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# Imago Dei: Why Christians Should Believe in Abstract Entities

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**Abstract:** The notion of abstract entities is a popular philosophical position and has been since Plato. The Church, however, has struggled with this notion for centuries. Are abstract entities theologically appropriate? If so, how are they connected to God? Many Christian philosophers and theologians reject abstract entities on the grounds that they are inappropriate and unnecessary. I argue, however, that abstract entities are critical to understanding the doctrine of the *imago dei*, which is vitally connected to other important doctrines such as the Incarnation and soteriology. Without abstract entities, the doctrine of the *imago dei* must be rejected along with its implications. Consequently, Christians should embrace abstract entities or risk great theological harm.

The issue of the relationship between God and abstract entities has resurfaced recently. The question being asked is should Christians endorse the existence of such entities and in what manner do these entities exist. I propose to answer the first part of the question affirmatively. There is theological reason for Christians to accept the existence of abstract entities in some form. After briefly covering the issue surrounding God and abstract entities, I argue that the theological doctrine of the *imago dei* implies the existence of abstract entities and that Christians should embrace the notion of abstract entities in some form.

## God and Abstract Entities

Abstract entities, also known as universals, have long been suggested as a way of explaining the existence and sharing of properties among objects. Objects are said to exemplify these abstract entities in various ways so as to give the object structure. The existence of such entities is supported by their ability to explain the predication of one property among two objects, the empirical

resemblance of properties between objects, and abstract reference to certain properties that appear necessary but might not be physical-material in nature.<sup>1</sup> Thus, abstract entities are a philosophically powerful tool metaphysically and epistemologically. Christians are obviously philosophically committed to the existence of God. In orthodox theology, God is typically thought of as independent and self-sufficient, making Him supremely sovereign over reality. This is traditionally referred to as God's aseity. All that is distinct from God is therefore dependent on his creative and sustaining activity. Paul Gould states that this concept can be expressed in the following proposition of Absolute Dependency:

**AD:** God does not depend on anything distinct from Himself for His existing. Everything distinct from God depends on God's creative activity for its existing.

This concept applies easily to the universe. God creates the universe, but he exists either logically or temporally prior to and independent of it. There is, however, one thing that seems to challenge this proposition: the necessary existence of abstract entities.<sup>2</sup> Beginning with Plato, many philosophers have believed that certain abstract entities, or Forms, necessarily exist and can provide the metaphysical basis for all of reality. The existence of such entities raises the question of God's relationship with these abstract entities, particularly since his sovereignty and knowledge would be intimately connected with them. Gould presents this conflict by introducing his Inconsistent Triad:

- (1) Abstract entities exist necessarily (Platonism).
- (2) Abstract entities distinct from God are created by God and hence dependent.
- (3) If abstract entities exist necessarily, they are either independent or uncreated.<sup>3</sup>

One of these three positions must be rejected he claims. If God is dependent on these entities for his knowledge of reality, then it seems that God is dependent on something external to his being which he does not control.

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<sup>1</sup> J. P. Moreland, *Universals* (Chesham, UK: Acumen Publishing Limited., 2001), 1, 4-6.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Gould, "The Problem of God and Abstract Objects," *Philosophia Christi* 13(2) (2011): 256.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

The rejection of claim (2) is what Gould calls the Ultimacy Problem. Properties exist independently of God, and God essentially has properties. As a result, God's nature is derived or actualized by some other entity, namely abstract entities. God would then be dependent and subservient on something outside of himself for being who he is. God would not be the ultimate reality. On the other hand, the rejection of claim (3) raises questions concerning the dependency relation between God and abstract entities. How do these abstract entities depend upon God? The relation cannot be merely logical dependence where the existence of God entails the existence of abstract objects but not vice versa. The divine properties would exist logically prior to the abstract entities that ground them. Rather, it would be a mutual logical dependence where the existence of God entails the existence of abstract entities and vice versa. This implication, however, creates a further problem, which Gould calls the Dependency Problem.<sup>4</sup> Abstract entities would exist in the same *a se*, independent, and necessary manner as God. They would not need to depend on God for their existence; however, these abstract entities are supposed to be dependent on God for their existence since he is their creator. Thus, abstract entities may not be necessary but contingent. How then should this dependence relationship be understood? Should abstract entities be rejected altogether in order to uphold the sovereignty and aseity of God?

