

The Image of God, Genesis 1

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“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our own image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’”

We cannot read the words of this creation account without the impression that something great is taking place, something extraordinarily glorious. God expresses his special love for man by calling man his “image.” This is obviously a trope, a figurative expression used to help us understand the inexpressible blessing of God. As long as our understanding is in its current corrupt form, we will never grasp the blessing called the “image”. We would not understand it even if we still possessed the concept of image, and understood it, even though we Christians experience the meager beginnings of a restoration. Still, God has chosen to speak to us through Moses in his usual way, a way that prompts every Christian heart to the kind of reflection that will surely aid the growth of the new man.

The rest of creation was finished. First called into existence from absolute nothingness by God’s creative act, his powerful Word and his “seeing,” the creation was at the end of its six days of coming into existence. Despite its great variety, it was in complete inner harmony. The God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.” These are not words thought up on the spur of the moment. God did not suddenly blurt them out. These are words of eternity. This is a thought that has moved God’s heart from eternity and filled it with a blessed joy. This is a thought that he has considered from eternity in his counsel. This counsel of God expresses the rich product of his love, wisdom, and might, of his entire essence. These words, “In our image, in our likeness,” express the goal of all of God’s ways. And he makes this goal unchangeable: man is to be God’s image.

When God began his work of creation, when heaven and earth appeared as *tohu wawohu*, his thoughts were about the being that was not yet there but was to be created. In the end, God wanted to place the completed work at that being’s free disposal. Each day with his almighty fiat God richly unfolded the lifeless and formless mass with that being in mind. Whenever he produced the form he wanted by “seeing” each object in his own beloved, productive, and blessed way, he was always thinking of that being. The thought that gave motion and direction to God’s activity was the thought that in the end he would entrust the entire creation to that being as a blessed place to live.

The work is finished. Everything fits together perfectly, just as God intended, and is a perfect place for man to live. Nothing is missing. Everything is ready. The great moment has come, the moment in which God wants to bring the creature into existence. God’s counsel from eternity was for the blessedness of the creature; everything God had done, from the beginning of time, was for the creature’s good fortune. What is the being supposed to be like, whom God will make lord of heaven and earth, and at whose free disposal God will place everything he has made?

This creature is to rule – without limits- as far as nature is concerned. The creature is not to share the dominion even in the least with any other creature. It is not even conceivable that any of the other creatures should fight him for dominion or revolt against his authority. This creature, to whom heaven and earth are given as a possession, is to rule as a free lord, as he pleases. If caprice is not to come of this, if the most tortuous slavery of dominated nature is not to arise, the ruler must understand the way of nature, must know its characteristics. Only in this way can he exercise his dominion in full freedom, still respecting the inner essence, the inherent powers, and the capabilities of the creatures.

Man is to rule, and is to enjoy his dominion, finding satisfaction in his dominion together with those dominated. He must have the ability to make calm decisions under pressure without losing intensity. He must

also have a soul capable of desire and joy, a soul that can be moved to action by delight in everything that it sees and does.

He is to rule, but not contrary to the one who made him ruler. His dominion over the rest of creation is limitless. His relation to his Creator, however, is naturally just as limited. But this situation is not to be construed as limitation. On the contrary, the creature is to view it as his highest fortune that the Creator has freely given him both his freedom and his crown.

Man is a creature capable of ruling and exercising dominion. This puts him into the category of a creature, in a certain sense on the same level with the other creatures. At the same time, it establishes an unbridgeable distance between him and the other creatures. This also shows the infinite distance of man from God. At the same time, it puts him in direct proximity with God, in God's class.

God wants man to be such a being according to his eternal, unchangeable plan. Now the solemn moment has come to create man. God summarizes all of his thoughts in one phrase: "In our image, in our likeness." What does this concept of image consist of? What does "image" mean?

