

THE IMAGO DEI
IN CONFESSIONAL LUTHERAN THEOLOGY:
ESTABLISHING BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING
NARROW AND BROAD SENSES

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ABSTRACT

The doctrine of the *imago Dei* grounds Christian teaching on human dignity, ethics, and identity. However, confessional Lutheran theology has focused almost exclusively on the narrow sense of the image—original righteousness lost in the Fall and restored in Christ—leaving the broader sense less explored. This thesis examines the biblical foundations and historical development of the *imago Dei* within confessional Lutheranism to define clear boundaries for understanding both senses. Through historical-grammatical exegesis of key Old and New Testament passages (Gen 1:26–28; 5:3; 9:6; Jas 3:9; Col 1:15; 2 Cor 3:18; 4:4–6), this study applies an ontological and functional framework to understand the image of God in both narrow and broad senses. The distinctions between the two emerge from theological challenges faced by the orthodox Lutheran church, as shown by a historical review of confessional Lutheran sources from the Reformation to today. This synthesis equips pastors to navigate contemporary issues related to natural law, human dignity, and biblical anthropology without compromising Lutheran principles.

INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of the *imago Dei*—the image of God—serves as one of the key teachings of Christian anthropology, grounding human dignity, sanctity of life, and ethical obligations. Yet current confessional Lutheran teaching creates practical confusion regarding this concept. While much has been said about the narrow definition of the image (image equals original righteousness, lost in the Fall and restored in Christ), this emphasis often comes at the expense of the broader sense of the term. The confessional Lutheran perspective on the image of God, especially in its broad sense, remains underexplored and offers meaningful opportunities for investigation. Luther has been quoted more than once describing humanity as a “stinking maggot-sack.” A colorful statement from a man of wit, made to emphasize man’s humility before an all-powerful and gracious God. While this is true, it is also true that he cares for his creation, particularly mankind, whom he has “crowned with glory and honor” (Ps 8:5 NIV).¹ We cherish the minds and bodies God has blessed us with because we have been “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps 139:14). Similarly, we aim to reflect this sentiment in a world that increasingly views its own minds and bodies as material to be manipulated for selfish purposes. However, the answers we offer are presented as disconnected biblical statements. The doctrine of the *imago Dei* is a unifying concept that anchors our various responses to transgender issues,

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all English Scripture quotations are from the New International Version (NIV)

natural law, the sanctity of life, human dignity, and civic ethics to a single point in space and time.

This thesis explores the biblical roots and historical development of the *imago Dei* doctrine within confessional Lutheranism, aiming to clearly define the concept of the image of God in both narrow and broad senses. The central research question is: What are the biblical parameters for understanding the *imago Dei* in both narrow and broad senses, and how do these align with confessional Lutheran teachings? By establishing these parameters through careful exegesis and historical study, this thesis prepares the way for future Lutheran discussions on natural law, social ethics, and biblical anthropology without compromising Lutheran distinctives.

An interpretive challenge arises in understanding the difference between the image in the broad sense and the image in the narrow sense. The narrow sense, original righteousness and holiness, is clearly revealed in Christ (Col 1:15; 2 Cor 4:4) and explicitly stated in passages about the new creation in believers (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). This was completely lost in the Fall and is restored through Christ. The broad sense, however, must be inferred from the creation account in Genesis and confirmed in post-Fall passages like Gen 9:6 and Jas 3:9. Since there is no single passage that explicitly defines the broad-sense image like there is for the narrow sense, we can best understand it ontologically (what constitutes the image in human nature) and functionally (the purposes for which God made us in his image).

Methodology and Outline

As students of Wauwatosa Theology, it makes sense that we would first go back to the sources to better understand what Scripture says about the image of God. This calls for a historical-grammatical exegesis of the *sedes doctrinae* passages in both the Old and New Testaments.

These passages are central to our understanding of the image of God. However, we are also aware that we are products of our own historical time and place, often unaware of how our current context influences our thinking and how it will be perceived decades or centuries later. In the historical overview, we will aim to understand what Luther and other reformers were grappling with when they discussed the image of God. By establishing the boundaries set by Scripture and examining how its teachings have been interpreted throughout history, we can finally synthesize our findings and highlight areas of agreement and disagreement. This process helps us determine the best way to apply the doctrine of the image of God in our present context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The doctrine of the *imago Dei* stands at the heart of Christian anthropology, grounding teachings on human dignity, the sanctity of life, and ethical obligations. Yet the scope of this doctrine remains contested. Does the image refer only to original righteousness, completely lost in the Fall and restored in Christ? Or does it also encompass something broader—rational faculties, dominion, relationality—that persists even in fallen humanity? This literature review surveys how theologians have understood the image of God, revealing a gap that this thesis addresses.

The Broad Sense in Non-Lutheran Scholarship

Outside confessional Lutheran circles, the idea that the image of God remains after the Fall is largely uncontested. Reformed and evangelical commentators see Gen 9:6 and Jas 3:9 as confirming that fallen humanity still bears God's image in some meaningful sense.² This is not a minority view — Gordon Wenham, Kenneth Mathews, Douglas Moo, and Peter Davids all share this common understanding in their commentaries. Discussing whether man still bears the image is not a matter for debate.

Passages from Gen 5:3, 9:6, and Jas 3:9 all confirm the presence of God's image in fallen humanity. Unless an explicit statement notes the complete loss of the image, these commentators

2. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC 1 (Dallas: Word, 1987), 29–32; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, NAC 1A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 166–69.

assume it remains. Another reason this isn't a debated point outside Lutheranism is the unfamiliarity with dividing the image into narrow and broad senses. The closest language to such a distinction is found in Kenneth Mathews, who refers to a “diminished glory” in post-Fall humanity.³

This broad agreement outside confessional boundaries is significant. It suggests that Scripture itself warrants speaking of the image in more than one sense—a point this thesis will develop exegetically. Yet Lutheran theology has historically been more cautious, for reasons rooted in the Reformation’s polemical context.

Lutheran Writings Emphasizing the Narrow Sense

Martin Luther’s treatment of the image was shaped by his conflict with medieval scholasticism. The scholastics, building on Augustine, located the image in the rational faculties (memory, intellect, and will) and treated original righteousness as a superadded gift (*donum superadditum*) that perfected but was not essential to human nature. Luther rejected this framework vigorously. To him, the image was original righteousness, not merely perfected faculties, but the proper relationship Adam enjoyed with God.⁴ When this was lost in the Fall, the image was lost entirely. Luther emphasizes the point further. If the image were connected to the faculties, then any faculties Satan shares with humanity would mean he still carries the image of God. Luther

3. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 310. Mathews speaks of a “diminished glory” in fallen humanity. See also Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 127, 192–94; Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, TNTC 16 (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1985), 133; Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 146.

4. Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* (1535), in *Luther’s Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muehlenberg and Fortress; St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–1986), 1:60–63 (hereafter LW).

considers this conclusion absurd, since no one would claim that God's enemy bears the divine image.⁵

The Book of Concord continues this emphasis in its polemical context. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession defined the image as “a wisdom and righteousness that would grasp God and reflect God” (Ap II:17–18), focusing on what was lost rather than what remains.⁶ The Formula of Concord, responding to the Flacian controversy, carefully distinguishes between human nature (which remains) and the image (which was lost), but does not explicitly call the remaining faculties “the image” (FC, SD I:10, 12).⁷

This narrow emphasis carries forward into American Lutheranism. Francis Pieper states that Luther's interpretation “is to be preferred,”⁸ though he acknowledges that other Orthodox theologians (Baier, Quenstedt) distinguish between a wider and proper sense.⁹ Pieper's preference makes sense in his context; the issues we face today weren't relevant to him. What mattered was the need to convict those who didn't believe in their lack of righteousness, which stemmed from the loss of the image of God. On the other hand, there was comfort for those burdened by guilt over their sin. God's forensic declaration of righteousness served as the soothing balm their troubled consciences needed, and they could be assured that from the moment of their new birth, they were being daily renewed in the image of their Creator. Lyle

5. LW 1:61. Luther argues: “If these powers are the image of God, it will also follow that Satan was created according to the image of God, since he surely has these natural endowments, such as memory and a very superior intellect and a most determined will, to a far higher degree than we have them.”

6. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 114 (hereafter Kolb-Wengert).

7. Kolb-Wengert, 533.

8. Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950–1957), 1:519.

9. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:518–19. Pieper acknowledges that Baier and Quenstedt distinguish between a wider and proper sense.

Lange's *God So Loved the World* maintains this narrow emphasis, explicitly denying that rationality is part of the image.¹⁰

This emphasis makes pastoral sense. The Reformers were fighting synergism—the idea that fallen humans can cooperate in their salvation. If the image (located in rational faculties) remained intact, synergists could argue that these faculties still held spiritual capacity. By defining the image narrowly as righteousness and insisting it was entirely lost, the Reformers closed this door. However, this emphasis creates exegetical tension with Gen 9:6 and Jas 3:9, which seem to attribute the image to fallen humanity.

Lutheran Writings Acknowledging a Broader Sense

Despite the narrow emphasis, there is a tradition within confessional Lutheranism that acknowledges a broader sense, even though it is often overshadowed. Johann Gerhard offers the most detailed explanation, identifying four ways the image “may be said to remain”: the essence of the soul with its faculties, a general analogy to the Trinity, dominion over creatures, and inborn remnants of the law written on the heart.¹¹ Johannes Quenstedt develops precise terminology by distinguishing between the image of God “specifically employed,” which is the image received “in part” (μερικῶς), and “wholly” (ὁλικῶς). He also differentiates between “principal perfections” of the soul and “less principal perfections” of the body. These distinctions relate to what was present at creation and later lost in the Fall (the narrow sense). Notably,

10. Lyle W. Lange, *God So Loved the World: A Study of Christian Doctrine* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2005), 189.

11. Johann Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces*, trans. Richard J. Dinda, ed. Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia, 2013), Commonplace XI, §129, 322 (hereafter Gerhard).

Quenstedt's use of the qualifier "specifically employed" reflects his awareness of the image in another sense.¹²

Adolf Hoenecke explicitly states that when the image is understood as "the spiritual nature of man with his spiritual powers—thus the likeness of God in the wider sense—then it was not lost in the Fall as Scripture confirms (Gen 9:6; Jas 3:9)."¹³ While Hoenecke can affirm the broad sense, he focuses more on the narrow sense, as shown by the considerable attention he gives to the Flacian controversy, the teaching of the *donum superadditum*, and other errors that stem from misunderstandings of the image of God.¹⁴

Among contemporary works, Daniel Deutschlander's *Grace Abounds* presents the "shell and core" metaphor: the shell (faculties of emotion, will, reason) remains, while the core (righteousness and holiness) was lost.¹⁵ The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod's current dogmatics textbook, *Confessing the Gospel*, presents both perspectives diplomatically; however, it notes that "these passages [Gen 9:6; Jas 3:9] can be interpreted to mean that the divine image remains in human beings even after the Fall," and that "Scripture speaks of the image of God in two senses."¹⁶

12. Johannes Andreas Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica*, II.3, cited in Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 235, (hereafter Schmid). All Quenstedt quotations are cited through Schmid.

13. Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern House, 1999), 2:322.

14. Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 2:322–30.

15. Daniel M. Deutschlander, *Grace Abounds: The Splendor of Christian Doctrine* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2015), 169.

16. Samuel H. Nafzger, John F. Johnson, David A. Lumpp, and Howard W. Tepker, eds., *Confessing the Gospel: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 1:279.

The Gap This Thesis Addresses

From this, it's pretty clear that many biblical exegetes see, within the pages of scripture, evidence of the image of God persisting after the Fall, because they do not separate it into a narrow or broad sense. It is also clear that within Lutheranism, there is a strong emphasis on the narrow sense of the image of God in our teachings about the fall, human depravity, and the subsequent restoration of that image at our new birth. Perhaps because justification is such a central teaching in Lutheran theology, it makes sense that we would emphasize the narrow sense of the image of God. And yet, our Lutheran Dogmaticians also mention a broad sense, but without extensively developing its significance or application.

Pastors facing questions about natural law, bioethics, and human dignity lack clear biblical and historical boundaries to guide their teaching. As with many teachings gleaned from dogmatics texts, there are passages and quotations taken from Scripture and dogmaticians that lay out the entire position, but these have been divorced from their historical context. The aim of this thesis is to provide both historical context for how the Bible reveals the image of God and, simultaneously, for how Lutheran dogmaticians—beginning with Luther and continuing to our day—spoke of the image of God. The goal is to lay out the biblical data and the confessional Lutheran interpretation of that data, outlining the parameters within which Lutherans understand and speak of the image of God.

BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

It is wise to start with Genesis 1 since this is where we first hear about the image of God, and in fact, it is within Genesis that the term appears most often. Gen 1:26–28 marks a slowdown in the creative process, as God deliberates: "Let us make," using the cohortative נַעֲשֶׂה (na'aseh).¹⁷ What follows is a creative act where the verb בָּרָא (bara, "created") appears three times in quick succession, highlighting the unique creative act that is about to take place.¹⁸

Created in God's Image (Genesis 1:26–28)

"Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground'" (Gen 1:26). Right from the beginning, both ontology and function appear together. The key Hebrew terms are אָדָם (*adam*, "mankind"), בְּצִלְמֵנוּ (*betsalmenu*, "in our image"), and בְּדְמוּתֵנוּ (*kidmutenu*, "in our likeness"). The prepositions בְּ (*bet*) and כְּ (*kaph*) indicate that humans are created according to and as the image and likeness of

17. On the plural "let us make," see Appendix A1. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 27–28 (divine deliberation), 28–29 (heavenly court interpretation); K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 161–62 (survey of six interpretation); Lawrenz and Jeske, *Commentary on Genesis 1–11*, 72–73 (Holy Trinity).

18. The verb בָּרָא appears three times in v. 27 alone, whereas it occurs only twice in the rest of creation (Gen 1:1, 21). Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 172–73; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 33.

God—we are made in the pattern of God’s image.¹⁹ This points to an ontological reality: we bear something of God’s nature in our very constitution.

The terms *צֶלֶם* (*tselem*, “image”) and *דְּמוּת* (*demut*, “likeness”) appear together here functioning as synonymous parallelism, with the second term clarifying and reinforcing the first.²⁰ The term *צֶלֶם* (*tselem*) can denote a physical representation, like a statue. In this context, mankind represents God.²¹ The statement “and let them have dominion,” *וַיְרִדוּ* (*veyirdu*), is joined to the image by a conjunctive *waw*, suggesting that the image enables this rule.²² Genesis 1:26 thus gives us both the ontological reality, man is created in God’s image, and the functional purpose: this image is exercised through dominion over the earth.

The threefold use of *בָּרָא* (*bara*) emphasizes that God’s creative action is unique and deliberate. As the text states, “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). The poetic structure of this verse centers around “image” through inverted parallelism in lines one and two, while the third line

19. The preposition *ב* in *בְּצֶלְמִי* likely means “according to” or “in the pattern of” (cf. Exod 25:40), indicating humans are patterned after God’s image, not exact replicas. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 167; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 29. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), s.v. *ב*; Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. and ed. M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000), s.v. *ב*.

20. Interpreters widely recognize that *צֶלֶם* (*tselem*, ‘image’) and *דְּמוּת* (*demut*, ‘likeness’) function together as parallel terms that reinforce each other’s meaning, rather than representing separate concepts. For refutation of Irenaeus’s distinction between “image” (retained) and “likeness” (lost), see Appendix A2. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 166–67; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 29–30.

