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Imagery in Spiritual Formation: Recovering a Lost Art

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BY

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DISSERTATION ACCEPTANCE CERTIFICATE

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WE THE UNDERSIGNED CERTIFY THAT WE HAVE READ THIS PROJECT AND APPROVE IT AS ADEQUATE IN SCOPE AND QUALITY TO COMPLETE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY IN LEADERSHIP AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION DEGREE

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John

INTRODUCTION

> "Images make the experience as accessible as possible. They invite you in, urging you to join yourself to the experience that is framed by the images."
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> - Leonard Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks*.

As a child I remember watching the cartoon Yogi Bear.[1] Yogi would ask his diminutive buddy Boo-boo, "Do you know what time it is? ... It's picnic basket time." Just as Pavlov's dogs salivated at the sound of a bell, a picnic basket would spring Yogi Bear into action. For all of us, most images elicit a response and for Yogi Bear a picnic basket brought a visceral and stomach-driven message: lunch. Images shape and form us. We grant them power as our feelings, thoughts, and experiences dialog with them. Images help us connect to God, others, and the objects they advertise. Whether we are fully conscious of our responses or not, images affect our decision-making and daily interactions with others. Whether it is a picnic basket, a rose, a diamond ring, a family portrait, a fish, a stunning sunset, or a sublime twilight reflection in a high Cascades pond, we respond to the visual cues we read in images.

Images form and shape our attitudes, values, virtues, behaviors, and stories. They provide a medium through which we connect with God and others. The aim of this dissertation is to provide a brief survey of the biblical, theological, historical, and contemporary models of imagery used in spiritual formation. It

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[1] *Yogi Bear*, TV, dir. William Hanna, Joseph Barbera, and Ed Benedict, (Los Angeles, CA: Hanna-Barbera Productions, 1961-1962).

offers a foundation for the use of imagery and examples of how to reintroduce and use imagery in our faith communities. Whether it is a formal setting or an informal setting, the goal is to help a generation of fill-in-the-blank Christians reconnect with God and each other through the medium of imagery. The current approaches to teaching and expressing faith rely heavily upon abstract and disembodied philosophical ideas. Yet, throughout the ages, God, Christ, and people of faith have found imagery to be an ally in communicating and connecting with God and others within a relational framework. Similarly, imagery is an effective and valuable medium to shape and mold individuals and the faith community by providing prompts to communicate and reinforce the community's stories, virtues, values, attitudes, and behaviors.

My aim is not to bash those who have grown up in faith communities devoid of imagery. Similarly, I don't want to reintroduce imagery merely as props for propositional or abstract sermons, theology, and doctrine. Instead, the aim is to provide foundational evidence for the utilization of imagery to communicate our community's stories and values. It is designed to help our communities connect with God and with others in increasingly incarnational ways by reflecting upon images of what it means to be in a relationship with God. In turn, this will instruct and affect our praxis, our theology put into practice. All this said, it is important learn how to communicate visually in a world that is visually conversant.

For the purpose of this document an image is any physical object or narrative that evokes an emotional and/or cognitive response. Broadly, it describes any icon, tapestry, symbol, painting, metaphor, simile, or narrative in

which an image is seen with the eye, touched with the hand, or creates an image in the mind of the creator and audience.

At this point let me clarify the terminology I will be using. As I talk about imagery in order to reduce confusion I have grouped them into four categories: physical images, narrative images, mental images, and kinesthetic images. Physical imagery encompasses icons, tapestries, paintings, drawings, sculptures, symbols, icons, and movies. This type of imagery is tactile, concrete, and made of the stuff of earth. Narrative imagery encompasses the world of words. It includes the use of metaphors, similes, analogy, juxtaposition, and other literary devices which create images in our minds helping us perceive what the author or speaker is communicating. The designation of narrative imagery will refer to the stories, words, or other literary devices specifically. Mental imagery is intimately tied to narrative imagery. In fact, most mental imagery is created from narrative imagery. However, I want to have a distinct and less confusing way of referring to the images our minds create. Mental images specifically refer to the images that flash across the screen of our minds. They may be static like a portrait or live action like a movie. They can be impressionistic, cartoonish, or even realistic. This type of imagery is created in the mind as we listen to a speaker, read a book, or day dream.

The last category of imagery is kinesthetic imagery. The Israelite nation called this formative practice mitzvah. Abraham Heschel explained, "The soul grows by noble deeds. The soul is illumined by sacred acts. ... the purpose of the

mitsvot is to refine man."[2] It is a form of visual stimulus that is "tactile learning, i.e. touching, feeling, experience the material."[3] Through the senses, touch, taste, sight, smell and hearing, one comprehends compelling ideas, behaviors, and feelings. In essence, it is experiential imagery. Through participation one is able to perceive and/or enter into a larger story. It is helpful to remember that mental imagery and kinesthetic imagery often utilize some form of physical imagery and narrative imagery. The different forms of imagery are mutually intertwined and there are few clear linear or even isolated categories. However, I intend to apply this terminology as a tool to help orient and clarify the discussion by orienting the reader to a specific type of imagery.

It would be important as one reads this document to remember that most imagery is created in the mind. The concept of audience we are familiar with developed in the late 14th century. It comes from the Latin word, *audentia*, meaning "a hearing, listening." This was developed from the compound of *au-dh*, "to perceive physically, grasp."[4] Imagery makes abstract concepts tangible so that an audience can grasp them and act upon them.[5]

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[2] Abraham J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1955), 357.

[3] "Dictionary.com, LLC", Ask.com, http://ask.reference.com/related/What+Is+Meant+by+Kinesthesia?qsrc=2892&l=dir&o=10601 (accessed July 20, 2010).

[4] Douglas Harper, "Online Etymology Dictionary", http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=audience&searchmode=none (accessed July 12, 2010).

[5] Arthur Asa Berger, *Seeing Is Believing: an Introduction to Visual Communication*, 2nd ed. (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1998), 2.

For millennia religious leaders and vendors used icons, symbols, words, and rites of passage in their religious acts of worship and evangelism. They utilized imagery to promote consumerism, political power, sex, success, science, and the church. The priest and priestesses of these varied religions created symbols to instruct and to conform the faithful to their religious ideals. Isolated and by themselves, images have no intrinsic meaning or muscle. The efficacy in an image, as Sweet says, lies in the ability to give meaning to the image.[6] Asa Berger aptly states that images "have the power to evoke powerful, and often unrecognized, responses in us."[7] They influence us whether or not we are cognizant of their forming and shaping us. We reflect upon them, day dream, and let the visions of their fruition in our lives become a reality. We venerate and adore the values and ideals they promote. In essence, images draw us to some form of worship. Frequently the images themselves become like gods to us. Some images draw us to worship the Lord our God, some draw us to worship the gods of our age, and others have the ability to do both.

Berger claims that "the power to create images ... which profoundly affect viewers' emotions and beliefs, and have social and cultural implications as well-should not be taken lightly."[8] In essence, both claim that images have the ability "to stimulate sexual desire, to generate intense feelings, to lead people to

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[6] Leonard I. Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks: Living with a Grande Passion* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2007), 111.

[7] Berger, *Seeing Is Believing*, 61.

[8] Ibid., 37.

perform selfless acts of bravery or cruel acts of barbarism."[9] Steve Turner further accentuates this point, saying, "The arts can sharpen the vision, quicken the intellect, preserve the memory, activate the conscience, enhance the understanding and refresh the language. Poetry, for example, is a useful antidote for the poison of sloganeering, spin, and double talk."[10] Berger further clarifies, "It is not the image or symbol itself that is responsible, but rather the ability of the image to evoke responses in people that are connected to their beliefs and values."[11] Thus the power of imagery lies in the meaning given to the image.

In this vein there is a rich theological and artistic heritage of imagery in worship through the church. Yet it has been absent in many of the Protestant and Evangelical expressions of worship in recent centuries. It is time we rediscover and recover imagery in spiritual formation. The first piece in this journey is to explore and uncover examples in Scripture, Church history, Christian theology, philosophy, and the market place. Ultimately, I plan to utilize photography as a current example and method of reintroducing images back into the image-stripped heritage of many Protestant and Evangelical churches.[12]

With the understanding that images shape us and help us connect with God, I am making the following claims. First, images define who we are as individuals and as a community. Symbols, icons, words, and signs mold and

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[9] Ibid., 5.

[10] Steve Turner, *Imagine: A Vision for Christians in the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 61.

[11] Berger, *Seeing Is Believing*, 5.

[12] Turner, *Imagine*, 16.

shape our lives. They keep stories, virtues, values, attitudes, and behaviors vital to our faith tactile and present. Second, the Scriptures are full of images that form, instruct, and reform us. The imagery found in the pages of the Bible is born of both earthly and heavenly creation. Third, we are made in the image of God. Post-Fall, this image is diseased. Yet, God continuously works in our lives transforming and renewing the image of God.

In this vein the incarnation stands as the fulcrum of human and biblical history. St. John of Damascus in his thesis on imagery in worship proclaimed, "just as the Word made flesh remained the Word, so also flesh became the Word, yet remained flesh, being united to the person of the Word. Therefore I boldly draw an image of the invisible God, not as invisible, but as having become visible for our sakes by partaking of flesh and blood".[13] God, in sending Christ to the earth, gave all of humanity a living, breathing, tangible, relational icon. Through Christ we learn, understand, and perceive more wholly what it means to live in a relationship with God and others.

The reason images are effective is they whisper to our souls, our inner longings. They call for a response. They lead us to worship and to interact with something or someone. Some images lead us to worship other people. Some images lead us to bow before the god of consumerism. Some images beckon us to prostrate before the god of political ideology. Some images drive us to bend before the goddess of success. Some compel us to surrender our love and worship to self in narcissism or self-loathing. Other images shape us in the spirit

[13] St. John of Damascus, *John of Damascus on the Divine Images*, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 16.

of the Almighty God and lead us to worship the one true, living God. By worship I mean they focus our attention in such a way that we feel compelled to follow because we desire to become like whatever "it" is. While there exist inherent dangers in the abuse of imagery, as Berger asserts images are the way we communicate and engage the world around us.[14]

The Bible is filled with stories that paint a vast and intricate portrait of what it means to walk with Jesus. They are the written icons of people who lived in relationship with God, faithfully or unfaithfully. These stories mold and shape our understanding. They create portals through which we enter the on-going biblical story of redemption. They help us retell the stories of faith handed from generation to generation. At this point let me describe what constitutes imagery.

St. John of Damascus defined imagery in two categories. The first "are words written in books, as when God had the law engraved on tablets and desired the lives of holy men to be recorded."[15] The second are "material images, such as the jar of manna, or Aaron's staff, which were to be kept in the ark as a memorial."[16] While St. John of Damascus applied a very broad, and I believe accurate, definition of imagery in many forms, too often the discussion of imagery orbits almost exclusively around the central themes of art, tapestry, symbols, and physical images.

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[14] Berger, *Seeing Is Believing*, 21.

[15] Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 21.

[16] Ibid.

William Dyrness aptly describes visual imagery from this perspective, "The visual arts embrace any visual object or production that is a personal and intentional expression of an artist who is usually, though not always, professionally trained and employed, either working alone or in collaboration with other artists, without direct reference to commercial value."[17] Frequently when we think of imagery our ideas are limited to the fine arts or professional arts. While their contributions are invaluable, imagery, as will be discussed in this document, encompasses a broad, inclusive description even if less skillfully applied by amateur creators.

The not-so-masterful images also form and shape our thoughts and lives. I think of the pictures children color which adorn our refrigerators. Masterpieces only to the beholder, they inspire parents, aunts, uncles, and loved ones who receive them. They are images of love. These glimpses into the mind of a child reveal more than the crude expressions in crayon scrawled on paper. These are more than bending lines, stick people, and gravity-defying pets. Each is a work of art, a work of love, from the masterful hands of the unskilled and unpretentious. Each offering represents more than what is seen. Each can be a deeper connection with God through realizing God loves us as untainted as the children around us who love us.

Equally impactful are the stories we are weaned on. Think back upon conversations around your dinner table, family gatherings, church, work place, or among friends. We recount important personal information and histories in

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[17] William A. Dyrness, *Visual Faith: Art, Theology, and Worship in Dialogue*, Engaging Culture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 9.

narratives. Rarely do we list off bullet points of disembodied factual tidbits. Communication is littered intentionally and unintentionally with stories invoking our imagination to see through another's eyes. Communication, especially when talking about or revealing something important, is frequently recalled in images. We set the canvas in descriptions of where we started. We paint the back drop with the color of adjectives and adverbs. We illustrate it with verbs detailing those parts that spring to life through our imagination. We dash it with the poignant color of metaphors and similes like butterflies fluttering about a spring field of flowers. In the end those listening have the canvas of their mind carefully painted. Accurate or not, the events we described come to life in another's mind. And it is these mental pictures which have formed and shaped our life stories.

Imagery may even be accidental. These accidental images are no less valuable in forming and shaping us. As we stare out a window, the panes may conjure up images of the cross. As we pass a field of grain, we may envision the story of the sower and the seed. As we view a church building, images of abuse, indifference, hostility, or comfort flood our memories. A spike on the side of a railroad track may remind us of the spikes driven into the flesh of Jesus Christ on our behalf. A single rose may transport back to a memory of love. Imagery has the power to inspire us, yet it does not need to be crafted by masterful or talented hands. It may just as well come from a beggar who offers a mere pittance; however, as Jesus said of the widow, "She has given more than all the others."[18] Imagine the feathers ruffled among the faithful in that synagogue.

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[18] Lk 21:1-4.

Regardless of artistic talent, images communicate truth in tactile ways. As N.T. Wright claims,

> The church should reawaken its hunger for beauty at every level. The arts are not the pretty but irrelevant bits around the border of reality. They are the highways into the center of a reality which cannot be glimpsed, let alone grasped, any other way. The present world is good, but broken and in any case incomplete; art of all kinds enables us to understand that paradox in its many dimensions.[19]

Images fit into a much broader category than being utilitarian or pedagogical. They convey truth. In many cases, the historicity of events may be suspect, however, reality and truth are conveyed. The truth of the story emerges more clearly in narration than a mere listing of facts. Lawyers, politicians, pastors, teachers, and family members have shown us that facts disembodied from narratives can be utilized to prove most anything. The narrative creates a movie on the screens of our minds that gives reference and meaning to the abstract data.

Somehow, through images, the beauty of paradox is allowed to remain unresolved along with the tensions of faith and life. Brennan Manning notes,

> Should you ever visit the cathedral in Fribourg, Switzerland, take note of the third stained-glass window on the right as you enter the church. It depicts the Abba of Jesus standing on Calvary at the foot of the cross with the spit-covered, blood-drenched body of his Son, cradled in his arms. The look on the Father's face seems to say, 'If I had known what this was going to cost, I never would have permitted it.'
>
> Bad theology? Yes. Poor exegesis? Surely. But the artist was not out to theologize or do exegesis. His purpose was to depict in dramatic form the love in the heart of Abba as his beloved Son was slaughtered on that hill outside the city wall of old Jerusalem.

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[19] N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (San Francisco: Harper SanFrancisco, 2006), 235.

> We can find truth in poetry, music, Betty Fusco's fresco, and myriad other art forms without getting hung up on the metaphysics of the deity.[20]

At times we need the artist, in his or her broadest meaning, to free us to explore our faith in paradoxical dimensions. The artist allows us to anthropomorphize God. At its best, imagery gives us freedom from our abstract western orthodoxy to explore ideas such as the emotions God may have endured during the crucifixion without fear of being a heretic. It seems the modern philosophical approach to theology tightens the grip on our imagination. It abstracts our thoughts about God with words that begin with "omni." Its mission to define and describe paradoxes leaves little room to explore, let alone step into, the mystery of all that is God. Instead, we have been taught to seek the comfort of having the philosophers and theologians explain away uncomfortable paradoxes.

When we allow images to speak and paradoxes to live, we join with the gifts God has given artists throughout history to engage and explore God from the many perspectives that help us grow in our faith. The ability of an image to mold and shape our understanding as well as to connect us with God and others is spiritual formation. As we move forward in this document, I plan to use the following language. When I talk about imagery I propose they are portals, totem poles, trophies, and icons, not talismans, magic, tools, or idols.[21]

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[20] Brennan Manning, *The Wisdom of Tenderness: What Happens When God's Fierce Mercy Transforms Our Lives* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 129.

[21] This language and idea was introduced asynchronously in conjunction with David McDonald.

Portals are gates. They give us an entrance to move from one place to another metaphysically, epistemologically, and theologically to explore thoughts, ideas, and experiences. These doors offer opportunities and avenues. Not all avenues as Manning articulated lead us to orthodoxy. However, they can lead us to fresh perspectives, new vistas, and broader horizons giving us room to reenter the paradoxes modern theology so deftly attempts to explain and de-mystify.

Imagery, in many ways, also acts as totem poles. My nearest reference to a totem pole is what I have seen in the movies or on the reservations of Native Americans.[22] Totem poles are a genealogical reference and a visual stimulus to recount the stories of the community. [23] Totem poles are not worshipped, prayed to, or the graven images missionaries once made them out to be.[24] The images in and of themselves do not tell the stories of the community. Rather, they provide a place where the people of the community retell the stories they already know over and over again.

From bottom to top, totems remind the community of their heritage. They clarify their identity: the tribe's stories, virtues, values, attitudes, and behaviors. They serve as reminders that recall the ancient stories of those who have passed away. A collage or scrapbooking can be an example of our attempts at totems

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[22] For the purposes of this document, I would like to dip into the rich heritage of creating totems and totem poles to remind us of important events in our lives.

[23] Lawrence E. Sullivan, *Native Religions and Cultures of North America: Anthropology of the Sacred* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 161.

[24] Ibid.

and totem poles. They remind people of their experiences at camp, a family reunion, or of a community journey. Totem poles stand as symbols of the tribe.[25]

Totems poles similarly provide markers. When one passes a totem pole, much as Abram passed the altars, the person is reminded to stop and remember something important in the life of the community. Abram built his totem, altar, after encountering God at seventy-five years of age in the land of Haran, he built an altar on the place he met God.[26] In the next paragraph, we see Abram building another altar as he called out on the name of the Lord.[27] This theme continued for Abram's children[28] and throughout the Scriptures. When the people of God encountered God they created a totem, an altar, to remind them of encountering God. These altars endured and every time the nomadic Israelites passed by, they served as witnesses to God's visit, call, and covenant.

Fearing we might conjure up ideas of the world of animism, Christians shy away from calling anything a totem pole. We prefer altar, vestibule, and other sanctified descriptions. However, we have our own "totem poles." Sometimes we allow them to become every bit as spiritually inflated as the Native Americans we criticize. We warn our children "do not touch the piano!" Or, "Do not mishandle the flag!" There is real fear that their sacramental nature may be compromised or

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[25] Another example would be the dances of the Polynesian cultures. In these, each choreographed move tells a different part of the story. The images created in the dance tell of battles, life, and the history of the islands.

[26] Gn 12:7.

[27] Gn 12:9.

[28] Also see: Gn 26:25, Isaac; Gn 35:1, Jacob; Ex 17:15, Moses.

damaged by their mishandling.[29] In our houses of worship, the piano, the organ, the pulpit, the communion table, and the flags are but a few examples of our totem poles. Though the use of imagery rarely is developed and utilized for these respective images, they are recognized as items of such sanctity and holiness that the mere act of moving them will incite fiery blazes of disbelief, outrage, and occasionally a burning at the stake. In most cases congregants honor our elders' commandment, "Do NOT touch."

Images also become trophies. Like the trophies from math Olympics, sporting events, diplomas, achievement, and more that adorn offices, mantles, and bedrooms, these images provide us something to take home. In their places of honor they provide us with icons that we point to and retell the stories of past achievements and successes. They give us continual reminders of significant and life-defining moments. In the Scriptures, we find the cross, lifted high with the body of Christ, as the ultimate trophy. What the Romans intended to create scorn and sow discontent, became the crossroads of history, the ultimate example and place to remember and retell the story of God's love for God's people.

Finally, images act as icons. Icons provide us with people or symbols we look through to catch a glimpse of God. An icon takes many forms: a painting, a statue, a relic, or some holy image. As you look at an icon of a person, you are pointed through that person to God.[30] Icons are helpful as they remind us of

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[29] Developed in collaboration with David McDonald, January 28, 2011.

[30] Gerald Lawson Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well: Christian Spirituality from Early Martyrs to Modern Missionaries* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007), 123.

God's traits seen through the representation of the lives and experiences of our brothers and sisters.

One of the most utilized forms of imagery is the icon. Pictures of Christ, as well as men and women of faith who embodied the life of Christ, are captured by the artist. The iconographer seeks to capture the reality of Christ's life in both the divine and human nature of Christ. Similarly, in the life of a faithful follower, the iconographer works to capture the virtues, values, attitudes, and behaviors that resemble Christ-likeness. Gerald Sittser captures this well, saying, "The image we see in the icon points beyond itself to the reality of the person, the incarnate Son of God, who transformed the material creation into a vessel for the divine."[31] Reflecting upon images of Christ and the lives of those persons who incarnated Christ helps to form and reform us.[32]

Icons are one form of imagery that has been controversial through the ages. Iconoludes,[33] those who utilize and promote icons in worship, believe icons continue to influence, shape, and draw many closer to God. Iconoclasts, those opposed to the use of icons in worship, believe icons to lead us away from God as idolatry. As I said, images mold and shape the world we live in. Those who interpret images hold great power and influence. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn quoted a Russian proverb to conclude his 1970 Nobel lecture on literature, "One word of

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., 122-123.

[33] Iconophile is a more contemporary form of this word, however, for the purposes of this document I will use the historical term, Iconolude.

truth outweighs the whole world."[34] Leonard Sweet, writing on the power of imagery, quoted Aleksandr and reinterpreted this proverb for our culture:

> In our culture, it's more true that one image of truth, and especially one person of truth, tilts the balance of history. People today are like the Israelites in the desert: they will follow a cloud or a pillar of fire, but not abstract commands and disembodied voices.[35]

Asa Berger notes that we live in a world where "visual images are playing an increasingly important role in our politics, our entertainments, and our everyday lives, I think developing visual literacy is even more crucial than ever."[36] Berger continues,

> We live in a world of things seen, a world that is visual, and we expend much of our physical and emotional energy on the act of seeing. Like fish, we "swim" in a sea of images, and these images help shape our perceptions of the world and of ourselves. It is estimated, for example, that most of us receive more than 80 percent of our information through our eyes.[37]

He argues visual imagery is a central communication form. Much of this visual communication happens symbolically and indirectly through words, signs, and symbols. These images are necessary in order to give philosophical abstractions form.[38]

This is an ancient tradition. Churches, political figures, kings, pharaohs, and rebels used the power of images to instruct, inform, rally, and fight. These entities also used images to pacify, calm, and give assurance. They all used

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[34] Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks*, 111.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Berger, *Seeing Is Believing*, xiii.

[37] Ibid., 1.

[38] Ibid., 2.

images to communicate stories, virtues, values, attitudes, and behaviors acceptable to their cause.

Take the cross for example. For the Romans it was "one of the strongest forms of deterrence against insurrection or political agitation in the Roman provinces."[39] The cross was a trophy. It was a symbol of humiliation, punishment, degradation, and a slow, painful death. The body was often left to decay and become food for scavengers.[40] Yet, the men and women who followed Christ embraced this trophy. They reinterpreted and adopted the cross to symbolize victory, God's love, and God's power. The Romans used the cross as a deterrent. The cross was designed to instruct the masses of the consequences for criminal behavior and rebellious uprisings.[41] Christians used the cross as a rallying point and an example of obedience and commitment.[42] It was a symbol of God's love and sacrifice, "God so love the world."[43] It remains a symbol reminding people of God's love and the grotesque sacrifice suffered on our behalf. In the faith community it serves as an image of our own willingness to die to oneself in order that one might love and live freely with God.[44]

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[39] Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 184.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Jn 3:16.

[44] Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 184.

Two other Christian symbols, sheep and fish, also remain meaningful. Fish can be found on websites, cars, cell phones, and in Christian homes. The symbol of the fish is a symbol of Christ. Similarly, the sheep reminds us of Christ the Good Shepherd. In many cases these symbols become familiar and are reduced to religious trinkets or tattoos to identify religious affiliation. In some cases these symbols are worn as beautiful pieces of jewelry. Regardless, the cross, sheep, and fish hang as a reminder etched upon the minds of Christians. They are images, icons that point through themselves to the story of Christ.

These icons mold and shape us each day. They reinforce the vision of who we are and what we want to become. These images create portals through which we enter into the world these images create. Similarly, these images create totem poles of historical figures and events through which we retell the story of our community. Images form and shape us spiritually. They mold our ideas, actions, attitudes, and relationships. Some images draw us closer to God. Other images lead us to prostrate ourselves in worship to secular gods and goddesses. Regardless of their affiliation and our willingness to confess their influence, images affect us spiritually in imperceptible ways as well as ways which are obvious.

Though images act as portals, totems, trophies, and icons, there is a danger that we may abuse them. This abuse may appear innocent or malicious. It may happen subconsciously or with great planning. However, the abuse begins on the slippery slope where an image transforms into a talisman, a magical item, a tool, or an idol. They go from pointing us toward God to being an object that

closes us off from God. They shift from being a window to a mirror. Instead of showing us the beauty of God all we see is what we expect to see. History is replete with examples and antidotes. Let us briefly look at the difference. Let us look at what happens when the object becomes an end in and of itself.

For instance, images often become talismans. A talisman is an object that gives special powers, insight, and/or direction to the person who wears it. Take, for example, a rabbit's foot or a four leaf clover. Carrying or wearing one is believed to bring you luck. Wearing a crystal around your neck is believed to bring positive energy. In religious circles, there are little figurines, statues, of saints carried with people to bring them safety, luck, and good fortune. One of the more bizarre talismans I have recently seen was on an episode of "The World's Deadliest Catch."[45] As the ships get underway, to appease the sea gods, one of the crab fishermen grabs a herring from the bait storage. He takes a big bite out of the fish and eats it. By doing this he brings luck and good "juju" to the crew and season. In essence, when the object in and of itself is believed to have special power it no longer points to God but itself. Turning an image into a talisman is one of the reasons the iconoclasts rallied against hagiography and religious symbols.

Similarly, images do not have magical powers. There are those who believe that if we say the right words or prayers to the statue of St. Mary our demands will be met. Reflecting upon a statue of St. Mary as an image of a woman of faith is a powerful and illuminating act of faith. She expressed

[45]"Slow Burn", (Discovery Channel, April 13, 2010).

unrelenting trust in God with the words, "I am the Lord's servant, and I am willing to accept whatever he wants. May everything you have said come true,"[46] and is a worthy image of faith to reflect upon. The image of Mary in and of itself holds no power. Some would argue that it is obvious that they are not praying to the statue, but the mother of Jesus who is in heaven beside Jesus pleads on their behalf. Reality, however, can easily become blurred between the image and the saint who points us toward God. While I do not wish to digress down this road too far, the reality remains, some people have prayed to these images believing there is magical power in them.

It is important to caution that there is a short distance between an icon and an idol. An image becomes an idol when the object becomes the focus of our worship, our adoration. When the icon no longer points us toward God and we begin to believe the object has power, we are no longer worshiping the Living God but the physical object. In a much broader definition, any object, image, person, or idea becomes an idol when we give it the power to determine our values, attitudes, and behaviors. As a people of faith, only God holds this place of honor.

This distance often is but a mere shift in thinking and heart motivation. While God created both male and female in God's image, Jesus said, "that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart."[47] While the very physical form of the human body is a

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[46] Mt 1:38 (NLT).

[47] Mt 5:28.

metaphysical representation of the beauty of God, the very act of lust is to turn it into a goddess and worship it. What begins as a way to view God becomes the veil preventing us from connecting with God.

There is no clearer abuse of this image of worship than a rock concert, secular or Christian. To be honest, this includes some of our worship conferences and worship services. Watch the screaming fans throw their offerings at the feet of their idol. Watch their undulations as the rhythms pulse. Observe the posters on teenager's walls, CD covers littering desktops, the cloistered garb worn to imitate the likeness of their worship, and for the lucky few, the life size cutouts of their idol to gaze and fantasize upon. Listen to the defensive talk as fans of rival bands articulate the accolades of their idol and trash the opponent. While I don't want to get lost on some dusty side road of the consumer, worship of musicians, actors, athletes, business gurus, or political figures, I wish to highlight that while we do not refer to them as idols, so frequently the icons who line our bookshelves, fill our iPods, line our movie closets, and hang on our walls are just that, idols. What begin as images to facilitate worship or growth, we gradually give power to define our ideas of morality, success, and personal self worth.

As Christians our history and present are littered with icons we have turned into idols. Even Billy Graham and Mother Teresa have not escaped our adoration and veneration. While there are inherent dangers of an icon becoming an idol, I do not think we need to abandon them. In fact, I would advocate through this document that our goal would be to reclaim the heritage of imagery.

While I assert that images have power to mold, shape, and influence us, they do not have power to control us, bend situations to our will, or force others to behave differently. Only we can give them that power. Images do not have the power to control nature. They do not have the power to transform or renew lives. Imagery itself, without meaning imbued upon it, is inert. As Segler and Bradley state in their book, *Christian Worship*,

> Symbols are concrete methods to call us away from ourselves to God. We acknowledge the presence of God by using symbols. In worship, symbols have a twofold direction, an ascending and descending action. They are agents for God to show himself to us, and they are agents by which we express ourselves to God.[48]

Similarly, they warn that these symbols don't compel God to be present. Rather they are totems that acknowledge that God has acted in history and God continues to be present in history. They point us to the mystery of God.[49] They assert that these symbols, "often describe more accurately than words concepts such as God, Christ, salvation, atonement, and eternity. Symbols begin with us where we are and take us to the great mysteries of God."[50] Ultimately worship should awaken the senses. It should be a whole body act that is tangible, tactile, and visible.[51] It should encompass the whole body, heart, mind and soul focusing upon the Creator and Life Giver.

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[48] Franklin M. Segler and C. Randall Bradley, *Christian Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, 3rd ed. (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 198.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid., 199.

Spirituality is more than abstract concepts and theology. As we will see in the coming chapters, the biblical, theological, and historical evidence shows a multitude of images that not only captivated people historically, but they also linger in our lives to this day. The presence of imagery is tangible, even if subconscious, long after the initial viewing. Images continue to teach us or haunt us long after the events of the present have passed. They lock into our memory vivid, tactile, defining moments. Some images, when recalled, are so vivid that they seem to transport us back to the event recalling smells, sounds, emotions, thoughts, and tastes.

In all these we see traces of the Creator who is relentlessly pursuing the Beloved. The Bridegroom tenderly calling us back is a beautiful image of relationship that Jesus gave us. The Song of Solomon paints the picture of the beloved seeking through the streets all night aching for her lover as an image of God's love for us. We are called and loved. The image is one of a Creator, Father, and Lover who desperately seeks out and draws in the object of God's desire, each one of us.

As I have pointed out so far, images are not to be dismissed as some uneducated form of communication. Rather, we would do well to recognize the power of images to evoke powerful responses in us. Images are foundational. The Bible is full of images that formed and shaped people of faith throughout the centuries by reinforcing stories, virtues, values, attitudes, and behaviors. The greatest image of all is humanity who was made in the image of God. Through

Christ, God's love is working redemption throughout history and throughout the world.

CHAPTER 1: IMAGERY IN THE BIBLE

> "Come, go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words.'"
>
> – Jeremiah 18:2

Imagery provides the fabric that gives meaning to ideas, concepts, and even language itself. As Berger points out, up to eighty percent of all communication is received visually.[1] Our world is made up of images. Everything from words, metaphors, pictures, and sculptures, to paintings, movies, and commercials fill our conscious and sub-conscious with images. These images bombard our senses and shape our lives. Throughout Christian history imagery contributed positively to shape the lives of the faithful and to help them connect with God and each other. Imagery is an ally in instructing and reinforcing the faith community's stories and values. My thesis is that we need to rediscover meaningful ways to use imagery in a contemporary setting. My contention is that it is necessary for us to rediscover imagery in spiritual formation. In worship, images provide us tactile places to further glimpse and understand God as they connect with us viscerally and emotively evoking memories and birthing dreams.

Because we live in an image affluent culture, people readily speak the language of imagery. Therefore, it is crucial for the followers of Christ and the church to be fluent in the art of visual communication. If the church cannot, we risk spinning our wheels and irrelevancy. Imagery is essential to our ongoing

[1] Berger, *Seeing Is Believing*, 1.

ability to communicate and to connect with God, with ourselves, and with others. Bradley Holt clearly articulates this:

> In an attempt to understand our lives, we use fundamental images, or root metaphors. Each image has value, but none is adequate by itself. For example, the Bible pictures God as rock, light, and fortress; lion, bear, and eagle; king, father, and shepherd; and mother, lover, and friend. None of these groupings alone adequately describes the nature of God. The same is true of our pictures of the Christian life.[2]

The metaphors we choose to use shape our experiences and help us interpret life.[3] Therefore, men and women of faith need to learn to become more fluent in the use and understanding of imagery.

Scripture stirs the heart, mind, and soul. God used imagery to enliven worship and to instruct the people in the stories, virtues, values, attitudes, and behaviors of their faith. "The Bible is more than a book of ideas: it is also a book of images and motifs. Everywhere we turn we find concrete pictures and recurrent patterns."[4] Turn the pages, peruse the thin sheets, and you will find detailed descriptions of acceptable sacrifices, articulate interpretations of visions, and elusive parables. God made imagery integral to worship and the spiritual formation of the people of Israel. In Exodus, God ordered the building of the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle for worship[5] detailing the extensive symbols

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[2] Bradley P. Holt, *Thirsty for God: A Brief History of Christian Spirituality*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 9.

[3] Ibid., 11.

[4] Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, xiii.

[5] Ex 25:1-22.

and beauty to be used while also commanding that no idols be made or used in worship.[6]

Jesus boldly used metaphors, similes, and occasionally allegory to create images that communicated truth into the everyday lives of the people.[7] Jesus drew from his childhood to "illustrate spiritual truths with the leaven in bread dough, sewing patches on old clothing, and storing new wine in old wineskins."[8] Jesus instructed the disciples in the upper room to repeat his actions in remembrance of him.[9] Paul continued this tradition as he told Timothy and Titus to "be an example to all believers."[10] To the church in Thessalonica, Paul said, "you became a model to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia."[11] These people not only imbued everyday images with meaning, their own lives also became images.

As I review Scriptural imagery from the perspective of the biblical people in chapters one and two, I will leave the theological debate to be discussed in chapters three and four. The point will be to build a clear idea of how God, Christ, and faithful followers used imagery to communicate and connect with God and

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[6] Ex 20:3-6; Lv 19:4.

[7] Keith W. Drury, *Holiness for Ordinary People* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2004), 63.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Mt 26:26-30; Mk 14:22-26; Lk 22:19-20.

[10] 1 Tm 4:12; Ti 2:7.

[11] 1 Thes 1:7.

others. Ultimately, the evidence will show Scripture supports and encourages the use of imagery in worship and spiritual formation.

Before we continue, I want to be clear that I am not seeking to lay out a comprehensive biblical survey. Rather, to create a picture by pointing out a story here, illuminating an icon there, or highlighting a major theme. Through investigating and exploring how these images formed the individuals and the community of followers in the Testaments, my hope is to create an understanding of the uses of imagery and the prohibitions against idolatry[12] in the Bible. My hope is that it will serve as a portal to enter into the biblical story and to understand how these images molded and shaped generations of faithful followers. Along the way I invite you to become an active participant. Enter the process with me by not just reading about the images but imagine them in your mind.

As we create this collage it is important that we understand how the primary hearers would were shaped by these stories. It will be essential to review how biblical images served as spiritual icons for the original recipients. Equally important is to explore how the echoes of these images continue to mold us today and help us connect with God and others. More illuminating is to show how we influence the Scriptures as we listen and imagine the stories. Essentially, how we interpret the Bible determines how biblical imagery influences us. If we believe the Bible is primarily a legal code then we will interpret it differently than if we view it as a love letter from God. It is foundational that we find a way to

[12] Ex 20:3-6; Lv 19:4.

reconcile the images of God with the images in our culture. We cannot employ legislation and abstract concepts to reach a postmodern audience hungry for authenticity and relationships.

This hunger is nothing new. For millennia people have used physical, narrative, mental, and kinesthetic imagery to experience, learn, teach, and share their faith. They have used it to encode and transfer their stories. Children in Jewish and Christian homes have grown up in the shadows of Noah and the Ark, Abraham and Isaac, David and Goliath, Moses and the plagues, Jonah and the whale, and other stories of the Bible.[13] The imaginations of children and adults throughout the ages have been the movie screens on which the narratives of Jewish lives and the Palestinian countryside came to life. Generations have imagined a young boy bending over a creek bed to choose five stones or pictured David as he told the giant his God would be victorious. With a quick motion of the hand a stone left the slingshot and imbedded itself in the forehead of Goliath. Stories have been told and reenacted by energetic children knowing themselves to be the heroes and legends of old.

Predating movies and PowerPoint, people growing up in church and Temple saw teachers make epic stories come to life on flannel graphs.[14] Children watched a two-dimensional Jesus walk on water. They saw Abraham place Isaac on the altar as a sacrifice and worried that poor Jonah would never escaped the

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[13] Victor Harold Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel: 1250-587 BCE* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 9.

[14] Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 13.

pesky whale. Recent technology, video, and CGI brought new life to these tales. Groups such as Story Keepers,[15] Veggie Tales,[16] and Walt Disney's "The Prince of Egypt"[17] captured anew the attention of young and old. While the medium has changed with time, the purpose remained: to visually pass on the rich, life shaping stories and icons of the Bible from father[18] and mother to child.[19]

Biblical icons permeate our western culture and vernacular. Movies, books, and speeches often include phrases such as: "Did you see a burning bush?" "Can you walk on water?" "Are you the Messiah?" "Calm the storm," and "Giant slaying." American leaders from George Washington to Barak Obama[20] used the image of Moses delivering the Israelite people from slavery and oppression to promote their cause. "From the Pilgrims to the Founding Fathers, the Civil War to the civil rights movement, Americans turn to Moses in periods of crisis. This narrative offers a road map of peril and promise."[21] Regardless of biblical literacy or religious affiliation, these stories are entrenched in our societal

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[15] For more information, also see: http://www.storykeepers.com/intro.html.

[16] For more information, also see: https://bigidea.com/index.aspx.

[17] Val Kilmer, Ralph Fiennes, Michelle Pfeiffer, Sandra Bullock, Jeff Goldblum, Patrick Stewart, Danny Glover, Steve Martin, Martin Short, *The Prince of Egypt*, Film, dir. Steve Hickner Brenda Chapman, Simon Wells (USA: DreamWorks Animation, December 19, 1998).

[18] A. E. Kitov and Nathan Bulman, *The Jew and His Home*, 8th ed. (New York: Shengold, 1963), 216.

[19] Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, 9, 27, 29.

[20] Bruce Feiler, "How Moses Shaped America", Time Inc., http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1927303,00.html#ixzz0uKcmjPsh (accessed July 21, 2010).

[21] Ibid.

DNA. While meanings and uses may vary from person to person and region to region, these archetypal images continuously shape our thinking and experiences.

Let me describe the landscape a bit. Our Western thinking focuses on abstract and philosophical concepts heavily influenced by Plato and Aristotle. In contrast, the Eastern Mediterranean cultures think in graphical, earthy, and physical terms influenced by the hardships of life.[22] Robert Capon reminds us that Scripture "is held together by icons, by word-pictures." [23] These take on many forms from the tabernacle to sculptures and from altars to metaphors. Some portions of Scripture read like a Picasso[24] and others like Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel.[25] Some read like a law library[26] and others a road map.[27] Some read like an episode of Jerry Springer[28] and others Little House on the Prairie.[29] Some passages read like the apocalypse[30] and others a gentle stream and green

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[22] Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, xv.

[23] Robert Farrar Capon, *The Fingerprints of God: Tracking the Divine Suspect through a History of Images* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 14.

[24] Ezekiel's Vision, Ez 1:4-28.

[25] Christ's Birth, Mt 1:18-2:18; Lk 1:26-38.

[26] Lv 11-26.

[27] Jesus sends the 12, Mt 10:5-16; Jesus sends the 72, Lk 10:1-16; the feasts, Dt 16:1-17.

[28] Amnon raping Tamar, 2 Sm 13:1-22; Lot's daughters, Gn 19:30-38; Judah and Tamar, Gn 38:11-30; 1 Cor 5:1.

[29] Jacob and Esau meeting upon Jacobs return, Gn 33.

[30] Moses and the war with the Amalekites, Ex 17:3; Jesus on a white horse robe dipped in blood and the armies of heaven following, Rv 19:11-21.

pastures.[31] Some read like emotional tirades[32] and others exhibited God's hand calming the storm.[33] The landscape of Scripture is rich with color and filled with vibrant hues creating concrete pictures.[34]

Even portions of the law are rich with imagery:

> When anyone brings from the herd or flock a fellowship offering to the LORD to fulfill a special vow or as a freewill offering, it must be without defect or blemish to be acceptable. Do not offer to the LORD the blind, the injured or the maimed, or anything with warts or festering or running sores. Do not place any of these on the altar as an offering made to the LORD by fire.[35]

Although a legal code, it reads like a description of a painting. It layers brush strokes on the canvas of the mind. Some of the descriptions such as "blemish," "maimed," or "sores" are less palatable, yet they created distinct mental images for the hearers of what an acceptable sacrifice looked like. That was the point. These graphic descriptors evoked memories of common sights: sores, warts, discharges, and defects. Any Israelite, adult or child, hearing this description could immediately point out an unclean sacrifice.

Throughout this discussion, we must remember the Bible is a book. Like all books, it is filled with words. However, unlike other books throughout history, people painted, sketched, sculpted, bronzed, animated, and sung most portions

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[31] Ps 23.

[32] Elijah running into the desert away from Jezebel, 1 Kgs 19:1-9; Jonah grumbling under the bush, Jon, 4:1-11.

[33] Jesus on the lake with the disciples, Lk 8:22-25; Jesus delivers a demon-possessed man, Lk 8:26-39.

[34] Capon, *The Fingerprints of God*, 20.

[35] Lv 22:21-22.

of the Bible. Why? Why the compulsion throughout the ages to reinterpret into images the words so meticulously preserved and handed down? The Bible is more than just the words on a page. It embodies the stories and values of a people of faith. It is the story of God's love, God's frustration with an adulterous people, and God's reconciliation with us. Thus, people of faith sought and continue to seek ways to communicate, teach, and inspire faith in others through its narratives.

The stories of people's lives recorded in these passages create compelling mental images. As Abraham Heschel states,

> The Bible is the great miracle of history. Like God, it is often misused and distorted by unclean minds, yet its capacity to withstand the most vicious attacks is boundless. The vigor and veracity of its ideas are perceptible under the rust and batter of two millennia of debate and dogma, it does not fade in spite of theology nor collapse under abuse. The Bible is the perpetual motion of the spirit, an ocean of meaning, its waves beating against man's abrupt and steep shortcomings, its echo reaching into the blind alleys of his wrestling despair.[36]

The story of a nation grappling with its covenant with God creates mental images on which subsequent generations are weaned. These stories become a form for holding the truth.[37] Regardless of these varied attempts to convey meaning through imagery, the Bible remains primarily preserved in words.

For centuries the Bible survived, passed from father and mother to child, in the oral tradition. Moses is credited as the first person to compile many of

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[36] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 241.

[37] Drury, *Holiness for Ordinary People*, 64.

these traditions into writing giving us the Pentateuch.[38] Faithful followers and meticulous scribes handed down from generation to generation his writings and the whole of scripture. The integrity of the Bible was protected by those to whom it was entrusted.[39] Within the faith community, scribes, with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, guarded the holy texts, carefully transcribing every jot and tittle with painful accuracy.[40] God richly blessed us with a text carefully transcribed, studied, and preserved over the span of millennia.[41] The Bible is awe-inspiring. Just knowing the miles and years this text has travelled leaves one grasping to comprehend what a gift, more precisely, what a treasure God has given us.

It is also important to acknowledge the Bible includes propositions, abstract ideas, and instructions for Christian living.[42] These include distillations of acceptable behavior, theological discourse, and articulations of doctrine. However, in our modern mindset of distilling objects to their component parts and determining how to make them work for us, we have often forgotten the Bible is a metanarrative of the Christian faith.

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[38] John H. Sailhamer, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Genesis-Numbers*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein and Richard P. Polcyn, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 5.

[39] Philip R. Davies, *Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 17-19.

[40] Raymond F. Surburg, *How Dependable is the Bible?* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1972), 75.

[41] For further study: Paul J. Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of Scripture: Problems and Proposals* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980). Also see: Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).

[42] Capon, *The Fingerprints of God*, 20.

A metanarrative is simply a "big story" which tells the tale of the world.[43] These "big stories" of creation, God, the universe, and faith are used to interpret and give meaning to the individual stories of our lives and communities. The term metanarrative in the post-modern thought has created controversy. James Smith summarizes Jean-Francios Lyotard, a prominent post-modern writer, and his complaint against using the term metanarrative. Lyotard's complaint is that a metanarrative does not make an appeal to universal reason but to faith to the exclusion of other metanarratives.[44] The reason many post-modern authors avoid this term is that it often is exclusive. These unique metanarratives brought much bloodshed by the hands of their faithful followers.

Leonard Sweet, Brian McLaren, and Jerry Haselmayer summarize the post-modern critique, "The postmodern critique of metanarratives is but an echo of the biblical warning against idolatry and, by implication, the totalizing of any theory or narrative other than God's story."[45] Christopher Wright summarizes that the Bible is a metanarrative because it, "renders to us the story of God's mission through God's people in their engagement with God's world for the sake of the whole of God's creation."[46] The reality is whether it is politics, theology, philosophy, science, or any other narrative of a faith system, we derive meaning

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[43] James K. A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 63.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Leonard I. Sweet, Brian D. McLaren, and Jerry Haselmayer, *"A" Is for Abductive: The Language of the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 193.

[46] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, 5th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 51.

for our lives from and within a story larger than our own. The pushback among the postmodern movement emerges from the exclusivity of metanarratives as well as the idea that individual narratives have no meaning.

For practical purposes I will refer to metanarrative in this paper as the larger narrative, "big story," through which the Christian faith finds meaning. This can include all the variations and interpretations, some orthodox and others unorthodox. Through the story of Scripture we understand and interpret our lives. Through the metanarrative of God's involvement with all creation and the mini-narratives of the lives of biblical characters, along with the mini-narratives of our experience, the Bible conjures up all forms of imagery that help us understand our lives and faith. These mini-narratives woven with God's thread illuminate the metanarrative. In the hands of the modern and imperialistic movements these stories bred exclusivity. Granted, each metanarrative claims to be the exclusive truth, however, they need not be applied with violence. In other words, we do not have to approach other metanarratives in an effort to debunk them or to destroy them. More so, we can approach all stories with humility. We can seek to understand how the metanarrative of God's redeeming grace through creation is working. God is at work in this world and like yeast the Kingdom of God is working its way through the whole.[47]

In recent centuries with the rise of rationalism and philosophy, the power of the narrative has been for the most part brushed to the side as fables or simply

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[47] Robert Farrar Capon, *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment: Paradox, Outrage, and Vindication in the Parables of Jesus*, comb. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002), 100-103.

irrelevant.[48] Many believed and taught that to truly seek God we needed to put off all distractions, especially those regarding sight.[49] John Calvin believed that what we see with our eyes only serves to distract. Yet, as stated, Scripture is full of imagery and much of our communication happens in the form of imagery. Even so, physical imagery, narrative imagery, mental imagery, and kinesthetic imagery connect deeply with our souls.

Imagery in various forms speaks in ways that philosophical abstractions and disembodied truth are unable to do.[50] Imagery helps us perceive and grasp thoughts, ideas, and truth in a tactile and tacit manner. It also allows us to imagine in our minds abstract concepts like discipleship. Images put flesh on the bones of ideas and values; they make concrete the abstract, rendering them accessible.[51] As Capon claims,

> The only really mischievous thing anyone can do with the Gospel is insist on hanging only the pictures he happens to like. That's what heresy really is: picking and choosing, on the basis of my interpretations, between the icons provided to me. Orthodoxy, if it is understood correctly, is simply the constant displaying of the entire collection.[52]

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[48] Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?*, 64.

[49] Randall C. Zachman, *Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 5.

[50] Berger, *Seeing Is Believing*, 2.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Capon, *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment*, 151-152.

This visual approach is closer to the Hebrew tradition and will help us return from the modern Gnosticism that has emerged as Christian faith.[53] This is why, I believe, in recent decades there has begun a resurgence of discovery and implementation of all forms of imagery in worship, especially narrative imagery.