Obviously it does not mean that we identify the entrusted dominion with the concept of image. The matter is scarcely done justice if man has dominion over creatures simply because of the concept of image. Then dominion is on the same plane as other results of the concept of image, like immortality, freedom from physical and intellectual collapse, and the like. Basically the correct thought is that in the dominion a predisposition or capability is set in motion. To rule with God, to administer God's property freely – here man is to find his blessedness. And in order to make man capable and worthy of such dominion, God grants him his image. Even the concept of image is not to be identified with dominion either, they are still woven together most intimately, so that we can hardly view one separate from the other.

Furthermore, it is obvious that the image is not something external. It is not to be only loosely attached to man, who was completed already. It was to penetrate and illuminate his entire essence. It was to come to expression in each of his deeds of dominion. Likewise, it is clear on the other hand that the image was not to form the substance of which man consisted, so that he would either be God's image or cease to exist, or at least would cease to be man. Rather, the expression obviously is to characterize the mindset of man. Man's thinking, feeling, and acting are to reflect God's mind. The salient feature in man that differentiates him from all other creatures is to consist of his being formed like God.

To designate this concept of image, Moses uses two synonymous expressions. *Zelem* is to designate more of a concrete copy that represents something (cf. 1 Samuel 6:5, 11; Numbers 33:52; 2 Kings 11:18; Ezekiel 7:20; 2 Chronicles 23:17), while *demuth* appears to stress more the fact that something is an exact replica, a copy (cf. 2 Kings 16:10; Isaiah 40:18; Ezekiel 23:15). *Demuth* thus stresses the similarity especially strongly, while *zelem* highlights the idea of representation. Together they state that man is God's representative on earth, corresponding in his entire way of thinking exactly to God's mind.

Every attempt to help us understand the grand thought that man is created in God's image must naturally lead to a diminution. We can imagine, feel, and enjoy the greatness of the blessing, but our spirit is not sufficient to grasp or understand it. Our knowledge is piecemeal. But if we view the image piecemeal, the whole thing escapes our view. We are only conscious of the part we can see. We may be more or less conscious of the part we can see. We may be more or less conscious of the other parts, but we lose the inner connections and the entire thing as such escapes us. Nevertheless, we dare not refuse to view the image from various sides, and hunt for its various aspects.

In such specific considerations of the image of God, the first thought that comes to mind is that God is a spirit. He is completely bodiless, pure personality. The concept of image, therefore, dare not be sought in the physical form of man. Certainly the form of the human body is significantly different from the form of animal bodies. Stance and appearance indicate the great difference between man and animal. But to seek the concept of image here would be a heathen thought. Among the heathen, the gods were a kind of superman, in whom all human characteristics, physical as well as intellectual, good and bad, were built up in superabundance. That almost makes their idea of God seem to be something god, and not as Paul portrays their perversion in Romans

1:23. No wonder, then, that the heathen changed the concept of image – of which they still had an idea – into the characteristic form and appearance of man, as Ovid does in his well-known verses:

*Finxit in effigium moderantum cuncta deorum
Pronaque cum spectent animalia cetera terram,
Os homini sublime dedit, caelumque videre
Iussit et erectos ad sidera tollere vultus.*

Since God is absolute spirit, however, the image of God is not to be sought in something physical. Certainly the human body reflects the image that man bears, but itself cannot be the actual bearer of the image.

We have to seek the image, then, in the intellectual part of man. The personal life of the soul of man came to fruition in ways that ran parallel to the life of God. Common psychology separates the active and passive processes in the human soul into three groups: intellect, will, and emotion. This division easily overlooks and forgets the unity of the entire life of the soul, and leads to a diminution of this marvelous life. But this is the unavoidable failing of all intellectual knowledge. Therefore we will make use of the division to observe the details of the image.

In order to support this division, we would first have to determine that the thinking of man ran parallel to the thinking of God. But there was always a difference: God was Creator, man creature. God is unlimited in his knowledge. Man is limited. God is omniscient. He grasps all things temporally and spatially in one all-encompassing glance. Man learns successively, and labors at it in his narrow consciousness. God is omnipresent. He penetrates all things actively and essentially, while man cannot penetrate nature and comes into contact with the outside world only with his sensory organs. Yet man's knowledge is a copy of God's knowledge. It could never have happened that a result of human investigation, a conclusion or a judgement, would have contradicted God's knowledge. Above all, the ethical principles according to which human thinking came to fruition were in complete harmony with God's principles. God made man upright, says the Preacher (7:29).

