

# Calvin and Later Reformed Theologians on the Image of God

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## Abstract

Even though John Calvin, in contrast with other theologians, presented a biblical view of the image of God, several aspects of his thought raise questions, including his language about the body as the prison of the human soul and his view of women as the image of God in a subsidiary sense. Several Reformed theologians have learned from Calvin's understanding of the *imago Dei* and corrected his concept by refining it. This paper proposes a theological development in our understanding of the *imago Dei*.

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**T**his article presents how the *imago Dei* developed from the medieval understanding through Calvin's theological contributions, leading on to later Reformed presentations. Rather than an ahistorical approach to Calvin, his theological development will be considered from a Reformed perspective.

## I. Calvin's Contribution to the understanding of the Imago Dei

As is the case with other theological themes, Calvin's formulation of the *imago Dei* is an important contribution to the development of theology.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a very thorough and precise investigation of this issue, see Jason Van Vliet, *Children of God: The Imago Dei in John Calvin and His Context* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht,

The following points are important for our understanding of this concept.

Firstly, for Calvin “image” and “likeness” mean the same thing. This is not typically a Calvinian but a Protestant contribution, for both Calvin and Luther, as well as many of their followers, are of the same opinion.<sup>2</sup> They differ from the Roman Catholic understanding of the “image” and the “likeness” of God, as do some Jewish scholars. So this is rather a Judeo-Protestant contribution to the doctrine of the *imago Dei*.

Secondly, Calvin provides a foundation for the *imago Dei* as a reflection of God. He describes the *imago Dei* in Adam as “mirroring” God’s righteousness: “Adam was at first created in the image of God, so that he *might reflect, as in a mirror*, the righteousness of God.”<sup>3</sup> In order to have a rounded definition of “image” we have to think of “the reflection of God’s glory.”<sup>4</sup>

Thirdly, Calvin finds the *imago Dei* in the whole person, a view especially opposed to that of Andreas Osiander (1498–1552). Calvin says, for example, that “there was no part of man, not even the body itself, in which some sparks did not glow.”<sup>5</sup> This is why he says in the first part of his discussion of the *imago Dei* in the *Institutes* that “God’s glory shines forth in the outer man.”<sup>6</sup> The *imago Dei* concerns the whole person, despite Calvin’s tendency to see the soul as being superior to the body. In this respect, Calvin is more biblical than earlier theologians, from Irenaeus to Abelard, and his contemporaries, such as Bullinger and Melancthon.<sup>7</sup>

Fourthly, Calvin describes the *imago Dei* in narrower and broader senses, saying that it “can be nowhere better recognized than from the restoration of his corrupted nature.”<sup>8</sup> In this respect Calvin draws out true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness from Colossians 3:10, as well as Ephesians 4:24, as the “original righteousness” (*justitia originale*) that was totally destroyed in

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<sup>2</sup> For Martin Luther’s view of the image of God, see his *Lectures on Genesis*, in *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. George V. Schick (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), 1:60ff. Also Philip E. Hughes, *The True Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 7, 67; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 203–4; Seung-Goo Lee, *What Is the Christian World-View?* Revised Korean edition (Seoul: SFC, 2005), 129.

<sup>3</sup> *Calvin’s Commentaries*, 22 vols. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), Eph 4:24 (296); cf. 2 Cor 3:18 (49). Henceforth “Calvin, *Comm.*,” followed, as here, by the Scripture reference and the page number in parentheses.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.15.4 (189). Henceforth Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.4 (189). The number in parentheses is the page number of the Battles edition. See also Calvin, *Comm.* Col 3:10 (211–12), *Comm.* 1 Cor 11:7 (357).

<sup>5</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.3 (188).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.15.3 (186).

<sup>7</sup> For this, see Van Vliet, *Children of God*, 258.

