



INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION

COMMUNION AND STEWARDSHIP:

Human Persons Created in the Image of God*

INTRODUCTION

1. The explosion of scientific understanding and technological capability in modern times has brought many advantages to the human race, but it also poses serious challenges. Our knowledge of the immensity and age of the universe has made human beings seem smaller and less secure in their position and significance within it. Technological advances have greatly increased our ability to control and direct the forces of nature, but they have also turned out to have an unexpected and possibly uncontrollable impact on our environment and even on ourselves.
2. The International Theological Commission offers the following theological meditation on the doctrine of the *imago Dei* to orient our reflection on the meaning of human existence in the face of these challenges. At the same time, we want to present the positive vision of the human person within the universe which is afforded by this newly retrieved doctrinal theme.
3. Especially since Vatican Council II, the doctrine of the *imago Dei* has begun to enjoy a greater prominence in magisterial teaching and theological research. Previously, various factors had led to the neglect of the theology of the *imago Dei* among some modern western philosophers and theologians. In philosophy, the very notion of the "image" was subjected to a powerful critique by theories of knowledge which either privileged the role of the "idea" at the expense of the image (rationalism) or made experience the ultimate criterion of truth without reference to the role of the image (empiricism). In addition, cultural factors, such as the influence of secular humanism and, more recently, the very profusion of images by the mass media, have made it difficult to affirm the human orientation to the divine, on the one hand, and, on the other, the ontological reference of the image which are essential to any theology of the *imago Dei*. Contributing to the neglect of the theme within western theology itself were biblical interpretations that stressed the permanent validity of the injunction against images (cf. Exodus 20:3-4) or posited a Hellenistic influence on the emergence of the theme in the Bible.
4. It was not until the eve of Vatican Council II that theologians began to rediscover the fertility of this theme for understanding and articulating the mysteries of the Christian faith. Indeed, the documents of this council both express and confirm this significant development in twentieth century theology. In continuity with the deepening recovery of the theme of the *imago Dei* since Vatican Council II, the International Theological Commission seeks in the following pages to reaffirm the truth that human persons are created in the image of God in order to enjoy personal communion with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and with one

another in them, and in order to exercise, in God's name, responsible stewardship of the created world. In the light of this truth, the world appears not as something merely vast and possibly meaningless, but as a place created for the sake of personal communion.

5. As we seek to demonstrate in the following chapters, these profound truths have lost neither their relevance nor their power. After a summary review of the scriptural and traditional basis of the *imago Dei* in Chapter I, we move on to an exploration of the two great themes of the theology of the *imago Dei*: in Chapter II, the *imago Dei* as the basis of communion with the triune God and among human persons and then, in Chapter III, the *imago Dei* as the basis of a share in God's governance of visible creation. These reflections gather together the main elements of Christian anthropology and certain elements of moral theology and ethics as they are illumined by the theology of the *imago Dei*. We are well aware of the breadth of the issues we have sought to address here, but we offer these reflections to recall for ourselves and for our readers the immense explanatory power of the theology of the *imago Dei* precisely in order to reaffirm the divine truth about the universe and about the meaning of human life.

CHAPTER ONE

HUMAN PERSONS CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

6. As the witness of Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium makes clear, the truth that human beings are created in the image of God is at the heart of Christian revelation. This truth was recognized and its broad implications expounded by the Fathers of the Church and by the great scholastic theologians. Although, as we shall note below, this truth was challenged by some influential modern thinkers, today biblical scholars and theologians join with the Magisterium in reclaiming and reaffirming the doctrine of the *imago Dei*.

1. The *imago Dei* in Scripture and Tradition

7. With few exceptions, most exegetes today acknowledge that the theme of the *imago Dei* is central to biblical revelation (cf. Gen. 1:26f; 5:1-3; 9:6). The theme is seen as the key to the biblical understanding of human nature and to all the affirmations of biblical anthropology in both the Old and New Testaments. For the Bible, the *imago Dei* constitutes almost a definition of man: the mystery of man cannot be grasped apart from the mystery of God.

8. The Old Testament understanding of man as created in the *imago Dei* in part reflects the ancient Near Eastern idea that the king is the image of God on earth. The biblical understanding, however, is distinctive in extending the notion of the image of God to include all men. An additional contrast with ancient Near Eastern thought is that the Bible sees man as directed, not first of all to the worship of the gods, but rather to the cultivation of the earth (cf. Gen 2:15). Connecting cult more directly with cultivation, as it were, the Bible understands that human activity in the six days of the week is ordered to the Sabbath, a day of blessing and sanctification.

9. Two themes converge to shape the biblical perspective. In the first place, the whole of man is seen as created in the image of God. This perspective excludes interpretations which locate the *imago Dei* in one or another aspect of human nature (for example, his upright stature or his intellect) or in one of his qualities or functions (for example, his sexual nature or his

domination of the earth). Avoiding both monism and dualism, the Bible presents a vision of the human being in which the spiritual is understood to be a dimension together with the physical, social and historical dimensions of man.

10. Secondly, the creation accounts in Genesis make it clear that man is not created as an isolated individual: "God created mankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). God placed the first human beings in relation to one another, each with a partner of the other sex. The Bible affirms that man exists in relation with other persons, with God, with the world, and with himself. According to this conception, man is not an isolated individual but a person -- an essentially relational being. Far from entailing a pure actualism that would deny its permanent ontological status, the fundamentally relational character of the *imago Dei* itself constitutes its ontological structure and the basis for its exercise of freedom and responsibility.

11. The created image affirmed by the Old Testament is, according to the New Testament, to be completed in the *imago Christi*. In the New Testament development of this theme, two distinctive elements emerge: the christological and Trinitarian character of the *imago Dei*, and the role of sacramental mediation in the formation of the *imago Christi*.

12. Since it is Christ himself who is the perfect image of God (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3), man must be conformed to him (Rom 8:29) in order to become the son of the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:23). Indeed, to "become" the image of God requires an active participation on man's part in his transformation according to the pattern of the image of the Son (Col 3:10) who manifests his identity by the historical movement from his incarnation to his glory. According to the pattern first traced out by the Son, the image of God in each man is constituted by his own historical passage from creation, through conversion from sin, to salvation and consummation. Just as Christ manifested his lordship over sin and death through his passion and resurrection, so each man attains his lordship through Christ in the Holy Spirit -- not only over the earth and the animal kingdom (as the Old Testament affirms) -- but principally over sin and death.

13. According to the New Testament, this transformation into the image of Christ is accomplished through the sacraments, in the first place as an effect of the illumination of the message of Christ (2 Cor 3:18-4:6) and of Baptism (1 Cor 12:13). Communion with Christ is a result of faith in him, and Baptism through which one dies to the old man through Christ (Gal 3:26-28) and puts on the new man (Gal 3:27; Rom 13:14). Penance, the Eucharist, and the other sacraments confirm and strengthen us in this radical transformation according to the pattern of Christ's passion, death and resurrection. Created in the image of God and perfected in the image of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit in the sacraments, we are embraced in love by the Father. 14. The biblical vision of the image of God continued to occupy a prominent place in Christian anthropology in the Fathers of the Church and in later theology, right up to the beginning of modern times. An indication of the centrality of this theme can be found in the endeavor of early Christians to interpret the biblical prohibition against artistic representations of God (cf. Ex 20:2f; Dt 27:15) in the light of the incarnation. For the mystery of the incarnation demonstrated the possibility of representing the God-made-man in his human and historical reality. Defense of artistic representation of the Incarnate Word and of the events of salvation during the iconoclastic controversies of the seventh and eighth centuries rested on a profound understanding of the hypostatic union which refused to separate the divine and the human in the "image."

15. Patristic and medieval theology diverged at certain points from biblical anthropology, and developed it at other points. The majority of the representatives of the tradition, for example, did not fully embrace the biblical vision which identified the image with the totality of man. A significant development of the biblical account was the distinction between image and likeness, introduced by St. Irenaeus, according to which “image” denotes an ontological participation (*methexis*) and “likeness” (*mimêsis*) a moral transformation (*Adv. Haer.* V,6,1; V,8,1; V,16,2). According to Tertullian, God created man in his image and gave him the breath of life as his likeness. While the image can never be destroyed, the likeness can be lost by sin (*Bapt.* 5, 6.7). St. Augustine did not take up this distinction, but presented a more personalistic, psychological and existential account of the *imago Dei*. For him, the image of God in man has a Trinitarian structure, reflecting either the tripartite structure of the human soul (spirit, self-consciousness, and love) or the threefold aspects of the psyche (memory, intelligence, and will). According to Augustine, the image of God in man orients him to God in invocation, knowledge and love (*Confessions* I, 1,1).

