4 | From image to likeness: incarnation and *theōsis*

Prelude

The mirror reflects a perfect image but back to front; while the xerox-machine turns out a pile of copies that are identical, multiple images indistinguishable from the original.

The artist produces an image which, however faithful a representation of the subject, is necessarily other; while the portrait-painter surveys her work, searching for the touch that would deliver the sitter's authentic essence.

The caricaturist demonstrates that 'similarity is not essential to likeness',[1] an alien shape suggesting the image of a particular individual; while the cartoonist captures the comical reflection of the dame in her dog.

The image-maker endlessly modifies computer designs; while the photographer adjusts the illumination to produce telling highlights and shadows, manipulating the picture further through the process of development and printing.

The politician is artfully made up, then trained in self-presentation to create a positive image; while the sculptor of old would gently tap the chisel and smooth the high cheek-bone to perfect a likeness appropriate to the regal status of the model.

The dictionary spells out the ambiguities and potential range of meaning:

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[1] Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 304, quoting E.H. Gombrich and E. Kris, *Caricature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1940).

image, likeness: a statue: an idol: a representation in the mind: a picture in the imagination or memory: an appearance: that which very closely resembles anything: a type: the figure of any object formed by rays of light reflected or refracted: a metaphor or simile: *public image* – the picture in the minds of most people of what, e.g., a political party stands for.

The iconoclast insists that scripture prohibits images and the divine cannot be represented in finite form; while the icon-writer creates an image which enables the worshipper to see through the traditional form to its transcendent archetype.

The exegete discerns types and images, patterns and parables across the panorama of scripture; while the poet creates images through figures of speech, like a prophet, stimulating fresh vision through symbol and metaphor.

The priest offers the eucharistic elements as material representations of the body and blood of Christ, and the church recognizes the image of Christ in the lived lives of the saints.

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Imago Dei

The preacher reflects on the assumption that it is the mind or soul which is in God's image. This interpretation inevitably carries negative implications for those perceived to be intellectually inferior – women, slaves, persons with disabilities. There are, of course, examples of positive acceptance of intelligent persons with physical disabilities, such as Didymus the Blind who was nick-named the See-er because he saw more profoundly than those with physical sight. But the intellectualizing tradition is elitist, and also dualist, excluding those who challenge the dualist analysis by the very fact that their incapacities profoundly affect their entire personality.

Taken to mean that each is made in God's image, this also conspires with modern individualism, encouraging people to assert their

rights no matter what their race, religion or impairment. This may enhance dignity and respect for those who are not white, male, able-bodied and intelligent, but such individualism tends to exacerbate the prejudice that, since we're made in God's image, we should all be perfect. Failure to reach notional perfection is then problematic. How can this person, who has physical or mental defects, be made in God's image?

The preacher returns to the biblical text. In Genesis Adam represents the whole human race – the very name means humankind. Adam was made in the image of God, but this was marred by disobedience, classically known as the fall. So glib talk about everyone being made in God's image needs countering with sensitivity to the corporate nature of that image, as well as awareness that all have fallen short of God's glory.[2] Paul's epistles show how crucial the parallel is between Adam and Christ. In Christ we are a new creation, and, as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. Adam is the 'old man', Christ the 'new man',[3] and all of us (male and female) are in Adam and potentially in Christ,[4] both being in some sense corporate figures. Christ is the true image of God – the image of God in Adam (the old humanity) was marred. It's in Christ that we're in God's image. Being in Christ is being in the body of Christ, a corporate reality – for a body is made up of many members, all of whom bring different contributions to the whole.[5] Indeed, those body bits we are ashamed of and cover up[6] are indispensable, and the weak are to be especially honoured. This is a physical image – and the physical reality was that in his bodily existence Christ was abused, disabled and put to death. Some aspects of God's image in Christ can only be reflected in the church by the full inclusion and honouring of those who have bodies that are likewise impaired.

Then the preacher remembers hearing Jean Vanier say that Mother Theresa spoke of repulsion, compassion and wonderment. She recalls

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[2] Romans 3.32.   [3] Romans 5; 2 Corinthians 5.17.   [4] Romans 7; 1 Corinthians 15.22.
[5] 1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12.   [6] See the Greek of 1 Corinthians 12.23.

passing through that sequence on successive visits to the original L'Arche community in France – first, embarrassment at her own *repulsion* when sitting opposite Edith at the dinner table, slobbering her food and wine down her front; then *compassion*, when she sat with Edith on the sofa during evening prayers, endeavouring to constrain her self-abuse; finally, *wonderment*: she'd happened to visit again when Edith had just died. At the wake, person after person gave testimony to what Edith had meant to them. Then she went to the chapel where Edith was laid out, surrounded by flowers and candles, still and at peace; in prayer with others she was overcome with *wonderment*. That kind of discernment is what allows recognition of God's image and likeness in human living and being.

From these reflections the preacher feels confident a sermon will emerge.

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In the patristic period, tensions surrounded the notion of God's image, including:

- different perceptions as to what constituted God's image in humankind – whether it was to be identified with the mind or soul, or the body, or the whole person, or virtue, or what
- different ideas about what might be the principal capacity resulting from human creation in God's image: rationality, freewill, sovereignty, or something else
- different estimates of how exclusively or inclusively the human race might be said to be in God's image
- different approaches to whether 'image' and 'likeness' meant the same thing, how far the 'image' was granted in the beginning or fully realized only at the consummation, whether it was lost or merely marred in the fall
- different Christological understandings – whether the image belonged to the incarnate Christ or the transcendent Logos, and, in the latter case, what kind of resemblance between Father and Son was implied.

In the fourth century a comprehensive model emerged which resolved some of these tensions, while integrating three biblical motifs: the prohibition of images; the identification of humankind as the locus of God's image; and the recognition of Christ as God's true image. Association of these three motifs generated Nicene theology, with its emphasis on the divinization of humanity. This complexity we'll explore fully before turning to questions of appropriation.[7]

I Made according to God's image

1.1 The homily, On That Which is According to the Image[8]

Scripture is like a mirror in which we see ourselves – otherwise, we remain ignorant of what and why we are, suggests the homilist. Genesis 1.26 demonstrates that God created humankind directly and with deliberation; but 'In what sense are we according to the image of God?' The author attacks those who deduce from the text that God is the same shape as ourselves, that there are eyes in God and ears, a head, hands, feet with which to walk, a behind on which to sit – for it says in scripture that God sits.[9] Such suggestions are blasphemous. God's image has nothing to do with our bodily shape.

> The human body is different in youth and in old age, different in health than in sickness, different in fear than in happiness . . . How then can what is changing be like the unchanging?

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[7] This chapter draws some material from my article 'God's Image: "The Elephant in the Room" in the Fourth Century?', *SP* 50 (2011), 57–71.

[8] Two homilies on the human creation appear to be Basil's, though never found with the *Hexaemeron*'s nine homilies in the manuscript tradition; in some manuscripts they are anonymous or attributed to Gregory of Nyssa. Greek text: Alexis Smets and M. van Esbroek (eds.), *Basile de Césarée: Sur l'origine de l'homme: Homélies* x *et* xi *de l'Hexaémeron, SC*; ET: Nonna Verna Harrison, *St Basil the Great: On the Human Condition* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005).

[9] E.g. Psalm 46.5.

To solve the puzzle, attention is directed to the words that follow, 'let them rule the fish'. The ruling principle is the superiority of reason. It is the 'inner human being' which is according to God's image;[10] 'I' am not identified with my hand; rather the hand is mine, and 'I am the rational part of the soul.' Human dominance over fish, wild beasts, birds, reptiles shows the superiority of reason. 'The passions are not included in the image of God, but reason is master of the passions'; for, 'where the power to rule is, there is the image of God'. The moral is that to 'throw away your own dignity' by allowing the passions to enslave you is to renounce 'the nobility of your own nature'.

Soon attention is drawn to the difference between Genesis 1.26 and 1.27:[11] why does the latter say only 'according to the image' when the former has said 'according to our own image and likeness'? Every detail of scripture is important, and the difference must be significant. 'By our creation we have the first, and by our free choice we build the second', for 'by free choice we are conformed to that which is according to the likeness of God'.

> In giving us the power to become like God, he let us be artisans of the likeness to God, so that the reward for the work would be ours. Thus we would not be like images made by a painter . . . For when you see an image exactly shaped like the prototype, you do not praise the image, but you marvel at the painter. Accordingly, so that the marvel may become mine and not another's, he has left me to become according to the likeness of God.

What it means to be 'according to the likeness' is demonstrated by cross-referencing the sermon on the mount, 'Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect', and 'For he makes his sun rise upon evil and good, and he sends rain upon just and unjust.'[12]

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[10] *According to the Image* 7, cross-referencing 2 Corinthians 4.16.
[11] *Ibid.* 15–16.   [12] Matthew 5.48, 45.

> If you become ... brother-loving and compassionate, you are like God. If you forgive your enemy from your heart, you are like God. If as God is toward you, the sinner, you become the same toward the brother who has wronged you, by your good will from your heart toward your neighbour, you are like God.[13]

So, 'as you have that which is according to the image through your being rational, you come to be according to the likeness by undertaking kindness'. The likeness is left incomplete, precisely so that 'you may complete yourself'. Christianity is 'likeness to God as far as is possible for human nature'. The hearers are encouraged to receive baptism,[14] women deliberately included – 'male and female he created them' according to Genesis 1.27. Women are not to use their weakness as an excuse, because that applies only to the body, not the soul; when have men been able to equal women's patience, or imitate women's vigour in fasting, toiling in prayer, abundance of tears or readiness for good works?

1.2 Antecedents and challenges

Few will be surprised to learn that the inclusion of women in God's image was contested:

> Diodore, Chrysostom and Theodoret ... liked to cite Paul's statement that man *qua* male "is in the image and glory of God but woman is the glory of man" (I Cor. 11.7). The most they would affirm is that women are "images of the image".[15]

By contrast, Clement of Alexandria had asserted that sexual differentiation applies only to this world, human God-likeness being incorporeal. With combined reference to Colossians 3.11 and Galatians 3.28, Clement underlined that all – barbarians, Greeks, slaves,

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[13] *According to the Image* 17.   [14] *Ibid.* 18.

[15] Frederick G. McLeod, SJ, *The Image of God in the Antiochene Tradition* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), p. 191.

children and women – are capable of attaining wisdom in Christ; 'woman shares man's spiritual and moral nature by being God-like human being, *anthropos*, in her rational soul'.[16] A hierarchical relationship is admitted, though 'women can imitate men's moral headship by dominating inferior bodily appetites'. The homily outlined above follows this tradition: the interior human being, or intellect, is created in God's image, 'male and female' designating a difference restricted to the body, and on the spiritual level both man and woman have the same capacity to imitate God, so achieving virtue.