<sup>8</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.4 (189).

the fall of Adam but restored in Christ.<sup>9</sup> But Calvin does not think that “original righteousness” alone is the *imago Dei*, for he says “these forms of speaking are synecdoches.”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, “this likeness ought to be sought only in those marks of excellence with which God had distinguished Adam over all other living creatures,”<sup>11</sup> and “the likeness of God extends to the whole excellence by which man’s nature towers over all the kinds of living creatures.”<sup>12</sup>

Finally, Calvin makes a redemptive-historical presentation of the *imago Dei*, beginning by considering the original state. Calvin then emphasizes that the original upright nature in which the human being was created is marred by sin, evidenced in the corruption and deformity of our nature: “There is no doubt that Adam, when he fell from his [original] state, was by this defection alienated from God.”<sup>13</sup> This is Adam’s spiritual death. “God’s image was not totally annihilated and destroyed in him, yet it was so corrupted that whatever remains is frightful deformity (*horrenda sit deformitas*).”<sup>14</sup> However, he adds, “We are restored by this regeneration through the benefit of Christ into the righteousness of God; from which we had fallen through Adam.”<sup>15</sup> And again, “Therefore in some part it [the image of God] now is manifest in the elect, in so far as they have been reborn in the spirit; but it will attain its full splendor in heaven.”<sup>16</sup> We can now know what that original state was like and what it is to be the image of God now only on the basis of restoration through the work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Hence it is clear that Calvin’s concept of the *imago Dei* is a redemptive-historical one.<sup>17</sup>

## II. *Problematic Aspects of Calvin’s Concept of the Imago Dei*

Nobody, however, has a complete understanding of the themes of the *loci communes*, and Calvin’s concept of the *imago Dei* is a case in point, since he was a child of his times, as the following considerations illustrate.

### 1. *The Soul as the Primary Seat of the Imago Dei*

In spite of Calvin’s contribution of finding the *imago Dei* in the whole person, he emphasizes that the soul is the primary seat of the *imago Dei*:

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Calvin, *Comm. Gen* 1:26 (94). See also *Institutes*, 1.15.4 (189–90).

<sup>10</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.4 (189). See also *Comm. Gen* 1:26 (94).

<sup>11</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 2.12.6 (471).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.15.3 (188).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.15.4 (189).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.3.9 (601).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.15.4 (190).

<sup>17</sup> See also Van Vliet, *Children of God*, 259.

“*The primary seat of the divine image is in the mind and heart, or in the soul and its powers.*”<sup>18</sup> He adds, “Therefore, although the soul is not man, yet it is not absurd for man, in respect to his soul, to be called God’s image,”<sup>19</sup> and again, “For although God’s glory shines forth in the outer man, yet there is no doubt that the proper seat of his image is in the soul.”<sup>20</sup> For Calvin, therefore, “the soul and its endowments—is called God’s image.”<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps Calvin’s assertions that “the spirit must be the seat of this intelligence”<sup>22</sup> and that “God’s image is properly to be sought within him, not outside him, indeed, it is an inner good of the soul”<sup>23</sup> also reflect this perspective. He explains in many places that the function of the soul is to understand and to will: “God’s image was visible in the light of the mind, in the uprightness of heart, and in the soundness of all the parts.”<sup>24</sup> So his explanation of the *imago Dei* is related to what Thomas Aquinas thought of the *imago Dei*, as both of them closely related the image of God to the soundness of the mind and the uprightness of the heart. Observe Calvin’s following description of Adam: “The integrity with which Adam was endowed is expressed by this word [*imago*], when he had full possession of right understanding, when he had his affection kept within the bounds of reason, all his senses tempered in right order, and he truly referred his excellence to exceptional gifts bestowed upon him by his Maker.”<sup>25</sup> However Calvin’s position is more redemptive-historical than that of Thomas, who had a more static understanding of the image of God, failing to recognize the noetic effects of sin, whereas Calvin is adamant on this point.

Calvin was emphatic about the spiritual aspect of the *imago Dei* and goes so far as to affirm that it is unscriptural to find the *imago* in the body.<sup>26</sup> But there is a more serious problem in Calvin’s thought at this point.

## **2. The Soul as the “Nobler Part” and the Body as “Prison of the Soul”**

Calvin calls the soul “the principal part” of the human being, “his nobler part.” Calvin even says that “the soul is *endowed with essence*” and what the body does is “*a motion devoid of essence.*”<sup>27</sup> Even though we can understand

<sup>18</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.3 (188).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.15.3 (186).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.15.3 (188).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.15.2 (185).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.15.4 (190).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.15.4 (189).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.15.3 (188); this citation contains assertions with Platonic connotations.