16. In Thomas Aquinas, the *imago Dei* possesses an historical character, since it passes through three stages: the *imago creationis (naturae)*, the *imago recreationis (gratiae)*, and the *similitudinis (gloriae)* (*S.Th.* I q.93 a.4). For Aquinas, the *imago Dei* is the basis for participation in the divine life. The image of God is realized principally in an act of contemplation in the intellect (*S.Th.* I q.93 a.4 and 7). This conception can be distinguished from that of Bonaventure, for whom the image is realized chiefly through the will in the religious act of man (*Sent.* II d.16 a.2 q.3). Within a similar mystical vision, but with a greater boldness, Meister Eckhart tends to spiritualize the *imago Dei* by placing it at the summit of the soul and detaching it from the body (*Quint.* I,5,5-7; V, 6.9s).

17. Reformation controversies demonstrated that the theology of the *imago Dei* remained important for both Protestant and Catholic theologians. The Reformers accused the Catholics of reducing the image of God to an “*imago naturae*” which presented a static conception of human nature and encouraged the sinner to constitute himself before God. On the other side, the Catholics accused the Reformers of denying the ontological reality of the image of God and reducing it to a pure relation. In addition, the Reformers insisted that the image of God was corrupted by sin, whereas Catholic theologians viewed sin as a wounding of the image of God in man.

2. The modern critique of the theology of the *imago Dei*

18. Until the dawn of the modern period, the theology of the *imago Dei* retained its central position in theological anthropology. Throughout the history of Christian thought, such was the power and fascination of this theme that it could withstand those isolated critiques (as, for example, in iconoclasm) which charged that its anthropomorphism fostered idolatry. But, in the modern period, the theology of the *imago Dei* came under a more sustained and systematic critique.

19. The view of the universe advanced by modern science displaced the classical notion of a cosmos made in the divine image and thus dislodged an important part of the conceptual framework supporting the theology of the *imago Dei*. The theme was regarded as ill-adapted to experience by empiricists, and as ambiguous by rationalists. But more significant among the factors undermining the theology of the *imago Dei* was the conception of man as a self-constituting autonomous subject, apart from any relationship to God. With this development, the notion of the *imago Dei* could not be sustained. It was but a short step from

these ideas to the reversal of biblical anthropology which took various forms in the thought of Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud: it is not man who is made in the image of God, but God who is nothing else than an image projected by man. In the end, atheism appeared to be required if man was to be self-constituting.

20. At first, the climate of twentieth century western theology was unfavorable to the theme of the *imago Dei*. Given the nineteenth century developments just mentioned, it was perhaps inevitable that some forms of dialectical theology regarded the theme as an expression of human arrogance by which man compares or equates himself to God. Existential theology, with its stress on the event of the encounter with God, undermined the notion of a stable or permanent relationship with God which is entailed by the doctrine of the *imago Dei*. Secularization theology rejected the notion of an objective reference in the world locating man with respect to God. The "God without properties," - in effect, an impersonal God - espoused by some versions of negative theology could not serve as the model for man made in his image. In political theology, with its overriding concern for orthopraxis, the theme of the *imago Dei* receded from view. Finally, secular and theological critics alike blamed the theology of the *imago Dei* for promoting a disregard of the natural environment and animal welfare.

3. The *imago Dei* at Vatican Council II and in current theology

21. Despite these unfavorable trends, interest in the recovery of the theology of the *imago Dei* rose steadily throughout the mid- twentieth century. Intense study of the Scriptures, of the Fathers of the Church, and of the great scholastic theologians produced a renewed awareness of the ubiquity and importance of the theme of the *imago Dei*. This recovery was well underway among Catholic theologians before the Second Vatican Council. The council gave new impetus to the theology of the *imago Dei*, most especially in the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*.

22. Invoking the theme of the image of God, the Council affirmed in *Gaudium et Spes* the dignity of man as it is taught in Genesis 1:26 and Psalm 8:6 (*GS* 12). Within the conciliar vision, the *imago Dei* consists in man's fundamental orientation to God, which is the basis of human dignity and of the inalienable rights of the human person. Because every human being is an image of God, he cannot be made subservient to any this-worldly system or finality. His sovereignty within the cosmos, his capacity for social existence, and his knowledge and love of the Creator - all are rooted in man's being made in the image of God. Basic to the conciliar teaching is the christological determination of the image: it is Christ who is the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15) (*GS* 10). The Son is the perfect Man who restores the divine likeness to the sons and daughters of Adam which was wounded by the sin of the first parents (*GS* 22). Revealed by God who created man in his image, it is the Son who gives to man the answers to his questions about the meaning of life and death (*GS* 41). The Council also underscores the trinitarian structure of the image: by conformity to Christ (Rm 8:29) and through the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Rm 8:23), a new man is created, capable of fulfilling the new commandment (*GS* 22). It is the saints who are fully transformed in the image of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 3:18); in them, God manifests his presence and grace as a sign of his kingdom (*GS* 24). On the basis of the doctrine of the image of God, the Council teaches that human activity reflects the divine creativity which is its model (*GS* 34) and must be directed to justice and human fellowship in order to foster the establishment of one family in which all are brothers and sisters (*GS* 24).

24. The renewed interest in the theology of the *imago dei* which emerged at the Second Vatican Council is reflected in contemporary theology, where it is possible to note developments in several areas. In the first place, theologians are working to show how the theology of the *imago Dei* illumines the connections between anthropology and Christology. Without denying the unique grace which comes to the human race through the incarnation, theologians want to recognize the intrinsic value of the creation of man in God's image. The possibilities that Christ opens up for man do not involve the suppression of the human reality in its creatureliness but its transformation and realization according to the perfect image of the Son. In addition, with this renewed understanding of the link between Christology and anthropology comes a deeper understanding of the dynamic character of the *imago Dei*. Without denying the gift of man's original creation in the image of God, theologians want to acknowledge the truth that, in the light of human history and the evolution of human culture, the *imago Dei* can in a real sense be said to be still in the process of becoming. What is more, the theology of the *imago Dei* also links anthropology with moral theology by showing that, in his very being, man possesses a participation in the divine law. This natural law orients human persons to the pursuit of the good in their actions. It follows, finally, that the *imago Dei* has a teleological and eschatological dimension which defines man as *homo viator*, oriented to the *parousia* and to the consummation of the divine plan for the universe as it is realized in the history of grace in the life of each individual human being and in the history of the whole human race.

CHAPTER TWO

IN THE IMAGE OF GOD: PERSONS IN COMMUNION

25. Communion and stewardship are the two great strands out of which the fabric of the doctrine of the *imago Dei* is woven. The first strand, which we take up in this chapter, can be summarized in the following way: The triune God has revealed his plan to share the communion of Trinitarian life with persons created in his image. Indeed, it is for the sake of this Trinitarian communion that human persons are created in the divine image. It is precisely this radical likeness to the triune God that is the basis for the possibility of the communion of creaturely beings with the uncreated persons of the Blessed Trinity. Created in the image of God, human beings are by nature bodily and spiritual, men and women made for one another, persons oriented towards communion with God and with one another, wounded by sin and in need of salvation, and destined to be conformed to Christ, the perfect image of the Father, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

1. Body and soul

26. Human beings, created in the image of God, are persons called to enjoy communion and to exercise stewardship in a physical universe. The activities entailed by interpersonal communion and responsible stewardship engage the spiritual - intellectual and affective - capacities of human persons, but they do not leave the body behind. Human beings are physical beings sharing a world with other physical beings. Implicit in the Catholic theology of the *imago Dei* is the profound truth that the material world creates the conditions for the engagement of human persons with one another.

27. This truth has not always received the attention it deserves. Present-day theology is striving to overcome the influence of dualistic anthropologies that locate the *imago Dei* exclusively with reference to the spiritual aspect of human nature. Partly under the influence

first of Platonic and later of Cartesian dualistic anthropologies, Christian theology itself tended to identify the *imago Dei* in human beings with what is the most specific characteristic of human nature, viz., mind or spirit. The recovery both of elements of biblical anthropology and of aspects of the Thomistic synthesis has contributed to the effort in important ways.