21. The term *צֶלֶם* can denote physical representation (statue, idol). Mathews *Genesis 1–11:26*, 166. In ANE contexts, kings erected their *צֶלֶם* as representatives in conquered territories. Genesis democratizes this: all humanity represents God’s rule. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 29, 31. BDB s.v. *צֶלֶם*; HALOT s.v. *צֶלֶם*.

22. The jussive *וַיְרִדוּ* with conjunctive *waw* may indicate purpose or result, linking the image to the dominion mandate. Lawrenz and Jeske, *Commentary on Genesis 1–11*, 73–74; Wilhelm Gesenius, E. Kautzsch, and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd English ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), §109f-h; Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 2nd ed., Subsidia Biblica 27 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2006), §114l-m.

explicitly includes both sexes—זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה (*zakhar unekevah*, “male and female”)—as image-bearers.²³ Genesis 1:27 is a clear statement of ontology that describes what humans are solely because of God’s creative act. Nothing is said here about function. This is simply a statement of being, of identity, of status. Both sexes bear the image fully and equally. Here, the text democratizes the image: all humanity, male and female, without distinction, bears God’s image.²⁴

What is this image? The text doesn’t tell us. It simply states it as fact. The ontological content of the image, namely what constitutes or reflects God’s image, is left undefined.²⁵ We know that we were made in God’s image, even if we don’t yet know exactly what that means in terms of our nature. But this much is clear: it’s intrinsic to who we were at creation.

Now the focus shifts to function. God blessed humanity, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Gen 1:28). This blessing acknowledges what God has equipped us to do through the ontological nature of the image. Genesis 1:28 emphasizes the functional aspect of what image-bearers do. The imperatives כִּבְשׁוּהָ (*kivshuha*, “subdue it”) and רָדוּ (*redu*, “rule”) outline the functions, which are twofold: procreation (filling the earth with

23. Genesis 1:27 has a chiastic structure: A (mankind/image) - B (image/mankind) - C (male and female). The chiasm emphasizes the divine image as the central reality, while the shift from singular (“him”) to plural (“them”) specifies that both sexes equally bear God’s image. Mathews *Genesis 1–11:26*, 172–73; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 33.

24. Genesis democratizes the image to all humanity, male and female equally, in contrast to ANE conceptions where typically only the king was considered the divine image. Mathews *Genesis 1–11:26*, 169 (contrast with ANE royal ideology); Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 31 (democratization of divine image).

25. Genesis 1:26–28 does not define the image’s ontological content, that is, what precisely about our nature constitutes the image. For survey of major scholarly theories (mental/spiritual, physical, representative, relational), see Appendix C. Mathews *Genesis 1–11:26*, 168–69; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 29–32 (survey of interpretations), esp. 30–31 (critique of ontological definitions).

image-bearers) and dominion (subduing and ruling over creation).²⁶ These functions stem directly from ontology. Meaning, we can exercise dominion because we are made in God's image. Function presupposes ontology.²⁷

Within Gen 1:26–28, we find both ontological and functional dimensions of God's image. Verse 26 introduces both: humans are created in God's image (ontology) for the purpose of exercising dominion (function). Verse 27 focuses on the ontological reality, an identity intrinsic to human nature alone, shared equally by male and female. Verse 28 focuses on the function: we represent God's rule by filling the earth and ruling over it.

The text outlines these aspects in a specific order, which is not insignificant: ontology before function. Verse 26 declares that we are made in God's image before mentioning dominion. Verse 28's functional commands presuppose the ontological reality of verse 27. The function flows from the ontology, not the other way around. You can have the ontological aspect without exercising the functional aspect, but you cannot exercise the function without possessing the image itself. Genesis 2 will offer further details about the image's function with God's expressed will.

26. Verse 28 specifies two functions of the image: (1) Procreation---filling the earth with image-bearers through marriage (cf. Gen 2:24; Matt 19:4–6); (2) Dominion---subduing (כבש) and ruling (רדה) creation as God's representatives. Unlike Babylonian accounts where humans serve gods, Genesis presents humans as stewards exercising God's authority. Mathews *Genesis 1–11:26*, 174–75; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 33; Lawrenz and Jeske, *Commentary on Genesis 1–11*, 73, 77; BDB s.v. רדה, כבש.

27. The directional flow is ontology to function. Verse 26 states the image before mentioning dominion; verse 28's commands assume verse 27's reality. Being comes before doing; function derives from and depends on ontology. This becomes especially important after the Fall: if the ontological image remains (Gen 9:6), then the functions also remain, though corrupted. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 160 (creation's ascending order), 173–74 (dominion flows from image); Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 32–33 (functional consequence of ontological reality); Lawrenz and Jeske, *Commentary on Genesis 1–11*, 74–75 (image as prerequisite for dominion).

The Image in Action and Under Question (Genesis 2–3)

Genesis 2 elaborates on the sixth day, illustrating the functional expressions of the image before the Fall. After establishing the ontological reality in Gen 1:26–27, Genesis 2 shows us what image-bearers do. Here, we see the functions operating as God intended.

We observe man’s rational capacity for categorization and dominion over the animals in Gen 2:19–20 with the phrase וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שְׁמוֹת (*vayikra ha-adam shemot*, “and the man called names”).²⁸ We observe stewardship in Gen 2:15 with the infinitives לְעֹבְדָהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָה (*le’ovdah uleshomrah*, “to work it and keep it”), indicating cultivation and preservation of God’s creation.²⁹

The moral aspect appears when man receives God’s command in Gen 2:16–17. The very act of giving the command presupposes the ability to obey (in the pre-Fall state), revealing moral reasoning and a will aligned with God.³⁰ The relationship with God is demonstrated through direct communication and unmediated fellowship (Gen 2:15–17). This relational quality appears when God creates a female partner, described as עֶזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ (*ezer kenegdo*, “a helper corresponding to him”), who is equal, “bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23). Marriage is established (Gen 2:24), with procreation implied (Gen 1:28).³¹

28. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 238 (naming asserts authority); Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 68–69 (naming as dominion/rational capacity).

29. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 67 (naming as dominion/rational capacity).

30. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 63–64 (moral capacity presupposed by command). Before the Fall, man’s original righteousness gave him the ability to obey God’s commands. After the Fall, though an unbeliever may perform the same external act as a believer, it is worthless before God without a heart of faith — a point Luther makes clear in *The Bondage of the Will*.

31. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 68 (עֶזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ), 71 (marriage established).

Before the Fall, image-bearers exercise dominion, steward creation, make moral judgments, and relate to God and one another. These functions flow from the ontological reality established in Gen 1:26–27.

Genesis 3 details the serpent’s temptation, humanity’s rebellion, and the consequences of God’s judgment. Notably missing is any direct statement that God’s image has been lost.³² If anything, it’s ambiguous. Yet it’s clear that something has changed, even if we’re not exactly sure what. However, the ambiguity raises questions.

What continues? Moral agency persists in verses Gen 3:6–13; a decision has been made, and God questions them about it. Adam and Eve still bear responsibility for their choices, even though the moral decision was catastrophically wrong. The relationship with God has clearly changed. Genesis 3:8 and 10 depict hiding, fear, and shame. Direct access to God’s presence is lost when they are expelled from the garden. Yet, God spoke to them, offering the promise in Gen 3:15 and clothing them in Gen 3:21. The relationship is damaged, but by God’s grace not destroyed.³³

Functionally, the image has been deeply hindered. Procreation continues, but now בְּעֶצֶב (be’etsev teledi vanim, “in pain you shall bring forth children,” Gen 3:16).³⁴ Marriage persists but with conflict (Gen 3:16). In Genesis 3:17–19, dominion unquestionably continues, but now over a creation that is cursed. Creation will produce קוֹץ וְדַרְדָּר (kotz vedardar, “thorns

32. For discussion of Irenaeus’s distinction, see Genesis 1 footnote 19 and Appendix A2. Genesis 3’s silence about image loss contradicts Irenaeus’s claim that the ‘likeness’ was lost.

33. In his promise (Gen 3:15) and action (Gen 3:21) God continues to maintain a relationship with man. (Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 247–48; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 80–81).

34. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 250–51 (תְּשִׁיבָה and a detailed analysis).

and thistles,” Gen3:18), and man will gather food בְּזַעַת אִפְיֶיךָ (*bezei 'at apekha*, “by the sweat of your face,” Gen 3:19).³⁵ The core idea: functions continue but are corrupted.

What has happened to the image of God? The text offers no clear answer. Humans still perform what image-bearers are meant to do: rule, procreate, make moral decisions, and relate, but these functions are now broken, corrupted, and painful.³⁶ Something has changed on an ontological level. But what exactly? Genesis 4 will reveal these corrupted functions in Adam’s descendants. Gen 5:3 will pose an even sharper question: what does Adam pass on to his offspring?

Genesis 2 depicts the image as a unified reality in which all its functions: dominion, procreation, moral capacity, and relationality work perfectly. There are no narrow or broad senses, and the ontological content remains undefined. Genesis 3 introduces the potential for a distinction without clarifying it. The same functions continue, but are now hindered and corrupted. If these functions are corrupted, something must have changed ontologically, yet the text does not say the image was lost. Genesis 3 raises the question, “What remains, and what was lost?” but leaves the matter unresolved. Reflecting on Paul’s revelation in Christ would reveal to later theologians what was lost (the narrow-sense image of original righteousness) and what corrupt vestiges remained (the broad-sense image).

35. Humanity’s dominion over creation is frustrated by the curse God placed on creation, but the man’s status as ruler over creation remains in force (Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 252; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 82).

36. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 253–54.

The Image Transmitted (Genesis 5:3)

Following the genealogy in Genesis 4, which links the tragedy of Cain and Abel to the line through which God's promise endures, we encounter verses that directly parallel the creation account but also contain subtle yet meaningful differences. Gen 5:1–3 calls back to Gen 1:26–2:4 but especially the creation of man, “When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth” (Gen 5:3). That key phrase, בְּדִמּוּתוֹ כְּצִלְמוֹ (*bidmuto ketsalmo*, “in his own likeness, after his image”), is significant. This closely parallels Gen 1:26–27, which also uses the terms דְּמוּת (*demut*, “likeness”) and צֶלֶם (*tselem*, “image”), connecting the two sections.³⁷ Interestingly, after the Fall, Adam had a son in his image and after his likeness, unlike Adam and Eve, who were created in the image and likeness of God.³⁸

What are the implications of this? Something has been transmitted based on the account of the Fall. We are not told that the image is gone, but we also know that something has happened to the image, especially in terms of its function. What has been transmitted from Adam to Seth? We don't know for sure at this point.

Genesis 4 shows that image functions persist but are corrupted.³⁹ Gen 5:3 then prompts a question: why does the language change from “in God's likeness” (Gen 5:1–2) to “in his [Adam's] likeness” (Gen 5:3)? This shift in language suggests both continuity and discontinuity.

37. For a detailed analysis of the parallels between these sections, see Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 307–08; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 126.

38. While Mathews and Wenham emphasize the continuity of the image, Lawrence and Jeske highlight its discontinuity, such as God for Adam and Adam for Seth. While this is important to recognize because it shows a clear shift in man's image, they might be overextending by suggesting that no image of God is passed from Adam to his descendants, unless they are referring only to the image in the narrow sense (Lawrenz and Jeske, *Commentary on Genesis 1–11*, 212).

³⁹ Authority over creation, Gen 4:2; procreation, Gen 4:1–2, 17, 25 (Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 280); rational capacity in moral decisions and cultural progress, Gen 4:7–8, 17, 20–22 (Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 111–14); worship, Gen 4:3–5; yet corrupted through murder, Gen 4:8 (Mathews, 265–66); separation from God, Gen 4:9–16; polygamy and violent boasting, Gen 4:19, 23–24 (Wenham, 112, 114).

On one hand, Seth is born in the image of God in that he retains the ontological and functional capacities that define humanity—reason, will, moral agency, and the mandates of dominion and procreation. On the other hand, he bears his father’s image in that he inherits a fallen nature. These capacities are now corrupted by sin, and he lacks the original righteousness that characterized Adam before the Fall.

The text does not clearly specify which emphasis is primary, and both capture important truths. What is clear is that something fundamental has changed. Functionally, Genesis 4 demonstrates that image-related abilities such as dominion, procreation, rationality, and relationality persist, albeit in a corrupted form. But this leaves the ontological question open: whether these functions stem from the same image God gave Adam, or whether a more significant change has taken place. When the text shifts from God’s image to Adam’s image without an explanation, the reader is left to wonder why. While the silence here is unsatisfying, Gen 9:6 provides more insight.

The Image Affirmed (Genesis 9:6)

Does the image persist after the Fall? Genesis 5:3, in Adam’s *toledot*, leaves us uncertain. Seth’s claim to be “in the image and likeness” of his father presents challenging interpretive choices: does the image God gave Adam remain intact in his descendants, was Adam’s fallen condition also transmitted, or is the truth a combination of both? The image shows functional traces already in Cain and Abel, but functional glimpses do not settle the ontological question. Scripture returns to the issue more explicitly a few chapters later, after the Flood, prompting us to reconsider what lasting status the *imago Dei* grants to humanity.

After the flood, God made a covenant with Noah and his descendants (Gen 9:1–17). In this new beginning, God blesses humanity to be fruitful and multiply, echoing Gen 1:28, and reaffirms human dominance over creation (Gen 9:1–3).⁴⁰ Under this covenant, God forbids murder and bases this command on humanity’s status as image-bearers: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his image” (Gen 9:6).

The Hebrew phrase בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֱתֶהְאָדָם (*betselem elohim asah et-ha’adam*, “God made man in his image”) is crucial. The conjunction כִּי (*ki*) functions causally, grounding God’s command *in* the image of God *in* which humanity was made.⁴¹ The verse’s chiasmic structure — *shed, blood, man // man, blood, shed* — links human action (shedding blood) directly to its consequence (having one’s blood shed).⁴² The כִּי clause that follows, not part of the chiasm itself, supplies the rationale for the punishment: the victim’s ontological status as God’s image-bearer.⁴³ Murderers who are guilty of shedding blood, shed the blood of God’s image-bearers.

From what precedes Genesis 9, we see continuity with the image God gave Adam at creation, as well as its corruption. Despite the ambiguity in Gen 5:3 and the persistent evil intentions of man’s heart (Gen 6:5, 7), Gen 9:6 provides a more explicit post-Fall statement that reaffirms man’s status as God’s image-bearer.⁴⁴ This post-Fall affirmation that all humans bear

40. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 399 (universality of pre-Sinitic covenants), 400 (blessing for Noah and sons); Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 192 (universal blessing).

41. On causal כִּי, see GKC §158b; J-M §170d, da.

42. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 193–94.

43. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 403 (prohibition rooted in image. For Mathew’s extensive treatment of the “accounting” [דָּרַשׁ] see 403–406).

44. An alternative interpretation, supported by Lawrenz and Jeske, suggests that Genesis 9:6 refers to humanity’s original creation in God’s image rather than its current state. According to this view, murder is prohibited because “it attacks the majesty” of a creation originally made in God’s image, and it shortens the time of grace for those who need to hear about God’s son, our Savior. (Lawrenz and Jeske, *Commentary on Genesis 1–11*,

God's image suggests continuity with the original creation. Based on Paul's epistle to the Romans, we understand this as the retention of the broad-sense image (rational and moral faculties), even though the narrow-sense image (original righteousness) was completely lost. What we discover here in Gen 9:6 receives further validation in the New Testament book of James.

The Image Confirmed (James 3:9)

James 3:9 provides the final piece of compelling evidence that the image of God yet remains in humanity, in some ontological way. Addressing a group of Jewish believers and giving moral exhortations about the good and evil that come from the human tongue, James lays the ethical foundation for why we should tame our tongues.