<sup>26</sup> Calvin, *Comm. Gen* 1:26 (94).

<sup>27</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.2 (184–85).

why he said this from the context, it is quite natural to ask what he had in mind. This question reaches its high point on the many occasions when he uses the expression “prison of the body”:

For so long as we live cooped up in this prison of our body, traces of sin will dwell in us; but if we faithfully hold fast to the promise given us by God in baptism, they shall not dominate or rule.<sup>28</sup>

But no one in this earthly prison of the body has sufficient strength to press on with due eagerness, and weakness so weighs down the greater number that, with wavering and limping and even creeping along the ground, they move at a feeble rate.<sup>29</sup>

Since we hope for what we do not see [Rom. 8:25], and, as is elsewhere stated, “faith is the indication of things unseen” [Heb. 11:1], so long as we are confined in the prison house of the flesh (*carnis ergastulo ... inclusi*), “we are away from the Lord” [2 Cor. 5:6].<sup>30</sup>

Following this line of thinking, Calvin even said that “when the soul is freed from the prison house of the body, God is its perpetual guardian,” and that “unless souls survive when freed from the prison house of their bodies, it would be absurd for Christ to induce the soul of Lazarus as enjoying bliss in Abraham’s bosom.”<sup>31</sup> This Pythagorean and Platonic expression<sup>32</sup> comes to Calvin through Neoplatonism and Augustine. This is vivid evidence that Calvin was of his time. He even uses the words that look like what we can find in the writings of Plato: “If to be freed from the body is to be released into perfect freedom, what else is the body but a prison?”<sup>33</sup>

In the same way Calvin spoke of human body as “an earthly vessel”: “God willed it [the body] to be the abode of an immortal spirit.”<sup>34</sup> For Calvin, the body is the habitation of the nobler part of human being, the soul.<sup>35</sup> He could also say that the regeneration of the soul does not affect the body before the resurrection.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 4.18 (98); Calvin, *Institutes* 4.15.11 (1312).

<sup>29</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 3.6.5 (689).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.25.1 (987).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.15.2 (184, 186).

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Plato, *Phaedo*, 62 B, 81 E, 82 E, 83 A; *Cratylus*, 400.

<sup>33</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 3.9.4 (716). Cf. Plato. *Phaedo* 64 A, 80 E. For this I rely on information provided by Battles in his edition.

<sup>34</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.1 (184).

<sup>35</sup> For a good discussion that for Calvin the body is basically the habitation of the soul, see Margaret R. Miles, “Theology, Anthropology, and the Human Body in Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*,” *Harvard Theological Review* 74.3 (1981), 310–11.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 311 on this point. When Miles quotes *Institutes* 2.3.1 saying that “he is not teaching a rebirth as regards the body” (p. 311, n. 42), she fails to respect the context of the passage.

In many places Calvin treats the body negatively or regards it as something evil that must be checked. But when he refers to the resurrected body, this negative approach is overcome. In this sense, Jason Van Vliet is quite right when he says that “Calvin the reformer is not as negative about the body as Plato the philosopher was.”<sup>37</sup> However, some Platonistic expressions are still there, even though they are marginal.

### 3. Angels as Also Created According to God’s Image

Although Calvin is more cautious than Thomas Aquinas,<sup>38</sup> he thinks that angels are also created in the image of God and so stands in the same tradition:

And indeed, we ought not to deny that angels were created according to God’s likeness, inasmuch as our highest perfection, as Christ testifies, will be to become like them [Matt. 22:30]. But by this particular title Moses rightly commends God’s grace toward us, especially when he compares only the visible creatures with man.<sup>39</sup>

In spite of Calvin’s caution and his desire to be biblical, it cannot be denied that he says that “the dignity that had been conferred upon man belonged also to the angels. . . . The image of God belongs to them [angels] also.”<sup>40</sup>

### 4. Woman as the Image of God in a Secondary Degree

Against the opinion to the contrary, Calvin makes it clear that he considers woman to be created in the image of God.<sup>41</sup> However, he claims that the woman is the image of God “in a secondary degree” (*secundo gradu*).<sup>42</sup>

What does he mean by this secondary degree? Calvin seeks to take into account the context of 1 Corinthians 11:7. But he takes the expression “man is the image and glory of God” *too* literally when he says that “there is some sense in which woman does not share” the image of God.<sup>43</sup> He adds, “But the statement in which man alone is called by Paul ‘the image and glory of God’ and woman excluded from this place of honor [the image of God] is

<sup>37</sup> Van Vliet, *Children of God*, 259.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.93.3. Here Thomas says that the image of God is found more perfectly in angels, since the intelligence of angels is more perfect than the intelligence of human beings. For a discussion and critique of this point, see Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 36.