The Platonic Theist upholds the strong Platonic Theory of abstract entities.<sup>5</sup> A typical reason for this position is that propositions are claimed to be bearers of truth value because they are what sentences assert. Propositions are not sentences themselves, since the same proposition can be asserted by more than one sentence in both the same and different languages. Thus, propositions must be entities that exist independent of the mind. Platonic

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 261. Gould notes that there is a version of Platonic Theism, which he dubs Dependent Platonic Theism, which denies (3) instead of (2). Abstract entities are necessary, but they are created by God and dependent on him for their existence. A proponent of this view would be Rene Descartes. See Rene Descartes, *Oeuvres*, ed. C. Adam and P. Tammery (Paris: Vrin, 1964), I: 135, 147, 151, III: 648, IV: 110, VII: 64, 80, 116-18, 383, 436, VIII: 380, XI: 37; *Philosophical Works*, trans. E. Haldane and G. T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), I: 121, 192, II: 19-21, 226, 228, 251; *Philosophical Letters*, trans. A. Kenny (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), 11, 13, 14, 136, 151; Anthony Kenny, *God of the Philosophers* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1979), 17-22. Keith Yandell calls this position Theistic Emanationism. See Keith Yandell, "God and Propositions," *Philosophia Christi* 13 (2012): 283-84, and Keith Yandell, "God and Propositions," in *Beyond the Control of God?: Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects*, ed. Paul Gould (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 21-35. Peter van Inwagen holds that at least some abstract entities are uncreated. See his "Did God Create Shapes?" *Philosophia Christi* 17(2) (2016): 285-90.

Theists contend that exegetical evidence, like Col 1:16-17, seems to indicate that both the visible and invisible realities are created by God, but this implication is questionable. They claim that it is unlikely that the biblical authors or the Church Fathers had metaphysics in mind when this passage was written, so one may infer that this passage does not apply to Platonic entities like propositions.<sup>6</sup> Also, Platonic Theists advocate the claim that theories involving created abstract entities do not provide adequate interpretations of the notions of creation and dependence. As a result, they do not show that there is an incompatibility between God's sovereignty and the existence of independent abstract entities. Thus, it is not evident that theories of the creation of abstract entities are simpler than Platonic theories. It is contended that the view of Platonic Theism can be entirely consistent with the theistic claim that God is sovereign and exists *a se*.<sup>7</sup>

Believing that there are dependency issues with Platonic Theism, the Patristics and Medieval Scholastics developed a different Platonic theory that avoided this problem.<sup>8</sup> Abstract entities were located within the mind of God as divine ideas.<sup>9</sup> As divine ideas, abstract entities are as much a part of the

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<sup>6</sup> See Yandell, "God and Propositions," 276-77, and Scott Davison, "Could Abstract Objects Depend Upon God?" *Religious Studies* 27 (1991): 485, 488-89.

<sup>7</sup> Davison, 490-96.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Aquinas argues that if abstract entities reside external to God, then God would not have perfect intellect and would depend on something outside himself in order to know things. If Aquinas' contention that abstract entities affect God's existence is true, then Platonic Theism seems to imply that God is not the ultimate source of all things. He is dependent on something other than himself. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, vol. 1, trans. Anton Pegis (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 1.16.1-7, 1.51.4-6.

<sup>9</sup> See Augustine, *Eighty-three Questions*, *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 70, trans. David Mosher (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 79-81; see also Augustine's *De Trinitate*, in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 18, trans. Stephen McKenna (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), 9.6.9-11, 12.14.22-3, 12.15.24, and *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. Anna Benjamin and L. H. Hackstaff (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1964), 2.13, 2.8; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Blackfriars (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), 1a.15.1-2; 1a.16.1; 1a.16.2; 1a.16.5; 1a.16.7; 1a.16.8; Thomas Aquinas, *Gentiles*, 1.60-62; Thomas Aquinas, *Truth*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Mulligan (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), 1.2, 1.4, 1.7-8, 3.1-2. For contemporary discussions on the Catholic theory of the divine ideas, see also Joseph Koterski, *An Introduction to Medieval Philosophy* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 63-64; Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, book 1, vol.2 (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1985), 59-60, 154; Mark Jordan, "The Intelligibility of the World and the Divine Ideas in Aquinas," *The Review of Metaphysics* 38(1) (1984): 17, 19; and J. Thomas Bridges, "A Moderate Realist Perspective on God and Abstract Objects." *Philosophia Christi* 17(2) (2016): 277-84.