The organ that we use to praise God, but then inversely turn to curse what God has created, might seem to our understanding as two distinct actions, but James draws out the absurd hypocrisy of such a distinction. How can we claim to praise God and yet curse humanity, who has been made in God's likeness?

Clearly, James is alluding to Gen 1:26, in which God created man in his image.⁴⁵ Perhaps even an allusion to Gen 9:6, where a prohibition is made on murder on account of man being made in the image of God. Cursing our neighbor is no less a trespass against the same commandment meant to protect life (Matt 5:21–22). As one scholar notes, "The connection is

284). While this interpretation is pastorally motivated, it stretches the text's straightforward meaning. Further discussion of this point can be found in the Summary and Conclusion (see "Why the Broad Sense Remains Necessary").

45. Douglas J. Moo, *James: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1985), 133.

simply that one cannot pretend to bless the person (God) and logically curse the representation of that person (a human).”⁴⁶

Given James’ audience, it might be tempting to limit his prohibition to those within the church. However, there is nothing in this verse that demands restricting the prohibition to only those in the church. The language seems as broad as possible, and, like Gen 9:6, it invokes an ethical standard based on all of humanity (ἄνθρωπος, *anthropos*),⁴⁷ who has been made in God’s likeness (ὁμοίωσις, *homoiosis*).

What is also striking is the use of the perfect tense of the participle γεγονότας (*gegonotas*, “having been made”). James is not describing the pre-fall state of creation; he is describing creation as it presently exists. As an adjectival participle modifying ἄνθρωπος (*anthropos*), it retains this strong aspectual force.⁴⁸ Combined with the present tense verb καταρώμεθα (*katarometha*, “to curse”), this means that the people we curse at present currently bear God’s image.

The Gospel Reveals the Image (2 Corinthians 4:4–6; Colossians 1:15)

Genesis leaves the ontological content of the image undefined, but the New Testament provides clarity through revelation. In Christ, the image is no longer a puzzle but fully revealed. By examining Christ as the image in Col 1:15 and 2 Cor 4:4–6, we see that the narrow sense of the

46. Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 146.

47. Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. “ἄνθρωπος.”

48. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 574 (The Perfect Tense), 615 (The Perfect Participle).

image is righteousness: the perfect ability for right relationship with God, expressed through self-giving love and sacrificial service. This righteousness was completely lost in the Fall and is restored to believers through Christ.

Paul's declaration is definitive: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation" (Col 1:15). This is not metaphorical language. It is a statement of fact.⁴⁹ Unlike mankind, who was created "in" the image, Christ "is" the image.⁵⁰ Christ is the image of God according to both his divine person and his redemptive office. As the eternal Son, he is the perfect visible expression of the invisible God; as our Redeemer, he embodies the righteousness and holiness that constitute the narrow-sense image we lost and need restored.⁵¹ In the ancient Near East, an image often functioned as the visible manifestation of the reality it represented.⁵² Applied to Christ, this reveals that Christ is not a copy of God's nature, but the perfect visible expression of the invisible God.⁵³

In 2 Cor 4:4, Paul writes that the gospel "displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." He explains in verse 6: "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face

49. James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 89.

50. David W. Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 94.

51. Christ's designation as "the image of the invisible God" pertains both to His divine nature, as the eternal Son, and His redemptive role, as a man born of a woman, born under law. The phrase in Col 1:15, describing Christ as "firstborn over all creation," declares His eternal supremacy. Meanwhile, 2 Cor 4:4 highlights "the glory of Christ" in the gospel. Together, God's righteousness is revealed through Christ's redemptive work. Both aspects are essential: Christ reveals what the image is (divine righteousness and holiness) and restores what was lost through His saving work.

52. David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, NAC 29 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 212.

53. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 57.

of Christ.” The concepts of “image” and “light” trace back to Genesis 1. The same God who created humanity came down in Christ as the light of the world, ready to recreate what was broken.⁵⁴

What is the glory that the gospel reveals? It is Christ crucified: his death on the cross for our sins, his resurrection, his perfect obedience, and love. Christ’s death most clearly shows God’s love and power, but to the world it looks like foolishness.⁵⁵ Still, in this apparent foolishness, the greatest display of God’s character, selfless love, is shown through sacrifice.⁵⁶

Christ’s Righteousness Restores the Image (2 Corinthians 5:17, 21)

Christ died for our sins. Through his sacrifice, we are justified—declared righteous before God. Paul writes: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21). Because the one who had no sin became sin for us, he gave us his righteousness in exchange.⁵⁷ Rom 3:21–22 states: “But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known. This righteousness of God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” The logical implication is that if Christ gives us righteousness, we must not have had it. Moreover, a connection is made between the gospel message, which

54. Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 334.

55. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 212.

56. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 216.

57. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 301.

“displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God,” and the “righteousness of God” (FC, SD I: 10–11).⁵⁸

Immediately preceding 2 Cor 5:21 and the imputed righteousness we receive through Christ, Paul explains how faith makes us new creations (2 Cor 5:17): “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” Lacking a righteousness of our own and needing re-creation, we come face to face with what occurred at the Fall of God’s creation. What Christ gave back to us was a righteousness we previously did not have.⁵⁹ Therefore, we trace this loss back to the Fall and understand that God has re-created us as a result of his alien righteousness.⁶⁰

Since Christ is the image and the image is righteousness, we lost the image in its narrow sense at the Fall, along with the ability to have a right relationship with God (Ap II:14).⁶¹ This narrow-sense image is restored through two simultaneous but distinct divine works (FC, SD III:18–19).⁶² Through justification, God declares us righteous by imputing Christ’s righteousness to us. We are declared righteous and stand in right relationship with God. This is God’s forensic verdict based on Christ’s alien righteousness. Through regeneration, the Holy Spirit creates faith in our hearts, making us new creatures. As a new creation, our capacity for a relationship with

58. The fact that Christ must provide righteousness implies a complete prior loss, which the confessions define as Original Sin: the total lack of the image of God. (Kolb-Wengert, 533). The New Testament defines the image of God in its narrow sense as the righteousness and holiness created in the new man (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10).

59. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 455.

60. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 432.

61. Kolb-Wengert, 114.

62. The Formula of Concord carefully distinguishes: “However, since the word *regeneratio*, regeneration, is sometimes employed for the word *iustificatio*, justification, it is necessary that this word be properly explained, in order that the renewal which follows justification of faith may not be confounded with the justification of faith” (Kolb-Wengert, 565).

God is restored within us (Titus 3:5). While these happen at the same moment, they must be distinguished. Justification is God’s unchanging declaration about us (forensic, external). Regeneration is God’s transforming work within us (effective, internal; Ap IV:43–47).⁶³ This restoration initiates our life of sanctification, which is the progressive renewal of the image (AC, Ger. XX:27–39).⁶⁴

Ever-Increasing Glory (2 Corinthians 3:18)

This is the restoration of the narrow-sense image through justification and regeneration, which begins the ongoing renewal of the broad-sense image in sanctification. Paul writes: “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18).

This transformation is real, internal, and ongoing. It isn’t a change based solely on our outward actions, which any devout person could do; rather, it is a change within our inner being. As we observe the glory of the Lord reflected in Christ, our minds are transformed so that we become conformed to Christ and his pattern of suffering and humble service. The passive voice, “are being transformed,” indicates that this transformation is carried out by God through the Spirit.⁶⁵ This progressive transformation is sanctification—distinct from justification, which is

63. Justification is purely forensic—a verdict declaring us righteous based on Christ’s imputed righteousness (Kolb-Wengert, 127). Regeneration is the Spirit’s work making us new creatures with restored capacity for faith and holiness. Both are necessary; neither may be confused with the other.

64. Kolb-Wengert, 56.

65. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 200–01.

complete and unchanging. While justification declares us fully righteous in God's sight, sanctification gradually renews our lives to reflect that righteousness.

Here is the evidence that the narrow-sense image restoration is real: your broad-sense image begins to function rightly again. We reflect that righteousness because, after we were declared not guilty, the Holy Spirit, through the means of grace, worked faith in our hearts. We were born again, regenerated, with the new man dwelling within us. The faculties and functions of our body that were previously directed toward our own ends are now redirected toward their proper orientation, God's will. The message of forgiveness frees and strengthens the new man to daily reject our old ways of living and thinking. Your moral sense is renewed, and your dominion reflects stewardship over exploitation. Your relationships are guided by love, not by selfishness.⁶⁶ Scripture also speaks of this renewal as being conformed to Christ's image (Col 3:10), as the new self is "being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."

The transformation is gradual, "from glory to glory," not instant. We struggle against our sinful natures, experiencing both progress and setbacks. Yet the Spirit truly reshapes our hearts and minds, and steadily restores our ability to have a right relationship with God. Through the Spirit, we can now live more like Christ and give greater glory to God. This process won't be finished until the resurrection, when we will fully reflect Christ's likeness (FC, SD II:66, 68).⁶⁷ But now, through the Spirit's work, the faculties and functional aspects of the image are being fulfilled as our true nature is gradually restored.⁶⁸

66. In his discussion of Rom 12:2 and the phrase, "be transformed by the renewing of your mind," Douglas Moo explains how sanctification influences our reasoning. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 775.

67. Kolb-Wengert, 556–57.

68. Garland, 2 *Corinthians*, 201–02.

HISTORICAL SURVEY OF ORTHODOX LUTHERAN THEOLOGY

As we survey the period of the Reformation through to our contemporary moment, it is clear from confessional Lutheran sources that two main streams of thought concerning the image of God are prevalent among Orthodox Lutherans. What one will not see, however, is an absolute disagreement about how either side understands the image of God. The areas of disagreement are terminological, exegetical, and methodological. But what both sides say about Scripture and what it tells us can be lined up side by side with little discrepancy.

The first stream emphasizes the narrow sense of the image almost exclusively, defining it as original righteousness, which was completely lost in the Fall. The second stream, while maintaining this same emphasis on the narrow sense as primary, also develops a broad sense—acknowledging that certain faculties and capacities remain in fallen humanity, though corrupted. As we will see, these two streams emerge already within the period of Lutheran Orthodoxy.

Rather than repeat what has already been said as we progress through the ages, I will focus on the unique contributions each theologian makes to the overall development of this doctrine.

Martin Luther

The main point to consider is that Luther's view on the image of God is not a systematic treatment. Rather, it is largely polemical and Christological. This stems directly from his context, where he was fighting medieval scholasticism and correcting errors that opposed the core doctrine of justification by faith. Because Luther faced many heretical doctrines, his main goal was to dismantle them. This means he did not always aim for a complete systematic explanation. Sometimes, he simply laid a new foundation and moved on.

With this in mind, the image of God in his writings emerges as a dismantling of false scholastic tradition and the creation of a simple foundation upon which later Orthodox Lutherans would build.

Because the scholastics located the image of God in the faculties of man—his will, reason, and intellect—they believed that the Fall merely cast out the likeness, that is, the righteousness of God (*donum superadditum*), leaving man and his faculties in a neutral state. As such, after the Fall, it was within man's power to take a step towards God on his own, without the means of grace and the Holy Spirit. While Luther himself may have felt that some distinction existed between the image and the likeness, he was not at all willing to allow that man could make any move toward God apart from God. Otherwise, the grace of God would no longer be grace; it would be a merited gift granted to man for his own efforts. Consequently, Luther's understanding of the image as essential to the relationship with God—one established because of the original righteousness God gave man—meant that the loss of the image coincided with the loss of this righteousness and the rupture of the relationship between God and man, one that could only be repaired by a gracious God.

In the past, scholastics followed in the footsteps of Augustine, who, Luther observed, worked under Aristotelian terminology to classify the composition of the image of God, equating it with the powers of the soul: memory, intellect, and will.⁶⁹ Yet Augustine also distinguished between the image and the likeness of God. The likeness, or *similitude*, was the gift of grace that perfected the image.⁷⁰ This conceptual framework—treating image and likeness as two distinct features—originated with Irenaeus but was carried forward by Augustine, and later became a source of error among the scholastics.⁷¹ Whether Augustine himself intended the conclusions that followed is debatable, given his staunch opposition to Pelagius. But by Luther’s day, the scholastics had certainly drawn them: just as God is free, so also man—endowed with free will through the image—could act autonomously in spiritual matters, moving closer to or further away from God apart from God’s initiative.⁷² In conjunction with this was the teaching that original righteousness was a *donum superadditum*—an original righteousness was not a part of man’s nature but an external gift, like an adornment added to him.⁷³

While scholastics differed on the details, according to the Franciscan version, the image accorded man the free will to have a relationship with God. Upon making the first move, man was rewarded with similitude or righteousness that inhered in the image, making it more perfect.

69. *Lectures on Genesis* (1535), in LW 1:60.

70. *Lectures on Genesis* (1535), in LW 1:60.

71. *Lectures on Genesis* (1535), in LW 1:60, n. 95. The conceptual framework distinguishing image and likeness goes back at least to Irenaeus.

72. *Lectures on Genesis* (1535), in LW 1:61.

73. *Lectures on Genesis* (1535), in LW 1:164–65. Cf. Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 2:323. Thomists (Thomas Aquinas and the Dominicans) held that righteousness was bestowed simultaneously with creation, while the Franciscans (Alexander of Hales, Bonaventura, Duns Scotus) taught it was bestowed as a reward for man’s meritorious use of his natural powers.

The likeness (*similitudo*), in effect, supercharged the image, enabling him to have a more perfect relationship with God.

But whether it was the Franciscan view or another version, the common error was treating original righteousness as an external addition that left human nature in a neutral state when removed. This inherent free will in man, based purely on the image, was the foundation on which later Catholic heresy would build. Because if man had free will within this image, then he could, by his own will, meet God. This led to the pithy statement, “God, who created you without you, will not save you without you.”⁷⁴

The implications of this are tremendous. Because in the Fall, what is then lost is not the image of God, since this is a part of man’s essence and makes a human a human, but only the likeness, man’s righteousness, which was gifted to him, was lost. Moreover, since free will is retained in the image, Adam continued with his free will, along with his progeny, long after the likeness, that is righteousness, was lost. Meaning the image was perpetually in a neutral state, able to move toward or away from God. From here, the conclusion was drawn that free will cooperated as the preceding and efficient cause of salvation — that by the powers of his own nature, man could bring about his own salvation.⁷⁵

Luther’s counter position is clear: original righteousness was a concreated gift, not a merited additional gift. The image is the righteousness, not the rational powers which allegedly merited it. What is clear from Luther’s writings is that while he acknowledges a possible distinction between the Hebrew terms *tselem* (image) and *demut* (likeness), he does not endorse

74. *Lectures on Genesis* (1535), in LW 1:61.

75. *Lectures on Genesis* (1535), in LW 1:61.

the scholastic theological use of that distinction—namely, that image (faculties) was retained while likeness (righteousness) was lost. For Luther, the “likeness” adds precision to the “image,” indicating not merely that man possessed intellect and will, but that these were perfected to understand and desire God. “Therefore, when Moses says that man was created also in the similitude of God, he indicates that man is not only like God in this respect, that he has the ability to reason, or an intellect, and a will, but also that he has a likeness of God, that is, a will and an intellect by which he understands God, and by which he desires what God desires, etc.”⁷⁶ And yet, although Luther might make a distinction between image and likeness, he also sees them as a piece cut from the same cloth, so that one who loses one loses the whole:

“Therefore, my understanding of the image of God is this: that Adam had it in his being, and that he not only knew God and believed that He was good, but that he also lived in a life that was wholly godly, that is, he was without the fear of death or any other danger, and was content with God’s favor. This is my image by which you are living, just as God lives, but if you sin, you will lose this image, and you will die.”⁷⁷

The remaining question, then, is: what remains after the Fall, and how does Luther characterize it? “I am afraid that since the loss of this image through sin, we cannot understand it to any extent. Memory, will, and mind we have, indeed, but they are most depraved and most seriously weakened. Yes, to put it more clearly, they are utterly leprous and unclean. If these powers are the image of God, it will also follow that Satan was created according to the image of God, since he surely has these natural endowments, such as memory and a very superior intellect and a most determined will, to a far higher degree than we have them.”⁷⁸

76. *Lectures on Genesis* (1535), in LW 1:337.

