HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies
ISSN: (Online) 2072-8050, (Print) 0259-9422

Eco-theological anthropology in Christianity: *imago Dei* and ecological preservation

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Dates:
Received: 02 Nov. 2024
Accepted: 06 Feb. 2025
Published: 09 Apr. 2025

How to cite this article:
Lala, I., 2025, 'Eco-theological anthropology in Christianity: *imago Dei* and ecological preservation', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 81(1), a10367. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v81i1.10367

Genesis 1:26 states that humankind has been created in the image of God. There are three general interpretations of what this means. While the substantial view emphasises the essence of humankind and the relational view underscores the social aspect, the functional view highlights the responsibility of humankind to God's creation. Recent studies have suggested that the substantial view was dominant in the pre-modern period and the functional view has become more popular in contemporary Christian theology.

Contribution: This study carries out a diachronic analysis that demonstrates that the functional view was always implicit in the substantial and relational views. Therefore, the responsibility that humankind bears towards the natural world is not a departure from the original denotation of *imago Dei*; rather, it is a faithful representation of it. The second encyclical of Pope Francis, Laudato si', testifies to this. Pope Francis draws attention to the functional view of *imago Dei* as an implicit part of the substantial view because of the just dominion that humankind should exercise over the rest of God's creation, which would reflect the dominion of God in a spatiotemporal way. Further, he asseverates that the vertical relationship with God cannot be extricated from the horizontal relationship with God's creatures, thereby functionalising the relational view.

Keywords: theology; *imago Dei*; ecology; climate change; substantial; relational; functional.

Introduction

Biblical exegetes agree that the concept of humankind being created in the 'image of God', or *imago Dei*, is one of the most significant anthropological ideas in Christianity (Søes 2024). Genesis 1:26 is the fundamental verse around which the debate as to what constitutes *imago Dei* revolves. God says:

> Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. (New International Version Bible)

Genesis 5:1[1] and Genesis 9:6[2] also mention the image of God. There are three main interpretations as to what is meant by 'image of God': the substantial view, the relational view and the functional view. Most Biblical scholars argue that the traditional interpretation that prevailed in the early period up to St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) was the substantial interpretation (Cairns 1953; Hall 1986; Lidums 2004; Middleton 2005; Ramsey 1950; Tarus 2016). According to this interpretation, humankind has an ontological association with God through possessing physical, psychical and spiritual qualities that relate to its very 'essence' [*ousia*] (Simango 2012:638–639; Szczerba 2020:22). Conversely, in the relational view, it is not the *ousia* that takes centre stage, but the social aspect in which humankind – through its relationships with each other or God, whether they be physical, psychical or spiritual – mirrors the internal relation within the holy trinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Robinson 2011; Szczerba 2020:22). Finally, the functional view argues that the image is not something that is in the *ousia* or in the relations of humankind, but in the function that humankind performs, which mirrors the dominion of God in a spatiotemporal way. It is this latter functional view that has gained traction in contemporary Biblical exegesis among many modern scholars (Garr 2003; Simango 2012:639; Wilson 2017).

This article argues that the diachronic dimension from the substantial view to the functional view is not as clear-cut as Biblical scholars have argued (Cairns 1953; Hall 1986; Lidums 2004;

1.'When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God' (New International Version Bible).

2.'Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind' (New International Version Bible).

Middleton 2005; Ramsey 1950; Tarus 2016). Indeed, the functional aspect has been an important aspect of *imago Dei* from the period of the early Church Fathers and constitutes an actualisation of the intrinsic qualities with which humankind has been imbued (Szczerba 2020; Tarus 2016). This means that the function humankind performs in terms of exercising its 'dominion' over the earth constitutes a fundamental aspect of *imago Dei*. This has major implications for ecological preservation as it is only through its preservation of all things in the natural world that humankind can achieve its potentiality to be an image of God (Deane-Drummond 2012). Humankind has so far failed in this functional responsibility (see section '*Imago Dei* and ecological preservation'). In the second encyclical of Pope Francis, Laudato si', the pontiff makes an impassioned plea for the functional aspect of *imago Dei* to be manifested through humankind's care of the natural world (Francis 2015). The penultimate section of this article ('*Imago Dei* and ecological preservation') elaborates on this topic.