28. The view that bodiliness is essential to personal identity is fundamental, even if not explicitly thematized, in the witness of Christian revelation. Biblical anthropology excludes mind-body dualism. It speaks of man as a whole. Among the basic Hebrew terms for man used in the Old Testament, *nēfēš* means the life of a concrete person who is alive (Gen 9:4; Lev. 24:17-18, Proverbs 8:35). But man does not have a *nēfēš*; he is a *nēfēš* (Gen 2:7; Lev 17:10). *Basar* refers to the flesh of animals and of men, and sometimes the body as a whole (Lev 4:11; 26:29). Again, one does not have a *basar*, but is a *basar*. The New Testament term *sarx* (flesh) can denote the material corporality of man (2 Cor 12:7), but on the other hand also the whole person (Rom. 8:6). Another Greek term, *soma* (body) refers to the whole man with emphasis on his outward manifestation. Here too man does not *have* his body, but *is* his body. Biblical anthropology clearly presupposes the unity of man, and understands bodiliness to be essential to personal identity.

29. The central dogmas of the Christian faith imply that the body is an intrinsic part of the human person and thus participates in his being created in the image of God. The Christian doctrine of creation utterly excludes a metaphysical or cosmic dualism since it teaches that everything in the universe, spiritual and material, was created by God and thus stems from the perfect Good. Within the framework of the doctrine of the incarnation, the body also appears as an intrinsic part of the person. The Gospel of John affirms that "the Word became flesh (*sarx*)," in order to stress, against Docetism, that Jesus had a real physical body and not a phantom-body. Furthermore, Jesus redeems us through every act he performs in his body. His Body which is given up for us and His Blood which is poured out for us mean the gift of his Person for our salvation. Christ's work of redemption is carried on in the Church, his mystical body, and is made visible and tangible through the sacraments. The effects of the sacraments, though in themselves primarily spiritual, are accomplished by means of perceptible material signs, which can only be received in and through the body. This shows that not only man's mind but also his body is redeemed. The body becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit. Finally, that the body belongs essentially to the human person is inherent to the doctrine of the resurrection of the body at the end of time, which implies that man exists in eternity as a complete physical and spiritual person.

30. In order to maintain the unity of body and soul clearly taught in revelation, the Magisterium adopted the definition of the human soul as *forma substantialis* (cf. Council of Vienne and the Fifth Lateran Council). Here the Magisterium relied on Thomistic anthropology which, drawing upon the philosophy of Aristotle, understands body and soul as the material and spiritual principles of a single human being. It may be noted that this account is not incompatible with present-day scientific insights. Modern physics has demonstrated that matter in its most elementary particles is purely potential and possesses no tendency toward organization. But the level of organization in the universe, which contains highly organized forms of living and non-living entities, implies the presence of some "information." This line of reasoning suggests a partial analogy between the Aristotelian concept of substantial form and the modern scientific notion of "information." Thus, for example, the DNA of the chromosomes contains the information necessary for matter to be

organized according to what is typical of a certain species or individual. Analogically, the substantial form provides to prime matter the information it needs to be organized in a particular way. This analogy should be taken with due caution because metaphysical and spiritual concepts cannot be simply compared with material, biological data.

31. These biblical, doctrinal and philosophical indications converge in the affirmation that human bodiliness participates in the *imago Dei*. If the soul, created in God's image, forms matter to constitute the human body, then the human person as a whole is the bearer of the divine image in a spiritual as well as a bodily dimension. This conclusion is strengthened when the christological implications of the image of God are taken fully into account. "In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear....Christ fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling" (*Gaudium et Spes* 22). Spiritually and physically united to the incarnate and glorified Word, especially in the sacrament of the Eucharist, man arrives at his destination: the resurrection of his own body and the eternal glory in which he participates as a complete human person, body and soul, in the Trinitarian communion shared by all the blessed in the company of heaven.

2. Man and woman

32. In *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II affirmed: "As an incarnate spirit, that is a soul which expresses itself in a body and a body informed by an immortal spirit, man is called to love in his unified totality. Love includes the human body, and the body is made a sharer in spiritual love" (11). Created in the image of God, human beings are called to love and communion. Because this vocation is realized in a distinctive way in the procreative union of husband and wife, the difference between man and woman is an essential element in the constitution of human beings made in the image of God.

33. "God created man in his image; in the image of God he created him; male and female, he created them" (Gen. 1:27; cf. Gen. 5:1-2). According to the Scripture, therefore, the *imago Dei* manifests itself, at the outset, in the difference between the sexes. It could be said that human beings exist only as masculine or feminine, since the reality of the human condition appears in the difference and plurality of the sexes. Hence, far from being an accidental or secondary aspect of personality, it is constitutive of person identity. Each of us possesses a way of being in the world, to see, to think, to feel, to engage in mutual exchange with other persons who are also defined by their sexual identity. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: "Sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of his body and soul. It especially concerns affectivity, the capacity to love and to procreate, and in a more general way the aptitude for forming bonds of communion with others" (2332). The roles attributed to one or the other sex may vary across time and space, but the sexual identity of the person is not a cultural or social construction. It belongs to the specific manner in which the *imago Dei* exists.

34. The incarnation of the Word reinforces this specificity. He assumed the human condition in its totality, taking up one sex, but he became man in both senses of the term: as a member of the human community, and as a male. The relation of each one to Christ is determined in two ways: it depends on one's own proper sexual identity and that of Christ.

35. In addition, the incarnation and resurrection extend the original sexual identity of the *imago Dei* into eternity. The risen Lord remains a man when he sits now at the right hand of

the Father. We may also note that the sanctified and glorified person of the Mother of God, now assumed bodily into heaven, continues to be a woman. When in Galatians 3:28, St. Paul announces that in Christ all differences – including that between man and woman – would be erased, he is affirming that no human differences can impede our participation in the mystery of Christ. The Church has not followed St. Gregory of Nyssa and some other Fathers of the Church who held that sexual differences as such would be annulled by the resurrection. The sexual differences between man and woman, while certainly manifesting physical attributes, in fact transcend the purely physical and touch the very mystery of the person.

36. The Bible lends no support to the notion of a natural superiority of the masculine over the feminine sex. Their differences notwithstanding, the two sexes enjoy an inherent equality. As Pope John Paul II wrote in *Familiaris Consortio*: “Above all it is important to underline the equal dignity and responsibility of women with men. This equality is realized in a unique manner in that reciprocal self-giving by each one to the other and by both to the children which is proper to marriage and the family....In creating the human race ‘male and female,’ God gives man and woman an equal personal dignity, endowing them with the inalienable rights and responsibilities proper to the human person” (22). Man and woman are equally created in God’s image. Both are persons, endowed with intelligence and will, capable of orienting their lives through the exercise of freedom. But each does so in a manner proper and distinctive to their sexual identity, in such wise that the Christian tradition can speak of a reciprocity and complementarity. These terms, which have lately become somewhat controversial, are nonetheless useful in affirming that man and woman each needs the other in order to achieve fullness of life.

37. To be sure, the original friendship between man and woman was deeply impaired by sin. Through his miracle at the wedding feast of Cana (John 2:1 ff), our Lord shows that he has come to restore the harmony that God intended in the creation of man and woman.

38. The image of God, which is to be found in the nature of the human person as such, can be realized in a special way in the union between human beings. Since this union is directed to the perfection of divine love, Christian tradition has always affirmed the value of virginity and celibacy which foster chaste friendship among human persons at the same time that they point to the eschatological fulfillment of all created love in the uncreated love of the Blessed Trinity. In this very connection, the Second Vatican Council drew an analogy between the communion of the divine persons among themselves, and that which human beings are invited to establish on earth (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 24). While it is certainly true that union between human beings can be realized in a variety of ways, Catholic theology today affirms that marriage constitutes an elevated form of the communion between human persons and one of the best analogies of the Trinitarian life. When a man and a woman unite their bodies and spirits in an attitude of total openness and self-giving, they form a new image of God. Their union as one flesh does not correspond simply to a biological necessity, but to the intention of the Creator in leading them to share the happiness of being made in his image. The Christian tradition speaks of marriage as an eminent way of sanctity. “God is love, and in himself he lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating man and woman in his image..., God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility of love and communion” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2331). The Second Vatican Council also underlined the profound significance of marriage: “Christian spouses, in virtue of the sacrament of matrimony, signify and partake of the mystery of that unity and fruitful love which exists between Christ and His Church (cf. Eph.