<sup>39</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.3 (188–89).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.12.6 (471). Calvin uses image sometimes in the less technical sense of a reflection or mirror of God’s character. Contrast this with later Reformed theologians’ views.

<sup>41</sup> See Calvin, *Comm.* Gen 1:27 (97); *Institutes* 1.15.4 (190); and *Comm.* 1 Cor 11:7 (232).

<sup>42</sup> Calvin, *Comm.* Gen 2:18 (129).

<sup>43</sup> John L. Thompson, “*Creatura as Imagem Dei, Licet Secundo Gradu*: Woman as the Image of God According to John Calvin,” *Harvard Theological Review* 81.2 (1988): 134–35.

clearly to be restricted, as the context shows, to the political order.”<sup>44</sup> This is why in his letter to Bullinger he says, “A gynecocracy ... is like tyranny, which is to be endured until it is overthrown by God.”<sup>45</sup> He also says, “Because [female government] deviates from the first and original order of nature, it ought to be counted among those punishments which are inflicted upon mankind for neglecting [that order], just like slavery.”<sup>46</sup> It is clear that he excludes women from the honor of imaging God in some aspects of life. He “excludes woman from the image of God only with respect to ‘the political order’ (*ad ordinem politicum*) or ‘the domestic state’ (*oeconomicum statum*) or ‘the conjugal order’ (*ad ordinem coniugalem*).”<sup>47</sup>

It is, however, an open question whether this scriptural passage (1 Cor 11:7) has a connotation that excludes woman from the image of God in any sense. It deals with the question of the headship of the male representative of humanity. We can interpret this passage as presupposing that human beings—whether male or female—are all created in the image of God. Indeed, there is room for interpreting Calvin’s words in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:7 as supposing that all human beings are created in the image of God. From this perspective woman is equal with man in God’s eternal design and shares the image of God with man. Only from the human perspective related to the present life (*ad praesentam vitam*) does Calvin emphasize male headship.<sup>48</sup>

In this sense, Mary Potter’s discussion of Calvin’s shifting theological perspectives in his concept of the *imago Dei* is worth considering.<sup>49</sup> For, according to Calvin, the present order demanding the subordination of woman is “part of the form of this world which is passing.”<sup>50</sup> This is a better interpretation of Calvin’s ideas than that of John Thompson, who suggests that Calvin has two different definitions of the *imago Dei*: “Calvin, in fact,

<sup>44</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.4 (190).

<sup>45</sup> Calvin’s Letter to Bullinger [3 May 1554], quoted in Thompson, “*Creata*,” 137, n. 38.

<sup>46</sup> Calvin’s Letter to Cecil [May 1559], quoted in Thompson, “*Creata*,” 137, n. 38.

<sup>47</sup> Thompson, “*Creata*,” 131. I follow Thompson’s discussion on this point. These three phrases come from respectively Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.4 (190); *Comm. Gen* 1:26 (96); and *Comm. 1 Cor* 11:7 (232).

<sup>48</sup> The human perspective that is related to the present life does not have any meaning in eternity. For example, Calvin makes it clear that the marriage relationship has legal effects only in this world. For a good discussion on this point in the thought of Calvin, see Heinrich Quistorp, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Last Things*, trans. Harold Knight (Richmond: John Knox, 1955), 175: “[Marriage] is merely a temporal, not an eternal, fellowship”; Jane Dempsey Douglas, *Women, Freedom, and Calvin* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 34.

<sup>49</sup> Mary Potter, “Gender Equality and Gender Hierarchy in Calvin’s Theology,” *Signs* 2 (1986): 731–32, quoted in Thompson, “*Creata*,” 132, n. 25.