With this groundwork laid, let us begin with one of the more obvious uses of biblical imagery. Physical imagery frequently described God's presence and God's relationship with humanity. Jeremiah 18 describes the prophet walking to the potter's house:

> This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: "Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message." So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.
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> Then the word of the LORD came to me: "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.[54]

Over the centuries, this passage remained an enduring image of God's work in our lives. It inspired paintings, sketches, and songs. We yearn for the image of a God who molds and shapes us. We ache for the intimacy this evokes: the loving hands of the Creator, massaging the moist clay, pushing here and pressing there, the masterful hands intently, gently, and forcefully shaping the clay. The clay, with all its natural resistance, gradually takes form. The use of clay here is

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[53] Philip J. Lee, *Against the Protestant Gnostics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 84, 95-96.

[54] Jer 18:1-6.

fascinating because clay has a natural resistance to being formed.[55] This natural resistance is what holds the clay in the form shaped by the potter. It is the process of yielding and resisting the potter's hands that gives the pot form.[56] In essence, "we respond to God's gracious initiatives and God responds to our responses ... and on it goes."[57] In this process it seems as if the Potter expects resistance.[58] And, in some cases, the clay is smashed down, more water applied, and reshaped. In other cases, the original form holds true. There is something comforting and emboldening to the soul and body to know that God is personally involved and the relationship entails mutual influence.[59]

We want to know God's work in our lives, however we must choke down challenges when we face depression, failure, and injustice. There are moments and seasons where the bitterness of life leaves us feeling less than comforted.

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[55] Daniel Rhodes, *Clay and Glazes for the Potter*, (Lola, WI: Krause Publications, 2000), http://books.google.com/books?id=wEOjXDfq5G8C&printsec=frontcover&dq=clay+and+glazes+for+the+potter&hl=en&ei=Qu1uTOK5KluisAP8n8yIBw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CDcQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed August 20, 2010).

[56] Warren W. Wiersbe and Logos Research Systems Inc., *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), Jeremiah 18:1.

[57] Clark Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, 8th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press USA, 1994), 7.

[58] Leander E. Keck, ed. *The New Interpreter's Bible: Introduction to Prophetic Literature, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel*, vol. 6 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 717.

[59] Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 15.

With the Psalmist we call out to God, "Deliver me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of cruel men."[60] David also cried out to God:

> But you, O Lord, be not far off;
> O my Strength, come quickly to help me.
> Deliver my life from the sword,
> my precious life from the power of the dogs.
> Rescue me from the mouth of the lions;
> save me from the horns of the wild oxen.[61]

Even Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"[62]

In my own life as I walked the valley of divorce, words of God's love brought the comfort I yearned to experience when I chose to accept them. During this time the image of the Potter was my anchor. I knew, that no matter how desolate and empty my life and soul felt, nor how distant and absent God appeared, the image of the Potter's hands on my life sustained me.

When I felt the most distant and abandoned, I would sit and reflect upon the sketch an artist drew for me. I would reflect upon this image until my soul found handholds to grasp, faith to desperately cling on to. This sketch reminded me of the reality I was not experiencing. I am not saying the pain went away. No, the pain was real, bitter, desolate, and isolating. Rather, this image helped me put flesh onto the truth I believed and created a space to reflect and to enter into it. Through the Scriptures and my own experiences, the truth is: God is in the

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[60] Ps 71:4.

[61] Ps 22:19-21.

[62] Mt 27:46b.

process of shaping our lives and the lives of nations, and the purpose of this is to create a vessel that is pleasing to the Creator.[63]

Paul's audience would have understood the image of clay jars in a way that our Ziploc and Tupperware generations cannot. The process of creating a clay jar was practical knowledge.[64] This enduring image reappears as Paul reminded the church in Rome of their relationship with God as being a part of creation, not as the creator:

> But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?' " Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?
>
> What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath— prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory— even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?[65]

This relationship is one in which the Potter has full rights to mold and shape a pot for use.[66] This use could be for a special use or it could be for ordinary use. It could be filled with water or it could be a refuse holder. The pot could be ornamental or it could be broken from continual use. As the pot is created, the pot does not determine its use. God creates and uses the pots to make known God's power, mercy, glory, or any other purpose "which he prepared in

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[63] Leander E. Keck, *New Interpreter's: Introduction to Prophetic Literature*, 717-718.

[64] Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, 29.

[65] Rom 9:20-24.

[66] Leander E. Keck, *New Interpreter's: Introduction to Prophetic Literature*, 717.

advance."[67] Using the image of the Potter and pot, Paul unveiled further insight into our relationship with God.

Paul continued to develop the pottery image in 2 Corinthians. Here he regards people as frail pots and Christ as the light within us:

> For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 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 the glory of God in the face of Christ.
>
> But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.[68]

This portrait of a "menial, frail, seemingly inept container"[69] containing the power of the message of the Good News of Christ creates tension. The power of the light of Christ entrusted to humanity? The message of Christ's light, the treasure, kept in frail containers, cracked pots, creates dissonance in our souls. Yet, just as Christ's incarnation revealed God's glory and light, so humanity through its frailty reveals God's power.[70] What an amazing image of walking in the light of Christ.

Paul reminded the early Christians of the power of the Gospel. All Paul endured, all the power he showed, and all the miracles he performed were

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[67] Rom 9:23b.

[68] 2 Cor 4:5-10.

[69] Leander E. Keck and J. Paul Sampley, eds. *The New Interpreter's Bible: 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, vol. 11 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 81.

[70] Ibid.

extensions of the light of Christ. He held the power of the light of Christ in paradox. All the power of God and the message of the Gospel, God's mercy and grace revealed in Christ, contained within a common household container.[71] It would be similar to putting the crown jewels of the Queen of England in Tupperware. It's unthinkable. Not the vessel, but what is in the vessel contains the true power. The power is the light. The power is the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ. The frailty of the pot only makes the true power, the light of Christ, more visible.

Hope would have emboldened those who listened. In ministry I hear all too often the words, "how can God use me?" God can! God chooses to use us. God plans to use frail jars and cracked pots. Here the light of Christ shines brightest. It is precisely the purpose of the Potter to mold pots to show God's glory.[72] This truth would have been reinforced to every Jewish-Roman man, woman, or child who used or looked at this common household container. Their existence provided reminders of the image of Yahweh's hands upon the lives of individuals and the life of the Israelite nation. Ornate pots, mundane pots, cracked pots, and broken pots, all became visual prompts of God's work in their lives.

In the face of the oppression of the Roman legions, the pots would remind them of God's work in their lives. This simple image did not take away the anxiety or fear. Rather, it served as a reminder of the truth. It was an anchor. And Paul

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[71] Ibid., 645.

[72] Murray J. Harris, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein and James Dixon Douglas (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 342.

would give rich meaning to these mundane household jars. These pots reminded them of the power of Christ within each believer. It would serve as a prompt to the grace and the precious gift offered to even the most detested and unclean person in God's sight. It is a brilliant image. While the Potter/pot image describes the image of relationship with God, this was not the only image used to describe God's presence.

God continually reassured the Israelite people that the Lord their God was with them. God sought to be known by the Israelites. God pursued the Israelites.[73] When God did so, it came in concrete images, vivid dreams, or a vision. These in turn were delivered by a prophet, judge, or leader. For Moses it was a burning bush.[74] For the Pharaoh it was ten plagues.[75] For the Israelites leaving Egypt it was a cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night. [76] For Elijah it was the deafening silence after the earth shook, the winds blew, and fire ripped across the mountainside.[77] One night Mary and Joseph met the presence of God, Emmanuel, and wrapped him in strips of cloth.[78]

The names of patriarchs, judges, kings, and prophets washed over the minds and lives of the people of God. Their names became icons providing

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[73] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 136.

[74] Ex 3:2.

[75] Ex 7-12.

[76] Ex 13:20-22; 14:19-25; 34:5; 40:34-38.

[77] 1 Kgs 19:11-13.

[78] Mt 2:12, 16.

mental images to reflect upon the faithfulness of God.[79] These names and the stories of their lives personalized God. God's own self-introduction to the people was, I am "the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."[80] This introduction painted a picture upon the minds of the Israelite nation of their forefathers. After 430 years of slavery[81] and countless prayers, one icon remained in the center of Israelite history, Moses.

Imagine yourself a Hebrew child raised from birth to revere and honor this man of faith whom God used to deliver your nation from captivity, write much of the Pentateuch, and talk face to face with God.[82] Imagine weaning on stories of his life. Moses, a Hebrew, raised Egyptian royalty, a prophet from God sent to Pharaoh, a man who ultimately never entered the promised-land.[83] Moses lived forty years in a self-imposed exile for killing an Egyptian guard.[84] Yet this man returned to lead God's people to freedom. A parched and thirsty nation rebelled against Moses. In response Moses impulsively "raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. ... The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will

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[79] Leander E. Keck and J. Paul Sampley, eds. *The New Interpreter's Bible: New Testament Articles, Matthew, Mark*, 5th ed., vol. 8 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 132.

[80] Ex 4:5.

[81] Ex 12:40.

[82] Willem VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word: an Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 28-30.

[83] Respectively, Ex 2:10; Ex 3:10; Ex 33:52.

[84] Ex 2:12.

not bring this community into the land I give them.'"[85] This was the same Moses who at Mt. Sinai received from God the Ten Commandments twice, spoke to God face to face, saw the backside of God, and descended from Mt. Sinai with his face covered because he was glowing with God's glory. [86] Through the entirety of his life, Moses, God's friend, provided a masterful icon to encourage and nurture human faith and to grasp the kind of covenantal relationship the Lord Almighty desired.[87]

In the stories of the Exodus, over and over the icons of cloud and fire are singed upon the consciousness of the Israelite nation. The cloud and pillar of fire, signs of God's continual presence, reminded the Israelites that they were a chosen people.[88] Can you imagine the affect these mental icons had upon the Israelites? Generations after the cloud evaporated and the pillar of fire returned to heaven, Jewish men, women, and children looked upon the clouds in the sky and gazed into the fires at night reminded of God's presence and the Almighty's Covenant.

As with all things that are familiar, over time clouds and fire became just clouds and fire.[89] The poignancy waned needing to be re-kindled by a new generation. The very physical images which provided portals to enter the reality

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[85] Nm 20:12.

[86] Ex 19:9; 20:1-21; 31:18; 32:2-6; 19; 33:11; 33:12-22; 34:29-35.

[87] VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, 30.

[88] Ex 13:22.

[89] Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Image Books and Doubleday, 1996), 85.

of God's presence became muted by familiarity, similar to Noah's rainbow.[90] Though the efficacy would diminish, for the Israelites every cloud and every fire served as a physical image through which to reenter the story of God's deliverance and presence.

During their sojourn in the desert, God gave the Israelites the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle. God designed, commissioned, and protected the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle.[91] These physical images stand as a great witness for the use of imagery in worship:

> See, the LORD has chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts— to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood and to engage in all kinds of artistic craftsmanship. And he has given both him and Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, the ability to teach others. He has filled them with skill to do all kinds of work as craftsmen, designers, embroiderers in blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen, and weavers—all of them master craftsmen and designers.[92]

God burned with anger at the Israelite's worship of a golden calf and God demanded the Israelites never make idols for use in worship.[93] However, even with the prohibition against making idols, God did not hesitate to inspire and to fill skilled craftsmen and weavers with his spirit.[94] They created the ornate and

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[90] Gn 9:13.

[91] Ex 25:1-22.

[92] Ex 35:30-35.

[93] Dt 4:16, 23-25; 5:8; 27:15.

[94] Vivian B. Mann, *Jewish Texts on the Visual Arts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 5-6.

intricate design of the Ark, the Tabernacle, the accoutrements of worship, and the priestly garments.[95]

The point drawn at this juncture is God prohibited the Israelites from making and worshipping idols.[96] Simultaneously, God commissioned the Ark of the Covenant to serve as a physical image for use in worship and a symbol to follow.[97] The ornate Ark held the mercy seat, God's chair, over-shadowed by the wings of two Cherubim. Inside the Ark were physical images of faith: the inscribed stone tablets, a jar of manna, and Aaron's staff that had budded.[98] Every time the nation stopped, the Levites erected the Tabernacle at the center of camp and placed the Ark of the Covenant inside. Then the cloud filled the Tabernacle announcing God's presence.[99] The Ark served as a potent, visual reminder of God's presence, leadership, and blessing.[100] It also served as a reminder of The Almighty's holiness and authority. The Ark was the tangible reminder of God's Covenant with the people and a reminder of God's presence available to the people.[101] Similarly, the Tabernacle served as the itinerant home

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[95] Ex 25:1-22; Ex 36:8-38; Ex 37-39.

[96] Ex 20:4.

[97] Ex 37:1a-2, 6a-7a, 9; Jo 3, 6; 1 Sm 4:1-11; 1 Chr 15; 2 Chr 6:1-11.

[98] Heb 9:4.

[99] Ex 26-27 gives elaborate details about the construction and design of the Tabernacle.

[100] Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 43.

[101] Ibid., 838.

for the Lord God Almighty, a constant visual reminder of God's presence on Mt. Sinai.[102]

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lead the Israelite nation. As they conquered territories and tribes, they followed the Ark. Take Jericho for example.[103] An absurd sequence of events led to this battle. The Israelite nation marched around the walled city seven times while the Ark of the Covenant led the way. On the seventh day, a ram's horn blew and the people shouted. The walls tumbled down. The narrative image of these events penetrated the Israelites consciousness.[104] God was their provision, protector, and warrior.[105] When the walls fell with that great shout and news of this bizarre victory spread, one can only imagine the fear and shock that reverberated through the other nations. An entire fortified city devastated with a shout.

Despite images left by unprecedented victories and their Covenant with God made visible by the Ark and Tabernacle, the Israelite nation become jealous as they looked at surrounding nations. Their hearts longed for a "real" king to lead them into battle. The elders went to Samuel and said, "you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."[106] They refused to listen and said, "We want a king over us.

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[102] Stephen F. Olford, *The Tabernacle: Camping with God* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1971), 30.

[103] Jo 6.

[104] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 213.

[105] Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 838.

[106] 1 Sm 8:4.

Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles."[107] They longed to be like others. Israel "forgot who it was and what it was that had brought them to this point in their history."[108] The image they hungered for was a flesh and blood king who would stand before them and lead them to victory.[109]

The age of Israelite kings emerged and brought another shift. David desired to build God a home worthy of the Almighty Lord.[110] He longed to honor God with a permanent Temple.[111] While David's motives were sincere, there appears to be an intimate link here to Israel's desire for a king. The land flowing with milk and honey was dotted with Temples filled with temple prostitutes, phallic symbols, and priests making sacrifices.[112] The other gods and goddesses had lavish temples, and yet, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob continued to live itinerantly in the Tabernacle.[113] David's image of honoring God by providing a permanent home was influenced by the worship of the gods and goddesses in

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[107] 1 Sm 8:19b-20.

[108] Timothy M. Pierce, *Enthroned on Our Praise: An Old Testament Theology of Worship*, (Nashville, TN: B and H, 2008), http://books.google.com/books?id=m1H8Vry5eO0C&printsec=frontcover&dq=Enthroned+on+our+praise&hl=en&ei=hAVvTLSoJ4ymsQOW6vy1Cw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCkQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed August 20, 2010).

[109] Michael Grant, *The History of Ancient Israel* (London: Phoenix, 1997), 72-73.

[110] Ibid., 84-85.

[111] 1 Chr 29:1-9 describes David's plans for providing the resources for the Temple.

[112] Grant, *The History of Ancient Israel*, 24-25.

[113] Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 463.

the countryside around him.[114] These influences also continued to lead the Israelites into idolatry and syncretism, worshipping the other gods and goddesses, as the golden calf did in Exodus.[115]

When Solomon completed the temple, God, in the minds of the people, relocated from leading the people and roaming the land to being civilized and located near the seat of power.[116] This remarkably resembled the surrounding nations. The God of the Israelites had a permanent home and the King of Israel built his palace next door.[117] The unintended consequence was the Temple and the palace intimately merged. At the nation's demand, the image of God leading the people was usurped by the physical image of a King. Trust in God eroded as the images of Saul, David, and Solomon's successes flourished. In a palpable sense, the nation became respectable in their minds and hearts. More importantly, the nation became respectable in the eyes and among the nations who surrounded them.[118]

The physical image of a King and Temple displaced the images of the cloud, pillar of fire, Ark, and Tabernacle. Despite the personal devotion David wished to express by building the Temple, David and Solomon's Temple became

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[114] Grant, *The History of Ancient Israel*, 84-85.

[115] 2 Kgs 23:24-25; 2 Chr 30:13-14.

[116] Grant, *The History of Ancient Israel*, 88-89.

[117] John William Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), 87. Also see: 2 Chr 2:1-2; also see David's prayer for Solomon to build the temple, 1 Chr 29:19; 1 Chr 28:10, David gives the plans for the vestibule of the temple to Solomon.

[118] 1 Sm 27-29, David's relationship with King Achish; 1 Kgs 10:1-13, The visit of the Queen of Sheba.

an icon for wealth, prosperity, and respectability.[119] While God designed the Tabernacle, David provided "all my resources ... for the temple of my God. ... gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, onyx, turquoise, stones of various colors, and all kinds of fine stone and marble in large quantities."[120] The idea of God at the center of the nation and living among the people was relocated to the Temple next to the seat of national power.

No one desired for God's favor to be lifted. Yet, seductively, icons of foreign gods, success, and respectability crept into the national consciousness. God lead a people, who wanted a human king, not an invisible deity, to be their conquering hero. While God remained at the center of the Israelite community, the nation wanted a physical king to be out front.

Not until the incarnation did the image of God become itinerate and once again live among the people. The incarnate Christ, Emmanuel, became the centerpiece of God's call to a covenantal relationship. Jesus became the living Temple. Christ, who makes a home in us, became more than a reorienting icon. Christ became the tabernacle once again. Paul redefined the Temple as the living Body of believers of which Christ is the head.[121] Instead of the Temple being equated with the seat of power and human leadership where people came to God, the physical image of covenant was reimaged as the tabernacle where God dwelt and led, once again, from within the people.

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[119] Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament*, 84-87.

[120] 1 Chr 29:2-5.

[121] Eph 2:21-22; 4:15-16, 25.

At this point I have jumped ahead of our current discussion and into the Messianic traditions. Before I pursue this, I want to quickly finish mentioning some significant images from the sacrificial system. One significant use of imagery was altars and feasts. These kinesthetic images provided rich practices in which the nation remembered the blessings of God.[122] Altars were often built by people of faith to mark a location and to recall specific covenantal encounters with God. These altars marked moments they believed God intervened on their behalf.[123] Feasts were times of community remembering and retelling. Specific acts were recounted and reenacted. God's continued provision was celebrated and honored.

This use of an altar is not unlike a tradition handed down to me by my youth pastor. On a night when I had made a particularly important commitment to live for Christ, Rick asked, "have you ever wondered why the elephants at the circus never break away from the chain attached to a tiny spike in the ground? When the elephants are little, they are chained to what appears to be a tiny spike. Unlike the spike you see at the circus which is fairly short, this spike is much longer and pounded deep into the ground. The young elephant will pull with all its might against the spike for days. Unable to break the chain or unearth the stake, eventually the elephant learns the spike is unmovable. So as these highly intelligent animals grow to be several tons the trainers know these mammoths will never again challenge the spike. The image is cemented in their

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[122] Pierce, *Enthroned on Our Praise: An Old Testament Theology of Worship.*

[123] Ibid.

minds and rooted deep in their sub-conscious. The spike is unmovable. However, the spike they are currently attached to may be only a few inches in the ground."[124]

As the tradition was handed to me, so I have passed it on to others: the invitation to imagine the decisions and commitments made with as much detail as possible. Let these decisions become an immovable spike. Create a chain and attach yourself to the spike. Imagine this new life you want to live, imagine it becoming the reality you are connected to. Don't imagine the chain as bondage but an umbilical cord bringing life and keeping you tethered to the life giving relationship with Jesus. Invite God to remind you of this commitment. Tell God of your desire to let it become an anchor in your life; ask God to help you anchor it deep within your being. Let me be clear, this does not keep you from abandoning God or from sin. Rather, it is a tool, a visual prompt, a reminder.

This practice of creating and retelling narrative images keeps the connections and experiences of God tactile and present.[125] This image, to me, provided the tether to keep these decisions real and tactile in my life. This image of a young pachyderm pulling, tugging, straining against the stake invigorated my imagination. It became a metaphor for my life. And as my life continues to unfold, I look back and recognize the moments I pulled yanked, tugged, and strained against the spike. Though I have felt at times I have completely abandoned the

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[124] Julia Boorstin, "The Best Advice I Ever Got," *Fortune* (2005), http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune_archive/2005/03/21/8254830/index.htm (accessed August, 20 2010).

[125] Capon, *The Fingerprints of God*, 151-152.

decisions I have made, the commitment I resolved to keep seemed to endure. Use of imagery such as this is designed to help people root deep, memorable connections with God.

Take, for instance, Noah's response after the waters subsided. "Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar."[126] God then gave the rainbow as a symbol of a covenant.[127] This image sealed God's covenantal promise to bless the people and to never destroy the earth again. The altar beside the decaying ark and the rainbow in the sky reminded Noah, his family, and succeeding generations up through today of God's deliverance, protection, and promise.

Following Noah, Abram firmly established the practice of altar building. Abram built altars to honor places he met God.[128] This tradition passed from father to son,[129] from Abram to Isaac, to Jacob, and to Joseph. Family altars then became national altars under the leadership of Moses. Each altar created an enduring visual reminder.[130] Nomadically, as the people crossed the land to feed their livestock, altars served as immovable reminders of God's blessing, God's covenant, and God's providence. I can only imagine Isaac's thoughts every time he passed Mt. Moriah and the altar where his Father was seconds from offering

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[126] Gn 8:20.

[127] Gn 9:12-17.

[128] Also see Gn 13:4, 18; 22:9.

[129] Also see Gn 26:23-26; Gn 33:18-20; 35:1-8.

[130] Pierce, *Enthroned on Our Praise: An Old Testament Theology of Worship.*

him as a sacrifice.[131] I wonder if he rubbed his wrists where the ropes had dug into his flesh or if his memory blocked the image of his body on top of the wood, with his father, dagger in hand, blade glistening in the sunlight, thrust it into the air and the sudden adrenaline fueled by fear he had felt. Maybe he only remembered the ram caught in the brush.

Regardless, these altars acted as totem poles, collectively serving as places of remembrance. Each altar provided a history lesson rich with memories spoken over dinners and around campfires. These seemingly innocuous stones stacked together, littering the countryside, stories built on stories, shaped the collective consciousness of the Israelite people and served as visual cues of God's call and favor.[132]

This heritage of building altars was not limited to the Old Testament. In Matthew we find Peter, James, and John on a mountain with Jesus. Moses and Elijah were also there talking with Jesus. Peter proclaimed, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."[133] While some translations interpret dwellings as altar and still others interpret it as tents, regardless, Peter recognized an encounter with God. In response he sought to build a physical image to commemorate this holy moment.

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[131] Gn 22:1-19.

[132] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 215.

[133] Mt 17:4.

Altars, in and of themselves, did not change lives or rescue anyone. Altars did not bring provision needed for life. Altars were not encounters with God. Rather, altars, like totem poles, provided places that evoked specific stories. In turn, they provided places to retell the stories of redemption, deliverance, and victories.

Feasts and celebrations, like altars, served as kinesthetic images to remember God's covenant. The most prominent Israelite feast was Passover.[134] Passover, cemented as the most significant feast, was made the beginning of the Hebrew calendar.[135] The ritual of the feast provided the most compelling practice and formed the most enduring kinesthetic image.[136] The Exodus, as the pivotal event in Israelite history, was symbolically relived over the course of a week. This feast began with a retelling of the story. The meal was elaborate and each course represented a part of the Exodus journey. The people drank or ate bitter herbs as a reminder of the agony and suffering endured in Egypt.[137] In later observances of the feast, they lived the week in makeshift huts as a reminder of wandering through the desert.[138] Passover served as a kinesthetic reminder of God delivering the Israelite nation from slavery in Egypt and coincided with the first barley harvest and the bringing of the first fruits to God.

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[134] James Hastings, J. A. Selbie, and J. C. Lambert, *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1908), 67.

[135] Ex 12:2.

[136] Ex 11:1-8; 12:1-28.

[137] Ex 12:1-11; Nm 9:11-14.

[138] Lv 23:33-43; Neh 8:13-14.

The Passover meal became a rhythm and practice which molded and shaped the Israelite nation. It gave visual and tactile cues for the narrative that defined an entire people. It created a portal to experience a defining time in their history: to see, understand, and re-experience their covenant with God.

In the New Testament, we have a similar ritual established in communion. During this celebration, Jesus called His followers to remember His life, passion, sacrifice, and resurrection. Replacing the Exodus and sacrificial moment was a Messianic moment, a spiritual deliverance over-shadowing, redefining, and replacing a physical deliverance. The upper room was to be relived. Passed on to us today, communion begins with an invitation to remember that Jesus Christ came to earth, lived, died, and rose from the grave in order that we might have life. This practice encourages participants to reflect upon their ongoing need for Jesus' redemptive work in their lives. As the wafer or bread is lifted and broken, the words of Christ are repeated, "Take and eat; this is my body."[139] As the cup is lifted Christ's words are shared, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."[140] For generations communion has continued as the Church's strongest and most powerful historic ritual offered both as a reminder and as a portal to those final hours with Christ.

Like Passover, every time one enters communion, it shapes and molds the participant. We can allow the commonality of communion to dull our senses,

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[139] Mt 26:26b.

[140] Mt 26:27b-28.

but our familiarity does not rob the act of its power if we still come, in any sense, to meet or remember God. Communion reminds us of our need for Christ and for God's redemptive work in our lives. It calls us to remember the cost of Christ's redemptive act and creates a space for us to respond by giving thanks. As we hold the bread and the cup, these images open a portal to centuries past where we may enter the story of God's redeeming work. While many other images also molded and shaped the Israelites and Christian communities, the trouble with images is they have a tendency to be transformed into idols.

Enduring, physical images can be powerful allies helping sculpt our lives and souls, yet the Scriptures contain harsh warnings against creating idols:

> You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. [141]

In Leviticus God instructs, "'do not turn to idols or make gods of cast metal for yourselves. I am the LORD your God."[142] In Deuteronomy the Levites declared with a loud shout, "Cursed is the man who carves an image or casts an idol—a thing detestable to the LORD, the work of the craftsman's hands—and sets it up in secret." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"[143] And in the desert, while Moses

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[141] Ex 20:3-6.

[142] Lv 19:4.

[143] Dt 27:15.

was on the mountainside with God, the Israelite nation built a golden calf and worshipped it. As Moses came near the camp he saw,

> the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. And he took the calf they had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it. ... And the Lord struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made.[144]

Despite strong prohibitions and repeated punishment, the Israelites deeply struggled with idolatry.[145] Even Solomon, builder of God's Temple, worshiped the gods of his 700 wives. He built temples and Asherah poles in high places which provoked God's jealous anger.[146]

Repeatedly, God's anger burned against unfaithful kings and the Israelites for their spiritual adultery and eventually the nation was torn in two.[147] Many kings led the people to follow the gods of their neighbors further provoking God's anger while only a few kings called the people back to worship the true and only God. One such king was Josiah who ruled over the northern kingdom. Hidden from infancy and raised by the priests to worship God,

> In his twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of high places, Asherah poles, carved idols and cast images. Under his direction the altars of the Baals were torn down; he cut to pieces the incense altars that were above them, and smashed the Asherah poles, the idols and the images. These he broke to pieces and scattered over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. He

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[144] Ex 32:19-20, 35.

[145] Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament*, 74.

[146] 1 Kgs 11:1-13.

[147] 1 Kgs 11:29-33.

> burned the bones of the priests on their altars, and so he purged Judah and Jerusalem.[148]

Josiah called the people back God.[149] He removed all the physical images from the land as he called the people back to worship the Lord their God. It would be easy to judge the Israelites and their syncretism. Physical images, graven images, are misplaced objects of worship and hard to miss because they are visible. However, there are other more seductive idols we struggle with today such as coveting.[150] Jesus echoed God's warnings to the Israelite's against coveting. Coveting makes an idol of what someone else owns and combines with a strong desire to posses it.[151] Instead of Asherah poles and temples, Jesus spoke of the desires and lusts of the heart.

Jesus drove home the idea that idolatry is intimately linked to the desires of our hearts. He instructed, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."[152] By the time of Jesus, the Israelites struggled primarily with the images kept in the mind and meditated upon in the heart. Idols do not need physical form. They can be mental images for which our heart lusts. Oscar Romero names several of these images: money, power, luxury and lust, "the dreadful

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[148] 2 Chr 34:3b-5.

[149] 1 Chr 34:33.

[150] Ex 20:17.

[151] Mt 15:1-20.

[152] Mt 6:21.

gods of our time."[153] They are the images and objects which drive our motivations and captivate our minds. These become our places of worship supplanting that which is due the Creator God.

The implicit meaning is that what we see with our eyes, covet with our heart, and play upon the screen of our mind becomes our acts of worship. Jesus taught, "I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."[154] The very act of lust lures us into worship. We create in our hearts passion, desire, and energy as we prostrate ourselves before the mental images we create. Regardless of how sterile and harmless we may envision the icon of lust, Jesus replied, we are provoking God to jealousy.

While the religious leaders outwardly, meticulously observed the law, inwardly they were sinning. Jesus accused them of idolatry regarding power, prestige, and money.[155] Along these lines Paul warned Timothy,

> But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.[156]

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[153] Oscar A. Romero and James R. Brockman, *The Violence of Love: The Pastoral Wisdom of Archbishop Oscar Romero* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 67.

[154] Mt 5:27-28.

[155] Lk 16:14-15. Also see, Mt 6:20-21.

[156] 1 Tm 6:8-10.

The writer of Hebrews also warned, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'"[157] The move from defining idolatry in physical terms to the fidelity of our being, our hearts, and our minds, reoriented the law from the external back to the internal.[158] While internal worship was not a new biblical concept, it was a widely forgotten practice and its rebirth was a drastic reframing for the people of Jesus' time.

Paul further illuminated the spectrum of idolatry:

> For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.[159]

These words were not just for issues facing the first century. Today we live in a narcissistic world where "me" has become the center.[160]

Teens wear T-shirts proclaiming, "It's all about me."[161] While most Christians and most people would never blatantly confess to such narcissism, in

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[157] Heb 13:5.

[158] Mt 15:15-20; 23:25-28.

[159] Rom 12:3.

[160] Joseph H. Hellerman, "A Family Affair: What Would the Church Look Like if it Put We Before Me?", Christianity Today International, http://www.ctlibrary.com/ct/2010/may/29.43.html (accessed August 21, 2010).

[161] For example see: CafePress.com, "Cafe Press", CafePress.com, http://shop.cafepress.com/all-about-me?cmp=knc--g--us--mis--mis-1-p--e--all_about_me_clothing&utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_term=all+about+me+clothing&utm_content=search-e&utm_campaign=mis--miscellaneous+1+prime+-+us&gclid=CNzasL6ay6MCFQUDbAodHknJvg (accessed August 21, 2010).

our culture it is a common struggle.[162] While our religious and national roots, dating back to the Puritans and Quakers, warn against false pride and boasting, people are increasingly becoming self-oriented.[163] People are screaming for someone to notice them, accept them, and make them feel significant, like they matter.[164] In our attempts at becoming noticed, accepted, and approved of, we can make ourselves into our own idols.[165] Our needs, our wants, our desires, our skills, our love, or whatever "it" is, become our hearts desire. We reach out to grab "it" as if "it" belongs to us.

The paradox of the "me" centered culture combating the religious ideals of humility has bred a self-loathing and shaming culture. Brennan Manning aptly captures this quandary, "In order to be free to be faithful to this sacred man and his dream, to others and ourselves, we must be liberated from the damnable imprisonment of self-hatred, freed from the shackles of projectionism, perfectionism, moralism/legalism, and unhealthy guilt. Freedom for fidelity demands freedom from enslavement."[166] The heart of the Puritans, Quakers, and

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[162] As a side note, I want to acknowledge that the Good News is about "me." The Good News is similarly about God seeking to redeem all humanity and all of creation. In a healthy sense, there is nothing wrong with realizing that salvation and some aspects of life are about me. Yet, there is a far cry between a healthy sense of self and the narcissism that permeates our present culture.

[163] Hellerman, "A Family Affair: What Would the Church Look Like if it Put We Before Me?"

[164] Rick McKinley, *Jesus in the Margins* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2005), 11-24.

[165] Brennan Manning, *Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging*, exp. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 40.

[166] Brennan Manning, *A Glimpse of Jesus: The Stranger to Self-Hatred* (San Francisco: Harper SanFrancisco, 2003), 49.

other religious groups transplanted to the new world was to honor God and to live humbly and simply.[167] At the same time, the self-sufficiency needed to explore and colonize a rugged land pruned out the physically weak and cultivated a lasting respect and importance for those who could make it on their own without help. These cultural values became inter-twined with religious values. To this day we struggle deeply with defining, let alone living in true humility, thinking either too much of ourselves and our abilities or denying that any good thing could come from us.[168]

Growing up, I remember grown men fighting to deny that they had any hand in the good things they did. They could be heard in loud, defensive, voices, "It wasn't me; it was the Lord." Paul asserted that it is equally grievous to the Lord to diminish the beauty of creation and the gifting God gave each one of us.[169] We are God's creation; we were made by God's hand. It is just as arrogant to say I am nothing but a worm and to diminish God's gifts and talents as it is to be puffed up with pride.

Paul says the cure to the idolatry of "me" is not the denial of God's gifts and talents but having a sober, sound judgment of oneself.[170] It is to celebrate the vast and wonderful person God created each of us to be. It is in knowing

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[167] William Penn, "The Missing Cross to Purity", Hall V. Worthington and Joan Worthington, http://www.hallvworthington.com/wjournal/journalintro.html (accessed August 21, 2010).

[168] Manning, *A Glimpse of Jesus*, 104.

[169] Eph 4:17-32; 1 Tm 4:11-15.

[170] Brennan Manning, *The Importance of Being Foolish: How to Think Like Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper SanFrancisco, 2005), 5, 130.

these good things are gifts, while embracing the fundamental need to rely on God's power. As Gayle Erwin succinctly stated,

> Humility is not hangdog approach to life. Humility is simply seeing ourselves as we actually are, not higher or lower. It means being gut-level honest about ourselves-being upfront. It means knowing who we are and owning that-and owning our emotions. It means living without hypocrisy. ... One of the most loving things I can do for someone is to be honest (humble) about myself so they don't have to sift through my deceptions.[171]

As we express true humility we no longer have to worship at the idol of self. We are free to love others as we have been loved.[172]

It is in our search to find any sense of self that we imbibe upon the intoxicating self-love.[173] The more we lose grip on an honest self-assessment, the more we imagine others as fulfilling our needs and our desires. The more self-deluded we become the less capacity we have for honesty and the giving and receiving of the love God offers freely.[174] As a result, we either have to puff ourselves up and attach importance to things that have no importance in order to feel good or to beat ourselves down to become acceptable.[175] James Masterson points out, "It is the nature of the false self to save us from knowing the truth about our real selves, from penetrating the deeper causes of our unhappiness, from seeing ourselves as we really are: vulnerable, afraid, terrified, and unable to

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[171] Gayle D. Erwin, *The Jesus Style* (Cathedral City, CA: Yahshua, 1997), 73-74.

[172] Manning, *The Importance of Being Foolish*, 106.

[173] Ibid., 60.

[174] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership: with Study Guide for Groups and Individuals* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 20.

[175] Manning, *Abba's Child*, 35-37.

let our real selves emerge."[176] These avenues of self-deception lead to the temples we have enshrined with our idols of self. These are visible to others as the items, thoughts, and feelings we have given power to define our sense of self and to which we have attached our sense of well-being and success. "Me" is sprawled across the entryways and little wooden statues with gold overlay meet us with all our hungers, appetites, and lusts.

We have discussed the hazards of idolatry in regards to idols being unworthy of worship and the worship of self, but another danger of physical idolatry is that all too often images that frequently are employed with good intentions become the objects of worship instead of remaining icons through which we see the creator.[177] As Vivian Mann talks about this dilemma,

> The biblical prohibitions against images were not due to an insensitivity to the appeal of visual forms. Rather they stemmed from the opposite – the realization of "the power of images" to lead their viewers to the worship of other gods. The people of Israel were forbidden both to depict idols and to depict the God of Israel, who is incorporeal.[178]

Physical forms easily distract our worship. Without constant reminders, we forget to remain focused on the one to whom the form is pointing.

Whenever the Israelites sought a physical form of their God to make their worship more respectable and tangible, they not only inherently limited their

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[176] James F. Masterson, *The Search for the Real Self: Unmasking the Personality Disorders of our Age* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 67.

[177] Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well*, 146.

[178] Mann, *Jewish Texts*, 5.

understanding of who and what God could be,[179] but they also became distracted by the meaninglessness of common idolatry redefining God by local deities. As Alister McGrath reframed this issue, "To create an image of God runs the risk of constructing something which we ourselves have generated. ... every image which we generate could become an idol."[180] The trouble with physical idols is they never satisfy our need for love, acceptance, and approval.[181] They leave us empty and strangle us.[182]

Like a dog returning to vomit, they enslave us to return and eat, seeking what we desire but they cannot give. Our neediness moves to the forefront and the imposter beckons us to imbibe upon ourselves. We become addicted and enslaved.[183] Idols and the imposter place unyielding demands upon us. Manning asserts, "The impostor has built life around achievements, success, busyness, and self-centered activities that bring gratification and praise from others."[184] We limit their power and being to what we can imagine. Physical images easily become harbored in our mind and heart, becoming our gods.[185] We read into them instead of God reading into us. They tear us far from the love that will bring

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[179] Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well*, 147.

[180] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 111.

[181] Manning, *Abba's Child*, 118.

[182] Ibid., 133.

[183] Ibid., 118.

[184] Ibid., 41.

[185] Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well*, 52.

healing, health, and renewal.[186] In the end, physical images, mental images, narrative images, and kinesthetic images, can easily become nothing more than idols.

Finally, Paul admonished that "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."[187] Instead of filling one's time with idle thoughts, one should meditate on images of whatever is good, lovely, or admirable. These kinds of mental images, instead of distracting us or limiting God to what we can recreate, inform our imagination, allow for mystery and paradox, and create rhythms of remembering and imaging what is good.[188]

Throughout this discussion we have seen how the Bible invites us to see and communicate the truth through imagery.[189] In fact, the Bible frequently utilizes imagery to help others to connect with God.[190] Yet as we enter these ventures we must remember that the images, while inviting us to look through them to see God,[191] can easily become the object of worship.[192] When we worship the physical object, it refracts the light inhibiting any connection with

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[186] Ibid., 146.

[187] Phil 4:8.

[188] Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well*, 335.

[189] Drury, *Holiness for Ordinary People*, 63.

[190] Capon, *The Fingerprints of God*, 13.

[191] Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well*, 336.

[192] Ibid., 146.

God. Regardless of the use or unintended outcomes, imagery is a fundamental and powerful part of our religious heritage. Or as Thomas Merton sums up the use of images, "We are well aware that images, symbols and works of art are only material. We tend to use them with greater freedom and less risk of error precisely because we realize the limitations of their nature. We know that they can only be means to an end, and we do not make "idols" out of them."[193] We think in images and we understand and communicate ideas, thoughts, and relationships through images.

Imagery powerfully shaped and molded the Israelite nation, the disciples, and continues to form us today. Some of these images have been used and abused to satisfy carnal ends, others have been handled with integrity. Regardless of how we choose to use images, they have power. Leonard Sweet reminds us,

> Since the mind is made of metaphors (remember, we dream in pictures, not in text), the greatest power over others is the power held by those who choose the metaphors. Jesus was history's greatest master of metaphor. ...
>
> It's correct to consider the image-rich Scriptures as the mind of God made available to us. The Bible 'thinks,' not in propositions and bullet points. But in images, metaphors, narratives, symbols, and song. Poetry is more the language of biblical faith than prose or philosophy. The church's failure of imagination is directly attributable to its failure to take up the poet's tools: image and imagination, metaphor and story, and metaphor stories known as parables.[194]

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[193] Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, 84.

[194] Sweet, McLaren, and Haselmayer, *"A" Is for Abductive*, 112-113.

Like all familiar things, biblical imagery can also become domesticated. Regardless of how poignant images are, often we have come to take them for granted.

Familiarity, constant interpretation, and frequent sermons can create a form of noise preventing us from clearly seeing the images or hearing the narratives. If we listen to the text, the Bible inundates the reader with pictures. The reader journeys from Genesis to Revelation challenged by the lives of common people and witnesses the greatest miracles of history. In its breadth, we can easily lose ourselves within the pages and stories finding that when we come out, we are changed.[195]

The picture God painted began with creation and culminated as God called the Israelites into a covenantal relationship. Through the incarnation of Christ, the incorporeal God came to life. As the people who lived with Jesus talked to God, touched God, and walked with God, Jesus called the disciples to follow and then he spent three years with them as he ate, slept, laughed, cried, preached, healed, performed miracles, and taught beside them.

As I have outlined in this chapter, the Bible is overflowing with images. "The Bible is more than a book of ideas: it is also a book of images and motifs. Everywhere we turn we find concrete pictures and recurrent patterns."[196] The power of imagery in the Bible is that it beckons us to enter into the scene. It calls us to become one with the story. It woos us to a holistic understanding of the

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[195] Capon, *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment*, 152.

[196] Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, xiii.

truth enveloped in relationship.[197] It invites us not just to think about Scripture; it yearns to become tactile within us. Our flesh, our senses, our imagination begin to taste the dust in the air, smell the damp Galilean seaside, or cry with Jesus at the news of Lazarus' death.

I propose that we not just read the Scriptures, but that we embrace the rich imagery, that we draw the marrow out of them. I propose we marinate in them. I suggest we baste ourselves in the rich herbs and spices of the characters, the follies, the playfulness, the faithfulness, stories of infidelity, and all that is in between. In fact, if we dare, that we let the icons and narratives read us as a two-way covenantal relationship. In other words, when we reflect upon an image usually we think about it and we read into it what we know. In a two-way relationship we would reflect upon the image and let the image and the Spirit guide us to new insights and understanding. I suggest we enter the Bible with abandonment and embrace the journey Scripture takes us on through the Holy Spirit.

I believe God is calling for us, like Jeremiah, to get up and go down to the Potter's house. God is calling us to see what we have so neatly packed away. So, get up, continue with me on this journey. Let us allow God to instruct us and shed new light upon what for many of Christians has become passively familiar, the living and vibrant icons of our faith.

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[197] Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you had really known me, you would know who my Father is. From now on, you do know him and have seen him!" Jn 14:6.

CHAPTER 2: IMAGO DEI

> It is not that the world needs the church in order to have Christ. The church also needs to be in relation to the world in order to know Christ and in order to be the body of Christ. Formation of Christ in the world does not take place apart from the world.
>
> - Ray Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*[1]

As demonstrated in Chapter One, imagery played a profound role in the Scriptures. Images served as totem poles and portals, emerging in the forms of physical, narrative, mental, and kinesthetic imagery. These totem poles and portals, imbued with meaning by God and the community, had a lasting influence upon the Israelites and Christians. They molded, shaped, and crafted their stories, virtues, values, attitudes, and behaviors in daily life. The physical images, from the ornate Temple instruments to the mundane daily tools that instructed the people about a relationship with God, to the kinesthetic rituals and feasts that brought to life the message of God's love, deliverance, and presence, continually presented the Israelites and Christians with totem poles to reflect upon and retell stories. These images were foundational in building their faith and lives.

Having touched on many of images presented in the Scriptures, I now want to look at the most compelling one, Imago Dei. In Genesis One we read that God made humanity in God's image and likeness. Then, in the Gospels, we read that God came to earth and took human form, the invisible God became visible.

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[1] Ray Sherman Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 118.

The aim of this chapter is to create an understanding and vision for Imago Dei that is both cumulative and contemporary. My aim is to focus on the implications of being made in the Image of God while addressing our theological heritage. Then we will tackle our present, and sometimes disparate, understandings. How we imagine God and how those around us imagine God, not only influences and contributes to our formulations and understanding of Imago Dei in ourselves and others, but also re-informs our ideas about God and Scripture. Relationally bound, ideas constantly change and reform one another. "As iron sharpens iron,"[2] Proverbs instructs, so our images, ideas, and understandings change, grow, and sharpen as we dialogue with others. Through our interaction with others, our thoughts, beliefs, and lives change. Ultimately, I seek to provide a framework that articulates the image of God and a vision of how that is lived out.

This discussion on Imago Dei will ultimately come to fruition in Jesus Christ. Jesus claimed, "If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him. ... Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."[3] Instead of Imago Dei remaining solely a philosophical and theological discussion, in Christ it becomes an anthropological discussion.[4] Through the incarnation, Imago Dei takes on a concreteness that our philosophical, systematic theologies have dismissed. Barth summarizes this thought, "The gracious God of whom we spoke is not an abstraction but the

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[2] Prv 27:17.

[3] Jn 14:6-7; 9b.

[4] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation, part 4*, ed. G.W Bromiley and T.F. Torranc, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1969), 19-20.

concrete reality of 'God in the flesh,' the man Jesus, who was in time and the Lord of time."[5] As we explore Imago Dei, the incarnation of God will inform, instruct, shape, and compose our understanding.

God's love is manifest in Christ. Christ's redemptive work is manifest in *Theosis*, the renewing of humanity in the image of God bringing unity with God. Christ became the lens through which post-Fall humanity can rediscover the Image of God. Advent brought this to light in a longed for, and yet unexpected, manner. An entire nation yearned for a Messiah as an earthly king, instead God became human and simply lived among us.[6] Instead of pursuing political reform, military victories, and religious purity, Jesus came as a frail baby, grew up, and lived among common and disenfranchised sinners.[7]

The incarnation took place in the world. As a result, the formation of our understanding of Christ, God, and Imago Dei does not happen in a vacuum. Ray Anderson states it well, "Formation of Christ in the world does not take place apart from the world."[8] The followers of Christ have argued and disagreed for millennia regarding incarnational ramifications of God, Christ, and humanity. These men and women have mined the depths of complex issues and realized they still see dimly. While the Scriptures stand as our authority, an incarnationally

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[5] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation, part 2*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1960), 571.

[6] Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, 36-37.

[7] Bruce Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 15.

[8] Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 118.

informed discussion on the Imago Dei is not so black-and-white. The issues are multifaceted.

Jesus, as an embodiment of God, makes our ability to describe and define Imago Dei terribly and terrifically complex. Developed and expounded in art, theology, and everyday life, Imago Dei has been contentious among believers and unbelievers alike. Poets, singers, painters, lay people, theologians, and philosophers face questions such as: are we carbon copies, lithographs, photographs, or facsimiles? Are we clones, genetically created, in God's image? Is the image relegated just to our soul? Is the image solely a function? These kinds of questions have filled libraries.

Further intensifying the debate, Imago Dei cannot be addressed without acknowledging and unpacking the effects of "The Fall." Theologians throughout the centuries have wrestled with what effect and/or affect did "The Fall" have on Imago Dei? Was the image marred? Was the image obliterated? Was the loss of the image physical, pertaining to the soul, or both? All this begs the question, what is the image of God? Even more important, how is this discussion relevant to our lives today?

As we explore being created in God's image, the attempt here is to highlight a few of the more prominent melodies and harmonies in this theological debate. Ray Anderson sums up the discourse of the debate well:

> ... does the concept of the Imago Dei mean that there is a subtle 'connective tissue' between the being of God and the being of the human person?
>
> ... are we to understand the imago as an imprint or endowment of the very character of God, or as an abstract idea of humanity, or merely as a goal?

... is ... the physical body ... to be included in the imago.

... does the doctrine of the Fall, in which human nature became hopelessly enslaved to sin, affect the concept of the imago Dei?[9]

Add to all these questions and debate the influences of personal experience, ecclesial history, Christian theology, other religions, politics, and popular culture and it is easy to understand how this discussion becomes convoluted. No one grows up in a vacuum. All these avenues of input influence the way we have envisioned the image of God and Christ in the past and continue to influence the present. Thus, Imago Dei has been the source of centuries of theological muse, debate, and frustration.

Every generation has wrestled with the idea of God and the image of God. The Greeks described their gods and goddesses in anthropomorphic terms.[10] They gave them human-like qualities. Artists and poets personified them with bodies, emotions, and desire fashioned after the humanity they ruled.[11] The Greek gods and goddess with immense appetites and egos brought endless suffering to the people who served them.[12] It appears that in our attempts to envision God or gods we consciously and sub-consciously return to what we know.

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[9] Ray Sherman Anderson, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 70-72.

[10] Jan N. Bremmer, *Greek Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 12.