Two things illustrate how easily, certainly, and intuitively Adam's knowledge came to fruition, without much of the cumbersome apparatus of observing, comparing, reflecting, abstracting, combining, perceiving, concluding, judging, etc. One, he gave the animals names expressing their innermost being in a certain sense on the spur of the moment. Two, he penetrated the essence and origin of his wife at first glance, as well as God's intended institution of marriage.

It can be shown that man's will did not contradict God's will simply from the fact that God entrusted dominion over the entire world to man without limitation. Man's will set goals that pleased God, and chose good, God-pleasing means to achieve each goal. Man would not destroy anything so long as he bore the image of God. Rather, he would rule everything in harmony with God's plans.

Furthermore, since man was not to carry out this dominion as an emotionless machine, and since God never intends to plague, torture, or lay noxious burdens on men, harmony of man's emotions with God's emotions was also given with the transfer of dominion. If this had not been the case, the dominion would have had to become an unbearable torture for man. As long as he bore the image, he could not enjoy things and actions abhorrent to God. Just as God's glance rested with inner satisfaction and pleasure on the entire creation, so also man was to be filled with joy when he looked at nature, and was to be in the mood to sing God's praises. And just as God wanted to bless his creatures, so also man was to enjoy a blessed inner satisfaction in tending the garden put under his care.

Man was bound most closely to his Creator by this harmony. He could cultivate blessed communion with God. No chasm separated them. On the contrary, man had an understanding of God's thoughts, could easily examine God's ideas, and therefore felt happy in God's presence. He took part in God's blessedness. He was bound with God by exactly the same way of looking at things and by the closest sharing of interests.

As our point of departure for viewing the image we can take the fact that the image is lost, but is renewed in Christians. What takes place in Christians as the new creation of the Holy Spirit belongs to the

image. On the other hand, what characterizes the mindset of natural man is the opposite of the image. The observation of the negative never leads to sure conclusions about the positive, but can undoubtedly serve to deepen positive knowledge gained in another way.

Paul himself displays this process in both passages often cited to explain the concept of image: Ephesians 4:23, 24, and Colossians 3:9,10. In both he expresses the admonition first to get rid of the old man and more and more and second to cultivate the new man that bears God's image, and to grow into it more and more. In both passages he sharply contrasts that which characterizes the new man and that which characterizes the old. By speaking of what the Christians have been up to then, he obviously wants to deepen their knowledge of what they are to be through the work of the Holy Spirit.

What the Holy Spirit created in Christians is undoubtedly most frequently designated by the word, "faith." This is the "new" in them. This is what so radically distinguishes them from their earlier mindset. They believe, and look to God with loving trust and trusting love. This position of their heart is the standard for all of their feeling, willing, and thinking. It guides and rules all their action toward God, their brothers, and the entire world. But the faith of Christians has first a very definite object. It looks to Christ with his work of redemption as he is offered and sealed in the means of grace. Mediated through this special faith, the entire relationship of Christians to God has now become one of faith.

What is the attitude of natural man about faith? From our observation we can appropriately sketch the forms of its appearance. It acts toward God in express enmity with derision and scorn. Furthermore, it sinks below the standard of cattle in the satisfaction of its bodily and earthly drives. Natural man is not able to guard himself from these extremes if God hands him over to the desires of his heart. But to observe the image it would be more advantageous to visualize the mindset that natural man shows in his most lucid moments.

What is the viewpoint of the most pure religions of natural man? We always find religion and ethics most closely bound. That is also the case in Christianity, but the relationship that religion and ethics have in Christianity is exactly the opposite of the relationship in all other systems. Christianity bases ethics on religion. First, the relationship between God and Man must be determined. Man and God must be united – and of course, God must do that – and then follows the correct, God-instituted relationship, along with the right relations of man. All religions conceived by man turn the relationship around. First man must behave correctly, and then because of that God's relationship to him takes the right shape.