5:32). The spouses thereby help each other to attain to holiness in their married life and by the rearing of their children” (*Lumen Gentium* 11; cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 48).

3. Person and community

40. Persons created in the image of God are bodily beings whose identity as male or female orders them to a special kind of communion with one another. As Pope John Paul II has taught, the nuptial meaning of the body finds its realization in the human intimacy and love that mirror the communion of the Blessed Trinity whose mutual love is poured out in creation and redemption. This truth is at the center of Christian anthropology. Human beings are created in the *imago Dei* precisely as persons capable of a knowledge and love that are personal and interpersonal. It is of the essence of the *imago Dei* in them that these personal beings are relational and social beings, embraced in a human family whose unity is at once realized and prefigured in the Church.

41. When one speaks of the person, one refers both to the irreducible identity and interiority that constitutes the particular individual being, and to the fundamental relationship to other persons that is the basis for human community. In the Christian perspective, this personal identity that is at once an orientation to the other is founded essentially on the Trinity of divine Persons. God is not a solitary being, but a communion of three Persons. Constituted by the one divine nature, the identity of the Father is his paternity, his relation to the Son and the Spirit; the identity of the Son is his relation to the Father and the Spirit; the identity of the Spirit is his relation to the Father and the Son. Christian revelation led to the articulation of the concept of person, and gave it a divine, christological, and Trinitarian meaning. In effect, no person is as such alone in the universe, but is always constituted with others and is summoned to form a community with them.

42. It follows that personal beings are social beings as well. The human being is truly human to the extent that he actualizes the essentially social element in his constitution as a person within familial, religious, civil, professional, and other groups that together form the surrounding society to which he belongs. While affirming the fundamentally social character of human existence, Christian civilization has nonetheless recognized the absolute value of the human person as well as the importance of individual rights and cultural diversity. In the created order, there will always be a certain tension between the individual person and the demands of social existence. In the Blessed Trinity there is a perfect harmony between the Persons who share the communion of a single divine life.

43. Every individual human being as well as the whole human community are created in the image of God. In its original unity – of which Adam is the symbol – the human race is made in the image of the divine Trinity. Willed by God, it makes its way through the vicissitudes of human history towards a perfect communion, also willed by God, but yet to be fully realized. In this sense, human beings share the solidarity of a unity that both already exists and is still to be attained. Sharing in a created human nature and confessing the triune God who dwells among us, we are nonetheless divided by sin and await the victorious coming of Christ who will restore and recreate the unity God wills in a final redemption of creation (cf. Rom 8:18-19). This unity of the human family is yet to be realized eschatologically. The Church is the sacrament of salvation and of the kingdom of God: catholic, in bringing together man of every race and culture; one, in being the vanguard of the unity of the human community willed by God; holy, sanctified herself by the power of the Holy Spirit, and sanctifying all men through the Sacraments; and, apostolic, in continuing the mission of the men chosen by

Christ to accomplish progressively the divinely willed unity of the human race and the consummation of creation and redemption.

4. Sin and salvation

44. Created in the image of God to share in the communion of Trinitarian life, human beings are persons who are so constituted as to be able freely to embrace this communion. Freedom is the divine gift that enables human persons to choose the communion which the triune God offers to them as their ultimate good. But with freedom comes the possibility of the failure of freedom. Instead of embracing the ultimate good of participation in the divine life, human persons can and do turn away from it in order to enjoy transitory or even only imaginary goods. Sin is precisely this failure of freedom, this turning away from the divine invitation to communion.

45. Within the perspective of the *imago Dei*, which is essentially dialogical or relational in its ontological structure, sin, as a rupture of the relationship with God, causes a disfigurement of the *imago Dei*. The dimensions of sin can be grasped in the light of those dimensions of the *imago Dei* which are affected by sin. This fundamental alienation from God also upsets man's relationship with others (cf. 1 John 3:17) and, in a real sense, produces a division within himself between body and spirit, knowing and willing, reason and emotions (Rom. 7:14 f). It also affects his physical existence, bringing suffering, illness and death. In addition, just as the *imago Dei* has an historical dimension, so too does sin. The witness of Scripture (cf. Rom. 5:12ff) presents us with a vision of the history of sin, caused by a rejection of the divine invitation to communion which occurred at the beginning of the history of the human race. Finally, sin affects the social dimension of the *imago Dei*; it is possible to discern ideologies and structures which are the objective manifestation of sin and which obstruct the realization of the image of God on the part of human beings.

46. Catholic and Protestant exegetes today agree that the *imago Dei* cannot be totally destroyed by sin since it defines the whole structure of human nature. For its part, Catholic tradition has always insisted that, while the *imago Dei* is impaired or disfigured, it cannot be destroyed by sin. The dialogical or relational structure of the image of God cannot be lost but, under the reign of sin, it is disrupted in its orientation towards its christological realization. Furthermore, the ontological structure of the image, while affected in its historicity by sin, remains despite the reality of sinful actions. In this connection – as many Fathers of the Church argued in their response to Gnosticism and Manicheism and -- the freedom which as such defines what it is to be human and is fundamental to the ontological structure of the *imago Dei*, cannot be suppressed, even if the situation in which freedom is exercised is in part determined by the consequences of sinfulness. Finally, against the notion of the total corruption of the *imago Dei* by sin, the Catholic tradition has insisted that grace and salvation would be illusory if they did not in fact transform the existing, albeit sinful, reality of human nature.

47. Understood in the perspective of the theology of the *imago Dei*, salvation entails the restoration of the image of God by Christ who is the perfect image of the Father. Winning our salvation through his passion, death and resurrection, Christ conforms us to himself through our participation in the paschal mystery and thus reconfigures the *imago Dei* in its proper orientation to the blessed communion of Trinitarian life. In this perspective, salvation is nothing less than a transformation and fulfillment of the personal life of the human being, created in the image of God and now newly directed to a real participation in the life of the

divine persons, through the grace of the incarnation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Catholic tradition rightly speaks here of a realization of the person. Suffering from a deficiency of charity because of sin, the person cannot achieve self-realization apart from the absolute and gracious love of God in Christ Jesus. Through this saving transformation of the person through Christ and the Holy Spirit, everything in the universe is also transformed and comes to share in the glory of God (Rom. 8:21).

48. For the theological tradition, man affected by sin is always in need of salvation, yet having a natural desire to see God - a *capax Dei* - which, as an image of the divine, constitutes a dynamic orientation to the divine. While this orientation is not destroyed by sin, neither can it be realized apart from God's saving grace. God the savior addresses an image of himself, disturbed in its orientation to him, but nonetheless capable of receiving the saving divine activity. These traditional formulations affirm both the indestructibility of man's orientation to God and the necessity of salvation. The human person, created in the image of God, is ordered by nature to the enjoyment of divine love, but only divine grace makes the free embrace of this love possible and effective. In this perspective, grace is not merely a remedy for sin, but a qualitative transformation of human liberty, made possible by Christ, as a freedom freed for the Good.

49. The reality of personal sin shows that the image of God is not unambiguously open to God but can close in upon itself. Salvation entails a liberation from this self-glorification through the cross. The paschal mystery, which is originally constituted by the passion, death and resurrection of Christ, makes it possible for each person to participate in the death to sin that leads to life in Christ. The cross entails, not the destruction of the human, but the passage that leads to new life.

50. The effects of salvation for man created in the image of God are obtained through the grace of Christ who, as the second Adam, is the head of a new humanity and who creates for man a new salvific situation through his death for sinners and through his resurrection (cf. 1 Cor 15:47-49; 2 Cor 5:2; Rom 5:6ff). In this way, man becomes a new creature (2 Cor 5:17) who is capable of a new life of freedom, a life "freed from" and "freed for."