<sup>50</sup> Calvin, *Serm.* 1 Cor 11:4–10, quoted in Thompson, “*Creata*,” 140.

has two distinct definitions of *imago Dei*. The first pertains equally to man and woman and has to do with the invisible, ‘inner good of the soul.’ ... Calvin’s second definition of *imago dei* pertains exclusively to man.”<sup>51</sup>

F. F. Bruce’s explanation of this passage contains a good insight: “Paul does not deny that woman also bears the image of God; indeed, he implies that she does by carefully avoiding complete parallelism in the following statement, ‘woman is the glory of man.’”<sup>52</sup>

In spite of his efforts to be faithful to scriptural ideas, Calvin appears to speak of woman in a demeaning way. Although he sets a time limit for this situation (“till the end of the world”), it is true that he says that “woman is a part of and like an accessory to man,”<sup>53</sup> and that “woman is by nature ... born to obey.”<sup>54</sup> In some aspects of life man is superior to woman and in some sense woman does not fully bear the image of God. This is another problematic aspect of Calvin’s concept of the *imago Dei*.

### III. *The Later Reformed Imago Dei Developed from Calvin*

Later Reformed theologians are not universally agreed in their explanations of the *imago Dei*, as might be expected. Several of them, however, do develop the Reformed tradition in a biblical way in their doctrines of the *imago Dei*. They tackle vulnerable aspects of Calvin’s thought by using what they learned from him and following him consistently to a logical conclusion. Four contributions are thus made to our understanding of the *imago Dei*.

#### 1. *The Imago Dei as the Whole Person*

Several later Reformed theologians are consistent in saying that the whole man is the *imago Dei*. Herman Bavinck is representative of this view:

a human being does not [simply] *bear* or *have* the image of God but ... he or she *is* the image of God. ... It follows from the doctrine of human creation in the image of God that this image extends to the whole person. Nothing in a human being is excluded from the image of God. While all creatures display *vestiges* [traces] of God, only a human being is the *imago* of God. And he is such totally, in soul and body, in

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<sup>51</sup> Thompson, “*Creata*,” 133. See also 142–43, where Thompson suggests that there is, for Calvin, “the *imago* as spiritual possession of both male and female” and also “the *imago* as the external possession of the male alone,” which is “a penultimate institution.”

<sup>52</sup> F. F. Bruce, *I and II Corinthians*, New Century Bible (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1971; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 105.

<sup>53</sup> Calvin, *Serm.* 1 Tim 2:13–15, translated and quoted by Douglas, *Women, Freedom, and Calvin*, 55–56.

<sup>54</sup> Calvin, *Comm.* 1 Tim 2:12 (67–68).

all his faculties and powers, in all conditions and relations. Man is the image of God because and insofar as he is truly human, and he is truly and essentially human because, and to the extent that, he is the image of God.<sup>55</sup>

In this way Bavinck makes it clear that both the human body and soul belong to the *imago Dei*. In another place he says, “Even the body is not excluded from the image of God.”<sup>56</sup> Again, critically alluding to Calvin’s view of the body, he says,

The human body belongs integrally to the image of God. ... The body is not a prison, but a marvelous piece of art from the hand of God Almighty, and just as constitutive for the essence of humanity as the soul. ... It is so integrally and essentially a part of our humanity that, though violently torn from the soul [in death] by sin, it will be reunited with it in the resurrection of the dead.<sup>57</sup>

For Bavinck, as we can clearly see, “the whole human person is the image of the whole Deity.”<sup>58</sup> In other words, “the whole human being is image and likeness of God, in soul and body, in all human faculties, powers, and gifts. Nothing in humanity is excluded from God’s image.”<sup>59</sup>

Francis Nigel Lee, a South African Reformed theologian now living in Australia, also makes this point clear. Following Bavinck, Lee says, “We would expect the image of God to cover the whole man, body *and* soul.”<sup>60</sup> Lee adds the following explanation:

The Bible teaches that man *is* the image of God, so that the whole man is the whole image, and the whole image is the whole man. Man does not just *bear* that image, as a porter bears a burden, for the image is not something *tacked onto* man as an afterthought, as it were, as if man ever did or ever could exist for a single second *without* the image. Nor is the image part of God, or only a reflection of *some* of the attributes of God, so that man only resembles God in *some* respects. No, rather does man resemble God in *all* aspects: *Everything* God has, man has too; but everything God has in a creative and independent way, man has only in a dependent and *creaturely* way.<sup>61</sup>

Together with Bavinck, Lee clearly maintains that human body is included in the image of God.