Natural man cannot conceive of the situation differently. When the gospel of God's free grace in Christ comes to him, it looks like foolishness, not only a laughable inconsistency, but also a cataclysmic error that must be battled. Otherwise the ethical world order is shaken to its foundations. The world would be troubled (Acts 17:6). If man no longer has to gain God's favor, if God himself creates reconciliation and freely forgives sin, every incentive to honest effort in moral things is taken away. Then the world necessarily becomes corrupt, morally declines. The main principle of natural reason, the elements of the world from which all moral philosophy, all ethics, have grown and been collected, is the idea of retribution, merit, reward, and punishment. Natural man views God as his feudal lord and himself as God's vassal. Whether he can feel comfortable in this servitude with his servile mind is a question that does not need to be discussed here. It depends on this servile mind being a fact and expressing itself in the way just described, when things are going best for it and it is not in open revolt. That is apparent in all systems of practical philosophy, in modern Freemasonry, in the Pharisaism of the Jews, and in the work-righteousness of the Roman church.

Here we have the actual negation of faith. Such a point of view was foreign to man while he had the image. It grabbed him when he lost the image. Previously, believing was characteristic of him – at that time, however, not yet mediated by faith in Christ. He received the blessings of God as pure gifts of love, enjoyed them, and thanked God for them.

Faith and unbelief viewed from another angle. Jesus stresses to doubting Thomas once as a warning the sharp, irreconcilable contradiction between faith and seeing. Thomas demanded to see and to grasp before he would yield to faith. This is characteristic of man after the loss of the image. He demands proofs for the things he should accept. This characteristic stands out so sharply that doubt is made the first principle of all investigation, even the source of all knowledge.

Coincidentally, we can point out here that when man makes this demand for proofs, he probably never becomes fully conscious of how many unproven suppositions he proceeds from in all of his assumptions, and how almost all of his conclusions, which are to bring him new bits of knowledge, are pure leaps into uncertainty.

Closely bound with doubt is – strangely enough – a powerful overestimation of knowledge, which is on a weak foundation. “Science” is just plain deified. Man wants to know and understand everything. The person who does not have a certain amount of “knowledge” at his disposal is viewed as an inferior man, while those who are knowledgeable are honored as the elite of humanity. Although knowledge is not to be despised, the overestimation that considers true faith a sign of backwardness came to bear only when the concept of image was lost. Adam believed, investigated in faith, and enjoyed the knowledge that came to him as a fruit of his believing investigation, but faith, through which he was bound to his Creator, meant more to him than all knowledge.

It is obvious that fear must result from the present-day point of view. Jesus puts fear and faith at opposite ends of the spectrum: “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” Peace and freedom from worry are only possible where a person has something good as is certain of it. According to essence, doubt includes uncertainty and fear. As long as there is knowledge that there is a God who repays all, although it assumes scientifically unproven and unprovable things, it maintains itself in the heart of man despite all battling. As long as the madness prances deceptively before man that God will mete out reward and punishment only on the basis of merit; as long as the idea continues that perfection is unattainable, and that therefore we can never be certain whether we stand in God’s favor, that in fact we must always be uncertain; so long must – not even mentioning the fully awakened conscience – care and fear torture man. Even if everything is uncertain, one thing is certain: death. And death causes fear.

In the state of having the image, fear was unknown. It first appeared when the image was lost, at that very moment. The thought that God is something other than love, that his love can have limits, that a conditional love is possible, that God could somehow be envious, jealous, full of disfavor and would be pleased to put limits on man’s fortune, very narrow limits, to put heavy burdens on man – that thought came first to Adam when he was whispered to from the outside. He lived in blessed trust in God’s love which seeks and effects nothing but his welfare, in carefree quiet. He did not do what he did to avert punishment, to earn merit. He did it with a thankful heart for the love that he enjoyed.