51. Man is freed from sin, from the law, and from suffering and death. In the first place, salvation is a liberation from sin which reconciles man with God, even in the midst of a continuing struggle against sin conducted in the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph 6:10-20). In addition, salvation is not a liberation from the law as such but from any legalism that is opposed to the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:6) and to the realization of love (Rom 13:10). Salvation brings a liberation from suffering and death which acquire new meaning as a saving participation through the suffering, death and resurrection of the Son. In addition, according to the Christian faith, "freed from" means "freed for": freedom from sin signifies a freedom for God in Christ and the Holy Spirit; freedom from the law means a freedom for authentic love; freedom from death means a freedom for new life in God. This "freedom for" is made possible by Jesus Christ, the perfect icon of the Father, who restores the image of God in man.

5. *Imago Dei* and *imago Christi*

52. "In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear. For Adam, the first man, was a type of him who was to come, Christ the Lord. Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his

love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling. No wonder, then, that all the truths mentioned so far should find in him their source and their most perfect embodiment" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22). This famous passage from the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Church in the Modern World serves well to conclude this summary of the main elements of the theology of the *imago Dei*. For it is Jesus Christ who reveals to man the fullness of his being, in its original nature, in its final consummation, and in its present reality.

53. The origins of man are to be found in Christ: for he is created "through him and in him" (Col 1:16), "the Word [who is] the life...and the light of every man who is coming into the world" (John 1:3-4, 9). While it is true that man is created *ex nihilo*, it can also be said that he is created from the fullness (*ex plenitudine*) of Christ himself who is at once the creator, the mediator and the end of man. The Father destined us to be his sons and daughters, and "to be conformed to the image of his Son, who is the firstborn of many brothers" (Rom. 8:29). Thus, what it means to be created in the *imago Dei* is only fully revealed to us in the *imago Christi*. In him, we find the total receptivity to the Father which should characterize our own existence, the openness to the other in an attitude of service which should characterize our relations with our brothers and sisters in Christ, and the mercy and love for others which Christ, as the image of the Father, displays for us.

54. Just as man's beginnings are to be found in Christ, so is his finality. Human beings are oriented to the kingdom of Christ as to an absolute future, the consummation of human existence. Since "all things have been created through him and for him" (Col 1:16), they find their direction and destiny in him. The will of God that Christ should be the fullness of man is to find an eschatological realization. While the Holy Spirit will accomplish the ultimate configuration of human persons to Christ in the resurrection of the dead, human beings already participate in this eschatological likeness to Christ here below, in the midst of time and history. Through the Incarnation, Resurrection and Pentecost, the eschaton is already here; they inaugurate it and introduce it into the world of men, and anticipate its final realization. The Holy Spirit works mysteriously in all human beings of good will, in societies and in the cosmos to transfigure and divinize human beings. Moreover, the Holy Spirit works through all the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist which is the anticipation of the heavenly banquet, the fullness of communion in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

55. Between the origins of man and his absolute future lies the present existential situation of the human race whose full meaning is likewise to be found only in Christ. We have seen that it is Christ - in his incarnation, death and resurrection - who restores the image of God in man to its proper form. "Through him, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross"(Col 1:20). At the core of his sinful existence, man is pardoned and, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, he knows that he is saved and justified through Christ. Human beings grow in their resemblance to Christ and collaborate with the Holy Spirit who, especially through the sacraments, fashions them in the image of Christ. In this way, man's everyday existence is defined as an endeavor to be conformed ever more fully to the image of Christ and to dedicate his life to the struggle to bring about the final victory of Christ in the world.

CHAPTER THREE

IN THE IMAGE OF GOD: STEWARDS OF VISIBLE CREATION

56. The first great theme within the theology of the *imago Dei* concerns participation in the life of divine communion. Created in the image of God, as we have seen, human beings are beings who share the world with other bodily beings but who are distinguished by their intellect, love and freedom and are thus ordered by their very nature to interpersonal communion. The prime instance of this communion is the procreative union of man and woman which mirrors the creative communion of Trinitarian love. The disfigurement of the *imago Dei* by sin, with its inevitably disruptive consequences for personal and interpersonal life, is overcome by the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. The saving grace of participation in the paschal mystery reconfigures the *imago Dei* according to the pattern of the *imago Christi*.

57. In the present chapter, we consider the second of the main themes of the theology of the *imago Dei*. Created in the image of God to share in the communion of Trinitarian love, human beings occupy a unique place in the universe according to the divine plan: they enjoy the privilege of sharing in the divine governance of visible creation. This privilege is granted to them by the Creator who allows the creature made in his image to participate in his work, in his project of love and salvation, indeed in his own lordship over the universe. Since man's place as ruler is in fact a participation in the divine governance of creation, we speak of it here as a form of stewardship.

58. According to *Gaudium et Spes*: "Man was created in God's image and was commanded to conquer the earth and to rule the world in justice and holiness: he was to acknowledge God as maker of all things and relate himself and the totality of creation to him, so that through the dominion of all things by man the name of God would be majestic in all the earth" (34). This concept of man's rule or sovereignty plays an important role in Christian theology. God appoints man as his steward in the manner of the master in the Gospel parables (cf. Luke 19:12). The only creature willed expressly by God for his own sake occupies a unique place at the summit of visible creation (Gen. 1:26; 2:20; Ps 8:6-7, Wisdom 9:2-3).

59. Christian theology uses both domestic and royal imagery to describe this special role. Employing royal imagery, it is said that human beings are called to rule in the sense of holding an ascendancy over the whole of visible creation, in the manner of a king. But the inner meaning of this kingship is, as Jesus reminds his disciples, one of service: only by willingly suffering as a sacrificial victim does Christ become the king of the universe, with the Cross as his throne. Employing domestic imagery, Christian theology speaks of man as the master of a household to whom God has confided care of all his goods (cf. Mt 24:45). Man can deploy all the resources of visible creation according to his ingenuity, and exercises this participated sovereignty over visible creation in through science, technology and art.

60. Above himself and yet in the intimacy of his own conscience, man discovers the existence of a law which the tradition calls the "natural law." This law is of divine origin, and man's awareness of it is itself a participation in the divine law. It refers man to the true origins of the universe as well as to his own (*Veritatis Splendor*, 20). This natural law drives the rational creature to search for the truth and the good in his sovereignty of the universe. Created in the image of God, man exercises this sovereignty over visible creation only in virtue of the privilege conferred upon him by God. He imitates the divine rule, but he cannot displace it. The Bible warns against the sin of this usurpation of the divine role. It is a grave moral failure for human beings to act as rulers of visible creation who separate themselves from the higher, divine law. They act in place of the master as stewards (cf. Mt 25:14 ff) who have the freedom they need to develop the gifts which have been confided to them and to do

so with a certain bold inventiveness.

61. The steward must render an account of his stewardship, and the divine Master will judge his actions. The moral legitimacy and efficacy of the means employed by the steward provide the criteria for this judgment. Neither science nor technology are ends in themselves; what is technically possible is not necessarily also reasonable or ethical. Science and technology must be put in the service of the divine design for the whole of creation and for all creatures. This design gives meaning to the universe and to human enterprise as well. Human stewardship of the created world is precisely a stewardship exercised by way of participation in the divine rule and is always subject to it. Human beings exercise this stewardship by gaining scientific understanding of the universe, by caring responsibly for the natural world (including animals and the environment), and by guarding their own biological integrity.

1. Science and the stewardship of knowledge

62. The endeavor to understand the universe has marked human culture in every period and in nearly every society. In the perspective of the Christian faith, this endeavor is precisely an instance of the stewardship which human beings exercise in accordance with God's plan. Without embracing a discredited concordism, Christians have the responsibility to locate the modern scientific understanding of the universe within the context of the theology of creation. The place of human beings in the history of this evolving universe, as it has been charted by modern sciences, can only be seen in its complete reality in the light of faith, as a personal history of the engagement of the triune God with creaturely persons.

