of ongoing life for the dead Bazin adopts a different approach. Bazin explains that “photography does not create eternity, ... it embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption.”⁶¹ This idea of time being embalmed in a photograph is a significant reason why people place value on photographic images. The images serve as portals, connections to memories and stories from the past.

One of the most valued images of the researcher is an image of his grandfather on his horse in his military uniform. The image was taken shortly after the outbreak of the First World War. While there is no violence portrayed in the image it is part of a larger story of a war that was supposed to be “the war to end all wars.” It serves as reminder of the story of the war that this one man refused to speak of because of the evil he experienced in the trenches. Photographs have value to the viewer because they are viewed and read “as the active play of a visual language.”⁶²

Another reason people tend to value portraits is demonstrated in the thesis work of Preston Pouteaux. In his thesis, Pouteaux seeks to connect the *imago Dei* with the *mission Dei* and he does so by creating an art exhibit in which members of his congregation are invited to view portraits of themselves with each portrait being accompanied by a written reflection. The final portrait in the series was a mirror that the participants were invited to stand in front of and reflect on their own reflection and

⁶⁰ Bazin, 14.

⁶¹ Bazin, 14.

⁶² Graham Clarke, *The Photograph* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 29.

connection to the mission of God in the world. As Pouteaux notes this project “was designed with the particular purposes of revealing to my community that which was intrinsically true about them (that they are made in the image of God and loved) and to expand their vision for what God’s call may be.”⁶³ Of particular interest is that in Pouteaux’s work he found that “many of those who discovered they were made in the image of God were excited by this discovery [and] dwelt upon it.”⁶⁴ Pouteaux’s work may suggest that when looking at a portrait there may be recognition that a person is observing something sacred, a person created in the image of God.

There is no question that people value photographic portraits of those they know and love. Whether a formal portrait or a snapshot as long as the image creates a sense of connection with the person in the image then it becomes a valued image.

When Image Creation of Image Bearers Verges on Idolatry

In the previous chapter idolatry was summarized as being the worship of or allegiance to anything or anyone other than the one true God or any attempt to constrain the one true God’s presence to a particular aspect of creation, whether real or imagined. This section will examine ways in which photographs of people, image bearers, may become idols in their own right, usurping the position that was intended solely for God.

The creation of photographic portraits has become a staple part of the modern world and, as has been noted, portraits are often highly valued as a means to connect with the past and keep the past alive in the present. However what may have been intended for

⁶³ Preston Pouteaux, “From *Imago Dei* to *Missio Dei*.” (D.Min. Thesis Project, Tyndale Seminary, 2012), 126.

⁶⁴ Pouteaux, 126.

good may, like the bronze snake that Moses created in the wilderness, eventually become an idol.

The biblical narrative reveals that God established the creative arts. Strong evidence of this is found in the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness and being instructed by God through Moses that they are to construct a tabernacle for the worship of God. At that time God appeared to Moses and said, “See, I have called by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: and I have filled him with divine spirit, with ability, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, in every kind of craft” (Exod. 31:2-5).

The ability to work with materials and create images is a God-given gift and therefore something that should be celebrated. Indeed part of the calling of Bezalel and the other artisans involved in the construction of the tabernacle was to create images of things unseen such as the cherubim that would spread out their wings over the mercy seat. These artisans were not tied to simply creating faithful reproductions of images that directly reflected the creation as perceived through the human senses. In giving the instructions for the making of the priestly robes God instructs them to make pomegranates of blue, purple and crimson, colors that are not natural to pomegranates and thereby show some artistic license in creating the robes. The tabernacle is full of imagery and yet it was not considered to be idolatry. Indeed its very creation was orchestrated, commanded and planned by God.

Gene Veith cautions “Art can express falsehood as well as truth.”⁶⁵ As Veith develops his discussion focusing on the question of idolatry he notes, “It may be easier for artists to resist idolatry than for their audiences. . . . Artists generally know their work too well to make false claims for it.”⁶⁶ This places a greater onus on the Christian artist to be aware of how others are interpreting their work and to be willing to address any “false claims” that are being made of it.

Digital Enhancement and Retouching

One of the pitfalls of digital photography is the ease with which images can be manipulated with editing software like Adobe Photoshop. This allows for the manipulation of images of people in such a way that the final image fails to reflect reality in any way at all. It can also be used to create images that can be used to promote an unattainable goal regarding a perceived ideal of beauty.

This can be seen in the 2004 Dove advertising campaign known as “Real Beauty.”⁶⁷ The campaign had a noble goal of trying to help correct the body-image problem created by the advertising industry by using women of a variety of sizes to reveal “real beauty.” Lauren Collins in an interview with one of photography’s top retouchers, Pascal Dangin, discussed the Dove campaign that he had been part of the team for. When asked about it he commented “Do you know how much retouching was on that?” and then added, “But it was great to do, a challenge, to keep everyone’s skin

⁶⁵ Gene Edward Veith Jr., *State of the Arts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 25.

⁶⁶ Veith, 142.

⁶⁷ “The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty,” <http://www.dove.us/Social-Mission/campaign-for-real-beauty.aspx> (accessed 3/23/2015).

and faces showing the mileage but not looking unattractive.”⁶⁸ Even the people who were supposed to appear natural had been retouched in such a way as to make them appear more beautiful. This was done with a view to create a desire within the viewers to want what they appeared to have which was in reality, an unattainable beauty, achieved only through digital manipulation.

In the Dangin interview, Collins also notes that there are many celebrities who keep him on retainer to retouch any images before they go to print out of fear that they may look bad. Shane Hipps notes that our culture demands that “the most ‘beautiful’ individuals in the world must be thoroughly transformed before being shown to the public.”⁶⁹

Hipps argues that the result of creating an idealized and unrealistic image is that it “draws our attention away from the inner life and toward the appearance of things, and this has serious implications for the soul.”⁷⁰ While this may be true to a degree, all photographs are, to some extent, a manipulation of reality. Therefore, it should be argued that careful discernment is required to make sure that the *imago dei* is not lost in image retouching or presentation.

The manipulation of images is, in and of itself, not a problem. Sculptors, painters and photographers have always used light and perspective to create their images. The definition of likeness is not a constant and a photograph is not reality. One of the challenges this presents for photographing people is that, as Sontag states, “a fake

⁶⁸ Lauren Collins, “Pixel Perfect.” *The New Yorker*, (May 12, 2008), <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/05/12/pixel-perfect>, (accessed 3/23/2015).

⁶⁹ Shane Hipps, *Flickering Pixels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 98.

⁷⁰ Hipps, 98.

photograph (one which has been retouched or tampered with, or whose caption is false) falsifies reality.”⁷¹

Walton explains the way a photograph distorts reality as he explains that a photographic image “of a running horse will portray it either as a blur, which it is not, or as a frozen, which it also is not ... and of course there is the possibility of retouching in the darkroom. It remains to be seen in what sense photographs can be inaccurate. Yet misleading they certainly can be.”⁷² There is a huge gulf between an image that is inaccurate and one that is deliberately misleading.

A portrait image that is clearly misleading as a result of its retouching process is probably reflecting a cultural ideal of external beauty rather than demonstrating a connection and reflection of the image of God in the person. The idealized image of beauty that is used to promote a desire within people to strive after it becomes an idol when it distorts the image of God in person and rather than people reflecting God the image of that person is now utilized to draw attention to itself or to drive attention and desire to a particular product.

The Sexualized or Sensual Photograph

Several genres of photography involve taking sensual or sexual images of a person. These genres include nude, boudoir, pornography and some aspects of glamour photography. Each of these styles to a greater or lesser degree runs the risk of degrading the image of God in a person and becoming a form of idolatry.

⁷¹ Sontag, 86.

⁷² Kendall L. Walton, 258.

Freeland explains the unique purpose of the nude in art, stating that it is “usually distinguished from the portrait by saying that a portrait depicts a specific individual, whereas a nude depicts a model who illustrates a generic human being.”⁷³ This allows Christian artists like Edward Knippers to utilize the naked human form in their artwork. Knippers explains the struggle many Christians have with his work: “In the minds of many Christians nudity equals pornography. For a right understanding, though, a distinction of categories must be made. Nude is not necessarily dirty any more than clothed is necessarily clean.”⁷⁴

Howells and Negreiros offer a perspective that challenges the use of nudes in art and acts as a counter to Knipper’s comment. In discussing Gustav Courbet’s painting, *The Origin of the World*, an image of a naked woman lying on her back, legs apart and revealing her pubic area for all to see, Howells and Negreiros ask “if much of what we have come to think of as art is in fact pornography.”⁷⁵

Veith makes an important assertion about the difference between reality and representation in art that has implications for photography. In discussing the image of cherubim that Ezekiel sees in his vision he states, “Representational art does not necessarily mean ‘photographic realism.’ ... To paint the cherubim as described by Ezekiel in hard-edged visual detail in a style of naturalistic realism would be aesthetically ludicrous and theologically misleading. The cherubim would seem more like science

⁷³ Freeland, 224.

⁷⁴ Edward Knippers, *It Was Good: Making Art to the Glory of God*, ed. Ned Bustard, (Baltimore, MD: Square Halo Books, 2006), 77.

⁷⁵ Howells and Negreiros, 100.

fiction monsters rather than spiritual entities.”⁷⁶ Photography, being a realistic medium, has its limitations and one of those limitations is its inability to depict a generic human being. The light being captured by a camera is always that of a specific individual who bears God’s image.

Inappropriate sexual activity is a well-covered topic in the Scriptures and in discussing the idolatry of Israel and Judah the metaphor of adultery is used:

I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries. Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear; she also went out and committed adultery. Because Israel’s immorality mattered so little to her, she defiled the land and committed adultery with stone and wood (Jer. 3:8-9).