Origen is the most obvious antecedent. *On First Principles* displays the same assumption that it is the incorporeal soul or mind which was made in the image and likeness of God,[17] and also the same distinction between image and likeness,[18] based on the same observation that Genesis 1.27 differs from 1.26. This:

> points to nothing else but this, that man received the honour of God's image in his first creation, whereas the perfection of God's likeness was reserved for him at the consummation.

For Origen, 'the purpose of this was that man should acquire it for himself by his own earnest efforts to imitate God'. The 'possibility of attaining perfection was given in the beginning through the honour of the "image"', but the perfect likeness was to be 'conferred on us in proportion to the perfection of our merits'.

This Alexandrian distinction between image and likeness, perhaps already suggested by Irenaeus, was dropped by Athanasius and Gregory of Nyssa, while Augustine was directly critical of the distinction – 'likeness' is after all inherent in 'image'.[19]

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[16] Kari Elisabeth Børresen, 'God's Image, Man's Image? Patristic Interpretation of Gen. 1,27 and I Cor. 11,7' in Børresen (ed.), *The Image of God: Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 194 ff.

[17] *First Principles* II.x.7, xi.3; III.i.13.   [18] *Ibid.* III.vi.1.

[19] *Unfinished Literal Commentary* 16, 57–8.

1.3 Epiphanius on the Audians

The opposite approach to Genesis 1.26 can be seen by turning to Epiphanius.[20] He, and later Theodoret,[21] attest a heretical group called the Audians, followers of one Audius, who came from Mesopotamia and was supposedly condemned at the same council as Arius. Theodoret accuses the Audians of immoral practices, but Epiphanius describes Audius as a purist who challenged lax standards in the church – indeed Epiphanius has considerable respect for him and his ascetic companions, regarding their way of life as admirable and their position entirely orthodox except for one small point – they:

> stubbornly declare that the gift of being in his image which God granted Adam applies to his body . . . "Since scripture has said <that God made> man from the earth," says Audius, "see how it has said with perfect truth that the entire earthy part is 'man'. Therefore it said earlier that the earthy part of man will itself be in the image of God."

Theodoret confirms this from another angle:

> He understood the Divine Being to have a human form, and conjectured it to be enveloped in bodily parts; for Holy Scripture frequently describes the divine operations under the names of human parts.

It is unclear, then, whether an anthropomorphic concept of God, or a reading of Genesis 1.26 in the light of Genesis 2, was the fundamental issue.

Epiphanius focusses on the stubbornness and ignorance of someone trying to decide in which part of a human being God's image is located because of 'the many conflicting ideas of this text which occur to people, occasioning a number of disputes'. Some say 'in the

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[20] *Panarion* 70; Greek text: Karl Holl (ed.), *Panarion*, *GCS*; ET: Philip R. Amidon, SJ, *The Panarion of St. Epiphanius. Bishop of Salamis*. Selected passages. (Oxford University Press, 1990.)

[21] Theodoret, *Church History* IV.9.

image' applies to the soul; others that it applies neither to the soul nor to the body, but means virtue. Others suggest it means baptism and the gifts conferred in baptism, quoting 1 Corinthians 15.49, 'As we have the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.' Others prefer to say that the image of God was in Adam until he fell, ate of the tree and was expelled; but from then he lost the image. Epiphanius reckons none of these accounts should be given attention; rather, one must believe that the image of God is in human being, and in the whole human being, not just one part. The image of God has not been lost, Epiphanius asserts, quoting Genesis 9.3–6: 'Do you not see that God's image is said to be in humankind ten generations after the creation of Adam?' Further quotes from the Psalms and the New Testament make the same point.

Working through the options one by one, Epiphanius first considers the arguments of people who say that God and the soul are invisible movers, active, intelligent, rational – so the soul is 'in the image', mimicking God as it does by moving, acting and doing all that man does rationally. Epiphanius will have none of it: God is more than ten thousand times more incomprehensible and inconceivable than the soul, and knows all things, himself containing all things without being contained; but the soul is contained in a body and has limited knowledge, and whereas God is indivisible, the soul has divisions, a point proved by quoting Hebrews 4.12–13. Next he challenges those who say that the body is in God's image: how can the visible be like the invisible, the corporeal like the incorporeal, or the tangible like the ungraspable? Everything made is inferior to the glory of the incomprehensible Trinity. Likewise the argument about virtue fails, because of different kinds of virtue and the human failings of even the most virtuous. As for baptism, what about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Elijah, Moses, Noah, Enoch or the prophets?

Epiphanius now turns to arguments that Theodoret's account of the heresy would have prioritized, and dismisses appeal to texts referring to the Lord's ears, eyes or hands to suggest that the body is in the image of God: of course, the Lord in his kindness appeared as

he chose, but the Gospel says 'No one has seen God at any time.'[22] So the Audians are confuted by the truth: God is incomprehensible.

With this account of the Audians Epiphanius is already addressing a central issue of the Origenist controversy. He himself began a campaign against Origen in Palestine, annoying the bishop by his meddling and setting the Latin monasteries of Rufinus and Jerome against each other. But his arguments against the Audians show that Epiphanius shared Origen's perspectives on the utter transcendence of the divine nature and that he could not himself be described as 'anthropomorphite'.

1.4 The Anthropomorphites

The wider Origenist controversy was precipitated by Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria; his paschal letter announcing the date of Easter in 399 denounced those who attributed a human form to God, infuriating many ascetics. Sozomen[23] suggests that the issue had already been agitating the desert monasteries, where some simply read the scriptures without questioning and others searched for hidden meanings. Faced with a storm of protest and demonstrations led by the desert monks, Theophilus publicly declared, 'In seeing you, I behold the face of God.' So the crowd demanded that he anathematize Origen's books, which he was willing to do, despite earlier favouring the position of Origenist monks. The historian Socrates[24] suggests an unprincipled *volte face.*

What lay behind Theophilus' change of mind may be understood better by turning to the coptic life of Abba Apphou.[25] On receipt of

[22] John 1.18.   [23] Sozomen, *Church History* VIII.11.

[24] Socrates, *Church History* VI.7.

[25] Etienne Drioton, 'La Discussion d'un moine anthropomorphite Audien avec le patriarche Théophile d'Alexandrie en l'année 399', *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 20 (1915–17), 92–100, 113–28. I am grateful to my former student Duncan Raynor for drawing attention to this material.

the encyclical Apphou was sent by an angel to Alexandria to question an expression not in accord with holy scripture, that expression being, 'It is not the image of God we bear.' Having obtained an interview with Theophilus, he asks for the letter to be read. The offending phrase is reached and Apphou interrupts, saying, 'Like that, this sentence is not correct.' His explanation is an appeal to Genesis 1.26–7. Theophilus suggests only Adam was created in the image and likeness; whereupon Apphou draws attention to Genesis 9.6, which refers to humankind being made in God's image at the time of Noah. Theophilus insists that God is impassible and self-sufficient, reducing the idea of God having human form to absurdity by asking how anyone can think an ailing man squatting to perform his necessities is in God's image. Apphou appeals to the ordinariness of eucharistic bread, yet it is the body of Christ. Theophilus replies that it only becomes Christ's body in the context of the liturgy. Apphou suggests that, as it takes faith to accept that, so it does to accept that humankind was created in God's image and likeness. He appeals to the analogy of the emperor's image: everyone will accept it is the king's image, but at the same time they know it is wood and paints – it cannot lift its head or speak or do any number of other things; but no one remembers these weaknesses out of respect for the king who proclaimed, 'This is my image' – indeed, to deny it would lead to execution for slighting the king. How much more if you slight humankind, in whom abides the breath or spirit of God, and who is therefore alive and honoured above all creatures on earth! All weaknesses are subject to salvation and healing, and one should not slight the glory God has given us.

Scriptural exegesis clearly lay at the heart of this controversy, not some kind of crypto-pagan or simple-minded anthropomorphism. Apphou exploits the point that an image is a representation *in another medium*. Against the affirmation of the soul as God's image, there was pressure to acknowledge the whole human being, including the physical reality of the body, as in some sense representing God. The Cappadocian Gregories had already affirmed the importance of

God's image in the physically distorted bodies of lepers[26] – the ailing man squatting to do his necessities was indeed still a human being made in the image of God. This emerging theme challenged the elitist assumptions of the whole Origenist approach, raising questions about the nature of God as well as the nature of humanity. Deep in the tradition, however, there was another way of addressing the issue.

II Christ as the image of God

The homily outlined in I.1 failed to pick up a distinction fundamental to Origen's treatment, namely, that the one true image of God is Christ, *according to* which humankind is made.[27] The Christological reading goes back to Irenaeus, but what he and Origen have in common betrays a fundamental difference: Irenaeus attributes the image to the incarnate Christ while Origen applies it to the divine Son of God or Logos.

II.1 Irenaeus

Only in one place does Irenaeus explicitly call the Son the 'image of God'. Quoting Genesis 9.6, he continues:

> the image of God is the Son, according to whose image was man made; and for this reason He appeared at the last times, to render the image like himself.[28]

That one explicit statement, however, illuminates several passages in *Against the Heresies.*

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[26] Cf. Chapter 1.

[27] A point derivable from the LXX version of Genesis 1.26–7, not the original Hebrew.

[28] *Apostolic Preaching* 22; ET: John Behr, *St Irenaeus of Lyons: On the Apostolic Preaching* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997).

Arguing against his opponents' assumption that God could not be directly involved in creating the material universe, Irenaeus made it clear:[29]

- that the Word (= the Son) and Wisdom (= the Holy Spirit) of God were those addressed when God said, 'Let us make'
- that creation was God's own handiwork, for it was 'by the Father's hands, that is by the Son and the Holy Spirit' that 'the human being . . . was made in God's likeness'
- that the whole human being, not just part, was made in God's image and likeness, the soul or spirit being only a part of the human being, not the human being itself.

Thus Word and Spirit are involved in making the whole human being according to God's image and likeness.

This whole human being is subsequently[30] taken to be modelled on the Son: 'God shall be glorified in his handiwork, fitting it so as to be conformed to and modelled after his own Son.' The Word 'from the beginning even to the end, forms us, prepares us for life, is present with his handiwork, and perfects it after the image and likeness of God'. This Word was:

> manifested when the Word of God was made human, assimilating himself to humankind and humankind to himself, so that by means of resemblance to the Son, humanity might become precious to the Father.