63. According to the widely accepted scientific account, the universe erupted 15 billion years ago in an explosion called the “Big Bang” and has been expanding and cooling ever since. Later there gradually emerged the conditions necessary for the formation of atoms, still later the condensation of galaxies and stars, and about 10 billion years later the formation of planets. In our own solar system and on earth (formed about 4.5 billion years ago), the conditions have been favorable to the emergence of life. While there is little consensus among scientists about how the origin of this first microscopic life is to be explained, there is general agreement among them that the first organism dwelt on this planet about 3.5-4 billion years ago. Since it has been demonstrated that all living organisms on earth are genetically related, it is virtually certain that all living organisms have descended from this first organism. Converging evidence from many studies in the physical and biological sciences furnishes mounting support for some theory of evolution to account for the development and diversification of life on earth, while controversy continues over the pace and mechanisms of evolution. While the story of human origins is complex and subject to revision, physical anthropology and molecular biology combine to make a convincing case for the origin of the human species in Africa about 150,000 years ago in a humanoid population of common genetic lineage. However it is to be explained, the decisive factor in human origins was a continually increasing brain size, culminating in that of *homo sapiens*. With the development of the human brain, the nature and rate of evolution were permanently altered: with the introduction of the uniquely human factors of consciousness, intentionality, freedom and creativity, biological evolution was recast as social and cultural evolution.

64. Pope John Paul II stated some years ago that “new knowledge leads to the recognition of the theory of evolution as more than a hypothesis. It is indeed remarkable that this theory has been progressively accepted by researchers following a series of discoveries in various fields

of knowledge”(“Message to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on Evolution”1996). In continuity with previous twentieth century papal teaching on evolution (especially Pope Pius XII’s encyclical *Humani Generis*), the Holy Father’s message acknowledges that there are “several theories of evolution” that are “materialist, reductionist and spiritualist” and thus incompatible with the Catholic faith. It follows that the message of Pope John Paul II cannot be read as a blanket approbation of all theories of evolution, including those of a neo-Darwinian provenance which explicitly deny to divine providence any truly causal role in the development of life in the universe. Mainly concerned with evolution as it “involves the question of man,” however, Pope John Paul’s message is specifically critical of materialistic theories of human origins and insists on the relevance of philosophy and theology for an adequate understanding of the “ontological leap” to the human which cannot be explained in purely scientific terms. The Church’s interest in evolution thus focuses particularly on “the conception of man” who, as created in the image of God, “cannot be subordinated as a pure means or instrument either to the species or to society.” As a person created in the image of God, he is capable of forming relationships of communion with other persons and with the triune God, as well as of exercising sovereignty and stewardship in the created universe. The implication of these remarks is that theories of evolution and of the origin of the universe possess particular theological interest when they touch on the doctrines of the creation *ex nihilo* and the creation of man in the image of God.

65. We have seen human persons are created in the image of God in order to become partakers of the divine nature (cf. 2 Pet 1:3-4) and thus to share in the communion of trinitarian life and in the divine dominion over visible creation. At the heart of the divine act of creation is the divine desire to make room for created persons in the communion of the uncreated Persons of the Blessed Trinity through adoptive participation in Christ. What is more, the common ancestry and natural unity of the human race are the basis for a unity in grace of redeemed human persons under the headship of the New Adam in the ecclesial communion of human persons united with one another and with the uncreated Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The gift of natural life is the basis for the gift of the life of grace. It follows that, where the central truth concerns a person acting freely, it is impossible to speak of a necessity or an imperative to create, and it is, in the end, inappropriate to speak of the Creator as a force, or energy, or ground. Creation *ex nihilo* is the action of a transcendent *personal* agent, acting freely and intentionally, with a view toward the all-encompassing purposes of personal engagement. In Catholic tradition, the doctrine of the origin of human beings articulates the revealed truth of this fundamentally relational or personalist understanding of God and of human nature. The exclusion of pantheism and emanationism in the doctrine of creation can be interpreted at root as a way of protecting this revealed truth. The doctrine of the immediate or special creation of each human soul not only addresses the ontological discontinuity between matter and spirit, but also establishes the basis for a divine intimacy which embraces every single human person from the first moment of his or her existence.

66. The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is thus a singular affirmation of the truly personal character of creation and its order toward a personal creature who is fashioned as the *imago Dei* and who responds not to a ground, force or energy, but to a personal creator. The doctrines of the *imago Dei* and the *creatio ex nihilo* teach us that the existing universe is the setting for a *radically personal* drama, in which the triune Creator calls out of nothingness those to whom He then calls out in love. Here lies the profound meaning of the words of *Gaudium et Spes*: “Man is the only creature on earth that God willed for his own sake” (24).

Created in God's image, human beings assume a place of responsible stewardship in the physical universe. Under the guidance of divine providence and acknowledging the sacred character of visible creation, the human race reshapes the natural order, and becomes an agent in the evolution of the universe itself. In exercising their stewardship of knowledge, theologians have the responsibility to locate modern scientific understandings within a Christian vision of the created universe.

67. With respect to the *creatio ex nihilo*, theologians can note that the Big Bang theory does not contradict this doctrine insofar as it can be said that the supposition of an absolute beginning is not scientifically inadmissible. Since the Big Bang theory does not in fact exclude the possibility of an antecedent stage of matter, it can be noted that the theory appears to provide merely *indirect* support for the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* which as such can only be known by faith.

68. With respect to the evolution of conditions favorable to the emergence of life, Catholic tradition affirms that, as universal transcendent cause, God is the cause not only of *existence* but also the cause of *causes*. God's action does not displace or supplant the activity of creaturely causes, but enables them to act according to their natures and, nonetheless, to bring about the ends he intends. In freely willing to create and conserve the universe, God wills to activate and to sustain in act all those secondary causes whose activity contributes to the unfolding of the natural order which he intends to produce. Through the activity of natural causes, God causes to arise those conditions required for the emergence and support of living organisms, and, furthermore, for their reproduction and differentiation. Although there is scientific debate about the degree of purposiveness or design operative and empirically observable in these developments, they have *de facto* favored the emergence and flourishing of life. Catholic theologians can see in such reasoning support for the affirmation entailed by faith in divine creation and divine providence. In the providential design of creation, the triune God intended not only to make a place for human beings in the universe but also, and ultimately, to make room for them in his own trinitarian life. Furthermore, operating as real, though secondary causes, human beings contribute to the reshaping and transformation of the universe.

69. The current scientific debate about the mechanisms at work in evolution requires theological comment insofar as it sometimes implies a misunderstanding of the nature of divine causality. Many neo-Darwinian scientists, as well as some of their critics, have concluded that, if evolution is a radically contingent materialistic process driven by natural selection and random genetic variation, then there can be no place in it for divine providential causality. A growing body of scientific critics of neo-Darwinism point to evidence of design (e.g., biological structures that exhibit specified complexity) that, in their view, cannot be explained in terms of a purely contingent process and that neo-Darwinians have ignored or misinterpreted. The nub of this currently lively disagreement involves scientific observation and generalization concerning whether the available data support inferences of design or chance, and cannot be settled by theology. But it is important to note that, according to the Catholic understanding of divine causality, true contingency in the created order is not incompatible with a purposeful divine providence. Divine causality and created causality radically differ in kind and not only in degree. Thus, even the outcome of a truly contingent natural process can nonetheless fall within God's providential plan for creation. According to St. Thomas Aquinas: "The effect of divine providence is not only that things should happen somehow, but that they should happen either by necessity or by

contingency. Therefore, whatsoever divine providence ordains to happen infallibly and of necessity happens infallibly and of necessity; and that happens from contingency, which the divine providence conceives to happen from contingency” (*Summa theologiae*, I, 22,4 ad 1). In the Catholic perspective, neo-Darwinians who adduce random genetic variation and natural selection as evidence that the process of evolution is absolutely unguided are straying beyond what can be demonstrated by science. Divine causality can be active in a process that is *both* contingent and guided. Any evolutionary mechanism that is contingent can only be contingent because God made it so. An unguided evolutionary process – one that falls outside the bounds of divine providence – simply cannot exist because “the causality of God, Who is the first agent, extends to all being, not only as to constituent principles of species, but also as to the individualizing principles....It necessarily follows that all things, inasmuch as they participate in existence, must likewise be subject to divine providence” (*Summa theologiae* I, 22, 2).

70. With respect to the immediate creation of the human soul, Catholic theology affirms that particular actions of God bring about effects that transcend the capacity of created causes acting according to their natures. The appeal to divine causality to account for genuinely *causal* as distinct from merely *explanatory* gaps does not insert divine agency to fill in the “gaps” in human scientific understanding (thus giving rise to the so-called “God of the gaps”). The structures of the world can be seen as open to non-disruptive divine action in directly causing events in the world. Catholic theology affirms that the emergence of the first members of the human species (whether as individuals or in populations) represents an event that is not susceptible of a purely natural explanation and which can appropriately be attributed to divine intervention. Acting indirectly through causal chains operating from the beginning of cosmic history, God prepared the way for what Pope John Paul II has called “an ontological leap...the moment of transition to the spiritual.” While science can study these causal chains, it falls to theology to locate this account of the special creation of the human soul within the overarching plan of the triune God to share the communion of trinitarian life with human persons who are created out of nothing in the image and likeness of God, and who, in his name and according to his plan, exercise a creative stewardship and sovereignty over the physical universe.