Jesus warned the people of the dangers of adultery and gave a very clear statement that inappropriately looking at a woman with any degree of lust was an act of adultery (Matt. 5:27-28).

This poses a challenge for photography, as this is one way in which photography is not like a painting. A photograph always depicts a specific human being rather than a generic image and therefore any photographs revealing a person’s body reveal a particular example of that body part belonging to a specific individual. If that photographic image in any way elicits an erotic, sensual or lustful response then as an object it is leading a person away from God’s intention for their life and becoming an idol for them. While art such as the poetry of Song of Songs or the paintings of Edward Knippers may utilize nude and erotic imagery, it focuses the attention of the reader or viewer on a generic human rather than a specific image bearer. With photography it is

⁷⁶ Veith, 122.

unavoidable that the focus of that erotic imagery is a particular person, an image bearer of God.

Lutz and Collins discuss the role of nudity in relation to the images found in National Geographic: “Like the nude and its role in Western high art painting, nudity in *Geographic* photographs has had a potential sexual, even pornographic, interpretation.”⁷⁷ They go on to explain that, “The *Geographic* nude is first and foremost, in readers’ attention, a set of breasts. This follows the culture at large, where the breast is made a fetish of, obsessed on.”⁷⁸ While recognizing the potential in other art forms for nudity to become sexualized Lutz and Collins focus specifically on photographs and the manner in which they are perceived by the viewer. This highlights the tension between the artist’s intent and the viewer’s perception. While the artist may be driven by pure motives the viewer may well turn that work of it into something it was never intended to be, an idol. This observation was made in the previous chapter in relation to Moses and the creation of the bronze snake that something intended for God’s purpose can be turned into an idol. To put the work of Lutz and Collins into a theological framework, it could be said that the breast is made into an idol.

Suffering and Violence

Sin is a reality in the world and as a result of sin we find violence and suffering being part of the world today. This means that there will be times when photographic images will capture images the suffering and violence in the world. It has already been noted that photography is not a neutral discipline but rather communicates a particular

⁷⁷ Catherine A. Lutz, and Jane L. Collins, *Reading National Geographic* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 175.

⁷⁸ Lutz and Collins, 175.

bias. This raises the question of how the suffering and violence of people are portrayed in a photograph and the manner in which this leans towards idolatry.

One of the challenges of photographs that depict suffering and violence is that “gazing upon photographs of suffering can reinscribe the very power relations the photo proposes to contest.”⁷⁹ While this concern of Cassidy’s is valid it should also be noted that “there are serious, powerful ways for photography to serve as antidote to violence and as a partner to those seeking to advocate on behalf of the poor.”⁸⁰

In a discussion of the film, *Born into Brothels*, O’Keefe the argues that “the film is a work of art and beautiful to watch, but it is also a work that depicts suffering beautifully.”⁸¹ As he develops his argument O’Keefe notes that the concepts of joy and suffering or the beauty of an image and the ugliness of reality are not incompatible. He uses the image of Christ’s death on the cross to illustrate this point, noting that it is ugly and violent and yet there is also beauty and joy to be found in it. As a result a photograph “can force us to ponder a very strange idea that beauty can actually co-exist with suffering.”⁸²

In looking at images that portray people in contexts of violence and suffering it must be asked whether the image points us toward God or away from God. As noted in the previous chapter, “the image can direct worship toward something other than God.”⁸³

⁷⁹ Laurie Cassidy, “Picturing Suffering: The Moral Dilemmas in Gazing a Photographs of Human Anguish,” *Horizons*, vol. 37 no. 2 (September 2010). 219.

⁸⁰ John J. O’Keefe, “God Through the Camera Frame,” *Journal of Religion and Society*, Supplement 8 (2012), 162.

⁸¹ O’Keefe, 163.

⁸² O’Keefe, 165.

⁸³ Kilner, 154.

If this is the case then an image of violence and suffering, if it fails to point us toward God, should be considered idolatry. O’Keefe explains that “if we are convinced that suffering is always an example of the callous indifference of the universe to the plight of its inhabitants, then a photograph of suffering could be said to be perverse by depicting such a harsh reality as lovely.”⁸⁴

As Kilner reminds us, “Sin, then, damages people rather than God’s image, and the restoration that takes place in Christ involves people rather than God’s image. ... As has always been the case regarding and being in God’s image, connection and reflection are central.”⁸⁵ The centrality of humanity’s connection to God, and the reality that God’s image remains intact, allows O’Keefe to think “about a beautiful photograph, even of a difficult subject, as a sacrament or an icon of the holiness of the material world. Said another way, photography can help us to see beyond the veil of ordinary experience to a deeper, more sacred level of reality.”⁸⁶

Self-Portrait

Perhaps the most pervasive form of photography today is the self-portrait or as it has become known in popular parlance, the “selfie.” The self-portrait was uncommon in the art world until the beginning of the sixteenth century after which it became significantly more common for artists to paint, sculpt and now photograph images of themselves.

Shearer West suggests there are several possible reasons for this. One important reason West provides is the significant philosophical and social shift that occurred at that

⁸⁴ O’Keefe, 164.

⁸⁵ Kilner, 287.

⁸⁶ O’Keefe, 164.

time in which “there was an increasing self-consciousness about identity, and a corresponding growth in the production of autobiography and other forms of self-narrative.”⁸⁷ This growing sense of self is picked up by Sontag who in discussing the work of Dorothea Lange and Minor White explains that “for Lange every portrait of another person is a ‘self-portrait’ of the photographer, as for Minor White – promoting ‘self discovery through a camera’ – landscape photographs are really ‘inner landscapes.’”⁸⁸

Another reason West provides for the development of self-portraiture is the new level of status that was being afforded to artists. West explains that at this time in history art was starting to be thought of in a different way. It was no longer seen as a simple mechanical process as there was now an emphasis being placed on the intellectual aspect of art and art theory. The artist now held a more important place in society which, as West explains, “At a time when conceptions of the artist’s role was changing, the self-portrait proved one means for an artist to reinforce and enhance this new idea of his or her worth.”⁸⁹ This idea that a self-portrait is used to reinforce the importance or worth of a person in her own eyes could lead to idolatry if the person begins to think of herself as being of greatest worth and thereby supplants the place of God.

In response to the question as to why people make self-portraits Steve Biver states, “I’ve no idea. But perhaps the following reason offered by Andy Warhol ... is as good as any: ‘I paint pictures of myself to remind myself that I’m still around.’”⁹⁰ This

⁸⁷ West, 164.

⁸⁸ Sontag, 122.

⁸⁹ West, 164.

⁹⁰ Fuqua and Biver, 113.

observation of the self-portrait as a reminder that one is still around may speak to the pervasiveness of the “selfie” where people are constantly flooding social media with images of themselves. Actor James Franco states, “A well-stocked collection of selfies seems to get attention. And attention seems to be the name of the game when it comes to social networking.”⁹¹ Perhaps this is another way for people to express that they are still around and to have their lives validated by others.

Summary

While aspects of photographing people may present the possibility of idolatry there is nothing that makes those images in and of themselves idolatrous. Much like the bronze snake that Moses was instructed to make for the good of the people photographs can serve a positive purpose. However much like the bronze snake became an idol the people worshiped, so photographs can also become idols and objects of worship.

⁹¹James Franco, “The Meaning of Selfies.” *New York Times*, (December 29, 2013), http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/29/arts/the-meanings-of-the-selfie.html?ref=technology&_r=4& (accessed April 10, 2015)

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

After reviewing the literature on both quantitative and qualitative research the researcher settled on a qualitative approach to the field research component of this project. In examining the relationship between the image of God in humanity and photography the researcher felt that the adoption of a qualitative methodology would yield the most satisfactory outcome. One main reason for the choice of this research methodology was due to the complex nature of the relationship between the various components involved in the research. As Paul Leedy and Jean Ormrod note, “Qualitative researchers rarely try to simplify what they observe. Indeed they recognize that the issue they are studying has many dimensions and layers, and so they try to portray the issue in its multifaceted form.”¹

Recognizing that there may not be a “single, ultimate Truth to be discovered”² the researcher selected a qualitative method with a view to the possibility of revealing multiple perspectives on the relationship between portrait photography and the theological concept that humanity has been created in the image of God.

The particular method of qualitative research for this study was the interview. The reason interviewing was selected was, as Irving Seidman explains, “not to test

¹ Paul D Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2010), 135.

² Leedy and Ormrod, 135.

hypotheses, and not to ‘evaluate.’ ... The root of in depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience.”³ Rather than forming and testing an hypothesis the research will allow the data to shape the question as an ongoing variable. The data collection and the analysis of that data form a simultaneous process allowing the researcher to gain understanding rather than test a theory.

With this in mind the dominant form for this research was phenomenological in its approach although elements of grounded theory were also employed in the interpretation of the data.

Professing Christians, Professional Photographers?

The phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to engage and explore the subject’s understanding and experience of what it means to be created in the image of God and the manner in which their understanding and experience of this impacts their work as professional photographers. As such there is not a specific question to be examined and tested in this work. Rather the research is designed to understand how and if Christian photographers integrate their life in Christ into their vocational calling with a particular view to understanding how and if the concept of humanity’s creation in the image of God impacts their work. Limiting the interviewees to professing Christian photographers allowed the researcher to narrow the focus the field research component.

A major reason for limiting the interviews to working photographers was that the theoretical position on the doctrine of the image of God had been examined through both the theological chapter and the literature review where the theoretical, theological and

³ Irving Seidman, *Interviewing As Qualitative Research* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2013), 9.

philosophical questions had already been addressed. The field research was designed to examine how these concepts came together in the lives of the people who most closely represent them.