The image was truly demonstrated, then, in the incarnation, since:

> he himself became that which bore his image and re-established the likeness . . . assimilating humanity to the invisible Father by means of the visible Word.

It was *said* in times past that humanity was created after God's image, he suggests, but it was not actually *demonstrated*; for the Word after

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[29] *Against Heresies* IV.20.1.   [30] *Ibid.* V.6.1, 16.1–2.

whose image humankind was created was not yet visible. Now that the Word has become flesh, the fact that humanity was modelled on this image of God has become evident, and the restoration of humankind to its lost 'likeness' has been made possible. So the incarnate Word is the image of God, the model after which humankind is fashioned. If it is the *incarnate* Christ that is the visible image of the invisible God, then that is indeed a representation of God in a different medium.

It is often assumed that Irenaeus made the same kind of distinction between 'image' and 'likeness' which Origen and Basil made, associating 'image' with creation and 'likeness' with eschatology, but reading back this distinction into Irenaeus' work has been challenged.[31] In the first four books of *Against the Heresies* this distinction is nowhere made, and in Book v Irenaeus clearly implies that 'both the image and likeness are related to man's initial creation, and the goal is that *both* are to be confirmed'. Humanity had to be created first, then to receive growth, then to be strengthened and abound, then to be restored, then to be glorified and finally to see the Lord, a vision that would produce immortality. Irenaeus seems to assume a progressive realization of both image and likeness.

So what Irenaeus envisages is creation according to the image and likeness of God in Christ, and failure to realize this fully until the incarnation. The key to his approach is this identification of *the incarnate Christ* as the true image and likeness of God, according to which the human being in its wholeness was created and destined to reach its full maturity. Despite some apparent similarities, Origen's overall understanding was profoundly different, precisely because for him God's true image is not the incarnate Christ but *the transcendent*

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31   John Kaufman, 'Becoming Divine, Becoming Human: Deification Themes in Irenaeus of Lyons' (Dissertation for the Degree of PhD, MF Norwegian School of Theology, Oslo, 2009), pp. 196–8.

Logos, and human beings are created according to that image in that they are *logikoi* (rational beings).[32]

II.2 Origen

For Origen, God's image is rationality, which endures despite distortion by sin, while likeness to God is the ultimate goal which may be reached by using rationality appropriately. In this Origen was anticipated by Clement – both, like Philo, correlate the Genesis text with Platonic ideals of assimilation to the divine, but they provide a Christian dress to this spiritual progress by seeing baptism and anointing of the Spirit as the means of grace by which likeness to God is effected. Likeness to God is reached by imitating the Word, who is the true image of God. Strictly speaking, only Christ, as God's Son, can be called the image of God; humanity is 'according to' the image, or 'an image of an image'. The term 'image' is sometimes applied to an object painted or carved on some material, such as wood or stone; that applies to the creature made 'in the image and likeness of God'.[33] Sometimes, however, a child is said to be the image of its parent, when the likeness of the parent's features is in every aspect faithfully reproduced in the child; this applies to the Son of God, who is the 'invisible image of the invisible God'.

Those analogies highlight a distinction as fundamental to Origen's outlook as his resistance to the image having anything to do with corporeality. He would have included Irenaeus among those he criticizes for supposing that the body was in any sense involved in the creation of humanity 'according to the image'. To Celsus, a pagan critic of Christianity, he insists[34] that no Christian holds the view that 'the part of man in the image of God is located in the inferior

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[32] See Henri Crouzel, *Théologie de l'image de dieu chez Origène* (Paris: Aubier, 1955); his findings are summarized in *Origen* (ET: A. S. Worrall, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989).

[33] *First Principals* I.2.6.

[34] *Against Celsus* VI.63; Greek text: P. Koetschau *et al.* (eds.), *Origenes Werke, GCS*; ET: Henry Chadwick, *Contra Celsum* (Cambridge University Press, 1965).

part of the composite man, I mean, the body'; nor would anyone apply the words 'in the image of God' to both together, as that would make God himself composite.

> That which is made in the image of God is to be understood as the inward man, as we call it, which is renewed and has the power to be formed in the image of the Creator, when a man becomes perfect as his heavenly Father is perfect . . . and assumes into his own virtuous soul the characteristics of God.

Then the body becomes a temple for the soul which is according to God's image and likeness.

Origen has a dynamic concept of progressive assimilation to the divine likeness, a likeness that coincides with knowledge of Christ face to face. Being created 'according to the image' is the starting-point, the freedom that allows one to choose to become 'imitators of God'. The Word forms itself in the Christian by the practice of virtues and by contemplation. Participation in Christ creates 'christs', adopted sons of God, by a process of divinization in which the likeness will be restored eschatologically.[35] 'The highest good, towards which all rational nature is progressing . . . is to become as far as possible like God', he says; recognizing that many philosophers agree, he suggests they got it from Moses, quoting Genesis 1.26–7. All this rests on his fundamental perspective that it is not the incarnate Christ but the transcendent Logos who is God's true image.

11.3 Fourth-century debates

The implications of Origen's view eventually came into dispute. The niceties involved are only now being uncovered as scholars realize that an account of the fourth century in terms of a binary opposition between Arian and orthodox is entirely inadequate, the divergences often crossing party lines. All parties accepted that the

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[35] *First Principles* III. vi.1.

pre-existent Logos was God's image, except, it seems, Marcellus of Ancyra, who confined the image to Christ's body on the grounds that an image is something other than its archetype. Debate centred on how the Logos or Son of God imaged God the Father, the ambiguity of the word 'image' allowing some to underline identity, others to emphasize difference.

At the heart of the theology of Eusebius of Caesarea lay the notion of Christ as God's image. He speaks of a 'Beginning', next to the being of God (who is without beginning), begotten from no other source than the Father, first-born and perfectly likened to the Father, thus known as the image of God, the power of God, the wisdom of God and the word of God.[36] God makes his offspring the foundation of all that is to be, the 'perfect creation of a perfect Creator', 'alone bearing in himself the image of the Godhead' which 'cannot be explained in word or conceived in thought', and he is called God through this image and because of this primary likeness. The Son is the image of the Father by intention and deliberate choice. The generation of the Son did not happen by separation or division, but before time and inconceivably: 'Who shall describe his generation?'[37] Clearly Eusebius wants the 'image' terminology to capture the closeness and similarity of Father and Son. But it also implies difference – non-identity. The Son is:

> the image of God, in a way ineffable and incalculable in our terms, the living image of the living God, *existing in its own right immaterially and incorporeally* . . . but not an image like that which exists among us which is different in its form, but rather himself being the whole identical form, and assimilated to the Father *in his own self-existence.*[38]

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[36] *Preparation* VII. xv.1, 2; Greek text: K. Mras (ed.), *Die Praeparatio evangelica: Eusebius Werke* VII, *GCS*; ET: E. H. Gifford, *Eusebii Pamphili Evangelicae Praeparationis Libri* xv (Oxford University Press, 1903).

[37] *Demonstration* IV.2.3, quoting Isaiah 53.8; Greek text: I. A. Heikel (ed.), *Die Demonstratio evangelica: Eusebius Werke* VII, *GCS*; ET: W. J. Ferrar, *The Proof of the Gospel*, 2 vols. (London: SPCK, 1920).

[38] *Ibid.* v.1.21.

This is subsequently clarified[39] by an analogy we have met before: Eusebius talks about the way the image of a king is honoured for the sake of the one whose likeness it bears: 'there are not two kings', the true one plus the one represented by the image. The Only-Begotten Son, as the only image of the unseen God, is worthy of receiving the Father's name, but 'as one who receives it and does not possess it in his own right'. He is to be thought of as 'secondary, and as holding a divinity received from the Father as an image of God'. God being 'seen through the Son as by a mirror and image'. So for Eusebius, God's image subsists as another being which nevertheless truly images God and is therefore co-honoured with God's name and worship – even a 'true image' must be different from the thing imaged.

This kind of 'image' theology reached its highpoint at the dedication synod in Antioch in 341, which asserted that the Son of God is the 'unchanging and unaltering, exact image of the Godhead and the substance and will and power and glory of the Father'.[40] The difference gives sense to the imaging. So this council, along with Eusebius himself, has been regarded as Arian. Indeed, Marcellus of Ancyra associated Eusebius with the Arian Asterius, one of whose fragments reads:

> The Father is other, who begot from himself the only-begotten Logos and first-born of all creation . . . God (begetting) God, the exact image of his substance and will and glory and power.[41]

Marcellus also quotes Eusebius as saying:

> Of course, the image and that whose image it is are not conceived as one and the same, but as two essences and two objects and two powers, just as they have two designations.

[39] *Ibid.* v.4.
[40] R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), p. 286.
[41] Fragment 21; ET: Hanson, *Search*, p. 36.

Marcellus agreed with Eusebius that an image is always other than that of which it is the image. Fragment 54 reads:

> Images of these things of which they are images are indicative of things not there so that the things not there seem to be manifested through them.

What Marcellus rejected was the notion that the *pre-incarnate Logos* was an 'unchanging image' of the Father's Godhead, substance, will, power and glory. He strongly objected to the notion of two pre-incarnate substances (*ousiai*);[42] so he asserted that image should only be applied to the body of the incarnate Word.[43] The humanity of Christ was a visible pointer to the invisible nature.[44] So the Nicene, Marcellus, and his opponents (Eusebius and the members of the dedication council) used the notion of God's image to establish difference, but with utterly different intentions.

This is just the first indication that different understandings of the 'image of God' crossed party lines. It has been suggested[45] that there were two main approaches:

(1) Arius and Asterius advocated a 'participative' understanding of the Son as the image of God – he is a distinct being who participates in divine attributes by grace and by adoption. In other words, there is no essential difference between the way the

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[42] J. T. Lienhard, *Contra Marcellum: Marcellus of Ancyra and Fourth-Century Theology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), pp. 75–6.

[43] Kelley McCarthy Spoerl, 'The Schism at Antioch since Cavellera' in Michel R. Barnes and Daniel H. Williams (eds.), *Arianism after Arius: Essays on the Development of the Fourth-Century Trinitarian Conflicts* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), p. 117, following Lienhard, 'Acacius of Caesarea: *Contra Marcellum*' in *Cristianesimo nella storia* 10 (1989), 1–21.