77. *Lectures on Genesis* (1535), in LW 1:62–63. Cf. LW 1:338.

78. *Lectures on Genesis* (1535), in LW 1:61.

Thus, it is clear that the faculties of memory, will, and mind are not something Luther desires to associate with the image of God, lest that also mean Satan and his demons possess that same image as well.

But then, what are we to do with passages like Gen 9:6, in which a prohibition against murder is centered in the concept of man possessing God's image? Luther would understand this passage as being a reference to a past condition. The same could be said for how he takes Jas 3:9:

“This is an outstanding reason why He does not want a human being killed on the strength of individual discretion. Man is the noblest creature, not created like the rest of the animals, but according to God's image. Even though a man has lost this image through sin, as we stated above, his condition is, nevertheless, such that it can be restored through the Word and the Holy Spirit. God wants us to show respect for this image in one another. He does not want us to shed blood in a tyrannical manner.”⁷⁹

Perhaps the most interesting thing to note is Luther's Christological understanding of the restoration of the image:

“If man created in this perfect image and similitude of God had not fallen, he would have lived forever, happy and full of joy, and he would have had a will that was glad and ready to obey God. But through sin, both the similitude and the image were lost. Nevertheless, as Paul says (Eph 4:23), they are renewed to some extent through faith. For we are beginning to know God, and the Spirit of Christ helps us to be eager to obey God's commandments.”⁸⁰

This is the possible restoration that exists in everybody through the Word and Holy Spirit. In some instances, it appears that Luther would describe the image as being memory, intellect, and will, with the concept of likeness being a refinement of this idea—being a perfect memory, intellect, and will, one that is desirous of God. But in the end, all of these were lost—that

79. Even when Luther comments on Genesis 9:6, he maintains this position. He states that “man has lost this image through sin” and that “it can be restored through the Word and the Holy Spirit.” His exhortation to “show respect for this image in one another” is grounded not in faculties that presently remain but in humanity's original creation and the possibility of Gospel restoration. See *Lectures on Genesis* (1535), in LW 2:141.

80. *Lectures on Genesis* (1535), in LW 1:337–38.

is, the perfection of the memory, intellect, and will. So while these faculties remained, they do not constitute the image because, for Luther, the image was never the faculties as such, but the perfection of those faculties—and that perfection is completely lost.

In fact, as Luther pointedly states in his *Lectures on Galatians*:

“The natural endowments are indeed sound. But which natural endowments? Those by which a man who is drowned in wickedness and is a slave of the devil has a will, reason, free choice, and a power to build a house, to carry on a governmental office, to steer a ship, and to do other tasks that have been made subject to man according to Gen 1:28. These have not been taken away from man.”⁸¹

So while these endowments remain, they are utterly corrupt by sin. The only hope of restoration is found in the regenerate man, born of water and the Word, and sustained through the sacraments. And yet, even this would be incomplete until the final consummation of God’s kingdom.

Luther was clear and forceful in linking the image of God to original righteousness, and in so doing made it clear that the loss of the image left humanity in a far worse state than the scholastics would lead one to believe. However, while his understanding of the image of God, derived from the New Testament, was correctly ascribed to original righteousness, there was the inconvenient issue of what Gen 9:6 and Jas 3:9 meant in their contexts. Luther was fine not tying up all loose ends and chose to understand these verses simply as references to what was once found in man and what could be restored in man by God’s grace. For his part, Luther ably laid a new foundation for understanding the image of God as a relational quality founded on the original righteousness God gave to man. It would be left to the compilers of the Book of Concord to determine how that original righteousness was a natural part of humanity.

81. *Lectures on Galatians* (1535), in LW 26:174–75.

Book of Concord

The confessional writings of the Lutheran Church carry forward Luther's emphasis and formalize the Lutheran position on the image of God. As with Luther, the Book of Concord addresses the narrow sense of the image almost exclusively. This is not to say there was no broad sense image left in man, only that such a dimension remained undefined in the confessional writings. The Reformers did not extensively develop passages such as Gen 9:6 and Jas 3:9 in their discussion, which accounts for their narrow treatment.

Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article II

Since Melanchthon authored the Augsburg Confession contemporaneously with Luther, it makes sense that his concerns would largely align with those Luther opposed. Melanchthon was combating two errors: first, Pelagian tendencies that denied the guilt of original sin; and second, the scholastic minimization of original sin through the teaching that original righteousness was a *donum superadditum*. However, the Apology also addresses false teachings not only within the Roman Catholic Church but also among those of the Radical Reformation, particularly Pelagian tendencies to exonerate humanity from the guilt incurred by the Fall of Adam and Eve. According to this line of thinking, while Adam and Eve were guilty, their progeny lacked that guilt until they incurred guilt of their own by sinning. The consequence of sin was then merely the mortality of the human body (Ap II:5).⁸²

Melanchthon also pointed out the trivialization of original sin among scholastics, stemming from their understanding of concupiscence. The term is used by both Lutherans and

82. Kolb-Wengert, 113.

Catholics, but for the scholastics, it was merely a draw or inclination toward sin, which became sin only when the desire was acted upon. Melanchthon correctly pointed out what was left out of this definition: “they fail to mention the more serious defects of human nature like being ignorant of God, despising God, lacking fear and confidence in God, hating the judgment of God, fleeing this judging God, being angry with God, despairing of his grace, and placing confidence in temporal things, etc” (Ap II:8).⁸³

At the heart of the problem was a failure to connect the presence of sinful thought with a lack of righteousness. When concupiscence was only a draw toward sinful action, and one that could be resisted through the natural powers—the faculties of the image of God—then humanity’s utter depravity was reduced to only those sins mankind acted upon. The Apology correctly equated sinful thoughts to sinful actions, as also do the Ten Commandments and Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, and explained the presence of these sinful thoughts as part of the Fall. Thoughts that existed precisely because humanity lost God’s righteousness, and through the sinful nature lacked true fear and trust in God (Ap II:9).⁸⁴

Because the Roman Catholic Church minimized the Fall into sin as merely a blemish on an otherwise neutral and unaffected image, it was logical that they would assume that humanity could play some role in salvation. This is because in their understanding, the Fall into sin was primarily a loss of the *donum superadditum*, God’s righteousness, which removed the perfected state of man. However, this did not mean that the faculties of man’s image were rendered corrupt

83. Kolb-Wengert, 114.

84. Kolb-Wengert, 114.

by sin; they were moved into a neutral state and could be disposed either towards self or toward its creator.

But Melanchthon is careful to point out that the loss of this image is not just the stripping of man of God's righteousness, but that the image's interconnectedness with the faculties means this loss is a massive tear in the spiritual nature of man. As though skin were torn from the muscle, or muscle from the bone, this was a radical destruction, not a mere loss of righteousness, or a return to a neutral state. The Apology states: "Humankind was formed in the image and likeness of God. What else does this mean except that a wisdom and righteousness that would grasp God and reflect God was implanted in humankind, that is, humankind received gifts like the knowledge of God, fear of God, trust in God, and the like" (Ap II:15–18).⁸⁵ What the reformers were attempting to highlight was the relational character of prelapsarian man. In a state of righteousness, man could enjoy living in the presence of God. This righteous state affected all of his faculties and directed them toward their proper end, God.

If the polemical context led the reformers to define the image strictly as righteousness, but also as an inhering righteousness natural to man—differing from the Catholic idea of the *donum superadditum*—then do we lose something or take a step backward by speaking of the image of God as encompassing more than just righteousness? Like many other theological terms, it all depends on your definition. If the context of the Apology teaches us anything, it is not that we cannot speak of the image of God in a broad sense; rather, it is only a defense of speaking about the image of God narrowly against those who would claim untruths about it. There is an image of God in the broad sense; the reformers did not address this because (1) their main

85. Kolb-Wengert, 115.

concern was with Pelagianism, and (2) they avoided dealing with Gen 9:6 and Jas 3:9 in their treatment of the *imago Dei*. Given their context, this makes sense — they want to be clear and concise in the face of heresy. Why add any additional confusion when discussing the image of God, especially when your main task is explaining it in the context of the Fall into sin?

Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article I

The Formula of Concord addressed the image of God amid new controversies within Lutheranism, particularly the error of Flacius Illyricus. Luther's treatment of the image was not systematic. It was a collection of well-formed thoughts that were precisely targeting the error of medieval scholasticism. But as with most things, when we are focused on one flank, the devil is up to antics on our open flank—something which a deliberate, systematic treatment, had that been Luther's aim, would have avoided. The problem came when Flacius treated Luther's thought on the image of God as a comprehensive, systematic treatment of the matter.

Flacius Illyricus understood the image of God as humanity's defining characteristic. The Fall into sin, the loss of righteousness, coincided with the loss of God's image. So far, Flacius had been consistent with what Luther had stated, but then he took it a step further by claiming that the image of God was replaced by the image of Satan.⁸⁶

86. Charles P. Arand, James A. Nestingen, and Robert Kolb, *The Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of the Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 206, (hereafter AKN).

What made this position untenable was Flacius's attempt to express biblical truth within an Aristotelian framework ill-suited to the task.⁸⁷ In doing so, he opened God to the accusation that he was the Author of evil. For it could be interpreted as claiming that man's very essence *was* sin, which would lead to heretical conclusions. What Flacius's position failed to account for was the source of this sinful essence. Either our good God, the sole Creator, was responsible for creating man with a sinful essence, which would simultaneously make him the author of evil, or the devil was endowed with creative ability, capable of producing a sinful essence within man — which would mean we functionally live in a dualistic cosmogony. Because both options are anti-biblical, the premise from which they arise is equally untenable. If man is, in his essence, sinful, then God is liable to accusation of being the author of sin: "God is not a creator or author of sin. Nor is original sin a creature or handiwork of God; rather, it is the devil's work" (FC, SD I:40)⁸⁸ Furthermore, if our essence is sinful, then the humanity Christ took on was also sinful, leaving our faith in the Savior futile: "in the article on redemption Scripture gives powerful testimony that God's Son assumed our human nature without sin, that he 'became one of us, in every respect like us' apart from sin" (FC, SD I:43).⁸⁹

The Confessions therefore carefully distinguish between nature and sin: "To describe the matter accurately: the distinction must be maintained between our nature, as it was created and

87. AKN notes that "Flacius followed his colleague into the swamp of joining biblical concepts and Aristotelian categories; he tried to express the biblical understanding of sin within this alien paradigm. Neither of the two theologians was sophisticated enough to recognize the linguistic and logical complexities and contradictions involved in their attempt to clarify Scripture with the aid of the Stagirite." AKN, 206.

88. Kolb-Wengert, 538.

89. Kolb-Wengert, 539.

preserved by God and in which sin resides, and original sin, which resides in our nature” (FC, SD I:33).⁹⁰ And again:

In order to distinguish God’s creation and work in the human being from the devil’s work, we say that it is God’s creation that the human being has a body and soul and can think, speak, act, and accomplish anything, for “in him we live and move and have our being.” That this nature is corrupted and that our thoughts, words, and deeds are evil is in its origin a handiwork of Satan (FC, SD I:42).⁹¹

Later Orthodox theologians developed precise terminology to explain the distinction between what is essential to man and what is accidental.⁹² The faculties (intellect, will, reason) are natural in the sense that they are definitive and consecutive. Righteousness, however, was natural only in the latter three senses, while not being definitive or consecutive. Thus, righteousness, though in one sense “natural,” was more accurately described as a natural accident — it could be removed without destroying humanity. The same logic applies to sin.

The synergists—influenced by the Roman Catholic teaching of the *donum superadditum*—posed the opposite problem. They taught that man could initiate or cooperate in salvation through the image of God that remained in him. This may well be the central reason the Formula focuses only on the narrow sense of the image: addressing the synergist concern required denying any spiritual capacity to whatever remained in fallen man. The Formula responds: “True, in other—natural, external matters, which are subject to reason, the human being retains to a certain extent its understanding, powers, and ability, even though so greatly weakened, so

90. Kolb-Wengert, 537.

91. Kolb-Wengert, 538–39.

92. Balthasar Meisner distinguished five senses in which something can be “natural”: “(1) definitively, for that which is given to man’s nature; (2) consecutively, for that which issues essentially from its form as the abilities of the soul; (3) subjectively, for that which is imprinted most deeply on its nature; (4) completely for that which adorns, aids, and completes its nature; (5) transitively, because it is extended naturally and through its nature.” See Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, vol. 2, 324.

poisoned and adulterated through the inherited defect, that it is worth nothing in God's sight" (FC, SD I:12).⁹³

As with Luther, the reformers recognized that the faculties (will, reason, intellect) remained, but given their polemical context, they did not ascribe to them the title "image of God." On the one hand, they were pushing against the Flacian error that sin was part of man's essence, so they needed to affirm that the faculties remain as God's good creation. On the other hand, they remained cognizant of the synergist who might credit these remaining faculties with spiritual capacity in conversion. This is effectively the broad sense image, just not named as such—because naming it "image" in that polemical context might have played into synergist hands.

The restoration of the image (narrow sense) comes through Christ alone. Through His death: "Poor sinful people are justified before God, that is, absolved—pronounced free of all sins and of the judgment of the damnation that they deserved—and accepted as children and heirs of eternal life, without the least bit of our own 'merit or worthiness,' apart from all preceding, present, or subsequent works" (FC, SD III:9).⁹⁴ This merit must be received through faith: "For faith does not make people righteous because it is such a good work or such a fine virtue, but because it lays hold of and accepts the merit of Christ in the promise of the holy gospel" (FC, SD III:13).⁹⁵

93. Kolb-Wengert, 534.

94. Kolb-Wengert, 563–64.

95. Kolb-Wengert, 564.

The image is restored progressively. “First of all, in conversion, the Holy Spirit kindles faith in us through the hearing of the gospel. This faith lays hold of God’s grace in Christ, and through it a person is justified. Thereafter, once people are justified, the Holy Spirit also renews and sanctifies them. From this renewal and sanctification, the fruits of good works follow” (FC, SD III:41).⁹⁶

The complete separation of nature from corruption awaits the resurrection: “The damage is such that only God alone can separate human nature and the corruption of this nature from each other. This separation will take place completely through death, at the resurrection, when the nature which we now have will rise and live eternally, without original sin, separated and severed from it” (FC, Ep I).⁹⁷

Martin Chemnitz

In the Formula of Concord, we see a recognition of the faculties of will, reason, and intellect, but without calling them the image of God. Given Chemnitz’s significant contributions to the Formula of Concord, it should be no surprise that his treatment does not deviate from this position. Yet in his *Loci*, Chemnitz provides a way to understand the image through his antithesis model. This sets up a distinction between what the image, narrowly speaking, is and what remains, a distinction that Gerhard will develop further.