One of the challenges of focusing on such a narrow group was realizing that one possible outcome of the interview process could be that the photographers being interviewed would make little or no connection between their vocational work as photographers and the theological concept of humanity being created in the image of God. While recognizing that this could be perceived as a possible drawback the researcher believes that even if this had proved to be the case this would not have invalidated the project but rather would have raised some interesting and important questions around the manner in which people live out their faith through their sense of vocational calling.

Data Collection

The needed Data

In order for this study to be completed certain data needed to be obtained. Having already conducted a theological and literary study of the topic the next phase was to come to an understanding of how the relationship between humanity's creation in the image of God and the creation of images of humanity through photography was comprehended by other people working professionally in the field of photography.

There were several areas of data the researcher sought to collect from the interviewees. The desired data included the perspective of the interviewees on what it meant for them to be disciples of Jesus Christ called by Him to work out their faith within a vocational calling to be a photographer. The information that needed to be acquired for

this included an understanding of the faith of the photographer and the way in which the faith of the photographer impacts the type of photographs they shoot. Of particular interest in this study was to develop an understanding of the way these photographers have, or have not, been influenced in their work based on the idea that humanity is created in the image of God. This would include collecting information on how the photographers would establish boundaries to the type of work they would accept and the type of photographs they would be willing to shoot because of their comprehension and appreciation of the dignity of humanity.

The desired data provided an understanding of the background that the interviewee had on the topic as well as the manner in which their knowledge of the subject matter influenced their behavior, opinions and feelings about the subject matter.

The location of the data

The data that needed to be obtained for this phase of the project is located in the thoughts, learning and life experiences of the photographers selected to be interviewed as part of this project. The interviewees for this study were selected by the researcher to provide the potential for a broad range of perspectives on the topic being examined. They included portrait photographers, sports photographers and the director of media for an international development agency. In order to provide as broad a perspective as possible the photographers selected for interviews also represented more than one ethnic and national background.

In order to protect the identities and confidentiality of the photographers a pseudonym has been assigned to each of them. The pseudonyms employed utilize a simple alphabetic code in which the first female interviewed is assigned a name

beginning with “A” and following on from that. The same method has been used to name the male interviewees in the order in which they were interviewed.

How the Data was Obtained

The data for this project was obtained through a series of interviews conducted with eight photographers. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner in that there were some predefined, open-ended questions the researcher wanted to ask as an initial starting point. After this the researcher moved to an unstructured form of questioning that was based on the responses the interviewees provided to the initial questions.

An interview guide was developed in order to make sure that each interview covered the same general areas of information. The guide that was implemented was designed to address the material covered in chapter two and three of this project.

First, the interview guide ensured that adequate biographical background information was gathered on each interviewee. Second, the guide addressed questions concerning the interviewee’s perception and understanding of the nature of photography. Finally and, the researcher believes, most importantly, the interview guide ensured that questions were asked that explored the interviewees’ understanding and perception of the influence their faith and humanity’s creation in the image of God has on their work. Utilizing this method helped to keep a clear focus while allowing for a greater degree of freedom and flexibility than would have been afforded if the researcher had used a fixed set of questions.

The Interviews

Eight interviews were carried out over the course of three weeks for the purpose of this research paper. The interviews included people from three different countries, the United States, Ireland and Northern Ireland. Seven of the people interviewed were Caucasian, one was Hispanic. Six of the interviewees were male and two female. Two of the interviewees work full-time for Christian non-profit organizations and a third does some contractual work for non-profits. The range of professional photography experience was one year to almost thirty years.

How the Data was Interpreted

The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Following the transcription process the researcher began the process of interpreting the information.

Having listened to the recorded interviews and read the transcripts the researcher sought to develop a picture of how professional photographers, who profess to be Christian, understand their work of photographing people, created in God's image, through their own eyes. It was important for the researcher to allow the transcripts to speak for themselves and not approach the analysis with a view to proving an already decided upon question or hypothesis.

The transcripts from the interviews were processed to identify the key themes and thoughts that each photograph sought to communicate. On the first read-through the researcher highlighted key words and phrases from each interview. The purpose of this was to gain a sense of those areas the interviewee felt were important. The next phase was for the researcher to take those words and phrases and organize them into a set categories based on their major themes. At this stage of the research project it was

important for the researcher not to superimpose his own bias on the process but rather to allow each interview to stand on its own.

Having processed all the transcripts the researcher began to examine those themes and concepts that stood out in the first phase and organize them into broader categories. It was important that the categories were based on the particular phenomenon the interviewee was talking about rather than on areas of shared agreement. This led the researcher to group the data into four categories that were communicated in the interviews: humanity, reality, relationship and morality.

Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin note, “When the researcher is convinced that his analytic framework forms a systematic substantive theory, that is a reasonably accurate statement of the matters studied, and that it is couched in a form that others going into the same field could use — then he can publish his results with confidence.”⁴

Acknowledgement of Personal Bias

Seidman notes that one of the challenges researchers face in process of gathering and then analyzing the data collected is that as result of their reading and preparation for the study they may potentially anticipate certain outcomes and results.⁵ At the same time he acknowledges that a clean line between data collection and analysis is not possible to maintain.

⁴ Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research* (Newbury Park: Sage, 2008), 113.

⁵ Seidman, 116.

Leedy and Ormrod note the importance of acknowledging personal bias in research.⁶ While working to minimize personal bias it is still an aspect of the research that is unavoidable.

In this project the researcher had already been active in both theology and photography for many years. As a result the researcher came to this work with some preconceived ideas as to where this research may lead. It was incumbent upon the researcher to come to this topic with as open a mind as possible and allow the fresh theological study and review of the literature to inform and shape his thoughts while limiting the bias.

While it is clearly impossible for the researcher to completely eliminate personal bias from the interviews he was careful to develop primary, open-ended questions that were worded in as neutral and non-leading a manner as possible. The researcher also sought to maintain a distance from the subject matter during the interviews by posing broad questions that allowed for the interviewee to answer without being guided to a specific area.

⁶ Leedy and Ormrod, 216.

CHAPTER FIVE
ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Meet the Photographers

Anne

Anne shared that her faith was formed in the Presbyterian tradition. She grew up in the Bible Belt and for many years she described her faith as being “more of a practice than it was personal.” In college she developed a personal relationship with God in Jesus but continued to eschew involvement in the local church. After several years she found her way back into the church as she came to appreciate how “community is so important to develop and grow and be held accountable and be supportive.”

Anne is currently living with her family on the East Coast just outside of Washington D. C. It was through the military career of her husband that she found her way into professional photography. With a graduate degree in psychology she was seeking ways to connect, serve and help others and found photography was a way to accomplish this. She began her career in photography taking photographs for friends and shooting military homecoming ceremonies. She transitioned into shooting professionally in 2014 and is currently working to build her business.

Beth

Beth graduated from a Christian college in the upper-Midwest with a focus on the fine arts. Her faith in Christ has been important to her for as long as she can remember. She began her photography career as a model for a studio and after shoots she would try

to replicate the work she saw. Before long Beth became an assistant wedding photographer. After college her friends began to ask her to shoot their weddings and in 1999 began working as a professional photographer. Today she focuses her work primarily on family portraits and weddings.

Beth views her work in wedding photography as an important aspect of her faith. In working weddings she seeks to enhance the overall sense of worship in her work. When it comes to how her faith impact weddings she notes, “I am way more involved in the celebration. I even help facilitate that celebration.”

Andrew

Andrew was raised in a home in which his mother was a committed Christian but his father was not. He says, “The role modeling of faith was done by my mum primarily and other role models came occasionally, teachers and people like that.” It was when Andrew turned sixteen that he had a sense that God wanted him to take his faith seriously.

After completing high school Andrew moved from Northern Ireland to Oakland, California, for a year where he worked in an inner city school. Upon his return to Northern Ireland he began a degree program in youth work after which he took a job working in youth ministry in a local church. At the same time he was pursuing his passion for photography and had made several trips overseas with an international Christian development organization working to help relieve poverty around the world. He thought he “should stay in youth work because it would keep [him] grounded and allow [him] to do the work [he] wanted.” What he discovered was that people started asking him to do wedding photography for them. He explains, “I built my business around

wedding photography. That still enables me to go and do other kinds of photography whenever the situation arises.”

The one thing that drives him is “seeing and documenting people’s stories around the world.” One of his assignments in 2015 was to work with the Syrian refugees.

Benito

Benito works as professional photographer in a border town in the southeast region of the United States. Benito’s faith journey saw him fall away from the church after high school. He explains how after high school, “I discovered partying and partied away ten years of my life.” It was when he turned thirty that he made the decision that he needed to go back to church and found a relationship with God in Christ.

Benito found his way into professional photography after seeing his cousin using her camera and thought this would be something he would like to try. From there he began to take pictures of local races. He was then asked by a co-worker to take pictures of her daughter’s volleyball game. This led to invitations to shoot senior pictures, quinceanera celebrations and weddings.

The majority of Benito’s professional work is with the Hispanic community. He has been shooting for professionally for six years.

Colin

Colin is the media manager for a large, international, Christian, non-profit organization with a commitment to see children lifted out of a life of poverty. Colin’s work takes him around the world as he seeks to document through the camera lens the work of the organization. Colin also has responsibilities for the work of the other photographers working for the organization.

His faith plays a central role in his work. He notes, “As long as we have a walk with Christ on our own and share with our families, our church friends, and others, we can stay balanced.” Prayer plays a central part in his life and work: “We pray a lot and expect all the staff to participate.”