divine essence as the divine properties are, and they exist *a se* within the divine essence. As a result, Augustine calls them eternal, uncreated reasons.<sup>10</sup> These divine ideas are also considered to be exemplars for all aspects of reality and are the formal causes by which God creates.<sup>11</sup> Alvin Plantinga supports this theory of divine ideas by arguing such Platonic truths are based in the divine noetic activity since the divine ideas are metaphysical forms that define reality. As a result, God possesses the property of necessarily thinking the ideas he thinks since the things that he thinks are the ground for truth.<sup>12</sup>

Supporters of created abstract entities are not persuaded by this conceptualist move. Matthew Davidson sees three motivations a person can have for accepting a theory of created abstract entities rather than uncreated ones. First, Col 1:16-17 states that God is the creator of all things visible and invisible, and abstract entities fall into this purview of creation even though the biblical authors did not have them specifically in mind. Second, uncreated abstracts entities are a possible challenge to God's self-sufficiency. God does not need to depend on or look outside himself for knowledge and guidance in creation. Third, perfect being theology holds that it is more perfect to have everything that is distinct from oneself also be dependent on oneself.<sup>13</sup> A

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<sup>10</sup> Augustine, *Eighty-three Questions*, 79-81; Koterski, 67. Augustine notes that *formae* is the Latin translation of the Greek *ideis*. Plato's Forms are literally ideas that properly exist within a mind according to Augustine.

<sup>11</sup> Koterski, 74. See also Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names*, trans. C. E. Holt (New York: Macmillan Company, 1940), 5.1-10. See Anthony Kenny, *God of the Philosophers* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1979), 15-16.

<sup>12</sup> Plantinga states that that anti-Platonic philosophers tend to abandon Platonic realism in favor of antirealism because they cannot conceive how truths can be independent of the mind as Platonism claims. Platonism is what he calls realism run amok. Platonic truths, thus, cannot be independent of the mind, namely God's, as Platonism claims. For Plantinga, a proposition is true if and only if it is believed by God, and he assents to it. Propositions are not true because God believes them. Rather, God believes these propositions because they are true. See Alvin Plantinga, "How to be an Anti-Realist," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 56 (1) 1982: 68-70, and Plantinga, "Augustinian Christian Philosophy," *The Monist* 75 (3) (1992): 291-320. See also Greg Welty, "Truth as Divine Ideas: A Theistic Theory of the Property 'Truth'," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 47(1) (2004): 55-69, and "Theistic Conceptual Realism," in *Beyond the Control of God?: Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Entities*, ed. Paul Gould (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 81-96.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew Davidson, "A Demonstration Against Theistic Activism," *Religious Studies* 35 (1999): 278-79. Davidson argues that the creationist must reject a simple logical dependence between God and abstract entities. It implies that abstract entities entail God and vice versa without need for a creation. The creationist must also reject a non-annihilation dependence where an object's continued existence depends on another. Then

further reason for rejecting uncreated abstract entities is that if abstract entities are part of the divine nature, then God's being is dependent on things that have nothing to do with him or his being, like *Socrates is sitting* or *the property of being red*.<sup>14</sup> This consequence seems just as troubling as having God depend on entities that are external to and independent of his being. This is not to say that the concept of divine ideas as abstract entities is completely rejected, for many creationist philosophers have proposed created abstract entities as divine ideas. Instead of being an uncreated part of the divine nature, divine ideas are brought into being either necessarily or contingently via God's creative thinking.<sup>15</sup>

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God can destroy abstract entities but not create them. Third is the rejection of a conceptual dependence where abstract entities are understood only by first understanding God. This dependence is a semantical or epistemological relationship, and it is false. Causal dependence is all that is left. See Davidson, 280-82.

<sup>14</sup> This problem can be magnified if one accepts divine simplicity, making such propositions and properties identical to the divine nature. Thus, God is identical with *Socrates is sitting* and *the property of being red*. But how can the divine being be either a proposition or a property, particularly ones that neither reference him nor apply to him? It is one thing to say that God is identical to propositions that reference God, who can be their truthmaker and that God is identical to any possible proposition or property. However, if all propositions and properties are contained within and entailed by one massive proposition, such as *God is divine*, or property, such as *the property of being divine*, then perhaps God could be identical to *that* proposition and property without strictly being identical to *all* propositions and properties. See Aquinas, *Theologica*, 1a.15.2; Aquinas, *Truth*, 3.2; Copleston, 359-60; Aaron Martin, "Reckoning with Ross: Possibles, Divine Ideas, and Virtual Practical Knowledge," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 78 (2005): 195-98; Nicholas Wolterstorff, *On Universals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970) 286; Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2007; William Vallicella, "Divine Simplicity: A New Defense," *Faith and Philosophy* 9(4) (1992): 508-25.