96. Kolb-Wengert, 569–70.

97. Kolb-Wengert, 489.

Chemnitz is quite clear that the image has been lost, as he equates it with righteousness. Consequently, without righteousness, there is no image.⁹⁸ How does Chemnitz regard what remains? Whatever remains is a far cry from what existed when man possessed the image of God. Original integrity was not only a well-balanced physical condition of the body, but it was particularly the uprightness of the powers of the soul.⁹⁹ What follows from the Fall is “either a depraved inclination, or a vicious attitude, or a corrupt and disordered entanglement of human powers.”¹⁰⁰

Like Luther, Chemnitz is not at all subtle. What we can glean from this is Chemnitz’s focus: he is hardly concerned about what remains; he is more concerned with what the image *is*. Meaning, what might fall under a broad definition of the image for Chemnitz is not the point under his consideration. If anything, we can assume that for Chemnitz, certain natural powers do exist, but their state is so corrupt and broken that they do not even meet the requirement to fall under the image of God—a definition which Chemnitz derives by examining what was lost due to the Fall. This is his antithesis model: that sin is not just an imputation, but an inhering corruption, because the integrity of the virtues has been lost. Original integrity included more than just physical soundness; it also included a sound mind. Finally, original righteousness consisted not only in adherence to the Second Table of the Law but also to the First Table, since man had a perfect relationship with God.¹⁰¹

98. Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici, Parts I–III*, trans. J. A. O. Preus, Chemnitz’s Works (St. Louis: Concordia, 2008), 1:509, (hereafter Chemnitz).

99. Chemnitz, 1:509.

100. Chemnitz, 1:511.

101. Chemnitz, 1:509–10.

Significantly, Chemnitz sees in Paul's epistles evidence for connecting the image with "glory": And Paul clearly appears to speak the same way, Rom. 3:23, "All lack the glory of God." For in 1 Cor. 11:7, "Man is the image and glory of God." And the restoration of the image of God is called glory, 2 Cor. 3:7ff. Therefore, according to Paul, there is a lack of glory, that is, of the image of God and original righteousness.¹⁰²

For Chemnitz, the image and glory are lacking—they must be restored through Christ.¹⁰³ This lack of glory does not mean there is no glory at all—only that what remains is a vestige of what once was.

Johann Gerhard

Where Chemnitz's antithesis method clarified what the image was by examining what was lost, Johann Gerhard takes the next step: he asks what remains and whether it may be called the image in any sense. Gerhard provides the most comprehensive systematic treatment of the image of God in Lutheran Orthodoxy. While he devotes the majority of his attention to the narrow sense, no one before him had wrestled with the broad sense at such depth.

Gerhard's unique contribution is twofold: first, he employs Aristotelian categories to refute the claim that original righteousness was a *donum superadditum*; second, he provides extensive development of what the broad sense includes and why God preserved it.

102. Chemnitz, 1:510.

103. Chemnitz, 1:510.

In the narrow sense, Gerhard defines the image as righteousness and holiness, drawing from Eph 4:24 and Col 3:10.¹⁰⁴ This righteousness permeated every aspect of human existence: “the image of divine wisdom used to shine in man’s intellect; the image of God’s goodness, patience, gentleness, and tolerance used to shine in man’s soul; the image of divine charity and mercy used to shine in the affections of the human heart; the image of divine righteousness, holiness, and purity used to beam in man’s will.”¹⁰⁵ The result was perfect harmony: “through this image man’s reason was subject to God, his will was subject to reason, his inclination and all the rest of his powers were subject to his will, so that in man there was the most beautiful harmony of all his powers and abilities.”¹⁰⁶

Gerhard uses Aristotelian substance-accident language to refute both the Flacian heresy and the Catholic teaching of the *donum superadditum*. The image cannot be man’s substance, for “If the image of God had been the whole man himself, it would follow that after the Fall Adam was a different man with regard to substance, and in essence fully other than the one who had been created initially.”¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, if the image were man’s substance, then original sin, which replaced it, would also be man’s essence, making God the author of evil.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, the image (as righteousness and holiness) is an accident, but one that inhered upon human nature from creation, not an external addition.

104. Gerhard, *Commonplace* XI, §23, 259.

105. Gerhard, *Commonplace* XI, §37, 267.

106. Gerhard, *Commonplace* XI, §38, 267.

107. Gerhard, *Commonplace* XI, §95, 293.

108. Gerhard, *Commonplace* XI, §97, 294.

In the broad sense, Gerhard acknowledges four ways the image may be said to remain. First, the actual essence of the soul—its intellect, will, and other powers—” remained the same after the Fall as it was before.” Second, a general analogy by which the soul “reveals a shadow of the Holy Trinity; that it is incorporeal, spiritual, intelligent, and having free will in matters subject to its powers.” Third:

“Dominion over other creatures . . . though the dignity of dominion has been weakened and diminished in many ways, some traces of it still survive.” Fourth, “Inborn elements in us which are tenuous remnants of the divine image in the mind and will of man and, as it were, the rubble of a beautiful building . . . because the work of the Law is still written even in the hearts of the unregenerate.”¹⁰⁹

Gerhard also develops four reasons why God preserved these remnants:

(1) To be conspicuous witnesses of our nature such as it once was as created by God, just as rubble and ruins testify of the dignity of a building. (2) That we may learn from them the mercy of God toward us most unworthy sinners. . . . (3) That those remnants of knowledge may be instructors of outward discipline which God uses as an instruction for the renewal of His image imparted to us through Christ. (4) “That the wicked may be made inexcusable while they suppress the truth in their wickedness and exchange the truth for a lie” (Rom 1:18, 25).¹¹⁰

Johannes Quenstedt

Building on Gerhard’s systematic treatment, Johannes Andreas Quenstedt brings the discussion to its highest level of precision. Like Gerhard, he acknowledges both narrow and broad senses while maintaining the narrow sense as primary. His unique contribution is to provide precise definitions that clarify the relationship between these senses. Quenstedt defines the image as “a natural perfection, consisting in an entire conformity with the wisdom, justice, immortality, and

109. Gerhard, *Commonplace XI*, §129, 322.

110. Gerhard, *Commonplace XI*, §137, 326.

majesty of God, which was divinely created in the first man, in order that he might perfectly know, love, and glorify God, his Creator.”¹¹¹

Quenstedt formalizes the distinction his predecessors had developed: “The image of God and original righteousness differ as the whole and a part. The image of God includes as well the principal as the secondary conformity with God; but original righteousness is ordinarily received as embracing only the principal conformity.”¹¹² This means that the complete image of God (the “whole”) includes both principal and secondary conformity to God, while original righteousness (the “part”) specifically refers to the principal conformity alone.

This formulation is not unique to Quenstedt and appears to have been in use prior to him, albeit perhaps under different terminology. The principal perfections included spiritual and moral perfections in human knowledge, holiness, and freedom of will.¹¹³ Whereas the secondary, or less principal perfections, dealt with the bodily perfections like the immortality of humanity and their dominion over nature.¹¹⁴ What is understood is that these principal and less principal conformities are aspects of the image of God as a whole, whereas the image of God in part refers specifically to original righteousness.¹¹⁵

111. Quenstedt, II.9, cited in Schmid, 226.

112. Quenstedt, II.3, cited in Schmid, 235.

113. Quenstedt, II.6, cited in Schmid, 232–33.

114. Quenstedt, II.7, cited in Schmid, 235–36.

115. What Quenstedt speaks of here is, in fact, just another way theologians prior to him spoke of the image of God. Greek terms had been used to describe precisely what Quenstedt described: the principal and less principal conformities, aligned with what Lutheran theologians called the image of God wholly received, *ὁλικῶς*, and the image of God partly received, *μερικῶς*, denoting the perfect knowledge of God and his original righteousness specifically. These distinctions are different from the narrow/broad distinction. See Schmid, 235; Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 2:329.

While it is certainly clear that the image of God in part is absolutely gone, it is fair to say that whatever righteousness inhered in the faculties of man, thus forming the complete image of God, these faculties were still extant after the Fall. A very bleak picture is described for us:

We assert that the powers of the unrenewed man, both in intellect and will, whether for the beginning, or continuing, or completing these entirely spiritual acts which have just now been mentioned, are not only bound, impeded, or even weakened or broken, but altogether destroyed, lost, extinct and a nullity. For, in knowing and seeking an object spiritually good, the old powers in man are not renewed, the drowsy are not awakened, the infirm strengthened, nor the bound loosed, but altogether other and new powers and faculties are bestowed and put on.¹¹⁶

In other words, and unlike what the Roman Catholics might assert, these faculties are incapable of knowing or seeking any spiritual good.¹¹⁷

However, the question remains: What does Quenstedt call these remaining faculties? In consulting Heinrich Schmid's *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* for Quenstedt's thoughts on this, it does not appear that he chose to give any name to the remnants, just as his predecessors in the Orthodox period similarly avoided systematic categorization. While Gerhard does provide four senses in which the image can be said to remain, these are descriptions, not formal categorizations, as would later be the case when theologians formalized the concept of the image of God in the broad sense. But Quenstedt does note that there is a unique manner in which we speak of the image: "The image of God, specifically employed, is not to be sought for in those things which yet remain in man since the Fall."¹¹⁸ Quenstedt's qualifier 'specifically employed' is significant, since it implies that Quenstedt is cognizant of the

116. Quenstedt, II.178, cited in Schmid, 269.

117. Quenstedt, II.176, cited in Schmid, 271.

118. Quenstedt, II.17, cited in Schmid, 231. The electronic text consulted reverses "obedience" and "disobedience"; the 1889 print edition correctly reads "disobedience of the first Adam" and "obedience of the second Adam."

image of God spoken of in another sense, namely, a corresponding general employment of the term.¹¹⁹

Like Chemnitz, Quenstedt focuses on what the image was rather than on naming or defining what persists after the Fall. His distinction between the image “specifically employed” and a more general use shows awareness that Scripture may use the term in different senses, but he does not develop this line of thought systematically. That said, one development of the late Orthodox period was that the image of God could be understood beyond a narrow sense. The image could also refer to aspects of humanity in the present. It would be left to later theologians to expand upon this thought.

Adolf Hoenecke

Where the Orthodox period theologians developed the technical apparatus for distinguishing what belongs to human nature essentially and what inheres upon it accidentally, Adolf Hoenecke devotes more time to expounding on Lutheran theologians who were comfortable explaining the image of God in both broad and narrow senses. Not original to him, Hoenecke provides a clear explanation of the various ways Lutheran theologians have understood the image of God, resulting in two distinct levels of understanding. The first level distinguishes between the image’s broad and narrow senses. The broad sense refers to man taken in his entire spiritual

119. This should not be surprising, as Gerhard had already allowed for this possibility when he described four ways in which the image of God still existed (see the Gerhard section above). David Hollaz (1648–1713), who came after Quenstedt, is also characterized by Schmid as affirming the same thing in lapsarian man: “The substance itself, of the human soul, exhibits certain things that are divine, and stands related to the Divinity as to a model. For God is a spirit, immaterial, intelligent, acting with a free will, etc. These predicates can, in a certain manner, be affirmed of the human soul.” Placing the quote in context, Schmid states that “man did not lose it [the image] in the Fall, and therefore it can be affirmed of him also after the Fall, Gen 9:6; Jas 3:9.” See Hollaz, in Schmid, 231.

personal essence; what Hoenecke defines as the image of God, *late dicta* (broadly speaking), composed of “free will, freedom of choice, self-consciousness, knowledge, even dominion over nature.”¹²⁰ In its narrow sense, the image of God consists of “wisdom, righteousness, and holiness, precisely the original righteousness,” which “are properly the likeness of God.” This narrow sense, *stricte dicta* (strictly speaking), refers to aspects of the image that are accidents of humanity, meaning their absence does not result in the cessation of the human, which is important for understanding how man can exist apart from the image of God after the Fall.

Hoenecke’s most significant statement is his clear acknowledgment that Scripture itself speaks of the narrow/broad distinction:

When the likeness of God is understood to be the spiritual nature of man with his spiritual powers—thus the likeness of God in the wider sense—then it was not lost in the Fall as Scripture confirms (Gen 9:6; Jas 3:9) by ascribing the likeness to fallen man. These are also the passages that show that Scripture itself has a distinction between the likeness in the narrower sense, which according to the statements of Scripture was totally lost, and the likeness in the wider sense, which was not lost.¹²¹

Yet there is another distinction when theologians speak of the image of God, which pertains exclusively to the image *stricte dicta*. This is the framework developed initially by the sixteenth and seventeenth-century theologians of the Orthodox period of the Lutheran Church. The ideas stem from explaining man in his prelapsarian status. It was already stated that, in the broad sense, man’s image consisted of reason, will, emotion, and bodily life. But what is to be said for these human faculties in humanity pre-Fall? The answer lies in man’s original righteousness, which Meisner speaks of as the received μερικῶς because of its inhering quality upon man. The attributes of this righteousness affected the substance of man, in the broad sense

120. Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 2:320.

121. Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 2:322.

of his image. This gives rise to the discussion of the image of God ὅλικῳς. The inhering righteousness, μερικῳς, encompasses the chief and lesser perfections. That is, a state in which man's reason acted in godly wisdom, his will was holy, his emotions were in harmony with the rest of him, his soul and his body were impassible, immortal, and capable of the perfect dominion God had given to man. It was this in particular, the image of God in the whole (ὅλικῳς) and in part (μερικῳς), which was lost after the Fall.¹²²

So while Hoenecke is correct in saying, “This is a different distinction of the likeness of God in the narrow and wider senses than the one cited earlier. By the likeness in the wider sense, the whole spiritual personal nature of man is understood,” he is also aware that the narrow sense of the image, *stricte dicta*, can be associated with the image of God ὅλικῳς: “It is evident that the image of God *stricte dicta* coincides with the image taken ὅλικῳς as the contents of the chief perfections and lesser chief perfections.”¹²³

When Hoenecke discusses the distinction between understanding the image of God ὅλικῳς and μερικῳς, and how it differs from the narrow-broad distinction, the key difference lies in what each framework addresses. The ὅλικῳς/μερικῳς distinction describes what was lost, providing two ways of analyzing that loss: comprehensively (ὅλικῳς), in which all the perfections have been destroyed, or by its defining characteristic (μερικῳς), in which the righteousness itself has been lost. The narrow-broad distinction, by contrast, answers a different question: the narrow sense describes original righteousness and all perfections which have now

122. Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 2:328–29.

123. Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 2:329.

been lost, while the broad sense defines what remains — man’s spiritual essence, his faculties, and dominion — which exist now in a completely fallen and corrupt state.

Where the *ὅλικῶς/μερικῶς* distinction adds specificity is in describing what the narrow sense contains. Saying that the narrow sense of the image is lost may conjure up only the abstract thought that man no longer has righteousness. The image of God taken *ὅλικῶς*, however, coincides with the narrow sense and specifies everything it consists of, namely, the chief perfections of the soul and the lesser chief perfections of man’s body and dominion. The image of God taken *ὅλικῶς* and the narrow sense of the image both describe man in his perfected state: one in abstract terms and the other in specific terms. And because of this, even while approaching the image of God from different angles, they complement one another.

This matters because if we speak of the image of God in the narrow sense only and equate it with original righteousness, we may mistakenly understand the Fall as a loss of moral and spiritual perfection alone, failing to recognize that man’s body, faculties, and dominion were also devastated. The *ὅλικῶς/μερικῶς* distinction adds content to the narrow sense, so that Lutherans could understand specifically how the Fall affected man in such a way that he could not, by his own power, approach God and restore the broken relationship humanity previously possessed with him.