Colin holds an undergraduate degree in cinematography as well as a graduate degree in homeland security and disaster recovery management. He found his start in professional photography through travelling internationally to shoot disasters.

David

David found his way into professional photography through a friend whom he describes as “a really good mentor and encourager.” As he began to take photographs he found more and more people asking him to shoot pictures for them and this led to paid work as a professional photographer. David is located in California and has been shooting photographs for many years but started to make an income from photography about four years ago.

Alongside his photography business, David works in schools where he is able to take his work as a photographer to help communicate, primarily through social media, the stories of the children in the schools.

David attends an independent evangelical community church where he leads a team of runners that train together and race to raise funds for clean water projects in Africa. He has been shooting professionally for four years.

Eric

Eric describes his faith background as being a “slightly wonky version of Christianity.” He grew up in Dublin, Ireland and attended a Brethren church that he

describes as being “strict and legalistic.” He describes his faith commitment to Christ as that of a person “who absolutely believes it to be true but constantly questions [his] own salvation.” He sees his faith as providing him the freedom to let go and embrace the moment as it allows him to recognize that everything in this world is temporary and fleeting in respect to the eternal.

Having appeared in front of the camera as a child Eric found his way behind the camera at the age of seventeen when a commercial photographer in Dublin invited him to come and work for him. Eric has been running his own photography business for the last twenty years. He has two sides to his business, commercial photography and the other is documentary and wedding photography. As Eric explains, “I’ve shot fashion, portraits, live music, and weddings and enjoy it all.” Eric’s portfolio includes work for some of the world’s largest fashion shows and most popular bands.

Frank

Frank works for a large, international, Christian, NGO that is committed to its work to end poverty in our world. He has worked as their director of photography for eleven years. Prior to this he worked for them as a freelance photographer for seven years and has accumulated over thirty years of experience in professional photography.

Frank received his start in photography in college when he joined the college paper and became the photo editor. He explains how “the camera gave me a tool for sharing what I saw and felt in a way that nothing else did.” Frank shared, “All along my main motivation was, and remains, to share what I think is God’s perspective on the poor, that they are wonderful creations of God and worthy of our love and admiration.”

Frank succinctly describes his faith in Christ: “Jesus is the Son of God and my Savior. I am here on earth to serve him.”

What the Photographers Said

After conducting and analyzing the interviews the researcher discerned four major categories that stood out in each of the interviews and were pertinent to this research paper. These four categories address issues and questions around humanity, reality, relationship and morality in photography.

These categories are illustrative of the way the photographers view their roles and responsibilities as image creators. As they engage in the process of creating a portrait of a person who already bears God’s image the photographers demonstrated an awareness of their role in maintaining and respecting the image of God in their subject.

The first category, humanity, is the one that most directly addresses the reality of people being created in the image of God. It speaks to the photographers’ sense of the dignity of all people. There is an appreciation of the beauty of all people in this category. Goodness, as a communicable attribute of God, informs the work of the photographers in this category.

The other three categories also pick up on aspects of the communicable attributes of God that we find in people as image bearers. The category of reality looks draws on the attribute of truthfulness as the photographers seek to capture the “real” person. The category of relationship draws upon the attribute of love. Finally, morality finds its base in the attribute of holiness.

Humanity

The first of these categories is humanity. This category speaks to the photographer's perspective on what it means for people to be created in the image of God. In each of the interviews the interviewees were asked if there were any particular biblical or theological concepts that impacted their work. Each photographer had his/her own perspective on this concept. The photographers who worked for the non-profit organizations provided the most articulate of the responses.

When the researcher asked Frank about the theological influences on work he commented, "I try to have my photography reflect what I believe is God's view of humanity." Later in the interview he would further articulate what he meant by this explaining, "The belief that humanity, all humanity, including the poor and insignificant are created in the image of God is the very essence of my motivation!" This passion for humanity being created in the image of God was also shared by Colin when, in talking about the organization he works for, he stated, "Being made in the image of God is huge for us."

Andrew reflected on how his background in youth ministry influences his work as a photographer, explaining how his objective in youth ministry "was to remind people that they were created in the image of God and that sometimes the image of themselves was a really poor image. My job was to be a facilitator of hope. I suppose I transferred that to photography."

While these three photographers directly mentioned the concept of the image of God in humanity as one of the key theological elements in their work, each one took a slightly different approach to what it meant for her/him.

Frank placed his emphasis on being advocates for the people he photographs. He asks himself the question, “Am I an advocate for the people who allow me to photograph them?” He would also ask, “Are you truly honoring the people you photograph, or even the scene?”

Most of the work that Frank engages in is shooting images of some of the world’s poorest and most vulnerable people with the intent for those images to be used in some of the richest and most powerful countries in the world. He notes, “The core of everything is that basic foundation of doing this as advocates, making sure the subject is happy with how we photograph and use their image, and that we are honest in our use of the photos.” He would also explain how “our work must reflect our love and respect for those we serve.”

In talking about his motivation for being a photographer Franks shares that “all along my motivation was, and remains, to share what I think is God’s perspective on the poor, that they are wonderful creations of God and worthy of our love and admiration.”

Colin approaches the image of God in people from the perspective of dignity. His passion is clear when he says, “Personally I try to avoid shooting ‘poverty porn!’ I don’t like it when the dignity of the subject is robbed.” He makes a direct connection between dignity and the image of God in a person when he said, “We’re made in the image of God and therefore everyone has dignity, especially children.”

Colin also commented that “balancing the dignity of the subject with the context of the situation can be difficult.” He explained how he tries to do this in his work by avoiding showing “dead bodies, flies on the face, really dirty children or HIV infected children.” He expressed the concern that “if I strip the dignity of a few kids to try to get a

stronger emotional response, it's not worth it for us in the long term." One rule of thumb Colin uses in the field is "if the mother wouldn't be proud of that content, don't shoot it."

One of the challenges Colin faces is that he shoots photographs in a wide variety of cultural situations and he shared how important it is to have an understanding and appreciation of the local cultural expectations. He shared this challenge of maintaining the dignity of a child's humanity, "We were working in Kenya, with the Massai. When approached you could touch the little boys on the heads, but couldn't give them a high-five. Touching of the head is a sign of respect there. In Asian countries, that touching of heads is extremely offensive. It's critical to be familiar with the local culture to show respect and awareness."

Andrew takes yet another approach to humanity being created in God's image. He states, "The thing that probably still drives me forward to the place where I still want to be, in some capacity, is in the humanitarian realm. Where I can go out and see and document people's stories around the world." This passion for utilizing his gifts in photography for humanitarian work finds its center in the gospels. "The passage that I hold closest is Matthew 25: I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me water, etc. The idea of the least of these has driven forward my desire for people to see vulnerability in others in order to accept them for who they are. This passage has built a culture around my life."

This has led Andrew to approach his photography with an understanding that "if I can bring a bit of Jesus' eyes into the photography world and then display people in the best light that I can ... then there can be an acceptance of who you are. When you accept

who you are and you know you're made in the image of God then I feel you have a greater ability to go out and do that for others."

Andrew sees the role he plays in his images of humanity in terms of being a "facilitator of hope." He feels that "liberating people to love themselves and appreciate how they look different from others is interesting." His approach to humanity reveals the value and uniqueness of each individual in the eyes of God. He referenced the story behind one photograph he shot on a trip to Lebanon,

Whilst the granny had told me her story she then motioned toward the boy who was four years old to tell us how he had watched his father be slaughtered in front of him. As she said that, the little boy fell to his knees and got visually very upset. The translation was late in coming through so I continued to shoot. Then, as I was going along and the boy fell on his hands and covered his face with his hands, I took a step back as the story unfolded and the translator immediately got down beside him. The emotion that came out in the frames, that I wasn't even fully aware I was taking at the time, was there's a very subtle hand on the little boy's knee and on his back from my translator and that subtle touch for me was the healing hand of God. The healing and protective hand of God on this little soul.

The other photographers interviewed also shared their perspective on humanity and what it means for them that humanity is created in God's image.

For David, Benito and Eric one of the driving factors in properly appreciating humanity is beauty. Eric states how his "belief that God that created people and the world, gives me a heightened sense of beauty and design." David states, "My faith influences me because I think all people are beautiful. And all have value and worth and are loved by God. We have the opportunity/duty as a photographer to look for them in all their beauty and all their glory. That could be a kindergartner or a senior citizen. There's a moment, an angle, a piece of lighting that makes them transcend so you see them like

God sees them.” While Benito notes that “there’s beauty in everyone and it’s my job to get to know them and bring it out.”

When Anne talked about humanity and being made in God’s image she said, “I keep thinking that we’re made in His image and that we’re perfect the way we are. And yet I, and others, don’t want our pictures taken. We’re made in his image and that’s good. I think our image is important and based on what our bodies look like. It’s good. God made us and made us to look like him.”

Anne sees her role in photography as helping people see who they really are as part of humanity created in the image of God. She explains that “when other people see us, they see the whole self.” She then goes on to say “if I can capture that most flattering image of them (from their perspective), they’ll see the whole. I’ve had good photos taken of myself and I can believe that that’s what people see when they look at me.”

When Beth looks at people through the camera lens she speaks of “having a heart for the fact that this person is an eternal soul and an awareness that I didn’t create this thing that I’m capturing. I’m like not this big fancy artist, I’m just taking a picture of this amazing creation that God has put together.” Beth expressed her understanding of humanity as image bearers of God as something that created a humbling sense of awe in her as a photographer.

As she explained what it is like to capture a great photo she said, “I think if you take an awesome photo you are really excited about it but the really great thing is that God created this awesome person with beautiful eyes and the like.” This sense of awe over the creation of humanity was also clear when she stated, “Sometimes you feel like

you're a little kid with your father and you're creating together—it's like God is letting you create with Him and it's just so much fun.”