It is this way of Adam above that the Holy Spirit has planted in Christians as a beginning, the way that he defends against all attacks, the way that he nurtures and preserves. A Christian does not seek to effect his own righteousness. He grasps the righteousness of Christ offered him. He does not seek to see or to comprehend. A word of his God is sufficient for him. He battles all doubt as godless; he seeks in faith to hold back all fear and care. But the beginning of the reproduction of the image in Christians is in great weakness and full deficiency. The image showed itself in Adam without any deficiencies, and also is illuminated in Christians to complete glory in heaven.

From observing the person of Christ we can gain important information about the image. The question has been much discussed by the dogmatists whether Adam was created according to Christ’s divine or human nature. It is generally denied, most recently by Doctor Franz Pieper (in his *Christian Dogmatics*, Volume One, 617f). That is proper. At the creation of Adam, Christ neither posed as model according to his divine nature nor according to his human nature. Adam was created according to the image of the triune God, and Christ is not the first but the second man, the last Adam.

But it is another question whether a view of Christ especially in his humanity can give us information about the nature of the divine image. This question is to be answered positively on the basis of the fact that Christ is compared to Adam. His humanity is placed on the same level as Adam’s. He is the second man, the last Adam, not just in name.

Divine nature as such ought to be excluded from this discussion. Completely aside from the fact that in itself it has remained invisible for us, just as that of the Father and the Spirit, the model according to which

Adam was created in the image is the Trinity, not the divine nature. Christ is not called the second Adam according to the divine nature.

On the other hand, it does not matter at all that Christ is called the image of the Father according to his divine nature in 2 Corinthians 4:4, Colossians 1:15, and Hebrews 1:3. The trinitarian relationship between the first and second persons of the Godhead is designated in Scripture by various expressions. The most common is probably the second person being called the Son of the first, who bears the name Father. Even if the expression borrowed from Psalm 2, “become your Father”, in this passage does not treat the inner relationship of the Father to the second person, but the historical sending of the Son, it does express the relationship indicated by the two names, Father and Son, completely in accord with these names. But we dare not lose sight of the fact that it is a matter of a designation borrowed from human relationships, a matter transcending all human knowledge, as high as the heavens.

Therefore Scripture does not limit itself to the use of this one group of expressions either. John’s designation “the Word” has come over less into the church’s usage and is less frequent, yet is still more clear. The Word is a revealed, expressed though that communicates itself to others, and makes itself valid, effective thought. God has a thought, a great thought, a thought in which all things in heaven and on earth are contained. To a certain degree, God has only one thought. The great fullness of all of this thought, so far above man’s thoughts, flows from this one thought, and returns to this one thought again. This thought is as old as God himself. It is coeternal with him. The thought that God thinks is not an empty game, however. It is concrete, essential, and personal. This expression, “Word”, is only an anthropopathic designation of the inner relationship of the first two persons of the Godhead.

And expression that highlights the complete correspondence and equality of essence of both persons more than the two previous expression is the designation of the Son as the image of God. Whoever sees the Son dare not seek and ask much longer. In the Son he sees the Father. But whoever seeks the Father outside of the Son never finds him. The incarnate image of God verifies this for the historically given relationships under sin. Without such relationships, all seeking of the Father would have been excluded a priori. The triune God was known to man in the image.

Thus when Scripture tells us to study the essential, incarnate image of the Father, the Son, the Word, in order to become acquainted with the Father, it is not that we should gain direct knowledge of our own concept of the image of God from viewing the divine nature of Jesus, but the opposite, since the second person is an image of the Father. We are created not according to the second person alone, but according to the Trinity.

It is a different matter with the human nature of Jesus. This is like Adam’s nature. Through the renewal of the Holy Spirit, we are to become like the image of God’s Son, so that he is the firstborn among many brothers. In the resurrection our body is to become similar to his transformed body.