What is interesting at the end of Hoenecke’s discussion of the image of God is how he tips his hand in favor of using the narrow/broad distinction. In an offhand critique of previous Lutheran theologians and their resistance to using such a distinction, Hoenecke responds, “But many dogmaticians, such as Dannhauer and Calov, refuse to call this the likeness of God, even in

the wider sense. This is without foundation, according to Jas 3:9.”¹²⁴ He also, along with the narrow/broad distinction he uses to explain how both righteousness can be lost and the image still remains in the spiritual-personal nature, introduces another distinction, general/specific, to address any objections someone might make regarding man’s physical dominion over creation. What mankind generally has control over today is not specifically what God had envisioned when he created Adam and Eve in their state of perfection. As will be seen later, this latter distinction has been subsumed under the narrow/broad distinction used by modern theologians.¹²⁵

Though Hoenecke acknowledges this distinction, it is also clear that he is more concerned with understanding the loss of the image in the narrow sense. Consequently, it might be fairer to state that he acknowledges the narrow/broad sense distinction but finds the narrow sense distinction of greater importance, since he devotes most of his efforts to explaining the importance of this Lutheran perspective.¹²⁶

Francis Pieper

From the precision of the Orthodox period, we turn to the American Lutheran reception of this doctrine. Francis Pieper preferred Luther’s treatment of understanding the image of God in a strict sense. His primary focus was understanding the image of God as original righteousness, though he does discuss the faculties and functions of humanity. By the end of his exposition on

124. Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 2:329.

125. Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 2:329.

126. Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 2:322.

the matter, it becomes apparent where he stands in relation to including them or excluding them from our understanding of the image of God.

As he lays out the understanding of the image of God, he begins with a rather nuanced view: “The image of God in man consisted in much more than in his possession of intellect and will, in his personality; it consisted in the right disposition of his intellect and will, in his knowledge of God and the will to do only God’s will, and his sensuous desires (*appetitus sensitivus*), in his eating, etc.”¹²⁷ From this, it is clear that for Pieper, the image of God primarily is a proper disposition in all of these faculties, as well as in doing the will of God. But he is also not excluding man’s intellect, will, and reason.

He goes on to cite Quenstedt: “The image of God consists in the knowledge of God, righteousness, and holiness, as Col 3:10 and Eph 4:24 demonstrate; not, however, in the members of the body, in the figure or stature of the body. Through the Fall the image of God was lost, but the bodily members were not lost.”¹²⁸ Pieper later specifically states an understanding of the image of God in a wider and proper sense: “The Lutheran theologians are agreed that the image of God, which consists in the knowledge of God and holiness of the will, is lacking in man after the Fall, since Col 3:10 and Eph 4:24 distinctly state that it is being restored in the believer.”¹²⁹

He continues:

Some deny this and take the passages to describe man as the noble creature who once had an image of God and in whom God would recreate this image through Christ. Thus Luther (on Gen. 9:6, St. L. 1:600 f.), Philippi (*Glaubenslehre*, 3d ed., II, 371 f.), Gottfried Hoffman (*Synopsis*, p. 291). Others say that these passages describe man as he is after the

127. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:516.

128. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:516, citing Quenstedt.

129. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:518–19.

Fall, a creature endowed with intellect and will, and contend that this constitutes a certain similitude with God. Thus Baier (II, 146), Quenstedt (*Systema* I, 876, 901 ff.), and others. (The latter distinguish between the image of God in a wider sense, according to which man, in distinction from the animals, is still a rational being even after the Fall, and the divine image in the proper sense, consisting in true knowledge and service of God, which was lost through the Fall.)¹³⁰

At this point, one might assume that Pieper is being fair to both treatments, and indeed, he does present both. But he lays his weight on the scales in favor of the narrow sense: “It will be seen that these interpretations do not differ materially, since Luther and those who agree with him do not deny that man after the Fall retains his intellect and will, and Baier and those who agree with him do not deny that man has through the Fall completely lost the *sapientia* and *iustitia originalis*. However, the interpretation of Luther is to be preferred.”¹³¹

What is of note is Pieper’s acknowledgment that the two interpretations “do not differ materially.” He is not condemning the Baier-Quenstedt position as wrong; rather, he is expressing his preference. For Pieper, that preference is rooted in pastoral concerns. He further explains that it is a “higher thought” to direct Christians toward what they can become in Christ rather than focusing on what they remain after the Fall. This shows an awareness that focusing on remaining rational capacities, even if technically correct, might misplace theological emphasis and could unintentionally downplay the catastrophic nature of sin’s corruption. Instead, Pieper wants believers to look forward to their restoration in Christ, where the image is being renewed in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness (Col 3:10; Eph 4:24).¹³²

130. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:519.

131. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:519.

132. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:522.

In other words, Pieper considers it allowable to speak of the image in either sense, but he sees usefulness in speaking of it only in the narrow sense. This is an important distinction. Pieper is not closing a door on the discussion of the image of God in a broad sense. However, his ministry context, like Luther and the early Confessors, was one in which the primary anthropological question was salvation-oriented: how is fallen man restored to God? In that context, emphasizing what remains in man after the Fall served no pastoral purpose and risked providing ammunition for synergism. The question of what it means to be human in a broader sense, such as questions posed by modern bioethics, the transgender debates, and debates over human dignity, had no relevance as it does today.

Modern Theologians

A great deal has been written about the image of God in the latter part of the era of American Lutheranism. In order to maintain a certain level of coherence for the remainder of this paper, I will treat only an analysis of dogmatics texts. But what concerns me most is laying out the “standard” dogmatic positions of the Confessional Lutheran Church.

To this end, I have chosen three textbooks: Lyle Lange’s *God So Loved the World*, Daniel Deutschlander’s *Grace Abounds*, and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s most recent dogmatics text, *Confessing the Gospel*.

God So Loved the World

Beginning with Lyle Lange, whose book is the oldest of the three, Lange maintains a very narrow emphasis, denying that rationality has any part in defining the image: “The image of God

did not consist in the fact that humans possess rationality. Even after the Fall into sin, we still have the capabilities of reason, though they are clouded by sin.”¹³³ This is certainly logical. How can someone lose the image of God and yet remain a rational, thinking human being? Such a statement would be illogical. This is a basic definition of the image of God, but it lacks the nuance found in previous Orthodox theologians.

Lange’s conciseness is consistent with the purpose of his text. *God So Loved the World* is written for a popular audience and avoids complexity by explaining the image of God in its simplest, narrowest terms. Lange does not address the broad sense that earlier dogmaticians acknowledged, and specifically the exegetical tension of Gen 9:6 and Jas 3:9. These remain outside the scope of his work.

Grace Abounds

Daniel Deutschlander offers a significant perspective by not only explaining the meaning of the image of God in a broad sense but also providing a modern framework for understanding the image of God in both a broad and narrow sense:

We might think of it this way: the living shell of the image of God in Adam and Eve consisted of emotion, will, and reason, the organs of the soul; it is in their emotions, will, and reason that they can most easily be seen as ‘like God.’ But the heart and core inside of that shell and indeed that which permeated the shell and made it so beautiful was God’s gift of righteousness and holiness.¹³⁴

This is a very novel way of framing the issue, though it is not without precedent.

Deutschlander moves away from the philosophical language of the broad and narrow distinction

133. Lange, *God So Loved the World*, 189.

134. Deutschlander, *Grace Abounds*, 169.

into a concrete and non-philosophically derived picture. His “shell and core” metaphor captures the narrow/broad distinction in accessible terms. The shell (the faculties of emotion, will, and reason) corresponds to the broad sense, and core (righteousness and holiness) corresponds to the narrow sense. This is not, however, a direct translation of Quenstedt’s ὀλικῶς/μερικῶς distinction, which, as noted above, pertains exclusively to the perfections within the narrow sense. Like the narrow/broad distinction, Deutschlander’s metaphor distinguishes between what was lost (the core) and what remains (the shell).

The reason for doing so is that it allows Deutschlander to elaborate on the shell’s ability to engage in civil righteousness. Fallen humanity retains the shell (reason, will, emotion) and can thus perform outwardly good deeds that benefit society. However, because the core is missing, these deeds lack spiritual value before God, no matter how impressive they may appear outwardly.¹³⁵

The advantage of explaining the image of God in the broad sense using the “shell” analogy is that it provides a clear explanation to believers and unbelievers alike who wonder why non-Christians are just as kind as Christians. Unbelievers can be just as lovely as Christians, maybe even more. How are we to understand their behavior and actions if they do not possess the image of God?

Deutschlander’s explanation provides a rationale for understanding why they do the good they do. They still have reason, will, and intellect, which can guide their outward behavior.¹³⁶ But what God cares about is the heart. So even if they are doing things that we as Christians

135. Deutschlander, *Grace Abounds*, 194–95.

136. Deutschlander, *Grace Abounds*, 197.

ought to be doing, because they lack the “core”—because they lack God’s righteousness, which made the shell so “beautiful,” means that all their works are done for themselves, not for God. And if it is for God, as some may argue, it is not for The God, but for a god of their own making, which only adds a step between the fact that they are still doing it for their own purpose.¹³⁷

Confessing the Gospel

Closing out the modern era of Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics, *Confessing the Gospel* presents a balanced view of both the broad and narrow sense of the image of God. As the most thorough seminary-level treatment of the image among recent LCMS resources, it deserves careful attention for what it teaches in its own right.

Confessing the Gospel explains the narrow sense first: “The Lutheran Confessions understand the image of God as knowing, fearing, and loving God, or, put most simply and comprehensively, as righteousness (Ap II, 15–18; see also Ep VI, 2 and SD I, 10). The image of God is the ‘original righteousness’ of Adam and Eve.”¹³⁸ Adding to this, *Confessing the Gospel* quotes Luther: “Therefore my understanding of the image of God is this: that Adam had it in his being and that he not only knew God and believed that He was good, but that he also lived in a life that was wholly godly; that is, he was without the fear of death or of any other danger, and was content with God’s favor.”¹³⁹ This is not righteousness for righteousness’ sake. It is

137. Deutschlander, *Grace Abounds*, 195.

138. Nafzger et al., *Confessing the Gospel*, 1:276.

139. Martin Luther, quoted in Nafzger et al., *Confessing the Gospel*, 1:277.

righteousness with the goal of establishing a harmonious relationship between the Creator and the created.

Confessing the Gospel also provides an extensive discussion of the image of God in a broad sense, with particular focus on the dominion God granted to mankind: “God made only human beings ‘in [his] image, after [his] likeness’ (Gen 1:26), and in his image he gave only to them the responsibility to exercise dominion and rule over creation.”¹⁴⁰ And *Confessing the Gospel* explains the implications of this by linking the dominion function that remains to various human activities such as arts and science, and human associations like the household and civil society. These activities are evidence of the ongoing functions at work throughout the world.¹⁴¹

Confessing the Gospel also highlights the exegetical challenge of Gen 9:6 and Jas 3:9 by acknowledging that, “These passages can be interpreted to mean that the divine image remains in human beings even after the Fall. Some have denied this interpretation, holding that these passages refer to the original creation of human beings and to their destiny through Christ.”¹⁴² Without dismissing either stance, *Confessing the Gospel* handles the ongoing debate within Confessional Lutheranism diplomatically. Its earlier link between the image and man’s lasting dominion already subtly acknowledges the broader sense. Although *Confessing the Gospel* approaches both perspectives carefully and respectfully, its thoughtful handling makes it an excellent explanation of the image of God.

Confessing the Gospel also provides a helpful historical overview of three major approaches to understanding the image: the structural view (Irenaeus, Augustine, Aquinas), the

140. Nafzger et al., *Confessing the Gospel*, 1:275.

141. Nafzger et al., *Confessing the Gospel*, 1:279.

142. Nafzger et al., *Confessing the Gospel*, 1:279.

goal or destiny view (Herder, Kant), and the relational view as given most thoroughly by Luther and the Lutheran Confessions.¹⁴³ While this survey is a useful background, what matters most for our purposes is *Confessing the Gospel*'s own constructive position, which takes both the narrow and broad sense seriously.

It is worth noting that each of these dogmatic texts serves a distinct purpose. *God so Loved the World* has a popular audience in mind and avoids complexity by explaining the image of God in its simplest, narrow sense. *Grace Abounds*, although also written for a popular audience, offers a more in-depth treatment of the image of God through its “shell” and “core” framework. *Confessing the Gospel* is clearly an academic text intended for seminary-level training. These distinctions may explain why they present the image of God in the manner chosen for each text. Together, they demonstrate that the trajectory of confessional Lutheran theology has been moving toward a fuller engagement with the broad sense, not as a departure from the confessional Lutheran tradition, but as a development consistent with what Lutheran Orthodox theologians already recognized.

143. See Nafzger et al., *Confessing the Gospel*, 1:332–36, for this historical survey.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The exegetical analysis of this thesis argued that, by starting in Genesis and proceeding chronologically rather than beginning with the New Testament and reading back into the Old Testament, the image of God is more complex than a narrow sense alone suggests. In fact, there is much more mystery that gradually reveals itself as one moves through Scripture in order. The main framework employed was to understand the image of God both ontologically (what it is) and functionally (what it does). From this, it became clear that even after falling into sin, a remnant of sorts remained in all humanity that can properly be called the image of God. This thesis considers the broad sense of the image, as opposed to the narrow sense, which is defined solely by righteousness.

Moving into the historical overview, the thesis examined how the historical context of the Lutheran Reformers influenced their understanding of the image of God—and, more accurately, what they believed was necessary to say about the image of God. It started with a strong defense of understanding the image of God in a very strict and narrow way, focusing only on original righteousness. But after the initial days of the Reformation and as the Orthodox period emerged, a reassessment in a less contentious environment allowed Orthodox Lutheran theologians to describe the image of God in a way that was not strictly tied to the definition of original righteousness.

By the time confessional Lutheran theologians were living in America, there was a consistent emphasis on understanding the image of God in its narrowest sense. However, theologians could acknowledge that Scripture discusses the image of God in a more nuanced way, which includes a broader understanding—specifically, by citing passages from Gen 9:6 and Jas 3:9. The task now is to integrate these connections: what do the exegetical findings and the historical tradition, taken together, tell us about how Lutherans should speak of the image of God today?

What the Exegesis Established

The exegesis of Gen 1:26–28 identified two complementary ways of understanding the image of God that cut across the traditional narrow and broad categories. The first was ontological, focusing on what the image of God is—specifically, a statement of being and status. The second was functional, explaining what this status enables humanity to do. The point to keep in mind is that the terms ontological/functional and narrow/broad are merely two different frameworks describing the same reality, not four distinct categories. The ontological and functional senses of the image describe the image both prior to and after the Fall; the narrow and broad senses describe what existed at the beginning of creation and what remains after the Fall, respectively. It became clear that in Genesis 1, the image served the purposes of man’s dominion and procreation. First, God granted man a status, and from that status, two functions emerged. Ontology always led to function, and conversely, a function would presuppose an underlying ontology.

Genesis chapters 2 and 3 show that this image existed before the Fall, as man exercised his rationality in naming animals, fulfilled his stewardship by caring for the garden, and demonstrated moral reasoning when God gave him commands. It also revealed his ability to form relationships, not only with God but also among humans (marriage). After the Fall, although Genesis does not mention any loss of the image, an impact on humanity is evident, as human functions were significantly damaged. Both Cain and Abel had vocations and used their reasoning to develop their roles as farmers or herders. Humanity's relationship with God continued through worship and with others through procreation. However, as the murder of Abel by Cain shows, something was broken. The functions of man's image were not functioning properly.

Genesis 5:1–3 and 9:6 demonstrate that this image has been passed down from Adam to Seth in a post-Fall world. This is clearly shown in Gen 9:6, when God issues an ethical command to Noah and his descendants, stating that no one shall shed the blood of a man, not even an animal, because man was made in God's image. Here, the status of man's image is reaffirmed, preserving the ontological dimension present since Gen 1:26–28, and indicating that this image would serve as the basis for man's ethical choices.