[11] Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical* (Oxford: Blackwell and Harvard University Press, 2004), 122-123, 183.

[12] Ibid., 188-189.

In the 16th century Michelangelo envisioned God with Greco-Roman features.[13] This Zeus-like picture is painted on the walls of the Sistine chapel. God reclines in heaven reaching out to give Adam life. Adam, on the other hand, limply stretches out to receive life with a finger barely able to hold itself up. This portrait of God and humanity captures our attention and imagination.

In recent history, movies have provided us diverse, illuminating, provocative, and humorous images of God. These stories served to connect us to a person or community's idea of God. If we choose to listen, these images provide portals for Christians to see God from another's perspective. These portrayals are frequently rebuffed within the Christian community as heresy. They commonly provide cannon fodder for sermons and blogs to illustrate heretical and worldly portrayals of God. The images are rarely orthodox and often controversial. Yet, they illuminate someone's understanding of God. If viewed and reflected upon, they can provoke believers to imagine God in a different light. They can consider a vantage point they rejected and will continue to reject. However, they also provide an important mirror for us to look into and see what people outside Judeo-Christian circles see in our beliefs and praxis.

Take for instance *Bruce Almighty*.[14] In 2003 Morgan Freeman characterized God as a patient, kind, and spunky janitor. The whiny self-indulgent Bruce, Jim Carry, blames God for everything wrong in his life. While the

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[13] Carolus at nl.wikipedia, "Adam na restauratie.jpg", Wikimedia, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Adam_na_restauratie.jpg (accessed November 16, 2009).

[14] Jim Carrey, Morgan Freeman, Jennifer Aniston, *Bruce Almighty*, dir. Tom Shadyac (USA: Universal Studios, May 23, 2003).

movie wrestles with the concept of prayer, it utilizes a popular and enduring image of God. God is an older male, grey hair, gentle, patient, eternal, and wise. God is portrayed as interested and involved with individuals, yet God has a broader, more eternal perspective which makes God appear absent or aloof.

Dogma[15] in 1999 provided a vastly different interpretation of God. This movie creates controversy through its crude and cynical portrayal of religious institutions, dogma, and Christianity. While the movie hit hard the abuses and misuses of dogma, it presents a unique picture of God as a young woman, Alanis Morissette. The movie climaxes with two fallen angels centered in the destruction and death created by their effort to manipulate church dogma. In the aftermath, Alanis, God, with childlike wonder flits about in a thigh-length, fairy-like white dress enjoying the world. Many Christians find this portrayal of God offensive at best. Yet, it gives refreshing insight into one cultural interpretation of God and the church, especially an image of God that is not male-centric.

Oh God,[16] released in 1977, gave George Burns an opportunity to create a new and classic interpretation of God. Cigar in one hand, drink in another, quipping about creating the banana, God seems like a jovial sincere old man. God laughs. God engages with the world. God cares about people and what concerned them. God even makes light of the misconceptions of God. George Burns' image of God is vastly different than the stuffy, holy, humorless God of my

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[15] Ben Affleck, Matt Damon, George Carlin, *Dogma*, dir. Kevin Smith (USA: Lions Gate Entertainment, Miramax Films, November 12, 1999).

[16] John Denver, George Burns, *Oh, God*, dir. Carl Reiner (USA: Warner Brothers, October 7, 1977).

childhood. In my church experience, preachers painted pictures of God in hard lines and abstract concepts. God was serious and strict. Yet, my heart resonates with George Burns' interpretation. God is not the police chief in the sky looking to catch you doing something wrong.[17] God is not thrown into hysterics by every sin. God loves creation and enjoys it. Like the other movies, this movie was broadly condemned in its time by Christians as offensive and heretical.

These movies, along with popular images, works of poets, painters, and theologians throughout history have helped craft our thinking, theology, and ideas regarding Imago Dei. They continue to put flesh on abstract ideas, philosophical constructs, and theological debate. They provide digressions and progressions. Regardless of orthodoxy, they shape us. They make God visible. More importantly, they keep the discussion going. In a tactile way they put a mirror up to our thinking, theology, ideas, and praxis. Their expressions make Christians see our beliefs and images of God through another person's eyes. Every generation has had their painter, writer, photographer, or filmmaker who in the vernacular context guided a reimaging of God. Today the medium continues to change. We are moving from CGI and film to holograms, avatars, and artificial intelligence. As this happens, the discussion and breadth of images expands exponentially.

While the breadth of artwork expands, the Bible is clear: humanity is made in the image of God. This is not just a compelling idea. It is the foundational framework for interpreting God at work in the world and God's relationship with

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[17] Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows*, v.

the world.[18] More importantly, it is essential in understanding and developing our view of humanity.[19] This unique and arresting truth, that God chose to make us in God's image, compels a closer look. In Genesis we read,

> God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."
>
> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.
>
> God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."
>
> Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.
>
> God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. [20]

The Judeo-Christian creation story hinges on the belief that God created the heavens and the earth. It climaxes on the day God creates humanity in God's image. It knits us together in the covenantal relationship God entered in and adheres to even in the face of abandonment and rebellion.

The creation account is a stunning narrative. The image of God as poet, singer, and composer orchestrating the universe intrigues us. The narrative creates a beautiful song of God's Spirit hovering over the formless void.[21] As

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[18] Anderson, *On Being Human*, 70.

[19] Ibid., 84.

[20] Gn 1:26-31.

[21] Gn 1:2. In Hebrew, (ruwach, רוּחַ) Spirit, breath, wind, air.

God spoke, the earth formed.[22] God breathed life in to the dust[23] and humanity sprang to life. Rather than some distant Creator, this narrative recounts a present creator who breathed life into all of creation.

As the composition of creation came to fruition, God could have condemned it like a perfectionist. God could have critiqued it and chopped it up like a producer. God could have ambivalently said, "It is done, good enough." Yet God chose to bless it. "God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.'"[24] God looked at Creation and declared it good. God created humanity in God's image and "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good."[25] God took pleasure in Creation. For a brief time, God and humanity shared an intimate relationship marked by the rhythms of walks through the garden in the cool of the evening.

To begin our scriptural analysis, let's turn to the Greek and Hebrew. In the Genesis passages the Hebrew word translated image (celem, מלצ) literally means shady or dark. "From this concept of shade, the idea of shadow developed. A shadow then, being the dark portion cast in the outline of the original object, was an image."[26] The Greek word skia (σκια) provides the closest synonym, referring

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[22] Gn 1:3, 6, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26.

[23] Gn 2:7. In Hebrew, (nashamah, נשמה) spirit, breath, wind, inspiration.

[24] Gn 1:22; Also see, 1:11, 28.

[25] Gn 1:31.

[26] Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1972), 117.

to a "concrete substance representing some idea or prototype. It is definite conformity to a pattern or mold."[27] This reinforces the Hebrew understanding of Imago Dei which drew a direct correlation between humanity and God.

The Septuagint used the word icon (eikon, εικον). "On the Rosetta stone it is used to designate a statue (eikona, εικονα) of Ptolemy which was being built."[28] The Greeks interpreted image as a "quite definite, concrete, objective entities, either the mold or that which is molded,"[29] in other words, archetype. For the Greek interpreters of the Hebrew Scriptures, the idea of image carried with it concreteness. It was not relegated to an abstract or disembodied idea, rather, being made in the image of God carried tangible, tactile capacities.

In the Genesis account God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness."[30] The word for likeness (demûṯ, דמות) in the Hebrew created tension. Unlike the idea of being a shadow or conformed to a mold, the meaning behind likeness carried the "thought of comparison, imitation, or becoming."[31] The Greek authors followed suit using the word similar (homoiosen, ηομοιοσεν). Literally it means, "like, similar, resembling, correspondence to, to be or become like, to compare one thing with another or to make like."[32] In a brief overview of the

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid., 119.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Gn 1:26.

[31] Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love*, 118.

[32] Carl Ludwig Wilibald Grimm, Joseph Henry Thayer, and Christian Gottlob Wilke, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: American Book, 1886), 445.

Hebrew and Greek one can glean the idea that being made in Imago Dei, being the likeness of God, carried with it a broad range of meaning including an on-going work in progress. The picture it created in the minds of the Hebrew and Greek readers was also one that embraced concreteness including the physical creation of our bodies and our souls.

Scripturally, outside of the Genesis One account, there are three direct references to the image of God. Genesis 5:1-3 refers to the creation account and to the offspring of Adam and Eve. Genesis 9:6 instructs Noah and his family not to kill another human being because humanity is made in the image of God. In Colossians 1:15 Paul refers to Jesus as "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation." Christ was Imago Dei made flesh. The incarnate God became the concrete expression of Imago Dei.[33] Christ became the prism through which we more fully understand the image of God.[34]

Biblically and historically our understanding of Imago Dei broke open with Advent when God became flesh. Theologians Thomas Oord and Michael Lodahl conceptualize the incarnation this way, "There is a basic Christian assumption at work here: Jesus' life and death demonstrate or reveal God's love to us. Jesus reveals God's essential character and being, giving us confidence to echo John's bold claim that 'God is love.'"[35] The Apostle John wrote, "God so loved the

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[33] Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 15-16, 18-19.

[34] Ibid., 20.

[35] Thomas Jay Oord and Michael E. Lodahl, *Relational Holiness: Responding to the Call of Love* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2005), 92.

world."[36] Christ became the incarnate Imago Dei. As Barth said, "theology has become anthropology since God became man."[37] In Christ the disciples touched, felt, and observed the living God.[38] Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."[39] Jesus claimed to be the visible image of the invisible God. As quoted earlier, Paul wrote, Christ is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ... For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him."[40] Listen to Paul's claims about Christ: image of the invisible God, the first born of creation, the fullness of God.

Emmanuel is the manifestation of all the Israelite's hopes and dreams, the living totem of God's continued presence and favor. Matthew begins his Gospel,

> Abraham was the father of Isaac,
> Isaac the father of Jacob,
> Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,
> Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar ...
> Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,
> Obed the father of Jesse,
> and Jesse the father of King David.[41]

For most Christians this is only a list of names. For the Jewish nation, genealogy served an important legal and relational role, a totem pole of living stories.[42] First,

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[36] Jn 3:16.

[37] Karl Barth quoted in Anderson, *On Being Human*, 70.

[38] 1 Jn 1-3.

[39] Jn 14:9b.

[40] Col 1:15, 19.

[41] Mt 1:2-6.

[42] Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, D-G*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 676.

genealogy provided the evidence through which one proved Jewish blood. Second, it served as a means to remember history through the narratives of people's lives. As a result, each name became narrative and mental imagery on the totem pole. The names elicited stories. Some stories were of faithfulness, others of betrayal. Some stories were of mercy and provision and others of hardship and bitter times. At the head of the totem pole sat the Messiah, the culmination of a nation's hopes and dreams.

Matthew explains via the totem pole, Jesus is God with us. History builds toward Christ. Christ reveals meaning back down the totem pole through father Abraham to the Fall and finally to Creation itself. Simultaneously, Jesus provides us a portal through which we enter into the ongoing work of God in humanity and Creation. Jesus becomes the apex of the Judeo-Christian history. Jesus becomes a way of understanding history backwards while providing on-going interpretation into the future. We can see God's love through the weaving of stories and lives leading up to the outrageous act of incarnation and redemption.

While Christ was the head of the totem pole, he confounded the Jewish nation. Jesus' claim to be the Messiah seemed incredulous. Jesus, neither tame or respectable,[43] failed to live up to cultural expectations. The Messiah was to be ruler, a king of obvious power and authority. Instead, Christ walked among the people. Instead of grasping worldly power, Jesus invited the world to enter him. Instead of asserting Kingship, Jesus embraced servanthood and sonship. Instead of the Messiah wearing a crown, Jesus painted the image of a life-giving

[43] Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, 23.

vine. Instead of a worldly kingdom, Jesus planted the image of a vineyard.[44] "Remain in me" was Jesus' admonition, invitation, and call. This call to remain was a visual one,[45] born of common vines, and it came with a promise: "I will remain in you." The invitation Jesus gave literally meant to build a home in Jesus.[46] Dwell with Jesus. In John 15:9 Jesus reframes this from being attached to the life giving vine to "remain in my love." The life giving vine is God's love. Jesus left the disciples with an imperative, repeated twice, "love each other."[47]

Paul was quite clear, "Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory."[48] Yet, the idea of a deity embracing pain and suffering out of love remains unfathomable. We repeat the story and still we do not understand it. Christ's presence in history provided the cornerstone, yet Jesus was and remains a mystery. God testified that Jesus is the Messiah through the Spirit.[49] Yet the Israelites were unable to recognize him. Jesus was not the Messiah, the vision of God incarnate, the Israelites had been nurtured to recognize.[50] The Israelites

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[44] Jn 15:1, 4, 5, 8-16, 17.

[45] Manning, *A Glimpse of Jesus*, 84-85.

[46] Jn 15:1-5.

[47] Jn 15:12, 17.

[48] 1 Tm 3:16.

[49] Lk 3:21-22.

[50] Celia Brewer Marshall, *A Guide Through the New Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 33.

expected the Image of God in flesh to take the authority of David's kingship.[51] They expected Jesus to consolidate power and deliver the Israelite people from the Romans as Moses had delivered the Israelites from the Egyptians. The Messiah's widely understood mission was to rebuild national power and influence.[52] Disappointed and disillusioned, many of the Jews rejected Christ.

Yet for those who believed, Jesus became a physical icon, a mental, narrative and kinesthetic image through which to see and know God. The image of Jesus the Messiah we construct, whether as an ancient Jew or today as a believer, foundationally altars our praxis. Unfortunately, the false images of the expected Messiah continue to cause iconic dissonance.

For instance take the example of WWJD, "What would Jesus do?"[53] This is a great question. I believe that the mental image of Jesus each person creates drastically alters our actions. These four letters created a unique and powerful icon that creates narrative images in our minds. People reflect upon their mental image of what Jesus would do in specific situations by reflecting on narrative images created by Scripture, sermons, and conversations. Then Christians put what they imagined into practice.

The point is the picture of Jesus that emerged in their minds became a reality in that individual's action. As a result, a breadth of decisions based upon

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[51] Leander E. Keck and J. Paul Sampley, eds. *The New Interpreter's Bible: Luke, John*, vol. 9 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 366, 369.

[52] Ibid., 366.

[53] This movement was a re-envisioning of Charles M. Sheldon's Classic work "In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?", 1897.

"What would Jesus Do" was justified. Yet, much of this thinking was conjecture, supposition, superstition, and legalism.

This question was employed with good intentions. Whether or not it was reflective of Jesus remains debatable. Regardless of the misconceptions, this practice of imagining "What Would Jesus Do" inspired creative expressions of faith. It was a brilliant use of imagery. Unfortunately, the popular fad never became a compelling movement. In part this was due to the interpretation of the image and scriptures. The focus was on actions while Jesus' call was to reform the heart first. Unbelievers never saw the loving and giving God. Rather they saw Jesus' own life incarnated in His followers lives through acts of legalism.

Historically, after Christ returned to heaven, the Imago Dei debate sought a more theologically definable articulation. The early church fathers held a wide range of often disparate and confusing beliefs. Gregory of Nyssa (335-394 CE) wrote that the image of God had primarily to do with human intellect[54] and our call to participate in every good.[55] Irenaeus of Lyons (2nd Century CE) attributed it to human freedom expressed in "lordship or dominion over one's actions."[56] Clement of Alexandria (150-217 CE) followed Platonic and Hellenistic influences and believed it was directly tied to human reason and perfect rationality.[57] Many

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[54] Gordon Haddon Clark, *The Biblical Doctrine of Man*, 2nd ed., Trinity Paper, no. 7 (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1992), 11.

[55] Christoforos Stavropoulos, *Partakers of Divine Nature* (Minneapolis: Light and Life, 1976), 26.

[56] Jane Kopas, *Sacred Identity: Exploring a Theology of the Person* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1994), 135-136.

[57] Ibid., 135.

of the early Church fathers believed Imago Dei to be tied singularly with the soul.[58] Justin Martyr (103-165 CE) believed it included the very form of our human body.[59]

Despite Justin Martyr's enthusiastic inclusion of the human body, Anderson points out that there was a widespread fear of giving God bodily form:

> Fear of anthropomorphism, which imports creaturely aspects of human being into a concept of God, threw up an almost insurmountable barrier to including the physical body in the correspondence between human being and God's being.[60]

In other words, while in popular culture today we imagine God as an old wise man or a young woman flitting about, theologically and historically, the church fathers and mothers believed it unacceptable to give the invisible God human form or attributes. However, in reference to Christ, because Jesus was God incarnate, it was acceptable and helpful to create images of Christ. Christoforos Stavropoulos summed up the early church fathers:

> Human beings, created as they are of matter and spirit, are called to share in all the good things of God. Within each human being, God sows all those seed like gifts which make us His image and lead us toward His likeness, insomuch as we cultivate these gifts. This is our calling – Theosis. Theosis is achieved little by little, through the step by step spiritualization of our human nature.[61]

A radical embracing of asceticism emerged during this time. Asceticism was employed in order that the body would not hinder the spirit from entering unity

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[58] Stavropoulos, *Partakers of Divine Nature*, 25-26.

[59] Clark, *The Biblical Doctrine of Man*, 11.

[60] Anderson, *On Being Human*, 71.

[61] Stavropoulos, *Partakers of Divine Nature*, 26.

with God.[62] These writings of the early church fathers and mothers provided the framework for later theologians as their constructs informed later theological developments.

St. Augustine (354-450 CE) articulated a theological argument that gained traction and dominated theology until the reformation. Jane Kopas summarizes Augustine of Hippo:

> Augustine developed an original understanding of the image of God in humans as a Trinity of memory, understanding, and will. He took a psychological and philosophical view and connected it with a spiritual capacity to remember, understand, and love God. This human capacity reflected the Trinity in God.[63]

For Augustine rationality makes one an image of God.[64] Augustine's idea of Imago Dei was heavily influenced by Plato's understanding of forms and his own doctrine of Original Sin.[65] On the other hand, Augustine's doctrine of Original Sin and his interpretation of the Fall as recorded in Genesis 3, depicted Imago Dei as irreparably damaged.[66] What remained was scarred, diminished, marred, and barely recognizable in comparison to the experience of the Garden.

As Augustine worked out his doctrine of Original Sin, his thesis contended pride was the root cause of the Fall. This "enormous offense against the

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[62] Laura Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers: Sayings, Lives, and Stories of Early Christian Women* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2001), 24.

[63] Kopas, *Sacred Identity*, 135-136.

[64] Mary T. Clark, *Augustine of Hippo*, Outstanding Christian Thinkers (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1994), 48.

[65] Augustine, *Saint Augustine: The Trinity*, ed. Stephen McKenna, vol. 45 of *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), 227.

[66] Kopas, *Sacred Identity*, 136.

sovereignty of God"[67] created an insurmountable break in relationship and marred humanity in regards to Imago Dei. Because pride was the root cause of Original Sin, it is interesting Augustine did not blame the physical body for sin. Original Sin was a form in the Platonic sense of forms, and thus Sin was committed in the will or soul. As Gordon Clark points out,

> it is clear that Augustine does not blame the body for sin but the soul or, more truly, human persons who reject God's will as made known by God to Adam or to humankind through his word in Scripture or in his incarnate Son. Nor is sin due to any defect in nature. Sin originates in history. [68]

In essence, while we are marred in regards to the image of God, Augustine did not and does not relate it to any defect in nature. This was an interesting hair to split, however understandable in light of Platonic structures. Augustine blamed the soul and pride. Pride was the downfall of humanity. Pride was the Original Sin. This left the door open for creation to bear the marks and dissonance of Original Sin while still reflecting and retaining God's original design as good.

The Reformers drew heavily from Augustine's doctrine of Imago Dei and Original Sin as they developed their own articulation. Calvin claimed Imago Dei is located in the soul, "For although God's glory shines forth in the outer man, yet there is no doubt that the proper seat of his image is in the soul."[69] And,

> although the primary seat of the divine image was in the mind and heart, or in the soul and its powers, yet there was no part of man, not even the body itself, in which some sparks did not glow. It is

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[67] Ibid., 180.

[68] Clark, *Augustine of Hippo*, 106.

[69] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill and Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 186.

> sure that even in the several parts of the world some traces of God's glory shine.[70]

Calvin affirmed Augustine's belief that Imago Dei was rooted in the mind, heart, and soul, and that the body pre-Fall reflected divine glory. He believed that the physical self as well as the pre-Fall nature contained sparks of God's image. For Calvin, however, Original Sin became a theological roadblock. The only bridge was a firm delineation and articulation of the doctrine of Total Depravity. Calvin was forced to accept his own logical outcome that The Fall led to a total corruption of the Imago Dei.[71]

Through the doctrine of Total Depravity, Calvin dismissed the idealism of pre-Fall humanity with the effects of Original Sin. Total Depravity simply states post-Fall there is no remnants of Imago Dei in humanity.[72] Humanity and creation are corrupt and bear no witness to the image of God.[73] Through election, God chooses those people who will enter the redemptive work through Christ.[74] Calvin asserted that the restoration of humanity was at work only in the lives of the elect. So, while Imago Dei is marred beyond recognition, the work of Christ renews some measure of divine grace within the elect.[75] Thus, God restores the

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[70] Ibid., 188.

[71] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans 1983), 250, 258, 265, 293.

[72] Ibid., 260, 273.

[73] Ibid., 249-250, 253.

[74] Ibid., 252, 274-275.

[75] Ibid., 251-252.

elect to unity with God.[76] For Calvin the challenge remained regarding those who are not elect. This ardent view of Total Depravity and election appears to negate God's love and desire that none should perish.

Calvin's work regarding Imago Dei paralleled Martin Luther's. Luther provided this helpful articulation to the debate, "This is what they maintain: God is free; therefore since man is created according to the image of God, he also has a free memory, mind, and will."[77] Notice the influence of Augustine. Luther illuminated this distillation by parsing words, "Moses does not employ the word 'similitude,' but only 'image.' Perhaps he wanted to avoid an ambiguity of speech and for this reason repeated the noun 'image.'"[78] Luther continued this line of thought:

> The main goal, then, to which Scripture points is that man is created according to the likeness of God; in eternity, therefore, he is to live with God, and while he is here on earth, he is to preach God, thank Him, and patiently obey His Word. In this life we lay hold of this goal in ever so weak a manner; but in the future life we shall attain it fully.[79]

Similar to Calvin, we can see the influence of Original Sin and the doctrine of Total Depravity on Luther's thinking.[80] As Luther wrote, "the will is extraordinarily depraved."[81] Luther also stated,

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[76] Ibid., 277.

[77] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Church and Ministry, 2*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 40 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press and Concordia, 1969), 61.

[78] Ibid., 68.

[79] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1-5*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press and Concordia, 1958), 131.

[80] Ibid., 114.

> in his leprous flesh, everything is almost dead and without sensation, except that he is rather violently excited to lust. ... after the fall death crept like leprosy into all our perceptive powers, so that with our intellect we cannot even understand that image. ... after sin, we all know how great passion is in the flesh, which is not only passionate, in its desire but also in its disgust after it has acquired what it wanted.[82]

Sin corrupts our understanding and ability to live as images of God, even after God's free grace takes root in our lives.[83]

Luther's theology revolved around a sole theme, the grace of God. In fact, Luther would articulate that we are unable to do anything good without the saving grace of God.[84] Thus, it is only by the grace of God we are aware of God and respond to God through Christ. That is why Luther wrote,

> Therefore when we speak about that image, we are speaking about something unknown. Not only have we had no experience of it, but we continually experience the opposite; and so we hear nothing except bare words. In Adam there was an enlightened reason, a true knowledge ... and a most sincere desire to love God and his neighbor.[85]

Luther's honesty and humility in confessing "we are speaking about something unknown" leaves the theological door slightly cracked. Unfortunately, especially to those in the Reformation's broad shadow, the stain of Calvin's Total Depravity became so pervasive that it obliterated even Augustine's understanding and included the entirety of the physical world as depraved.

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[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid., 62.

[83] Ibid., 62-63, 71.

[84] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Career of the Reformer, 2*, ed. Helnut T. Lehman, vol. 32 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press and Concordia, 1958), 83, 92-93.

[85] Luther, *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1-5*, 63.

The challenge left by Augustine, Calvin, and Luther was that the image resided solely in our psyche: soul, spirit, and mind. This technically left room in Augustine's construct for the physical creation to still reflect God's glory, however, humanity was imputed with sin.[86] While Augustine stopped short of the doctrine of Total Depravity, Calvin and Luther embraced it fully[87] in an effort to combat any hint of human effort receiving credit for salvation.[88] Luther clearly stated, "Faith alone saves."[89] Salvation, which brings the renewal of Imago Dei, the renewal of the corrupted soul, mind, and spirit was solely the gift of grace.[90] In Calvin's articulation, God's grace for the elect was irresistible.[91] Luther, on the other hand, pulled up short of irresistible grace and held ardently that by grace alone are we saved.[92] Or as Luther said, "we are saved by his immutable love."[93] Either way, humanity was left powerless and with an abstract Platonic form of Imago Dei.

While these theologians rooted Imago Dei in the psyche, and tracked its destruction through Original Sin and Total Depravity, they described Imago Dei in

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[86] Clark, *Augustine of Hippo*, 52-53.

[87] Kenneth J. Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley's Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 38.

[88] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 274.

[89] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Christian Society, 1*, ed. Halnut T. Lehman, vol. 44 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press and Concordia, 1966), 264.

[90] Ibid., 280-281, 285, 287.

[91] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 256-258.

[92] Luther, *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1-5*, 342.

[93] Ibid., 242.

regards to attributes of God's thinking, understanding, and governing. The biggest hole in this thinking was that it did not account for the essence and ethos of God. The Bible is clear: God is love.[94] Or as Richard Rice claims, "From a Christian perspective, love is the first and last word in the biblical portrait of God."[95] In the 18th century another prominent theologian emerged. His passion was to make Christ accessible to the broken masses.

John Wesley (1703-1791) was born a generation after the prominent European Protestant reformers. Wesley's influence over England and the New World transformed a generation, two nations, and continues to have deep implications both in theology and in practical ministry.[96] Wesley was an eclectic reader from an Anglican upbringing.[97] Theologically he would describe himself as a hairsbreadth from Calvin and Luther.[98] He embraced the Augustinian and Reformation theologians' understanding of Original Sin and narrowly skirted the theological construct of Total Depravity partly due to his slightly different articulation of Imago Dei.[99]

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[94] 1 Jn 4:16.

[95] Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 18.

[96] Steve Harper, *The Way to Heaven: The Gospel According to John Wesley*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 6.

[97] Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 31.

[98] Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 19-20, 44.

[99] John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Letters, Essays, Dialogues, Addresses*, 3rd ed., vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 230.

Wesley believed there were three parts to the Image of God: the natural, political, and moral:

> "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him:" ... not barely in his natural image, a picture of his own immortality; a spiritual being, endued with understanding, freedom of will, and various affections; nor merely in his political image, the governor of this lower world, having "dominion over the fishes of the sea, and over all the earth;" –but chiefly in his moral image; which, according to the Apostle, is "righteousness and true holiness." ... In this image of God was man made. "God is love:" Accordingly, man at his creation was full of love; which was the sole principle of all his tempers, thoughts, words, and actions. God is full of justice, mercy, and truth; so was man as he came from the hands of his Creator. God is spotless purity; and so man was in the beginning pure from every sinful blot; otherwise God could not have pronounced him, as well as all the other work of his hands, "very good."[100]

For Wesley, the natural image encompassed the spirit, understanding, will, and liberty we were given at our creation. The political image was the responsibility to govern; to be God's ambassador to the beasts, birds, and creation; and to govern one's self. The moral image was developed in terms of God's love, righteousness, and holiness.[101] Among these, Wesley stressed that Imago Dei was chiefly the moral image.

Wesley further clarified this distinction in his sermon, Justification by Faith:

> In the image of God was man made; holy as he that created him is holy, merciful as the author of all is merciful, perfect as his Father in heaven is perfect. As God is love, so man dwelling in love dwelt in God, and God in him. God made him to be 'an image of his own eternity,' an incorruptible picture of the God of glory. He was accordingly pure, as God is pure, from every spot of sin. He knew

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[100] John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Sermons 2*, 3rd ed., vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 66-67.

[101] Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 22-23.

> not evil in any kind or degree, but was inwardly and outwardly sinless and undefiled.[102]

In this sermon you see the influences of the mystics and the Eastern Orthodox Church. This articulation was reminiscent of the Trinitarian "we" in the creation account. God lives in love expressed through community. God creates in love and out of the love expressed within the Trinity. Humanity, in the Image of God, is an expression of that love. There is no greater evidence of love than God breathing life into humanity. God breathed into humanity giving a living soul.[103] Shared through the relationship of the Trinity, expressed to humanity and creation, we see the greatest expression of Imago Dei, love.

The theme of God's love filled Wesley's letters, journals, sermons, and theology and inextricably influenced his decisions in all forms of practical ministry:

> God is love, he [the Christian man] is conformed to the same likeness. He is full of love to his neighbor, of universal love, not confined to one sect or party, not restrained to those who agree with him in opinions or in outward modes of worship, or to those who are allied to him by blood or recommended by nearness of place. Neither does he love those only that love him or that are endeared to him by intimacy of acquaintance. But his love resembles that of Him whose mercy is over all His works. It soars above all these scanty bounds, embracing neighbours and strangers, friends and enemies-yea, not only the good and gentle, but also the forward, the evil, and unthankful. ...
>
> His love, as to these, so to all mankind, is in itself generous and disinterested; springing from no view of advantage to himself,

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[102] John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Sermons 1*, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1984), 184.

[103] Harper, *The Way to Heaven*, 22.

> from no regard to profit or praise-no, nor even the pleasure of loving.[104]

To Wesley, this is Imago Dei. Through this lens our natural state and political state are understood. It is in this generous and self-giving love that the image of God becomes visible in our own self and in those around us. It also compels us to see Imago Dei not only in believers, but in all people.[105] All people and all creation possess the fruit of God's creative love. This description of Imago Dei as love provides the foundation for bypassing the "elect" as an elitist group.[106]

This emphasis on love in Wesley's works was deeply influenced by the Moravians and Luther's introduction to Romans.[107] At an Aldersgate Street meeting of the Moravians Wesley first felt his heart "strangely warmed" by God's love and grace.[108] While Imago Dei is directly tied to moral underpinnings, Imago Dei is a tangible reflection of God's love and this love transforms our hearts and manifests in humanity through the renewing of our actions and attitudes.[109]

Along these lines Wesley offered a different path of understanding sin, The Fall, and the saving work of God's grace than previous theologians. He was

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[104] John Wesley, *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M./ 2, 1742-1749* (London: Epworth Press, 1931), 376-80.

[105] John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Sermons 3*, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1986), 207.

[106] Wesley, *Works of John Wesley: Letters, Essays*, 230.

[107] John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Journals 1*, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 98-103.

[108] Howard A. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley and Patterns for Church Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 26.

[109] Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love*, 110, 31.

fortunate enough to stand at a place in history where he was able to read and weigh all that had passed before him. He held this wealthy theological inheritance in constant tension with his commitment to practical integration of faith and God's love as lived out in everyday ministry to real, common people.[110] Ultimately, Wesley defined sin "as a malignant disease rather than an obliteration of the imago Dei in fallen human nature."[111] Sin was not a physical destruction of creation. Instead, that which was created in love still bore evidence of that love and its loving Creator. "Sin was not some mysterious spiritual entity that attached itself to human nature like a barnacle attaches itself to the hull of a ship, instead, Wesley spoke of sin in relational terms."[112] Sin was the breaking of that deep, life-giving relationship with God.[113] It was rejecting God's love and choosing instead to trust in ourselves.

Kenneth Collins captures Wesley's articulation of sin:

> The nature of human sin ... is not pride, as is sometimes mistakenly supposed, but unbelief, the perversion of a relationship between God and humanity. A lack of faith in God, then, the desire to be independent, is the true foundation for the *subsequent* evils of pride and self-will. In other words, out of alienation and unbelief, pride and self-will inevitably flow; out of alienation and unbelief every other evil disposition emerges.[114]

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[110] Heitzenrater, *People Called Methodists*, xi, 165-171.

[111] Albert Cook Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Tidings, 1975), 34.

[112] Harper, *The Way to Heaven*, 23.

[113] Wesley, *Works of John Wesley: Sermons 2*, 231.

[114] John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Sermons 2*, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1985), 178.

This is where Wesley's departure from Augustine, Calvin, and Luther becomes helpful in the understanding of Imago Dei. The effects of sin remain the same; we are alienated from God and helpless to change.[115] We cannot come to God on our own.[116] God had to do something to awaken us to the Image of God in which we were created.[117] For Wesley, this awakening came not through election but Prevenient Grace.

In his articulation of Prevenient Grace, the grace that comes before salvation through the universal work of Christ,[118] Wesley accounted for free will. "Wesley affirms that after the fall God did not leave humanity in this utterly dejected state, but re-inscribed, in some measure, a knowledge of this moral law upon the human heart."[119] Yet this basic knowledge, this awareness of divine attributes, was a result of God's Prevenient Grace at work.[120] Through Christ's incarnation, Christ's death, and resurrection, grace is freely given to all humanity.

Once awakened from an ignorance of sin and our broken relationship, God lovingly grants each person the on-going ability to choose to trust in this grace.[121] The choice is to either embrace a relationship with God or to reject it.

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[115] Ibid., 177-182.

[116] John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Sermons 4*, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1987), 154-156.

[117] Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 41.

[118] Harper, *The Way to Heaven*, 35-36.

[119] Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 41.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Ibid., 45.

While the initial work of prevenient grace is irresistible[122] and persistent throughout a person's life, later graces, including convincing grace, are resistible.[123] The ability to choose or reject God remains and the matter of election is reduced from a dictatorial mandate to the simple fact that God knows the future as well as the past.[124] As with Creation and The Fall, a foreknowledge of disobedience and rejection is not enough of a deterrent to keep God from fully loving and fully vesting in a person. Instead, it describes the ongoing work of God through Jesus Christ in all humanity and creation.[125]

Prevenient Grace awakens and makes us aware of God's love for us.[126] It offers each of us the opportunity to recognize our need for God and to respond to it. When we choose to receive God's ongoing graces, God's perfecting love[127] continues to work in our lives renewing us in the image of God.[128] This work continues to draw us deeper into relationship with God over a lifetime. This process is what Wesley would refer as Christian Perfection, the love of God being renewed in our lives.[129] This portrait of Imago Dei is lavish with concreteness.

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[122] Ibid., 44.

[123] Ibid., 54.

[124] This thought was articulated by Reverend Shannon Hartley.

[125] Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit*, 56.

[126] Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 39-40.

[127] Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love*, 31.

[128] Wesley, *Works of John Wesley: Sermons 2*, 5-7, 17.

[129] Wesley, *Works of John Wesley: Sermons 2*, 7.

With this survey of the theological landscape, I am left with this one pervasive echoing thought: there is something special about humanity. Jane Kopas captures this truth well, "Whether individuals exemplify the image perfectly or live up to it as an ideal is not an issue. The species-wide presence of the image of God in creatures undergirds the worth of all human beings."[130] There is sacredness to being human. Regardless of the image being a concrete form or being rooted in our reason or soul, we are sacred. The point is that God made us in God's image and, on that basis alone, Jane Kopas aptly points out, humanity is sacred.

In our post-modern ethos of ever-changing relationships and personal-preferences, Imago Dei is the response that helps us reground value in the person.[131] There is inherent value in humanity and all of creation because God affirmed all of Creation, including humanity, "very good." Theologically and historically we may not be able to clearly agree on a definition of Imago Dei, yet, all theologians agree that because we are created in the Image of God we are significant to God.[132] More compelling, Wesley illuminates the truth that God,

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[130] Kopas, *Sacred Identity*, 133.

[131] Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 197-199.

[132] R. Larry Shelton, *Cross and Covenant: Interpreting the Atonement for 21st Century Mission* (Tyrone, GA: Paternoster, 2006), 25.

who is love, is at work in all of humanity and Creation.[133] God is presently restoring this image and inviting us to trust in this work.[134]

The very real problem and implications of this image come from the images of God that are created in the wake of the Platonic thoughts of Augustine, Calvin, and Luther. Living in the shadow of an Original Sin and Total Depravity laden theology and praxis, the language of Creation being "very good" seems unfamiliar, unearthly, and idyllic. The trouble with centering Imago Dei in the soul and mind is that it serves to disassociate it from physical life. In essence, it returns us to a neo-Gnosticism and neo-asceticism where creation and our bodies are at war with the work of God.

Furthermore, theologians, pastors, and lay people alike have turned away from the earthiness of the Jewish understanding of God and embraced a more philosophical, reason-centered approach unaware of how Greek thought has supplanted and reinterpreted God's original image-rich relationships. While theologically and philosophically accurate, there emerges a physical space between the Creator and creation with repetitive use of abstract philosophical theology. The abstract disembodiment of theology from the person of God serves to alienate our ability to imagine Imago Dei. It creates unattainable images of faith and God. In the Jewish understanding of Scripture, the road to the sacred went through the secular.[135] God was not distant from humanity. God was still

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[133] Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love*, 25.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Abraham Joshua Heschel and Susannah Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), 76.

the One who hovered over the deep and breathed life into the void and dust. God remained immersed in common endeavors and simple deeds.[136]

When we insist on focusing on philosophical images of God so unreachable that it creates a chasm between the Creator and the created, it manifests as anxiety in the beloved.[137] It generates an unattainable reality.[138] Often within disembodied theology, instead of the image reflecting God's love, the image becomes the maker of its own image and refracts the light of Christ onto itself.[139] Instead of resting in the mystery of God's love, we wrestle with God desperate to receive God's love based on our merits.[140] Instead of trusting and resting in God's love, like Jacob we grab God's ankle demanding a blessing[141] for the images and efforts we create.

Zephaniah paints a picture of God singing over us and of us being renewed in God's love.[142] However, God's people prefer the Protestant work ethic.[143] While hard work is not diametrically opposed to God's love, the

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[136] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), 263-267.

[137] Manning, *Abba's Child*, 19-20.

[138] Brennan Manning, *Ruthless Trust: The Ragamuffin's Path to God* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2000), 73-74.

[139] Manning, *Abba's Child*, 40-41.

[140] Gn 32:24.

[141] Gn 25:23-26; 27:1-40.

[142] Zep 3:17.

[143] Robert E. Skinner, *Two Guns from Harlem: The Detective Fiction of Chester Himes* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1989), 121.

Protestant work ethic has brought with it a not-so-secret belief that we can earn God's love. Instead of trusting that we are wonderfully and fearfully made, we clutch to the conductor's wand insisting on making ourselves into a composition pleasing to God.[144] Instead of trusting the incomprehensible mystery of the paradox of God's present love with the perceived distance of space, time, and brokenness, we become self-made people, determined to do it by ourselves. We even have a tough time imaging that God knit us together. It is impossible to comprehend that God thought about us while we were in our mother's womb. This motherly image of God with needle and thread knitting the sinews and tissues is incomprehensible in an abstraction of God.[145] It would appear that we are not unlike the Israelites; we have a terribly difficult time believing or picturing God is love, much less living it out.

Too frequently we have created with our theology and philosophy an insurmountable image of God as abstract and disengaged, while the biblical reality that God loves us, God is active, God is intimately involved in the routines of life, and God takes great joy in us bounces off our self-sustaining, broken hearts. Somehow we cannot imagine in our modern minds that God would sing over us, pursue us, and take great joy in us solely because we are God's children. We have a difficult time envisioning God enjoying creation as portrayed in *Bruce Almighty*, *Dogma*, and *Oh God*. These images show God engaged in

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[144] Ps 139.

[145] Ps 139:13; Jer 1:5.

creation and enjoying life. They even illuminate how unexpected God may appear, contradicting our expected images of a Messiah.

Equally, the focus of Protestant thinking to contend with the Fall profoundly influences the way we imagine God.[146] First off it has become unfathomable to imagine the Creator of heaven and earth enjoying creation, looking at it, and saying, "it was very good."[147] Total Depravity and the complete loss and/or corruption of Imago Dei have consumed Protestant and Evangelical energies and imagination.[148]

Imago Dei appears to be relegated to nothing more than a utopian ideal. While acknowledged, it remains safely tucked in the context of pre-Fall language. It lacks the teeth of paradox where we are forced to contend with the present Fallen state and the temporal reality of God's love, prevenient grace, and Christ's present and ongoing work of redemption. God's image as marred, broken, lost, diseased, or any euphemism we choose describes the present brokenness of our lives. The malignant disease of sin easily corrupts our view of the world around us. However, Christ came to re-create all of Creation. Redemption is not the removal of something from our lives, rather it is an invitation to a relationship, to

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[146] Julius H. Rubin, *Religious Melancholy and Protestant Experience in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 16-18.

[147] Gn 1:31.

[148] Daniel Steele, *Love Enthroned: Essays on Evangelical Perfection* (New York: Nelson and Phillips, 1875), 331-333.

enter God's love,[149] and to join in the work of re-creation. Jesus called this the Kingdom of God, describing a present and coming reality.

Salvation is not a free pass out of Hell. It does not magically make all of life easy or innocent. This invitation and God's love do not instantaneously remove all temptation, bad habits, or lustful desires. God's love does not immediately solve our financial crisis or keep our spouse from leaving. Instead, this love, as we learn and grow to trust it, brings us peace, calmness when there is much to think about, when our stomach churns, or when our heart breaks. It brings us joy, a deep gratitude in all situations, which strengths our souls. It also gives us the courage to love others when our heart tells us we are right and the other person doesn't deserve grace or forgiveness. This is not an incantation of forgetfulness and bliss. To think such Pollyanna thoughts would be lunacy. Rather, it is re-creation of relationship involving difficult and personal choices and sacrifices. It is the process of entering into the renewal of Imago Dei with God, theosis. It is accepting the Potter's hands. God as love makes Imago Dei intrinsically relational.

For Abraham and the Jewish nation, Imago Dei was marked by covenant.[150] For humanity, in light of Christ's work, it is a returning to the eternal

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[149] David Brian Perrin, *Women Christian Mystics: Speak to Our Times* (Franklin, WI: Sheed and Ward, 2001), 33.

[150] Gn 12:1-5; 19:4ff.

dance.[151] It is trusting in the love of God. Larry Shelton captures this covenantal image:

> Described in profoundly personal and intimate terms, such as hesed (union) and 'emeth (faithfulness, steadfastness), this intimate bond of loving, faithful union between God and humans provides a safeguard for even the most threatening and distressing situations of life. On the basis of this love, God expresses the relationship with Israel in the form of a covenant. ... This covenant with Israel is a token of divine love, of the communion between Yahweh and the people. ... In fact, the divine/human relationship finds expression in the creation of humanity as the image of God.[152]

He goes on to quote Old Testament theologian Edmond Jacob:

> To remain an image man must maintain his relationship with God, he must remember that he is only an ambassador and his dominion over creation will be effective only in proportion as that relationship becomes more real.[153]

We function in our Imago Dei through the way we love God and love one another. This covenantal relationship in turn influences how we understand Scripture.

Our mental, physical, narrative, and kinesthetic pictures of Imago Dei indelibly influence how we live in relationships. If we believe God condemned post-Fall humanity and that we are Totally Depraved, then the picture of Imago Dei will have no real influence or meaning in praxis. If we believe the very DNA

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[151] Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I am a Missional, Evangelical, Post/Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-Yet-Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished Christian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Youth Specialties Zondervan, 2004), 56.

[152] Shelton, *Cross and Covenant*, 24.

[153] Theodorus Christian Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, eng. ed. (Newton, MA: Charles T. Branford, 1966), 171. Quoted in Shelton, *Cross and Covenant*, 25.

God created us with is destroyed and replaced with self-serving narcissism, then even if God renews us, we still contend with the Fall as our primary function.

This emphasis paints a very harsh picture of God in our minds. This mental image of rebellious children forever punished by God fails to woo us. We live in fear of God not because of God's awesomeness, but because we fear God's constant condemnation and punishment. This is reinforced by the narrative images from a chorus line of people, Scriptures, and art which tell us we are sinners.[154] While this is the truth, a focus on Sin without grasping God's love, ultimately leads us to retain an image that God never moves past condemning us. We project upon God the feelings of our condemnation. This view of God and Imago Dei culminates in self-flagellation. Self-condemnation and merciless self-inflicted punishment are the dissonant chords of our life's opus resulting from perceived and real moments when we missed the mark.[155] These mental images of the eternal policeman reinforce our perfectionist, moralistic, and deterministic idealism. Brennan Manning writes, "The perfectionist and moralist in the spiritual life is locked into the saint-or-sinner syndrome, tyrannized by an all-or-nothing mentality."[156]

As Brennan Manning continues,

> we cannot assume that He feels about us the way we feel about ourselves-unless we love ourselves compassionately, intensely, and freely. In human form Jesus revealed to us what God is like. He exposed our projections for the idolatry that they are and gave

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[154] Manning, *A Glimpse of Jesus*, 6.

[155] Ibid.

[156] Ibid., 7.

> us the way to become free of them. It takes a profound conversion to accept that God is relentlessly tender and compassionate toward us just as we are-not in spite of our sins and faults (that would not be total acceptance), but with them. Though God does not condone or sanction evil, He does not withhold His love because there is evil in us.[157]

Essentially, these mental images we create of Sin and our projections of God's response to Sin profoundly influence our concept of Imago Dei. When we are perfectionistic and Fall-centric, it creates a relationship of fear and self-loathing.[158] As Daniel Steele captured Calvinistic tendencies in the late 1800's, "in Calvinistic writings especially, we find that the true measure of piety is self-abhorrence."[159] It amplifies the adversarial and mistrust of God. This unequivocally changes our praxis, regardless of our theology. It changes the way we treat God and one another. Our mental and narrative image is quite literally no different than the view from prison.

The point is many Protestant and Evangelical Christians living today are post-Fall centric and tend to disassociate their understanding of the image of God being renewed in each person which is a present reality and Truth. The truth is that God is love. The truth is without God's love we are unable to re-enter the Divine Dance. As the Apostle John wrote, "Perfect love drives out all fear, for fear has to do with punishment."[160] God does not condemn us. Rather God, through love, seeks to save us. Imago Dei for many Protestants remains an abstract form

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[157] Manning, *Abba's Child*, 19-20.

[158] Steele, *Love Enthroned*, 332.

[159] Ibid., 331.

[160] 1 Jn 4:18.

or ideal without real life praxis. It is essential we rediscover this precious gift. That we take up the challenge to love as God first loved us.

Let me see if I can rephrase this in a more concrete way. Imagine a junior high dance. The room is decorated, the lights are low, and the music pulses. God smiles and invites us to dance. Yet, fear, fueled by self-consciousness, anchors us to the wall. Fear of looking foolish chokes out all boldness. Fear of stepping on God's toes plants our feet in place. Anxiety of looking stupid or being rejected makes us want to run screaming from the building. Worse yet, what if you are the only one dancing? The one asking us to dance cannot possibly like us! All the while, something in our bodies responds to the rhythms and without our conscious thought, while anchored to the wall, we begin to tap a toe and sway. We hate being glued to the wall, however, we dare not brave taking God's hand. God could not possibly love someone as ugly as me. Still God's love beckons us to reenter the Divine Dance.[161]

These mental, physical, and narrative images of Imago Dei impact our relationship with God, as well as our relationship with our own self and with other people. At this point, I want to paint a picture of Imago Dei in light of God as love. The perfect example of this love is the Trinity. "Trinity is that this relationship among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit-a dynamic sharing of self-giving, other-receiving love-is God's essential nature. It is who, and what, God is, always and eternally. God is this richly complex relational matrix and ever shall be."[162] Love

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[161] Craig A. Boyd, *Visions of Agape: Problems and Possibilities in Human and Divine Love* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 28-29.

[162] Oord and Lodahl, *Relational Holiness*, 79-81, 98.

is not some emotional response, though love does evoke strong emotions.[163] Love is relationship.

Theologically, love has been defined in terms of agape love. Yet Thomas Oord and Michael Lodhal assert these three forms of love stand as equals: agape, eros and philia. Agape (αγαπε) "calls us to promote well-being to the extent possible in any context, even the messiest ones."[164] Eros (εροσ) calls us "to promote well-being by affirming and enjoying what is valuable."[165] This expression of love is God's invitation to love what is valuable, beautiful, and desirable, to enjoy the garden. And, philia (φιλια) is "love that promotes well-being by seeking to establish deeper bonds of cooperative friendship."[166] This is a love characterized by the enjoying of friendship and the deeper bonds of relationship. Love, in a relational prism, is about the interactions we have with others.[167] It is about looking out for each other's best interests while enjoying those life-giving relationships our lives were created for and yearn to experience.[168]

Oord and Lohdal make an insightful argument. Being raised in the church, I have often heard sermons and read commentaries proclaiming a hierarchy

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[163] Ibid., 74.