Reality

The second category to emerge from the interviews was the photographers' views of reality. While photography creates a two-dimensional, static image from a three dimensional and dynamic world the photographers all sought in some way to have their images be perceived as a true reflection of reality. As with the photographers' understanding of humanity they had a variety of ways of referencing how they thought of their images as communicating reality.

Anne stated as clearly as anyone what she was looking for in her photography saying “I want it to look real.” She would also speak of how she wanted to capture images “of their real personalities.” Eric said, “I love capturing real moments and recording history and stuff like that.”

In expressing his concern that a photograph represents reality Colin provided a word of caution noting how “you can easily shoot something that doesn't represent the situation the way it really is.” In making this statement he is speaking to his desire for photographs to portray reality as it is. He makes the simple statement, “I want my viewers to see what life is like,” and notes that the photographer is “there as a witness, documenting real life.”

Frank explained that “for a photograph of people to be real and dynamic, the situation has to be real.” This concept of a photograph having a dynamic element, in spite of it being a static medium, was expressed by several other photographers. Andrew talked of capturing the “fleeting glance of a father as he goes through the emotion of seeing his

daughter come down the stairs.” Beth shared that she likes to get images of “people interacting together.” In talking of what made a good photograph David said, “A good photo is whether a person is feeling alive and connected.”

As Andrew shared about his work in wedding photography he talked about how his goal “is to create a sincere documentation of the relationships that go on between two people, and the family around them.” Finding and capturing those moments when the true feelings of people become evident serves as his main focus in making sure his images represent what is real. When the researcher asked him what sincerity looked like he gave several examples saying, “Sincerity can be a small tear in the corner of a mother’s eye. It can be a fleeting glance of a father as he goes through the emotion of seeing his daughter come down the stairs. It can be the overt emotion of a groom as he sees his bride come down the aisle. It can be the humorous emotion of a brother.”

David’s approach to reality in his photography focuses on emotion. He explains that “if it doesn’t click emotionally with people, you won’t get the positive feedback from people.” David articulates this when he talks about how in a wedding portrait “people can see the love.” Benito shares this sentiment of finding a deeper emotional connection with his subjects in photography noting how “I have to look past the obvious beauty, dig deeper and bring out who they really are.”

For Anne the keyword that allowed her to feel she had captured reality was “authentic.” She notes that an image “must look authentic.” When asked what authentic looks like Anne added, “I think people know what the cheese face looks like and if I say one, two, three cheese, they’re performing. Where, when you’re being authentic, you’re interacting with each other. It’s less performance and it’s more subconscious.” Beth takes

a similar approach to Anne in noting that a good photo “catches an emotion that is valuable in itself.” She also explains that what she is looking for is to “try to capture natural expressions. Sometimes they smile but it not their natural smile; I will take the natural one over the common camera smile.”

Capturing reality had a slightly different feel for Frank and Colin as photographers directly employed by nonprofit organizations. Frank talked about how he goes about selecting images to publish and stated importance of the relationship between the photograph and viewer noting “the root of this question is honesty, accuracy and integrity. If a normal person viewing a photograph we publish believes it says a certain thing, then that better be true. If the photo implies that [our organization] is working in that location doing such and such, then we better be doing that.” When Colin shared about his work as a disaster photographer he said that “we showed how things really were and that meant some of our photos were more graphic.” However now that he works for an organization focused on children he talks about being “more sensitive” while still capturing “real life as it exists.”

Another aspect in the conversation on the question of reality came in the ways in which the photographers were willing to manipulate a situation in order to create the reality they were looking for. There were two forms of this at work, one was affecting the environment before the photograph was taken and the other was the manipulation of the digital files after the image was captured in camera.

Beth, Andrew and Eric freely acknowledged the impact their presence had on manipulating the situation in which they were shooting. Beth clearly stated, “I do manipulate.” She explained what this looks like in her wedding photography as she

directs the situation to get the photos she wants “by saying things like, ‘OK guys kiss!’ or, ‘everybody be excited,’ you know like I’m really a part of the celebration.” Andrew talked about using conversation, particularly questions, to get to what he felt was the real person. He explains that “any portrait work that I’ve done I spend time bringing the person out of themselves.” While for Eric, even though he talks of his love of capturing “real moments,” there is an acknowledgment in a discussion of one of his photos where he says, “I told this person where to sit and play his guitar, but it was no more staged than that.”

The thought communicated by Eric, that “it was no more staged than that,” illustrates the tension between the photographer and the reality they seek to capture. David explains how “if it feels like a portrait is staged, you’ll see less of a reaction.” Or as Frank notes, “Staged photography, no matter how perfect, always seems to have an odor of falsehood to it, or plasticness, or something that says to reader that it isn’t genuine.”

The other place where reality can be, and is, manipulated is in the digital post-processing of the image. While the photographers all wanted to portray reality they also acknowledged that they use editing tools to manipulate the images. Beth stated that she is willing to “do mostly touchup on a person of things that aren’t permanent, like a scratch or a cut” but when it comes to the background environment she says, “I don’t mind doing whatever to the environment.” Eric produces a lot of his work in black and white and explains, “I think there can be something really timeless with black and white. . . . I just like it best when the color is taken out of the picture. It becomes more about light and

colors don't distract." While David says, "I do some post-processing, but sparingly and to represent the subject in a positive light."

Colin explains the tighter limitations he works with as a media manager, "I will sometimes change saturation. We'll do some color work, but won't edit anything out. ... Sometimes they'll intentionally blur part of a photo and that's allowed. We don't add or take away anything. If there's an object in the background that's distracting, it's usually not removed."

Even though these photographers work hard to capture reality as it is. Their presence and the limitations of their craft, requires them to manipulate the environment in order to regain a perspective of reality.

Relationship

The third category that emerged from the interviews is relationship. All the photographers interviewed expressed the need to develop a relationship with the people they were shooting. This category looks at the importance the photographer places on developing a relationship with their subject in order to capture the image they are looking for. Andrew notes that he tries "to build a relationship with people so when I go to take the photos they're more relaxed and comfortable with the process."

Anne noted that none of the classes she had taken on photography had taught her "how to interact with people to get them captured as their real selves." So Anne went back to her training in psychology, explaining how her goal "as a psychologist was to develop trust with whoever I'm working with To have a good session you have to develop trust with the people you're taking the picture of." In developing a relationship

of trust she is then able to find a connection with her subject and when this happens she feels that “you can capture that relationship” in the camera.

Andrew relied heavily on his training in youth work to develop a relationship with his clients. He explains that this background has “enabled me to ask structured questions so people open up.” He shared how at weddings he often asks the bride and groom questions to get them to open up a little but then usually he will focus the camera “on the person who is listening and get their reaction from that.”

Both Benito and Colin talked about the importance of developing a relationship with their clients before taking their photographs. Colin shared that when his team of photographers travels to a location and “meet our subjects for the first time, we meet them with our cameras off. We meet them; we talk to them, look them in the eye and get to know them. We let them ask us questions and we create a relationship with them.” Benito noted how he tries “to get to know them before the actual session.” Colin noted how if “you have a relationship with who you’re shooting, it makes a better photo.”

In talking with Frank he shared that he had recently taken a trip to Mongolia where he “spent a week living in a ger next to a family.” As he shared about this trip he explained how his “favorite way to photograph is to spend lots and lots of time with the subject.” He then stated that “real life happens in front of you when you allow it to happen.”

One aspect of the relationship between the photographer and the subject that came up in the interviews was the issue of power. There was recognition by some of the photographers that an imbalance of power existed in the relationship between them and their subjects. Benito recognizes that there is a need to “apply boundaries for what you

shoot.” This helps address the concern that Andrew expresses when he says, “I don’t want to be taking advantage of or exposing a vulnerable sense of someone.”

When Eric expressed the power dynamic between photographer and subject he stated how he “always tries to put people at ease.” In noting that there is often a level of discomfort that people feel when a camera is pointed at them, he explains how “people can be self-conscious and are obsessed by what they look like” so he tries to alleviate this tension by reminding them that “it’s not life or death stuff so don’t take it too seriously.”

In recognizing that the photographer is the one who is in control and holds a position of power, David shared how he wants, “to honor their participation in” the process. As a result he likes to ask his clients “if it represents them enough.”

When Colin is on assignment in a third world nation he recognizes that “there’s a power to stereotype what you’re shooting, as a westerner.” In explaining this he talked about how Americans can walk into a situation with “western arrogance and assume you know the situation and why something is the way it is.” With the reality of this possibility in mind he shared this statement that “there is a lot of power, there is also accountability.” He used this statement to contrast the work of photojournalists with the work of the non-profit he works for. “If you have a photojournalist taking pictures,” he explains, “there is less accountability.” When it comes to the way in which Colin and his team work he shared how “we’ll shoot what we see but we debrief about it later and make decisions about what we should or shouldn’t have taken.” This helps them mitigate the imbalance of power which is important to Colin as he notes the power of the photograph saying, “Good photographs change your perceptions about the world.”

Morality

The fourth category that evolved from the interviews is referred to as morality. The photographers interviewed for this project had a strong sense of a moral responsibility that was fueled by their faith in Jesus Christ. The particular moral issues and concerns they raised varied somewhat depending on the type of photography they engaged in.

Colin, who works in third world nations but has his images used primarily in the United States, noted that “if there’s nudity, we don’t use the photo at all. ... I defer to western sensibilities when facing nudity.” When Colin is in Africa “and photographing a woman who is not wearing a bra and the photo would show that,” he states, “I’ll adjust and just shoot her face.”