<sup>15</sup> See Christopher Menzel, "Theism, Platonism, and the Metaphysics of Mathematics," *Faith and Philosophy* 4 (4) (1987): 365-82; Scott Davison, "Could Abstract Objects Depend Upon God?" *Religious Studies* 27 (1991): 485-97; Michael Bergmann and Jeffery Brower, "A Theistic Argument Against Platonism (and in Support of Truthmakers and Divine Simplicity)," in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, ed. Dean Zimmerman, vol. 2 (New York: University of Oxford Press, 2006), 357-86; Thomas Morris, *Anselmian Explorations* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 161-78; Richard Davis, *The Metaphysics of Theism and Modality*, NY: Peter Land, 2001; Richard Davis, "God and the Platonic Horde: a Defense of Limited Conceptualism," *Philosophia Christi* 13(2) (2011): 289-303; and Paul Gould and Richard Davis, "Modified Theistic Activism," in *Beyond the Control of God?: Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Entities*, ed. Paul Gould (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 51-64.

Others have completely rejected the existence of abstract entities because of the various issues and concerns presented here.<sup>16</sup> William Lane Craig argues for two reasons to accept metaphysical nominalism. First, abstract entities are queer entities that cause all sorts of problems. They are best discarded. Secondly, creation *ex nihilo* seems to presume the creation of all objects, even abstract entities, and thus presumes the truth of nominalism.<sup>17</sup> As Brian Leftow asserts, all entities are concrete particulars, and God possesses the ultimate scheme of classification for these concrete particulars. He is the ultimate ground for mind-causation of properties (rather than properties causing mental recognition), and he is the ground for applying concepts to objects (rather than objects being the ground for concepts).<sup>18</sup> By removing abstract entities from the equation, one no longer has to contend with their relationship to God or even to reality itself escaping the problems Gould presents.

### The Imago Dei

The argument over the theological viability of abstract entities is certainly challenging and complex. What then can be said to help resolve the issue one way or the other? Should Christian hold to the existence of abstract entities or find them theologically offensive? It is here that I should like to expand on recent comments in this debate by focusing on the theological doctrine of the *imago dei*. In critiquing the nominalist position, J. Thomas Bridges asserts that without universal abstract entities it is difficult to give a coherent account of “humanity” and the various theological doctrines with which it is involved, such as people’s shared nature with Adam, Christ’s

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<sup>16</sup> See Brian Leftow, “God and the Problem of Universals,” in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, ed. Dean Zimmerman, vol. 2 (New York: University of Oxford Press, 2006), 325-56; Brian Leftow, “Is God an Abstract Object?” *Nous* 24(4) (1990): 581-598; William Lane Craig, “A Nominalist Perspective on God and Abstract Objects,” *Philosophia Christi* 13(2) (2011): 305-18; William Lane Craig, “Nominalism and Divine Aseity,” *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion* 4 (2011): 44-65; Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, *Creation Out of Nothing* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 167-96; William Lane Craig, “Anti-Platonism,” in *Beyond the Control of God?: Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Entities*, ed. Paul Gould (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 113-26; and William Lane Craig, “God and Abstract Objects,” *Philosophia Christi* 17(2) (2016): 269-76.

<sup>17</sup> Craig, “Nominalism and Divine Aseity,” 44-65; Craig and Copan, 173; Craig, “A Nominalist Perspective on God and Abstract Objects,” 305-06. The argument of queerness goes both ways. All objects can be queer in the hands of a metaphysician. Second, there is no presumption for nominalism, since other theories can accommodate traditional theistic claims. See Gould, “God and Abstract Objects,” 271-74.

<sup>18</sup> Leftow, “God and the Problem of Universals,” 339-47.



incarnation, and soteriology.<sup>19</sup> It is Bridges contention that only abstract entities of some kind can do the explanatory lifting necessary for these doctrines to make sense. It is here I believe that the doctrine of the *imago dei* comes into play and demonstrates Bridges' point. Because of the doctrine of the *imago dei*, abstract entities are needed theologically.