Diachronic analysis of *imago Dei*

The major problem with the substantial view is the effect original sin has on the image of God. As the substantial view argues that *imago Dei* is within the ontological nature of humankind, it axiomatically cannot be forfeited by any heinous actions committed. Thus, the early Church Father Irenaeus (d. 202) famously distinguished between 'image' [*eikon*] and 'likeness' [*homoiosis*] (Szczerba 2020:23). While the former was static and represented an intrinsic potentiality, the latter was the actualisation of that potentiality through actions. This meant that the 'image' could not be lost, but the 'likeness' was forfeited through original sin (Tarus 2016). Irenaeus (2002) writes:

> Having thus formed the world, he (the Demiurge) also created the earthy [part of] man, not taking him from this dry earth, but from an invisible substance consisting of fusible and fluid matter, and then afterwards, as they define the process, breathed into him the animal part of his nature. It was this latter which was created after his image and likeness. The material part, indeed, was very near to God, so far as the image went, but not of the same substance with him. The animal, on the other hand, was so in respect to likeness; and hence his substance was called the spirit of life, because it took its rise from a spiritual outflowing. After all this, he was, they say, enveloped all round with a covering of skin; and by this they mean the outward sensitive flesh. (p. 1:10)

Irenaeus differentiates between the 'material part' that is the image, which is 'very near to God', and the likeness of God that is the 'animal' part of its nature. The image, he argues, remains fixed and immutable, but the likeness varies and changes. It is this likeness that was lost when Adam disobeyed God (Irenaeus 2002:1:43–44). He goes as far as to assert that Adam was not created perfect, so even before his sin he was incomplete and needed to progress towards 'God-likeness' through the Holy Spirit (Tarus 2016:19–20). In addition, Irenaeus mentions the gendered relation in which humankind exists as contributing to the likeness of God because it reflects the internal diversity of the holy trinity (Irenaeus 2002:1:30). This means that Irenaeus is a proponent of the 'composite' view that many contemporary theologians, such as Anthony Hoekema (d. 1988) and Bruce Ware advocate (Tarus 2016:23–24). While Hoekema marries the 'structure of man' with 'the functioning of man', which he identifies as both the relations a person has with others as well as the actions they undertake in order to cultivate those relations (Hoekema 1986), Ware refers to a 'functional holism' that integrates the image of God as that which reflects the divine, the internal diversity in the trinity through male-female relations, and human-non-human relations and human responsibility in replicating the divine dominion in a spatiotemporal way (Ware 2002).[3]

Irenaeus' distinction between 'image' and 'likeness' was maintained by Clement of Alexandria (d. 215) who explains that 'Man is the image of God and can be restored to God's likeness' (Osborne 2009:35). The clear implication here is that while the image was not lost because of original sin, God's likeness was lost and could be restored through actions. Clement's illustrious student, Origen of Alexandria (d. 253), likewise affirmed this essential difference. Origen (1982) writes:

> The apostles transformed themselves to such an extent to his likeness that he could say of them, 'I go to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God' (John 20:17).[4] For he had already petitioned the Father for his disciples that the original likeness might be restored in them. (p. 66)

In the same way as his teacher, Origen asserts that the likeness of God was lost and required actions to restore it, which is what the apostles carried out. However, Origen also attributes divine assistance to this restoration. To put otherwise, while the likeness is lost through actions and it is restored through actions, the latter is, nevertheless, contingent on divine help. This means that only after initiating the restoration through functionally representing God is the completion carried out by God (Doeing 2020:50–51).

Basil the Great (d. 378)[5] applies a two-way dualistic theology in which a stringent separation is instituted between the body and the soul (Basil 2005). The body is ontologically incapable of reflecting the divine image, argues Basil, because of the incorporeality of the divine (Basil 2005). Yet the soul itself is divided: the rational soul reflects the image of God, while human free-will reflects the potentiality to attain likeness of God (Basil 2005). The Antiochene theologians, who were very influential in the late fourth and fifth centuries and generally promulgated a less allegorical theological interpretation to the Bible in contradistinction to their Alexandrian counterparts (Perhai 2015:4), such as Diodore of Tarsus (d. 390), Ambrose (d. 397), John Chrysostom (d. 407),

3.Page numbers are given for direct quotations from specific pages. However, if the terms are general and occur many times within the article, just the article name and date are cited to avoid excessive listing of page numbers.

4.In the New International Version Bible, the translation is slightly different to the citation in Origen. It reads 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'.