Most of the work Colin engages in involves taking pictures of children. He explains the moral responsibility of that stating how “using a photo regardless of content would be wrong for us and could be disastrous for the child.” This thought is echoed by Frank when he said, “Ends don’t justify the means.”

As Frank talked about the question of morality he identified two major issues for photographers and a third issue aimed specifically at Christian photographers. The three issues he named were pride, honest and mediocrity. With the huge increase in recent years of social media platforms Frank noted that “we photographers are tempted to become the important thing” as we look for “followers and status.” While working full-time as an advocate for others Frank makes this issue personal explaining, “My biggest morality issue is pride, doing photography for me and not on behalf of others.”

The second issue raised by Frank was honesty. He stated that “Photoshop and all the other digital tools have made honesty an enormous morality issue, too.” He poses the question “how much alteration is part of the process of making a memorable image, and when does it become falsehood?” David concurs that this can create a sense of falsehood as he notes how “we airbrush someone’s stomach and that’s not real.” Although rather than viewing this as a moral concern David sees it as shifting from a real photograph to art. He explains that “people need to learn that not every photo depicts a true image. We don’t go far enough or start young enough, teaching people what art is and how we use it in society.”

For Anne the question of honesty was raised when she talked about expectations of others. She is concerned about the current “thought that families are perfect.” She shared how people “crave that for your photo, where everyone laughs and smiles” and as a result there is “too much acting and we miss the reality.” This notion of perfection and honesty was raised in a similar way by Andrew who commented, “I was asked to do a swimsuit shoot for a catalogue which just wasn’t me as I knew I’d be pushed to see perfection through the lens rather than reality.”

Frank’s third concern was mediocrity. This was something that pertained specifically to his career in nonprofit work. He stated that “sometimes mediocrity is acceptable in Christian circles.” He expanded on this thought explaining that because the work was being done for good reasons it can create a level of complacency in which it is sometimes perceived that “excellence isn’t important.”

For the other photographers much of the discussion on morality was related to questions on sexuality. Benito and Beth have both been asked to consider shooting

boudoir images and turned down these business opportunities. Benito explained how he said “No, sorry. There are limits to what I shoot and how I shoot.” In discussing the limitations on what she would be willing to shoot Anne also mentioned boudoir images noting that she “wouldn’t want to take them.” Her moral reasoning for this was that she did not want to create an environment in which people could “feel objectified.” She added that “objectified is just inappropriate.”

Beth went in a slightly different direction as she talked about how some photographers have gone “in an immodest direction with things, kind of exploitative direction.” She stated that the root cause of this is “the sinful nature of men” and explains how photographers who engage in these exploitative practices “don’t think how it will affect the world.” Anne also saw the exploitative aspect of photography at work and noted that “children and sexuality used to sell a product, to make money, is not at all what I do.”

While Andrew has never been asked to do a nude shoot, he did voice that “if someone asked me to do a naked shoot; I’d have to say I’m a married man so I have to guard myself.”

Beth and Eric have both worked in the fashion industry. Eric explains how in his work he “would stay away from stuff I feel is too overly sexualized or overtly sexual.” He expressed a struggle with the reality that “when doing fashion shoots, it sometimes feels like clothes are optional” even going as far as to describe fashion shoots as “light porn.” Beth expresses a similar concern noting that “young adults and women just put all sorts of makeup on them to make them look older and sexier than they are.” From Beth’s perspective this “is crossing the line.”

Another morality issue that was raised by both Peter and Beth was the issue of shooting homosexual weddings. Beth explained that she has done a number of photo shoots for homosexual couples noting that she does not “have a problem photographing a family with two dads and their children.” Beth states how she feels that this is “their family that they love one another and they want to capture this time in their lives.” Eric also says, “I’ve worked with homosexuals before and taken photos of them. I’ve always been polite and treated them as I would anyone else.” When it comes to homosexual weddings though Beth explained how she has “had to grapple with marriage laws and this year didn’t book any weddings.” As she is trying to reconfigure this aspect of her business she said she would consider shooting a gay wedding “if I could do photojournalism and if the couple knew, I feel like I would want the couple to know where I stand, that I’m not seeing this as an actual marriage. For some reason I feel if they knew and they still wanted me to do it then I wouldn’t have a problem with it.”

Eric shared a story where he agreed to a wedding by email and when “the couple asked to meet with me that was the first time I realized it was two blokes.” He expressed his moral discomfort in noting that “I realize they’re just people, but in my heart, I know in God’s scheme of things two men or two women isn’t part of His scheme of things.” He shared a previous experience like this when he turned down the job and he noted that “they tried to sue me.”

Anne also addressed the issue of a gay wedding and while she hasn’t been asked to shoot one at this time stated that she would be willing to do so. The reason she expressed was that “Jesus loved everyone and I want to demonstrate that in my work and interactions with others.”

While each photographer had his/her own emphasis on how to view morality and the impact it had on his/her own work there was little doubt that this was an important category for each of them.

CHAPTER SIX

EVALUATION AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The objective of this project was to examine how the creation of humanity in the *imago Dei* impacts the manner in which we think of portrait photography. In pursuit of this goal the researcher performed a thorough examination of the biblical texts that address the concept of image and likeness. Close attention was paid to the theological development of the doctrine of the image of God throughout the history of the church. Of particular interest to this project was the examination of whether any aspect of the image of God could be considered part of the physical creation of humanity.

Following the biblical and theological component of the project the researcher delved into literature related to developing a philosophical understanding of photography and portraiture. This examination of the literature also looked at the value people attach to portraits and what it means when we say that a photograph captures the real person.

Having completed the literature review alongside the biblical and theological study the project moved into the third phase, interviews with professional Christian photographers. The goal of these interviews was to develop an understanding of the photographers' approach to portrait work. This was carried out with a particular focus on how they understand and articulate the philosophical and theological vision they bring to their work as it relates to the creation of humanity in the image of God.

The final aspect of this project was the discernment of guiding concepts that would help Christian, and perhaps other, photographers reflect on what it means to capture a portrait of someone who is created in the image of God.

Biblical and Theological Discoveries

It is clear from examining the Scriptures that humanity is created in the image of God. The challenge for the researcher was to develop an understanding of what it means to say that people are created in God's image.

The first item of note was that the Hebrew words, *tselem* and *demuth*, are used in a synonymous manner. While these words provide a clear statement that humanity is created in God's image there is not a significant theological context through which their deeper understanding can be readily discerned.

In looking at the broader cultural and historical context the research examined the world of the Ancient Near East. Within this context kings were known to place statues to represent their presence in areas of their kingdom in which they were absent. With this context in mind the research suggested that God placed humanity on earth as His representative rulers. This finding was also supported in the broader biblical context.

In examining the approach of a several theologians it was discovered that there is a broad range of theological perspectives regarding what it means for humanity to be created in God's image. The influence of contemporary philosophical ideas was also seen to have significantly influenced the thinking of the theologians on this topic.

The relationship between the physical creation of humanity and the image of God was an important aspect of this project. It was noted that, in Christ, the true image of God is to be found in the incarnation. This true image is found in the whole person of Christ,

not merely the spiritual side of Christ. This allows, perhaps even demands, that the image of God in humanity should be seen to encompass the whole person, mind, body and spirit. Image bearers are then to reflect the true image of God as revealed in Jesus.

Another element of this study was an examination of idolatry. The researcher examined whether a symbol is pointing through itself to the one true God or if it is distracting and causing people to create false gods. It was noted that if the latter was the case it should be considered idolatry. It was also stated that a person could fall into idolatry if they are attempting to constrain God's presence to any particular image.

The Significance of the Biblical and Theological Discoveries

The biblical and theological work provided a solid foundation for the project. In examining the broader usage of *tselem* and *demuth* it became clear that they are used to depict physical objects. While no one would dispute that humanity is part of the physical creation there has always been a question in theological circles as to the extent this physicality relates to the image of God in a person. The conclusion that the image of God in humanity extends to the whole person is significant for this study as it allows for the possibility that a photographer, in taking a portrait, is actually creating an image of a person who is already the image of God. If the physical aspect of humanity is fully detached from the image of God in humanity then this project would not have been possible as a photograph can only portray what is revealed in the physical realm. However, as the researcher concludes, if there is a physical component to the image of God in humanity that aspect of God's image in humanity has the potential to be viewed in a photographic image of a person.

As a people created in the image of God humanity is charged with the responsibility of representing God in all they do. In examining the connection between image and idolatry it was noted that one of the primary identifiers of an idol was whether the image pointed others to God or away from God, thereby creating a false god or idol. This theological component should be a significant consideration for any Christian working in the photography. There is a danger with any artistic endeavor that the resulting creation would become an idol. This may pose a unique danger for portrait photography in which people, who are called to represent God on the earth and point all of creation back to God, become the focus of attention.

There is an added level of theological responsibility for the Christian photographer to ensure that in his role as an image creator he is creating images that reflect the truth that people are created in God's image. While the photographers have no control over how people view their images, they do have control over their own intentions in the creation of an image. As the people of Israel were making their way to the Promised Land we see Aaron intentionally creating an idol. We also see Moses, in creating the bronze snake, intending to create an image of redemption that centuries later would become an idol.

Discoveries from the Related Literature

The first discovery from the literature review was that photography is not a neutral discipline. A photograph always communicates something and as a result there is both a theological and moral value that can be attached to any image.

This plays into the second area this chapter looked at which was the way in which photography depicts reality. Photography can only provide a perspective on reality as

viewed by the photographer. The photographer's choice of focal length, depth of field, shutter speed, the angle of view and lighting all play a significant role in creating the perspective of reality desired by the photographer. While there is a general perception that the image in the photograph is real it is still an art form that is representative of reality.