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<sup>55</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation*, trans. John Vriend, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 554–55.

<sup>56</sup> Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 212.

<sup>57</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:559.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:533.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:561.

<sup>60</sup> Francis Nigel Lee, *The Origin and Destiny of Man* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977), 34.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

John Murray also says that people wrongly relate the *imago Dei* only to the soul, for God has no body: “But it is man in his unity and integrity who is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26, 27; 2:7; 9:6). Man is body, and it is not possible to exclude man in this identity from the scope of that which defines his identity, the image of God.”<sup>62</sup>

Louis Berkhof, introducing Francis Turretin’s understanding of the *imago Dei*, is also of the opinion that the image consists in the soul or spirit of man, in the psychical powers or faculties of man as a rational being in the knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, and in man’s bodily dominion over the earth.<sup>63</sup>

Anthony Hoekema, also agreeing with Bavinck, says, “If it is true that the whole person is the image of God, we must also include the body as part of the image. . . . When we think of man in connection with the various relationships in which he functions, we are confirmed in the conclusion that the image of God in man does not concern only a part (the ‘soul’ or the ‘spiritual’ aspect) but the entire person.”<sup>64</sup> It is true that not all of the later Reformed theologians are very clear on this point.<sup>65</sup> But there are many Reformed theologians who belong to the mainline Reformed party who are developing their concept of the *imago Dei* in a way that enables them to overcome Calvin’s ambiguous approach to the *imago Dei*.

## 2. A Positive Understanding of the Human Body

There are many later Reformed theologians who have completely overcome the Neoplatonic phrase “the body as the prison house of the soul”—and the dualistic tendency that can be developed from such a phrase—and speak of man as a psychosomatic unity.<sup>66</sup> Hence the ultimate state of the true believer is that of resurrection, not of uniquely spiritual existence in heaven. These

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<sup>62</sup> John Murray, “Man in the Image of God,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 2, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 39.

<sup>63</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 207.

<sup>64</sup> Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 68.

<sup>65</sup> For Reformed theologians who hold another view, see J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian View of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), 169 (= *The Christian View of Man* [London: Banner of Truth, 1965], 145), who holds that the image of God refers to man’s soul. Ursinus, Polanus, Leydecker, Wollebianus, A. Diest, Marck, and Walaeus held a view similar to Machen’s. Cf. Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: Allen & Unwin, 1950; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 234–37. Mastricht, Martinus, and Trelcatius found the image of God primarily in the soul, but also in the body as well (pp. 236–37).

<sup>66</sup> See especially John Murray, “Trichotomy,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 2:33; Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 217–18; and Henry Stob, *Ethical Reflection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 226.

theologians affirm that the intermediate state where human beings do not have a body is “incomplete and provisional.”<sup>67</sup>

It is certain that later Reformed theologians highlight the positive nature of the human body, considering the body from the light of creation and also from the perspective of resurrection.

### 3. *Imago Dei in the Narrower and Broader Sense*

Most later Reformed theologians, following Calvin, consistently speak of the double aspect of the *imago Dei* in their presentation, indicating true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, as well as the rest of the image of God. Unlike the ideas of the *imago Dei* as the whole person and of the human body as a positive thing, this is taken from what Calvin suggested and developed with greater clarity. In the narrower sense (*sensu strictu*) the image is understood as “original righteousness” (*justitia originale*). Following the scriptural understanding of the *imago Dei*, the image in the narrower sense of original righteousness has been completely blotted out in the fall,<sup>68</sup> but the rest of the *imago Dei* is still there, although in the broader sense it has become deformed.<sup>69</sup>

In Christ, however, original righteousness is restored in principle, and at the same time the *imago Dei* in the broad sense is also renewed. In this way the later Reformed theologians help us to a proper understanding of what happened in the fall and what is restored in redemption.