[44] J. M. Robertson, *Christ as Mediator: A Study of the Theologies of Eusebius of Caesarea, Marcellus of Ancyra, and Athanasius of Alexandria* (Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 132.

[45] Mark Delcogliano, 'Eusebian Theologies of the Son as the Image of God before 341', *JECS* 14 (2006), 459–84.

Son is God's image and the way any other creature might come to be God-like.

(2) Eusebius and others took a 'constitutive' approach to how the Son was the image of God. Eusebius, for example, quotes texts such as Colossians 1.15 'image of the invisible God', Philippians 2.6 'the form of God' and Hebrews 1.3 'the radiance of the glory and the character of the *hypostasis* of God' as revealing his relationship to the Father's divinity, a relationship which is his alone, and because of which the one God is made known through the Son as through an image. So, for Eusebius, the Son is also God, because he 'bears the utmost accuracy of likeness to the Father in his own essence' rather than by participation through grace.

In rejecting participation, Eusebius was more like Athanasius than the Arians, while Athanasius did not share Marcellus' position. One might conclude that the notion of 'God's image', though scriptural, did little in the end to resolve the issues around the relationship of Father and Son, because of the inherent ambiguities around the relation of image and archetype. However, what did make a difference was the theological insight that the way the Son imaged the Father was a subject which could not be divorced from that other biblical claim – the imaging of God in humankind.

III Incarnation and *theōsis*

III.1 *Athanasius*

'He became a human being that we might become divine.'[46] This was the basis of Athanasius' argument that the Logos incarnate in Christ must be fully divine, *homoousios* with the Father. He is the true Son of God through whom we become adopted sons. He is the

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[46] *On the Incarnation* 54; Greek text edited and translated by R. W. Thomson, *Athanasius: Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione*, OECT.

archetypal Image of God through whom we come to be in God's image and likeness. What Athanasius did was to hold together the various biblical statements about God's image.

In his two-volume work, *Against the Gentiles–On the Incarnation*, Athanasius reveals how his thinking about God's image is integrated into a coherent vision of God's relations with humanity. The soul should have been able to perceive in itself God's Logos, 'in whose form it had been created'; but once perverted by bodily pleasures, it turned outside itself and made imaginary gods – fleshly desires obscured 'the mirror it had within itself through which alone it was able to see the image of the Father'. This 'mirror' of God's own Logos made humanity rational through its likeness to the divine, and human beings should have conversed happily with God if that grace had been retained.[47] Idolatry, the worship of man-made gods fashioned out of 'gold and silver and bronze and iron and stone and wood'– an utterly irrational practice condemned by scripture[48] – is the principal symptom of the soul's loss of purity. But, with purification of soul, people:

> may be able to contemplate therewith the Word of the Father, in whose image they were made in the beginning . . . So when the soul . . . keeps pure what is in the image, then . . . it can truly contemplate as in a mirror the Word, the image of the Father, and in him meditate on the Father, of whom the Saviour is the image.[49]

This presumes that the true image is the pre-existent Logos of God, and that humankind was created according to his own image by that Logos – in other words, as an image of God's image. The Logos, being the 'good offspring of a good Father and true Son' is 'the power of the Father and his wisdom and Word', not by participation, but:

[47] *Against the Nations* 2, 8.   [48] *Ibid.* 12, 13–14.   [49] *Ibid.* 34.

absolute wisdom [*autosophia*], very Word [*autologos*], and himself the Father's own power [*autodynamis*], absolute light [*autophōs*], absolute truth [*autoalētheia*], absolute justice [*autodikaiosynē*], absolute virtue [*autoaretē*] and indeed stamp, effulgence and image.[50]

In other words, being God's image is constitutive of his being, but creatures may participate in this 'absolute' by grace, imaging the perfect image. To enable this participation:

he became man that we might become divine; and he revealed himself through a body that we might receive an idea of the invisible Father.[51]

Athanasius constructed an overarching plot centred on the incarnation.[52] Human beings, created alongside everything else out of nothing, had the extra grace of being made in God's own image. This gave them a share in the power of the Logos – his life and rationality; but this was lost as a consequence of the perversion which clouded the 'mirror' which potentially gave access to communion with God; so humankind was sinking back into the nothingness from which it had been called into life:

man who was rational and who had been made in the image was being obliterated; and the work created by God was perishing.[53]

God's solution was the incarnation:

The Word of God came in his own person, in order that in it death could be destroyed and men might again be renewed in the image.[54]

Athanasius now calls in the familiar parable of the literal image or portrait. Painted on wood and spoiled by dirt, it needs the original sitter to come so that it can be renewed in the same medium: 'even so the all-holy Son of the Father, who is the image of the Father, came

[50] *Ibid.* 46.   [51] *On the Incarnation* 54.   [52] *Ibid.* 3–21.   [53] *Ibid.* 6.   [54] *Ibid.* 13.

to our realms to renew man who had been made in his likeness'. Unlike Origen, Athanasius makes no distinction between image and likeness, both words referring to what was obscured by 'idolatry and impiety'. Because this damage involved the loss of the Logos, only the Logos could rectify it:

> no one else could bring what was corrupted to incorruptibility, except the Saviour himself, who also created the universe in the beginning from nothing; nor could any other re-create men in the image, save the image of the Father; nor could another raise up what was mortal as immortal, save our Lord Jesus Christ, who is life itself; nor could another teach about the Father and overthrow the cult of idols, save the Word who orders the universe, and who alone is the true only-begotten son of the Father.[55]

That renewal included the body, which 'because of the Word who was dwelling in it, became immune from corruption'. Athanasius is confident that 'corruption has ceased and been destroyed by the grace of the resurrection', because he 'sanctified the body' and gave life to the body.[56] The pre-existent Logos is the true image, but the incarnate Logos is the revelation of this image:

> For because they are men, they would be able to know his Father more quickly and more closely through the body corresponding to theirs and the divine works effected through it.

The most potent evidence for this is the despoiling of the idols, false images of the divine.[57] The true, invisible God is made visible through the incarnation and the restoration in human nature of the image of God's true image.

In Athanasius, then, three strands in the biblical material concerned with God's image are integrated: the commandment to make no images, the affirmation that human beings were created in God's

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[55] *Ibid.* 20.   [56] *Ibid.* 43–4.   [57] *Ibid.* 55.

image and the confession of Christ as the true image have been brought into a creative, systematic relationship.

III.2 Cyril of Jerusalem

That something like this was presupposed in the tradition is suggested both by the way in which Irenaeus anticipates the key elements in Athanasius' overarching schema and also by the *Catechetical Homilies* of Cyril of Jerusalem. Cyril lived through the disputes of the fourth century. Suffering exile more than once and labelled 'semi-Arian', he nevertheless seems a good representative of a traditional Christianity that sought to avoid extremism, and somehow instinctively understood how things hang together. Cyril is clear that God is beyond all images.[58] In all God's good creation, only humankind was made an image of God; and given that a wooden image of an earthly king is held in honour, how much more a rational image of God?[59] The self-governing soul is in the image of the Creator. The body is an instrument, a garment and robe of the soul; it is not the source of sin – it can only act or react when animated by the soul; but it may become a temple of the Holy Spirit, and is to be kept pure for the resurrection.[60] Cyril associates 'image' with the humanity of Christ; he explains[61] that humanity had forsaken God and made carved images of human beings. So since a human image was falsely worshipped as God, God became truly a human being so that the falsehood be done away with. The Lord took our likeness from us to save us, so that sinful humanity might become partaker of God.

So all three biblical strands are found in Cyril in some form and in some degree of relationship. The end of idolatry is explicitly related to the imaging of God in the incarnation; and elsewhere the imaging of God in humanity is related to God's Image in Christ.

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[58] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Homilies* IV.4–6: Greek text: Migne, *PG* 33; ET: *FC*; selections in Edward Yarnold, SJ, *Cyril of Jerusalem* (London: Routledge, 2000).

[59] *Ibid.* XII.5. [60] *Ibid.* IV.18, 23, 26, 30. [61] *Ibid.* XII.15.

But the whole picture is not explicitly highlighted or drawn out in a single exposition; it emerges in a collage.[62] Implicit is the notion of participation in God or *theopoiēsis*.

III.3 *Gregory of Nyssa*

Gregory of Nyssa, in his treatment of God's image in *The Making of Humankind*,[63] emphasizes the human power of self-determination: freewill, as well as rationality, are capacities that imitate the divine. The image finds its resemblance to the Archetype in being filled with all good, he suggests. So:

> there is in us the principle of all excellence, all virtue and wisdom, and every higher thing we can conceive; but pre-eminent among all is the fact that we are free from necessity . . . [and] have decision in our power as we please, for virtue is a voluntary thing, subject to no dominion: that which is the result of compulsion and force cannot be virtue.[64]

But there are two other important characteristics of Gregory's thought which take things further:

- Gregory has a strong sense of human solidarity.[65] In Genesis 1.26 the whole corporate human nature is to be made according to its prototype, there being in Christ Jesus neither male nor female. 'In the divine foreknowledge and power all humanity is included in the first creation . . . as it were in one body'; for 'the image is not in part of our nature, nor is the grace in any one of the things found in that nature, but this power extends equally to all the race'. 'The whole race was spoken of as one man,' and 'our whole nature . . . extending from the first to the last, is, so to say,

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[62] Cf. M. C. Steenberg, *Of God and Man: Theology as Anthropology from Irenaeus to Athanasius* (London: T & T Clark, 2009), for his integrated picture of Cyril's theology.

[63] Cf. Chapter 3.   [64] *On the Making* XVI.11.   [65] Cf. Chapter 1.

one image of Him who is'.[66] Thus the church, the body of Christ, becomes potentially the 'truth' of the image in Gregory's thought, as von Balthasar makes clear, quoting words which suggest that 'contemplating the Church' is a way of seeing 'the Invisible One in a more penetrating way'.[67]

- Gregory develops the notion of 'mirror', already noticed in Athanasius. The mind, being in the image of what is the most beautiful and supreme good, 'remains in beauty and goodness so long as it partakes as far as possible in its likeness to the archetype . . . being formed as though it were a mirror'.[68] In his classic study of Gregory, von Balthasar notes that it is characteristic of Gregory that when he speaks of 'image', he immediately substitutes 'mirror', the soul contemplating the archetype in her own beauty as in a mirror and an image.[69] The theme becomes particularly prominent in the *Homilies on the Beatitudes*:

> If a person's heart has been purified . . . he will see the image of the divine nature in his own beauty . . . When [the inner man] has scraped off the rustlike dirt which dank decay has caused to appear on his form, he will once more recover the likeness of the archetype . . . thus he becomes blessed, because when he looks at his own purity, he sees the archetype in the image.[70]

The archetype is, as von Balthasar notes, the perfect eschatological Image that is the total Christ, which is reached by 'the elevation of

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[66] David Bentley Hart, 'The Mirror of the Infinite: Gregory of Nyssa on the *Vestigia Trinitatis*' in Sarah Coakley (ed.), *Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 118–19. See further J. Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical Background and Theological Significance* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

[67] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought: An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*, ET: Mark Sebanc (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995; French original 1988), p. 152, quoting *On the Song of Songs* 8.