[164] Ibid., 78.

[165] Ibid., 79.

[166] Ibid., 80.

[167] Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love*, 25.

[168] Darrell L. Guder et al., eds., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998), 82.

between the different kinds of love. Most notably referenced is Jesus' question to Peter, "Do you love me?"[169] Agape appears to be the greatest form of love. Yet, the argument Oor and Lohdal make is that the different forms of love are treated equal and are equally needed. Warren Wiersbe supports Oord and Lohdal as he explains,

> Many commentaries point out that, in this conversation, two different words are used for "love." ... it is doubtful that we should make too much of an issue over this, because the two words are often used interchangeably in the Gospel of John. In John 3:16, God's love for man is agape love; but in John 16:27, it is phileo love. The Father's love for His Son is agape love in John 3:35 but phileo love in John 5:20. Christians are supposed to love one another. In John 13:34, this love is agape love; but in John 15:19, it is phileo love. It would appear that John used these two words as synonyms, whatever fine distinctions there might have been between them.[170]

I agree with Oord, Lohdal and Wiersbe that we have made too much of differentiating and creating hierarchies of love. The Bible is clear that God is love. The full richness of God's love, I believe, encompasses equally and even surpasses the many forms of love we are able to describe and to define in human terms.

Thus, when God, who is love, invites us to build the home of our life in Trinity, it is an invitation to the eternal dance.[171] It is an invitation to enjoy the beauty, desire, and deeper bonds of relationship with God and others. As

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[169] John 21:15, 16, 17.

[170] Warren W. Wiersbe and Logos Research Systems Inc., *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), Jn 21:9.

[171] Perrin, *Women Christian Mystics*, 33

humans we express and experience love through relationships not abstractions. The primary manner in which we express this love is through our choice to obey God. Jesus taught, "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love."[172] This is reminiscent of his earlier instruction, "the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me."[173] For those who heard Jesus speak, this would have conjured up images of the law, the codified religion the leaders imposed. Knowing the confusion this command would incite, Jesus clearly repeated this command, "to love each other."[174] Obedience is an expression of love and love is a visible manifestation of Imago Dei.

Jesus instructed, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."[175] The apostle John echoed this teaching, "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."[176] Paul admonished the church in Ephesus, "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant

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[172] Jn 15:10; also see Jn 14:21.

[173] Jn 14:31.

[174] Jn 13:34-35; 15:12, 17.

[175] Jn 15:13.

[176] 1 Jn 4:9-10.

offering and sacrifice to God."[177] Within the incarnation of Imago Dei, no greater love exists than the willingness to give oneself even to death.

The visible manifestation of God's love is our obedience to God regardless of cost.[178] However, as Ray Anderson points out,

> Obedience by itself is the most insidious of all temptations. It is the ontological source and motive behind obedience that gives it its character. Thus obedience is not the central motive in the life of Jesus as a sheer ethical demand. Rather, it is the inner life of sonship that comes to expression through his obedience that characterizes Jesus. And it is in this sonship that we find the motif of self-emptying carried out through his identification with both the sinner as the object of divine love as well as the Father as the source of love.[179]

Being a child of God is the icon of intimacy and connectedness. Obedience is not the hallmark of Jesus' image, being God's child is.

The greatest expression of Christ's intimacy came in his expression of trust-filled love as he walked to the Cross. As we trust God's invitation to enter love, we enter the eternal dance. For each of us, this invitation also entails deeply personal and costly crosses. As the Apostle John wrote, we are invited "to become children of God" to be Christ's "friends."[180] Love, like the God who gives it form, is not tame. It is wild and passionate. Any intimate relationship with God, just as Christ's, will reflect and be imbued with these characteristics.

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[177] Eph 5:1-2.

[178] Jn 15:10.

[179] Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 114.

[180] Jn 1:12; 15:14-15.

Paul developed Christ's intimacy through the kenotic act, Jesus' giving up his divine and kingly status. Christ was fully human and yet fully Divine. He willingly emptied himself of his will and his rights as God to become human. Christ could have come to earth and put on the clothing of humanity without ever experiencing the reality of being humanity. Paul reminds us that Jesus did become flesh and bone. Jesus,

> Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross![181]

When the word was made flesh, Jesus emptied himself of his power and rights as God. In this, Jesus became for us an icon and a portal. In the language of Abram and his family, he became our altar, the place we remember what God has done for us, a place to continue to meet God.

Christ, the icon, in turn, rotates the spotlight off His own redemptive act onto His relationship with the Father to provide an image of our call to intimacy. This call is to imitate Christ's kenotic act, to willingly empty ourselves of self-motivations and self-will, in order that the love of God given through Christ might become manifest in and through our lives. To be transformed into the image of Christ as we live. This emptying of our selves is not a surrendering of our personality or removal of ambition or will. Brennan Manning describes this process as not an emptying but a becoming whole again:

> This loving awareness of being the child of the Father moves us out of a life spent pursuing our base desires and frees us to pursue the

[181] Phil 2:6-8.

> kingdom of God. We no longer have to live lives bifurcated by our needs. Everything we have and are forms but one self, one heart beating with the lifeblood of Jesus.[182]

In the spirit of Christ, we become children of God. We choose to lay down the things in our lives that distract us from God. We choose to receive our title as son or daughter. Brennan Manning articulates our identity as children of God, "In claiming ownership of our divine status as sons and daughters of the Creator of the Universe, we gain a coherent sense of self. We lose ourselves to find ourselves. This loss paves the way for the Holy Spirit to transform our lives."[183] We chose to learn to listen for and to obey God's command to love God and others and, in return, we receive love.

Through Christ's transforming work in our lives, in ever-increasing measure, we become more like Jesus. In Jesus' actions and self-sacrificing love, we see that God is love. Jesus' identity as son, expressed in his love for the Father, drove him to willingly empty himself.[184] This was not the tarnished love that we frequently experience. It was not the self-seeking, self-pleasing, narcissistic, or self-fulfilling love so readily available in our world.[185] Rather it is a self-freeing love of God and people.[186]

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[182] Manning, *The Importance of Being Foolish*, 130.

[183] Ibid.

[184] Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 114.

[185] Manning, *Abba's Child*, 36-37, 40-41.

[186] 1 Jn 4:10.

Wesley professed the Imago Dei is directly tied to the "being" of God: God is love.[187] As Wesley said, "Accordingly, man at his creation was full of love; which was the sole principle of all his tempers, thoughts, words, and actions."[188] It is through love that God rules and reasons. It is through love that God entered a covenantal relationship with Abraham and the Israelite nation.[189] It is love that motivated God to send "his one and only Son."[190] It is love that brought Christ's kenotic incarnation. It is love that seeks to save the world not condemn it.[191] It is love that we fear, but are compelled to follow. It is love that smashes the broken pot and reforms one whole, useful, and beautiful. It is love that is kneading its way through the dough of creation, renewing, redeeming, and reviving it from the effects of the Fall.[192] It is love that leads us to, in Paul's admonition, "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."[193]

God's love is the essence of God's being. It provides the framework for the creation narrative. It is the outline of the story of redemption in the Testaments and the driving force behind Jesus' presence on earth. Love is Imago Dei. As this love grows in our lives, as we recognize remnants of Imago Dei in humanity and creation. It drives us to treat others and creation differently.

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[187] 1 Jn 4:8, 16b.

[188] Wesley, *Works of John Wesley: Sermons 2*, 66-67.

[189] Gn 12:1-5; Ex 25.

[190] Jn 3:16.

[191] Jn 3:17.

[192] Capon, *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment*, 101.

[193] Eph 4:2.

It gives us permission to interpret their actions and reactions in a whole new light. Love enables us to grapple with humanity's paradox: frailty and kingly status inextricably inter-twined. Love enables us to see beyond brokenness to the sacred in the other. It opens our eyes to the evidence of God, the Imago Dei, in creation and others.

In our post-Fall living and breathing I have tried to explore, imagine, distill, and unpack what it means to be created in the image of the Creator. While artists, poets, philosophers, and theologians have dredged the rivers of possibilities, the sum of these questions still leaves us ample room for exploration and imagination. This is partly due to the reality that Christ is a mystery and will always remain a mystery. Yet, of this we can be certain, God is love and the evidence of this love is recorded in the Old and New Testaments. Let us empty ourselves as Christ did, build the homes of our lives in Christ, and let God's love remake us into Imago Dei.

As we move into the historical and theological evidence, we will see the importance of the incarnation in forming the basis for the use of imagery in spiritual formation.

CHAPTER 3: HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL INFLUENCES UP TO THE 7TH ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

> For those given to contemplation, visible objects take on a deeper significance as disclosures of invisible realities. For the symbolic contemplation of intelligible realities through the medium of sensible objects is nothing more than the comprehension of the spiritual thought of visible objects by means of the invisible.
>
> - Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogia*[1]

In the previous chapter the incorporeal, invisible God took center stage. Creation was God's opus with humanity being made in God's image as the climatic crescendo. The opus raged on as dissonance filled the universe through the Fall. As God took human form in Christ the melodies and harmonies began to re-emerge. Imago Dei, the image of God as love, was birthed in the dance of the Trinity.[2] The Spirit breathed and continues to breathe life into all of creation. This images of God's love, the Spirit's breath, and our being made in God's image gives our minds and our eyes something to reflect upon. Each person bears the likeness, the image, of our creator. This, in and of itself, provides strong witness to the power of images in spiritual formation.

In the first two chapters we looked at biblical evidence and the accounts of God's instruction for the Israelites to create icons. These images were used in worship as ways of imagining the unseen reality of heaven. They served as

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[1] Maximus the Confessor, "Mystagogia," ch. 2, lines 50-53.

[2] This is the Eastern Orthodox view of the Trinity.

reminders of Israel's covenant with God. These images were also used to remember God's faithfulness. The Bible gives abundant evidence of a rich spiritual heritage integrating imagery with worship and teaching. How then did we end up with a modern Protestant movement that has largely stripped and sterilized meaningful images and icons from our houses of worship?

In this chapter my aim is to trace the historical and theological influences of the use of imagery in spiritual formation. The goal is to highlight key people, councils, and periods of time that created and influenced our understandings and uses of images from the Old Testament to the 7th Ecumenical Council. The point is to expose the iconoludes, iconoclasts, and those in between. The result will be to articulate for this span of time a working understanding how images were utilized in worship as well as exposing the influences and influencers who pushed either to utilize or to remove images from worship and spiritual formation.

From a historical perspective, imagery and icons were created to remind and teach believers of specific events, places, and encounters with God. They acted as photo albums, scrapbooks, Facebook pages, and blogs by engaging the observer with reminders of who they were, places they had been, and the values they had embraced as the stories shaped their lives and changed their destinies. These icons embodied the narratives that gave meaning and purpose to the Israelite nation. They provided not only visual prompts, but also places of reflection, education, and meditation.

Christianity has a rich and diverse heritage in the making and utilization of images from St. Francis and the San Damiano cross to Luther's 95 Theses.

Cathedrals, chalices, icons, tapestries, and other created images inspired people of faith. Conversely, the crusaders' cross, the worship of our lady of Guadalupe, saints on the dashboard, and other such abuses are equally notorious and ridiculed for their misguided and destructive powers. Whether used to inspire faithfulness to God or to enslave the masses, people rally behind these images. Their presence is a constant reminder of the reality they create and the power they evoke.

Equally, these images served as portals. Through the use of the imagination, words and pictures came to life. They transported the viewer to the Red Sea, the lion's den, the Mount of Olives, or another encounter with God. Today they continue to lure our imagination in to the stories of the past and to enflame creativity. Stories whose aural and textual familiarity has become domesticated can suddenly burst with fresh vibrancy and insight to a new generation. Elizabeth Zelensky and Lela Gilbert in their book, *Windows to Heaven*, capture such a portal in the story of Chuck Smith, Jr., a contemporary Protestant pastor, and his visit to the Ipatievsky Monastery outside of Moscow where he viewed the icons:

> All at once ... I found myself in the book of John. And it wasn't the same as reading the book of John or studying the text. It was far more than that. I was there. I was in the midst of the story. And as I slowly moved on, I was in the book of Acts. I stood and stared, and in some way I don't completely understand, it seemed to be coming to life before my eyes.[3]

[3] Elizabeth Zelensky and Lela Gilbert, *Windows to Heaven: Introducing Icons to Protestants and Catholics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005), 34-35.

For Chuck Smith, Jr. this was more than an ecstatic experience, it was a portal to encounter Jesus on the Sea of Galilee, with the woman at the well, and on a hill called Golgotha in a way he had never imagined possible.

As chapters three and four unfold I will investigate and unpack the major historical and theological influences regarding the use of imagery in the church. Utilizing a historical timeline, my goal in this chapter is to illuminate the rich heritage of imagery up to the 7th Council. In chapter four I will then trace history from the 7th Council to the development of the prevailing modern Protestant iconoclastic[4] disposition. This is an ambitious goal. I want to be clear that this is will not be a *comprehensive* survey. Instead, while wading through an ocean of historical and theological material, I simply plan to linger at a few of the major islands of thought and practice. By this I hope to create a map of the heritage which has come to us.

Imagery was essential to the early church. From the end of the New Testament writings until roughly 200 A.D., most Christian visual imagery was found in catacombs and burial places.[5] This physical imagery depicted paintings, drawings, or carvings of shepherds, fish symbols,[6] lambs,[7] athletes, and palms:

> The meanings of such paintings were intentionally hidden from outsiders. ... One needed to know the meaning of the fish symbol,

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[4] Iconoclasts were people who due to the abuse of icons sought to end their use in worship or destroy them. Iconoludes were those people who sought to preserve and enrich the use of icons in worship.

[5] Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 26.

[6] Léonide Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992), 70.

[7] Ibid., 73.

> that its Greek letters spelled out Christ, God, Son, Savior. It was something only insiders would know and respond to. It was not intended-as it is today-to be a witness to outsiders.[8]

Physical imagery was not a tool for proclaiming faith. Images were intended to evoke mental images bringing to life the biblical stories in the minds of Christians as they walked through their everyday lives. They were not used as evangelistic propaganda, but rather served as reminders of faith, serving as prompts to remember the lessons learned about living a Christian life.

Physical images used and created by the early Christians were borrowed and reinterpreted not only from the ancient Hebrew writings, but also from secular and pagan symbols. They created a visual faith designed to inspire perseverance in the shadows of persecution and under the constant threat of death. The visual story "is meant to inform, even inspire, and to recount and recall the biblical narrative, rather than evoke a spiritual reality. The spiritual content is mediated to the viewer by the vocabulary of images that serve as abbreviated representations----a kind of shorthand for the full story of salvation."[9] Physical images provided visual cues to reinforce the salvation story. They served to keep the story of Christ fresh in the hearts and minds of the people.

For those living under the threat of persecution, physical imagery, through simple codes, created a visual literacy that reinforced the message of Christ and inspired the faithful to persevere. As Ouspensky states,

> The Christian artists who lived in the times of Nero or Diocletian undoubtedly saw the atrocious scenes in the amphitheaters, and

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[8] Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 26.

[9] Ibid., 31.

> these episodes were a matter of glory and consolation for all the brothers. ... The drama of the represented situation is not so much the very moment of sacrifice as the internal, spiritual state of the persons, i.e., the state of prayer. The Christian, who always had to be prepared to confess his faith through suffering, was therefore provided with an internal attitude which he had to preserve at all times. That which could calm, strengthen and teach was portrayed, and not that which could possibly repel or frighten. What these images also conveyed was the teaching of salvation. The sacrificed Isaac was saved, as were Noah and Daniel, and this portrayed our salvation. In addition to prayer, toil was also represented in order to demonstrate its purifying character and to remind Christians that all human toil should be to the glory of God.[10]

In the face of suffering, the threat of the amphitheater, and a generally hard life, Christian physical imagery thrived. The stories depicted and the symbols adopted spoke deeply to the emotive needs assuring them that only in faith was there real and eternal life. In this hostile environment Christians created a language allowing them to communicate without being exposed.[11]

Today we find the Christian catacombs rich with paintings depicting God's deliverance. Images of Daniel, Jonah, Noah, and Lazarus litter the passages like graffiti.[12] In places where the bodies of the faithful found physical rest, images of God's deliverance filled those believers still living with hope to inspire faithfulness. Images of a God deeply vested in their present suffering and persecution were both comforting and a constant reminder of a faithful God.[13] This was the God who suffered physically, the same God who promised to never

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[10] Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, 76-78.

[11] Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 26.

[12] John Baggley, *Doors of Perception: Icons and Their Spiritual Significance* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 11.

[13] Ibid.

forsake them. The witness of those who lay in the catacombs juxtaposed with depictions of the biblical stories of deliverance quickened and emboldened their faith.

Not all symbols and imagery were directly equated with persecution. Symbols of loaves and fishes, the last supper, and communal meals symbolized "the heavenly banquet. Fish represented the soul immersed in the baptismal life, while fishermen indicated Christ and his apostles, the fishers of souls."[14] It was more than deliverance. These were signs of God's provision, blessing, and the eternal communion of believers with God and one another. As mentioned, there was nothing remarkable or distinctively Christian about any of these images. However, to these early Christians they were vital. They were a lifeline, a life-preserver, centering them in faith even as the waves of persecution stormed round them. Images of fish, loaves, and the Last Supper fed the souls of people facing persecution. Where persecution aimed to isolate and dishearten, The Table, the Last Supper, reminded them of the communion of saints and their covenant with God.

In this environment three key images were adopted from the broader pagan culture by these First-Century and Second-Century believers. First, there was the shepherd with a lamb. The lamb was usually depicted on the shepherd's shoulders or the shepherd would be seen standing with the flock. In the pagan cultures this shepherd and lamb symbolized philanthropy. In Christian traditions it symbolized Christ as the Good Shepherd. Second, there was a figure standing

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[14] Ibid., 12.

with hands raised in prayer. To the Romans this symbolized piety. To the Christians it was adopted as a reminder of the faithful who departed. Third, there was the philosopher sitting with a scroll in hand. In the contemporary culture this was the symbol of wisdom. To the Christians this symbolized Christ, the source of Holy Wisdom.[15] This visual literacy and rebranding of common symbols created a foreign language, providing another layer of insulation and protection. The secular saturation made the physical imagery even more innocuous and increasingly powerful.

Most of the Christian symbols were common in the Hellenistic-Roman pagan world.[16] They saturated daily life. They were innocuous because of their proliferation in the market place, on public buildings, on government buildings, and down every avenue of life.[17] They were present in every civic place and depicted in art. To the Christian, regardless of the artist's beliefs or convictions, each symbol and painting served as a portal into the biblical story. They served as reminders of God's covenant made through Christ. The power came through their abundance. Everywhere the eye glanced a fish was seen, a palm branch hung, or a lamb was depicted. Each glance reinforced the message each symbol evoked. The reinterpretation of these mundane images created a visual language for these Christians.[18] These images served to reinforce the teachings of faith

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[15] Ibid., 10.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 26.

and to encourage believers in their daily lives. Similarly, the understanding of a symbol's meaning became the litmus. If you could explain the Christian meaning of the fish, the shepherd, or the man with arms raised high, Christians knew you were one of them.

The early Christians used images to gaze and to reflect upon, to instruct new believers, and to remind each other of God's story. This was the story of the present reality of Christ. These images served as portals to transport the person gazing upon them to the reality that Christ was soon returning. Regardless of what happened in this life, eternity with our Creator was already an unfolding, present reality. These were not the escapist tactics used by today's evangelicals to prepare for the end times. Instead of retreating from the world, Early Christians engaged their world and transformed the meaning of images. They were used to enflame the faithful to be present in their daily toil and suffering. In the dust of the streets, in the sweat of the day, in the haggling at the market, and in the shadow of the amphitheater these symbols and icons kept present the story of salvation and the coming glory of Christ's imminent return. These were tactile and visual reminders. They were instructors of the ongoing and unfolding reality of God's presence and love.

It is illuminating to look back on this history and see such a stark contrast with our contemporary use of imagery. To the Early Christians, imagery was essential. It encouraged, inspired, and instructed people in their faith. There existed little, if any, division between the sacred and secular. In fact, the overlap strengthened the power of the images. Everything was seen as God's. There

was no separation of the things of this world and the real things, the forms, as Plato would categorize them.[19] It is interesting how these symbols and images found in the streets and pagan houses of worship were given scriptural meaning. The Christians didn't sanitize them. Images weren't yanked from their natural dwellings. Rather, they imbued the fish, the loaves, the shepherd, and the palms with meaning. They utilized what was present in the same manner that God instructed Abraham and Moses to set up rocks in the desert or Christ instructed the disciples to break bread and drink wine in remembrance of him.

As Christianity grew and spread, the leaders of the church scrambled to combat heresies and splinter groups. To truly grasp the immense work of the 7th Council we must first take a brief look at the early church fathers and Hellenistic influences that created the need for the Council to convene. From the vantage point of history, the most expedient way to track the opinions and views on icons and images is through the early church fathers.

The tides of history brought a wave of change in the Third and Fourth Centuries. Christianity transformed from being a persecuted, pesky cult to the official religion of the Empire. Consequently, imagery changed. No longer was quickening hope a necessary present reality in the face of persecution. Previous symbols such as loaves and fishes and images of Christ as the Shepherd transformed into symbols of "Christ as the new Emperor, communicating that he reigns over all, just as the earthly emperor reigns over the earthly political

[19] Garth Kemerling, "Plato: Education and the Value of Justice", http://www.philosophypages.com/hy/2h.htm#cave (accessed October 5, 2009).

system."[20] As Christianity gained respectability, influence, and power, the reminders of God's faithfulness transformed into the reality of Christ as conquering King. Christian art flourished in the late Roman Empire.[21]

However, before we can address the early church fathers, it is essential that we grasp Plato's (427-348, BCE) influence. In fact it would be impossible to overestimate the influence of Plato.[22] It would be impossible to unravel the influence the Hellenistic culture had upon the Jewish and Christian theologians and philosophers without understanding his influence. As Leonid Ouspensky observes, "Christianity absorbs everything that can serve as a form of expression from the world around it. Thus the Fathers of the Church used all the apparatus of ancient philosophy for the benefit of theology."[23] The church Fathers saw in the world around them both physical and philosophical evidences of God at work. This frequently led to the transforming of the popular and pagan traditions and philosophies in accordance with Christian teaching.[24]

In today's climate these authors would be suspected of syncretism. Yet, these early writers recognized elements of God's story in the secular philosophies.[25] Rather than look at Plato and others as enemies, the early church

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[20] Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 27.

[21] Baggley, *Doors of Perception*, 15.

[22] Loren Cunningham and David J. Hamilton, *Why Not Women?: A Fresh Look at Scripture on Women in Missions, Ministry, and Leadership* (Seattle, WA: YWAM, 2000), 72.

[23] Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, 86.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 33.

Fathers incorporated Plato and Neoplatonic thinking into their theology.[26] They viewed the philosophers' contemporary methods as worldly articulations about God's truth.[27] Today some would view this as pure genius. Others would be outraged by their attempts and denounce it. There are those in Christian circles today, who like the early Christians, work to reinterpret and rebrand the common and mundane to serve Christianity. Similarly, there are those who sit in the bulwarks of their doctrine and denounce the integration of secular ideas into the Christian language.

The point of contention I have with Platonic influences in theology is the very core of his philosophy, the bifurcation of visible world from the true forms which we cannot see. In practice Platonic Christianity differed from the ascetical practices of the early Christians. In Platonic traditions Christian life would be described as,

> the growth of a spiritual desire for God rather than as the faithful obedience to the divine commands through which one earns a reward in the next life. It conceives of grace as God's operation which revives and nourishes, which removes the obstacles to the development of the desire God created in humanity. The primary grace is God's self-revelation in the economy of creation and salvation which culminates in the incarnation of the Word. ... The commandments of God, along with the teaching and example of Christ and his saints, inspire and guide the Christian's purification and development.[28]

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[26] Daniel Pickering Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972), 4-5.

[27] Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, 86-87.

[28] J. Patout Burns, *Theological Anthropology*, Sources of Early Christian Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 9.

Plato's hierarchy of the soul and true forms became valued over the body and creation.[29] While one can understand the separation of the ascetics from Plato, one can also see the launching point of the devaluation of the material world as inhibiting our ability to see the true forms or to see God.

Plato's devaluation of the body in respect to the soul came to permeate Christian thought. Platonic forms of Christianity developed in the confluence of Plato's claim that what we see is "misleading, transient appearances of sensible objects."[30] What is truly real is "the permanent reality of unchanging, abstract forms." [31] As Kemerling states,

> the theory of forms is central to Plato's philosophy. ... the philosophers who think about such things are not idle dreamers, but the true realists in a society. It is precisely their detachment from the realm of sensory images that renders them capable of making accurate judgments about the most important issues of human life.[32]

Plato developed a hierarchy of cognition. The lowest, most primitive levels of reality were shadows, pictures, and the senses. Yet it was precisely these visible materials that provide the basis for belief. The next step on the rungs of reality were the "forms of numbers, shapes, and other mathematical entities."[33] Through these forms we are able to perceive the most basic systematic knowledge of objects. True forms begin to be visible, yet they remain clouded by the material

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[29] Walker, *The Ancient Theology*, 6.

[30] Kemerling, "Plato: Education and the Value of Justice."

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

world. The precipice of knowledge and understanding comes in the significant forms: equality, beauty, truth, and the good.[34]

To be able to communicate his view of forms, Plato wrote the *Allegory of the Cave*. The allegory sets the scene, "Suppose that there is a group of human beings who have lived their entire lives trapped in a subterranean chamber lit by a large fire behind them."[35] Chained in place all they see are the shadows of their own bodies and the things around them on the walls. Suppose that one of these human beings breaks these chains and climbs to the surface escaping the cave. The light would blind the individual at first. Eventually, the cave-dweller would be able to see and appreciate the world. Finally, imagine that this individual returned to the cave to persuade others of the world outside. On the wall are shadows. The people living in the cave believe these shadows to be what is real. Since the individual is now clumsy in the dark, those in the cave are unimpressed and dismiss this individual's pleas.

Heidegger explains why Plato used allegories to articulate what he meant:

> An allegory, of a sensory image, is therefore nothing more than a clue for seeing (a provision of a clue through something which is represented sensuously). Such a clue leads us to what simple description, be it ever so accurate and rigorous, can never grasp. There is thus an inner necessity to the fact that when Plato wants to say something fundamental and essential in philosophy, he always speaks in an allegory and places us before a sensory image.[36]

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth: On Plato's Cave Allegory and Theaetetus*, trans. Ted Sadler, Athlone Contemporary European Thinkers (London: Continuum, 2002), 13.

Heidegger would continue to explain that Plato's use of allegory was not evidence of his uncertainty. It was evidence to the contrary. Heidegger points out, "In all genuine philosophy there is something in the face of which all description and proof, however brilliantly scientific, fails and sinks down into empty business."[37] Plato used allegory and viewed creation and physical forms as road signs pointing to the "truth" where truth was embodied in the forms we cannot see but these unseen forms are the true reality.

Essentially, without allegory, the ideal forms would be ungraspable by the untrained. Through the *Allegory of the Cave*, Plato tried to accurately represent the levels of reality. He made clear that one could not truly appreciate its significance without achieving the highest level of knowledge and understanding.[38] The crude physical forms help us to recognize the true forms. It is ironic that in order to communicate his philosophies, Plato had to utilize narrative imagery. He had to paint a picture of what he was talking about in order that people would be able to envision the true forms. It is equally ironic that Plato used the material world to communicate about the very forms that could not be seen.

Plotinus of Alexandria (204-270, CE) renewed and contemporized Plato's work. Plotinus' work fueled the ascetic movement and emerged as Neo-Platonism. Holmes succinctly summarizes Plotinus, "The salvation of humanity is the result of the purification of the mind or rational soul by an ascent through the

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[37] Ibid.

[38] Kemerling, "Plato: Education and the Value of Justice."

emanations of the One to participation in the divine Mind."[39] He believed and taught a supreme transcendent One. This One was completely beyond all objects while all lesser objects emanated from the perfect One.

While Plotinus embraced Plato's forms, Neo-Platonists made it possible to render ancient gods with monotheism because they were all lesser objects of the perfect One.[40] As a result, the church Fathers defending Christianity from the pagans embraced Neo-Platonic thought.[41] This line of thinking created a bridge to other religious expressions. It opened doors for the church fathers to show pagans that the perfect One, the true form, was the true God. The Neo-Platonists abandoned ascetic preferences and rediscovered room for earthly objects as pointers and road signs. They helped a believer move toward the goal, the One. Regardless, this philosophy pressed the church Fathers to discover the true forms through stripping themselves of earthly attachments and desires. At the outset, the physical forms seemed to have a significant place in Neo-Platonism. Yet, in reality, they served only as a stepping stone to the One and the true forms.

Through Plato's work and bolstered by the Apostle Paul's articulation of the war with the flesh,[42] the ascetics gained momentum. Even Paul wrote to the Philippians, "Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators

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[39] Urban T. Holmes, III, *A History of Christian Spirituality: An Analytical Introduction*, Library of Episcapalian Classics (Harrisburg, PA: Moorehouse, 2002), 24.

[40] Walker, *The Ancient Theology*, 4-5.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Rom 7:14-21; 1 Cor 15:50.

of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh–though I myself have reasons for such confidence."[43] The Montanists and Gnostics and other extreme expressions of the Christian faith began to teach Jesus was never truly human. They truly believed there was no way that God could inhabit such a crude and sinful form as earthly flesh. The only way to truly be united with God was to shed bodily appetites as much as humanly possible. True spirituality was gained only in abandoning the physical and embracing true and pure forms of spirituality.

Clement of Alexandria (150-217, CE), Origen (185-254, CE), Augustine (354-430, CE), and many of the most influential early church fathers adopted and adapted Plato's and Plotinus' philosophies. Their philosophical theologies stripped the halls of faith of icons and other symbols of faith. Dyrness summarizes Plato's influence on Augustine's theology:

> The signs that God places in creation and Scripture are meant to lead us to a vision of God, where we will be like him, for we will see him as he is (I John 3:2). But they do not do this directly; they are simply pointers.[44]

Thus, these forms of the flesh and the material world serve as nothing more than crude pointers. Their value rests in their ability to point to a true vision of God. While God is creator, the reality of God is not seen in God's creation. Rather, reality is seen in the vision of the true form of God. While there is insight in this statement and value for challenging us to learn more of God, the unintended

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[43] Phil 3:2-4.

[44] Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 33.

consequences of adopting, adapting, and heavily integrating Plato and Plotinus was a devaluation of creation. As the centuries passed and this philosophy rooted itself in Christian theology and thought, creation became increasingly suspect. Ultimately, it would lead us to Calvin who would claim that true worship should be devoid of any visual distractions.

One of the consequences of the abstraction of God and faith was that the tactile quality and earthliness of the Old Testament and Jewish faith was uprooted and cast aside in a search for an idealized God. Abraham Heschel, one of the leading Jewish scholars in the last century, characterized the Hebrew view:

> Judaism does not despise the carnal. It does not urge us to desert the flesh but to control and to counsel it; to please the natural needs of the flesh so that the spirit should not be molested by unnatural frustrations. ... Judaism is not committed to a doctrine of original sin and knows nothing of the inherent depravity of human nature. ... Judaism teaches us how even the gratification of animal needs can be an act of sanctification.[45]

He continues,

> Our Flesh is not evil but material for applying the spirit. The carnal is something to be surpassed rather than annihilated. Heaven and earth are equally His creation. Nothing in creation may be discarded or abused. The enemy is not in the flesh; it is in the heart, in the ego.[46]

As Heschel articulates, this war with the flesh, that many church Fathers and ascetics embraced, ultimately led to a rejection of that which God had blessed and created to be a blessing. Heschel goes so far as to say that, "Nowhere in the Bible is found any indication of the idea that the soul is imprisoned in a corrupt

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[45] Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, 263-264, 267.

[46] Ibid., 264.

body" or "that allegiance to God demands renunciation of worldly goods."[47] Old Testament scholar Daniel Block affirms Heschel's view articulating that the Greeks dichotomy of soul, as non-physical, and body, as physical, would have been foreign to the ancient Hebrews. [48] Human beings don't have a soul; we are a whole being body and soul. [49] Scripture does not teach dualism.

Mildred Wynkoop captures this thought brilliantly from another and equally helpful vantage point:

> Life, divine life, takes up dust to transform it into a living thing. This is Hebrew "materialism." Hebrew man did not despise himself, his work, his world, because God's breath was in all created things. When God's breath, or Spirit, withdrew, then what was left was death, and dust. [50]

Claude Tresmontant rephrased this by illuminating that the Hebrew person understood that "dust is not the cause of death, it is death which fathers dust."[51] God breathed life into humanity and creation. The very best of God created something beautiful and vital. While there were consequences to Adam and Eve's choice to eat of the Tree of Knowledge, God never revoked the Creation blessing nor contradicted the pronouncement of creation as very good. Just as a loving parent often explains the consequences of actions to a child, God did

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[47] Ibid.

[48] Daniel Isaac Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1 - 24*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: WB Eerdmans, 1997), 562.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love*, 113.

[51] Claude Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought* (New York: Desclée de Brouwer, 1960), 7.

clarify that childbirth would be difficult and filled with pain and that the ground would be cursed making it frustrating to work.[52] The ultimate consequence of the Fall was separation from intimacy with God, however nowhere does God say that creation was completely corrupted.

The vernacular of the Old Testament, which rooted faith in daily and physical life of humanity, was interrupted and cast aside by an intellectualization of faith.[53] Reason and the rational mind began to supplant the biblical heritage of God at work in and through Creation.[54] As Heschel succinctly points out, "In our daily experience words are used as means to convey meaning. In the Bible to speak is to act, and the word is more than an instrument of expression; it is a vessel of divine power, the mystery of creation."[55] Platonic forms supplanted holiness as a part of regular daily toil.[56] This new understanding of creation, combined with Paul's seemingly Platonic articulations of the flesh,[57] fueled the desert fathers and mothers ascetical practices and abuses. Despite the Hebrew understanding and the earthy call to holy living of the Old Testament, many of the early church Fathers choose a more ascetic life.

Urban Holmes describes Clement of Alexandria's idealized ascetical practice of celibacy:

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[52] Gn 3:16-19.

[53] Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, 263-264.

[54] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 253-254.

[55] Ibid., 253.

[56] Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, 266.

[57] 1 Cor 15:39-50; 2 Cor 12:7-10; Gal 6:13-15; Phil 3:3.

> Virginity will become an ideal. This is related to the understanding of the supreme characteristic of humanity: reason. Reason is in the head or brain and it is masculine. Therefore, women, who in orthodox Christianity are clearly considered fully human, are less given to reason, and contact with them leads out of reason. There is a vivid description in Clement's writings of how intercourse causes the blood to rush from the head to the penis, thereby rendering us less than human.[58]

While this may seem ridiculous in today's culture, we still cling to the advent of reason. We distance spirituality from earthly materials. As Clement taught, we live in the post-Fall corruption of all things material. The only way to know and understand God is to remove all material attachments. It appears that the illumination of the mind is the path to intelligible realities.[59] A renewed Gnosticism emerged.

Regardless, Clement did not completely abandon the use of imagery. In fact he spoke of art as being praise worthy because God gave the painters their gift. However, he strongly warned against the worship of art and the use of icons in worship:

> Art has not her illusion with which to beguile; for it leads you on, though not to be in love with the statues and paintings, yet to honor and worship them. The painting, you say, is lifelike. Let the art be praised, but let it not beguile man by pretending to be truth.[60]

His ascetic preference spoke loudly while he apprehensively left room for people to enjoy and appreciate art. Clement was clear that art had no value in connecting one with God. It was praise worthy as long as you remembered it had

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[58] Holmes, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, 26-27.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Clement quoted in Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, 38.

no revelatory capacity. One can see the mingling of Platonic thought here where true spirituality is the removal of all material attachments. Yet, art and creation are praiseworthy. We know this from God's own work as an artist and God's own blessing of creation.

Origen (185-254), one of the most influential church Fathers, created the prototype for Christian ascetic practices.[61] He did not completely banish imagery despite saying, "we look not to the things that are seen, since we realize that they are transient, while others are eternal."[62] For Origen, everything was a struggle and temptation. He was tormented by his attachments and sin.[63] Because of this torment, his love for the austere life grew in order that he would have ever decreasing distractions caused by fleshly appetites.[64] His ultimate goal was to gain knowledge of spiritual realities through Scripture.[65] These realities were hidden, similar to Plato's forms.

For Origen, the only way to understand these realities was to participate in Christ. Holmes summarized Origen's view that the "spiritual life is a process of progressive detachment from the world. To imitate Christ is to live the Cross, which leads to illumination by the Logos."[66] Simultaneously, the path to

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[61] Robin Maas and Gabriel O'Donnell, *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 39-40.

[62] Origen, *Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer and Selected Works*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1979), 74.

[63] Holmes, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, 26.

[64] Origen, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom*, 3-4.

[65] Ibid., 193, 199, 245.

[66] Holmes, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, 27-28.

detachment would lead a person down the road of self-knowledge.[67] Again, Holmes summarizes Origen's two kinds of self-knowledge, "One demands a constant struggle with demons, against which the Cross is the supreme expression and hope. The other is a gift of God."[68] What becomes evident as one engages Origen is a renewed form of Gnosticism. An elitist spirituality was sewn into the fabric of the church and set against those who participated in the appetites of the flesh and the pleasures of the world.

To this point, my main argument has been simple. The influence of Plato, Plontinus, Clement, Origen, and countless other ascetical Church Fathers created a hierarchy of spirituality.[69] Material, matter, and creation, including humanity, were bifurcated from what they would consider truly spiritual matters.[70] As Sittser summarizes Plotinus, "the soul originated in God, but it has become separated from God by being encompassed in creation, as if the material world were a kind of weight dragging the soul downward."[71] Whether they were fighting the demons of lust, greed, hatred, or a myriad of other spiritual infirmities, this manner of thinking allowed them to isolate the problem in the temporal material world.

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[67] Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, trans. R. P. Lawson, Ancient Christian Writers (New York: Newman Press, 1956), 15.

[68] Holmes, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, 28.

[69] Maas and O'Donnell, *Spiritual Traditions*.

[70] Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well*, 167.

[71] Ibid.

Being human is the sum of the whole created being: body, mind, heart and soul. Those in the early church who embraced, integrated, and built on Plato's teachings unintentionally bifurcated the Hebrew idea of personhood. Thus, a person could blame all their unhealthy passions and desires on one part of their humanity and punish it. One could beat and whip one part of their humanity in order to set free the true self–the Platonic form of soul. From this, in turn, emerged a hierarchy of spirituality in which those who lead an austere life were seen as holier, wiser, and closer to God. While I do not question the sincerity of these men and women who genuinely sought to limit those passions and thoughts which distracted them from God, I want to point out that this hierarchy brought a dismantling, a dismembering, of personhood. As a result, a number of unhealthy spiritual practices and theologies were adopted and, for a time, spirituality kept many people from allowing God's redemptive love to engage their whole self.

In other words, these sincere men and women of faith sought to free themselves from the pains of fleshly appetites and attachments in order that they might find union with God.[72] The spirituality they created intentionally or unintentionally rejected the biblical reality that we are made in the image of God. There are consequences to the Fall: our covenant with God is broken and our relationship with ourselves, others, and all of creation is frustrated and filled with labor. These men and women rejected the very gift of God in their own lives. Through material expressions and our daily routines we encounter God, we don't

[72] Ibid., 170-177.

just receive signs that point toward God. While these men desperately wanted union with God, they rejected many of the portals through which they could see God.

Augustine (354-430) benefited from the thoughts and lives of those before him. It is well documented that Augustine was familiar with ascetic, Platonic, and Neo-Platonic thought.[73] He spent nine years with the Manichaeans who believed in an ascetic lifestyle as the material world was evil.[74] Their view was created from a dualism defined by an unbridgeable gap between the material, darkness, and spiritual world, light. They essentially believed that every part of life that has to do with the flesh was contemptible[75] and that only that which is spiritual, gained through knowledge, can bring us to union with God.

Eventually, Augustine rejected the Manichaeans and embraced Platonic Christianity. While a dualism remained in his thinking and theology, as Augustine's writing matured, he increasingly brought a unity between the two.[76] William Dryness summarizes Augustine's argument in his work "On Christian Doctrine":

> God uses temporal things to show us the eternal reality for which our soul hungers-the earthly sign points to and represents a spiritual reality (though it does not directly mediate that reality). ... Augustine expressed the view that the world and Scripture are both full of signs that can lead us to God.[77]

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[73] Burns, *Theological Anthropology*, 12.

[74] John M. Rist, *Augustine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 2-3.

[75] Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 60-61.

[76] Burns, *Theological Anthropology*, 12.

[77] Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 33.

A sign is something that helps us to see beyond our senses, "so that by means of the corporeal and temporal things, we may comprehend the eternal and spiritual."[78]

Augustine did not completely abandon his ascetic lifestyle or the Platonic influences of forms. However, a generosity emerged during his life that created space for creation to be a part of the process of spiritual growth and revelation instead of a hindrance.

In Augustine there emerged adoptions and adaptations of the Platonic and Neo-Platonic thought. Reason was further elevated as the prime method of understanding true spirituality. Augustine taught reason moves from one object to another as it systematizes and hungrily continues to seek new objects to systematize. Harrington summarizes Heidegger's view of this objectification. "Heidegger blames this reason for the transformation of things and places into quantities, a slow measuring out of the landscape as human beings seek to comprehend it, literally, piece by piece."[79] Heidegger held that Reason is an invaluable asset in understanding and growing one's faith. However, reason by itself or held in primacy leads to the objectification and abstraction of others, creation, and God. It creates an unhealthy divide between flesh and spirit.

As Ursula King reminds us, "It was the aim of the ascetic and monastic life to achieve the conquest of self through renunciation so that, once purified from

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[78] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. (New York: Library of Liberal Arts, 1958), 10.

[79] L. Michael Harrington, *Sacred Place in Early Medieval Neoplatonism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 5.

all obstacles, the soul might live the perfect life face to face with God, in direct communion and union with him."[80] Yet this aspiration became a digression as the more ascetic strains bred extreme lifestyles, including castration. In the more popular forms there developed extreme punishments, such as whipping and starvation of the body, to help one rid oneself of the temptations of the flesh.[81] As mentioned earlier, this developed a hierarchy of spirituality.[82] The more austere you were the more honor you received.[83] The stricter and more punishing you were of your body the more praise you received. This created an environment of distrust, guilt, shame, and rejection of one's body and created material. In an effort to draw closer to God, the ascetics rejected of all God's creation although the God they served had declared these same parts of creation "very good." It was in this environment that heresies were birthed, nurtured, and passed on to succeeding generations of ascetics and theologians.

Manichaeans, Docetists, Montanists, and Gnostics thrived despite persecution by the church. As the 7th Council would articulate three centuries later, the threat was not to doctrine or theological premise, rather the fight was for Christ's humanity, the incarnation.[84] In these strict and rigorous environments, with the rejection of creation and the body as contemptible, it became natural for

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[80] Ursula King, *Christian Mystics: Their Lives and Legacies Throughout the Ages* (Mahwah, NJ: HiddenSpring, 2001), 8.

[81] Rist, *Augustine*, 110.

[82] King, *Christian Mystics*, 18.

[83] Ibid., 21.

[84] Baggley, *Doors of Perception*, 22-23.

theology and well-intentioned leaders to disassociate Christ from the incarnation. Eventually, they taught that while Jesus was on earth, Jesus never was fully human.

In the midst of this increasingly swirling theological turmoil from Clement of Alexandria (150 CE) to John of Damascus (749 CE), several church fathers and mothers opposed the extreme asceticism and spoke strongly for the use of imagery as a means of revelation and instruction in the Christian life. These church leaders believed that sight and physical images were powerful allies in revealing and understanding truth. Among these were Aeropagite (1st Century), St. Basil (330-379 CE), Dionysius of Athens, and Theodore Studios (759-826 CE).

St. Basil wrote, "Among our senses, sight is the one that has the most efficient power to perceive sensible reality."[85] St. Dionysius, the bishop of Athens, claimed, "Truly, sensory images make invisible things visible."[86] They worshiped and venerated icons and images as much as the sacred writings. "The language of sacred art is thus a language that corresponds to that of the sacred writings. It is not simply a matter of art illustrating the words of Scripture."[87] As for St. Theodore Studios, he reacted to the iconoclasts' claims asserting, "If merely mental contemplation were sufficient, it would have been sufficient for Him to

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[85] St. Basil, "Enarratio in prophetam Isaiam," in *San Basilio. Commento al profeta Isaia*, ed. P. Trevisan (Turin: Societa Editrice Internazionale, 1939), Chapter 1, section 8, line 5.

[86] St. Dioysius quoted in Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 91.

[87] Baggley, *Doors of Perception*, 24.

come to us in a merely mental way."[88] Here we can clearly see St. Studios defending the incarnation. He claimed, "'Hearing is equal to sight, and it is necessary to use both senses.'"[89] Sacred art was held in high regard, venerated, and worshipped for its value in helping us connect with God.

Similarly, these early fathers and mothers believed the painters of images captured, instructed, and inspired men and women of faith. In capturing the merits of those who died for their faith and those who embodied the life of Christ, a painter illuminated their lives for others to reflect upon. St. Basil exhorted the painters:

> You, painters of the saints' merits. Complete with your art this incomplete image of a great leader. ... Illuminate with the flowers of your wisdom the indistinct image which I have drawn of the crowned martyr. Let my words be surpassed by your painting of the heroic deeds of the martyr. I will be glad to acknowledge such a victory over myself. ... I will look at this fighter represented in a more living way on your paintings. Let the demons cry, defeated once again by the courage of the martyr. Let them be shown once more the burned, victorious hand. And let the initiator of combats, Christ, also be represented in this painting.[90]

Images of the saints provided a wealth of spiritual instruction as the faithful reflected upon them. These men and women were rightfully lifted up as their actions and attitudes, their very lives, were living evidence of the incarnate Christ.

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[88] St. Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons*, trans. Catharine P. Roth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1981), 27.

[89] Ibid., 37.

[90] St. Basil, *In Barlaam martyrem*, ed. J.P. Migne, Patrologiae cursus completus (series Graeca) (MPG), vol. 31 (Paris: Migne, 1857-1866), 489.

St. Nilus (430) echoed St. Basil as he called for the best painters to adorn the church. He promoted a common sentiment among many of the early church fathers and mothers that icons and the other images of the Scriptures become the Bible for the illiterate and the poor:

> Let the hand of the best painter cover both sides of the church with images from the Old and New Testaments, so that those who do not know the alphabet and cannot read the Holy Scriptures will remember, while looking at the painted representations, the courageous deeds of those who served God without malice. Thus, they will be encouraged to emulate the ever-memorable virtues of these servants of God who preferred the heavens to the earth, and the invisible to the visible.[91]

Pope Gregory (540-604 CE) referred to icons and images as the *biblia pauperum*, the Bible of the Poor, which was good for education, inspiration, and remembrance.[92] As theologians defended the use of images, the *biblia pauperum* became their baseline argument: if for no other reason, we should fill churches with images of the Bible because art and imagery, as a visual language, can be easily read and understood by the poor and uneducated. They also believed these visible forms provided portals to the invisible world that would encourage spiritual growth through entering the narrative of the Bible.

These works of art not only provided the uneducated with the ability to read the Gospel, they also served as portals for all faithful people to enter the ongoing story of salvation. A contemporary of St. Basil, Gregory of Nyssa (335-394), noted,

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[91] St. Nilus quoted in Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, 84.

[92] Joseph Gutmann, *The Image and the Word: Confrontations in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, Religion and the Arts (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), 84.

> the Divine beauty is not adorned with any shape or endowment of form, by any beauty of colour, but is contemplated as excellence in unspeakable bliss. As then painters transfer human forms to their pictures by the means of certain colours, laying on their copy the proper and corresponding tints, so that the beauty of the original may be accurately transferred to the likeness.[93]

Again we can hear the echoes of Plato and Plontinus emerge, yet we see them applied differently. Instead of these forms dulling the mind, these forms illuminate the mind. These paintings encapsulated the beauty of the saints and the divine moments of the Bible. Sittser describes this process as a tracing of spiritual transformation:

> The intent is not to "tell the facts" of the saint's life in a straight forward way but to trace the spiritual transformation of the saint over time. In a sense, the stories of Saints function as written icons, showing us what it means to grow into the likeness of Christ.[94]

While not physically accurate in their brush strokes and coloring, these images accentuated and illuminated the desired qualities in the lives of the saints that were being honored. Those characteristics being honored were the ones that illuminated Christ in and through the way they lived. The artists captured Christ's reflection in their lives. They created portals to enter into unity with the Divine.