Here too it is not possible to gain a direct view of the image of God, since Jesus has not come into the world for the purpose of letting us see what we have lost, but in order to bring us back to that from which we have fallen. He was to achieve this goal by taking our place. The humanity which he assumed was no longer the glorious one that Adam once possessed. It was humanity as it had become under the consequences of sin. He had to become like his brothers, with the single exception of sin. Sinlessness is, of course, the core of the concept of the image. Everything else, all pure knowledge, pure striving, pure joy, is only a fruit of sinlessness, to be viewed as granted with sinlessness. These blessings, especially the last one, can be severely limited and even completely lacking without essential damage to the image. Even though Jesus would have liked to be joyful, he took on shame, anxiety, and pain without losing the image. If sin enters, the concept of image itself is gone. Sinlessness was in Jesus and was clearly recognizable to everyone, friend and foe, despite the form of a servant. Sinlessness stood out on the form of a servant as on a dark background.

What was Jesus’ sinlessness? Our essence, the essence of those who are made like the image of God’s Son by the Holy Spirit, is designated summarily as faith. From that it is likely that Jesus’ sinlessness also consists essentially of faith.

Jesus spoke much about faith and called it a work of God that men believe in him. It is hardly necessary to discuss further his many statements about faith and invitations to faith, but an indication may be allowed in

the prayer of Jesus which appears characteristic for his evaluation of faith. He thanks his Father that he has hidden the truth of the gospel for wise men and revealed it to children. He attributes this activity of his Father to his good pleasure. Since it is God's pleasure that all sinners be saved, he is pleased to establish a way to appropriate salvation that excludes no one because of a natural difference. Wisdom and cleverness make a natural difference among men. Wisdom and cleverness may offer many advantages for temporal life. But they do not advance the acceptance and enjoyment of salvation. An overabundant emphasis on and regard for intellectual comprehension hinders salvation. The way to salvation stands open also to children. The wise and clever must forget their wisdom and cleverness, turn around, and become like children, if they want to get to heaven. Thus Jesus evaluates faith.

Accordingly, he always led a life of faith. In the state of his humiliation it was mediated by the Word of God. He overcame the temptations of the devil, who pressed him in a similar way and with the same weight as he once did to Eve in paradise. Jesus followed the Word with full trust no matter how much the circumstances argued against it. His faith shone especially bright on the cross. Completely abandoned by God, granted no friendly look of grace any longer, terrified by God's lightnings of anger, languishing under the fearful pressure of judgement, he clung in faith to his God when he offered up all of his strength, drew comfort from the observation of a psalm, wrestled in prayer with God, and received the victory.

The unshakable faith which did not sway even in the most violent attacks under the most unfavorable conditions forms the core of the active obedience of Christ in which he, in our place, acquired the image for us again. At the same time he prefigured the image for us. Through faith Adam was bound with God. Through faith he was put in the position of representing God on earth, to rule creation like God.

It is surprising that this grand thing, the image, which appears as a brief summary of the entire blessing of God over man, is so seldom mentioned in Scripture. Only in a few scattered passages is reference made to it. It is especially striking that the concept appears to be completely lacking in Genesis 2, where the creation of man is reported. Genesis 2 most clearly portrays the careful way in which Jehovah, the God who is concerned about man's salvation, went about the creation of man. But it does not mention the concept of image, which appeared so prominently in Genesis 1 as the one grand blessing with which man was gloriously bestowed.

It is already pointed out that the concept of an image used by a living person is obviously a trope, a metaphor. This expression is to help us understand a truth that would possibly not grab us and bless us in the same measure if it were expressed naturally. In the place where man is spoken of for the first time, no other expression would give us the feeling so directly of the overpowering loftiness of man than the one chosen by God: "In our image, in our likeness." But after this purpose was achieved, it could only have weakened the powerful impression if Moses had constantly operated with this picture language. Therefore Moses uses the expression only at significant turning points of his account, since reference is made to the original creation. Especially in the second chapter circumstances demanded an avoidance of the trope and a speaking of the matter in real words.

Therefore Moses speaks in real words also of the great matter when he presents in individual concrete details how man is installed in his office as God's representative on earth, like-minded with God. He also mentions expressly at the creation that God blew living breath into his nostrils. Without going further into the question whether "living" is to be limited to the functions of purely animal life, since much is also said about the animals having a living breath (cf. Genesis 7:22); without going further into whether the Word here is not to refer to the functions of the intellectual, personal life, since it is nowhere stated that God directly breathed the breath of life into the animals; one thing is certain, proceeding directly from the expressions used: it is a spirit of God, God's spirit, which is active in man and determines his life. Thereby in very real words, their similarity to God is established.