[68] *On the Making* XII.9.

[69] *Presence and Thought*, pp. 115, 121–2, quoting e.g. *On the Song of Songs*, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, *Homilies on the Beatitudes*.

[70] *Homily 6*.

the created image to the plane of the uncreated Image and its integration into it . . . But what integrates us into this Image is love.'[71] David Bentley Hart,[72] creating a collage of passages, shows how mirroring and light-reflection implicitly hold those same three strands together in Gregory's thought: the Son is the eternal image in which the Father contemplates and loves his essence – the hidden Father made luminously manifest in the infinite icon of his beauty. Human nature is a mirror, a 'uniquely privileged surface in which the beauty of the divine archetype is reflected'; when our nature draws near to Christ, it becomes beautiful with the reflection of his beauty. This radiance is exactly what was missing when we languished in the chill of idolatry – we assumed the lifeless coldness of what we worshipped.

III.4 The emergence of an integrated model

What emerges is a comprehensive model with the potential to resolve those tensions noted at the start. Only gradually was it fully articulated. Athanasius and the Cappadocians, those who fashioned the notion of *theopoiēsis/theōsis* and recognized that it implied Nicene orthodoxy, were those who had a sense of the interrelationship of differing aspects of God's image as presented in different parts of scripture. This doctrinal 'ecology', by which key components mutually sustain one another, was rooted in traditional Christian thinking as found in Irenaeus and Cyril's *Catechetical Homilies*. The so-called Arian and Origenist controversies thus present themselves as different stages in a single debate, with similar issues at stake: a tendency to devalue the physical creation and human embodiment, and to find mediation through a hierarchical understanding of how God relates to the creation. In the Nicenes, *theologia* is rooted in God's *oikonomia*;[73] the body is potentially the temple of God and the human person is God's image on earth, while the whole is held together in

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[71] Von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, pp. 168–9.
[72] Hart, 'The Mirror of the Infinite', pp. 117–20.   [73] See Chapter 8.

a Christology which sees Christ as intrinsically God's Image, both as Son of God and also as the new Adam, humanity as it was meant to be.

This integrated model put the incarnation at the centre, and enabled human beings to be incorporated in the body of Christ so as to be recreated in God's image and likeness, the true Son of God ensuring that the archetypal Image of God is imaged in images of the Image, so enabling humanity to be adopted as God's son and heir through participation in him. Embodiment and solidarity were affirmed as the medium in which God is imaged. Gregory Nazianzen's affirmation of the lepers[74] made this crystal clear; the poor are 'essentially "deserving" of assistance . . . because intrinsically, even though paradoxically, they represent the presence of God within a fragile world'.[75]

That was a profoundly paradoxical claim, given assumptions about the nature of God. Persistent was focus on the intellect, the potential seat of contemplation and knowledge of God, as the element in human being understood to image God and be the 'divine sense'.[76] Deeply engrained was the notion that regaining God-likeness meant withdrawal from the physical realities of life and the eradication of the passions – the homily outlined in 1.1 above included exhortation to rule over one's irrational passions, the beasts within. Monks and holy men imaged God, the ascetic ideal being *apatheia* (passionlessness), for this, they supposed, characterized the divine. The incarnation, however, along with specific Gospel teachings, provoked quite other perceptions of the divine nature. Gregory Nazianzen's appeal on behalf of lepers was grounded in the view that God is love, and the realization of that image was to be found by imitating God who sends rain on just and unjust alike, while Christ is the model.

[74] See Chapter 1, quoting *Oration* 14.14.

[75] John A. McGuckin, *St Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), p. 150, n. 234.

[76] A. N. Williams, *The Divine Sense: The Intellect in Patristic Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

So God's image in humankind is divine gift rather than inherent property, and communion with one another, with Christ, and ultimately with the Triune God, is found in reciprocal mirroring of the glory of the divine Image.

IV Towards appropriation and extension

In *Eccentric Existence* Kelsey draws attention to the theocentric nature of pre-modern theology,[77] making the point that theological anthropology as a separate discipline scarcely existed before the challenge of the Enlightenment stimulated its development. Others agree: it was 'bound up with the "turn to the subject", commonly associated with the philosophical method of Descartes'.[78] This enhanced focus on individual autonomy, on the nature of the self or human person, hardly encourages the idea that the patristic material has any pertinence. Yet the *Imago Dei* has been the coping-stone of theological anthropology;[79] so current themes are anticipated in patristic material, if in a different key. My argument will be that the integrated position implied in the thinking of the Nicenes is worth appropriating and extending in relation to, and sometimes in critique of, contemporary assumptions.

IV.1 God's image and human rights

In popular parlance, being made in God's image is a slogan providing Christian colouring for a modern human rights perspective: every individual, whether male or female, black or white, rich or poor, disabled or able-bodied, is to be treated with the respect and dignity

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[77] Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, p. 29.

[78] Colin Crowder, 'Humanity' in Adrian Hastings, Alistair Mason and Hugh Pyper (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought* (Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 311–14.

[79] It is interesting that Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, treats this in Codas, offering it as the climax of his massive work.

that come from being made in God's image. God's image is treated as something inherent in each individual, rather than as divine gift.[80] Such usage is in line with the way some of the fathers used the idea to attribute dignity to every particular human being, even those marginalized from society as lepers and outcasts, but in their case this rested on explicit appeal to human solidarity, and to Christ as the 'image' through which the dignity of each is imparted. This put claims about human being in a very different framework from post-Enlightenment and post-modern individualism. That theological framework needs reclaiming.

iv.1.1 Solidarity

The inherent dignity of each discrete individual is problematic. Individualism is shown up as wide of the mark by those, like Arthur, whose dependency is such that their very survival is owed to others. Each particular person is not autonomous in practice; only in community and through a sense of human solidarity can all receive dignity and personhood.

Some contemporary theologians have regarded communion and relationships as constitutive of what it means to be human. For Zizioulas:[81]

> being a person is fundamentally different from being an individual or a "personality", for a person cannot be imagined in himself but only within his relationships.

'The mystery of being a person', he writes, 'lies in the fact that here otherness and communion are not in contradiction but coincide'; indeed, this 'does not lead to the dissolving of the diversity of beings

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[80] The notion that God's image is something inherent in, or 'possessed' by, humankind is criticized by Alistair I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[81] John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (London: DLT, 1985); quotations are from pp. 105, 106, 102, 115 and 122.

in one vast ocean of being, but to the affirmation of otherness in and through love'. He even identified the fall as 'the refusal to make being dependent on communion'.

> The Word of God does not dwell in the human mind as rational knowledge or in the human soul as a mystical inner experience, but as communion within a community.

The eucharist 'gives [the church] the taste of eternal life as love and communion, as the image of the being of God'.[82]

The general point that humanity should be conceived as fundamentally constituted for relationship is not his alone. McFadyen[83] argues on biblical and theological grounds that 'an orthodox understanding of humanity created in the image of the Triune God and redeemed through God's address in Christ seems to require a relational understanding of human being'. His book explores the social formation of persons. 'There is no "self" in itself, but only as it is with and for others':

- identities are to be construed in terms of response to God and others
- individual identity denotes the way one is for others, and is derived from one's previous relations
- a person . . . is a subject of communication, an 'I' before the 'I' of others, and personhood is fostered through being addressed, intended and expected as a person by others: that is, through relations which take dialogical form.

Thus personal integrity is profoundly related to the mutuality involved in communication, trust and commitment.

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[82] Zizioulas' position is grounded in Cappadocian theology, but his understanding is contested; see Lucian Turcescu, 'Modern Misreadings of Gregory of Nyssa' in Coakley (ed.), *Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa,* pp. 97–109.

[83] McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood*; quotations from pp. 65 and 154.

Such reclamation of the centrality of relationship, both with God and with one another, is embodied in a particular way in the lived reality of the L'Arche communities. Communion within a community enables not merely the imparting of dignity to those who are scarcely dignified, but also a sense of sacramental presence, perceived in a particular person, or experienced in mutual relationship with that person. This appropriates the patristic sense of human solidarity, and extends it beyond the 'top-down' tendency to patronize the poor and marginalized through 'charity' – the fathers' idea that those receiving alms reciprocate by praying for the giver and becoming the giver's means of salvation is now perceived as tainted by power relations. The creation of communities where 'assistants', often themselves young and vulnerable, receive love and affirmation from those they assist puts solidarity into a different register, that of mutuality. But the fundamental point is the challenge to individualism. In response to ideologies of individual rights and autonomy, public policy seeks to offer persons with disabilities independence and choice, but in subtle ways this can actually undermine the quality of life of those with learning disabilities. Often they cannot take the initiative, even to choose to have a birthday party, let alone organize it! Without incorporation into community, they are like disconnected limbs, supported as necessary but scarcely living. They reveal what is in fact the same for everyone: relationships are fundamental. This challenge to individualism is profoundly important. The fathers were almost certainly right that the statement in Genesis 1.26–7 referred to the corporate whole of the human race, not to each discrete particular person.

Yet the 'contrast between individualistic and relational concepts of human being as though they are mutually exclusive' is hardly sustainable;[84] relations between concrete individuals imply 'unsubstitutable personal identities'. Arthur is Arthur and no other, a particular person to whom respect and dignity is accorded within

[84] Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, p. 399.

the supportive and responsive networks of others who are in relationship with him.[85] So what does it mean to be a person? In post-Enlightenment culture a person is defined as:

> a morally perfectible, autonomous centre of self-aware consciousness, in contradistinction to non-self-aware, nonconscious "things" that are subject to physical determinism. A person is a "subject" in contrast to an "object".[86]

Kelsey acknowledges the power of this modern concept, which, coupled with the self-expression of romanticism, shapes our experience of the self and subjectivity;[87] but he counters it by stating that we are constituted persons by God relating to us rather than by any set of capacities. God addresses us, so offering us personal status as 'living human bodies'.[88] This is absolutely vital if Arthur and others like him are not to be implicitly excluded from personhood. Furthermore, it is realized only in the solidarity of community.