### 4. *Imago Dei and the Exercise of Dominion*

One of the more important contributions of later Reformed theologians is their provision of a more complete understanding of the relationship between the *imago Dei* and dominion over the world. Calvin criticizes the view of those who understand the *imago Dei* as merely the exercise of dominion,<sup>70</sup> especially John Chrysostom, who identifies the *imago Dei* with “dominion” (*imperium* or *dominatus*). Calvin rejects Chrysostom’s explanation, arguing that the *imago Dei* is not the exercise of dominion over the world as God’s vice-regent, even though he allows that dominion is one aspect of the image of God.<sup>71</sup> In this way Calvin stands against the Socinian

<sup>67</sup> Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 218; Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), chaps. 17 and 20; and Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 722–23.

<sup>68</sup> Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 213; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 204, 207.

<sup>69</sup> Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 210; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 204.

<sup>70</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.4 (190).

<sup>71</sup> Calvin, *Comm. Gen* 1:26 (94).

understanding of the *imago Dei*;<sup>72</sup> he also stands against the functional approaches of more recent theology that consider the *imago Dei* as consisting principally in dominion even before these interpretations made their appearance.<sup>73</sup>

John Murray says that some Reformed theologians regard dominion as an element in the divine image but that “it would appear preferable, however, to regard dominion as a function or office based upon the specific character defined as the image of God.”<sup>74</sup> Sinclair Ferguson also comments that “in the exegesis of Gen. 1:26 given in 1:27–28, dominion is a *function* of man as God’s image, rather than a *definition* of the image itself.”<sup>75</sup> Hugh McDonald also points out that “our dominion is not the image, but we rule over the world because we are the images of God.”<sup>76</sup> Bavinck also makes clear that “such dominion is not a constituent element of the image of God. Nor does it, as some have maintained, constitute the whole content of that image.”<sup>77</sup> Rather, “the image comes to expression in the dominion and by means of it must more and more explain and unfold itself.”<sup>78</sup> So we must conclude, in agreement with Lee, that “man’s dominion is a necessary *result* of his being God’s image.”<sup>79</sup> Such an understanding of the relationship between the image of God and dominion over the world seems more accurate than the one that tries to see dominion as an element of the image of God.

## Conclusion

The issues raised by this article are meaningful primarily in the historical sense of how the development of Reformed theology in relation to the *imago Dei* has been carried out in light of Calvin’s influence; it is also meaningful in that it shows ways in which our theology might develop. Reformed theologians are not to simply repeat what their predecessors have said. Rather, they are to follow Calvin in correcting the church fathers’ and medieval

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. *Catechismus Racoviensis* (1574), 42; quoted in Lee, *The Origin and Destiny of Man*, 41, n. 41.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Leonard Verduin, *Somewhat Less than God: The Biblical View of Man* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 27; and Walter Harrelson, *Interpreting the Old Testament* (New York: Holt, Reinhart & Weston, 1964), 51.

<sup>74</sup> Murray, “Man in the Image of God,” 41.

<sup>75</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, “Image of God,” in *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 328.

<sup>76</sup> Hugh D. McDonald, *The Christian View of Man* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1981), 36.

<sup>77</sup> Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 215.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>79</sup> Lee, *The Origin and Destiny of Man*, 41.

theologians' understanding of the *imago Dei* by providing a deeper biblical understanding of it. True Reformed theology is done only when it is faithful to the teaching of the Scriptures and correcting what is lacking in the previous generations' understanding of theological themes. Later Reformed theologians corrected Calvin's understanding using what they learned from Calvin himself in the case of the *imago Dei* as being the whole person and in the presentation of a positive biblical understanding of the human body. It is problematic both to disregard the biblical tradition and to merely reiterate the interpretations of past tradition. In light of this article, we look forward to the future of theology with an attitude similar to that shown by Calvin and later Reformed theologians in their own time.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> For another suggestion regarding the way that theology should develop properly, see Seung-Goo Lee, "Proposal for an Apostolic, Biblical, Eschatological Theology: From a Korean Context," in *Religion without Ulterior Motive*, ed. E. A. J. G. Van der Borgh (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 164–68.