Whether one views the image of God from a functional or ontological perspective, it is clear that the image of God still resides in man in some form. Man continues to perform the functions of the image granted in Genesis 1 long after the Fall, which implies an underlying ontology. God himself issues an ethical command based on an ontological reality—that man is created in his image. However, it is also evident that the Fall into sin has significantly hindered man's ability to fulfill these functions properly. Additionally, man's relationship with other humans, and most importantly with God, has been broken and damaged. Therefore, the exegesis

clearly shows that, whether considered ontologically or functionally, the image of God existed in creation and persisted after the Fall. This ongoing ontological reality is what the broad sense refers to.

What the Historical Overview Confirmed

When examining the different views Orthodox Lutherans have about the image of God, there is a wide area of agreement along with some unresolved questions. Both groups—those who focus mainly on the narrow sense and those who consider both senses—share a common core idea. The difference is whether to systematically develop what remains after the Fall and refer to it as the “image” in any sense. As this study has demonstrated, both approaches serve valid pastoral and theological purposes, and both are supported by the confessional tradition.

From Luther through the Orthodox dogmaticians to modern theologians, confessional Lutherans consistently affirm that original righteousness is the proper image, that it was completely lost in the Fall, that it does not simply correspond to human substance or rational faculties, but that restoration comes solely through Christ, and that what remains is corrupted.

The advantage of defining the vestiges as the image in the broad sense is that it provides a framework for understanding other distinctly human issues, such as civil righteousness, vocation, and dominion. Scripture often uses many terms in both proper and improper senses, as well as in narrow and broad senses. The image of God is simply another example of these.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ For example the use of the term “Gospel,” “Law,” “Repentance,” “Church,” “Sacrament,” “God,” “Faith,” and “Righteousness” to name a few.

Each of these frameworks helps us understand a particular perspective of the image of God. The image understood *ὀλικῶς/μερικῶς* was used to explain what was lost in the Fall by trying to understand what we had in the beginning. In part, the image was righteousness, and in whole, it was the spiritual and physical perfections in man's possession. Later, the narrow sense and broad sense were introduced. It was clear that the image understood *ὀλικῶς/μερικῶς* corresponds to the narrow sense because they referred to man in his state of righteousness. The added benefit of the narrow and broad senses was that they defined what was lost and what remained. This paper's own framework understands the image of God both ontologically and functionally. It defines what the image is and what it was used for. While it may overlap with the narrow and broad senses, it is not a perfect match because what the narrow sense describes — original righteousness — only existed before the Fall. In contrast, the ontological reality of the image takes on a different character depending on one's position relative to the Fall, and the same is true of its function. In the exegesis, the focus was on the ontological and functional realities. This approach answered the questions: What is the image ontologically, and what is its purpose? The ontological reality is that humanity is given a status from God—created in his image. This status persists not only at creation but also afterward, during humanity's fall. The functions reveal what humans can do given their status as God's image, such as: procreation, dominion over the environment, moral discernment, and relational qualities with God and others. What remains after the Fall versus what existed during humanity's perfect state, both ontologically and functionally, are different. However, the ontological and functional frameworks do not fully describe what this looks like; they simply assert that the image of God exists in mankind both at creation and after the Fall.

In the era of Lutheran dogmaticians, new frameworks were developed, frameworks that preceded the ontological and functional frameworks used in this exegesis. The first was the *ὀλικῶς* and *μερικῶς* distinctions. These addressed how extensive the loss of man's image was and are strictly related to understanding what the image of God is in a narrow sense. It described the image of God in terms of righteousness, consisting of chief and lesser chief perfections, all stemming from this righteousness. The *ὀλικῶς* image theory holds that when righteousness was lost, everything that depended on it was lost as well, namely, the chief and lesser perfections.

The narrow and broad frameworks answer the question: What was lost in the Fall, and what remains afterward? The origin of this idea is found in later dogmatic traditions. Its scope focuses only on humanity after the Fall. While the narrow sense is equated with original righteousness, which is completely lost, the broad sense refers to the remaining faculties of human reason, will, and moral judgment. Although these faculties are present in humanity, they are corrupted and hardly resemble what humanity was like before the Fall in a state of perfection.

What is clear is that the ontological and functional framework crosses the dogmatic categories rather than neatly mapping onto them. The ontological understanding of the image does not equate to the image of God *ὀλικῶς*, because the ontological sense of the image of God persists both before and after the Fall. The functional aspect of the image of God does not encompass the broad sense of the image, because the functions that existed in mankind after the Fall were present before the Fall. It should be noted that the ontological/functional distinction drawn from Genesis operates on a different axis than the *ὀλικῶς/μερικῶς* distinction developed in the dogmatic tradition. The latter describes what was lost; the former describes what was given. They complement rather than compete.

The Broad Sense: Acceptable and Now Necessary

As the theological discussion evolved from the early days of the Reformation through twentieth-century America, the conversation shifted from understanding human depravity and its relation to the image of God to affirming that the image of God was lost because of the loss of original righteousness. However, it was also recognized that the image persisted in the remnants of humanity, whether believers or unbelievers, particularly in man's will, reason, and moral awareness. Pieper also acknowledged this, but did not see it as necessary to emphasize. Like Luther, he approached the topic with pastoral concern about what was lost in humanity and, through God's agency, his means of grace, and the Spirit, what could be restored in all who believe in Jesus Christ, who justifies freely by his grace. Pieper considered it acceptable to speak of the image in a broad sense, but within a salvation-focused context, he saw no practical purpose in doing so.

While this made sense in both Pieper's and Luther's time, in a modern context, the conversation has shifted. Though it remains important to discuss what was lost and defend the teaching of the narrow sense of the image of God, it is also clear that understanding the image of God in a broader sense is becoming increasingly important in a post-Christian era—an era that begins to question the very foundations of God's created order. The church is no longer only concerned with the idea of man's sinfulness but also with understanding what man is: that he is a significant life form; that he was created with two sexes, male and female; that he was endowed with a conscience capable of discerning right from wrong in a civic sense; that man's ability to think is not solely the reason he is the crown of God's creation, since many machines can think more clearly and quickly than many humans. The narrow sense of the image cannot address this.

Instead, by exploring the broad sense, the church can engage with questions related to transhumanism, gender identity, bioethics, the right to life, human dignity, and social ethics.

To be clear, the purpose of developing the broad sense of the image is not evangelistic. The broad sense of the image does not bring anyone closer to understanding who their Savior is; that is the work of the narrow sense, of the gospel, and of the Holy Spirit. Rather, the broad sense serves an apologetic purpose—a context for believers to keep in mind when interacting with unbelievers about ethical judgments, even when the two parties hold different moral commands. At the heart of this is the role that moral capacity plays. Rom 2:14–15 teaches that Gentiles who do not have the Law nonetheless do by nature what the Law requires, because the work of the Law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness. This moral capacity is not incidental to the argument for the broad sense; it is fundamental to it. It is the very thing that makes apologetic engagement with the unbelieving world possible from the start. Because aspects of this moral awareness given at the beginning persist in every human being after the Fall. This is moral awareness: the conscience and the law written on the heart. These are what Christians appeal to when discussing ethical matters with unbelievers in the public square.

The exegesis in the first part of this paper supports this claim. Within all human beings, there exists an ontological reality that has persisted even after the Fall. The evidence for this is observable: unbelievers carrying out the functions of this ontological reality daily, such as creating families, pursuing their vocations, and collectively ruling and subduing the earth. These are not random observations. They are the functional expressions of the image described in Gen 1:26–28 that continue in a post-Fall world. The fact that unbelievers perform the functions of the image affirms the underlying ontology's persistence. Christians don't rely on these functions to convert unbelievers — that is the gospel's work — but to engage them on common moral

grounds. We recognize that, though their moral awareness is corrupted, it still reflects the persistence of the broad sense of God's image.

Recognizing the moral capacity of unbelievers is important not because it affirms their worldview, but because it provides a foundation for ethical discussion. Believers can appeal to the remaining moral sense of the unbelieving world so that the law's sense of right and wrong may be felt—a recognition of a need that their current knowledge cannot fulfill, a need only satisfied in their Savior. They may not call what they have the image of God, but Scripture informs the church of the reality of their circumstances. The broad sense thus gives believers a theological reason to have ethical conversations with those who do not accept scriptural authority, without forcing the gospel into contexts where it was not intended to be used as a tool of civic persuasion.

Although those who focus on the narrow sense of the image do so out of concern for correctly understanding original righteousness, this does not mean the church should avoid discussing the image in a broad sense, especially because of its apologetic value. If the goal is to highlight human depravity, it is appropriate to speak only of the image of God in a narrow sense. However, if the aim is to discuss vocation, civil righteousness, ethics, human dignity, or issues regarding gender and marriage, then grounding the discussion in the image of God is relevant because the church is addressing not only what God intended for believers but also for unbelievers. Therefore, the study of the image of God requires a careful balance.

Recent work has identified areas where exploring the broad sense can be productive. Kenneth Cherney pointed out the challenge that arises when artificial intelligence can imitate rational faculties once thought to be uniquely human, prompting us to base the concept on more

than just intellectual ability.¹⁴⁵ Nathan Jastram studied how humanity's creation as male and female provides material for addressing current questions of gender identity.¹⁴⁶ Burnell Eckardt highlighted the physical and incarnational aspects of the image, linking embodiment to Christ's two natures.¹⁴⁷ The broad sense of the image also has implications for natural law, specifically the law written on the heart (Rom 2:14–15), that warrants further examination.

Guarding the Narrow Sense

Before exploring where the broad sense leads, theological guardrails must be established to ensure that exploration does not come at the expense of confessional roots. Robert Kolb's analysis of Luther's two kinds of righteousness reminds us of what is at stake. "Adam and Eve had no time of probation in which to perform deeds which would make them eligible for and worthy of their humanity. They were created truly human."¹⁴⁸ They were human in God's sight not because they demonstrated their humanity through particular actions, but because "they had been created by his breath and hand because he wanted them as his children."¹⁴⁹ The main point of the image, in its narrow sense, is that God was bestowing upon humanity a status—one given freely, not earned. As Kolb notes, "The gift of human life had established Adam's and Eve's

145. Kenneth A. Cherney Jr., "Distinctively Human: An Anthropology of Genesis 1 and 2," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 119, no. 1 (2022): 7.

146. Nathan Jastram, "Man as Male and Female: Created in the Image of God," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (2004): 8–18, esp. 15.

147. Burnell F. Eckardt Jr., "Another Look at Imago Dei: Fulfilled in the Incarnate One," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 79 (2015): 76.

148. Robert Kolb, "Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness," *Lutheran Quarterly* 13 (1999): 460.

149. Kolb, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," 463.

existence and identity.”¹⁵⁰ This is pure grace and is the foundation of the entire understanding of justification.

Gerhard Forde, in his analysis of Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation, clarifies why the narrow sense should guide theological thinking. The church must be cautious of the theology of glory and instead embrace the theology of the cross. When God looks at us, he is not observing residual goodness. As Forde explains, God “creates precisely out of nothing,” and “the sinner must be reduced to nothing in order to be saved.”¹⁵¹ God brings life out of death through the cross. Forde warns that theologians of glory are “trapped in the ‘merit machine,’ and thus can fight despair only by falling back on their accomplishments.”¹⁵² The church must be careful not to focus on the broad sense of the image and walk away with a sense of humanity’s greatness, as though this were a reason God chose to save us. It is easy to look at ourselves and justify ourselves. For this reason, theologians of the cross emphasize the brokenness of the human condition and acknowledge that only Christ can restore us to where we were meant to be. Theologians of the cross, then, are “those whose eyes have been turned away from the quest for glory by the cross, who have eyes only for what is visible... the suffering and despised crucified Jesus.”¹⁵³ The understanding of the broad sense of the image should therefore be limited to its apologetic use, while the narrow sense is the lens through which to perceive what God does for us through Christ.

150. Kolb, “Two Kinds of Righteousness,” 460.

151. Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 114–15.

152. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 64.

153. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 79.

A useful framework for understanding the image of God in both senses is Luther's teaching on the two kingdoms. When the church speaks of the image of God in a broad sense, it is primarily dealing with matters assigned to God's left hand, namely civil affairs, rather than issues related to salvation. This does not mean there is a clear dividing line between the broad and narrow senses of the image, just as there is no clear division between the kingdom of God's left hand and right hand. The two spheres certainly interact. However, by recognizing that discussions of the broad sense of the image focus mainly on human nature apart from God, the church can prevent any conclusions about this broad sense from becoming a means of salvation in itself. The image of God in the narrow sense is properly associated with the kingdom of God's right hand, because here the church speaks of the *ordo salutis*, which explains the loss of righteousness, humanity's total corruption, and the impossibility of self-restoration. The restoration of the image in its narrow sense can only be achieved through the gospel and the teaching of justification through Christ Jesus.

Conversely, the broad sense is very important in apologetics as Lutherans interact with the unbelieving world on ethical and civic matters. This is done by engaging their remaining image—perhaps not something they would explicitly identify as such—but aspects like reason, conscience, and moral awareness are remnants of that broad sense. Here, the church is not trying to impose the kingdom of God's right hand onto civic life. Instead, believers meet their unbelieving neighbors where they are, through their reason.

The ontological truth that humanity is created in God's image is confirmed by God's prohibition of murder in Gen 9:6. This emphasizes the dignity and value of humanity, even outside of redemption. The ontological dimension benefits both kingdoms: in the kingdom of God's right hand, the church seeks to restore what was lost; in the kingdom of God's left hand, it

recognizes the remains of something that can still be appealed to—a functional aspect of reason, will, and moral judgment. This is helpful for believers as they discuss ethics, vocation, or other public issues with those inside and outside the church.

Moving forward, one can see how the ontological and functional framework helps address the image of God in the broad sense while keeping a clear separation from the image of God in the narrow sense.

Where the Broad Sense Leads

Having established where conversations about the broad sense properly take place, the thesis now examines more closely the ontology and function of the image in fallen humanity. In many ways, the topics that emerge here—conscience, civil ethics, human dignity—overlap with discussions that have long taken place under the heading of natural law. What the broad sense of the image offers is a direct theological foundation for these conversations within the doctrine of the image of God.

Contemporary scholarship explains why the broad sense matters for the church’s teaching and why it cannot be dismissed. Kenneth Cherney’s work on Genesis 1 and 2 clarifies what the image signifies in a world of transhumanism and artificial intelligence. As Cherney notes, “the transhumanist phenomenon has a remarkable way of bringing into focus the question... the definition of who we are.”¹⁵⁴ If artificial intelligence can mimic human reason and intellect, then what does that mean for understanding the rational soul as part of the divine image? Cherney observes that, “the number of properties that are uniquely human is shrinking before our eyes,

154. Cherney, “Distinctively Human,” 7.

which makes defining the ‘image of God’ in terms of these properties a questionable move.”¹⁵⁵

Instead, he focuses on the image’s basis in status and function: “as God’s image bearers, we were created to exhibit divine traits and exercise divine rule.”¹⁵⁶ The distinction Genesis draws between humans and any other creation is primarily based on worth, not abilities—truth that applies to both the regenerate and the unregenerate alike.

Cherney’s shift from defining the image by properties and faculties to defining it by status and function aligns with the conclusion of this paper that Genesis establishes the image’s ontological foundation (Gen 1:27) before its functional role (Gen 1:28). There is value in not reducing the image to a list of capabilities that technology might someday imitate. At the same time, the properties and faculties that remain (reason, will, moral awareness) are not incidental. They are the functional expressions of the ontological reality. Without a broad-sense doctrine, the church has little to tell the world about why a human being is fundamentally different from a machine, since the narrow sense (original righteousness) does not answer that question for the unbeliever.