IV.1.2 Dignity in Christ

Genesis underpins the popular use of the *Imago Dei* to affirm that all are made in God's image. The fathers, however, read Genesis in the light of the New Testament, which identifies Christ as the true image of God. Kelsey[89] makes the same move. The incarnation offers an important corrective to the idea that the 'image of God' in humanity is meant to signify the rights of an autonomous individual, inherent in each human creature. It is 'in Christ' that human beings are found to be in God's image.

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[85] For the importance of dignity not being inherent but accorded by others, see David A. Pailin, *A Gentle Touch: From a Theology of Handicap to a Theology of Human Being* (London: SPCK, 1992).

[86] Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, p. 360. Cf. Chapter 3.

[87] *Ibid.*, pp. 363–78. [88] *Ibid.*, pp. 274–83. Cf. Pailin, *A Gentle Touch.*

[89] *Ibid.*, pp. 901 ff, 938, 1002.

The principal New Testament passage is Colossians 1.15–20: the Son is the 'image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation', in whom everything was created. Not only is he the one through whom and for whom all things were created, and in whom 'all things hold together', but 'he is the head of the body, the church'. It was, and perhaps remains, unclear whether the principal focus is on the pre-existent Christ or the incarnate Christ; yet the sense of the passage as a whole is that Christ, as God's image, incorporates all that he has created, and in him it is possible for human creatures to be transformed, reconciled and raised from the dead.

This theme of human transformation in Christ provides the context of nearly all the New Testament passages that use the language of 'image' or 'likeness'. In 1 Corinthians 15.49, a contrast is drawn between 'the image of the man of dust' and 'the image of the man from heaven'; those to be changed by resurrection are to be in the image of the one already raised, namely Christ. In 2 Corinthians 4.4, we read of 'the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God', which provides the framework for understanding 2 Corinthians 3.18: 'And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.' As Kelsey puts it:

> As *Imago Dei* Christ mirrors the glory of God in such a way that those who "gaze" on that mirror undergo a transformative "seeing".[90]

Again, in Romans 8.29, those whom God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. All these texts associate the image of Christ with human transformation or renewal.

[90] *Ibid.*, p. 1000.

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The approach to 'God's image' through the New Testament gives content to the God-likeness given in principle at creation and to be realized in Christ. It directs attention to concrete human living and relationships in the everyday such as are captured in stories of Jesus' life, not to mention the 'mind of Christ' displayed in his *kenōsis* and journey to the cross. Such embodiment of the character of the God who sends rain on just and unjust alike, who lovingly 'lets go' of what has been brought into being out of nothing, allowing it the freedom to become itself, both endorses and challenges the moral autonomy which human individuals have claimed. For, on the one hand, it confirms the idea that the gift of the image involves freedom and potential to make moral choices; on the other hand, it offers an ethical model which cannot be realized through autonomy, but only through self-submission to the good of others and the formation of a habitude of God-like loving in the context of everyday human existence. It also takes account of the limits of autonomy, allowing for the incorporation even of those with profound disabilities who lack capacity for moral responsibility.

As long as we work with an individualistic approach, the grounds for ascribing dignity, or indeed rights, to those whose freedom is curtailed and responsibility compromised seem shaky. But if God's image has something to do with human solidarity, then, even if Arthur is never able to make his own moral choices, he belongs to what might be called a moral community, implicated as he is in the relationships he has with those around him. Together, through communion in community, the gift of God's image and likeness is received and developed; how much more is this so if the model of God's image is the incarnate Christ, and the body of Christ is where God's image is realized in human solidarity.

A Christian approach to God's image in humanity must surely have such a Christological dimension. God's image is not something inherent, nor is it similar to 'human rights', but rather a gift of grace. It points away from discrete, supposedly autonomous, individuals to the solidarity of incorporation into

the humanity of Christ, who is truly 'the image of the invisible God'.

IV.2 Towards a positive theological anthropology

In Western Christianity there is a deep strain of pessimism about human nature. The doctrine of 'original sin', Augustine's principal legacy, encourages people to regard themselves as 'miserable sinners', while the evangelical Gospel, calling on individuals to turn from sin and receive Christ as their personal Saviour and Lord, easily slips into reinforcement of personal guilt, with resultant self-deprecation masquerading as humility. Secularized culture has internalized this tradition as an excuse for moral failure: 'We're only human'; while popularized science has made us apes not angels. The notion of being made in God's image fails to act as a corrective to this endemic pessimism. Perceptively, Nonna Verna Harrison[91] draws on patristic material to challenge this pervasive outlook; she dedicates her book to 'all those people whom other people have thrown away', affirming that God does not do that.

Her greater optimism comes from the traditions of Eastern Christianity – not that a sense of sinfulness or the need for salvation is absent from any Christian tradition,[92] but tendencies in Eastern theology offer greater affirmation of human potential: (i) the emphasis on synergism – the capacity of human persons to respond to the workings of the Spirit and form themselves in virtue; (ii) the focus on incarnation rather than atonement; (iii) the idea of *theōsis* – that the goal of human existence is to realize the gift of God's image and likeness. Harrison writes: 'as human beings we are called to an unending process of becoming more and more like God, especially by sharing God's character and love'.

[91] Nonna Verna Harrison, *God's Many-Splendored Image: Theological Anthropology for Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010). Quotations are largely from pp. 186–90.

[92] See Chapter 5.

Her chapters explore various facets of God's image and likeness: freedom and responsibility; Christ incarnate as model; human capacity for spiritual perception, which allows for knowledge and love of God; moral excellence, virtue and humility; royal dignity within creation, with consequent responsibility for the planet and its ecosystems; and so on. Her purpose is to show that 'we are invited to work with God to co-create our future identity in a way that is more and more Christ-like', and that 'authentic spiritual perception' brings 'practical wisdom', enabling 'deeply loving service to neighbours and to God's creation even in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles'. 'In principle all are called to be saints'; 'we are invited by grace to participate in God's virtues, such as justice, wisdom, humility, compassion, and above all love'. This involves a 'long growth process'; yet the image is a gift to every human being, including men and women, rich and poor, social outcasts such as slaves and the homeless disabled; and everyone as embodied beings may be filled with the divine life, and respond to the call to a royal priesthood – offering to God 'the praise and thankfulness of all creation' and bringing 'God's blessing to all creation'. Human reason, creativity and culture, including science and the arts, manifest God's image, as does human community, which reflects community in the Trinity. Earthed in the theological spirituality of the fathers, this account acknowledges human failings and distortions while celebrating for the contemporary world the high dignity of God's gift and call through the theme of 'God's many-splendored image'.

Paradoxically perhaps, this high optimism yet deep realism about human nature is best exemplified within contexts such as the L'Arche communities. The essays in *Encounter with Mystery* show time and again how persons with disabilities and their assistants reveal to each other their God-likeness. The way in which together they reflect God's glory is embodied in communities of love and communion. A contemplative ability to discern God's presence is evident – a waiting on God and each other in patience, alongside loving service and growth in 'God's virtues'. Growth in those supposedly

without impairments is generated through identification with those who embody humanity's creatureliness, frailty and vulnerability, those who are utterly dependent on others and yet in their weakness have profound strengths which nourish the gifts of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.[93] The gift of God's image can be discerned if we have eyes to see, ears to hear, and the kind of humility that is not self-deprecation but openness to others. This is the dimension caught at L'Arche in the aphorisms: 'Christian faith is not problem-solving but mystery-encountering'; and 'mystery is communicated by participation'.[94]

Reappraisal of the pessimism endemic in Western theological perspectives is enabled by Kathryn Tanner.[95] She asks 'what light might be thrown on the well-worn idea that humans are created in the image of God, if Christ were the key to understanding it'. Developing patristic insights, she contrasts a weaker way of resemblance to God shared by all with a 'much stronger way of being an image through participation in what one is not'. Creatures:

> would image God . . . in virtue of the gift to them of what remains alien to them, the very perfection of the divine image that they are not, now having become their own.

Christ she offers as 'the paradigm of this strong sort of imaging through participation'. The 'perfect hypostatic unity' of incarnation 'makes for perfect imaging', and:

> Ordinary human beings would be the image of God in the strongest sense too . . . not when trying to image the divine image in a created fashion all by themselves, but instead, when drawing near to the divine image, so near as to become one with it.

[93] Galatians 5.22–3.   [94] See my *Encounter with Mystery*, pp. x–xi.

[95] Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge University Press, 2010). Quotations are from pp. 1, 12–14, 22, 37, 44, 53, 58.

Jesus Christ is 'more than a paradigm'; 'he has become for us the very means'. Indeed, 'the Word's presence to us seems necessary . . . simply for us to be the sort of creatures God intends us to be'. So 'human nature must be characterized by an expansive openness that allows for the presence of God within it'. Echoing Gregory of Nyssa she writes:

> Humans are unusually impressionable in a way that the language of image often unpacks in a quite concrete, albeit metaphorical, way: they are like soft wax that a vast variety of seals might indent to their image; they are the mirror of whatever it is upon which they gaze.

There is something 'unbounded' about human nature; and thus 'humans imitate God's incomprehensibility', though God's 'unbounded fullness' contrasts with 'an emptiness in our own nature that opens us up to everything intelligible and good'. This sets off discussion of the nature of grace, allowing Tanner to argue that this 'strong sense . . . in which we participate or share in what we are not' is an understanding of grace which should bridge 'the usual theological divides between Protestants and Catholics'.

Kelsey's book offers a similar picture of human existence 'as eccentric, centered outside itself in the Triune God in regard to its being, value, destiny, identity, and proper existential orientations to its ultimate and proximate contexts'.[96] 'Jesus Christ in his humanity' is presented as the 'decisive image of God', which both 'defines how God is most aptly characterized', and also affirms the actual and particular bodily life of each finite human creature, which has 'an unsubstitutable personal identity' and 'concrete ways of interrelating with others'. The 'basic identity' of human beings 'is defined by the direct gift of God of being finite creatures empowered by God to be and to act, to give and receive', by God's 'drawing them to

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[96] Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, p. 893. Further quotations are from pp. 915, 1022, 1042–3, 1050.

eschatological consummation', through a process of judgement and transformation, as well as by being reconciled despite estrangement.

> Jesus is paradigmatic of who all actual living human personal bodies are . . . inasmuch as they are images of the imager of God . . . they, too, are finite mysteries, imaging the image of the triune infinite mystery.