2. Responsibility for the created world

71. Accelerated scientific and technological advances over the past one hundred and fifty years have produced a radically new situation for all living things on our planet. Along with the material abundance, higher living standards, better health and longer life spans have come air and water pollution, toxic industrial wastage, exploitation and sometimes destruction of delicate habitats. In this situation, human beings have developed a heightened awareness that they are organically linked with other living beings. Nature has come to be seen as a biosphere in which all living things form a complex yet carefully organized network of life. Moreover, it has now been recognized that there are limits both to nature's resourcefulness and to its capacity to recover from the harms produced by relentless exploitation of its resources.

72. An unfortunate aspect of this new ecological awareness is that Christianity has been accused by some as in part responsible for the environmental crisis, for the very reason that it has maximized the place of human beings created in the image of God to rule of visible creation. Some critics go so far as to claim that the Christian tradition lacks the resources to field a sound ecological ethics because it regards man as essentially superior to the rest of the

natural world, and that it will be necessary to turn to Asian and traditional religions to develop the needed ecological ethics.

73. But this criticism arises from a profound misunderstanding of the Christian theology of creation and of the *imago Dei*. Speaking of the need for an “ecological conversion,” Pope John Paul II remarked: “Man’s lordship is not absolute, but ministerial,...not the mission of an absolute and unquestionable master, but of a steward of God’s kingdom” (Discourse, January 17, 2001). A misunderstanding of this teaching may have led some to act in reckless disregard of the natural environment, but it is no part of the Christian teaching about creation and the *imago Dei* to encourage unrestrained development and possible depletion of the earth’s resources. Pope John Paul II’s remarks reflect a growing concern with the ecological crisis on the part of the Magisterium which is rooted in a long history of teaching found in the social encyclicals of the modern papacy. In the perspective of this teaching, the ecological crisis is a human and a social problem, connected with the infringement of human rights and unequal access to the earth’s resources. Pope John Paul II summarized this tradition of social teaching when he wrote in *Centesimus Annus*: “Equally worrying is the ecological question which accompanies the problem of consumerism and which is closely connected to it. In their desire to have and to enjoy rather than to be and grow, people consume the resources of the earth and their own lives in an excessive and disordered way. At the root of senseless destruction of the natural environment lies an anthropological error, which unfortunately is widespread in our day. Humankind, which discovers its capacity to transform and in a certain sense create the world through its own work, forgets that this is always based on God’ prior and original gift of the things that are” (37).

74. The Christian theology of creation contributes directly to the resolution of the ecological crisis by affirming the fundamental truth that visible creation is itself a divine gift, the “original gift,” that establishes a “space” of personal communion. Indeed, we could say that a properly Christian theology of ecology is an application of the theology of creation. Noting that the term “ecology” combines the two Greek words *oikos* (house) and *logos* (word), the physical environment of human existence can be conceived as a kind of “house” for human life. Given that the inner life of the Blessed Trinity is one of communion, the divine act of creation is the gratuitous production of partners to share in this communion. In this sense, one can say that the divine communion now finds itself “housed” in the created cosmos. For this reason, we can speak of the cosmos as a place of personal communion.

75. Christology and eschatology together serve to make this truth even more profoundly clear. In the hypostatic union of the Person of the Son with a human nature, God comes into the world and assumes the bodiliness which he himself created. In the incarnation, through the only begotten Son who was born of a Virgin by the power of the Holy Spirit, the triune God establishes the possibility of an intimate personal communion with human beings. Since God graciously intends to elevate creaturely persons to dialogical participation in his life, he has, so to speak, come down to the creaturely level. Some theologians speak of this divine condescension as a kind of “hominization” by which God freely makes possible our divinization. God not only manifests his glory in the cosmos through theophanic acts, but also by assuming its bodiliness. In this christological perspective, God’s “hominization” is his act of solidarity, not only with creaturely persons, but with the entire created universe and its historical destiny. What is more, in the perspective of eschatology, the second coming of Christ may be seen as the event of God’s physical indwelling in the perfected universe which consummates the original plan of creation.

76. Far from encouraging a recklessly homocentric disregard of the natural environment, the theology of the *imago Dei* affirms man's crucial role in sharing in the realization of this eternal divine indwelling in the perfect universe. Human beings, by God's design, are the stewards of this transformation for which all creation longs. Not only human beings, but the whole of visible creation, are called to participate in the divine life. "We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now; and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, we also groan with ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies" (Rm 8:23). In the Christian perspective, our ethical responsibility for the natural environment – our "housed existence" – is thus rooted in a profound theological understanding of visible creation and our place within it.

77. Referring to this responsibility in an important passage in *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul II wrote: "As one called to till and look after the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15), man has a specific responsibility towards the environment in which he lives, towards the creation which God has put at the service of his personal dignity. It is the ecological question – ranging from the preservation of the natural habitats of the different species of animals and other forms to "human ecology" properly speaking – which one finds in the Bible a clear and strong ethical direction leading to a solution which respects the great good of life, of every life....When it comes to the natural world, we are subject not only to biological laws but also to moral ones, which cannot be violated with impunity" (42).

78. In the end, we must note that theology will not be able to provide us with a technical recipe for the resolution of the ecological crisis, but, as we have seen, it can help us to see our natural environment as God sees it, as the space of personal communion in which human beings, created in the image of God, must seek communion with one another and the final perfection of the visible universe.

79. This responsibility extends to the animal world. Animals are the creatures of God, and, according to the Scriptures, he surrounds them with his providential care (Mt 6:26). Human beings should accept them with gratitude and, even adopting a eucharistic attitude with regard to every element of creation, to give thanks to God for them. By their very existence the animals bless God and give him glory: "Bless the Lord, all you birds of the air. All you beasts, wild and tame, bless the Lord" (Dn 3:80-81). In addition, the harmony which man must establish, or restore, in the whole of creation includes his relationship to the animals. When Christ comes in his glory, he will "recapitulate" the whole of creation in an eschatological and definitive moment of harmony.

80. Nonetheless, there is an ontological difference between human beings and animals because only man is created in the image of God and God has given him sovereignty over the animal world (Gen. 1:26,28; Gen. 2: 19-20). Reflecting the Christian tradition about a just use of the animals, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms: "God entrusted animals to the stewardship of those whom he created in his own image. Hence it is legitimate to use animals for food and clothing. They may be domesticated to help man in his work and leisure" (2417). This passage also recalls the legitimate use of animals for medical and scientific experimentation, but always recognizing that it is "contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer needlessly" (2418). Thus, any use of animals must always be guided by the principles already articulated: human sovereignty over the animal world is essentially a stewardship for which human beings must give an account to God who is the lord of creation in the truest sense.

3. Responsibility for the biological integrity of human beings

81. Modern technology, along with the latest developments in biochemistry and molecular biology, continues to provide contemporary medicine with new diagnostic and therapeutic possibilities. These techniques not only offer new and more effective treatments for disease, however, but also the potential to alter man himself. The availability and feasibility of these technologies lend new urgency to the question, how far is man allowed to remake himself? The exercise of a responsible stewardship in the area of bioethics requires profound moral reflection on a range of technologies that can affect the biological integrity of human beings. Here, we can offer only some brief indications of the specific moral challenges posed by the new technologies and some of the principles which must be applied if we are to exercise a responsible stewardship over the biological integrity of human beings created in the image of God.

82. The right fully to dispose of the body would imply that the person may use the body as a means to an end he himself has chosen: i.e., that he may replace its parts, modify or terminate it. In other words, a person could determine the finality or teleological value of the body. A right to dispose of something extends only to objects with a merely instrumental value, but not to objects which are good in themselves, i.e., ends in themselves. The human person, being created in the image of God, is himself such a good. The question, especially as it arises in bioethics, is whether this also applies to the various levels that can be distinguished in the human person: the biological-somatic, the emotional and the spiritual levels.