A third element looked specifically at portraits and the value people place on them. A portrait contains several facets including the likenesses of the person, the particular aspect of a person that defines who they are, a sense that the creation of the portrait is a two way process between subject and the photographer and a sense that the person is really present in the final image allowing the viewer to make a statement that affirms that it is really the person in the photograph.

People often place great value on a portrait as it serves to provide a sense of immortality, allowing the person imaged to be ever present with the person owning the portrait.

Building on the theological concept of idolatry this section examined the way in which a photograph can become an idol. There were several ways in which it was noted that this could happen. One way in which this could occur was through the image editing process. Another way was to create images that appeal to the sinful nature of humanity, drawing the viewer in to glamorize and focus on sexual and violent content. The self-portrait was another mode of photography that could quickly fall into the category of idolatry.

The Significance of the Discoveries from the Literature Review

One area of significance was in the discovery that photography is not a neutral discipline. A photographer in creating a portrait is doing something more than making a simple replication of the person. The image created by the photographer will not be value neutral. The photographer can never be said to be truly taking pictures for the purpose of having a visual record of a person or event. In light of this project's goal, to examine how the creation of humanity in the *imago Dei* impacts the manner in which we think of portrait photography, the fact that the photographer creates an image with both a theological and moral bias provides a strong argument that the Christian photographer must be careful to protect the theological and moral sense in which the people they are shooting are created in the image of God.

A second observation was that photography can only portray the world from a particular perspective. A photograph can never be said to be a true representation of reality. Rather a photograph portrays its own unique sense of reality and perspective. This new reality and perspective is provided by the imagination and vision of the creator. That a photographer creates a new reality, a new perspective, in her images of humanity ties back into the initial discovery that photography is not neutral. Photographers are in the creation business and in creating images of people who already bear God's image there comes an added dimension of accountability to ensure that their depiction of, and perspective on, reality does not diminish the image of God in their subject.

Building on this the literature review moved into an examination of portraits and why people value them. This was an important aspect of this project as the four areas of portraiture, likenesses, the aspect of a person that defines who they are, the creation of the

portrait as a two way process between subject and the photographer and the sense in an image that the person is really present, helped tie this chapter into the biblical and theological chapter. It accomplished this by reflecting the story of creation.

In the biblical story God creates humanity in His image. In a photograph the photographer is the one who creates an image of humanity. In the creation story God creates humanity with a set of expectations for the role they will play and who they are to become. In photography the photographer is looking to create an image that defines who their subject is as a person. The third element speaks to the relationship between the creator and the created image. While God created *ex nihilo* the ongoing relationship with humanity was, and is, an important aspect of God's intent for humanity as God's image bearers. Being a step removed from original creation the photographer must establish the relationship prior to creating the image. The final aspect of a portrait is the sense that the person is really present in the image. Just as humanity is to reflect God in the world a good portrait will reflect who the person really is, it will allow the viewer to see the image and acknowledge the presence of the imaged person.

The significance of the value people place on portraits is seen in the relationship between the image, the person the image represents and the person viewing the image. A portrait is an image of a person who bears God's image and as a result has an inherent dignity. A portrait will always portray an aspect of God's image in the person who appears in the photograph. The photographic image, while temporal, creates the illusion of bestowing a sense of immortality on the subject.

The final point of significance for this chapter is the manner in which photographic images can become idols. As with any part of creation when they become

an end in themselves rather than point beyond themselves to God a photographic portrait can become an idol. At times they are deliberately created to be idols, as in pornography and other sensual images or in over glamorized sports images in which people are setup to be given a god like status and persona through the image. The recognition of the image of God in humanity should temper the Christian photographer to avoid situations like these and ensure she is accurately representing image of God in her subjects.

Discoveries of the Field Research

In conducting interviews for the field research component of this thesis project the researcher discovered a high level of consistency in the manner in which Christian photographers approached the task of photographing people. After reviewing the interviews the four areas that stood out to the researcher were labeled as humanity, reality, relationship, and morality.

In regard to humanity each photographer recognized the unique position of each person they photographed as being someone who was created in the image of God. With this understanding the photographers expressed a sense of appreciation of the innate dignity of the person they were creating images of.

All of the photographers expressed a desire for their work to be seen as a reflection of reality. Even though the photographers hope their work will be viewed as a reflection of reality they also acknowledge that it is more than merely a direct representation. They freely acknowledge that it is their view of reality that they are portraying and that in order to create that perspective they openly stated that the images they create go through a process of manipulation. It is only after this process that the photographers consider their images to portray reality.

The third discovery in the field research was the importance that photographers placed on relationships. The relationship between the photographer and the person being portrayed in the image was of great importance. It was in developing the relationship between photographer and subject that the photographer felt she was able to bring out the best and the real person in their subject.

The final discovery in the field research was in the area of morality. Each of the photographers interviewed for this project shared how their faith in Jesus Christ grounded them with a strong sense of morality when it came to photographing people. This sense of morality covered topics from same-sex marriage to the false depiction of reality by creating images of the perfect family. It also dealt with questions of honesty and integrity in the way in which photographers can manipulate reality with the use of digital editing software.

The Significance of the Field Research Discoveries

Through the process of conducting and analyzing the field research one significant aspect was the reality that the photographers are, as people, created in the image of God. This in turn had an impact on how they thought about and conducted their work. As the photographers engaged in process of image creation they demonstrated several of the communicable attributes of God. They also demonstrated, on a micro level, some attributes of God that are often considered incommunicable. This included the sense of being a creator and having the power to create something that did not previously exist. It also included the ability to change and manipulate reality to match their vision. The photographers, as image bearers themselves, recognized the great responsibility with which they had been entrusted as image creators in their own right.

On the micro level the photographer had a tremendous amount of power, having the option at any given time to choose to create or not create an image. This was something the photographers took seriously in their quest to show dignity and respect to their subjects.

In the conversations with the photographers there was a clear sense in which they saw their subjects as people created in the image of God. This reality had a significant impact on how they conducted their work. The strong emphasis the photographers placed on maintaining the dignity of the people they photographed was clearly influenced by their understanding that all people are created in God's image. In their own work as image creators the photographers all sought to maintain the truth that all people are created in the image of God. In doing this they all expressed agreement that there is a line that can be crossed where an image becomes an idolatrous pointing to itself, or perhaps the photographer, rather than to God.

The photographers, being created in the image of God, approached their work as image creators in much the same way as we saw God approaching the work of creation in Genesis. The key themes from the interviews, humanity, reality, relationship and morality all reflected the creation process. The importance of relationship both within the triune God and in the desire of God to create humanity to have a relationship with Himself is reflected in the work of the photographer as she seeks to develop a significant relationship with the person whose image she is shooting and follows that up by creating a new image that people are able to relate to and that reflects reality.

While the reflection of reality is only a slice of what could be seen and is two-dimensional rather than three-dimensional, the photographers still sought to create

images that could be understood and perceived to be real. As God created humanity in His image from the dirt on the ground, a photographer creates an image that can be printed on paper or displayed on a screen that is truly a reflection of the original person who in turn is created in the image of God.

In Scripture it is clear that God expects those who bear His image to adhere to a level of moral behavior. This reality comes to bear on Christian photographers as they too seek to maintain a moral balance in their work. This was evidenced both in the type work they were willing to do and the manner in which they were willing to stylize the images.

Conclusions

This thesis was written with a view to examining the impact humanity's creation in the image of God has on portrait photography. In looking across the three elements of this project, the biblical and theological, the literature review and the field research, the following conclusions were reached.

The first conclusion is that the image of God should be the primary driver in any discussion of humanity. From the theology chapter it was noted that all people are created in the image of God. As a result of being created in God's image all of humanity has an innate dignity as image bearers. Although this image has been tainted by sin it has not been totally lost. The image of God can be seen in the triadic makeup of people, mind, body and spirit. For this project a major focus was on how the physical appearance of people was part of what it means to be created in the image of God.

Establishing that the creation of humanity in the image of God includes the physicality of humanity provided the needed criteria to examine the portrait as an image of the image of God in humanity. A portrait being a photograph of a person will portray

an aspect of God's image in the person who appears in the photograph, even if that person's image and actions have been distorted by sin.

The field research further solidified the centrality of the image of God in all humanity. The photographers interviewed for this project all expressed a sense of understanding that their clients had a level of dignity because they bore God's image. They also sought to bring out the best of their subjects in their portraits.

While this initial conclusion may have a broad and general feel it is nonetheless an important conclusion as it should have an impact on how photographers and other artists approach their work of portraying people.

The second conclusion is that idolatry is an ever present threat to the work of a Christian photographer. Idolatry was a theme that ran through each section of the project. As a result of sin people have a tendency towards elevating something other than God and the worship of God to a primary place in their lives. As this comes to bear on the work of the photographer there is a danger in creating images that draw an unhealthy level of attention to the subject rather than reflect the image of God in the subject. The Christian photographer needs to be mindful of the manner in which they portray their subject and should always be aware of the fine line in their work between creating an idol and a God honoring image.

Tied to this second conclusion is the idea that photographers need to be aware of the possibility of creating idols of their own selves. As participants in an act of creation the photographers place themselves in the position of being creators in their own right. In this capacity they run the risk of assuming a godlike status and in doing so become their own idol.

Another conclusion of this study is the realization that, with the acceptance that a photograph is never neutral, a portrait will always portray either a positive or a negative image of the person. The Christian photographer must keep this in mind as he works to create an image and should strive to maintain the dignity of the subject as God's image bearer. This can pose a significant challenge in certain genres of photography particularly when it comes to photojournalism and covering violent events. In those instances the photographer needs to have a sense of awareness that by revealing the sinful side of humanity he is pointing towards the need for redemption and in doing so preserves the dignity of the subject as an image bearer of God.