These proposals from recent Western theologians counter that self-understanding as 'miserable sinner', rooting self-affirmation in being the image of the Image of God. Preoccupation with sin fails to transform; affirmation which can transfigure comes from the discernment of God's image in ordinary human beings in everyday relationship with God and others. Optimism about human nature is engendered by attention to others, by empathy with others – human characteristics which evolutionists have struggled to explain, but which Christians have long seen exemplified in those saints who reflect God's image by living Christ-like lives. Even for Augustine, 'the constant identification and owning of sin' meant humility:

> 'purity' is not to be defined in the language of achievement or avoidance but of single-minded self-exposure to God's pure truth . . . The holiness of the indwelling Spirit who causes Christ to be alive in us comes into us through a radical putting aside of self-reliance.[97]

Holiness is not one's own accomplishment, but an emptiness within which it is possible to receive, an emptiness God will fill, but requiring self-abandonment, and a way of turning the desire for perfection into a pure and simple wish for God. Indeed, Augustine himself famously said, 'You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.'[98]

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[97] Rowan Williams, *Why Study the Past?* (London: DLT, 2005), p. 49.
[98] *Confessions* I.i.(1).

IV.3 *Embodied rationality: wisdom and God's image*

In the Western world, secularism has provoked a divorce between rationality and religion. Aggressive atheists argue that religion is irrational, while many church people affirm faith against reason, and decry the 'cerebral' nature of Protestant Word-centred Christianity, preferring the heart over the head. The notion that God's image is in the rationality with which humans are endowed would hardly seem likely to command positive response in this climate, especially as it has inbuilt elitist overtones which appear to exclude persons with brain damage, such as Arthur. Besides, the patristic warnings against identifying God's image with a particular aspect or part of human nature, such as the soul or mind, are to be taken seriously. Still, the fathers do present a challenge to the split between head and heart, and the somewhat parallel gulf between spirituality and theology. Patristic theology involved the intellect in prayer and contemplation, and for them Christ was the embodiment of God's Wisdom and Word, the latter encompassing Reason or Mind as well as language.

> The emphasis on intellect as a divine attribute, a definitive human faculty, and a basis for human sanctification allows the theologians of the early church to write theology in a way scarcely envisageable today, in which both strictly academic or technical questions can be pursued alongside spiritual ones.[99]

We need to regain such an integrative understanding.

IV.3.1 Integrating head and heart

Reintegration means challenging the post-Enlightenment narrowing of rationality whereby what is subjective rather than objective is bracketed out, while rational knowledge is separated off from the embodied reality of wise, everyday living. The necessary challenge

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[99] Williams, *Divine Sense*, p. 2; cf. p. 238.

is offered by Iain McGilchrist in *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*, an illuminating treatment of the nature of intelligence and cultural history. His sophisticated discussion, informed by current neuroscience, offers pointers to the nature of embodied human wisdom.

It has long been recognized that the brain is asymmetric, that each hemisphere has 'sensory and motor responsibility for, and control of, the opposite (or "contralateral") side of the body', and language is 'the defining difference, the main specific task of the left hemisphere'.[100] But there is a problem:

> attempts to decide which set of functions are segregated in which hemisphere have mainly been discarded, piece after piece of evidence suggesting that every identifiable human activity is actually served at some level by both hemispheres.

Indeed, 'it is no longer respectable for a neuroscientist to hypothesize on the subject'. So McGilchrist rejects popular ideas about the left hemisphere being 'rational, realistic and dull', 'hard-nosed and logical', and therefore 'male', while the right hemisphere is 'airy-fairy and impressionistic', 'creative and exciting', 'dreamy and sensitive', and so 'female'.[101] However, he does insist that the asymmetric nature of the brain is not 'random', and there is 'something profound here that requires explanation'. So he explores the different 'worlds' of the two hemispheres, and the importance of their proper integration for a truly healthy personality and a wise culture.

The fundamental difference, he suggests, lies in the way in which each hemisphere attends to the world. The brains of animals and birds are also divided: 'chicks prioritize local information with the right eye (left hemisphere), and global information with the left eye

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[100] Quotations in this paragraph are from McGilchrist, *Master and Emissary*, pp. 1–2.

[101] I myself expressed scepticism about this exploitation of the divided brain in my paper, 'From Analysis to Overlay: A Sacramental Approach to Christology' in David Brown and Ann Loades (eds.), *Christ: The Sacramental Word: Incarnation, Sacrament and Poetry* (London: SPCK, 1996), pp. 40–56.

(right hemisphere)'[102] – which means they can successfully peck at individual grains of corn while looking out for predators. Such differences are consistent and may 'foreshadow differences in humans'.

> It might then be that the division of the human brain is also the result of the need to bring to bear two incompatible types of attention on the world at the same time, one narrow, focused, and directed by our needs, and the other broad, open, and directed towards whatever else is going on in the world apart from ourselves.

Developing this basic perception, McGilchrist notes that the two hemispheres contribute different things to language; the right hemisphere takes in the whole context and has facility in using and understanding metaphor and humour, while the left hemisphere is literalizing and limited to the immediate logic of the situation, even if this is against what experience and common sense would suggest. The left hemisphere deals with abstraction and categorization, while the right hemisphere is concerned with relations between particulars. The left is concerned with utility, tools, mechanisms, things devised by human beings, the right with living things, things that have meaning and value for us as human beings, and in particular the recognition of faces. The right mediates 'empathetic identification' and allows one to put oneself in someone else's shoes and surmise what another might be thinking; the right has 'the preponderance of emotional understanding' and is 'the mediator of social behaviour', playing 'a vital role in emotional expression', apart from anger: for 'competition, rivalry and individual self-belief, positive or negative, would be preferentially treated by the left hemisphere'.

So McGilchrist suggests that 'linear, sequential argument is clearly better executed by the left hemisphere', but other types of reasoning, 'including deduction, and some types of mathematical reasoning, are

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[102] Quotations in this paragraph are from McGilchrist, *Master and Emissary*, pp. 26–7, 49–52, 55–8, 61.

mainly dependent on the right hemisphere'.[103] Insight, or 'the sort of problem-solving that happens when we are, precisely, not concentrating on it, is associated with activities of the right hemisphere'. The right hemisphere specializes in non-verbal communication, and deals with whatever is implicit, whereas the left hemisphere is tied to 'more explicit and more conscious processing'. Subtle unconscious perceptions, such as the reading of facial expressions, are picked up by the right hemisphere. The right can cope with depth, with the unknown, the infinite and uncertain, with what is 'other', whereas the left needs certainty and needs to be right. So the 'sense of self' is 'grounded in the right hemisphere, because the self originates in the interaction with "the Other"'. Indeed, the right:

> matures earlier than the left, and is more involved than the left in almost every aspect of the development of mental functioning in childhood, and of the self as a social empathic being. Social development in the infant takes place independently of language development, another pointer to its right-hemisphere origins.

The human quality of a pre-linguistic person such as Arthur is excitingly illuminated by this observation, and is reinforced by his response to music, also a right-hemisphere function and possibly the 'ancestor of language'.

> The attunement of emotionally expressive facial expressions between mother and baby in the child's early maturing right hemisphere means that, long before the infant either comprehends or speaks a single word, it possesses a repertoire of signals to communicate its internal state.

McGilchrist concludes that the left deals with the kind of knowledge and rationality which is dominant in our culture – repeatable

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[103] Quotations in this paragraph are from *ibid.*, pp. 65, 71, 82–3, 88, 103–5.

knowledge, "pieces" of information, 'general, impersonal, fixed, certain and disengaged'. But:

> [m]ost forms of imagination, for example, or of innovation, intuitive problem-solving, spiritual thinking or artistic creativity require us to transcend language, at least language in the accepted sense of a referential code. Most thinking, like most communication, goes on without language.[104]

Words 'come into their own' for 'transmitting information, specifically about something that is not present to us'; and they make concepts 'more subtle and available to memory'. But body language, body movement in dance to music, singing – embodied expression which appears useless in evolutionary terms – these are right-hemisphere functions, and they are what creates social cohesion and community, transcending utility and forming civilization. Indeed:

> [m]ost of the remarkable things about human beings, the things that differentiate us from animals, depend to a large extent on the right hemisphere.

These he instances as 'imagination, creativity, the capacity for religious awe, music, dance, poetry, art, love of nature, a moral sense, a sense of humour and the ability to change their minds', and suggests that:

> [i]t is the task of the right hemisphere to carry the left beyond, to something new, something 'other' than itself.

Much else in McGilchrist's argument is of fascination and relevance, but for our purposes the most significant points concern:

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[104] Quotations in this paragraph are from *ibid.*, pp. 92, 96, 107, 108, 114, 127, 164.

- the way in which the distinguishable characteristics of the two halves of the brain actually work together, indeed the overdevelopment of one in relation to the other seems to lie at the root of some disabilities, autism being a classic of left-brain dominance
- the way in which mind is embodied in physical expressions of community such as singing and dancing – human language and intellect not being just about the manipulation of information, the communication of data or the mounting of logical argument, but also about the arts, literature, music, these being as important as science in expressing truth
- the way in which consciousness and mind are rooted in brain and body – mind is 'a process more than a thing – a becoming, a way of being, more than an entity'; it is 'the brain's experience of itself'.[105] McGilchrist is thoroughly opposed to reductive, mechanistic models: rather, accepting the 'incarnation' of mind and self in the physical brain, while also insisting on the complexity and importance of thinking, planning, creating, feeling and interacting with others, he emphasizes the aspects of human reason which transcend utility, foster relations with others, and facilitate the emergence of both culture and a sense of self
- the way in which the two clusters of functions overlap with the popular distinction between head and heart, so carrying the implication that true rationality requires the embrace of left-brain rationalistic argument within the wider world of right-brain wisdom – in other words, the mutual interaction of the critic's analytical precision and the visionary's holistic perspective.[106]

All these features point to the integration we seek, challenging the logocentric narrowness of scientific materialism, and the atheism

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[105] *Ibid.*, p. 20. Cf. Chapter 3.

[106] For my earlier treatment of this subject, see 'The Critic and the Visionary', Inaugural lecture, University of Birmingham, 1987, part of which was reproduced in *SJT* 41 (1988) 297–312.

now so aggressively associated with it, by taking up critical reason into intuitive insight and wider wisdom.

iv.3.2 The true theologian

Word and Wisdom are significant concepts in theology. In McGilchrist's terms, religious fundamentalisms, with their literalism and dogma, together with a good deal of academic theology, with its emphasis on critical analysis, are dominated by the left-brain, words without wisdom. Spirituality, on the other hand, with its affective, imaginative and relational leanings, often lacks the wisdom to appreciate the contribution made by left-brain rationalism. The point is we need both perspectives. In Christian theology the Word of God and the Wisdom of God are together incarnated in Jesus Christ. The Word may represent language, propositional reasoning, certainties, purposive action, order (the left-brain's contribution), Wisdom open-ended possibilities, insight and intuition, metaphorical suggestiveness, loving commitment to the other (the right-brain's perspective). The true theologian will image Christ in holding these together.