5.The date (d.) after the names of many scholars reflects the date of their death.

Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428), Nestorius (d. 451) and Theodoret (d. 457), disagree with this. For them, the image of God is reflected in the dominion humankind exerts over all things (Behr 2013:29–30; McLeod 1999). However, this dominion is a responsibility to justly *serve* the creation in the manner that befits the vicegerent of God so that the existence of God is emblematised through this functional image of God (McLeod 1999). Later, Wolfhart Pannenberg (d. 2014) takes this same position of the relationality of humankind to God as being fundamental to the just dominion that it exercises in its functional manifestation of *imago Dei* through being 'open to the world' (Pannenberg 1970:11; Sayari, Mamat & Hasbullah 2020).

One of the most influential Church Fathers, Gregory of Nyssa (d. 394), also does not distinguish between the image and likeness of God, but nevertheless adopts a composite view in which the substantial, relational and functional aspects of *imago Dei* are incorporated. Further, as Wojciech Szczerba (2020) observes, Gregory is 'thoroughly inclusivist' in his approach, since he:

> not only defends the concept of the salvation of all people, regardless of their origin or religious convictions, but *de facto* espouses the idea of the salvation of all rational creatures. (p. 16)

Gregory believes *imago Dei* involves a vertical and a horizontal relational dimension: the former is the relation in which humans are subordinate to God, and the horizontal relation is the one in which they are related to other humans and creatures, and bear responsibility for the way they treat them (Gregory 1892:34–41; Groody 2009; Szczerba 2020). In this way, he amalgamates all three views of *imago Dei*. According to Gregory, the substantial view is that Adam is created in the image of God because he has an upright posture and rationality (Gregory 1892). However, 'rationality' for Gregory refers mainly to Adam's free-will and not to his intellectual ability (Gregory 1892:645; Meredith 1999:21). The upright posture and rationality mark Adam out as exceptional among all of God's creatures (Szczerba 2020). Nevertheless, this exceptionalism is also expressed as Adam's care of God's creatures that is spatiotemporally emblematic of God's care of all things (the functional view), and this care of all things is reflected in his relationships with God, other humans and other creatures that mirror the internal relational associations of the holy trinity (Meredith 1999; Szczerba 2020). Indeed, Gregory 'urges the inseparability of all three persons in baptism' because just as:

> to think of the Father without also thinking of the Son is difficult, if not impossible, so too to form an idea of the Son, without involving the Spirit, is likewise barely possible. (Meredith 1999:39)

This trinitarian relationality is later expressed by Jürgen Moltmann (d. 2024) as the immediate nuclear family of Adam in which Adam, Eve and Seth reflect the Father, Holy Spirit and Son. This is the relationality of man-woman-son (Moltmann 1985:235). The relational view is expressed functionally in the way humans treat animals, and nature more generally, which should be reflective of God's perfect and care-giving dominion (Moltmann 1985; Szczerba 2020).

The functionalisation of the relational view that is carried out by Moltmann has its roots in Gregory's theology because he collectivises the individualism of *imago Dei* when he asseverates that Genesis 1:26 refers primarily to the creation of humankind as a whole and only secondarily to Adam (Szczerba 2020). St. Augustine of Hippo (d. 430), likewise, refers to the image of God as referring not to the individual but to the rationality of humans (Deane-Drummond 2012). Unlike Gregory who underscores human free-will more than intelligence, it is the latter that is paramount for Augustine (Curtin 2014), who had an abiding influence on the Western tradition (Sullivan 1963).

According to Curtin, Augustine agrees with Irenaeus on the importance of rationality, but he denigrates the Irenaean notion that the body could be a locus for the *imago Dei* (Curtin 2014:33). It is only the rational soul that can serve this purpose. Thus, the relational internal plurality of the holy trinity is reflected in the trinitarian internal plurality of the memory, intellect and will (Father, Son and Holy Spirit, respectively) that comprise human rationality. The elision of the difference between the substantial view (rationality as *imago Dei*) and the relational view (intellect-will-memory of human rationality) is also expressed functionally in human rationality's quest to reconcile with the divine. It is in the active acts of the internal self remembering itself, knowing itself and loving itself that *imago Dei* is achieved (O'Callaghan 2007). But this internal triplicity is reflected externally in remembering, knowing and loving the natural world (Sullivan 1963; Tarus 2016). Fundamentally for Augustine, however, this reconciliation can only occur through Christ. Therefore, although Augustine also champions a composite view, the soteriological function of Christ is imperative to repair the rupture in the human-divine relationship brought about by original sin (Sullivan 1963; Tarus 2016).