Nathan Jastram’s study of maleness and femaleness as aspects of the image of God addresses an urgent contemporary issue. While affirming that original righteousness is the true image, Jastram emphasizes that it does not encompass the entirety of what Genesis 1 refers to as the image.¹⁵⁷ The word *tselem* is often linked to tangible objects. Men and women together

155. Cherney, “Distinctively Human,” 16.

156. Cherney, “Distinctively Human,” 20.

157. Jastram, “Man as Male and Female,” 8–18, esp. 15.

exercise dominion, and this shared role is part of their image of God.¹⁵⁸ The point is that the image of God should not be viewed solely as a spiritual concept. Burnell Eckardt supports this view: “Jesus is himself the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15),” and Adam “was made from the dust of the ground to be the expressed and wonderful representation of God himself, both as he himself is, and as he would one day appear.”¹⁵⁹ There is a real reason why God created us as physical beings—male and female. This broader understanding helps address gender roles and human dignity without simply claiming that the image is lost in a way that erases these distinctions.

Jastram’s approach highlights an ontological reality that existed before the Fall and continues afterward: Gen 1:27 places “male and female” directly alongside “in the image of God.” This is not just a claim about righteousness but an ontological statement about created identity. The broader understanding upholds this claim and offers theological support for discussing gender and embodiment in ways that the narrow perspective alone cannot. The physical makeup of our bodies is a temple that God formed as an expression of himself, and the distinct features of male and female should be understood as characteristics of the image of God in the broad sense.

The broader idea of the image (reason, will, and moral judgment) relates to what Paul describes in Rom 2:14–15: Gentiles who do not have the Law but, by nature, do what the Law requires, because it is written on their hearts and their consciences influence how they live. This moral awareness was implanted in humanity when God created us in his image, granting us the

158. Jastram, “Man as Male and Female,” 23–25.

159. Eckardt, “Another Look at *Imago Dei*,” 76.

ability to understand something of his created order and to follow his will. Before the Fall, humanity did so perfectly. After the Fall, corruption was so thorough that the relationship with God and the understanding of his will were lost, though traces of moral knowledge remained, even if hidden.

That understanding of God's will stays in the heart, and the ability to reason and recognize it continues even among those who do not believe in the one true God. When the broad sense of the image is explored, one enters the realm of natural law where, guided by Scripture but engaged through reason, the church seeks to understand what the remaining image consists of and why the values embedded in God's created order are worth preserving. The conscience, in this framework, is a function of the remaining image. And as the exegesis has established, function presupposes ontology: the conscience functions because the ontological image persists. This is the theological foundation for natural law, since it is rooted in the broad-sense image that God has preserved in every human being.

Clearly, there is a notable difference between the clarity of the ontology and the perfection of the functions before the Fall, compared to lapsarian humanity. However, they remain present and recognizable. Future exploration may aim to further develop this broad structure, though any conclusions drawn primarily from human reason will necessarily be provisional. Areas where the broad sense of the image could prove useful include natural-law arguments for the sanctity of life, the created order of male and female, the foundation of human dignity in secular ethics, and conscience as a function of the image of God. These topics are beyond the scope of this paper, but it is clear that there is a place in our present age for understanding and speaking of the image in its broad sense.

Why the Broad Sense Remains Necessary

A fair objection might be raised here: if confessional Lutherans already have answers from Scripture to questions about sanctity of life, gender identity, and civic ethics, why is the broader sense of the image necessary at all? Why not just address each issue directly from Scripture without introducing a framework that, in the wrong hands, could blur the teachings of original righteousness and justification? This concern warrants a serious and straightforward response.

The first reason is exegetical honesty. Asserting that the Bible refers to the image of God only in a narrow sense, without recognizing the broader sense, requires more logical gymnastics than the text itself justifies. Gen 9:6 grounds a moral command, the prohibition against murder, on the ontological reality that man is created in God's image, even after the Fall. Jas 3:9 also references the image of God as a reason that cursing other human beings is wrong, without limiting the scope to the regenerate. Explaining these passages without accepting a broad understanding of the image means either ignoring their clear meaning or reinterpreting them in ways that stretch credibility. Distorting the text to fit a favored systematic position is not only a failure of exegesis but also goes against confessional Lutheranism's stance of letting the scriptures speak for themselves.

The second reason is that the objection is based on a false dichotomy. The concern that discussing the image of God in a broad sense will somehow lead to abandoning the teaching of the image in its narrow sense—and that this will, in turn, weaken the teaching of justification—is understandable but mistaken. The broad and narrow senses are not in conflict. Throughout the history of Lutheran Orthodoxy, from Gerhard to Quenstedt, theologians articulated both senses without sacrificing their stance on original righteousness or *sola fide*. Talking about the broad sense did not weaken the narrow sense for them, and there is no reason to think it would do so

now. On the contrary, the church's honesty in acknowledging both senses may actually strengthen its longstanding credibility in allowing Scripture to speak for itself.

The third reason is that the broad sense provides a unifying theological framework that connects what could otherwise be a collection of unrelated topics. Without it, the church treats transgender issues, natural law, sanctity of life, human dignity, and civic ethics as separate matters, each requiring its own approach. The ontological and functional framework arising from the broad sense of the image offers a single doctrinal thread linking all these topics. The Lutheran church already has a robust body of literature on each of them; what the broad sense offers is the connective tissue—a coherent doctrinal structure where these topics can be grouped and understood together.

Finally, until the question has been thoroughly explored, it is premature to conclude that there is no benefit in examining it this way. The broad sense aligns with Scripture's own framework for understanding what a human being is, and therefore it should serve as the church's framework as well. Confessional Lutherans emphasize the importance of the image of God in the narrow sense; this view does not dispute that. However, the image of God in its broader sense remains relevant for discussing issues related to the kingdom of the left hand and general apologetics, especially as Christians engage with an unbelieving world in a manner that is both respectful and theologically grounded.

CONCLUSION

The overview of Genesis and other related passages concerning the image of God shows that what God gave to humanity in the garden was an ontological status. This status was immediately followed by a command, which man was functionally capable of fulfilling. The ontology—containing the image—and the functions that expressed this ontology became evidence that could be traced through the Fall among sinful humanity, where the functions were still being carried out by Adam and Eve’s descendants. This presupposed that the ontology must still exist. This assumption was then confirmed when God gave the Noahide covenant and command, based on the ontology of being created in God’s image, to not shed the blood of fellow human beings. Consequently, it is this remaining remnant that grounds the prohibition against murder, which this thesis defines as the broad sense of the image of God.

The development of the doctrine of the image of God in Lutheran Orthodoxy follows a clear progression. Both Luther and The Book of Concord focus almost exclusively on the narrow sense, primarily aiming to counter medieval scholasticism and the Flacian heresy. Chemnitz broadens the scope with his antithesis method. By examining what was lost after the Fall, he explains what remains. Gerhard provides a thorough, systematic treatment of both senses, using Aristotelian categories to counter the teaching of the *donum superadditum* and to develop an extensive theology of the broad sense. Quenstedt adds technical precision by distinguishing between the image received as *ὅλικῶς/μερικῶς*, which proves useful when comparing the narrow and broad senses.

Early American Lutherans, especially Pieper and Hoenecke, could reasonably conclude from Scripture alone that the Bible referred to a broad understanding of the image. Pieper himself does not deny that there is a biblically acceptable way of speaking about the image of God in this broad sense. However, during his own time, there was no need to use it. As a result, his pastoral focus was mainly on discussing the narrow sense of the image of God, because that directly connects to the teaching of justification and the gospel message shared with others.

In the specific context of today, however, the broad sense has found its purpose. The anthropological questions the church faces go beyond salvation to explore what it truly means to be human. Each sense of the image dominates in its respective realm: the narrow sense in the kingdom of God's right hand, and the broad sense in the kingdom of God's left.

Perhaps the lesson is simply this: the church focuses on the most relevant understanding of the image of God for its context. For the early Reformers, who fought false teachings from the Catholic Church and scholasticism, it made sense to describe the image of God mainly in its narrow sense. This was the dominant position until today, when God's church must deal with a society that is increasingly non-Christian, the church needs to equip its people with a framework for engaging unbelievers on topics like human dignity, sexuality, and ethics—while never losing sight of the urgent need for Christ's righteousness.

When the image of God is considered in its narrow sense, what is being done if not emphasizing the doctrine of justification? When the image of God is examined in its broader sense, what is being done if not establishing a foundation to teach all of humanity about their created dignity and their Creator's purpose? The image of God is not just a doctrine about human abilities. It is, in both senses, a doctrine about relationships—the relationships God intended with

him and among ourselves, the relationships humanity broke, and the relationships Christ came to restore.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ The author made use of Grammarly to improve grammar and readability. In addition to consulting with his thesis advisor, the author also used Claude AI to help clarify the Aristotelian concepts underlying the *ὅλκωζ/μερικῶζ* distinction and its relationship to the ontological/functional framework.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: The Significance of “Let Us Make”

The phrase “let us make” (נַעֲשֶׂה, *na’aseh*) is unique in the creation account. Whereas God speaks all other creatures into existence with impersonal commands—“Let there be...” (יְהִי, *yehi*) or “Let the earth/waters bring forth...”—humanity’s creation is preceded by divine deliberation. This deliberative form appears nowhere else in Genesis 1.

The question arises: who is the “us”? Various interpretations have been proposed:

- (1) God addressing the heavenly court or angels, citing Philo and Isa 6:8.¹⁶¹
- (2) The Trinity—a Christian interpretation, though as Wenham notes, “It is now universally admitted that this was not what the plural meant to the original author.”¹⁶²
- (3) Remnants of polytheistic accounts (the modern critical view).
- (4) Plural of majesty—rejected because “we” as plural of majesty is not used with verbs.¹⁶³
- (5) Divine self-deliberation or self-encouragement (Joüon, Cassuto).
- (6) God addressing His Spirit, though this fails if רִיחַ in v. 2 means “wind.”¹⁶⁴

161. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 28.

162. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 28.

163. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 28, adds Joüon’s observation “that ‘we’ as a plural of majesty is not used with verbs has led to the rejection of this interpretation.”

164. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 28–29.

Mathews favors the Spirit interpretation, noting the Spirit is mentioned in v. 2.¹⁶⁵ Jeske and Lawrenz argue that angels cannot be in view because they are not mentioned in chapter 1. The text clearly states mankind is made in “his image” (singular) in v. 27, not “their image.”¹⁶⁶ The deliberative form, regardless of the specific interpretation, emphasizes the special significance of humanity’s creation and may hint at the plurality within the Godhead, though that fuller revelation awaits the New Testament.¹⁶⁷ What matters exegetically is that the creator(s) are divine and spiritual, not corporeal, which has implications for what we mean by “image”—the resemblance must include non-corporeal aspects.

Appendix B: צֶלֶם and דְּמוּת—Synonymous Parallelism or Distinct Concepts?

The relationship between צֶלֶם (*tselem*, “image”) and דְּמוּת (*demut*, “likeness”) has been debated since the early church. Irenaeus, reading from the Septuagint which inserted καί (“and”) between the two nouns, distinguished them: *tselem* referred to natural qualities like reason and personality, while *demut* referred to supernatural graces like ethical thinking. This allowed Irenaeus to argue that in the Fall, the likeness was lost but the image remained.¹⁶⁸

However, this distinction is foreign to Genesis for several reasons. First, the Hebrew text has no conjunction—the terms are in apposition, with the second specifying the first. The Samaritan Pentateuch, LXX, and Vulgate insert “and,” but the Masoretic Text may stand without

165. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 162.

166. Lawrenz and Jeske, *Commentary on Genesis 1–11*, 72–73.

167. See Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 27, where he notes the narrative’s slowing pace through expansive language to illustrate the deliberate actions of God.

168. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 29–30.

it.¹⁶⁹ Second, Gen 5:1–3 uses the terms interchangeably: in 5:3, the order is reversed (*demut* then *tselem*), and the LXX itself uses the same Greek term εἰκών (*eikōn*) for both Hebrew words in different verses.¹⁷⁰ Third, the Tell Fakhariyah inscription in Syria—a bilingual Assyrian and Aramaic text honoring King Hadad-yith'i—uses both terms together to describe the king's statue, demonstrating that in the ancient Near East these terms were paired synonymously.¹⁷¹

The terms therefore function as synonymous parallelism: *demut* clarifies and reinforces *tselem*, with *demut* adding the nuance of “resemblance” or “pattern” to *tselem*'s more concrete sense of “representation.” The interchangeability is further evident in Gen 5:3, where the prepositions *kaph* and *bet* are used in reverse order when describing *demut* then *tselem*.¹⁷²

The theological danger of Irenaeus's distinction is that it allows for the loss of part of the image (likeness) while retaining another part (image)—a move that many Protestants reject.¹⁷³ This rejection is not based on dogmatic reasons, but because the text does not support Irenaeus's distinction. Both terms describe a single reality: humanity is made in the image-likeness of God.

169. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 29.

170. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 166–67.

171. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 29; Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 167.

172. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 127.

173. A further explanation is provided in the Thesis itself with the discussion of the *donum superadditum* put forth by medieval scholasticism. See pages 28–31.

Appendix C: The Undefined Ontological Content of the Image

The text simply does not define what the image *is* in terms of human constitution or nature.

Mathews states: “Genesis, however, says nothing about the image of God as to its ontological content, and therefore to develop an anthropology rooted in this phrase is speculative.”¹⁷⁴

However, this has not stopped theologians from speculating. Wenham surveys several theories:¹⁷⁵

(1) Mental/spiritual faculties. The image refers to capacities like reason, will, personality, and moral agency that humans share with God. *Problem:* It is difficult to pin down which specific faculties constitute the image, and there is suspicion that “the commentator may be reading his own values into the text.”¹⁷⁶

(2) Physical resemblance. Since *tselem* can mean physical statue, perhaps humans physically resemble God. Supporting this: Seth is born “in his [Adam’s] image” (Gen 5:3), suggesting physical resemblance. *Problem:* The creator is spiritual, not corporeal, so how can there be physical resemblance? Also, this seems to violate the prohibition against making graven images of God. Kenneth Matthew’s response: “This dichotomy is at odds with Hebrew anthropology, which views a person as a unified whole.”¹⁷⁷

174. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 168.

175. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 30–35.

176. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 30a.

177. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 167–68. See also Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 31–32, who makes a similar point.

(3) Representative/functional. The image makes humanity God’s vice-regent on earth, representing His rule. This is Wenham’s preferred view. Supporting evidence: the immediate connection to dominion in v. 26, and the ancient Near Eastern practice of kings as divine representatives. *Problem*: “But this merely describes the function or the consequence of the divine image. It does not pinpoint what the image is in itself.”¹⁷⁸

(4) Relational. Karl Barth argued that the image is humanity’s capacity for relationship with God, based on the plural “Let us make” and “male and female.” *Problem*: Gen 5:3 and Exodus 25 suggest the image describes the product of creation, not the process.¹⁷⁹

What can we say with confidence? Gen 1:26–28 establishes that humans *are* made in God’s image—it is a fact of our created nature. The image is something that characterizes human existence as a whole, distinguishing us from animals. But the specific ontological content—precisely what about our nature constitutes the image—is not defined here. We must wait for further biblical revelation (especially the New Testament) to understand more fully.

178. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 30b–31.

179. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 31–32.

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THE IMAGO DEI IN CONFESSIONAL LUTHERAN THEOLOGY: ESTABLISHING
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