Simply put, the doctrine of the *imago dei* is the claim that all human beings have a special likeness to God that sets humanity apart in nature. The concept of the image of God is critical because it is what makes human beings human. No other creature is referred to in this manner.<sup>20</sup> This doctrine is not explicitly mentioned often in the Bible, but it is implied in other places. It is mentioned only three times in the Old Testament: Gen 1:26-27, 5:1, and 9:6. In these verses, it is indicated by this doctrine that God is above nature and humanity as the creator. Humanity is a part of nature but is lifted up above the plane of nature to some degree via his special creation and connection with God. This specialness is universal to all races and is held by women as well. Further, the image is still present in sinful man due to its connected to the heinous crime of murder and is given as the justification by God for the use of capital punishment.<sup>21</sup> For the Hebrews, it was the ability to relate to God but not a fleshed out notion of what this ability involves. The image is to be found chiefly in the spiritual part of man's nature (as seen by the use of the word *ruach* for both God and man's spirit) though this fact will certainly leave trace imprints upon man's physical parts as well.<sup>22</sup> In the New Testament, there are three main senses of the *imago dei*: to describe Christ's singular dignity and divine Sonship, to describe the likeness the believer enters into upon faith in Christ, and to describe man's humanity.<sup>23</sup> Paul states in 2 Cor. 4:4 that Christ is the perfect image of God, so looking at Christ is to look at God, which is later confirmed by verse six. This same idea can also be found in Col 1:15, John 14:8-9, and Heb 1:3. These verses emphasize Christ and his unique status linking the *imago dei* to the Incarnation.<sup>24</sup> This image is restored via Christ's

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<sup>19</sup> Bridges, 280.

<sup>20</sup> Millard Erickson. *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 518.

<sup>21</sup> Erickson, 519-20; David Cairns, *The Image of God in Man* (London: SCM Press, 1952), 19-21; Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 13-17, 19-20. The notion that mankind still possesses the image is also claimed in James 3 where cursing a man is said to be heinous because of the image of God.

<sup>22</sup> Cairns, 22-27.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>24</sup> Hoekema, 21-22.

salvation as expressed in Rom 8:29, 2 Cor 3:18, Eph 4:23-24, and Col 3:10 where the elect are said to be made in the image of Christ who is the perfect image of God. This restoration of the image affects both mankind's spiritual and physical parts via the resurrection. The image of God is thus the purpose of mankind and is bound up in the character of mankind's existence.<sup>25</sup>

As is evident, the doctrine of the *imago dei* has major theological implications; however, there has always been the nagging question of exactly what aspect of humanity the doctrine encompasses. This question has led to three major views regarding the doctrine of the *imago dei*. The first, oldest, and most common of the views is the substantive view which locates the image in a quality of human beings. This view typically borrows from the Greek worldview by equating the image with the possession of reason and the ability to think as this quality is something that is believed to be universal to man and lacked by other beings in the universe. This view is seen in every Christian writer up to Aquinas.<sup>26</sup> John Calvin advances a similar view by arguing that the soul, the seat of which is to be found in the rational and intelligent mind, is the image of God possessed by all human beings. He argues that the first man truly resembled his Creator in his original integrity when he possessed a right understanding, affections regulated by reason, and his senses were governed in proper order; however, there is no part of man that is not arrayed with some of the divine glory, even his physical nature. God endowed humanity with a rational mind by which they determine good and evil, what they ought to do, and the will to follow reason so that they may govern their life on earth as well as ascend to eternal felicity with God, and one can know what the image is by looking to what Christ's salvation restores in humanity.<sup>27</sup> Whether it is the ability to reason or the immaterial soul, all human beings possess some quality(s) that make them like God which other natural entities do not. Thus, the *imago dei* is to be found in the very substance of mankind as something he possesses.

More contemporary theologians have developed a second view of the *imago dei* where the image is seen as the ability to have a relationship with God (and also with man), and human beings display that image when they are in those relationships. This relational view has several basic premises. First, the image is to be understood via the life of Christ, which one obtains via

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<sup>25</sup> Erickson, 519-20; Hoekema, 23-24; Cairns, 37-39, 51-52.

<sup>26</sup> Erickson, 521; Cairns, 112-13; Hoekema, 36-37. For a fully developed expression of this view, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Blackfriars (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), 1a.93.1-5.