Regardless, the iconoclasts blasted the iconoludes saying that the iconoludes were worshiping the saints. However, the iconoludes retorted that their sincere intention was to see God through the lives of the saints. There is ample evidence that many people of faith did not abuse the images by

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[93] Gregory of Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises, ETC*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 14 vols., vol. 5 of *Nicene and Post - Nicene Fathers*, Second Series (Peabody, MA: Henderson, 1994), 391.

[94] Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well*, 121.

worshiping them. However, the iconoclasts accused them of treating the images like gods in the manner of the Greeks and Romans. St. Athanasius (293-373 CE) aptly gave defense in his writings, "The Hundred Chapters":

> We the faithful do not worship images as gods, as did the heathen Greeks–God forbid!–but our only purpose and desire is to see in the image a reflection of the facial form of the beloved. Therefore if the image should be obliterated, we would throw it into the fire ... so also the faithful do not embrace images for their own sake, but kiss them as we often embrace our children or our parents, to show the affection in our hearts. So also the Jew, when he venerated the tablets of the law, or the two cherubim, hammered from gold, did not honor stone or gold for its own sake, but the Lord who had ordered them to be made.[95]

St. Leontius (6th Century CE), Bishop of Neapolis (7th Century CE), continued the defense,

> We do not worship as gods the figures and images of the saints. For if it is the wood of the image that we worship as God, then we would worship all other wood as well, and we would not throw the image into the fire when the picture fades, as we often do. And again, as long as wood is fastened together in the form of a cross, I venerate it because it is a likeness of the wood on which Christ was crucified. If it should fall to pieces, I throw the pieces into the fire. When a man receives a sealed order from the emperor, he kisses the seal. He does not honor clay, paper, or wax for their own sake, but he gives honor and veneration to the emperor. Likewise when Christian people venerate the form of the cross, they are not worshipping the nature of wood, but they see that it is marked with the imprint of the hands of Him who was nailed upon it, and so they embrace and honor it.[96]

St. Athanasius and St. Leontius articulated the distinction between worshiping the physical materials and using the image as an icon or a portal through which

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[95] An ancient witness quoted in Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 92-93. This quote is attributed to St. Athanasius' "The Hundred Chapters," chapter 38, written to St. Antiochus the Perfect. However, Louth believes this may be wrongly attributed.

[96] St. Leontius quoted in Ibid., 98. This quote origninates in St. Leonitius' 5th book against the Jews, of which the original work appears to be lost.

the image leads one to worship the true God. This distinction, reiterated from Basil in the fourth century to John of Damascus in the eighth century, provided a thin line of differentiation.

While the iconoclasts and ascetics harassed and reformed the church, St. Ambrose (337-397 CE), bishop of Milan, wrote to Emperor Gratian (359-383 CE) regarding the most alarming heresy: Arianism. Arianism claimed Christ was never fully human.[97] The Arians claimed that Jesus took on a physical appearance but was never incarnate. They believed Jesus' spirit never fully inhabited the flesh, that material from corrupt creation.[98] The reason: God could not be corrupted by flesh and blood.[99] Once divorced from the material world of flesh and bone, the abstraction of spirituality created a real and imminent crisis within the church: was Jesus really human? The church fathers and mothers rightly saw the attack on any and all of creation and images as an indirect attack on Christ's incarnation. St. Ambrose defended the incarnation:

> He was God before He took flesh, and God when He took flesh. ... But there is danger that we think of Him in abstractions, not realizing the double principle of His headship and ascribing to Him a divided wisdom. We would then glorify a mutilated Christ. How is it possible to divide Christ in this way, when we must worship both His divinity and His flesh? Do we divide Him when we venerate His flesh? Do we divide Him when we venerate the divinity?[100]

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[97] Richard P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381* (New York: T and T Clark, 2005), 449-451.

[98] Ibid., 54, 120-122, 501.

[99] Ibid., 392.

[100] St. Ambrose quoted in Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 101-102. For the purposes of this document I preferred this translation to the translation of Ambrose's works by Roy J. Deferrari, Ambrose, *Saint Ambrose: Theological and Dogmatic Works*,

These theologians pointed out how we strip Jesus of his power if we do not embrace the paradox of the incarnation. When we divorce Jesus' humanity from his divinity, his life and redemptive act become nothing more than abstract mental gymnastics. However, if Jesus is the incarnate Christ, taking onto his divine form also the human form, then God obviously did not reject creation. Thus, we may use the created world and the creativity God endowed within us, which itself is reflective of God's nature, to make images and icons.

Unfortunately, over time, abandoned of clear teaching and instruction, a new generation of idolatry arose among the common people even while church heresies were hotly debated. People increasingly worshipped the images and icons instead of looking through them to see God.[101] Home and businesses boasted images, whether pictures or statues, to which their owners no longer merely venerated, but also prayed, worshipped, and adored.[102] The people and some priests came to believe the image would do what they asked, as if the image had some magical power.[103] By the time of the iconoclast controversy and the 7th Ecumenical Council (787),[104] the use and range of imagery,

> included the didactic, illustrative material used in churches; the images of Christ and the Virgin that had an official, dogmatic function; the motifs and images that were related to Christian burial;

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ed. Hermigild Dressler, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 44 (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), 248.

[101] Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 172.

[102] Baggley, *Doors of Perception*, 18-19.

[103] Walker, *The Ancient Theology*, 11.

[104] Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 7.

> and it also included a range of images of saints ... that were often taken away from a liturgical setting and used in homes and shops, and given a degree of veneration that was not purely commemorative.[105]

Even as church leaders wrote to combat and clarify the brewing controversy, heresies spread and dogged the church. The revulsion of icon worship and abuse fueled the iconoclasts. In the center of it all Emperor Leo III (717-741) asserted his power as prophetic leader and incited iconoclastic revolts. In several cases this lead to the wholesale removal and destruction of icons.[106]

By the time the 7th Council convened there was backlash on both fronts. Fear filled pockets of leadership. Bishop Serenus of Marseilles removed the sacred pictures from his church in order that people would no longer worship them.[107] In some places the images were forcibly removed by the iconoclasts from the churches and destroyed.[108] Increased abuses served as evidence to mount pressure upon the church. Priests and laity alike were pressured to let reason and the spirit to become the central aim of spirituality by the 7th century. The goal for a spiritual person was to remove all physical distractions and, as much as humanly possible, all bodily distractions.

The 7th Ecumenical Council convened to combat these destructive threats to orthodoxy and the rising idolatrous practices. They sought to put down the consequences of extreme asceticism, the heresies regarding Christ's humanity,

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[105] Baggley, *Doors of Perception*, 18-19.

[106] Gutmann, *The Image and the Word*, 52-53.

[107] Ibid., 78-79.

[108] Ibid., 75-76, 78-79.

and the iconoclastic uprising. The first heresy they addressed was "the place of matter in God's scheme of things."[109] The second, a natural consequence of the first, was stripping Christ of his humanity where the incarnation itself was threatened. Finally, they met to defend icons as revelatory. In other words, they desired to affirm God's work through sight as well as sound, through the eye as well as the ear.[110] While this controversy ultimately was more vital to the Eastern Orthodox Church's expression of faith, both the Eastern Orthodox and the Western Catholic Church affirmed the 7th Council's articulation of the use of icons. Ultimately, St. John of Damascus wrote the definitive theological articulation of icons that the Council affirmed and that both the Eastern and Western Churches continue to affirm to this day.

While St. John stands alone at the top articulating one of the most comprehensive theological treaties on imagery in worship in the Western and Eastern Church, the preceding early church fathers and mothers added invaluable insight and laid the groundwork. St. John defined imagery in two categories. The first "are words written in books, as when God had the law engraved on tablets and desired the lives of holy men to be recorded."[111] The second were "material images, such as the jar of manna, or Aaron's staff, which were to be kept in the ark as a memorial."[112] He clearly defended the utilization of

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[109] Baggley, *Doors of Perception*, 22.

[110] Ibid., 21.

[111] Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 21.

[112] Ibid.

imagery while maintaining that those same images were nothing more than material items.

Icons were made from the dust of the earth. This material, which constructed icons and symbols, in and of its self was not divine. However, the icons and symbols were venerated and honored because they lead to the remembrance of the divine.[113] St. John firmly asserted and encouraged others in the making and use of images and symbols:

> We use all our senses to produce worthy images of Him, and we sanctify the noblest of the senses, which is that of sight. For just as words edify the ear, so also the image stimulates the eye. What the book is to the literate, the image is to the illiterate. Just as words speak to the ear, so the image speaks to the sight; it brings us understanding. For this reason God ordered the ark to be constructed of wood which would not decay, and to be gilded outside and in, and for the tablets to be placed inside, with Aaron's staff and the golden urn containing the manna, in order to provide a remembrance of the past, and an image of the future. They ... were brought forth in the sight of all the people, who gazed upon them and used them to offer praise and worship to God.[114]

While this statement laid out his theology and argued for the use of imagery, St. John faced the iconoclasts and their literal interpretation of Deuteronomy 4:16-19 prohibiting the making of images for worship:

> Since you saw no form when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire, take care and watch yourselves closely, so that you do not act corruptly by making an idol for yourselves, in the form of any figure—the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth. And when you look up to the heavens and see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, do not be led astray and bow down to them and

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[113] Ibid., 26.

[114] Ibid., 25-26.

> serve them, things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples everywhere under heaven.[115]

St. John countered a wooden interpretation of Deuteronomy with a broader scriptural understanding. As evidenced above, he pointed out God's command to make the Ark of the Covenant, cover it with gold, and place the urn with manna, the stone tablets, and the staff inside. These items and the Ark were to serve as a memorial. Even more importantly, this Ark was to be brought before Israel and gazed upon during worship, travel, and in battle.

In order to have the Ark of the Covenant and Tabernacle made, God instructed Moses to take an offering and gave specific instructions regarding its construction.[116] Furthermore, when Solomon built his temple, he was instructed to have it "decorated with the images of animals, lions and oxen, and palm trees and pomegranates."[117] In both cases, God called upon the most gifted artists to do the work. Moses employed Bezalel because God filled him with "divine spirit, with ability, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft."[118] Solomon employed Hiram from Tyre as a bronze artisan because "he was full of skill, intelligence, and knowledge in working bronze."[119] St. John pointed out that God commanded the people of Israel not make idols of any earthly material into any shape of creation and worship them. This same God also commanded the

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[115] Dt 4:16-19.

[116] Ex 25:1-22.

[117] Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 62.

[118] Ex 31:3.

[119] 1 Kgs 7:13-14.

Israelites in the building of the Ark of the Covenant, the Tabernacle, the Temple, and the utensils used in the worship of God.

God clearly gave two seemingly divergent and conflicting commands regarding worship and images. Was God talking out of both sides of his mouth? St. John aptly stated, "You see that the one thing aimed for is that no created thing can be adored in place of the Creator, nor can adoration be given to any save Him alone."[120] St. John rebuffed those critics who claimed iconoludes worship the physical art. "Use every kind of drawing, word, or color. Fear not; have no anxiety; discern between the different kinds of worship."[121] He demonstrated there were two distinct forms of worship: Latreia (λατρεία), best translated as adoration, and proskinesis (προσκύνησις),[122] best translated as veneration or honor. Latreia, as he pointed out, is seldom used and is reserved to describe the worship reserved for God alone. Proskinesis, on the other hand, is used to describe the honor or veneration given when honor is due to someone or a sacred object.

When Abraham bowed before the sons of Hamor,[123] he was giving honor that was due to them, proskinesis. When Jacob bowed before Esau,[124] he was venerating the one who deserved honor. When Joshua and Daniel[125] bowed

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[120] Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 17.

[121] Ibid., 18.

[122] Proskinesis literally means "kissing toward".

[123] Gn 23:7.

[124] Gn 33:3.

[125] Jo 33:13-15; Dn 8:16-17.

before the angel of the Lord, they were honoring those who came in the name of the Lord.[126] We may venerate and honor kings, emperors, or presidents because honor is due them.

When we do this we adore and honor, latreia, God who is Lord of all creation. Similarly, when we draw the image of Christ incarnate in his birth, his baptism, or his miracles, we bring honor, proskinesis, to the image in order that we may bring adoration, latreia, to God. When we venerate, the images of Mary, mother of Jesus, and the Saints, we offer adoration to the One to whom their lives served and loved. We venerate, the created icon, person, or creation because it leads us to adoration of the God of all Creation.

For St. John this distinction played a vital role in understanding the difference between the worship of images and the worship of God. While the iconoclast believed in a hierarchy of worship where matter was contemptible,[127] St. John rebutted,

> I do not worship matter; I worship the Creator of matter, who became matter for me, taking up His abode in matter, and accomplishing my salvation through matter. ... It is obvious to everyone that flesh is matter, and that it is created. I salute matter and I approach it with reverence, and I worship that through which my salvation has come. I honor it, not as God, but because it is full of divine grace and strength.[128]

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[126] Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 18-19.

[127] Ibid., 60-61.

[128] Ibid., 61-62.

He reiterated Genesis 1:31, "God saw what he had made, and indeed, it was very good." He embraced creation as God's. Matter was not evil because God created it; in honoring material things you adore God.

In his third treaty on images, St. John clearly delineated these distinct categories of worship as absolute worship and relative worship. Absolute worship is adoration, which is reserved for God alone. Adoration can be described in five ways. There is adoration of a servant for the master, God. There is adoration in awe of God and yearning for God. There is adoration in thanksgiving for all the good things God has given. There is adoration inspired by our needs and hope for God's blessing. Finally, there is adoration of God through repentance and confession.[129] In these expressions we give God absolute worship.

St. John then described relative worship. These are the places where God alone is holy. The lives of the saints are holy. The created things God used to accomplish our salvation, the incarnation, the cross, the cave, Gethsemane, Bethsaida, and the temple are holy. The worship we give to objects dedicated to God, the Bible, chalices, and candlesticks are holy. The visions and dreams of the prophets are honored. The honor we give to each other since we are made in God's image is holy. The honor we give to those who are in authority over us is holy. The honor a servant gives to a master is holy.[130] In all these things we give honor to God through the relationships we have with these created things. It was the development of these distinctions that provided the language for

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[129] Ibid., 82-87.

[130] Ibid., 84-88.

understanding the colors and shades of worship. St. John articulated that when we show honor and veneration to images, to creation, and to created icons they become windows through which we give adoration to God.

St. John claimed God to be the original icon creator. When God first created humanity, male and female, in God's image, God was creating the archetype for the use of imagery pointing to and reflecting the Creator. The incarnation with both Jesus' full divinity and full humanity remained central to his argument: [131]

> God, who is without form or body, could never be depicted. But now when God is seen in the flesh conversing with men, I make an image of the God whom I see. I do not worship matter; I worship the Creator of matter who became matter for my sake, who willed to take His abode in matter; who worked out my salvation through matter. Never will I cease honoring the matter which wrought my salvation! I honor it, but not as God. How could God be born out of things which have no existence in themselves? God's body is God because it is joined to His person by a union which shall never pass away. The divine nature remains the same; the flesh created in time is quickened by a reason-endowed soul. Because of this I salute all remaining matter with reverence, because God has filled it with His grace and power. Through it my salvation has come to me.[132]

In St. John's words, he, nor the church, worshiped matter, rather through matter we are able to see the Creator.

The biblical evidence was clear to St. John that God endorsed and even created images to serve as places of remembrance, instructors of the faith, and portals of revelation. The icon had always been intended as a window to view the

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[131] John of Damascus, *Saint John of Damascus: Writings*, ed. and trans. Frederic H. Chase, vol. 37 of *The Father's of the Church* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1958), 271.

[132] Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 23.

intangible, an altar where we remember the places we met with God. The icon was also an instructor for those reflecting upon the lives of the faithful. Standing with the church fathers and mothers before him, St. John taught that the material world was not deplorable; rather it was sacred. The icons then were sacred, not because of the material with which they were created, but rather because of the One whom they revealed. And as all material items come to an end or a death, when an icon faded and became worn out, he instructed others to "throw the image into the fire."[133]

I believe the Protestant and Evangelical traditions have much to learn from these early fathers and mothers. I believe we have much to learn from the iconoclasts and the iconoludes. Sittser reminds us of the potential for abuse.

> There is risk in all this-the risk of idolatry. Though the Pentateuch prescribed the use of sacred objects, places and rituals so that God and humanity could safely and meaningfully meet, it also warned against the sin of idolatry, which consists of reducing God to something less than what God is or replacing God with something else. The Old Testament addresses this problem. The Ark of the Covenant provided a space for an encounter between divine and human. Yet even in the case of this sacred object, God himself was not portrayed directly. The space reserved for God-the "mercy seat," as it was called-was left empty, as if to demonstrate that God could not be reduced to a concrete object.[134]

The iconoclasts saw faithful worshippers kissing, praying, and lavishing gifts upon the icons, images, and symbols of worship. They rebuked the church for the abuses, for turning the material into gods. When the objects themselves became gods, the backlash was reasonable; there is only one God! When the

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[133] Ibid., 98.

[134] Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well*, 146.

people began to adore the material world instead of the living God, believing their prayers would be answered by a picture, a staff, or another sacred object, the rage of iconoclasts broke upon the iconoludes.

While these objections were fueled by righteous anger, their expression and rage went too far leading to wholesale destruction of icons. Though their passion was to bring reform, they provided fuel for the heresies and further compromised the incarnation. This chasm was fueled by Plato, Plontinus, and the Hellenistic hierarchy of forms. This division and hierarchy of forms, in the hands of the iconoclasts, tore creation from the Creator. The absolute corruption of material things in their eyes made their use deplorable and incompatible with the things of the spirit which were free to pursue God.

Caution in the use of imagery is wise. However, the rejection of all material things is extremely misguided and unbiblical. As St. Basil, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. John of Damascus, and many others articulated, God created the heavens and the earth and God declared them good. The fall was not a removal of our image but a marring, a breaking, a corrupting of our relationship, our covenant, with God. Through the incarnation, God gave the world a visible image through which we could see the Father. God created the ultimate icon.

As this chapter closes let us learn from both the iconoclasts and iconoludes for there is very real danger in either extreme. In our image-saturated culture, where visual literacy is becoming more vital than aural and written literacy, we need to rediscover a sacred theology of imagery. In a world where communication is visual the church must learn to be visually conversant to

dialogue with the present culture. We would do well to learn from the church fathers and mothers, the Scriptures, and the use of imagery. We must create forms and images in the present to develop a contemporary visual language theology that will open doors to conversations with both those in the pews and those on the streets.

As we endeavor to traverse these paths, we would do well to remember the voices of the past who cried out against the abuses in order that we might not needlessly repeat past mistakes. More importantly, we need to be able to recognize abuses and teach proactively. We must hold in tension the iconoclasts' recognition and warning of the potential dangers regarding the use of imagery in worship with the iconoludes' enthusiasm to use them in worship. Ultimately, the early church and many church fathers and mothers along with the 7th Council believed the benefits of using imagery in worship outweighed the risks.

In Chapter Four we will continue our journey through history. We will engage the Reformation as its influence on imagery in faith left Protestants with an indelible tradition of iconoclasts. I want to be clear that I do not advocate that we return to equating holy images with the Scriptures, rather I simply believe that to engage our culture we must increase our use and appreciation for imagery as well as articulate a contemporary theology of imagery. As Ouspensky quoted the Quinisext Council,

> Holy Scripture and the holy image are "mutually revelatory." One single content is witnessed in two different ways with words or with images-conveying the same revelation in the light of the same sacred and living Tradition of the Church. ... Thus, the visible

> image is equivalent to the verbal image. Just as the word of scripture is an image, so is the painted image a word.[135]

May we discover a place for imagery in our own spiritual journey as individuals as well as one we can share as a community of faith.

[135] Quinisext Council quoted in Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, 138.

CHAPTER 4: HISTORICAL, THEOLOGICAL, PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCES – ST. FRANCIS AND THE REFORMATION TO THE PRESENT

> In former times, God, being without form or body, could in no way be represented. But today, since God has appeared in the flesh and lived among men, I can represent what is visible in God. I do not worship matter, but I worship the creator of matter who became matter for my sake ... and who, through matter accomplished my salvation. Never will I cease to honor the matter which brought about my salvation!
>
> - John of Damascus, *On Divine Images*[1]

The 7th Council wrote the definitive theological grounding of imagery in worship. It was ratified and received by both the Eastern and Western Churches. The distinction in the use of imagery in worship was one of worship as adoration (Latreia) or worship as honor (Proskinesis). Adoration was reserved for God alone. Honor was given to all material that pointed past itself to help us enter more intimately into a relationship with God.[2] Regardless of the council's best efforts, platonic philosophies and asceticism undermined the council's articulations as true forms and freedom from the sinful body were popularized and became the apex in the hierarchy of spiritual pursuits.

The debate regarding the use of imagery ultimately became a defense of Christ's incarnation.[3] In other words, the incarnation is the point. The incarnation

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[1] Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 9.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Baggley, *Doors of Perception*, 23.

is foundational to understanding the Gospel as well as our covenant with God. It is foundational to understanding the role and use of all of creation in worship. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."[4] The pivotal argument during the 7th Council for the use of icons and imagery in worship was "that in the incarnation a decisive and eternal change took place in the relationship between God and material creation."[5]

In this Chapter the aim will be to continue to uncover the path to our present Protestant and Evangelical iconoclast attitudes. I plan to accomplish this by tracing the discussion forward from the 7th Council. I will begin with a review of Jesus as an icon. St. Francis will take center stage as one of the greatest examples of the use of imagery in spiritual formation. Then we will spend time with the Reformers. Ultimately, this chapter will culminate in a brief compilation of post-Reformation iconoclasts.

As stated, the shift to a more platonic and ascetic spirituality had begun by the 7th Council (787 CE). The Catholic Church embraced a more reason-and-mind oriented path. As we will see the Reformation further thrust the Protestant church whole-heartedly toward rational and philosophical verbal expressions of faith. While this emphasis has served parts of our spirituality well, there is another part that we would do well to rediscover: the books we read with our eyes, images. To do this I want to continue our trek across the ocean of history.

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[4] Jn 1:14.

[5] Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 9.

Yet before we continue our historical journey, let's review what is at stake, the incarnation.

Jesus was the living image of the immortal, invisible, incorporeal God. Through Jesus' life, through his humanity, we are able to see God. Jesus became the physical embodiment of God through which the Trinity was made visible. In reflecting upon images of Jesus and reflecting upon the images created by the Scriptures, we see God. Through this prism we see the full extent of God's love shown through Christ.[6] Jesus expressed his love by washing the disciples' feet.[7] Jesus showed his love for us in his willingness to go to the cross.[8] Jesus showed his love for the Father in being obedient even to death.[9]

If we rip Christ's humanity from the incarnation, we return to the heresies of the Arians and Gnostics. According to Arian and Gnostic thought being Christian is found in disembodied knowledge that somehow unlocks the key to salvation. In the world of leadership studies, Edwin Friedman says that too often we believe some special knowledge will unlock the key to great leadership. Friedman articulates this idea well, "So often we look for knowledge and techniques to solve problems. Yet this does not address the real issues, which are relational. The real problems stem from our anxieties and insecurities."[10]

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[6] Jn 13:1b.

[7] Jn 13:2-17.

[8] Jn 19:16-17.

[9] Jn 19:18-37.

[10] Edwin H. Friedman, *Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Seabury Books, 1999), 3.

Often we look for some knowledge or technique to solve a relational problem. The root of this struggle stems from the broken covenant with God and broken covenant with each other.

Without the incarnate Christ being both fully human and fully divine we are left with an incomplete picture of God. As Jesus commanded his disciples, "love each other as I have loved you."[11] Jesus reminded the disciples that it is through our love that others will know we belong to him.[12] It is through our love of our neighbor and even our enemies that people will recognize we are followers of Christ.[13] It is through our love that others catch glimpses of Christ and through Christ see God. It is love lived out in the midst of pain, struggles, temptations, and failures that bears witness to God's miraculous work in our lives. Essentially, through imitating Christ, we become living icons.

As we become imitators of Christ our lives become incarnational. They are transformed by God's love and the ongoing formative work of the Holy Spirit. Through this process others are able to see through our lives and get a glimpse of God. Our lives become the living Gospel through which believers and seekers alike view a covenantal relationship with God. Throughout history icons served to envision the lives of those who faithfully followed Christ. The creators of the icons worked to capture these qualities so that people would have places to reflect upon Christ-like qualities. They accentuated the aspects of Christ-likeness for

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[11] Jn 15:12b, 17.

[12] Jn 13:34-35.

[13] Lk 6:27-36; 10:25-36.

others to reflect upon. As John the Apostle wrote, "we have heard ... we have seen with our eyes ... and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.[14]

Several men and women throughout history have challenged us and led the church in utilizing imagery in spiritual formation both by their teachings and by their lives. St. Francis (1181-1226) was one such person. Not only did his life become an icon but he utilized images and symbols to help people keep Christ continually before them. St. Francis came at a tenuous time in Church history. Historically and theologically, the journey from the 7th Council to the time of St. Francis was long and painful for the church. In 1054 CE the Western Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches endured a bitter divorce.[15] With the split came two very different approaches to visual worship.

In the Eastern Orthodox Church icons remained as esteemed as the written Scriptures.[16] These images were central to their communication of faith.[17] The incarnation remained central to the Eastern Orthodox Church's understanding and expression of faith through icons.[18] In the centuries following this divorce, the Eastern Orthodox Church proclaimed that "material creation, is at the heart of the economy of salvation. Humankind is the center of created life being made in the image of God, and through the gift of free will, we are the

[14] 1 Jn 1:1.

[15] Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 38.

[16] Baggley, *Doors of Perception*, 23-24.

[17] Zelensky and Gilbert, *Windows to Heaven*, 22.

[18] Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 8.

means through which God acts in all creation."[19] They affirmed the material world was intimately connected with the spiritual. To see God and to recognize truth meant that one could not be divorced from the physical and material world. Today in the Eastern Church images and creation serve "as portals to a higher domain."[20] The use of sight provides access to the "realm of transcendence, the dwelling place of Eternal Beauty and Truth."[21]

In contrast, the Western Catholic Church produced didactic attitudes toward imagery while still affirming the 7th Council. In the Catholic Church, icons faced increasing hostilities and destruction. Dryness describes this difference succinctly,

> Outward forms were meant to assist in forming godly habits of mind, and whatever was believed to contribute to this was welcomed. The Eastern Church ... took far more interest in the direct access to God that the forms provided, while the Western tradition placed greater emphasis on their pedagogical value.[22]

Zelensky describes how the Western church responded to these images with down to earth questions:

> Why are the facial expressions so fixed?
> Why do the icons appear to be two-dimensional?
> Why the colorful robes? Do the colors mean anything?
> Why did our guide insist that icons are written, not painted?
> Why are some icons covered in silver or gold?
> Why does Jesus hold his hand in the same position in so many icons?[23]

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[19] Zelensky and Gilbert, *Windows to Heaven*, 25.

[20] Ibid., 13.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 33.

[23] Zelensky and Gilbert, *Windows to Heaven*, 13-14.

The Western Catholic Church and Protestant Churches turned to the Biblical text as their primary source of spiritual insight despite the fact that most people could not read. The visual became a practical method of teaching rather than a portal for theological revelation, let alone to a higher domain.[24] The result was the prominence of the priests as mediator. This priestly role ultimately became one of the chief rallying cries of the reformation.

Regarding the Bible, the Eastern Orthodox and the Western Catholic Church as well as the Protestant and Evangelical traditions have a long history of showing great honor toward the Scriptures.[25] Yet their approaches to the text were divergent. In the Eastern Church the Bible was considered an aural form of imagery as well as a source of authority. In the West the Protestants understood it to be the sole source of information and inspiration. For the Western Catholic church the Bible was considered one of the two primary sources of authority along with the Papal office.[26] While I have grossly simplified these biblical traditions, I used these simplified descriptions to help differentiate. Ultimately, the Reformers and Protestant traditions rallied around the banner of Sola Scriptura.[27] A few Reformers incorporated illustrations of the testaments for pedagogical

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[24] Ibid., 16-17.

[25] Ibid., 25.

[26] Zachman, *Image and Word*, 91.

[27] Herbert David Rix, *Martin Luther: The Man and the Image* (New York: Irvington, 1983), 58.

purposes, however, these representational art forms[28] were limited in use so as not to distract worshipers performing religious devotions and practices.

The Eastern Orthodox Church ultimately claimed the Western Catholic Church worshiped the Bible. They believed the Catholic Church more than venerated the text; they asserted the Western Church adored the Scriptures. This was the inverse claim the Catholic Church provided accusing the Eastern Orthodox Church of adoring the icons. The Reformers, over the next three centuries, from St. Francis to the Reformation, exceeded both traditions in their meticulous handling of the Bible.[29]

The tradition of venerating the Scriptures as a book[30] became visceral in my first youth pastorate. When I threw away a tattered old Bible a dear old woman chastised me. She recovered the Bible from the garbage can, tersely scolding, "Never throw away the Bible. It is God's word and it must never be discarded like trash." However, this Bible had lost its usefulness. No one read it because the pages were missing, whole chapters were missing, and the pages were torn. I believed that when it lost its usefulness you recycled it. However, this Bible as an icon had become sacred in her eyes. The physical Bible was holy and the physical pages seemed to carry some magical power. Unlike the icons of the Early Church that were thrown away and burned when they lost their

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[28] Zelensky and Gilbert, *Windows to Heaven*, 16.

[29] As mentioned earlier, I am oversimplifying in order to make clearer the larger argument.

[30] Zelensky and Gilbert, *Windows to Heaven*, 25.

usefulness,[31] when a Bible fell apart, the Protestant church screamed, "don't burn it." The Bible transformed from a compass pointing us to Christ, the Truth, into the pages themselves becoming sacred. It appeared as if the Bible morphed from being a medium to communicate the Good News to the Bible having some magical power.

I point this out as an example. In not so subtle ways we turn to the Scriptures as if they magically hold all the answers. In our modern expressions of faith, the Bible has become a self-help book or worse an answer book. Even Jesus corrected the scribes, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."[32] To sum this up, Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."[33] In other words, Scripture is to be held in highest esteem. Yet there is nothing sacred about the physical Bible. It is just earthly material, paper, ink, glue, and often leather. These physical elements hold no special value. Similarly, there is nothing magical about words on the page. There is no magical incantation to receive salvation. However, the power of Scripture comes as the Holy Spirit illuminates our hearts and minds to the Truth, Jesus Christ. The Scriptures testify to this truth, and in their testimony they become sacred as they point us to Christ.

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[31] Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 92-93.

[32] Jn 5:39-40.

[33] Jn 14:6.

It was into this rift between word and imagery St. Francis (1181-1226 CE) arrived. St. Francis embodied a radical embracing of imagery in a way that honors God. More so, St. Francis, like his beloved Jesus, became a living icon. In many ways he turned martyrdom into a way of life.[34] As G.K. Chesterton said of Francis of Assisi,

> St. Francis was not thinking of Martyrdom as a means to an end, but almost an end in itself; in the sense that to him the supreme end was to come closer to the example of Christ. Through all his plunging and restless days ran the refrain: I have not suffered enough; I have not sacrificed enough; I am not yet worthy even of the shadow of the crown of thorns.[35]

To understand the radical and compelling nature of St. Francis, let's take a walk through the wilderness of Assisi.

St. Francis created some of the most endearing and lasting images in the Western Church. These images created a new way of thinking which led to new ways of living. These images were powerful and compelling. They captured the attention and intellects of archbishops and kings, yet they were simple enough to carry in the hearts and minds of the illiterate peasants, beggars, and common people. Ultimately, St. Francis' own life became the image, the icon, the metaphor for connecting and living with creation, people, and God. This exploration of imagery in St. Francis's life will at times feel biographical, however it is important to understand how St. Francis's life itself became an image and

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[34] Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well*, 48.

[35] G. K. Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi* (London: Image Books Doubleday, 2001), 114.

remains an icon in the minds of those who continue to walk with this saint through the writings passed on to us.

Before I unpack St. Francis's life as an image, let's look at a few of the images Francis utilized in spiritual practice. For St. Francis the material that made up images held no special power, hidden meaning, or efficacy yet the images were powerful. They served as places of reflection and visual prompts for spiritual disciplines as well as tactile and visible pedagogical helps. He grasped the need for something physical and tangible to help people to connect with God. As the Franciscan Friars wrote,

> Francis´ highest intention, his chief desire, his uppermost purpose was to observe the holy Gospel in all things and through all things and, with perfect vigilance, with all zeal, with all the longing of his mind and all the fervor of his heart, "to follow the teaching and the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ." He would recall Christ's word through persistent meditation and bring to mind his deeds through the most penetrating consideration. The humility of the incarnation and the charity of the passion occupied his memory particularly, to the extent that he wanted to think of hardly anything else.[36]

The incarnation, the humility of Christ, captivated him.

The very thought of Christ entering the world that Christ created consumed St. Francis' time in mediation. During his lifetime there was such a chasm between the priests and laity that many felt faith was something only the spiritually elite could achieve. St. Francis set an example of true discipleship for the laity.[37] Holiness was reserved for clergy, monks, or those wealthy enough to

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[36] Vita prima Thomas of Celano, "St. Francis of Assisi, The Christmas Crib", www.franciscanfriarstor.com/stfrancis/stf_francis_christmas_crib.htm (accessed December 13, 2008).

[37] Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well*, 194.

have the leisure time to pursue it.[38] To Francis, the fact that creation cried out and testified to the beauty of God stood in stark contrast to popular thinking. In the theological traditions of Augustine and philosophical yeast of Plato, the things of creation were considered lesser and corrupt compared to true forms. Even more insidious was the manner in which creation connected our very bodies with sin. Yet, to Francis, the physical things of this world were the means through which everyone might connect with God.

St. Francis knew sin corrupted our bodies and all of creation was tainted by the effects of sin, rebellion against God. However, he "embraced the entire world with a kind of reckless joy. That included the natural world too, which he celebrated as a precious gift from God."[39] He knew creation as a means through which we are able to see, embrace, learn, and love God. He taught creation is part of our family and we are brothers and sisters with all of creation.[40] St. Francis captured this in his hymn "All Creatures of Our God and King":

> All creatures of our God and King,
> Lift up your voice and with us sing,
> O praise Him! Alleluia!
> Thou burning sun with golden beam,
> Thou silver moon with softer gleam,
> O Praise Him, O Praise Him, Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! [41]

It was out of this theology of creation, passion for the incarnation, and devotion to living out the Scriptures literally that St. Francis developed his praxis of images.

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[38] Ibid., 189-191.

[39] Ibid., 195.

[40] Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi*, 79.

[41] The authorship of this hymn is debated, however, it is considered consistent with St. Francis' life and thought.

Some images came in the form carvings, words, people, or other tangible forms. St. Francis created one of the greatest images which still captives our imagination today, "The Canticle of Brother Sun." Read. Let your imagination and heart hear the flow of all creation praising God. Truly enter the verse as a part of creation:

> Praise be You, my Lord, with all your creatures,
> Especially Sir Brother Sun,
> Who is the day and through whom You give us light.
> And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;
> And bears a likeness of You, Most High One.
> Praise be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
> In heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.
> Praise be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
> And through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather
> Through which You give sustenance to Your creatures.
> Praise be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
> Which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.[42]

Though not considered highly educated, Francis often wove words to create tapestries for the mind, mental and narrative images which remained with people much like the songs "Amazing Grace"[43] or "It Is Well with My Soul."[44] The way Francis talked and wrote often reframed the way one thought, felt, or even imagined life. These narrative images formed and shaped people in his time even as they continue to form and shape people today.

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[42] St. Francis and St. Clare, *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 38-39.

[43] John Newton, 1760-1770.

[44] Horatio G. Spafford, 1873.

Francis utilized traditions in imagery to encourage those who walked with him and followed him. He regularly admonished the Friars Minor[45] to meditate on the Scriptures through the Stations of the Cross. While reflecting upon the Cross at San Damiano, Francis received his call to rebuild the church. Francis believed this call was to literally rebuild and restore the decrepit San Damiano church.[46] He scoured the countryside collecting stones and other resources to rebuild it.[47] Ultimately, this little church became the metaphor for the rebuilding of the Catholic Church. He also reflected upon the crucifix which depicted Jesus nailed to the cross. Behind it was painted images of the crucifixion.[48] These images guided his meditation of the suffering and passion of Christ. Eventually, reflection upon The Stations of the Cross and the crucifix itself became a regular staple in the life of the Friars Minor.[49]

One of the most endearing of all the images Francis left us was the crèche. Francis said, "If thou wilt that we celebrate the present festival of the Lord at Greccio make haste to go before and diligently prepare what I tell thee. For I would make memorial of that Child who was born in Bethlehem and in some sort behold with bodily eyes His infant hardships how He lay in a manger on the hay

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[45] This was the name St. Francis gave to the Friars who followed him. Literally: "Little Brothers."

[46] Ira Peck, *The Life and Words of St. Francis of Assisi* (New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1973), 32.

[47] Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi*, 49-50.

[48] Thomas of Celano, "St. Francis of Assisi, The Christmas Crib."

[49] St. Francis, "Saint Francis Stations of the Cross", Saint Francis of Assisi National Catholic Church, http://francisassisipncc.org/stations.html (accessed November 3, 2010).

with the ox and the ass standing by."[50] What an amazing vision. This simple practice, this physical image, endures to this day and has morphed into many forms. It frequently has been adapted to the use of cute children dressed as animals. For Francis, this simple manger scene connected an event a millennia past to present day minds, hearts, hands, noses, and ears.[51] It is said that great joy spread among the people at the first crèche as they observed the sleeping baby. For the first time the Bible came alive in ways people could experience with all their senses. Imagine standing with Francis at the first crèche. How awe inspiring.

The Tau, the Greek letter for "t", was Francis's favorite symbol. He required the Friars Minor to wear it on a regular basis. The Tau was to be a constant reminder of the cross of Christ.[52] Francis took this static symbol and gave it living form. When the Friars Minor greeted one another they put their arms out wide and in doing so their tunic would create the Tau symbol.[53] When the friars saw the Tau they were prompted to remember the suffering and love of Christ. It served as a constant reminder especially in the sufferings of service and

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[50] Thomas of Celano, *The Lives of St. Francis of Assisi*, trans. A. G. Ferrers Howell (London: Methuen, 1908), 82-83.

[51] St. Bonaventura, "The First Christmas Creche: The True Story of Greccio, Italy, Dec. 24th, 1223 A.D.", The Franciscan Archive, http://www.franciscan-archive.org/bonaventura/opera/creche.html (accessed November 3, 2010).

[52] Ken E Norian, "The Tau Cross: An Explanation", The Franciscans, http://www.franciscanfriarstor.com/archive/stfrancis/stf_the_tau_cross.htm (accessed November 3, 2010).

[53] Thomas of Celano, "St. Francis of Assisi, The Christmas Crib."

of dying to one's self as Christ died. It was a visual reminder, one they could touch, which served as a prompt to guide their thoughts back to the Gospel.

As one can see, "a spiritual revolution was in progress. ... it was typified by new devotion to the humanity of Christ: the use of the Christmas crèche, the Stations of the Cross, the systematic meditation on the passion of Christ."[54] Francis utilized a number of images, both unique and some well tested, as a means of helping the Friars and people to stay engaged and continually meditate upon the life of Christ. In using tactile images, the reality of the Gospels became more poignant. The message was not lost in some ethereal discussion or theological treatise or hidden in the passages of an unreadable book. Rather, the very use of created things rooted faith back into creation. It made the message clear. It helped prick the heart and focus the mind. It served as a tool of remembrance every time a glace fell upon an image or icon. Yet, beyond all this, the most compelling use of imagery was Francis' life itself.

What I found stirring my soul as I immersed myself in the images St. Francis used was the reality that St. Francis himself became a living image, an icon of the gospel, lived out among the common people. He was a present reality people touched, saw, and heard. His message struck the hearts of listeners who were able to hear the message of the gospel not just through proclamation, but also through visual witness.

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[54] Maas and O'Donnell, *Spiritual Traditions*, 91.

As mentioned in an earlier quote, Francis' passion was "to follow the teaching and the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ."[55] He wanted to live out the gospel literally. This was not a new ascetic form. Rather, it was out of a great love for Christ[56] and reverence for the incarnation that he sought to imitate Christ.[57] So, if the gospel said to love those who hate you, you were to love.[58] If Jesus said not to take anything with you when you set out on a journey, then you took nothing with you.[59] Trusting God for every need by radically embracing poverty, serving others, and receiving only what others offered created a vast contrast between the Friars Minor and the world around them.

St. Francis weaved a beautiful image of joy[60] and summarized joy as, "above all the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit, which Christ grants to His friends, is that of self-conquest and of willingly bearing sufferings, injuries and reproaches and discomforts for the love of Christ."[61] Again, Francis lived this with such passion and conviction that people could not deny his devotion nor could they dismiss him as an ascetic lunatic. As Gerald Sittser points out, "Francis won the admiration of the people because he lived a Christ-like life in the same world

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[55] Thomas of Celano, "St. Francis of Assisi, The Christmas Crib."

[56] Holt, *Thirsty for God*, 89.

[57] Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi*, 109.

[58] Lk 6:27-36.

[59] Lk 10:3-4.

[60] Ugolino di Monte Santa Maria, *The Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi*, trans. W. Heywood, Vintage Spiritual Classics (New York: Vintage Books, 1998).

[61] Ibid., 21.

that ordinary people occupied."[62] People saw the quality of Christ's life lived among them. They knew and recognized its power and possibility.

Through the power of observation, people were confronted with images of Christ. It was as the apostle John wrote,

> That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ... We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete. [63]

From the moment Giovanni Francesco di Bernardone as a young aristocrat shed his wealthy clothing and put on rags as Francis he dedicated his life in service to the poor.[64] In opposition to his father he began giving the family fortune to those in need. He lived "utterly scorned and mortified for penance, in such a manner that he was deemed a mad man and was scoffed as at a madman driven away with stones and mud by kinsfolk and by strangers."[65] In quiet endurance and patience, living through these first years where he was spit upon, beaten, harassed, and accused of being insane for rejecting his role in society, Francis lived out a visible representation of Christ's suffering and humiliation. Through the power of their senses people saw the gospel embodied in a person.

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[62] Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well*, 197.

[63] 1 Jn 1:1, 3-4.

[64] Maria, *The Little Flowers*, xxi, xxxiv.

[65] Ibid., 4.

This rebellion culminated in a final confrontation. His father, enraged at Francis' behavior and seeing that it was not just another childish phase, dragged Francis before the local Bishop. There his father demanded that the Bishop speak to Francis and straighten out his religious fanaticism. As a result, Francis stood in the middle of town stripped off his clothes, bundled them up, turned to his father, and handed his clothes to him. In this act Francis "renounced his heritage and proclaimed that from that point on his Father in heaven would be his only true father."[66] In the midst of all of Creation, his family, the town, Francis lived out what the rich young ruler could not.[67] People saw with their own eyes what rarely is seen today, a person who is willing to follow Christ regardless of the personal cost.

Another piercing example from Francis' life is the night he faced his fear of leprosy.[68] The legend recounts how Francis was walking home late one night and met a leper walking toward him. As they were to pass, Francis stopped and kissed the leper.[69] It was in this moment his spirit was set free. He not only overcame his fear of lepers, he began to encourage the Friars Minor to join in serving and ministering to those marginalized by society.[70] As this story was retold of his encounter with the leper and the subsequent action of ministering to

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[66] Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well*, 195.

[67] Lk 18:18-29.

[68] Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well*, 195.

[69] Celano, *The Lives of St. Francis of Assisi*, 17-18, 153.

[70] Ibid., 74-75.

the lepers, people could see Jesus among the lepers.[71] Through this encounter Francis brought life to the story of the Good Samaritan.[72]

As Francis kept Christ before him continuously, his life increasingly became an image of the Scriptures brought to life.[73] As he read the Scriptures, he did what he saw Jesus doing. He embodied what Paul admonished the church in Philippi to do:

> Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.[74]

Francis' life was his message and, in that, his life was his song, a Canticle of Christ. He incarnated the Spirit and words of Christ. As he kept Christ before his eyes with physical imagery and daily living, people around him changed. As they bored of throwing insults, mud, and rocks, they began to passively listen to see if what he lived out was real. The mocking turned to questioning, "Is this man for real?" The questioning turned to belief. Belief transformed into admiration. Admiration became imitation.

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[71] Mt 8:1-4, 10:8, 26:6-12; Mk 1:40-45; Lk 5:12-16, 17:11-19.

[72] Lk 10:25-37.

[73] Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi*, 108.

[74] Phil 2:14-18.

Beyond the initial cynicism from the people in Assisi, Francis' greatest defense was his steadfast love of Christ.[75] It was through this love that Francis was compelled to live as Christ lived.[76] As GK Chesterton said, "his religion was not a thing or a theory but a thing like a love-affair."[77] It was through this love that the intangible teaching of the Gospel through the Holy Spirit became compelling. It was in seeing, touching, hearing, and participating in the Gospel that people began to be transformed through the Holy Spirit. The Gospel wasn't an ethereal ideal nor was Christ an intangible Savior. Both became real and touchable and people drank them in with their lives. They experienced the living person of the incarnate Christ through the love one man had for his Creator. Through the images Francis created, they continually were reminded of the Gospel message. To summarize the whole, their senses were filled with experiences of Christ through the life of Francis and the Friars Minor and the enduring images they left behind.[78] The amazing thing was that this changed the lives of people from all walks of life, not just the poor and uneducated.

Francis' message to the church today is clear. We must authentically and tangibly live out our love for Christ in our neighborhoods, communities, families, and every place we find ourselves. We must keep Christ before us at all times, listen to the Holy Spirit, and follow obediently. The method will vary. However,

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[75] Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi*, 7.

[76] Celano, *The Lives of St. Francis of Assisi*, 9, 114.

[77] Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi*, 8.

[78] Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well*, 197.

the motivation to find ways to keep the image, the words, and the life of Christ before us continuously must be embraced. In doing so, we will rekindle the imagination of a new generation to see, hear, feel, and touch the Savior we love. We enter into a life like this not because we have to do it to please God or others. Rather, we do it because we are compelled by Christ's love and our love for Christ.

Despite Francis' influence in the 12th century, imagery continued to decline as the influence of reason and philosophy grew. After centuries of icon abuse by the Catholic Church, Protestant reformers struck out against their use. However, only in a few cases did violent iconoclastic movements literally rip, smash, and tear the icons from churches. Joseph Gutmann highlighted a few of the most destructive acts against the icons:

> Some Lollards of Leicester cooked their supper over a fire struck from a statue of St. Catherine; and wild Bohemian Taborites were fond of knocking the heads off statues of the saints in the churches of Pisek and Pilsen nevertheless, the loss to European art from these isolated incidents was negligible. With the exception of a few Hussite communities in fifteenth-century Bohemia, iconoclasts in Europe never had the support of secular authority. European art suffered much more from the depredations of "free companies" during the Hundred Years War and from the "urban renewal" projects of Renaissance popes than from the antics of these few image-breakers; and not until the arrival of Zwingli's preachers and Cromwell's troopers was the total body of European religious art seriously diminished.[79]

While there was obvious and literal destruction of icons, Gutmann points out that until the Reformation the most destructive forces were the "free companies" and papal renewal projects.

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[79] Gutmann, *The Image and the Word*, 75-76.

Despite growing iconoclastic sentiments, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 CE), one of the church's great theologians, defended the utilization of images. He echoed John of Damascas articulating that "religion does not offer worship to images considered as mere things in themselves, but as images drawing us to God incarnate. Devotion to an image does not stop there at the image, but goes on to the thing it represents."[80] William Durandus (1230-1296 CE) similarly echoed St. Gregory, "Pictures and ornaments in churches are the lessons and the scriptures of the laity."[81] Yet these affirmations in the Catholic Church were undermined by the increasing separation of the physical from the spiritual.

Aquinas had deeply rooted Neo-Platonic leanings as evidenced in his writing of "The Ascent." Through the discipline of reason, prayer, and meditation one worked toward the "goal of the spiritual life ... 'beatific vision,' which could not be experienced fully until heaven."[82] So while Aquinas affirmed the use of icons, he undermined the power of the icon. Ultimately, the icon was utilized to help one through reason, prayer, and meditation to transcend the trappings of the earth. True knowledge and understanding come as reason and faith are set free from the attachments of this world. A week before his death he "had a vision of God while worshiping, causing him to assert that, by comparison with this vision, all he had written was worthless."[83] St. Thomas left ample room for the use of

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[80] Ibid., 1.

[81] Ibid., 2.

[82] Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 43.