The fathers anticipate this integration.[107] Gregory Nazianzen puts it in his own terms in his *First Theological Oration*.[108] The 'best theologian', he suggests, is not the one who can give a complete logical account of his subject – for if God is beyond the grasp of human comprehension, then the normal processes of human logic are

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[107] This is further developed in 'The Critic and the Visionary' and 'The God of the Greeks and the Nature of Religious Language' in W. R. Schoedel and Robert Wilken (eds.), *Early Christian Literature and the Greek Intellectual Tradition*, Festschrift for R. M. Grant, Théologie Historique 53 (Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1979). Cf. Williams, *Divine Sense*.

[108] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Theological Orations*: Greek text: P. Gallay and M. Jourjon, *Saint Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours théologiques (27–31)*, *SC*; ET: F. W. Norris, with F. Williams and L. Wickham, *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning: The Five Theological Orations of St. Gregory Nazianzen*, Supplement to *VC*.

inapplicable. Rather, the true theologian is one who 'assembles more of Truth's image or shadow'. Heretics he accuses of the clever tricks of logicians who perform acrobats with words, twisting absurdity into apparently reasonable syllogisms and quibbling sophistries – in McGilchrist's terms, the left-brain over-dominant. The true theologian must qualify by meditation, by purification of soul and body, and by genuine commitment to the subject – in other words, by a holistic recognition of the transcendence of the subject-matter, and the significance of embodiment – a right-brain outlook. Religious language is necessarily metaphorical and symbolic, but this does not mean it is irrational. Gregory works within a tradition which recognizes that language has to be 'stretched' so as to point beyond itself. Knowledge of God comes partly through a balance between the analysis of apophaticism and the suggestiveness of analogy and synthesis, by which an overall viewpoint is taken of the way things are and how things point beyond themselves, but ultimately from that kinship to the divine implied by creation according to God's Image, the Word and Wisdom incarnated in Christ.

V Conclusion

Necessarily this discussion has been inchoate, in that hardly any attempt has been made to discuss the nature of the God imaged in human being – that will be the task of the final chapter. Christological material has figured because it has implications for a specifically Christian anthropology, but also because it highlights two significant points for doing theology in dialogue with the fathers: (i) it illustrates the process of theological argument whereby the implications of Christian confessions were articulated, thus implicitly providing a critique of the doctrinal development approach; and (ii) it alerts us to the ways in which different doctrines are deeply integrated with one another. In particular, it is impossible to divorce Christian

understanding of the divine gift of God's image from the 'grand narrative' of fall and redemption, which implies the gift's loss or marring. To that we turn in the next chapter.

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Reflections in a mirror

The preacher begins the sermon for the feast of transfiguration:

> What we now see is like a dim image in the mirror; then we shall see face-to-face.[109]

In the ancient world, most mirrors would have been pretty dim – the best technology was polished metal. A clear image would perhaps appear in a still pool, and, like Narcissus, you'd be entranced by the clarity of your own reflection, but generally you'd only see yourself as a dim image in a mirror. Paul goes on:

> what I know now is only partial; then it will be complete – as complete as God's knowledge of me.

So was he talking about knowledge of God or self-knowledge? Maybe we see God dimly by dim reflections of divine glory in our own faces.

In a long and complex passage elsewhere,[110] Paul ponders the story of Moses receiving the law on Mount Sinai. Such divine glory was reflected in Moses' face that he had to put a veil over it, which he only removed when he turned to the Lord. Paul suggests the veil was to conceal how temporary the old covenant was, and the veil is removed when a person turns to Christ. This was a novel way of reading the text to show how, in Christ, the new covenant in the spirit is fulfilled. The climax is this:

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[109] 1 Corinthians 13.12.   [110] 2 Corinthians 3.

> All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

Yes – God's image and glory are to be seen in our faces as we are transformed into the true image, which is Christ. And that must surely mean we are gradually drawn into the transfiguration.

Let me share an illuminating night. I was with a group doing a sponsored trek up Mount Sinai for a disability charity. We were staying at a Bedouin eco-lodge in the midst of the desert. Darkness fell before 6pm, and in the blackness and clarity of the desert, the night sky was a sight beyond anything seen before, pinpoints of light everywhere, with the Milky Way streaking with stunning brilliance across the heavens. Early to bed, I lay awake, unable to sleep. A three-hour meditation moved from scenes of the 'great and terrible wilderness' we'd traversed on foot that day, with its dry wadis and amazing rock formations, to the prospect of the next day's trek up Mount Sinai.

There God spoke with Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend; yet when Moses asked God to show him his glory, the response was:

> I will make all my goodness pass before you . . . but you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live. See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.[111]

From Moses, thoughts turned to Elijah, the prophet who ran away to the same mountain to escape opposition, and found God not in storm, earthquake or fire, but in that 'still small voice', probably better translated 'a sound of sheer silence'.[112] Next day I would discover

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[111] Exodus 33.11, 19–23.   [112] 1 Kings 19.11–12.

'Elijah's basin' part way up the mountain, but that night my mind slipped from 'no one can see me and live' to the moment when the disciples discerned the glory of the Lord as Jesus was transfigured on a mountain and was joined by Moses and Elijah.

Emerging from the pitch-black of the stone sleeping-hut, I found the desert transfigured by the silvery light of the moon. Then, in the morning, before our ascent of the mountain, I found myself in the church of St Catherine's monastery at the foot of Mount Sinai and there glimpsed in the apse the famous early mosaic of Christ's transfiguration to which the church is dedicated. The icon showed Christ bathed in light against the dark-blue depths of God's eternal infinity.

No one can see God and live, and God's presence is in a still small voice. It's hard to hear, and we see only God's back. Yet God's glory is seen in the face of Christ, and insofar as we are in Christ, we may reflect that glory, even if only dimly. And sometimes we catch a glimpse in another's face, in an everyday saint who somehow embodies the love of Christ, or in someone who needs us to show the love of Christ – one of those whom neither the sheep nor the goats recognized:[113] someone hungry, or thirsty, a stranger, someone with no adequate clothing, sick or in prison.

It's even possible for a face-to-face meeting to put us in both places at once – meeting each other's mutual neediness. Many years ago I was visiting the original l'Arche community in Trosly-Breuil, and spending the evening at one of the foyers. A man with Down's syndrome settled on the floor at my feet, placed his arms round my knees and stared into my face with love and concentration. Our mutual gaze became deeply significant, as I began to sense that he was offering me the wordless response of love which, at the time, I scarcely received from my own severely disabled son. His name was Christophe – Christ bearer.

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[113]   Matthew 25.31–45.

What we now see is like a dim image in a mirror, then we shall see face to face. Amen.

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Postlude

Elusive Likeness

A glimpse of an image is caught
in an almost ginger moustache
and a certain look round the eyes.
With its littleness and loss
of brain development
the grandson's likeness belies
the grandfather's dignity
and impressive intellect –
an offence one might surmise.
Yet the glint of a loving smile
encaptures its genesis
in shy, suggestive guise.

So the human likeness to God:
a gargoyle one might surmise,
a mirror-image that lies,
its hazy reflections reversed –
huge hints, yet hard to trace,
that veil their archetype,
yet focussed face to face
reveal what love implies.
So too God's image in Christ:
God's likeness in human guise –
an unlike likeness formed
from utter otherness
in close proximity;

transcendent holiness
in physicality;
in littleness and loss
an outline sketch that tries
to capture its genesis
in that look about the eyes;
intangible, infinite grace
extended in tender touch
and shining from the face –
invisible visage caught
in expressions loving and wise.

Perception[114]

Imagine a life with sound but no word –
A life full of music and buzzing and shouts
But no structure or form. Could meaning be there
At all, or would everything be absurd?

Imagine a life with sight but no sense –
A life full of colour and movement and shapes
But no objects or space. Wouldn't it seem
A random muddle, a jumble immense?

But patterns are there, and proportion discerned
In the slatted light of Venetian blinds,
In the fractals of trees or the web of a grill:
So some sense of beauty is learned.
Yet much blindness remains, and still there's a kind
Of incomprehension that shuts off the mind.

And expressions are there, and moods conveyed
In the tone of voices, in laughter, in tears:

[114] An earlier version of this was published in *Face to Face* (revised and enlarged, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990).

In music's dynamics, its beat and its flow –
So some connection is made.
Yet much deafness remains, and still there's a kind
Of incomprehension that shuts off the mind.

Perception has limits. Our brain-damaged son
Lives a life full of colour and music and light,
A life full of loving and sharing and fun,
But really perception has only begun.
He has such limitations – yet still there's a kind
Of mysterious awareness enlarging the mind.

Perception has limits – our vision's too small.
As for loving and sharing, our failures appal.
We have such limitations – but still there's a kind
Of mysterious transcendence enlarging the mind.

Other Observations

Admiration gazes in a pool,
At nature's water-colour portraiture.
A ripple-raising touch spells caricature!
Self-images tend to distort. Only the fool
Refuses to learn self-knowledge in laughter's school.
Reflection writes the unwritten literature
That details character in miniature,
Disclosing truths by likeness, often cruel.
But feeling a fool's not being a fool. The way
To reflect the image of God is to turn the face
Away from self to catch the glancing ray
Disturbing the waters, laughing the laugh of grace.
Bent in the pool is the crutch of vanity.
The sanity of fools is sanctity.

In the Hermitage

Rembrandt's *Prodigal Son* and an icon of the crucifixion

Contemplation gazes at the feet.
All down at heel and travel-worn, the shoes
Gave no protection: shame let stones abuse
His soles, and urged him on through dirt and heat.
Crushed in the crowds all one could see was the feet,
The prodigal's status summed up in that image of strife
With gravelly ground, the humiliations of life.
But somewhere up there his father ran to greet.
Embodied, with feet of clay, another threads
His way by just such pebbly paths. He treads,
His feet in touch with earth and pierced with nails,
Deepening the crippling wounds that hurt entails.
The icon seen from below, those nailed feet raise
The eyes, somewhere up there, to meet love's gaze.