<sup>27</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, trans. John Allen (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Education, 1928), 1.XV.2-4 and 8.

revelation. Second, the image is not a static quality but a dynamic relationship involving both the human to God and human to human aspect. Third, the image is universal and found in all human beings even sinful ones. Fourth, no conclusion can or need be made regarding what quality is needed for a relationship.<sup>28</sup> This view is represented by theologians such as Emil Brunner and Karl Barth. Brunner argues for the notion that all human beings possess the same nature (relational before God), and it is not spoiled by sin since the ability to sin presupposes this nature. This formal nature of relationship with God is never lost since one is always in some sort of relationship with God the Creator. On the other hand, the material nature of one's relationship with God is one's current obedient relationship with God which may or may not be occurring properly, yet one always has a responsibility towards God. As a result, human beings are always related to and responsible to God whether they reflect the image perfectly or not.<sup>29</sup> Barth, like Brunner, has a relational view where the image is still present in human beings but is found in both the vertical relationship with God and the horizontal relationship with man. Both are part of what it means to be human as relationship is humanity's design and purpose as existence is confrontation with another. This image is best seen through Jesus who perfectly expressed these relationships, not by examining fallen humanity who is out of harmony with this purpose.<sup>30</sup> Thus, Barth heavily emphasizes revelation as the means to understanding human nature and the *imago dei*. As a result, the relational view downplays if not outright rejects the substantive view of the divine image. If any human qualities do play a part, they are merely functional in achieving relationship and not representative of the image itself.

A final view on the doctrine of the *imago dei* is the functional view. The functional view holds that the image is neither a quality nor a relationship but is a function, something human beings do. This function is typically identified as mankind's dominion over nature. It is argued that it is more than coincidence that the creation of the image is closely tied to the command of dominion in Genesis. Mankind is commanded to exercise dominion over the earth just as God exercises dominion over all creation. Only human beings can exercise this dominion. As a result, this function of dominion reflects God's

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<sup>28</sup> Erickson, 524, 526-27.

<sup>29</sup> See Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1947), and *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption* (London: Lutterworth, 1952).

<sup>30</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1958), 3.1-2

Lordship in man and over all things.<sup>31</sup> The function of dominion is seen as being universal to and exercised by all human beings whereas the ability and exercising of reason and relationship to God are not due to the effects of sin.

While all of these views certainly play a part in the doctrine of the *imago dei*, it is the substantive view that is primary to understanding this doctrine. As was stated previously, the divine image is universal to the human race. It has not been lost for it is inseparably connected to humanity and intertwined with humanity's destiny. Further, the divine image is not present to a greater degree in some persons and less in others nor is the image correlated with some variable that may or may not be actualized. In fact, the *imago dei* appears to precede any such variable thus making it primarily substantive in nature. The other views focus on the consequences of bearing the image rather than getting to the root of the image. Consequently, the image must be (primarily if not exclusively) a quality or set of qualities that allow for relationship and function to take place, such as personality, intelligence, thinking, and will.<sup>32</sup> The image is both a structural and function thing. Just as an eagle flies as one of its functions it cannot do so without its wings, one of its structures. Human beings were created to function in relationship, worship, and love of God but cannot do so without certain structural functions.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the structural and substantive view must be the primary location of the *imago dei* in human beings so that they may exercise relationship with God and others as well as exercise the function of dominion over the earth.

This conclusion has great implications for the debate over abstract entities. Since the *imago dei* is universal to all human beings, then the qualities and properties that comprise the divine image must be present in all human beings. As a result, all human beings share and exemplify certain properties and functions. This sharing and exemplification of properties can only take place if there are multiply exemplifiable abstract entities. Nominalism does not possess the ontological ability to account for these shared qualities. In fact, it must outright reject the multiple exemplifications of properties among human beings. All concrete particulars are unique and share nothing in common with other concrete particulars. Any resemblance is merely appearance, not reality. "Divine image" and "humanity" are just words people use to understand and classify things. They are not real objects and have no actual bearing on the

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<sup>31</sup> See G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962); Leonard Verduin, *Somewhat Less Than God: the Biblical View of Man* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970); and Norman Snaith, "The Image of God." *Expository Times* 86(1) (1974): 24.

<sup>32</sup> Erickson, 532-33.

<sup>33</sup> Hoekema, 69-70.

ontological structure of reality. As a result, nominalism cannot provide a ground for the doctrine of the *imago dei* since there is no such thing ontologically speaking. Consequently, the Christian nominalist must reject the biblical doctrine of the *imago dei* along with its various theological implications bringing great theological harm. Human beings do not actually share a common nature with each other and God. The incarnate Christ is not really like any human person since there is no common human nature for him to take on. In fact, he may not even be incarnate at all! Further, Christ cannot die in humanity's place and redeem them since he himself shares nothing in common with any human person. There is no *humanity* or *divine image* to redeem since such objects do not actually exist. Given the importance of the doctrine of *imago dei* in understanding not only humanity but also the doctrine of God, the Incarnation, and soteriology, Christians should reject nominalism and embrace the existence of abstract entities in some form.

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