[83] Ibid.

imagery in worship, created fresh avenues for Platonic thought to develop, and furthered the separation of the material world from the spiritual world in spiritual formation. The material world, while helpful, was deemed useful only as it helped us gain a vision of God. This vision came "through the exercise of reason, and finally through prayer and meditation."[84]

In spite of these affirmations and the Catholic Church's use of imagery, the abuses grew. In the last waves of the medieval times, reformers emerged. They saw pagan expressions emerging in the worship of icons.[85] Instead of the icon offering a way of giving honor to God, to an increasing number of people the artifact was believed to have real power. Imagery was reduced to carnal levels. People believed the wood and canvas held magical powers.[86] People prayed to the images and the saints depicted in them as if the image or the saint held the real power. Adoration, which was reserved for God alone, was given to the material.[87] People prayed, bowed, and gave offerings to these images and symbols as if they imbued power.[88]

Pagan practices were not the only issue. Social justice also became a central theme. Where vast numbers of people lived in poverty, the Catholic

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[84] Ibid.

[85] Clemena Antonova, *Space, Time, and Presence in the Icon: Seeing the World with the Eyes of God* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2010), 68.

[86] Richard Cavendish, *A History of Magic* (1978), 49.

[87] Baggley, *Doors of Perception*, 19.

[88] Justo L. González, *The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, vol. 1 of *The Story of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), 259.

Church sold indulgences.[89] They raised money to pay for the art and cathedrals. Poverty-stricken people gave the church every last coin in hope of releasing the soul of a loved one into heaven.[90] Meanwhile people starved. The reformers raised issue at these abuses and injustices. When vast numbers of people were starving, sick, or unable to buy clothes, how could the church justify preying upon the superstitions and hope of the poor?[91] Huge sums of money were being raised to build Cathedrals while people died. The reformers looked at the expense and questioned the efficacy of this practice. In their eyes, these practices plundered God as the church spent vast sums on icons and décor while people suffered.[92] Justice demanded a reform.

Early reformers like John Wycliffe (1324-1384 CE) and John Huss (1372-1415 CE) spoke out against these abuses while still tolerating the careful use of imagery. While not violently opposed to imagery, to combat the abuses, John Wycliff "stressed the Mediatorial role of Christ and insisted on the Bible as the exclusive source of Christian truth."[93] He believed that the Scriptures belonged to the people not the Church. Wycliffe combated the priestly role as moderator. He attacked the hierarchy created by the Catholic Church. He rallied against the abuses of power and cultic religion. However, he ultimately accepted the

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[89] Justo L. González, *The Reformation to the Present Day*, vol. 2 of *The Story of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper SanFrancisco, 1985), 20-21.

[90] Ibid., 21.

[91] Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 51, 54.

[92] González, *The Reformation*, 22.

[93] Gutmann, *The Image and the Word*, 91.

reverence shown to the image of a Saint and he cautiously accepted the role of images, especially biblical stories, painted for didactic purposes. Finally, in the eyes of the Catholic Church, he committed the grand heresy of translating the Bible into the vernacular.[94]

John Huss, on the other hand, was more preoccupied with doctrinal and theological issues. Hussite iconoclasm developed in the same streams of clerical abuse and liturgical excess, not to mention political and philosophical reforms. Early on Huss showed disinterest in being caught up in the debate regarding the religious practices or icons and images:

> Early Hussite criticism of images was remarkably tolerant, urging merely the restriction of their numbers and the elimination of abuses rather than wholesale abolition. Huss himself allowed the veneration of images of Christ with a modest degree of honor (dulia), although he rejected the worship of crucifixes with the high reverence of latria, which was properly reserved to God alone.[95]

While latreia, adoration or high reverence, was reserved for God alone, Huss maintained a mild tolerance for the use of imagery, but the tides were radically shifting. As the Reformation gained traction, abuses increased and the Catholic Church waned in political power while the reformers gained popularity and influence.

To this point it had been fairly clear in the Catholic Church there was a general acceptance and utilization of physical, mental, narrative, and kinesthetic images in worship while iconoclastic movements called for reform. The major theologians, while cautious in the face of abuses, continued to support the

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[94] Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 91.

[95] Gutmann, *The Image and the Word*, 93.

efficacy of these icons. As we transition to the Reformation, it is important to remember that the reformers were emerging at the end of a period of history where superstition ran rampant.[96] This was due to a confluence of pagan influence, lack of education, the lack of a vernacular spiritual education, and poverty. In Christian circles common cultic practices attached God's power to the image. People prayed to the icons. People gave offerings to the icons. People believed the icons had the power to act on their behalf.[97] Over the centuries these abuses escalated in popularity and practice. The winds of change which began with the early reformers became a gale which blew through the Catholic Church. Eventually, this swept out not only thousands of church-goers, but also swept out any use of any imagery in the newly-formed Protestant churches.

The Reformation was not a time in history for tolerance.[98] As Protestants divorced the Roman Catholic Church, men and women were excommunicated, tortured, and burned at the stake by both sides.[99] Theological, political, and physical battles raged. Intolerance poured through the cities, allegiances were galvanized, and the abuses of indulgences and images were harshly confronted by the Reformers.[100] As the Protestant movements worked to unite, they were

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[96] Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 51.

[97] Ibid., 35.

[98] Bob Scribner, *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation*, ed. Ole Peter Grell and Robert W. Scribner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 45-46.

[99] Edward Peters, *Torture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 150.

[100] Charles Garfield Nauert, *The Age of Renaissance and Reformation* (Hinsdale, IL: Dryden Press, 1977), 141-144.

sharply divided on issues of polity, theology, and praxis. Into this scene emerged opportunities for Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), John Calvin (1509-1564 CE), and Martin Luther (1483-1546 CE) to rise as voices of leadership.

Zwingli and Calvin were the most destructive and intolerant leaders of the iconoclastic movements. Luther was, at best, a cautious supporter. Zwingli and his followers were notorious for their destruction of icons as they stripped houses of worship. In the southern German and Swiss towns where the Reformation was more fully embraced, city councils were pressured to remove icons in order to avoid mob violence.[101] Charles Garside summarized Zwingli's theology and beliefs regarding images, "The prime symbol of true belief is the word, invisible and heard; the prime symbol of false belief is the image, visible and seen."[102] Zwingli ripped images from the church physically as well as theologically. In his rejection of all things Catholic to rid the Church of abuses, he articulated a position so extreme no room was left for imagery.

In a similar vein, John Calvin, Father of the stain of Total Depravity, also led his followers. John Calvin almost single-handedly molded and shaped the Protestant theology and ideology regarding imagery. Calvin's educational background was steeped in devotional emphasis and his teaching on worship permeated the Reformation.[103] His position was to remove any semblance of distraction from worship. The most offensive distractions were the things one

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[101] Gutmann, *The Image and the Word*, 108.

[102] Charles Garside, *Zwingli and the Arts* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1981), 175.

[103] William Roscoe Estep, *Renaissance and Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1986), 225.

could see.[104] This man who passionately and tirelessly worked to create the city of God in Geneva also spoke as passionately and vehemently against imagery in worship.

Calvin clearly states his position:

> Since this brute stupidity gripped the whole world–to pant after visible figures of God, and thus to form gods of wood, stone, gold, silver, or other dead and corruptible matter we must cling to this principle: God's glory is corrupted by an impious falsehood whenever any form is attached to him.[105]

Calvin drove the point home:

> We see how openly God speaks against all images, that we may know that all who seek visible forms of God depart from him. ... God's majesty is sullied by an unfitting and absurd fiction, when the incorporeal is made to resemble corporeal matter, the invisible a visible likeness, the spirit an inanimate object, the immeasurable a puny bit of wood, stone, or gold.[106]

Calvin saw this prohibition as an articulation of God's law spelled out in Deuteronomy. At this point Calvin parted ways with the church Fathers by prohibiting the use of all imagery in the church.

In his institutes, Calvin rebutted St. Gregory's support of images as the Bible for the uneducated:

> I know that it is pretty much an old saw that images are the books of the uneducated. Gregory said this yet the Spirit of God declares far otherwise; if Gregory had been taught in His school with regard to this, he never would have spoken thus. For when Jeremiah declares that "the wood is a doctrine of vanity", ... when Habakkuk teaches that a molten image is a teacher of Falsehood", ... from such statements we must surely infer this general doctrine, that

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[104] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 100-101.

[105] Ibid., 100.

[106] Ibid., 101.

> whatever men learn of God from images is futile, indeed false. If anyone takes exception that it was those who were misusing images for impious superstition who were rebuked by the prophets, I admit it is so. But I add, what is clear to all, that the prophets totally condemn the notion, taken as axiomatic by the papists, that images stand in place of books. For the prophets set Images over against the true God as contraries that can never agree.[107]

Calvin left no room for discussion. In black and white he condemned the use of imagery outlined in the Old Testament. Calvin admitted God chose to reveal God's own self through the use of imagery such as the cloud and flame in Deuteronomy 4:11. However, Calvin asserted these images kept the minds of the Israelite people from penetrating too deeply into the things of God.[108]

Calvin was clear that even in teaching about God imagery only serves to distract.[109] He believed that images dull one's mind from being free through rationality to penetrate the real things of God.[110] The use of images was thus not a valid or true method of teaching.[111] Imagery was trash and lead only to the false:

> In the preaching of his Word and sacred mysteries he has bidden that a common doctrine be there set forth for all. But those whose eyes rove about in contemplating idols betray that their minds are not diligently intent upon this doctrine.
>
> Therefore, whom, then, do the papists call uneducated whose ignorance allows them to be taught by images alone? Those, indeed, whom the Lord recognizes as his disciples, whom he honors by the revelation of his heavenly philosophy, whom he wills to be instructed in the saving mysteries of his Kingdom. I

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[107] Ibid., 105.

[108] Ibid., 102.

[109] Ibid., 107.

[110] Ibid., 100, 107.

[111] Ibid., 112.

> confess, as the matter stands, that today there are not a few who are unable to do without such "books." But whence, I pray you, this stupidity, to do without such "books." But whence, I pray you, this stupidity was fit to instruct them? Indeed, those in authority in the church turned over to idols the office of teaching for no other reason than that they themselves were mute.[112]

This was a harsh indictment. It spoke of the papists' abandonment of their responsibility to teach. The mere presence and use of imagery was an indictment against the priests for abdicating their responsibility to teach the people. He believed that in looking at the images people's minds were not intent upon the teaching of the doctrine.[113]

More insidious in Calvin's eye was the observation that what often begins as veneration frequently degrades to adoration:

> For just as soon as a visible form has been fashioned for God. His power is also bound to it. Men are so stupid that they fasten God wherever they fashion him; and hence they cannot but adore. And there is no difference whether they simply worship an idol, or God in the idol. It is always idolatry when divine honors are bestowed upon an idol, under whatever pretext this is done. And because it does not please God to be worshiped superstitiously, whatever is conferred upon the idol is snatched away from Him.[114]

Calvin believed that in worship "we must close our eyes and cling only to the Word of God, which alone cannot lie."[115]

While the use of any art in worship was forbidden, Calvin held in high regard living images of God. These images became visible through "the internal illumination of the Holy Spirit, which alone gives us the eyes to see these living

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[112] Ibid., 107.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Ibid., 109.

[115] Zachman, *Image and Word*, 1.

icons."[116] These living images could be seen in nature or in the life of a faithful follower such as St. Francis. Through hearing the word of God we are able to see the living images of God. One could further their journey from understanding God in the visible to the invisible through contemplation upon such images.[117] These he contrasted with dead images, icons, symbols, paintings, and the like, which are attempts to transform God into our own image. These dead images simply represented reality, and thus could not be a representation of God.[118]

While Calvin was an iconoclast, he was not anti-art. He believed God inspired artists.[119] He clearly delineated appropriate subjects for an artist, "Therefore it remains that only those things are to be sculptured or painted which the eyes are capable of seeing: let not God's majesty, which is far above the perception of the eyes, be debased through unseemly representations."[120] History, events, some images, and some forms of bodies may have been of some usefulness in teaching. He would have conceded that most of the images in churches would fit into this category. However Calvin continued, "I am not saying how wickedly and indecently the greater part of them have been fashioned, how licentiously the painters and sculptors have played the wanton here-a matter that I touched upon a little earlier. I only say that even if the use of

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[116] Ibid., 2.

[117] Ibid., 7.

[118] Ibid., 8.

[119] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 112.

[120] Ibid.

images contained nothing evil, it still has no value for teaching." [121] It is interesting that while Calvin created room for didactic use of imagery, he immediately contradicted it in the same paragraph.

Ultimately, images had little or no value to Calvin because they "bridled" the mind and hindered one from being able to penetrate into God.[122] The only way one could be unbridled in their understanding and learn about God was through hearing the Scriptures and reflecting upon them.[123] Interesting enough, Calvin allowed for the living images of God, the lives of holy people around us, to guide us in our faith. In many respects, art's only value to Calvin was to bring pleasure.[124]

Compared with Zwingli, the most violent iconoclast, and Calvin, who sought the end of icons, one could say that Martin Luther was supportive of icons. However, he was horrified by the contemporary Catholic abuses. He was particularly concerned with a kinesthetic image, the sale of indulgences. The saying was that every time a coin clanked a soul was set free from purgatory.[125] On his pilgrimage to Rome, Luther observed people in long lines crawling up stairs or waiting to view the relics in hopes to shorten their stay or a dead

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[121] Ibid.

[122] Ibid., 102.

[123] Zachman, *Image and Word*, 1.

[124] Christopher Richard Joby, *Calvinism and the Arts: A Re-Assessment* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2007), 2.

[125] Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 51.

relative's stay in purgatory.[126] The superstition of the people and the extravagance associated with the relics and icons fueled his rage and disgust.[127] With this said, Luther never intended to leave the Catholic Church, he desired only to bring reform.[128]

Luther weighed in on the debate regarding the worship of images. He claimed they had no intrinsic value to salvation.[129] Yet icons were helpful in teaching, understanding, and communicating about God:

> Images, bells, Eucharistic vestments, church ornaments, altar lights, and the like I regard as things indifferent. Anyone who wishes may omit them. Images or pictures taken from the Scriptures and from good histories, however, I consider very useful yet indifferent and optional. I have no sympathy with the iconoclasts.[130]

Luther believed that many of the rituals and cultic practices of the church were helpful. That is, they were helpful but not salvific.

Martin Luther hinged his entire theology, rightfully so, on the notion that we are saved by faith alone. In his introduction to Romans he wrote,

> Faith is a work of God in us, which changes us and brings us to birth anew from God. ... It kills the old Adam, makes us completely different people in heart, mind, senses, and all our powers, and brings the Holy Spirit with it. What a living, creative, active powerful thing is faith! It is impossible that faith ever stop doing good. Faith doesn't ask whether good works are to be done, but, before it is

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[126] Ibid., 52-53.

[127] Ibid., 51.

[128] Holt, *Thirsty for God*, 100.

[129] Alfred Plummer, *The Continental Reformation in Germany, France and Switzerland from the Birth of Luther to the Death of Calvin* (London: Robert Scott, 1912), 99.

[130] Luther, *Church and Ministry, 2*, 371.

> asked, it has done them. It is always active. Whoever doesn't do such works is without faith; he gropes and searches about him for faith and good works but doesn't know what faith or good works are. Even so, he chatters on with a great many words about faith and good works.
>
> Faith is a living, unshakeable confidence in God's grace; it is so certain, that someone would die a thousand times for it. This kind of trust in and knowledge of God's grace makes a person joyful, confident, and happy with regard to God and all creatures. This is what the Holy Spirit does by faith. Through faith, a person will do good to everyone without coercion, willingly and happily; he will serve everyone, suffer everything for the love and praise of God, who has shown him such grace. ... Ask God to work faith in you; otherwise you will remain eternally without faith, no matter what you try to do or fabricate. [131]

It is by faith alone that we are saved. All the other practices, rituals, and cultic undulations that create spiritual rhythms in our lives must be seen through this lens.

However, Martin Luther spoke plainly and aptly when he condemned the practices of faith done as ritual alone:

> As the greatest of all abominations I regard the mass when it; preached or sold as a sacrifice or good work, which is the basis on which all religious foundations and monasteries now stand, but, God willing they shall soon be overthrown. Although I have been a great, grievous, despicable sinner, and wasted my youth in a thoughtless and damnable manner, yet my greatest sins were that I was so holy a monk, and so horribly angered, tortured, and plagued my dear Lord with so many masses for more than fifteen years, But praise and thanks be to his unspeakable grace in eternity, that he led me out of this abomination, and still continues to sustain and strengthen me daily in the true faith, despite my great ingratitude.[132]

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[131] Martin Luther, "Preface to the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans", St. Anselm College of Humanities Program, http://www.ccel.org/l/luther/romans/pref_romans.html (accessed April 17, 2010).

[132] Luther, *Church and Ministry, 2*, 370.

These abominations were as much idol worship to Luther as the abuses he observed at the Vatican.

The generous attitude that Luther brought to images in an iconoclastic atmosphere was unheralded. He recorded in his devotional writings that illustrations of the biblical stories could be very helpful:

> I do not think it wrong to paint such stories along with the verses on the walls of rooms and chambers so that one might have God's words and deeds constantly in view and thus encourage fear and faith toward God. And what harm would there be if someone were to illustrate the important stories of the entire Bible in their proper order for a small book which might become known as a layman's Bible? Indeed, one cannot bring God's words and deeds too often to the attention of the common man.[133]

Luther not only thought these depictions of the biblical stories were good, he also felt they were "necessary-in fact, very badly needed."[134] As for the iconoclast, he simply stated, "They do not need our advice and we don't want theirs, so it is easy for us to part company."[135] While he would not share company with the iconoclasts, he similarly criticized the misuse of religious pictures. Luther himself permitted and urged the use of icons and images to build up the Christian.[136] He also used them to teach people as well as provide common places of reflection upon the teachings of Christ. Under his tutelage and instruction several wood cutouts were made for people to gaze and reflect upon.

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[133] Ibid., 43.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Ibid.

[136] Ibid.

Luther addressed the accusations of the Deuteronomic prohibition against making images in two arguments. First, that if the images were helpful to faith then use them, if they were not helpful to faith, then let them fall to the wayside. This included all images made as memorials or witnesses to Saints. He referenced the people of Israel using stones to build places of remembrance. [137] He recognized God's own knowledge and use of images with people to serve as powerful reminders of God. His basic premise then was if the image draws us toward faith in God great, if not, then get rid of it.

The second defense in the use of imagery developed from his experience of reading and hearing the Scriptures:

> God desires to have his works heard and read, especially the passion of our Lord. But it is impossible for me to hear and bear it in mind without forming mental images of it in my heart. For whether I will or not, when I hear of Christ, an image of a man hanging on a cross takes form in my heart, just as the reflection of my face naturally appears in the water when I look into it. If it is not a sin but good to have the image of Christ in my heart, why should it be a sin to have it in my eyes? This is especially true since the heart is more important than the eyes, and should be less stained by sin because it is the true abode and dwelling place of God.[138]

Luther clearly understood something that the iconoclasts missed: that the very act of reading the Scripture creates images in our minds and hearts.

While Luther was a mediating spokesperson for imagery, the thrust of the Reformation pushed for further iconoclasm. Feeling justified in their passion to correct abuses with abuse, these iconoclasts didn't know what to do with Luther who resented their attitudes and destruction of the icons. Steeped in the Catholic

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[137] Ibid., 91. Also see, Jo 24:26; 1 Sm 7:12.

[138] Ibid., 99-100.

tradition, Luther created a reasonable Protestant articulation for the use of imagery. While separating from the Catholic Church, unlike his contemporaries, Luther did not transform his faith into a bifurcation of created matter and the spirit. Luther provided the groundwork for the Protestant Reformation to embrace imagery. However, as the theology and devotional spirituality of this movement crossed the Atlantic, it was Calvin and Zwingli's voices which created a broader impact.[139]

While the spiritual influence in the New World was a mixing bowl of religious refugees, by the late 1700's the major influences were the Pietists/Puritans from the Reformed background,[140] the Quaker followers of George Fox, Catholics, Anglicans, and Methodists.[141] The Puritans, Quakers, and Methodists were deeply influenced by the Reformation and developed their religious practices in the devotional style absent of imagery.[142]

Let me give a few examples. James Owen, a 17th century Presbyterian minister, wrote a book, *The History of Images and Image Worship*, as an "Antidote against the Intoxicating Cup of the Great Whore [images]".[143] John Wesley, the founder of the Methodists, characterized the use of imagery as "a kind of self-condemnation in the Church of Rome; whilst they commonly either

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[139] Holt, *Thirsty for God*, 118-119.

[140] Holmes, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, 131.

[141] Belden C. Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality*, exp. ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 137-138.

[142] Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 58-59.

[143] James Owen quoted in Gutmann, *The Image and the Word*, 2.

altogether leave out this Commandment ... or render it imperfectly and by halves: 'Thou shalt not make to thee an idol.'"[144] Aside from these images, Wesley also asserted there was still an even more dangerous idol:

> If, by the grace of God, we have avoided or forsaken all these idols, there is still one more dangerous than all the rest; that is, religion. It will easily be conceived, I mean false religion; that is, any religion which does not imply the giving the heart to God.[145]

This was reminiscent of Luther's distaste for hollow worship. The sincere aim of many of the religious people in the New World was to create a place of pure religion.[146]

Imagery was not embraced in physical forms, yet there was a rich heritage of spiritual language used to describe the spiritual journey. "Bernard McGinn reflected on the 'ocean' and 'desert' ... while Andrew Louth used the image of 'wilderness' to discuss a variety of spiritual writers in the Christian tradition. ... Puritan topologists such as Milton and Bunyan, Christian spirituality lives and breathes through symbols drawn from nature."[147]

In Jonathon Edwards (1703-1758 CE) the image of the spider emerged over and over. In his infamous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," Edwards used the spider to describe what it was like when one chooses not to respond to God:

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[144] Wesley, *Works of John Wesley: Letters, Essays*, 109.

[145] John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Sermons 3*, 3rd ed., vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 268.

[146] Edmond Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), 168-174.

[147] Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred*, 231.

> The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. You have offended him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince; and yet it is nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment. ... Yea, there is nothing else that is to be given as a reason why you do not this very moment drop down into hell.[148]

Edwards' readers or listeners were encouraged to imagine themselves in the place of the spider with the horrible threat of hell for all who have failed to receive God's grace.[149] Ironically, while there was a ban on the use of visual imagery in worship, these preachers clearly utilized narrative imagery in their sermons to capture the attention of their listeners and to present truths in ways they could be easily understood. As Luther said, "it is impossible for me to hear and bear it in mind without forming mental images of it in my heart."[150] Many of the images and pictures painted by these Protestant theologians and preachers in the minds of the hearers have become a part of our folklore and heritage and continue to be reflected upon as icons of American spirituality.

Since the Reformation, many of the Protestant traditions have lost their language for the arts. Images, if used, are utilitarian. The transition from austere to the mediated use of images in the past fifty years revolved around the image's

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[148] Jonathon Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God", Christian Classics Ethereal Library, http://www.ccel.org/ccel/edwards/sermons.sinners.html (accessed November 4, 2010).

[149] Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred*, 232-233.

[150] Luther, *Church and Ministry, 2*, 99-100.

educational value.[151] Art was created with either a *Precious Moment's* idealized childlike quality to it or it was created to support the challenge of the pastor's message.[152] If pictures through their childlike softness communicated God's love they were used. If pictures drove the preaching point home they were embraced. If lithographs, clip art, crosses, flannel graphs, picture slides, overheads, or projectors helped illuminate the Bible, then they were used. However, unlike the 7th Council's affirmation, these images were defined as having no intrinsic ability to instruct or be revelatory. In a tradition where the primacy of preaching reigned and art was suspect, art and images became nothing more than a utilitarian means of enhancing communication and education.[153]

Steve Turner aptly described this Protestant heritage of artistic expression in the past fifty years:

> Consistently, Christians didn't consume much art either. On the whole they didn't own televisions ("the devil's box"), collect art or go to the theater. Fiction, like dancing, was okay for children but not for adults. Rock music was worldly. Movies were suitable only if they were cartoons, family entertainment or, oddly enough, fact based war epics. The reasoning was that most art was created by nonbelievers and could therefore damage our spiritual health. We sang a chorus that ran:
>
> > Be careful little eyes what you see
> > Be careful little eyes what you see
> > For there's a God up above
> > Who is looking down in love
> > So be careful little eyes what you see.[154]

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[151] Turner, *Imagine*, 48.

[152] Ibid., 40, 48.

[153] Zelensky and Gilbert, *Windows to Heaven*, 16.

[154] Turner, *Imagine*, 16.

Fear of damaging one's spiritual health drove the separation of art from faith. The reformers rejected icons and images because of the abuses. Over time the rationale shifted focus. The goal was to keep people from being distracted or worse damaged.[155] This desire to draw close to God was intimately connected to the fear of God watching from above.[156] Love of God and love of others was poignantly connected to a deep fear of sin.[157] Legalism became the icon of the day. It was preached and the mental images created in the listener's minds that to please God one had to avoid sin. Sin management ruled.[158] Protestant traditions abandoned the powerful affirmation of the 7th Council regarding images: that icons and images were equated with the Scriptures in their ability to reveal truth, to reveal God.

With all this said, I believe we need to rediscover imagery as a part of shaping and connecting our live in and with God. I believe that we need to rediscover the art of imagery, whether it is embodied in words, action, painting, photography, video, pottery, a Cross, avatars, or something else. We need to create and utilize images to help people keep the Gospel continuously before their eyes. Even more urgent, as I already mentioned, we need to see the Gospel

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[155] Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 58-59.

[156] Holt, *Thirsty for God*, 122.

[157] Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: Harper SanFrancisco, 1997), 41, 54.

[158] Charles J. Conniry, Jr., *Soaring in the Spirit: Rediscovering the Mystery of the Christian Life* (London: Authentic Paternoster Press, 2007), 27-28.

lived out in people so those around them can say, "I have seen, I have heard, I have touched."[159]

We need to live lives which will ignite the imagination and root the Gospel in Creation. We need to rediscover the Hebrew earthiness and holiness through the routines of life. Our faith must be seen, felt, heard, and lived. Each of us must become a compelling image that will keep the message of the Gospel before the eyes of the people with whom we live, work, and play.[160] Imagine, Christ alive and reflected in us--everyday.

We need to move away from philosophical and Gnostic-like Christianity. We need to put creation back into our journey with Christ. We need to up-end our current fixation with spirituality being centralized primarily as an experience of conversion and discipleship solely focused on right thinking and correct doctrine. I believe we must enter, by a variety of methods, into forming people by offering to them a compelling, living image of Christ to touch and to see. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we must live the Scriptures, embrace, question, and revel in them, not just study and memorize them. In this, our faith and praxis will be seen. This will then interact with the lives of those around us releasing the power of God to transform.

As I wrap up this part of the journey, I am once again deeply compelled by St. Francis and his life. It is not the results of his life that compel me as much as his willingness to live it with joy. He found joy in the suffering and the self-

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[159] 1 Jn 1:1.

[160] Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well*, 138.

emptying. When he would begin to grumble he would gaze upon the Tau, the cross, creation, a brother, or a sister and remind himself that Christ willingly redeemed all of creation.[161] Today, may God's blessed Body find new and compelling ways to live out the Gospel. May we create physical prompts and reminders that conjure up God's story.

Similarly, in houses of worship, where the echoes of the harsh rejections of images and austere expressions of faith reverberate,[162] we must rediscover the tactile part of spiritual formation. As the world hungers for visual richness in their living spaces, places of commerce, institutions of healing, and restaurants, Protestant churches cannot remain stark and barren and speak relevantly.[163] The gradual integration of visual images in worship has been a major turning point in the past thirty years.[164] We need to rediscover, embrace, and affirm the rich theological heritage that helps us to bring a renewed sense of meaning to our utilization of imagery.[165]

As we rediscover imagery in spiritual formation, let us learn from the past. Let us avoid reacting and rejecting the Protestant devotional rituals "sitting in pews, closing one's eyes during prayers, and so on."[166] We don't need to

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[161] The National Shrine of St. Francis of Assisi, "The 'Tau' Cross", http://www.shrinesf.org/francis10.htm (accessed December 13, 2008).

[162] Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 58.

[163] Zelensky and Gilbert, *Windows to Heaven*, 23-24.

[164] Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 65.

[165] Ibid., 20-21.

[166] Ibid., 54.

abandon the proclamation of the Word which became the centerpiece of Christian rituals. We need to enrich it, to illustrate the spoken Word. The call is to create physical cues to bring our minds back to the message of Christ and its present reality transforming us each day.

CHAPTER 5: CONSUMERISM, A RELIGION OF IMAGES

> The spirituality, the alternative reality, the easy transcendence, the celebrity homilies, the gospels inspired by celebrities' deaths, the icons on their way to apotheosis-all these edged entertainment, as incarnated by celebrities, ever closer to theology, in a way, turning the tables. If religion had become entertainment, entertainment was now becoming a religion.
>
> - Neal Gabler, *Life the Movie.*[1]

To this point, the biblical, historical, and theological evidence for imagery in worship within the history of Christianity has been the focus of our discussion. Ample evidence is found to support the utilization of imagery in worship and to instruct people in their faith. Similarly, there is evidence that particular uses of images are prohibited. Those who support the use of imagery in worship cite God's instruction to build the tabernacle and Ark of the Covenant as well as the incarnation as irrevocable witnesses. Those who call for the removal of all imagery point unwaveringly and woodenly to God's command not to make idols. As delineated, most of the evidence condemning the use of imagery centers on the image itself being worshipped instead of the Lord of all Creation receiving adoration.

Ultimately, John of Damascus in the seventh century delineated the difference between worship as honor, veneration, and worship as adoration. In all

[1] Neal Gabler, *Life the Movie: How Entertainment Conquered Reality* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 174.

acts of worship, we are called to look beyond the physical created image or the mental image to see and worship the Creator. Our continuous call as people of faith is to grow in our love for God and others and in a post-modern world images have become the common language. Images are vital to our ability to communicate, to instruct, and to love people into connection with God and with other people inside and outside the church.

While history is full of examples of the rich use of imagery, in the past 500 years, especially among the Protestant and Evangelical branches of faith, images were seen as a lesser mode of entertainment or communication and frequently seen as offensive. As such, they were largely ignored or derided. Currently, with the rise of technology and the post-modern, all forms of imagery are harnessed successfully in the religion of the consumer.

This chapter will look at how consumerism is one of the most successful religious practitioners of imagery. The first goal of this chapter will be to illustrate how Consumerism behaves like a religion. Next, I will illustrate how the priests of marketing utilize physical, narrative, mental, and kinesthetic images to communicate their message. They use all forms of imagery to brand, build, and reinforce their values, attitudes, and ideas. Finally, I propose that we learn from these practitioners, as the church has done for centuries. I believe people of faith and the church must rediscover the use of imagery in connecting people to the living God.

My aim is not to deconstruct or rally against the marketing machine. Rather, while using the media and forms employed by these religious leaders in

the consumer world I will ask, what can we learn from these experts? How do we employ images? The early church asked this question of many cultures as its missionaries spread across the known world. They rebranded the symbols and icons as they taught and ministered. In pursuing these essential and timely cultural-based questions, I want to illuminate the way imagery is harnessed and created to remind worshippers of values, attitudes, virtues, commitments, ideals, and theology. As all forms of imagery have become increasingly vital to the marketing world, an essential piece to their success is the process of branding. It will be important in this chapter to tie in the way these icons and symbols of faith are created, used, and distributed.

Why does popular culture remain a vital discipline for the church to study? Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor aptly articulate this rationale:

> First, ... popular culture both reflects who we are as people and also helps shape us as people.[2]
>
> Second, popular culture ... is ... studied by the broader culture. Society already employs movies, music, and television as an arena of discourse, the primary forum for disseminating values, ideas, and ethics.[3]
>
> Third, pop culture serves as the lingua franca of the postmodern world, a point often missed by scholars. ... Academia seems to be intoxicated with "ideas from above"-with the view that the best ideas, and those most worthy of study, emanate from the intelligentsia and trickle down to the rest of society. ... But much has changed in Western culture in the past one hundred years, not

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[2] Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor, *A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Pop Culture*, ed. William Dyrness and Robert Johnston, 2nd ed., Engaging Culture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 19.

[3] Ibid., 20.

> the least of which is the onset of postmodernism with its "from below" perspective about ideas and values.[4]
>
> There is a conversation about God going on in popular culture that the church is not engaged in and is often unaware of. If the Christian world continues in its scholastic mode, viewing popular culture as degraded and superficial, then the gap between church and culture will continue to widen.[5]

Ultimately, Detweiler and Taylor argue that, "young people have developed a new 'canon' of literacy. This new canon draws from a broader range of influences and from a wider range of source materials."[6] Popular culture, now a vast contributor to the new canon, drives and interprets much of the classical education. The effectiveness of the popular culture, marketers, and celebrities, made it the new superpower.[7] Technology and imagery fuel the contemporary religion and consumers fuel this machine.

In the Christian world Consumerism has been demonized and often with reasonable support. Consumerism has served as the whipping boy of sermons, books, seminars, and teaching. It appears easy to accentuate the negatives of this false religion. However, we fail to see the irony in our condemnation. We are consumers ourselves.

While the content may vary, we have our venues of popular consumption that fuel the Christian industry. You only need to attend Creation Festivals, Christian rock concerts, or any one of a myriad of seminars by your Christian

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[4] Ibid., 21.

[5] Ibid., 23.

[6] Ibid., 21.

[7] Ibid., 26.

Celebrity. While the intent is to worship God, the aisles, foyers, and public spaces are lined with books, DVD's, T-shirts, and all varieties of memorabilia. As Chuck Colson wrote, "the church has bought into the same value system: fame, success, materialism, and celebrity. We watch the leading churches and leading Christians for our cues. We want to emulate the best-known preacher with the biggest sanctuaries and the grandest edifices."[8] We worship at the idol of success. The modern church fully embraced Consumerism's bench marks of market share under the spiritual guise of Church Growth, measuring the triple bottom-line of buildings, budgets, and butts.[9]

Before this train of thought digresses too far, I want to reiterate that my aim is not to tear down Consumerism. My aim is to point out that as Christians we are fully vested in this cultural religion, and some creative thinkers have utilized tools of the Consumer religion to help people connect with God and connect with each other.

Consuming is elemental to life. Asa Berger points out that all cultures throughout history are based upon consumption. People need to eat, have a place to live, clothe themselves, create a method of teaching their young, and have access to health care.[10] At a foundational level we are consumers. Berger points out that Consumerism emerges when, "cultures in which the personal

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[8] Charles W. Colson, *Loving God: An Inspiring Message and a Challenge to all Christians*, spec. Man in the Mirror ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 14.

[9] Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Releasing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 56.

[10] Arthur Asa Berger, *Shop 'Til You Drop: Consumer Behavior and American Culture* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 1.

consumption of goods and services becomes an all-powerful force."[11] Ultimately, Consumerism is a natural evolution of prosperity in a consumer culture. Consumerism thrusts us past meeting our basic needs and indoctrinates us with consuming as an end unto itself.

Consumerism claims that life is about gaining goods and experiences.[12] Doug Bailey states, "Consumerism teaches us that our primary attachment should be to things, to image, and to status. As a result, communities, traditions, service organizations, and even the people around us must often learn to take second place in our lives."[13] Jay McDaniel argues that Consumerism is a religion because it provides us with a matrix to develop values, attitudes, and meaning for life:

> Of course, consumerism is not a religious tradition in the sense that Roman Catholicism is a religious tradition. ... Rather it is a religion in the sense that Confucianism is a religion. Just as Confucianism is a set of attitudes and values that once shaped so many East Asian cultures, so consumerism is a set of attitudes and values that now shape all cultures.[14]

In Confucianism the emphases are family, respecting elders, and tradition.[15] In Consumerism the emphases are the individual, respecting elders, and tradition.[16]

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Anthony B. Robinson, "Articles of Faith: Consumerism is a Greedy Society's Religion," *Seattle PI*, no. February 8, 2008 (2008), http://www.seattlepi.com/local/350593_faith09.html (accessed December 8, 2010).

[13] R. Douglas Bailey, "Consumer Theology: Its Causes, Effects, and Solution" (DMin diss., George Fox Evangelical Seminary, 2008), 13.

[14] Jay McDaniel, *Living from the Center: Spirituality in an Age of Consumerism* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 70.

[15] Ibid.

However, the attitudes of Consumerism are rooted in the primacy of the individual, staying young, creativity and newness. [17] Consumerism makes claims about life, creates its own rituals, has its own rites of passage, and even has its own holy days.[18] These traditionally were roles that religion held, however, now they are reinterpreted by Consumerism.

Chris Seay declared, "The fastest-growing religion in the world is not Islam or Christianity; the symbol of this rising faith is not the star and crescent or the cross, but a dollar sign. This expanding belief system is radical consumerism."[19] Sulak, writing on the effects of consumerism on the Buddhist religion, claims,

> Western consumerism is the dominant ethic in the world today. You cannot walk down the streets of Bangkok, for example without being bombarded by billboards touting the benefits of various soft drinks. Streets here are jammed with expensive, foreign cars that provide the owners with prestige and the city with pollution. Young people define their identities through perfumes, jeans, and jewelry. The primary measure of one's life is the amount of money in his or her checkbook. These are the liturgies of the religion of consumerism.[20]

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Robinson, "Articles of Faith: Consumerism is a Greedy Society's Religion."

[19] Chris Seay, "The Religion of Consumerism," *The Ooze*, no. November 4, 2009 (2009) (accessed December 8, 2010).

[20] Sivaraksa Sulak and Tom Ginsburg, *Seeds of Peace: A Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1992), 3.

It appears the marketers have borrowed a page from the church and the iconographers.[21] James Twitchell points out, "You can still see the religious roots of commercialism in advertising. Buy this object and you'll be saved. You deserve a break today. You, you're the one. We are the company that cares about you. You are in good hands. We care. Trust in us. Buy now."[22] Claims all eerily familiar to revival meetings.

James Twitchell in his book AdCult USA says, "by adding value to material, by adding meaning to objects, by branding things, advertising performs a role historically associated with religion."[23] He demonstrates that the symbols, brands, and logos are the real power behind the marketing machine.[24] The reason is that often our ability to translate humor, advertising, or meaning across cultures is limited. Similarly, Twitchell believes it is logical that we would spiritualize the material. He states, "Materialism is what you spiritualize when you have plenty of stuff. But if you have a dearth of things, you spiritualize the next world, the world after death."[25] As said, affluence affects our values and behaviors in regards to material possessions.[26]

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[21] Betsy U. Chang, *Industry of Identity Deficit and Cannibalization of Time Matrices* (Victoria, BC: Trafford, 2001), 20.

[22] James B. Twitchell, *Lead Us into Temptation: The Triumph of American Materialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 6.

[23] James B. Twitchell, *Adcult USA: The Triumph of Advertising in American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 12.

[24] Ibid., 22.

[25] Ibid., 263.

[26] Ibid., 264.

Over the centuries, the church created sacred objects and these sacred objects communicated the time of day, rites of passage, remission of sins, our identity, and our place in the community. In essence, these objects orchestrated the congregants' behavior and rituals throughout the day.[27] Similarly today, Consumerism, through advertising, creates sacred objects that communicate the time of day, rites of passage, remission of sins, our identity, and our place in the community.[28] In these manners, Consumerism behaves in ways historically attributed to a religion.

Even more than imitating religion, through mediating meaning and branding, the purveyors of Consumerism talk like a religion. Leonard Sweet states,

> I find it troubling that the world is stealing Christianity's best lines. From 'mission statements' and 'servant leadership' to 'no fear,' the world is co-opting the church's language ... why has Christian language been co-opted by corporate America? Partly because the church doesn't know what to do with its own stuff. We can't figure out how to use it in this new world.[29]

He illustrates the recent trend of corporations co-opting religious language. Sweet used the example of evangelism:

> I saw how willing some Christians (even clergy) were to drop the name entirely, I began hearing the word spoken ever more loudly in some surprising places–namely the corporate world. Some of the biggest names in the worlds of science and business ... are now

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks*, 13.

> calling for leaders ("new revolutionaries") to become "evangelists" and "evangineers."[30]

Consumerism is co-opting the sacred. They are behaving like the early Christians. Like missionaries they are going into the land and redeeming the symbols, icons, culture, and ideas to promote the religion of consumption.

I believe the church humbly should learn from these consumerist preachers and iconographers. The church would do well to understand how to reclaim and revitalize lost or abandoned images. We need to learn to better communicate, imagine, and reinforce the message of God's redeeming love visually. I do not suggest we buy into the consumption message that the modern iconographers are selling. Nor do I suggest we use an "any means necessary" approach. However, I believe it is necessary for Christians to learn, utilize, and become image conversant. We must rediscover and explore ways of sharing the message of the Good News of Christ in common, vernacular images which point to God. This retelling must be rooted in a congruency of message and lifestyle; it must be given freely, not so others can consume another form of spirituality to add to their eclectic lives, but that they might finally find the love they desperately seek. In that love, God's love, they will find life. Life that fulfills, satiates, and speaks to their deepest longings, fears, and hungers.

Consumerism, for all intents and purposes, acts and reacts like a religion. It has created its own brands of icons, symbols, and rites of passage. The iconographers, the marketers, bring the worshippers, the consumers, to the

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[30] Ibid., 15.

temple.[31] The temple is located in a shopping mall, local restaurant, the internet, a conference, political rally, or any of a variety of places designed to serve the consumer.[32] The priests, with our icons, call the people to come and worship. They continually place images, brands, and symbols before us.[33] As they lead us in worship of the god of consumerism, they employ with great alacrity the medium of physical, mental, narrative, and kinesthetic images. These rites of passage create places of meditation, which reform our thoughts, ideas, goals, attitudes, ambitions, and lives. The lure of money, the feel of power, and the appearance of success are intoxicating.

Celebrities, I use this term broadly to include any person from media and politics to a self-promoted internet sensation, become the priests. Pictures of these famous and infamous figures are plastered everywhere. We have billion dollar industries to track and report on the minutia of their activities and preferences. Entire industries never sleep as they capture these living icons at work, play, and indiscretion.[34] These images adorn groceries store checkout lines, freeway billboards, and TVs much like the Orthodox Church is adorned with Christian icons and symbols.

Marketers have turned us into iconophiles. We venerate and adore images of the cool, the successful, the wealthy, and the powerful. The lure of

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[31] John Fiske, *Reading the Popular* (New York: Unwin Hyman, 2000), 15-16.

[32] Ibid., 13.

[33] William K. Carroll and Yildiz Atasoy, *Global Shaping and Its Alternatives* (Aurora, ON: Garamond Press, 2003), 40.

[34] Entertainment Tonight, People Magazine, and TMZ to name a few.

money, the feel of power, and the appearance of success are intoxicating. They can easily become cheap substitutes for the love and acceptance we crave. It is through the lives of famous people that we escape the mundane rituals of our everyday lives.[35] Their lives become portals to escape the average and routine and the means to enter a life where everyone wants to know our name.[36] It is through their lives that we imagine a life and a world supposedly better than our own. Their lives become the physical and mental images we meditate upon.

Celebrities convince us by their lives how to behave, what to wear, and what to purchase. Their images surround us. These men, women, and kids adorn our TV, newsprint, websites, bedroom walls, and iPods.[37] These physical images serve as places of meditation. Their constant presence prompts us to remember the religious virtues, values, and behaviors of consumerism. They remind us of the vision of who we are to become. They personify beauty, youth, and sex appeal beaconing us to mold and sculpt our bodies. They are the gurus who serve up plates of knowledge: time management, investing, healthy living, leadership, and success. They are the activists and political leaders who entreat us to believe with promises of a better future. The elusive promise is, if I become

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[35] Seay, "The Religion of Consumerism."

[36] Ted Danson, Shelley Long, Kirstie Alley, Nicholas Colasanto, Rhea Pearlman, John Ratzenberger, George Wendt, Woody Harrelson, Kelsey Grammer, Bebe Neuwith, *Cheers*, dir. James Burrows, Glen Charles, and Les Charles, (United States: CBS Television Distribution). Cheers iconic theme song was, "Where Everybody Knows Your Name." In today's culture people hunger to have other want to know their name. This is a result of the celebrity culture.

[37] Twitchell, *Adcult USA*, 4.

like Mike,[38] Tiger,[39] Oprah,[40] or insert your celebrity, then I will become acceptable, loved, and, more importantly, cool.

The 1999 PBS documentary, *Merchants of Cool,*[41] hypothesized that the current teen culture was a result of marketing. More so, that our current culture is caught in a feedback loop: Marketers, Teens, Marketers, Teens, etc. Neil Docherty and team unearthed a mountain of research unpacking the effects of the marketing machine. One of the salient points in their research was MTV's research methods. MTV gleans significant research in the homes and bedrooms of teens. Their target audience is a middle-class teen. MTV sets an appointment and shows up at the teen's home for an interview. Like the trusted priests of another time, they are allowed by parents and teens to head into their child's bedroom behind closed doors. The MTV researcher, a camera person, and the teen sit alone in the room. The content of these interviews ranged from looking in closets, dressers, and desks to observing what hangs on the walls. They want to know what the students are thinking, believing, watching, and, most importantly, purchasing. Essentially observing what the teen believes is cool.

These students opened up. They nervously poured out their thoughts and feelings as if it were a confessional. MTV gathers the videos of these experiences, make copies, and distributes them to their marketing teams. When I

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[38] Michael Jordan.

[39] Tiger Woods.

[40] Oprah Winfrey.

[41] Neil Docherty, PBS Video, and McIntyre Media, *The Merchants of Cool,* DVD (Orangeville, ON: McIntyre Media 1999).

first saw this, I was amazed, shocked. This is an unbelievable amount of access. More shocking than this was an unprecedented amount of trust given to MTV by students and parents. However, their tactic is brilliant. While they drive the market of cool, they are also listening carefully to their congregants. They hear and digest where the people are.

To illustrate the affects MTV and other marketers have on our teens, *Merchants of Cool*[42] put hidden cameras at a teen dance. When the teens didn't think there was a camera present, the dance and the party was tame, timid, and sedate. When they introduced a camera crew, the teens started gyrating and grinding up next to each other. The teens pandered to the camera, in order to get noticed. They mimicked MTV and their favorite artists. The point made was that marketers, with their superstar icons, wield a great deal of power to influence, mold, and shape our beliefs, behaviors, and spending habits.[43] As the producers argue, this is the feedback loop, marketer, teen, marketer, teen, marketer.

While MTV focuses on teens and younger, companies like Accenture target adults. Accenture capitalized on Tiger Woods as the image to "personify its claimed attributes of integrity and high performance."[44] Yet, in the wake of Tiger's scandal, "Accenture said … the golfer is 'no longer the right representative' after

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[42] Ibid.

[43] Also see, Frontline, PBS Video, and WGBH Educational Foundation, "The Merchants of Cool", WGBH Educational Foundation, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cool/view/ (accessed December 6, 2010).

[44] espn.com: Golf, "Accenture Cuts Woods as Sponsor", ESPN.com News Services, http://sports.espn.go.com/golf/news/story?id=4739219 (accessed June 8, 2010).

the 'circumstances of the last two weeks.' The move ends a six-year relationship during which the firm credited its 'Go on, be a Tiger' campaign with boosting its image significantly."[45] To me this echoes St. Basil's words, "Let the hand of the best painter cover both sides of the church with images ... so that ... while looking at the painted representations ... they will be encouraged to emulate the ever-memorable virtues of these servants of God."[46] Is this not reminiscent of, or a secular interpretation of, Calvin's call to look upon the living images to guide us in our faith?[47] Accenture utilized an age old practice of creating an image for people to remember, reflect upon, and emulate the virtues of a particular person. Like the motivational posters that emerged in the 90's,[48] these icons and pictures are utilized to communicate virtues and ideas through reflection upon them. They are intended to inspire us to desire and emulate what we see.

Today Oprah stands as arguably one of the most visible religious leaders in our Consumeristic society. Newsweek in 2001 described Oprah:

> She is a multimedia tycoon, producing film and TV projects, giving away millions to charity and, most recently, putting her stamp on the world of print with a new magazine. Her journey continues to

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[45] Ibid.

[46] St. Nilus, *Letters*, Patrologia Graeca, vol. 79 (1857-1866), 577, quoted in Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, 84.

[47] Zachman, *Image and Word*, 7.

[48] "Motivational Posters", Metaverse, http://www.motivationalposters.com/ (accessed December 6, 2010). Also see "Successories", Successories.com, http://www.successories.com/category/motivational+posters/motivational+posters.do (accessed December 6, 2010).