The reason why the concept of image is otherwise so seldom in Scripture is that through the fall into sin the similarity with God disappeared, and has even changed into its exact opposite. Even in those in whom new birth has taken place it appears only in a very imperfect way. Therefore it was a matter of using other tropes, which express the same thought without immediately evoking the idea of completion.

A related expression is found in Genesis 3:1, 3. A son bears the image of his father. In 1 Corinthians 15:45-49, in a parallel which he draws between Christ and Adam, Paul argues that we are renewed according to the image of the second Adam, and are to bear the image of the heavenly Adam. He connects the same thought in Romans 8:29 to a second related expression; We are to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. To be Christ's brother, to be God's child, is essentially the same thing as bearing God's image. Genesis 6:2 already speaks of God's child.

The concept of child contains the attribute of incompleteness, a being in development. Therefore it is the more suitable term for our present condition. The image begun is expressed in the idea that the complete image is highlighted as the goal. John says the same: We are now God's children, and it is yet to be seen what we will become. But we know that when it is clear what we will become, we will be like him. What is to be produced now in a long process by hard work and under dangerous battles had fallen from the beginning like ripe fruit into our lap. We were created as God's image-children.

It remains yet to mention in a few words the question whether the concept of image in biblical image is constant, or whether Scripture somehow knows an image in the narrower and in the wider sense, in the actual, exact, and in the relatively looser sense. Those who think that a double sense must be assumed point especially to Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9 to support their claim. Both passages speak of men living in the present and apply to them the statement that God made man – the species man and thereby every individual – in his image. Here they think that image cannot be understood in the strict sense, but refers to the fact that God grants man reason, and has created him as a personal being, blessings which man still possesses even after the fall.

Since nowhere else in Scripture is there any indication even in the most remote sense that the concept of image can have varying circumference, since in these passages the image of God in man is pointed out in a very solemn manner, we would only be justified to take up this solution when every other interpretation proves untenable. But the suggested solution also proves to be hardly useful. Just try to substitute their broad sense in both passages. Where is the directly convincing force of James 3:9 then? "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made reasonable, personal beings." Genesis 9:6 works the same way.

No, God made man in his image. This was not the result of a momentary mood. It was his counsel from eternity. This thought filled eternity. And even if man has thrown this precious gift away in ingratitude, has left God's image and become God's enemy, God still has not given up his thought. He made man in his image, and does not look at man differently, even after the fall. In accordance with the changed circumstances, he must deal differently with his image. He seeks to restore it. But it remains his image. In the beginning it was made by a creative act of God. Now it is "made" by the unspeakable sacrifice of God's Son, and is "made" by the untiring work of the Holy Spirit. We praise God for the love that he shows to his image, and we should curse the image for which he makes such efforts for any slackness.

In Genesis 9:6, the concept of image appears as a basis for the doubled sense. No one should shed the blood of man, for man is God's image, and the murderer's blood is to be shed by man, for men are God's image. The latter is a disciplinary measure of God under the present conditions on earth. God had made man lord of the world, and his fall dragged the natural world into suffering. Under the dominion of sin, man's gift of governing degenerated into coarseness and impiety. Violence took the upper hand in such a manner that men not only boasted about it (Lamech), but also received fame and honor from it (Genesis 6:4), so that God finally had the old world destroyed in the flood. After this judgement, he obligated himself never to let anything similar happen. But in order that such a thing never become necessary again, man himself is to take care of discipline and order, and especially to nip violence in the bud unrelentingly. He is to condemn the murderer. And he is empowered to do that. He is God's image, originally made for this through creation, and now also through redemption and sanctification. The image is to be exercised and schooled, and is to mature toward perfection by man's keeping God-pleasing order on earth.

Our concept of image with God is the one great thought of God. It is the beginning, middle, and end of all his ways.