This focus of this project on the image of God and portrait photography has practical implications for those seeking to work as photographers. The theological, philosophical and sociological concepts that influence the work of Christian photographers were discussed and highlighted in this work. Christians are called to live their lives under the authority of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. This should permeate every aspect life and this project provides a framework for understanding some of the fundamental considerations of someone seeking to be a disciple of Jesus Christ while working as a professional photographer.

Strengths of the Project

Several elements helped make this a strong project. The first was the diversity of photographers interviewed. Through the inclusion of both men and women, people from different nations, different ethnic and cultural backgrounds as well as photographers from a variety of genres the researcher was able to craft a significantly more robust project than would have been achievable with a more homogenous group. The fact that two of

the photographers work full-time for Christian organizations and a third has worked on assignment for another meant that they had taken time to think through some of the issues regarding the image of God in their portrait work. Gaining an understanding of the way the photography departments of these organizations view the photographing of people helped to support the findings of this thesis.

One other strength of this project was the literature review. The literature review provided a solid overview of the philosophical, historical and social aspects of photography as a discipline. This created a very solid base for the field research aspect of the project. It was important to the overall success of this project that this was a strong component as it built on the theological work and established the ground from which the field research would occur. One of the strengths of this section of the project was that it drew from both Christian and non-Christian authors in an attempt to grasp a broad understanding of thinking on both photography and portraiture. It was important for this section of the project to be strong as the researcher was unable to find any previous studies or books that directly examined portrait photography from a Christian perspective.

The final strength of this project comes in the overall value it offers to Christian photographers and perhaps other artists. This project helps provide a biblical and theological framework upon which Christian photographers can draw as they seek to create images of people who are already image bearers of God. In this sense this project serves as a discipleship tool for Christians in the photography business seeking to bring Christ into every aspect of their lives.

Weaknesses of the Project

One of the challenges faced in this project was the use of the word image. The researcher debated between listing this point as a strength or a weakness for the project and settled on placing it in this section. The word image was primarily used in two different ways. The first was in reference to the image of God in people and the second was in reference to images created by human hands. This at times caused a tension in the writing as image bearers created images of image bearers. In acknowledging this tension in the project the researcher believes that it is an unavoidable tension. Even if it creates a philosophical concern about the dual use that is presented by it the tension is real and speaks to the close connectivity between the dual uses of the word. In English the word image is the correct word to use in both contexts and the referent should provide a clear understanding of what it being communicated in each context.

A second challenge in this project was the limited number of interviews conducted for the field research. It would have been beneficial to have conducted a larger number of interviews in order to have a better sampling of each of the demographic areas represented in the study. While this study is able to draw some general conclusions about the way in which the image of God impacts the work of portrait photography a broader demographic would perhaps have allowed for the drawing of some very specific conclusions. If there had been significantly more time and resources available the researcher would have enjoyed extending the interview process to include at least twice as many participants.

Another weakness of this study was the need to maintain the confidentiality of the photographers. While this is considered to be a normal part of the research process it

definitely placed a limitation on the field research component. Several of the interviewees shared stories and information that would have been both interesting and helpful for the project. However, using these stories would have required risking the loss of anonymity both for the interviewee and for the organization they work for.

One final weakness can be found in the theological work of the project. Due to the nature of this project it was only possible to provide an overview of the work of the various theologians on the image of God. There is a great deal more that could have been written regarding the work of each theologian mentioned.

CHAPTER SEVEN

REFLECTION

Personal Growth

It was with a sense of fear and trepidation that I entered into the process of writing this thesis. Intellectually I understood that I had the ability to complete this project but there was a definite sense of self-doubt coursing through my mind. Throughout the writing process my mind kept wandering back to a ninth grade history project. The teacher gave me a score of zero and placed me in detention as I had thoroughly failed to apply myself to the task of getting the work done. This life event has haunted every major academic undertaking since then. Throughout this journey self-doubt has been an ever present ghost and I am pleasantly surprised to have made it to this point.

The rigorous and well-guided process for this thesis project provided the opportunity for me to overcome this hurdle of self-doubt. It has also provided me with the needed confidence to feel able to take on other opportunities of self-study at this level. Completing this project has finally allowed me to put that ghost to rest.

When it came time to develop a thesis topic for the Doctor of Ministry degree I thought I had a clear sense of direction. I had a solid proposal and was ready to start writing but I hit a major roadblock. I came to the realization that I was not going to be able to complete the thesis project if I stuck with this topic. I had to go back to the drawing board and start over.

The process of starting over provided space and opportunity to discern an area of study that truly aligned with my interests and passions. After careful consideration I was able to combine my passion for theology with my passion for photography and engage in a project that I could enjoy writing over the course of a year.

The entire process of researching and writing was a great blessing and I learned a great deal through it. As I entered into the process of theological reflection on the image of God in humanity I was, once again, profoundly struck by the reality that everyone who has ever lived bears God's image. As I engaged with the perspectives offered from a variety of theologians it allowed me to gain a deep appreciation for the breadth and depth of thought that had been brought to bear on this topic. As a result of studying the creation of humanity in God's image I was forced to stop and reflect on the importance of the creation story being the starting point of Scripture.

Understanding that all of humanity is created in God's image has helped refocus my passion for evangelism. Recognizing the intrinsic value and dignity of people as image bearers allows me to appreciate more fully why God would love the world as much as He does. It helps me appreciate and better understand why God would come to us in Christ and give Himself for our sin. It all ties back to the beginning when God looked at creation and declared how good it was. To appreciate that all people still bear God's image, even when it is hidden and scarred by sin, allows me to see that no one is beyond the possibility of redemption and adds a deeper meaning to Christ's call to love our enemies.

Developing a deeper sense that the image of God in people extends to their physical existence was also important. Grasping this reality not only allowed me to

develop a greater appreciation of the vocational call of a photographer but also generated a greater passion for the sanctity of all life. The physical body is important, it matters and it has value.

As an avid photographer, I was honored to be able to spend time interviewing the photographers for this project. Some of the photographers interviewed are working at the very highest level of their profession and were able to provide me with tremendous insight. It was very helpful to gain an understanding of how they integrate their faith in Christ into their work and the challenges that being a professional photographer presents to a person of faith. Seeing the integration of faith and work in this environment will help me in my life as a pastor in helping other people think about how they can better integrate their faith and work. It also encouraged me to reflect on the way in which I integrate my faith into my own work on an ongoing basis.

Some of the stories shared by the photographers never made it into this project as they would have required the loss of confidentiality. This was unfortunate but thankfully the photographers have shared many of these stories elsewhere for the benefit of others. These untold stories continue to touch my life and challenge me to reflect on what it means to live out my calling on a daily basis as a follower of Jesus Christ.

In engaging in the literature review I found myself diving into the philosophical and sociological dimensions of photography. I found this to be a deeply spiritual experience. In reflecting on how a portrait is defined I was drawn to the awe-inspiring sense that photographers (and I include myself in that category) have a responsibility to draw out the reality that the person being photographed is created in the image of God.

Personally, this makes the taking of a photograph a spiritual and holy discipline that challenges me to always look for the image of God in the other person.

In reflecting on the nature of photography and it not being a neutral discipline, I was forced to consider whether the images taken draw people toward the image of God in a person or push them in the direction of idolatry. This provided a fresh framework for considering whether an image of a person is honoring both to them and to God.

I believe the work done in this project will continue to mold and shape my life for many years to come. The doctrine of the image of God has become the starting point from which I am now in the process of using as the foundation for understanding all theology. The power of image creation to be used for good or for idolatry will impact how I take photographs of all kinds. Moving forward I am sure I will continue to read and research topics related to this project for my own edification.

Ideas for Further Research

As I reflect on the work of this project there are a number of ideas that would be of interest and value for further research.

The original project examined the responses of photographers working in a variety of different genres. One area for further research would be to narrow the genre of photography for the study and specifically examine the impact of the *imago Dei* on the work of photographers within a particular genre. This would allow for a more nuanced focus on the specific facets of a genre and would be uniquely beneficial for people seeking to work out their vocational calling within that context.

One genre of photography that was absent from the original field research was photojournalism. To conduct a study examining how the *imago Dei* impacts the work of

photojournalists would be a worthy endeavor. Photojournalists have a responsibility to tell a story of how the world is. In their work they portray the good, the bad and the ugly.

A study of the way in which photojournalists attend to their work would involve asking more in depth questions around the photographer's responsibility to care for people as a Christ follower. One of the issues that could be explored in this research would be the point at which the photographer would put down their camera and directly intervene in a situation in order to help someone. A study looking at photojournalists would allow for a greater level of conversation around the portrayal of the fallen nature of humanity. In photographing sinful behavior it would raise the questions about how the perpetrators are perceived as being in the image of God. It would also engage questions about the photographer's responsibility for seeking to bring justice to the victims through their work.

Another area for further research could be to examine how and if the doctrine of the image of God is used as part of the curriculum for students of photography and fine arts in Christian colleges and universities. This research could examine the manner in which this doctrine is used by the teachers and the influence of the doctrine in the ongoing work of the students after they graduate. Research along these lines could be utilized to study the importance and impact of Christian doctrine as it relates to a specific course of higher education.

Further research in this area could be expanded to include those outside the Christian faith. A study involving photographers from multiple religious and nonreligious backgrounds would allow the researcher to examine the way in which people of faith practice their craft in relation to those without faith. A study of this nature might allow

for an examination of any common elements that are innate in humanity as a result of being created by God. It would also allow for the study of key elements of divergence between those who are committed to their life in Christ and view the world through that lens from those who hold a different philosophical or religious perspective.

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