> inspire women to listen to their own voices and try to play by their own rules.[49]

Christianity Today noted, "To her audience of more than 22 million mostly female viewers, she has become a post-modern priestess-an icon of church-free spirituality." Oprah's shows offer a blend of self-empowerment, spirituality, and consumerism[50]

Oprah acknowledges her strong Christian roots saying, "I knew I was going to help people, that I had a higher calling, so to speak."[51] Similarly she has been known to refer to her show as "my ministry."[52]

LaTonya Taylor notes Oprah is famous for her benevolence:

> She gives liberally of her time and money, convincing others to do the same through her Angel Network and the Use Your Life Award. She has funded scholarships at historically black colleges, rescued a local Special Olympics program, written checks to churches, and moved families out of the inner city. She is the national spokeswoman for A Better Chance, a program that gives disadvantaged students opportunities to attend top secondary schools. In 1991, Oprah promoted the National Child Protection Act, also known as the "Oprah Bill," which created a database to track child abusers.[53]

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[49] Lynette Clemetson, "Oprah on Oprah," *Newsweek*, no. January 8, 2001 (2001), http://www.newsweek.com/2001/01/07/oprah-on-oprah.print.html (accessed December 8, 2010).

[50] Terence J. Fitzgerald, *Celebrity Culture in the United States*, ed. Paul McCaffrey, The Reference Shelf, vol. 80 (New York: H.W. Wilson, 2008), 80.

[51] LaTonya Taylor, "The Church of O," *ChristianityToday*, no. April 1, 2002 (2002), http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/april1/1.38.html (accessed December 8, 2010).

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

Part of Oprah's appeal is that she inspires people to make practical and lasting changes in their lives.[54] Another part of her appeal is her philanthropy.

Oprah's influence is immense. Her book of the month club creates instant best sellers. During the 2008 presidential campaign a survey by The Pew Research Center reported of Oprah's endorsement of Presidential candidate Obama, "15 percent of Americans said that Winfrey's endorsement would make them more likely to vote for Obama."[55] Regardless of your political views or thoughts regarding Oprah, her opinions and influence are vast. She is a priest in the modern tradition. Her life is a living icon. People see her picture, watch her syndicated show, and track her in her magazine. People model their virtues, values, attitudes, and behaviors based upon her wisdom and suggestions. In this Oprah does not stand alone.

The names of Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, Bono, Jim Morrison, and others are still spoken with similar reverence. Some celebrities reach the status and reverence of only needing one name: Oprah, Tiger, Madonna, Bono, Michael (Jordan or Jackson), and Montana to name a few. Their influence extends beyond the grave. Every year tens of thousands of people travel to Graceland and the respective resting places of famous people. Like the pilgrimages of old, they trek across continents and oceans to visit the homes and graves of their heroes.

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[54] Ibid.

[55] Fitzgerald, *Celebrity Culture*, 79.

As claimed to this point, celebrities are the priests of the new religion. Some of these are also popular Christian leaders. Reflecting on George Marsden's work, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925*, Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor note that, "America's first 'celebrities' also included star preachers such as Charles Finney, Henry Ward Beecher, Dwight L Moody, and Billy Sunday":[56]

> They transfixed audiences with dramatic stories and theatrical timing. Traveling evangelists attracted huge crowds, taking their tours on the road and under a tent. They offered thrills and spills beyond any circus. The use of music, the dramatic pauses, the special seating for those particularly worried about their salvation created a uniquely American merging of entertainment and religion.[57]

The result was masses flocked to see the show and hear the preachers. This practice holds to this day.

People flock to the ministries of Billy Graham, Rick Warren, Bill Hybels, Andy Stanley, and Joel Osteen. While I do not question the quality or sincerity of their work, I only point out that as people of faith and especially pastors these represent our sanctioned celebrities. It is a multimillion dollar industry of seminars, books, and classes. In the loneliness and isolation of the small church, pastors think, "If I can be like Rick, then all will be well." Programs come prepackaged and principles that "work" are crafted into workbooks given to those who attend. Each person returns to their ministry with visions of success. The pictures, narratives, and values are reinforced by the measure of the multitudes

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[56] Detweiler and Taylor, *A Matrix of Meanings*, 100.

[57] Ibid.

reached. The measure of success is parroted from the marketers and investors around us whose thin film of Consumeristic faith over-lays the faith we believe we are living out "more successfully."

Our icons embody the essence and reality of success. We have the physical, mental, narrative, and kinesthetic images of success that we venerate and adore. There are the icons of success: beautiful home, expensive cars, private jets, lavish office, personal shoppers, and personal assistants. We are saturated with images of the famous and successful informing our purchasing habits, behavior, and beliefs. These images are strategically placed by well researched and savvy marketers. These marketers and publicists are people who inform the priests who in turn drive our consumer appetites. They create our appetites and shape our understanding of the world around us. They keep icons and physical symbols present to reinforce the Consumerists' message.

For the past few centuries while the world was embracing Consumerism, the Protestant and Evangelical churches were busy focusing on heaven. The primary mission and goal was to "get people saved." Eternity was on our minds as we had no answers or mission in the earthly endeavors of living. Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor contend that in the modern era the church focused on apologetics that proved the existence of God[58] and the afterlife.[59] While

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[58] Ibid., 22.

[59] Ibid., 62.

Christianity focused on preparing for the afterlife and preparing the soul for the next life, advertising focused on the here and now.[60]

Advertising as a religion transcended from the local churches of informing the congregation to the Cathedrals of dogma and doctrine. Detweiler states, "They help us make decisions, develop values, take risks-treading on religion's traditional territory: In our consumer driven society, advertising often serves as our language. Theology must engage this meaning-making, soul-defining medium."[61] The unintended consequence has been that the church abdicated its role in everyday life. An unintended consequence of "getting people saved" is that most Evangelical and Protestant churches became irrelevant in the eyes of the public. In this vacuum, marketers filled the void with real heroes, tactile values, and earthly virtues, not a promise of an ethereal eternity. Regardless of our judgment of Consumerisms values, they created the new canon.

Advertising adorns the walls of these new Cathedrals. They are the scriptures of the new canon. James Twitchell illustrates this religious quality of advertising through the Air Jordan ad campaign by Nike:

> Mr. Jordan is hanging there in the sublime-if you look at Renaissance church paintings, or Impressionistic landscape paintings, you realize that whatever there is in this ethereal band of air is graced with transcendental meaning. The golden halo of a hovering Giotto angel ... is a signifier of man's ancient yearning for life above the limen (the edge), at the edge of transcendence.[62]

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[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

[62] James B. Twitchell, *Twenty Ads that Shook the World: The Century's Most Groundbreaking Advertising and How It Changed Us All* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000), 205.

Jordan became the icon of a generation. The mere mention of his name evoked in many the virtues of working hard, being successful, and living a lavish lifestyle. Yet in this generation a name is not enough.

Leonard Sweet claims the success of Starbucks comes from an EPIC environment: Experiential, Participatory, Image Rich, and Connective.[63] He illustrated that the corporate world borrowed these from the Christian world. Sweet states, "The spiritual life has earthly dimension – it is life that you can taste, and smell, and touch, and see, and hear. It is reality."[64] He captures the essence of faith as life contrasted with our current practice of faith as a study:

> If faith is indeed a life (which it is) and not merely a course of study or an intriguing intellectual pursuit (which it was never meant to be), then faith is nothing less than the consuming experience of God. It is not a set of beliefs or even a lifestyle, but breath and pulse and life itself. It is the opposite of pursuit; it is heartbeat.[65]

Sweet's claim is reminiscent of Herschel's insights into the Jewish heritage. The focus for the Jewish people wasn't escapism into some future utopia, rather it was living out your faith in the present.[66] It was faith lived in the reality of meeting God in the routines of the day.[67] It was finding God present in the dust, pain, joy, and sweat of the day.[68] Sweet's point is that the church has a great deal to learn from its own heritage through the eyes of companies like Starbucks who are

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[63] Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks*, 20.

[64] Ibid., 19.

[65] Ibid., 21.

[66] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 358-59.

[67] Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, 266.

[68] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 356.

adept at applying the church's practices. More so, today people want more than a hope for eternity. They hunger to participate in a meaning-filled, rich life. And the church is curiously irrelevant in its academic studies and rapture-centered escapism.

Marc Gobe substantiates Sweet's claims to EPIC environments in his book Emotional Branding. Gobe believes that emotional branding is an essential part of the process. Gobe states, "By emotional, I mean how a brand engages consumers on the level of the senses and emotions; how a brand comes to life for people and forges a deeper, lasting connection." [69] Gobe illustrates that shopping today is an all-sensory activity. Merchandisers use scents to create familiarity and color theory to attract consumers.[70] They use symbols, the iconography of the postmodern world, to captivate the imagination and create environments.[71] Gobe declares, "Given the competition among today's corporations, it is my feeling that no business can afford to neglect the five senses. Carefully crafted sensory appeals can create that consumer preference which distinguishes a brand amidst a sea of competing commodities."[72] These environments are reminiscent a Roman Catholic or an Orthodox Church service with its smells, textures, and images. Marketers create branding to build

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[69] Marc Gobé, *Emotional Branding: The New Paradigm for Connecting Brands to People*, rev. ed. (New York: Allworth Press, 2009), xviii.

[70] Ibid., 71.

[71] Marc Gobé, *Emotional Branding: The New Paradigm for Connecting Brands to People* (New York: Allworth Press, 2001), 71.

[72] Gobé, *Emotional Branding, revised*, 71.

emotional and intellectual loyalty.[73] In the future, the essentials to branding will be listening to customers,[74] creating dialogue with customers,[75] and viewing customers as partners.[76]

In contrast with the modern Protestant and evangelical church, Consumerism has engaged people in the places where they live. They practiced the traditions of the church in creating lasting images while the church busied itself in citadels of defending God and eternity. In contemporary terms, Marketers created brands in which the values, attitudes, virtues, and behaviors were perpetuated. They used icons, symbols, names, colors, slogans, and sounds to communicate compelling ideas that captured the attention of customers through the senses.[77] They created an identity with which the customers and companies aligned.[78] They delivered on their promises consistently.[79] They listened to their respective congregations, customers, and remained relevant ultimately over time building trust and loyalty.[80]

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[73] Ibid., xviii, xix.

[74] Ibid., xxviii.

[75] Ibid., xxvi.

[76] Ibid., xviii-xix.

[77] Rita Clifton, *Brands and Branding* (New York: Bloomberg Press, 2009), 62.

[78] Ibid., 64.

[79] Ibid., 63.

[80] Ibid., 65.

As Clifton and associates point out that this branding is the sum of the experiences people have with a company. Yet the most efficacious venue is through sight:

> We find these experiences rooted in the five senses: seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, and touching. Of all the ways to communicate Brandscendence, visual design is one of the strongest. The design disciplines have some of the most evolved standards to articulate brand strategy today.[81]

The visual creates lasting associations. For example, when you see golden arches you think McDonalds. When you see a red-cross you think of the Red Cross. When you see a red can you think Coca Cola. When you see an apple with a bite taken out of it you think Apple. When you see a black circle that looks like an eye you think CBS. The list could continue.

We live in an ocean of images. The cathedrals of Consumerism line the streets. The icons of worship visually surround us. The priests continue to beacon us to follow. To see the efficacy of this religion one only needs to walk the halls of a college dorm. James Twitchell poignantly illustrates,

> Adolescents decorate their walls with the aspirational images of their future. A decade ago or so they could buy poster-size reproductions of the works of great masters to thumbtack to the dorm wall. Now a company called Beyond the Wall sells students ads from Nike, Citizen Watch, Bain de Soleil, Valvoline, Sony, and the rest blown up to poster size at $10 a copy. Such posters are the mezzotints of modern life, the art of materialism. [82]

Mt. Dew, Diesel, Abercrombie & Fitch, Budweiser, Nike, celebrities, and myriad other companies and famous people are the images they wake up and fall asleep

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[81] Kevin A. Clark, *Brandscendence: Three Essential Elements of Enduring Brands* (Chicago, IL: Dearborn Trade, 2004), 11.

[82] Twitchell, *Adcult USA*, 4.

to. These are the values the students ultimately meditate upon, consciously and subconsciously, and impersonate.

Today, consuming ads is like breathing air. The effects of this air we breathe generates a legacy of disciples who embrace the virtues, values, and practices of the religion. The telltale sign of our indoctrination is our ability to self-market. MySpace, Face Book, YouTube, Twitter, blogs, and many other venues offer the individual an opportunity to self-promote. Justin Bieber is a prime example of a YouTube sensation. After singing in competition, Justin's parents put videos of his performances on YouTube for family and friends.[83] However, on this public site, his videos caught traction with web surfers. Millions of hits later, he signs with Disney and is now one of the new teen mega-stars. Putting the few super sensations aside, social networking sites provide ample evidence of self-branding and kids are savvy exploiters.

Teens create a persona. They use pictures, album covers, song lyrics, poetry, blogging, and more to project their identity. Kids emulate what they have seen from celebrities, advertisers, and those they believe are cool. The memory is fresh of the hysteria MySpace brought to many of my youth pastor friends. After being "friended," the youth pastor would be shocked and in some cases outraged at their youth ministry student leadership in sexy clothes and sexual poses. They would be incensed at the content and language posted on these students' MySpace pages. Simply, the students learned to market themselves. They learned to promote themselves and get noticed. Success was marked by

[83] "Justin Bieber - Biography", LetsSingIt.com, http://artists.letssingit.com/justin-bieber-qlswd/biography (accessed December 15, 2010).

the number of "friends" you acquired and who followed your postings. Through the web, individuals have the opportunity to create their own image, to transcend the ordinary, and to get noticed, even if only for a moment. Students, the disciples of Consumerism, have learned well, and they are branding and making icons of themselves.

The manner in which the world communicates has changed. The religion of Consumerism recognized it and transitioned from the philosophical and abstract language of philosophers and scientists to the language of images. This is not a lesser form of language, yet, they realized, it is a powerful tool to enable people to grasp, comprehend, and transfer values, virtues, attitudes, and behaviors. For centuries communicating meaning and values was the sacred ground of the church. For centuries the church utilized images effectively. It is time we reengage in visual language.

I do not advocate we adopt the values and behaviors of Consumerism and I do not advocate we become opportunistic like Consumerism. Yet, in our affluent and public relations dominated world, the slope is slippery. It is easy to be seduced by money, power, and the ideas of success. With this in mind, I still believe we have much to learn. Marketers recognize the constant companions of personal power and self-determination: loneliness, sickness, weariness, anxiety, and depression.[84] Out of the caverns of isolation and anxiety a culture of envy leads to a constant stream of purchasing. Purchasing your favorite brand

[84] Detweiler and Taylor, *A Matrix of Meanings*, 81-83.

becomes the salve for the soul-weary person. It is a cry to feel noticed, feel important, and feel loved.

Christian ministries are not immune to the effects of opportunism; we would do well to focus on the message of the Gospel learning from the wisdom of Solomon in Ecclesiastes, the words of Christ, and the experiences and lessons of saints who have gone before us. The answers we give to people who long for acceptance and rest must not be met with trite quips about God and eternity. Rather, it must embrace the present, remembering and proclaiming the Kingdom of God as both a present and a coming reality. The church must meet the person on a gut level not with answers to real or theoretical questions, but in their real life, in relationships, and with tactile and tangible images. As we think about our "brand" the Gospel, we must reengage in visual literacy. We must rediscover the power of the senses: sight, touch, taste, sound, and smell. We need to especially rediscover the power of imagery. We need to engage in creating and giving meaning to physical, mental, narrative, and kinesthetic images. We need to let them serve as manners in which people engage the Gospel, much as Marketers use symbols, colors, names, slogans, sounds, smells, and icons.

We would do well to take a page out of Alina Wheeler's book, *Designing and Branding*. We need to appeal to the senses. We need to create an identity that fuels recognition.[85] We need to clarify our message and the heart of our religion. We need to clarify our big idea and make it the totem pole around which

[85] Alina Wheeler, *Designing Brand Identity: An Essential Guide for the Entire Branding Team*, 3rd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2009), 4.

our entire culture is interpreted and lived.[86] We need to make big ideas accessible and unify our story, values, virtues, attitudes, and behaviors through branding.[87]

Essentially we need to find symbols, phrases and rituals that capture the essence, personality, and position of the church.[88] As demonstrated earlier, since the Reformation the church's focus has been academic, philisophical and esoteric. The personality and ethos of the church as stereotyped by the public is viewed as dogmatic, defensive, and irrelevant. This is not appealing to people who are hungering and searching for something authentic which will minister to their loneliness. In other words, they are looking for congruency in the mission, history, culture, values, and personality of the brands.[89] In a world where worshipers have a plethora of reliable brands to choose from, consumerism, success, and the like, the church is but one of the brands they can choose.

The church must keep in mind that most people will not respond to a philosophical, academic, or abstract conversation. People want dialogue. As part of a global and connected world, people, both inside and outside the citadels of Christianity, need to feel a part of the process of branding. Thus the church needs to rediscover its roots. It needs to reengage through creating contemporary icons, images, symbols, and rites of passage.

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[86] Ibid., 16.

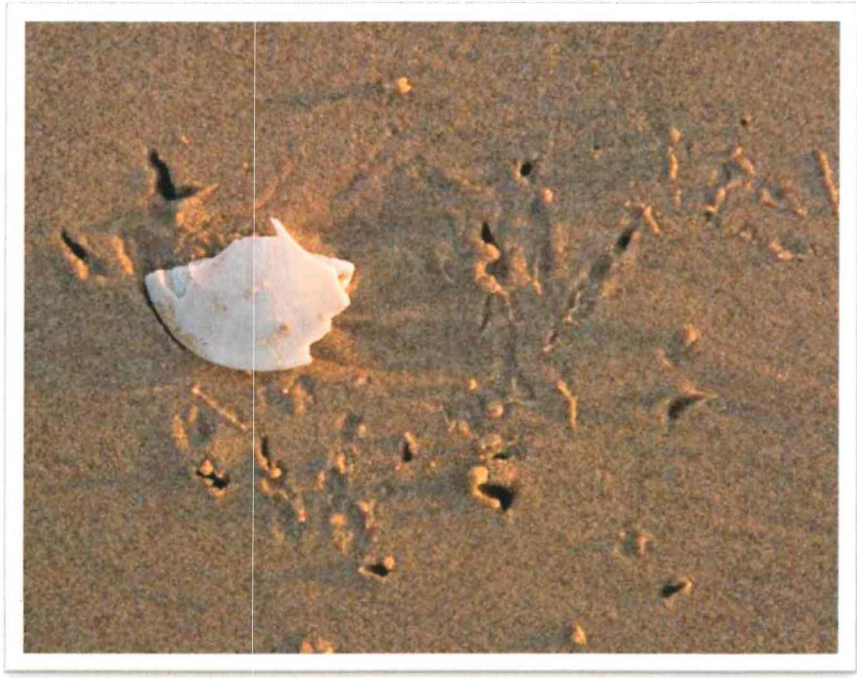
[87] Ibid., 6.

[88] Ibid., 24.

[89] Ibid., 36.

As God created people to each live out a unique story, the church must enter into these individual narratives. As we engage people who weary from isolation, tired from the mundane, satisfied with life, or elated with their own good fortune we bring the story of faith. As people of faith we would do well to translate God's story into our culture's universal language, imagery. As we hold the Bible in one hand, we should cast an eye to books like *Brandscendence* and *Emotional Branding* and learn from them. Only when narrative stories are woven together in a religiously-relevant manner will we effectively minister to the unfulfilled spiritual hunger which marks our world today. If the Incarnation is the point, if we truly believe it is the way God chose to meet people, then we too must re-engage humanity incarnationally.

CHAPTER 6: PHOTOGRAPY, A PRACTICAL APPLICATION



[1]

As I have reflected upon the biblical, theological, and historical evidence for imagery in worship, as well as Consumerism as a religion, the above image describes it best. This sunset photograph was taken at Cannon Beach, OR. After nine hours of class my mind was numb and on information overload. My heart yearned to stand in the thin space.[2] In Celtic spirituality, a thin space is where we experience a deep sense of God's presence in our everyday world. For me one

[1] John Stone, *Sand Dollars & Seagulls*, 2007, Cannon Beach.

[2] Jerry C. Doherty, *A Celtic Model of Ministry: The Reawakening of Community Spirituality* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 45.

of these this spaces is where the ocean meets the shore. I flirted with the waves while taking pictures to avoid getting wet. On this particular evening, I noticed an abnormal number of sand dollars on the beach. Like a five-year-old searching for a four-leaf clover, I scoured the surf for a whole one. All I found were broken pieces. Puzzled, I stopped. Muffled sounds of cracking like ceramic breaking pierced the rhythms of the ocean breaking upon the sand. I listened. I saw seagulls swooping upon the sand dollars. With each decisive peck, the fragile shells shattered. I shooed the gulls away to no avail. The battle was on. I worked to collect sand dollars, and the seagulls sought a meal. As the sun set, I left empty-handed and the shoreline was scattered with pieces of sand dollars and seagull footprints.

Biblically, historically, and theologically imagery in spiritual formation has been like these sand dollars. Some people walked the beach looking for image-rich treasures, picking them up, and displaying them. Others saw imagery as expendable and valueless, swooping in and wielding a sharp beak of destruction. One side embraced imagery, fighting for their use. The other side broke and burned them. The truth is there is evidence to support both approaches. The present conundrum is that the world has embraced imagery in its many forms of worship and communication. Our language has become more visual, yet frequently western churches lack the ability to communicate in an image-rich language.

This cultural embrace of imagery was depicted in Chapter 5. Consumerism borrowed a page from the book of Christian history. This religion

utilizes imagery to communicate acceptable virtues, values, attitudes, and behaviors. Icons, celebrities, captured the deeds and demeanor of this religion's holy men and women. Consumerism creates rites of passage and rituals that physically embed their stories of faith. They use common symbols from the culture around them keep the gospel of consumerism before people's eyes and rooted in their lives. Until the marketing machine harnessed imagery and gave images meaning, currently referred to as branding, the roll of creating brands was the purview of the church.

One of the most prolific uses of imagery today is photography. The low cost and easy access of digital photography gives people the ability to be on vacation, on a retreat, or having a meal, snap a picture on their phone and text or Facebook it. Families, churches, and friends use Photobucket, snapfish, Flickr, blogs, personal websites, and social networking sites to chronicle and share life as it happens. Digital photography allows people to brand themselves by selecting the images they post. In doing so, they act like a marketers. They create icons of their lives, a persona, and broadcast their image, their brand. In essence they iconize themselves.

Thus, I offer photography as a practical and widely accessible application of imagery in spiritual formation. I don't speak of photography in a strictly professional sense. Similarly, I do not refer to photography solely in a technically proficient manner. Rather, I use the term photography to include all manner of images captured through the lens of a camera, phone, or a video still by professionals and amateurs alike.

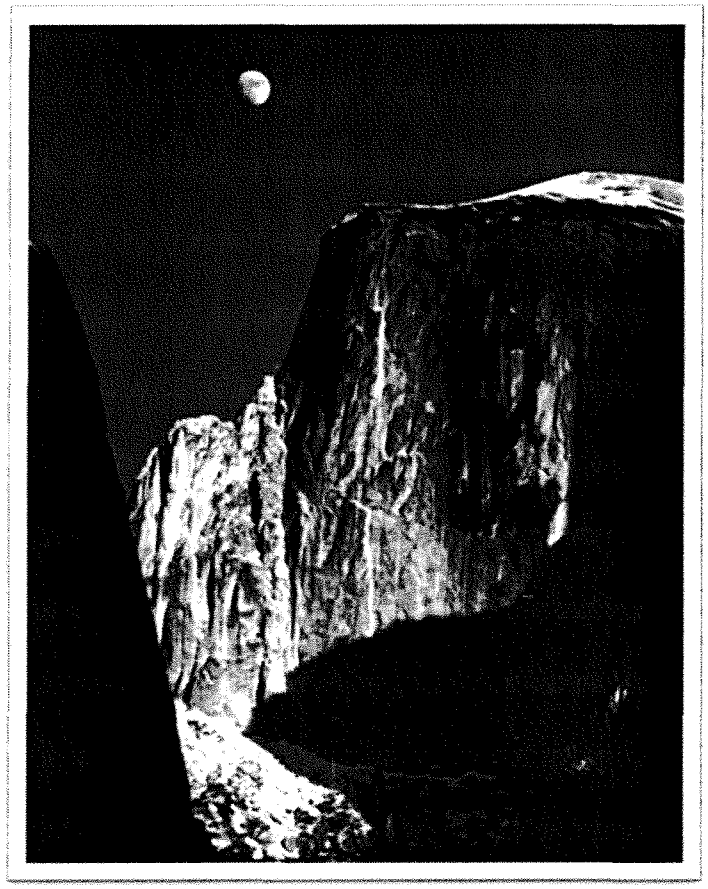
In this chapter I will show the influence and reach of photography through the lens of five professional photographers who brought both controversy and real, lasting change to the world. Next my aim is to show how we, as faith communities, may use images to communicate our stories, values, and behaviors. These images provide worshippers with a place to reflect and be molded through visual reminders. I want to illustrate how even amateurs from our communities of faith are able to brand images to help the community be formed spiritually. Photography provides one creative medium through which visual momentum is created and maintained. On a side note, I want to acknowledge that photography is not the only medium. I could have used painting, crafts, ceramics, wood working, logos, tagging, design, or any other form of art. As stated, I chose photography because of its prolific use, ease of access, and influence for many people in our western culture.

In the past 150 years photographers have captured scenic byways, the carnage of war, human plight, epic moments, sublime intimacy, and the mundane. From the plains of Africa to the Grand Tetons; from the amber fields of grain to the bullet-ridden homes of gangland; photographers have immortalized fragments of time, majestic grandeur, humanity, and fleeting vulnerability. Sometimes it is skill and other times it is the grace of being in the right place with your finger pressed on the shutter release.

For the purposes of this document, I have selected five professional photographers to illustrate the effectiveness of photography: Ansel Adams, Joe

Rosenthal, Steve McCurry, Anne Geddes, and Annie Lebovitz. Each of these prominent artists impacted their cultures with photography.

Ansel Adams is one of the most influential and celebrated photographers in the twentieth century. Adams' work at Yosemite National Park is still considered ground breaking and produced some of his most awe inspiring photographs.



[3]

Above is one of his most iconic photographs from Yosemite: Moon and Half Dome. Peter Barr describes Adams images and published thoughts as,

> a complex blend of aesthetic idealism and radical political engagement that is often overlooked. Equal parts aesthete and social activist, Adams hoped that his sharp-focused black-and-

[3] Ansel Adams, *Moon and Half Dome, Yosemite*, 1960.

> white photographs would help persuade Americans to value creativity as well as to conserve and expand American freedoms and wilderness preserves.[4]

William Turnage believed this pursuit was more than a cause. He said Adams, "focused on what he termed the spiritual-emotional aspects of parks and wilderness and relentlessly resisted the Park Service's 'resortism.'"[5] Adams utilized his photography to promote environmental awareness and the preservation of wilderness areas.[6]

The values, virtues, and attitudes that drove Adams are captured in his own words. Adams said, "I believe the world is incomprehensibly beautiful–and endless prospect of magic and wonder."[7] Some of this wonder he captured in this photograph of Mt. Williamson.

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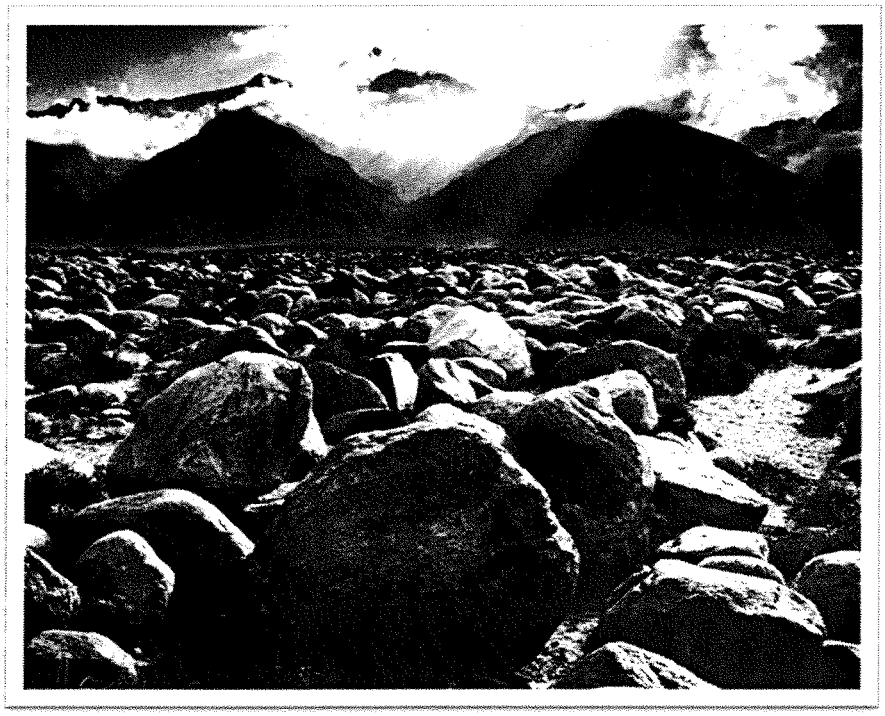
[4] Peter Barr, "Ansel Adams, America's Saint George of Conservation", Housantonic Community College, http://www.hcc.commnet.edu/artmuseum/anseladams/barressay.html (accessed December 30, 2010).

[5] William Turnage, "Ansel Adams, Photographer", The Ansel Adams Gallery, http://www.anseladams.com/anseladams_biography_s/51.htm (accessed December 31, 2010).

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ansel Adams, *Ansel Adams in the National Parks: Photographs from America's Wild Places*, ed. Andrea G. Stillman (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2010), 11.



[8]

For Adams this was more than a job. There was a spiritual side to nature:

> Yosemite Valley, to me, is always a sunrise, a glitter of green and golden wonder in a vast edifice of stone and space. I know of no sculpture, painting or music that exceeds the compelling spiritual command of the soaring shape of granite cliff and dome, of patina of light on rock and forest, and of the thunder and whispering of the falling, flowing waters. At first the colossal aspect may dominate; then we perceive and respond to the delicate and persuasive complex of nature. [9]

Adams' first real influence in the political realm came when he published *Sierra Nevada, the John Muir Trail* in 1938. He sent copies to President Roosevelt and the Interior Secretary Harold Ickes.[10] The photographs were instrumental in

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[8] Ansel Adams, *Mount Williamson, The Sierra Nevada, from Manzanar, CA* 1945, The Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust.

[9] Ansel Adams and John Szarkowski, *The Portfolios of Ansel Adams* (Boston: Little Brown Bulfinch Press, 1977).

[10] Ansel Adams and William Turnage, *Ansel Adams in the National Parks: Photographs from America's Wild Places*, ed. Andrea G. Stillman (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2010), 331.

swinging opinions in favor of preservation. After this Adams became "widely regarded as the principle photographer of, and unofficial spokesman for, the National Parks system."[11]

For Adams, love and reverence for nature originated in the San Francisco Bay area and Yosemite National Park. These places of spiritual encounter fueled his passion for the environmental issues. Particularly important to him were Yosemite National Park, the national park system, and, above all, the preservation of wilderness. As Turnage stated,

> He fought for new parks and wilderness areas, for the Wilderness Act, for wild Alaska and his beloved Big Sur coast of central California, for the mighty redwoods, for endangered sea lions and sea otters, and for clean air and water. An advocate of balanced, restrained use of resources, Adams also fought relentlessly against overbuilt highways, billboards, and all manner of environmental mendacity and shortsightedness. Yet he invariably treated his opponents with respect and courtesy.[12]

The photograph below is of one of his two favorite subjects, El Capitan. The other was Half Dome.

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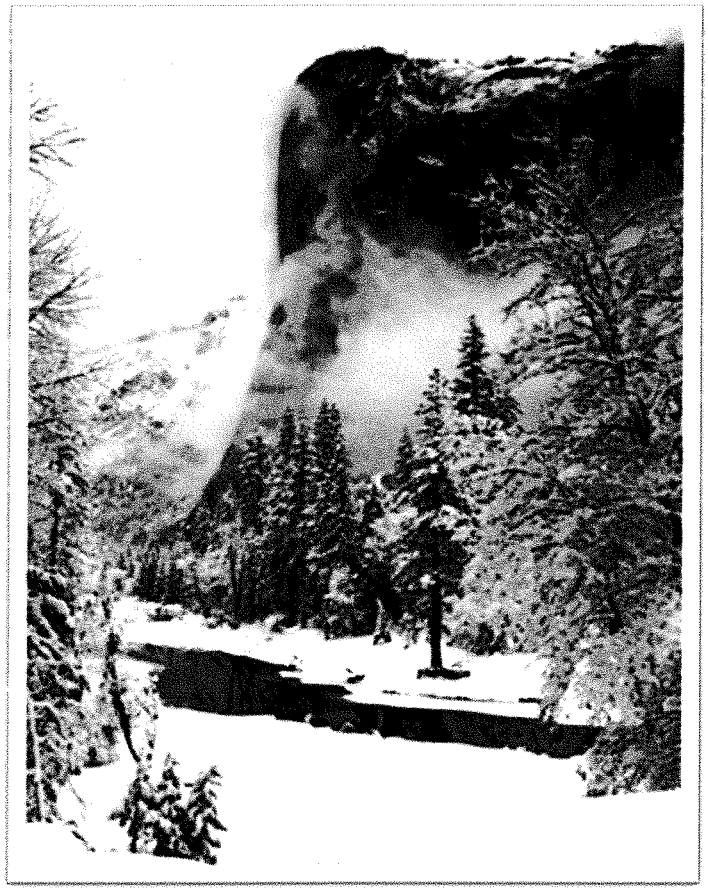
[11] Barr, "Ansel Adams, America's Saint George of Conservation."

[12] Turnage, "Ansel Adams, Photographer."



[13]

It was images like El Capitan that captured more than just a physical location. They communicated the majesty and grandeur of creation. These images evoked a visceral response to protect and preserve these natural treasures in many. This was especially true in Congress. Ultimately, Adam's life work gave him a seat at the table with presidents including Lyndon Johnson, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter, the later presenting Adams with the Presidential Medal of Freedom.[14]

[13] Ansel Adams, *El Capitan, Winter, Yosemite*, 1950.

[14] Barr, "Ansel Adams, America's Saint George of Conservation."

[15]

Ansel Adams believed photography had an obligation. Photography was "to help us see more clearly and more deeply, and to reveal to others the grandeurs and potentials of the one and only world which we inhabit."[16] It is photographs like *Canyon de Chelly*, pictured above, that help people see wild, untamed beauty. This photo, though illustrating a desolate and harsh environment, possesses elements of life. The canyon walls are etched and weathered from exposure to harsh elements. The earth scared by flooding and winds. There is a beauty in the history etched on the canyon walls through harsh conditions.

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[15] Ansel Adams, *Canyon de Chelly, Arizona*, Circa 1941-1942.

[16] An Address Occidental College, by Ansel Adams, A Photographer Talks about His Art. Los Angeles, CA.

Yet there is hidden life in this valley. The clouds bring hope of rain which in turn brings life to the vegetation hidden from the eye encapsulated as seeds. The river arcing through the canyon brings water to a parched land. Life for many is often like this picture, harsh. Yet, for all of life's challenges, the physical and emotional scars are not without their beauty. The canyon of life may appear devoid of life, then, with a single rain storm, vegetation hidden beneath the soil blooms. Hope resides unseen.

While Adams' spirituality was nature, his works made accessible and visible the wonders of God's creation. Jesus rebuked the religious leaders saying, "even if these people were quiet, the rocks would cry out."[17] To look at a single picture or flip through the pages of an Ansel Adams book, each image reminds the viewer that God's words in Genesis ring true, "It is very good."[18] Creation is a witness to the God of the universe. It groans for God and it cries out to God.[19] For Adams the absolute beauty and magic of nature was his value. And through his work he passed on a reverential appreciation of nature.[20] For people of faith, Adams work serves as to remind us we are stewards on this planet called earth. Our responsibility before God and others is to preserve, protect, and nurture.

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[17] Lk 19:39-40.

[18] Gn 1:31.

[19] Rom 8:18-23.

[20] Adams and Turnage, *Ansel Adams in the National Parks: Photographs from America's Wild Places*, 323, 328.

Because of his work, the beauty of creation was communicated in a manner that made visible and tactile a national treasure. These photographs, which he put before Presidents, Congress, and a nation, are icons of beauty with a prophetic call to stewardship and preservation.

A contemporary of Adams, Joe Rosenthal took his camera into the carnage of war instead of the beauty of nature. In 1945 he captured an image of marines raising the US American flag on Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima.[21]

[22]

This picture was branded by President Roosevelt to shore up receding support for the war. It became an icon embodying US America's courage, determination,

[21] There were actually 2 flag raisings. This picture was taken by Joe Rosenthal.

[22] Joe Rosenthal, *Iwo Jima Flag Raising*, 1945, John H. Bradley.

and will to win against all odds. This photograph came during a particularly bleak time in the Pacific Theater of World War II. The war wrought heavy casualties hopping from island to island, and support in the states became contentious. As casualty counts and pictures from Iwo Jima were printed, the US American public reacted with shock and dismay.[23]

[24]

Pictures like this showing the dead on the beach evoked visceral memories of the casualties accumulated in the battle for Tarawa fourteen months earlier.[25] The high price of human life tore at a nation's conscience.

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[23] Colonel Joseph H. Alexander, "Iwo Jima's Costs, Gains, and Legacies", The Marine Corps History and Museum Division, http://www.nps.gov/archive/wapa/indepth/extcontent/usmc/pcn-190-003131-00/sec7.htm (accessed December 28, 2010).

[24] Joe Rosenthal, "World War II," Circa 1945.

[25] Alexander, "Iwo Jima's Costs, Gains, and Legacies."

The debate raged in the press. The cost of forcibly seizing the islands from the Japanese was questioned and opposed.[26] Iwo Jima, one of the fiercest battles of the World War II Pacific Theater, was won at a steep human price. Only 216 prisoners[27] were taken out of the 20,000 Japanese soldiers present,[28] and US America reported 6,821 dead and 19,217 wounded in action.[29]

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Robert S. Burrell, *The Ghosts of Iwo Jima*, vol. 102 of *Texas A&M University Military History Series* (College Station: Texas A and M University Press, 2006), 83.

[28] "Iwo Jima Operation, February-March 1945, Overview and Special Image Selection", Department of the Navy, Naval Historical Center, http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/events/wwii-pac/iwojima/iwojima.htm (accessed December 28, 2010).

[29] Burrell, *The Ghosts of Iwo Jima*, 83.

[30] Rosenthal, "World War II."

The pictures of bodies and war machines littering the beach of Iwo Jima left a bitter taste in the mouths of Americans. The lifeless bodies rolling in the surf screamed at the conscience of US America. Winning the war was the objective, however, whether our method was worth the human price became hotly contested.

President Roosevelt was able to reduce public outcry by emphasizing the sacrifice of the troops epitomized by Rosenthal's photograph.[31] Alexander wrote, "FDR made it the official logo of the Seventh War Bond Drive and demanded the six flag-raisers be reassigned home to enhance popular morale. Regrettably, three of the six men had already been killed in subsequent fighting in the drive north on Iwo Jima.[32]" It was branded by the US American Government because it embodied the stories, attitudes, virtues, and behaviors the government celebrated. They used this picture to communicate the sacrifice and toughness of the soldiers, the will to press on to victory, and the capability of the US American forces.[33] The picture galvanized and re-energized a nation to press toward victory in the face of stiff criticism.

During his life, war photography was Rosenthal's main assignment.[34] Rosenthal joined the U.S. Maritime Service and photographed convoys in the

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[31] Alexander, "Iwo Jima's Costs, Gains, and Legacies."

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Liz Masoner, "Profile of Joe Rosenthal", About.com, The New York Times Company, http://photography.about.com/od/famousphotographers/p/joerosenthalprofile.htm (accessed January 19, 2011).

Atlantic. Later the AP sent Rosenthal to cover battles and their aftermaths in the Pacific and he photographed Guam, Peleliu, and Iwo Jima.[35]

[36]

Rosenthal's photographs ranged from the grotesque bodies left on beaches to the religious ritual of mass served on battle-singed islands. Above is a poignant image of mass in a battlefield. Men of faith knelt among the bloodshed of war to practice the sacrament. It begs the question, where is God not? Is there any place in heaven and earth that God is not present? It is a stark reminder of God's presence, regardless of what is transpiring around a person. When facing the disappointments, bitter divorces, and carnage of life, there is a strong desire to believe in something greater than ourselves. Rosenthal's body of work encompassed this.

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Joe Rosenthal, *Communion on Iwo Jima*, Circa 1945.

Rosenthal described much of his photography saying, "It was like shooting a football game. You never knew what you got on film."[37] Ultimately, these photographs were the result of a talented photographer being present and keeping the shutter moving. Rosenthal gave sight to a war thousands of miles and an ocean removed from a nation entangled in debate over the value of life against the objective to win. One side cried out against the high price of human life, and the other side pointed out the cost would be greater if the enemy were allowed to entrench themselves. These photographs brought flesh to a war distant and abstract.

These and all photographs of war bring up many emotions. Two commonly shared feelings are patriotism and outrage. As I look at the first photo of US American marines planting a flag on Iwo Jima, there is a twinge of national pride. As I view a picture of ground zero with an US American flag in the aftermath, a sense of patriotic anger swells.

[37] Joe Rosenthal, "Iwo Jima Flag Raising", John H. Bradley, http://www.iwojima.com/raising/raisingb.htm (accessed December 28, 2010).

38

Pictures of war evoke visceral reactions. They serve as reminders of The Fall.[39] They serve as reminders of the atrocities humanity is capable of inflicting upon each other. They remind us of the dangers and outcomes of objectifying people, races, and nations. These images keep before our eyes the vast and devastating cost of war and, regardless of our "just war" theological arguments, war is grotesque.

Similarly, these war photographs illustrate the Bible. Scripture contains many references to wars.[40] There are graphic descriptions of the results of the

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[38] Steve McCurry, *New York City, New York, USA*, 2001.

[39] Gn 3.

[40] From Cain and Abel battling for God's favor (Gn 4:2b-16), to the Israelites conquering the Promised Land (Jo 1), God using the nations to punish Israel's unbelief (Lv 26:27-33, Jer 2:1-20) and Christ's return to establish a new heaven and a new earth (Rv 21:1), the Bible is replete with battle stories.

Assyrians destroying the countryside and the violence ensuing.[41] Rosenthal and other war correspondents' work are used to encourage and enflame national patriotism, it also serves as a stinging reminder to the vast pain, suffering, atrocities, and injustices embodied by war.

In our generation, Steve McCurry records the ravages of war and its devastating effects. In 1984 he photographed a 12 year old Afghan girl in a refugee school. McCurry's photograph brought global awareness to the suffering of individuals and an entire nation. This image seared the heart.[42] As Cathy Newman wrote about Sharbat's eyes, "They are haunted and haunting, and in them you can read the tragedy of a land drained by war."[43]

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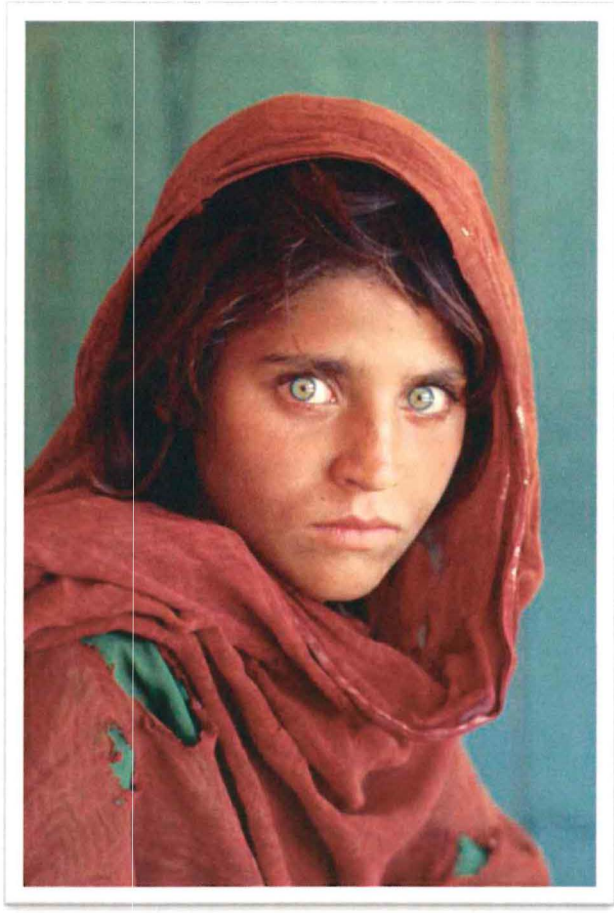
[41] 2 Kgs 15:29; 17:3-6; 19:11, 17.

[42] Cathy Newman, "A Life Revealed," *National Geographic*, no. April 2002 (2002), http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2002/04/afghan-girl/index-text (accessed December 22, 2010).

[43] Ibid.



[44]

Sharbat Gula, known for 17 years only as the "Afghan Girl,"[45] grabbed the world with her piercing green eyes flecked with hints of blue. This image froze in time the fear, suffering, and plight of millions of refugees whose villages, homes, and lives were devastated by the Soviet helicopters and rebel armies.[46] This photo adorned the cover of National Geographic's June 1985 issue.

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[44] Steve McCurry, *Afghan Girl*, 1984.

[45] David Braun, "How They Found National Geographic's 'Afghan Girl'," *National Geographic*, no. March 2003 (2003), http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/pf/6736300.html (accessed December 22, 2010).

[46] "Steve McCurry: Unveiling the Face of War," *National Geographic* (2001), http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/100best/multi1_interview.html (accessed December 22, 2010).

This issue was dedicated to the life along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. The pictures illustrated the plight of Afghan refugees. Immediately, this photo took on iconic status. Gregg Zoroya states in his short article about finding the real Sharbat Gula in 2002,

> the photo has been compared in iconic significance with such other famous 20th century images as the Iwo Jima flag-raising photograph of World War II by Joe Rosenthal; the fatal shooting of Kennedy assassin Lee Harvey Oswald captured on film by Dallas *Times Herald* photographer Bob Jackson; and W. Eugene Smith's picture of a child crippled by industrial poisoning being bathed by her mother in Japan.[47]

In an interview for the National Geographic's 100 Best Pictures edition, Steve McCurry stated, "This portrait summed up for me the trauma and plight, and the whole situation of suddenly having to flee your home and end up in refugee camp, hundreds of miles away."[48] He believes this image of Sharbat took hold of the imagination of the world because her eyes expressed the pain and resilience as well as strength and beauty.[49] Ultimately, he asserts that she became a symbol of the dignity and toughness of her people.[50]

Steve McCurry's photography gives a portal past a person's defenses and into their soul. As McCurry said,

> Most of my pictures are grounded in people. I look for the unguarded moment, the essential soul peeking out, experience etched on a person's face. I try to convey what it is like to be that

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[47] Gregg Zoroya, "'National Geographic' tracks down Afghan girl," *USA Today*, no. March 13, 2003 (2003), http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2002/03/12/afghan-girl.htm (accessed December 22, 2010).

[48] "Steve McCurry: Unveiling the Face of War."

[49] Braun, "How They Found National Geographic's 'Afghan Girl.'"

[50] Ibid.

> person, a person caught in a broader landscape that I guess you'd call the human condition.[51]

Traveling the world McCurry has brought to light the human condition. His photographs bring an incarnation to the human impact of wars and the struggles of the disenfranchised, the marginalized. As with Gula, McCurry brings flesh to the viewer's abstract concepts of refugee camps, poverty, and suffering. His photography gives tangibility to the accompanying text. In response, people are haunted.

As stated, McCurry puts flesh on the plight of the poor and marginalized.

[52]

This "Beggar Girl" in India and this boy, next page, in Latin America shout at us. They illuminate the biblical call to care for the widow and orphan. In US America we live insulated in our cars, our homes, and our North American comforts.

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[51] Steve McCurry, "Steve McCurry: Portraits", Steve McCurry, http://www.stevemccurry.com/main.php (accessed January 20, 2011).

[52] Steve McCurry, *Beggar Girl, Bombay India*, 1996.

McCurry interrupts our comfortable lives with the faces of those we edit out of our visual periphery.

[53]

In these two pictures the pain and hollowness of their eyes beg us not to ignore them. We read in the Gospels that Jesus affirmed the Jewish commands to care for the widows and orphans. Jesus affirmed the Jewish law to provide hospitality to those who are foreigners. This is not a call to bankrupt or exhaust ourselves meeting every need we hear about. It is a call to remember that our faith requires us to care for and give preference to those who live in the margins.

In photographing people in the margins, McCurry doesn't fabricate or exploit the scene. He doesn't use some technique to draw out an emotional response from the person. As he says of his style,

[53] Steve McCurry, *Latin America Photography*, 2009.