83. Everyday clinical practice generally accepts a limited form of disposing of the body and certain mental functions in order to preserve life, as for example in the case of the amputation of limbs or the removal of organs. Such practice is permitted by the principle of totality and integrity (also known as the therapeutic principle). The meaning of this principle is that the human person develops, cares for, and preserves all his physical and mental functions in such a way that (1) lower functions are never sacrificed except for the better functioning of the total person, and even then with an effort to compensate for what is being sacrificed; and (2) the fundamental faculties which essentially belong to being human are never sacrificed, except when necessary to save life.

84. The various organs and limbs together constituting a physical unity are, as integral parts, completely absorbed in the body and subordinate to it. But lower values cannot simply be sacrificed for the sake of higher ones: these values together constitute an organic unity and are mutually dependent. Because the body, as an intrinsic part of the human person, is good in itself, fundamental human faculties can only be sacrificed to preserve life. After all, life is a fundamental good that involves the whole of the human person. Without the fundamental good of life, the values – like freedom—that are in themselves higher than life itself also expire. Given that man was also created in God's image in his bodiliness, he has no right of full disposal of his own biological nature. God himself and the being created in his image cannot be the object of arbitrary human action.

85. For the application of the principle of totality and integrity, the following conditions must be met: (1) there must be a question of an intervention in the part of the body that is either affected or is the direct cause of the life-threatening situation; (2) there can be no other alternatives for preserving life; (3) there is a proportionate chance of success in comparison with drawbacks; and (4) the patient must give assent to the intervention. The unintended

drawbacks and side-effects of the intervention can be justified on the basis of the principle of double effect.

86. Some have attempted to interpret this hierarchy of values to permit the sacrifice of lower functions, like the procreative capacity, for the sake of higher values, like preserving mental health and improving relationships with others. However, the reproductive faculty is here sacrificed in order to preserve elements that may be essential to the person as a *functioning* totality but are not essential to the person as a *living* totality. In fact, the person as a functioning totality is actually violated by the loss of the reproductive faculty, and at a moment when the threat to his mental health is not imminent and could be averted in another way. Furthermore, this interpretation of the principle of totality suggests the possibility of sacrificing a part of the body for the sake of social interests. On the basis of the same reasoning, sterilization for eugenic reasons could be justified on the basis of the interest of the state.

87. Human life is the fruit of conjugal love – the mutual, total, definitive, and exclusive gift of man and woman to one another – reflecting the mutual gift in love between the three Divine Persons which becomes fruitful in creation, and the gift of Christ to his Church which becomes fruitful in the rebirth of man. The fact that a total gift of man concerns both his spirit and his body is the basis for the inseparability of the two meanings of the conjugal act which is (1) the authentic expression of conjugal love on the physical level and (2) comes to completion through procreation during the woman's fertile phase (*Humanae vitae*, 12; *Familiaris consortio*, 32).

88. The mutual gift of man and woman to one another on the level of sexual intimacy is rendered incomplete through contraception or sterilization. Furthermore, if a technique is used that does not assist the conjugal act in attaining its goal, but replaces it, and the conception is then effected through the intervention of a third party, then the child does not originate from the conjugal act which is the authentic expression of the mutual gift of the parents.

89. In the case of cloning – the production of genetically identical individuals by means of cleaving of embryos or nuclear transplantation – the child is produced asexually and is in no way to be regarded as the fruit of a mutual gift of love. Cloning, certainly if it involves the production of a large number of people from one person, entails an infringement of the identity of the person. Human community, which as we have seen is also to be conceived as an image of the triune God, expresses in its variety something of the relations of the three divine Persons in their uniqueness which, through being of the same nature, marks their mutual differences.

90. Germ line genetic engineering with a therapeutic goal in man would in itself be acceptable were it not for the fact that it is hard to imagine how this could be achieved without disproportionate risks especially in the first experimental stage, such as the huge loss of embryos and the incidence of mishaps, and without the use of reproductive techniques. A possible alternative would be the use of gene therapy in the stem cells that produce a man's sperm, whereby he can beget healthy offspring with his own seed by means of the conjugal act.

91. Enhancement genetic engineering aims at improving certain specific characteristics. The idea of man as “co-creator” with God could be used to try to justify the management of

human evolution by means of such genetic engineering. But this would imply that man has full right of disposal over his own biological nature. Changing the genetic identity of man as a human person through the production of an infrahuman being is radically immoral. The use of genetic modification to yield a superhuman or being with essentially new spiritual faculties is unthinkable, given that the spiritual life principle of man – forming the matter into the body of the human person – is not a product of human hands and is not subject to genetic engineering. The uniqueness of each human person, in part constituted by his biogenetic characteristics and developed through nurture and growth, belongs intrinsically to him and cannot be instrumentalized in order to improve some of these characteristics. A man can only truly improve by realizing more fully the image of God in him by uniting himself to Christ and in imitation of him. Such modifications would in any case violate the freedom of future persons who had no part in decisions that determine his bodily structure and characteristics in a significant and possibly irreversible way. Gene therapy, directed to the alleviation of congenital conditions like Down's syndrome, would certainly affect the identity of the person involved with regard to his appearance and mental gifts, but this modification would help the individual to give full expression to his real identity which is blocked by a defective gene.

92. Therapeutic interventions serve to restore the physical, mental and spiritual functions, placing the person at the center and fully respecting the finality of the various levels in man in relation to those of the person. Possessing a therapeutic character, medicine that serves man and his body as ends in themselves respects the image of God in both. According to the principle of proportionality, extraordinary life-prolonging therapies must be used when there is a just proportion between the positive results that attend these therapies and possible damage to the patient himself. Therapy may be abandoned, even if death is thereby hastened, when this proportion is absent. A hastening of death in palliative therapy by the administration of analgesics is an indirect effect which, like all side-effects in medicine, can come under the principle of double effect, provided that the dosage is geared to the suppression of painful symptoms and not to the active termination of life.

93. Disposing of death is in reality the most radical way of disposing of life. In assisted suicide, direct euthanasia, and direct abortion - however tragic and complex personal situations may be - physical life is sacrificed for a self-selected finality. In the same category is the instrumentalization of the embryo through non-therapeutic experimentation on embryos, as well as by pre-implantation diagnostics.

94. Our ontological status as creatures made in the image of God imposes certain limits on our ability to dispose of ourselves. The sovereignty we enjoy is not an unlimited one: we exercise a certain participated sovereignty over the created world and, in the end, we must render an account of our stewardship to the Lord of the Universe. Man is created in the image of God, but he is not God himself.

CONCLUSION

95. Throughout these reflections, the theme of the *imago Dei* has demonstrated its systematic power in clarifying many truths of the Christian faith. It helps us to present a relational - and indeed personal - conception of human beings. It is precisely this relationship with God which defines human beings and founds their relationships with other creatures. Nonetheless,

as we have seen, the mystery of the human is made fully clear only in the light of Christ who is the perfect image of the Father and who introduces us, through the Holy Spirit, to a participation in the mystery of the triune God. It is within this communion of love that the mystery of all being, as embraced by God, finds its fullest meaning. At one and the same time grand and humble, this conception of human being as the image of God constitutes a charter for human relations with the created world and a basis upon which to assess the legitimacy of scientific and technical progress that has a direct impact on human life and the environment. In these areas, just as human persons are called to give witness to their participation in the divine creativity, they are also required to acknowledge their position as creatures to whom God has confided a precious responsibility for the stewardship of the physical universe.

** Preliminary Note*

The theme of “man created in the image of God” was submitted for study to the International Theological Commission. The preparation of this study was entrusted to a subcommission whose members included: Very Rev. J. Augustine Di Noia, O.P., Most Reverend Jean-Louis Bruguès, Msgr. Anton Strukelj, Rev. Tanios Bou Mansour, O.L.M., Rev. Adolpe Gesché, Most Reverend Willem Jacobus Eijk, Rev. Fadel Sidarouss, S.J., and Rev. Shun ichi Takayanagi, S.J.

As the text developed, it was discussed at numerous meetings of the subcommission and several plenary sessions of the International Theological Commission held at Rome during the period 2000-2002. The present text was approved *in forma specifica*, by the written ballots of the International Theological Commission. It was then submitted to Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, the President of the Commission, who has give his permission for its publication.