> When walking in the street I'm opened up to a certain kind of person, a person who will speak to me in a very profound way, and once I find that person, I get very excited. I suddenly get very enthusiastic, and I think my enthusiasm is infectious and suddenly we have this chemistry, this sort of bond where I'm so enamoured with them and how they look and how the present themselves.
>
> It's actually a really quite an odd thing to walk up to a stranger and yet within a matter of seconds to be able to try and persuade them to actually stop what they were doing and to allow me to take their picture. I've sort of developed a way that is in part showing respect, plus there's an element of humour to try and defuse the sort of embarrassing, awkward situation.[54]

McCurry's photography allows us to walk the streets of Afghanistan, India, and the world to meet humanity. There is a visceral quality to the images he captures which elicit a response from the viewer. These pictures illuminate the human condition of people who have no voice and, in many situations, no hope. The human condition today is not so different from the world in which Jesus lived.

His image of a coal miner, pictured on the next page, in Afghanistan brought to light the unspeakable conditions people in developing and third world countries face. In an interview for BBC News, McCurry narrates what he saw:

> You know the thing that was so astonishing about these coal miners in Afghanistan, they go underground for 12 hours a day, they go in six o'clock in the morning and when the sun's setting they come back out. They've been breathing coal dust all day long, there's no protective gear except this sort of flimsy helmet. But the first thing this man did when he came out to the ground, after breathing all this coal dust, is light up a cigarette. And I just found it so amazing.[55]

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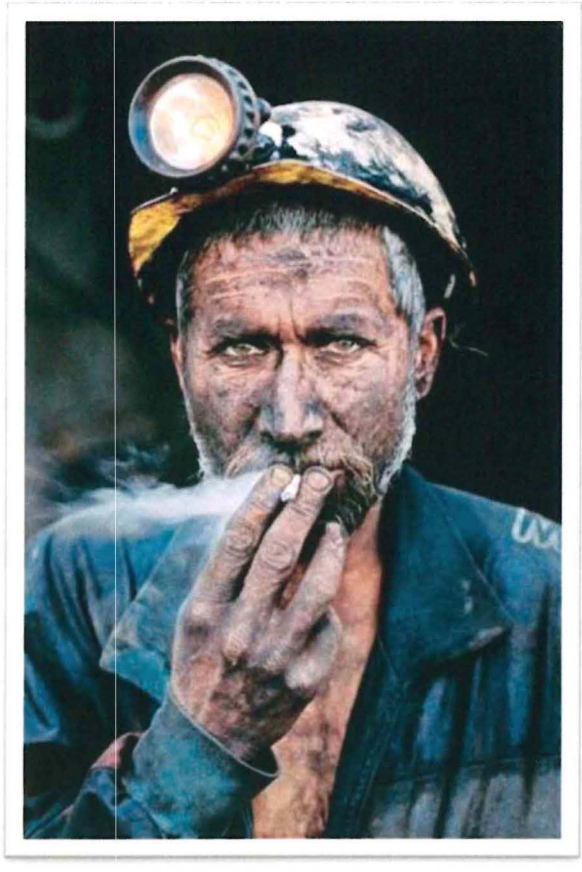
[54] Phil Coomes, "Steve McCurry: Retrospective", BBC News, http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/photoblog/2010/07/steve_mccurry_retrospective.html (accessed January 20, 2011).

[55] Ibid.



[56]

Like Ansel Adams' picture of *Canyon de Chelly,* one can see the effects of the weather of life etched in this man's face, hands, and posture. Instead of wind and water, this miner endured hard labor, unhealthy working conditions, and low pay. These eroded the youthfulness and innocence from his life.

Yet, as I look into his eyes, I don't see a man seeking pity. I don't see a bitter soul. I see weariness and resilience. This man did not ask for this life, however, he is making his way through the storms, dust, and barren land and surviving. There is no reason to feel sorrow for him. However, from our insular luxury, there is much room for us to speak out against these conditions.

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[56] Steve McCurry, *Coal Miner Smoking a Cigarette, Pul-i-Khumri, Afghanistan*, 2002, Magnum Photos.

As I reflect upon McCurry's photos, familiar scriptures prick at my conscience. Jesus cried out, as you have done for the least of these, you have done to me.[57] In the Old Testament the law required that widows and orphans be looked after.[58] In the New Testament Jesus lays bare the hypocrisy of the religious elites as he exposes their indifference toward the widows and orphans.[59] He chides the people for their callous indifference that making a profit is more important than helping the poor.[60] Regardless of McCurry's religious affiliation, his work preaches the Gospel message. It calls us to see the disenfranchised, and, like Christ, to seek the people in the margins.[61] He sought the widows.[62] He sought the orphans. He sought the adulterer.[63] He sought the poor.[64] He sought the sick.[65] He sought those who were unclean.[66] He didn't visually edit them out of his life. Instead, he sat down in the heat of the day and

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[57] Mt 26:40.

[58] Ex 22:22; Dt 10:18-19, 16:11; Zec 7:10.

[59] Mt 23:27-28; Mk 12:41-44.

[60] Mt 23.

[61] Lk 5:31-32.

[62] Lk 7:11-17; 21:1-4.

[63] Jn 4; 8:1-11.

[64] Mt 9:36.

[65] Mt 8-9; Lk 14:1-6.

[66] Mt 9:9-11, 19-22.

offered living water.[67] McCurry calls for the viewer to respond, to care about people. He calls the viewer to see people.

While McCurry's photos captured the human condition and often human resilience, Anne Geddes gained notoriety in the 1990's for illuminating the frailty and preciousness of human life. Geddes aptly describes her photography, "I felt that if I could truly convey the exquisite, yet vulnerable, beauty of each baby, perhaps I could also help strengthen the awareness of the need to protect them."[68]

[69]

As seen in this picture, Anne Geddes records with exquisite detail the frailty of children. *Jack Holding Maneesha* was taken in the hospital neonatal intensive

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[67] Jn 4.

[68] Anne Geddes, *A Labour of Love: An Autobiography* (Kansas, MO: Andrews McMeel, 2007), 73.

[69] Anne Geddes, *Jack Holding Maneesha*, 1993.

care unit. Maneesha was 28 weeks old and weighed 2.2 pounds at the time of the shoot.[70] Jack was chosen because he had a "warm, gentle personality, which was essential for the shoot."[71] Maneesha, age 12, wrote of the photograph she titles "My Picture,"

> Anne says that to her a great image is one that you can look at for a long, long time. I often gaze at the image of myself in Jack's big hands, and wonder how I could ever have been so small. ... Over the years my parents have told me many stories about the time when I was born and everything that happened. But I still used to wonder what all the fuss was about. Now I am older and can understand a bit more—the word "miracle" really has special meaning to me.[72]

Geddes dedicated her work to the protection of children.

She states her purpose and mission clearly, "Every child deserves to be protected, nurtured, and loved, and unfortunately, for some children, this is simply not the case."[73] Maneesha's picture encapsulates this mission.

Her "calling,"[74] as Geddes tells it, is not to "just continue with my photography of babies, but also to convey the message that they are incredibly

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[70] Anne Geddes, "A Labor of Love: Anne Geddes, an autobiography, Until Now: Jack Holding Maneesha", Andrews Michael Publishing, http://www.andrewsmcmeel.com/anne-geddes/special-baby.html (accessed January 21, 2011).

[71] Anne Geddes, "Jack holding Maneesha ", AnneGeddes.com, http://www.annegeddes.com/LimitedEdition/Modules/LEP/JackHoldingManeesha.aspx (accessed January 21, 2011).

[72] Maneesha, "Then & Now: Jack Holding Maneesha", Anne Geddes, http://www.annegeddes.com/modules/anne/galleries/ThenAndNow/Maneesha2.aspx (accessed January 20, 2011).

[73] Geddes, *A Labour of Love: An Autobiography*, 73.

[74] Ibid.

precious and vulnerable human beings who deserve our full protection as they grow and develop. Babies are a unique gift, and should be treated as such." [75]

These photographs speak volumes. The need to protect, nurture, and love children[76] is not bound by gender or race. It is humanity's calling. Jesus said, "don't hinder these children from coming to me. It would be better to hang a millstone around your neck."[77] In Proverbs the writer says, "blessed is them man whose quiver is full of them."[78] God instructs Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you."[79] The Bible is clear, children are a reward, a blessing, from God.[80] They are the greatest of all treasures we are given in life.

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[75] Ibid.

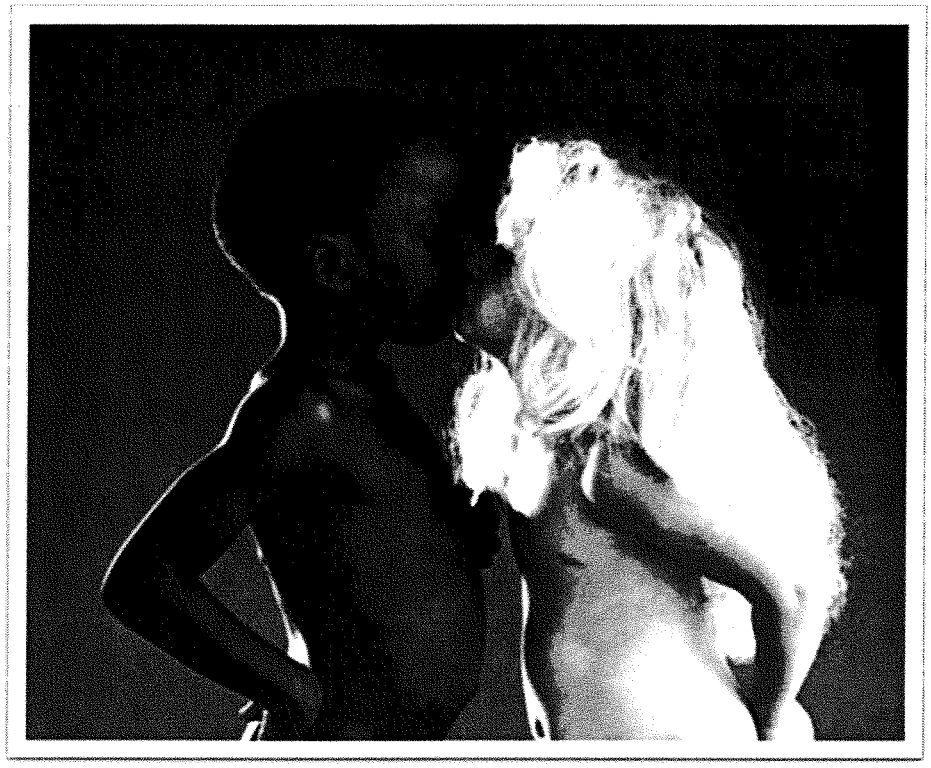
[76] Geddes, "Jack holding Maneesha."

[77] Mt 18:6.

[78] Ps 127:5.

[79] Jeremiah 1:5a.

[80] Ps 127:3.



[81]

While babies are the primary focus of her work, she also photographs young children. This picture of Zac and Georgina, embodies the spirit of Geddes work with children. She demonstrates a child's innocence and honesty. She visually articulates a child's willingness to embrace others.

Geddes articulates the artist's view of the portrait, *Zac and Georgia*, in her book *Until Now*:

> I think that most young children don't really have a concept of their image on film, nor are they interested in the end result. They are far more interested in just having a good time. If they are enjoying themselves, they are more likely to be totally spontaneous. Zac and Georgina got on really well, even though they had never met prior to this day. They both had such wonderful personalities. I try to get everyone involved in the shoot, including the parents. To me, my shoots are always a team effort.[82]

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[81] Anne Geddes, *Zac & Georgina: Black and White Friendship*, 1991.

[82] Anne Geddes, *Until Now* (San Rafael, CA: Cedco Pub., 1999), an unnumbered page.

She illuminates the willingness of children to accept and embrace others. Until we program our children, they innocently embrace the world. They play, frolic, and hug life. Yet, abuse, hatred, bitter memories, and biases are ingrained through the adults who love them.

Geddes' body of work causes me to pause. While I do not have children of my own, I recognize what a gift and responsibility I have as a pastor and an uncle. God calls all people, parents, relatives, and communities of faith to raise children.[83] We are called to mentor, instruct, and correct children. We are to teach them about living in relationship with God and others.[84]

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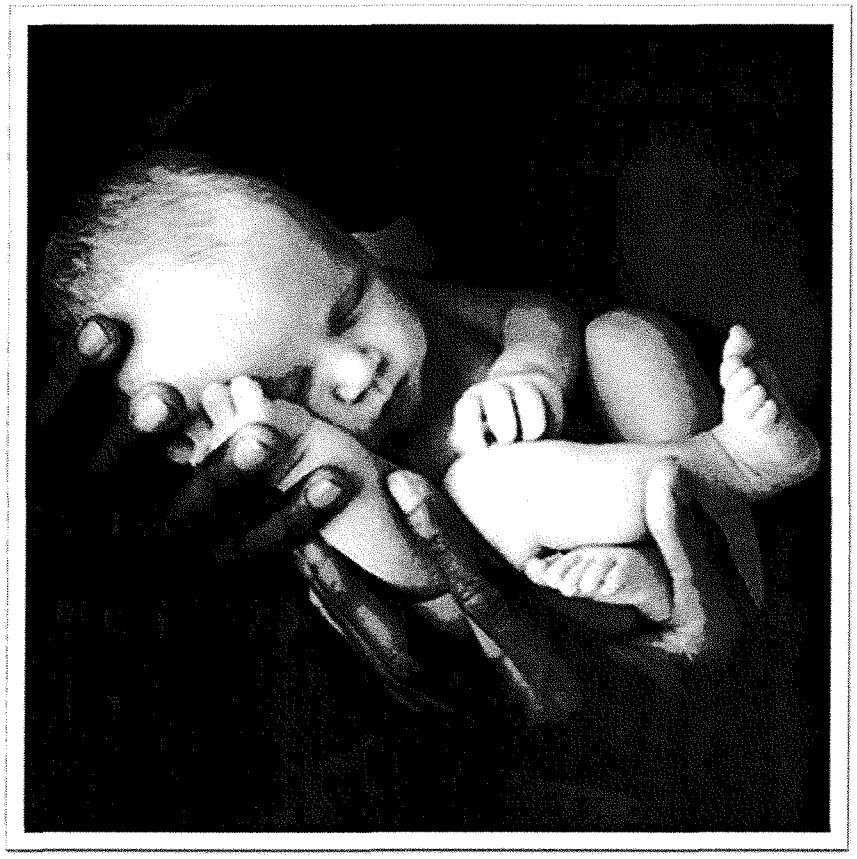
[83] Eph 6:4.

[84] Dt 11:19.



[85]

It is our responsibility to continue to grow in our love toward God and others. The sobering reality is that the Gospel these children will read is the Gospel they see and experience preached in our actions and attitudes. Children read our lives and mimic our behaviors. Like barometers, children pick up on our fears and joys. They codify them into their lives and embed them in their actions. Children are our gift and a precious responsibility from God.

Anne Geddes, regardless of her religious affiliation, captures the biblical mandate to cherish and raise our children. She illuminates with images the tenderness, frailty, and preciousness of children. She captures the innocence of childhood and brings before our eyes Jesus' words, "I tell you the truth, unless

[85] Anne Geddes, *Newborn in Hands*, 1993.

you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."[86] Geddes' work offers unique insights into Jesus' words. Further, the images create visceral reactions that connect the viewer with the passage. Exposed to the extent and pervasiveness of child abuse, Anne is a prophet calling us to cherish our children, to protect, to nurture, and to love.[87]

Much like McCurry and Geddes, Annie Leibovitz seeks to draw out the vulnerability of people. However, her subjects aren't the small and fragile, nor the war hardened and marginalized. Leibovitz has spent her life creating icons. She has had access to the celebrity culture and the leaders who shaped and continue to shape our world. Her body of work includes stars, famous public figures, and international events. Below are twelve of the stars, athletes, and public figures Leibovitz has photographed. From upper left to right they are Richard Gere, Lance Armstrong, Steven Spielberg, Demi Moore, (second row) Scarlett Johansson, Michael Jordan, Bono, Keith Richards, (third row) Barak Obama, George Bush, Queen Elizabeth II, and Desmond Tutu.[88]

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[86] Mt 18:3-4.

[87] Maneesha, "Then & Now: Jack Holding Maneesha."

[88] "Annie Leibovitz: John Lennon and Yoko Ono, Richard Gere, Jamie Lee Curtis, Steven Spielberg & Pamela Anderson", Les cahiers d'Alain Truong, http://alaintruong.canalblog.com/archives/2010/01/17/16550711.html (accessed January 3, 2011).

[89]

Through her body of work, she earned a stunning reputation for photographing the essence of a person.[90] Steve McCurry referred to this as capturing a bit of the soul. For Leibovitz, her most renowned and controversial

[89] From upper right: Annie Leibovitz, *Richard Gere*, 2003. Annie Leibovitz, *Lance Armstrong, New York City*, 1999. Annie Leibovitz, *Steven Speilberg*, 2003. Annie Leibovitz, *Demi Moore*, 1991, Vanity Fair. Annie Leibovitz, *Scarlett Johansson*, 2009. Annie Leibovitz, *Michael Jordan*. Annie Leibovitz, *Bono*, 2010. Annie Leibovitz, *Keith Richards*. Annie Leibovitz, *Barack Obama*, 2009, Vanity Fair. Annie Leibovitz, *George Bush*. Annie Leibovitz, *The Queen: Queen Elizabeth II*, 2007. Annie Leibovitz, *Desmond Tutu*.

[90] Brooklynn Museum, "Exhibitions: Annie Leibovitz: A Photographer's Life, 1990–2005", Brooklynn Museum, http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/annie_leibovitz/ (accessed January 3, 2011).

work has been her portraits. Yet the breadth of her work includes reporting from the siege of Sarajevo in the early 1990's, the landscapes in the American West, and the Jordanian desert, to the Olympics.[91] She served as the chief photographer for Rolling Stone magazine, Vanity Fair, and Vogue along with numerous freelance jobs. [92] She built a reputation creating icons.

Annie Leibovitz is one of the greatest portrait photographers of the past 25 years and one of US America's best.[93] Similarly, she is one of the most controversial. Two of Leibovitz's controversial works are her portrait of John Lennon and Yoko Ono and the recent portrait of Miley Cyrus. While conservative groups have spoken against her work, there is no doubting her influence. The evidence is her high demand to photograph celebrities, presidents, and famous public figures. Below we have the controversial photo of John Lennon and Yoko Ono.

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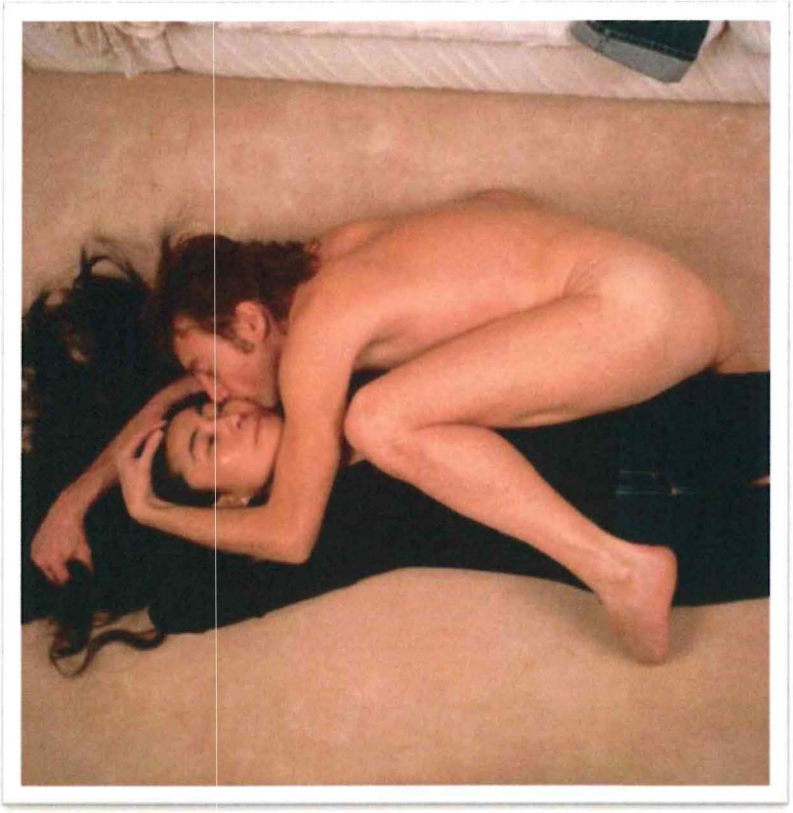
[91] Ibid.

[92] Vanity Fair, "Annie Leibovitz", Vanity Fair, http://www.vanityfair.com/contributors/annie-leibovitz (accessed January 3, 2011).

[93] Biography.com, "Annie Leibovitz Biography", A&E Television Networks, http://www.biography.com/articles/Annie-Leibovitz-9542372 (accessed January 3, 2011).



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When Lennon and Ono saw the photo they said, "'You've captured our relationship exactly.'"[95] Leibovitz remembers Yoko saying, "What you saw in the photo was the real John—open, daring, vulnerable, warmhearted."[96] The portrait of Lennon and Ono was taken in Dakota, NY hours before Lennon was murdered. The honesty of the picture combined with the murder of John Lennon hours later, vaulted this photo to iconic status. It would serve as John Lennon's goodbye to the world.[97] This photo of Lennon's vulnerability and Ono's apparent

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[94] Annie Leibovitz, *John Lennon and Yoko Ono*, 1980, Rolling Stone, Dakota, NY.

[95] Jann Wenner, "Remembering John Lennon", Rolling Stone, http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/remembering-john-lennon-20101208 (accessed January 4, 2011).

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid.

distance struck a chord with many. It made visual and tactile the condition of the relationships of many viewers. More so, it iconized a legend.

Leibovitz is not catering to a conservative audience whose sensibilities are offended by nudity, and in many cases offended with good cause. She is a product of the consumer society. She photographs and records the celebrities of our day and age. Her passion is to bring to light the very essence of the person she shoots. She works to create a relaxed environment and develop a shoot that will be honest and representative of the person. The response she received from Yoko and John was that Leibovitz captured their relationship "exactly." In the process she creates secular, consumer icons presenting the essence of the person much like iconographers have done for centuries.

Another controversial photograph was Miley Cyrus' portrait. In this case, her icon created dissonance. Parents reacted in outrage at the Disney star's mostly nude photos. There were outcries of shock at how a role model for their preteen and teen children was manipulated in order to sell magazines.[98] This makes sense. Miley Cyrus was underage and nude. It is reasonable to assume that she had no idea what the long range implications would be of her own exploitation. And parents resonated with the need to protect their children.

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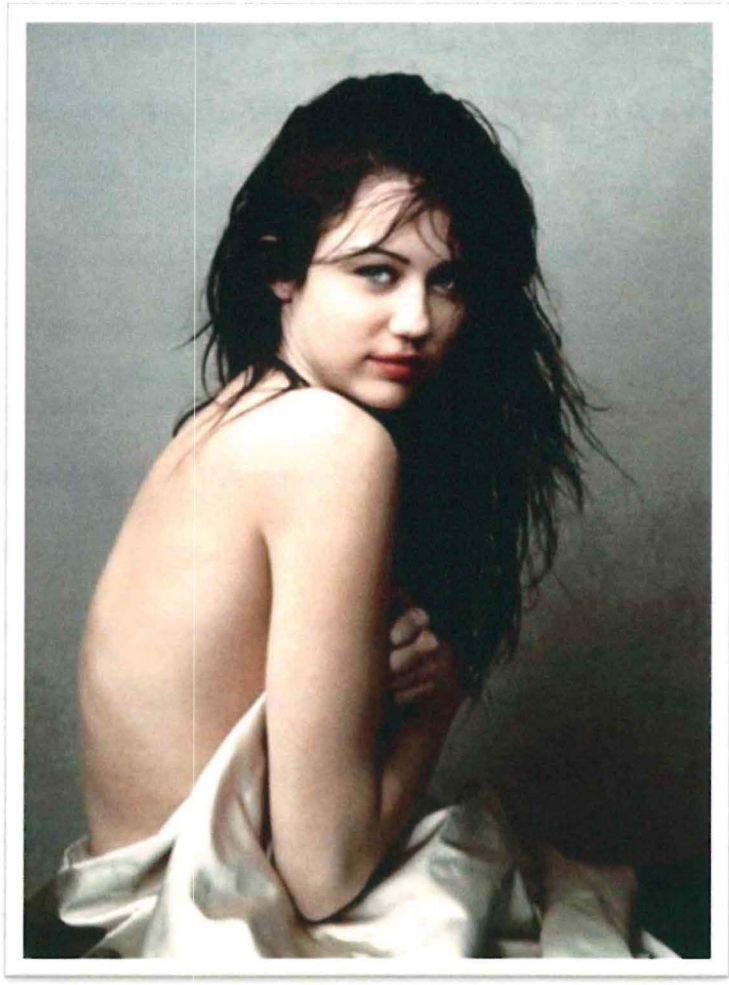
[98] Associated Press, "Miley Cyrus Vanity Fair photo 'beautiful': Leibovitz", CBC News, http://www.cbc.ca/arts/media/story/2008/04/28/cyrus-photos-vanityfair.html (accessed January 3, 2011).



[99]

Leibovitz responded to the criticism in a written reply. "I'm sorry that my portrait of Miley has been misinterpreted. ... Miley and I looked at fashion photographs together and we discussed the picture in that context before we shot it. The photograph is a simple, classic portrait, shot with very little makeup, and I think it is very beautiful."[100] She went on to say that the family approved all

[99] Annie Leibovitz, *Miley Cyrus*, 2008, Vanity Fair.

[100] Lorena Blas, "Leibovitz apologizes for Cyrus' 'Vanity Fair' spread", USA Today, http://www.usatoday.com/life/people/2008-04-27-miley-vanity-fair_N.htm (accessed January 3, 2011).

the portraits as they were being taken.[101] Regardless of intent or even the family's approval, the values, virtues, and attitudes portrayed violated those of a vast sub-culture of parents with children who idolized Miley Cyrus.

Another way to approach this picture is not to assume it is exploitive. Rather, in working with Leibovitz, Miley and her parents were able to see past the veneer of her celebrity status and grasp a look into the real Miley Cyrus. With the sheet wrapped around her, the pose isn't sultry or lustful. It doesn't harbor the lure of a temptress. This photo exudes a vulnerable quality, a metaphorical shedding of her celebrity skin. Underneath the celebrity exists a young woman unsure and insecure. There is a tiredness in her eyes. The portrait begs the viewer to see her as a person, not her persona.

The most important insight we glean is that we live in a world of people who are very good at branding themselves. Young people and even older generations have become adept at creating personas. It is a rare gift to see past another's projected self-image and view the true self. Pretention fills our relationships in a consumer driven world. And for this reason, people cling to the photographs like these because they are a rare glimpse behind the curtain. As I look at this picture, the Psalmist's words come to mind, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."[102] In this same vein, "O LORD, you have searched me and you know me."[103] God

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[101] Press, "Miley Cyrus Vanity Fair photo 'beautiful': Leibovitz."

[102] Ps 51:17.

[103] Ps 139:1.

desires honesty, a heart that understands its need for God. All our sacrifices are empty. For what God desires us to come honestly into God's presence. Like Miley in this portrait God invites us to shed our persona. We are invited to engage God and others with honesty and vulnerability.

Annie Leibovitz's portraits carry this honesty because she has a straight forward approach. In an interview with Dave Weich about her new book title "Women," Annie states that she prefers the title Portrait photographer. "In a portrait, you have room to have a point of view and to be conceptual with a picture. The image may not be literally what's going on, but it's representative."[104] Her point of view is to be as straight forward as possible.[105] Yet she also wants to leave a room for interpretation. What sets her work apart is that she captures an intimacy and vulnerability in the person. She credits John Lennon with helping her create an atmosphere that allows others to be vulnerable:

> What I learned from Lennon was ... to be very straightforward. I actually love talking about taking pictures, and I think that helps everyone. You're not there in the room talking to someone about something else while you're really trying to take their picture. ... Lennon was very straightforward and helpful. What he taught me seems completely obvious: he expected people to treat each other well.[106]

This straight forward relationship with the people she is photographing is seen in her work. Her work resonates and influences others. She connects with a part of

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[104] Dave Weich, "Annie Leibovitz Puts Down Camera, Talks", Powells.com, http://www.powells.com/authors/leibovitz.html (accessed January 3, 2011).

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid.

our lives that makes us uncomfortable. In real ways, she exposes our vulnerability, as we recognize it, in the portraits she takes.

To this point, we have seen professional photographers who in the past 100 years utilized their medium to influence and affect the world around them. Their work provided and still provides visual cues to remember and meditate upon their message. As you have read and seen to this point, photography profoundly communicates and its effects are enduring. In today's world the proliferation of and ease of access to digital photography, has opened up a visual world previously associated with professionals and the affluent. In today's culture even a cell phone allows instant access to capturing a moment in time. While the professionals will always hone their craft and the images they present will still captivate their audiences, the sheer number of photos being taken has shifted the realm of images we generally see.

At this point I want to put the spotlight on amateurs. There are volumes of photographs in the homes, houses of worship, and social networking sites of average, everyday US Americans. Through Flickr, Facebook, blogs, and other websites we brand ourselves and the organizations we belong to through pictures. While the use and effective range of images born of amateurs may be within their social networks, family, and faith community, they are no less powerful than the professionals within their environment. In the next few pages I will offer a few examples of such pictures.

The first three examples I offer come from my own adventures. In fact, for me, photography started out as a private hobby to journal and remember. I first

picked up a camera as a way to capture the way I saw the world. Photography has always been a deeply personal journey, and it serves as a way to express the manner in which I view the world. I love the grandeur of the scenic. This picture of Haleakela's Fissures was taken from the observatory at 8,000 feet. When I returned from vacation in 2005 a few people from the church politely watched my slide show.

[107]

I was astounded at their reactions. This one picture set off a long conversation about life and death and heaven. Those who saw the photos encouraged me to print and hang them around the church.

While I consider myself an amateur, what I heard those around me say was these photos had something to offer. They communicated and captivated

[107] John Stone, *Fissures: Haleakala*, 2005, Maui, HI.

other people. There was something about this photograph that grabbed their attention. It transported them through the portal of memories and abstract ideas, connecting thoughts and mental images of their own.

For me this picture still evokes strong memories of the bitter wind and freezing temperatures. It brings to mind the solitary qualities of life. There is something about this picture that speaks a truth in life. God's creation is amazing and beautiful. Similarly, it is astounding how often in life I feel isolated and almost unseen.

Two years later, I found myself on a different sort of adventure, walking in a vineyard.

[108]

[108] John Stone, *Harvest Grapes*, 2007, Silverton, OR.

I was on the quest to find the perfect cluster of grapes. I was looking for color, roundness, and light. I had been out for about thirty minutes when I came across this cluster. At first I walked on by mumbling to myself about the nastiness of the cluster. While I am not afraid of spiders, cobwebs remind me of old, dead things. About one hundred feet later, I turned and walked back. I stood there amazed at the beauty of it all.

It became, for me, a metaphor. Too often I see other people and what I notice most is the cobwebs that distract me from the ripe fruit of their life underneath. Too often I bump up against the unlovely part of their life and miss the true beauty that might lie beneath. I am disgusted or afraid of the exterior and the emotional, physical, and spiritual webs that encase them. Rarely on first glace do I take time to truly see the person. Similarly, it made me reflect upon the cobwebs in my life. Do others see me for who I am, or do they see the cobwebs that envelop me?

In 2007 I returned to Hawaii and as I was walking through a botanical garden in Maui. The image that captivated me was this flower in barbed wire.

[109]

Unlike the grapes, I quickly found great beauty and truth in this scene. What I noticed first was that everyone visiting this garden was engrossed by the perfection of so many of the flowers and vegetation. I could hear their words as they walked the paths echoing the beauty surrounding them. I eavesdropped on one conversation behind me as a couple wondered why I would be taking pictures of a barbed wire fence.

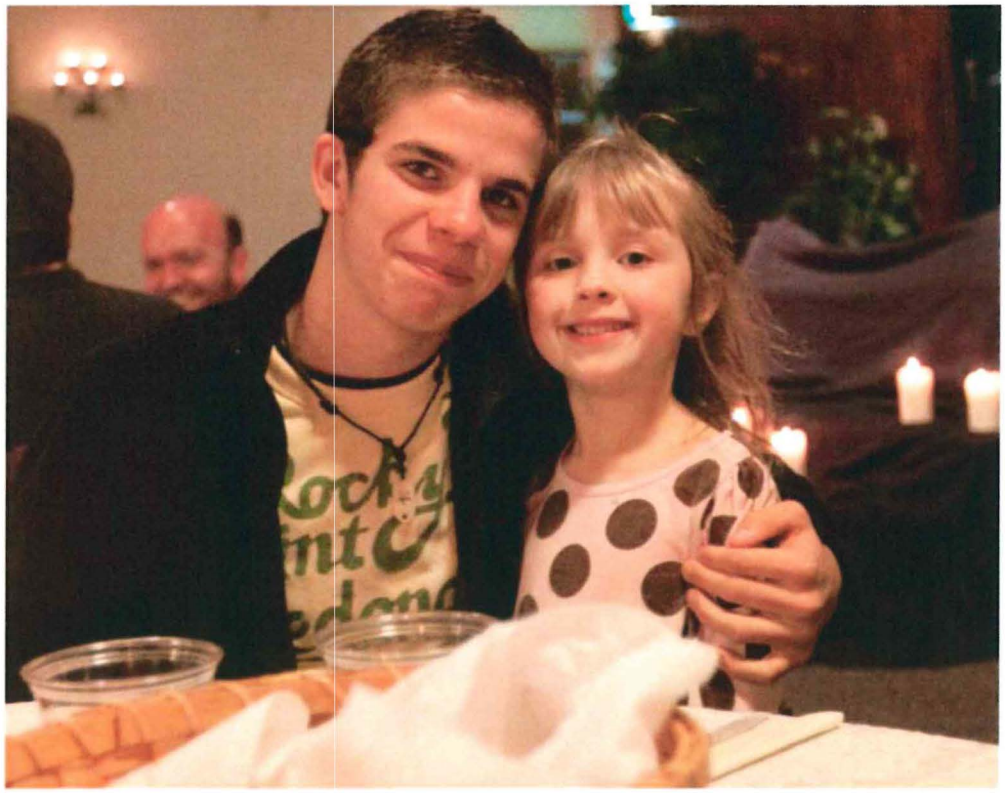
One quality this picture embodies is the lack of perfection. This flower has brown shriveled pedals on it. It isn't located in a pristine environment or a perfect row surrounded by other plants. Rather, it survives in the margins that separate this botanical garden from a pasture. The barbed wire creates an unwelcome feeling that would repel a casual observer. Why would one look over to the edge of the field when apparent perfection surrounds them?

[109] John Stone, *Barbed Wire*, 2007, Maui, HI.

Yet, to me, life is more like this flower. It sits on the margin. There are dead places in our lives as equally as there are beautiful places. We often put up the barbs to surround us in order to protect ourselves from that which threatens us. The greatest threat would be love. There is no more frightening proposition in the world than to open oneself up to the potential of receiving another person's, let alone God's, love. It is safer to push people away and insulate our hearts from receiving further wounds.

It is amazing at the strong reactions I have received from people over the past few years to these photographs. While I do not possess the skills and talents of a professional, through the lens of a camera I have been able to let others see the world through my eyes. In turn, as they talk about their impressions and reactions to these photographs, I have had opportunity to see the world through theirs.

The final examples of amateur photography are those I draw from Crossroads. At every event we have anywhere from two to five cameras clicking away. Parents, kids, staff, and even visitors are handed cameras and encouraged to take pictures. What has emerged is a kaleidoscope of our community and faith.



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These images capture the essence of who we are as a faith community. They communicate our values and behaviors. It is amazing how often visitors enter our facility and stop in front of the pictures hanging in the entry. They slowly walk down the hall toward the sanctuary, beckoned in by the faces that greet them.

Whether it is on our website, our Facebook page, or our hallway, we have branded ourselves by the icons we post and hang on our walls. One visitor caught me off guard when she mentioned that she was pleasantly surprised that the pictures we use to promote our congregation were congruent with her experience. What this visitor communicated was that the pictures we chose to brand ourselves with resonated with her experience.

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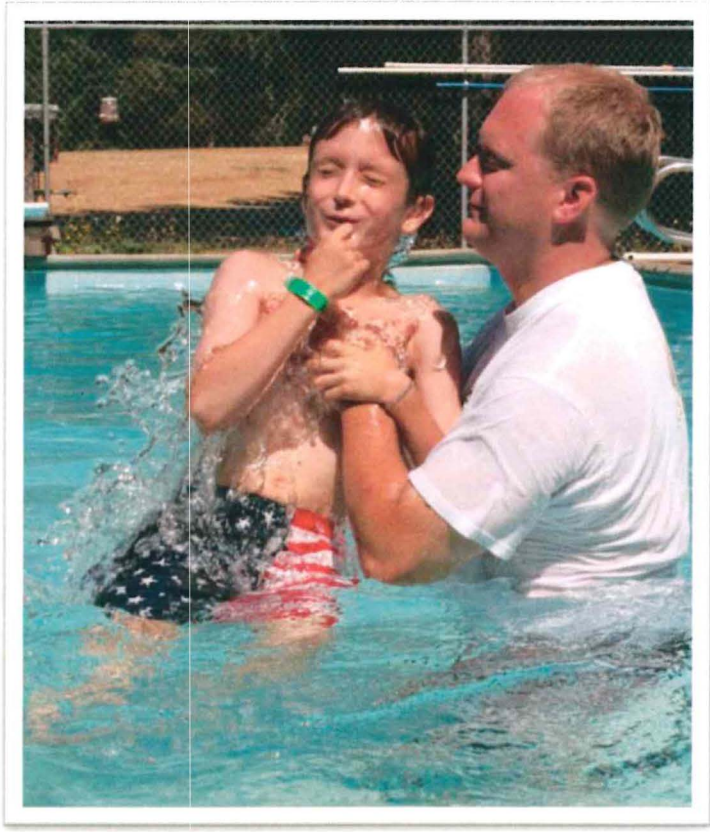
[110] Allison Davids, *Thanksgiving*, 2010, Corvallis, OR.

The pictures we take are not relegated to church use alone. We gather them and place them on DVDs. We give them out to all who attend.



[111]

What is amazing to me is how many of these pictures show up on personal websites, blogs, and Facebook pages. Families post images of their family and friends: images of their children growing in their faith and taking steps as they mature, images of adults walking beside the children, children walking with children, and adults walking with adults, all discipling each other.

[111] Kaylyn Hill, *Baptism*, 2009, Glendale, OR.

[112]

These pictures, wherever they are viewed, become powerful icons. They are reminders to the children of the adults who took the time to encourage and walk with them. They serve as prompts to those who view them of the values the people of Crossroads hold. The faces and actions teach others that Crossroads is a place about people. While Crossroads is not a perfect community of faith, we are very much like the flower and barbed wire. These images, however, help keep before our eyes those ideas, thoughts, theologies, and concepts that tell us why we should care and what we should care about.

These are but a few examples of imagery in spiritual formation from the amateurs. The point is these images keep flesh on the ideas and values we build

[112] John Stone, *Communion*, 2009, Corvallis, OR.

our faith community around. They serve as visual prompts, places of reflection, icons through which we peer through to see our Creator.

My encouragement is to begin using photography and all forms of imagery. Talk with people, be a person of change. Voice ways you see the person(s) in the photo live out an aspect of faith. Begin by inviting others to help you choose which five photos embody who you are as a faith community and then display them in large format in a prominent place. In sermons refer to them and illustrate how they embody the stories, values, virtues, attitudes, and behaviors your community is about. Guide the process with key leaders helping you.

As I draw this chapter to a close, I leave you with this image.

[113]

[113] John Stone, *Hand in Hand*, 2009, Corvallis, OR.

As I watched Abs and Maggie walk down the street together, I pointed my camera and held down the shutter release. When I looked at the photo later, I knew I had been allowed into something special. These two girls, in all their innocence, to me, embodied what it means to be a follower of God. They walked along and without any formal invitation chose to walk together through this part of their life. They naturally held hands as they looked out for each other, guided each other, and shared this time together.

Jesus walked along the Sea of Galilee and turned to Peter, Andrew, James, and John and said, "follow me."[114] As Jesus invites us to travel with him, may we use photographs to remind us of the places we have travelled together. May we use photography to remind us of our values and to put flesh on the abstract ideas of disciple making. May we use photography, in the words of Ansel Adams, "to help us see more clearly and more deeply, and to reveal to others the grandeurs and potentials of the one and only world which we inhabit."[115]

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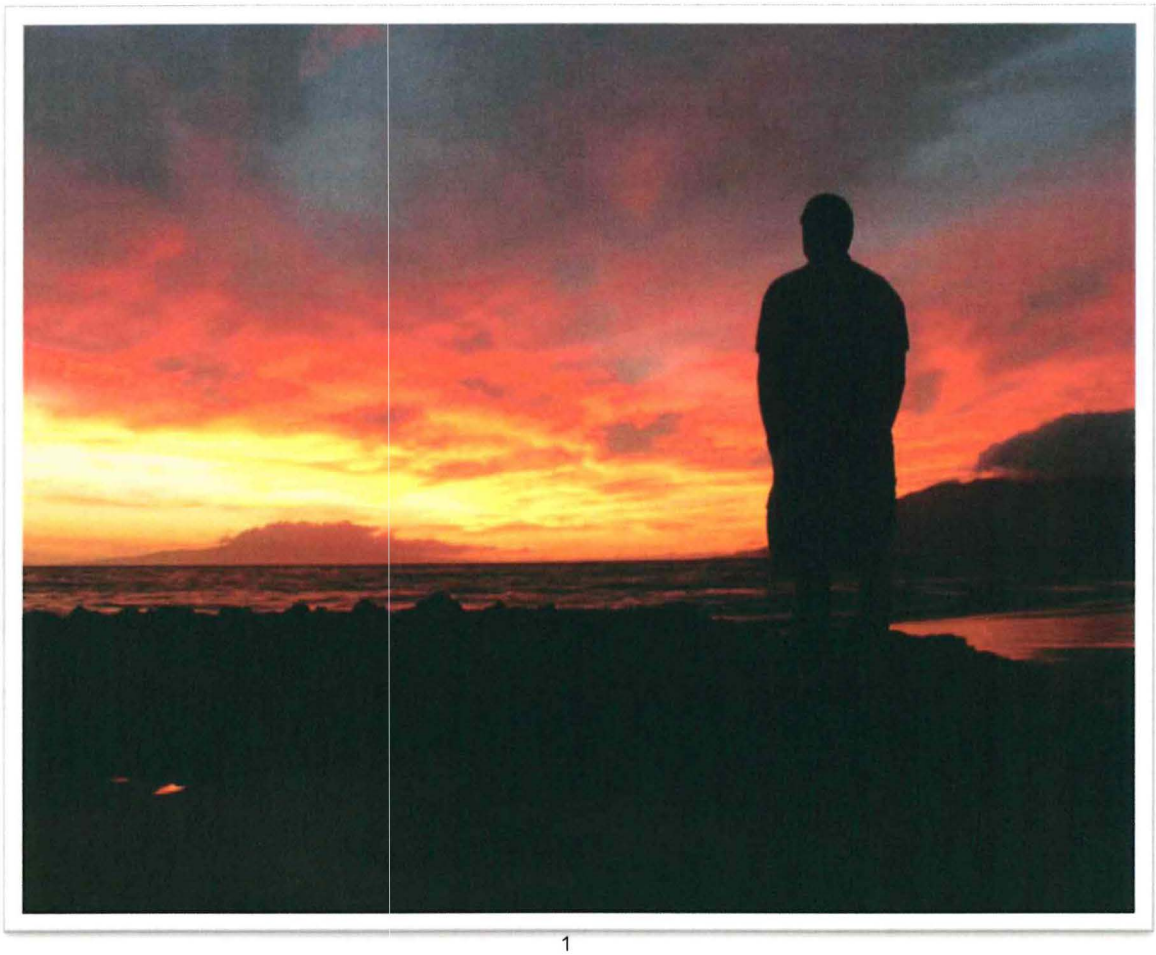
[114] Mt 4:18-22.

[115] Adams, A Photographer Talks about His Art.

CONCLUSION



[1]

Sunsets in Maui can be breath taking. However, for a sunset to be brilliant, the sky has to have clouds hanging just above the horizon ready to reflect the setting sun. In 2006 after a strenuous day of off-path hiking, Matt, Trevor, and I saw the clouds hanging perfectly over the horizon. Matt and I rushed to the beach while Trevor headed out to a meeting. As my exhausted

[1] John Stone, *Kam 3 Sunset*, 2006, Keihe, Maui, HI.

body relaxed to the rhythmic breaking of the ocean on the beach, I pondered, "How could such a breath taking evening be usurped by a meeting?" The gripping thought, it had become familiar. To me, an Oregonian, this evening on the beach was a rare treat, but for Trevor, a resident, this was but one of many sunsets. Familiarity often numbs us to the world present around us.

This sunset symbolized the lavishness of God's love and creativity. What made this sunset poignant was the contrast of its peacefulness to the arduous day of waterfall climbing. My body was exhausted, and as I waited for the sun to dip below the horizon my body hurt. All I wanted was to go to Fred's Mexican Restaurant, return to the condo, and sleep. As I sat on the beach fighting my body, I was drawn in to the unfolding symphony of light. How many nights have I been in Maui and seen such a display of creativity? The answer was few. While the sunsets in Maui are peaceful and worthy of watching, only a few exhibit the clouds hanging perfectly in the air. This was a gift.

God gives us imagery for all the reasons mentioned and articulated in this dissertation. However, above all its uses, it is a gift. Some people are too exhausted from life to listen to the image. Some people are too preoccupied with the business and busyness of life to stop and reflect. Some people are too familiar with the image and it dulls the impact of what was once a life stopping image. Life is full of divergent and convergent moments drawing our attention. Similarly, it would be a mistake to reduce images to utilitarian purposes alone. As this dialogue about imagery will continue outside the confines of this document, I invite you to see it as a gift. Like all gifts, images can be abused and misused.

However, just because an image may be tainted or perverted by its use it does not mean we should reject such a gift.

Images like this sunset are gifts to the process of our spiritual formation. They shape and connect us. Images keep present in tactile, incarnational ways the values and behaviors we desire our lives to exhibit. Images provide us places to connect with God and others. Images become the space where the ocean meets the shore. In these images we physically and metaphorically see more clearly.

There are three images I want to leave you with as we conclude this journey together: totem poles, portals, and elephants. I offer the image of totem poles as a model for utilizing images in spiritual formation. Totem poles were a genealogical reference and a visual stimulus to recount the stories of the community.[2] Through creating totem poles, we take the information and reinforce it through building rhythms that allow us to continually revisit our story: doctrine, practices, virtues, values, attitudes, and behaviors. The totem pole provides a faith community a place to retell and relive the formative stories of a faithful God and the people who follow this God.

Totem poles are created from symbols, pictures, art, narratives, and even kinesthetic rites of passage. A totem pole gives a community the opportunity to create symbols, photographs, icons, and more to tell their stories. Just as the iconographers told the stories of faithful people who formed this community, so a community can create places of remembrance and storytelling.

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[2] Sullivan, *Native Religions and Cultures*, 161.

Second, I leave you with the image of a portal. Science fiction and fantasy have for decades created alternate universes. A portal can be a tornado, a big ring, a Delorian, a watch, or a closet. The power of a portal is that it allows you to experience an alternate life. It allows the observer to become a participant. I think some of the most powerful images we create are kinesthetic images: rites of passage, emersion experiences, and sacraments. These provide opportunities to experience something with our whole being, not just our minds, and to be changed by it.

By creating images within experiences and reenacting historical experiences, people enter the story of faith as a whole person. We need to root our faith in our physical memory and soul, not just our cognitive functions, to be present in every part of our life. We need incarnational living, to put flesh on the skeletal structures of abstract faith.

So, as we think about imagery in spiritual formation, I leave you with the story about the training of baby elephants told in chapter one. When elephants are young they are attached to a chain and that chain is attached to a long spike driven deep into the ground. Like the elephant, we need physical reminders to anchor our stories. We need anchors that when we tug on the chain, remind us of the deep anchor of faith, our relationship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. This is the life-giving relationship that is the core of our life. It is the Divine Dance in which we are participants.

Images are a powerful ally in spiritual formation. Imagery, in all forms, provides lasting and tactile connections with God and others. The very present

danger is when we allow or even make these images an end into themselves. The reality is the images in spiritual formation should point us toward God. When they lose their efficacy in doing so, then we should be compelled to throw them away. More so, the power of images is they invite us to tell, retell, and tell again the stories of God. Yet, as with all things that are of this world, we must hold on to them with gentleness. We must be willing to let them go when they no longer serve to connect us with God's story and the stories of other people.

I leave you with this blessing, may God's love fill you and may you recognize and receive God's gifts in the mundane, in the celebrations, and in the suffering of life and may these gifts pass from your life to richly bless everyone you meet.

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