St. John Damascene (d. 749), even though he influenced the Eastern tradition more, also held a composite view of *imago Dei* in which he stressed the ontological connection between the goodness of God and humankind (substantial view), the relationality of the holy trinity as representative of the three divine boons bestowed on humankind by God: intellect [*nous*], reason [*logos*] and free-will (relational view) and the corollary of these divine favours, which was dominion over all things in a form of just rule over God's creatures and nature (functional view) (Meany 1954). Much like Augustine before him, he functionalises the relational view by asserting the bifurcation of internal and external dominion or the division between the animals within the self and those in the external world (Meany 1954). He also institutes a tripartite hierarchy in which the fidelity to manifestation of *imago Dei* is predicated on functional actualisation of the divine favours with which humankind is endowed, which serves as an important precursor to the Thomist hierarchy (Merriell 1990).

St. Thomas Aquinas synthesises Irenaeus, St. John and Augustine's theology. He agrees with Irenaeus' bifurcation between image and likeness, equating the former to rationality and the latter to piety (Lidums 2004; Tarus 2016). It is Aquinas' immense focus on human rationality, which is the defining characteristic of his theology (Aquinas 1922). Following in the Aristotelian tradition, Aquinas identifies three types of souls: the rational soul for humans, the sensitive soul for animals and the vegetative soul for plants (Aquinas 1922). It is only the rational soul that has the aptitude to truly know and thus, love God (Aquinas 1922). To put otherwise, the relationality of the tripartite soul is reflective of the holy trinity. Yet, this attention to rationality does not overlook the actualisation of the rational potentiality through action (Deane-Drummond 2012). Aquinas systematises St. John's hierarchy by delineating three levels of image bearing: the aptitude to know the divine in the postlapsarian state, the imperfect redemption of knowing God and the perfect redemption of loving God (Aquinas 1922). The trinitarianism of the divine is thus expressed in a hierarchical relationality, which, in turn, postulates the functionalisation of human rationality into righteous dominion over animals and nature (Deane-Drummond 2012).

Aquinas was inspired by the works of Peter Lombard (d. 1160) who affirmed the substantial view of *imago Dei* as rationality and carried out a similar Trinitarian 'relationalisation' of the concept to Augustine, which would reverberate in the corpus of Aquinas when he said that this image comprises memory, intelligence and love (Saccenti 2010:298–301). Also echoed in Aquinas' output is the Lombardian division of the image as rationality, and the likeness as justice, which marks the functionalisation of *imago Dei* (Lidums 2004:49). Drawing also on Augustine, Aquinas highlights the role of divine grace in the perfect redemption from the postlapsarian state. He elaborates that the aptitude or nature of the postlapsarian state is only redeemed in the perfect likeness of God through likeness of divine glory via divine grace. In other words, the relationality of nature, grace and glory is expressed as the complex interplay between human righteousness and divine help (Curtin 2014:67; O'Meara 1997).

Augustine similarly affected the thought of John Scotus Eriugena (d. 877) who underlines that humankind is a rational being much like its predecessor, but he goes further. Eriugena elaborates that the substantial view of rationality as *imago Dei* is expressed functionally because humankind's rationality enables it to be an intermediary between God and the rest of the creation (Otten 1990:11). The mediatory role of humankind is exemplified in its integration of angelic rationality and animalistic sensualism. Thus, the relationality of functional mediation between God and the creation has an internal triplicity of human comprehensiveness that encapsulates angelic reason and animalistic senses (Otten 1990). It is based on this triplicity that 'man brings creation back to God by bringing it first back to himself' (Otten 1990:12).

Perhaps the Christian thinker who married the substantial and functional aspects more than any other was the Benedictine monk St. Peter Damian (d. 1072) (Ranft 2006). Damian wrote that being created in the image and likeness of God meant that only humankind was 'capable of receiving divine grace and illumination' (Damian 1959:56). However, this had a very particular signification for him because the substantial image of God was the capacity for creation, which could only be actualised by all humans in myriad ways by preparing the world for the eschaton (Ranft 2006:77). For him, the substantial view of *imago Dei* as creative capability was inextricably intertwined with the functional view of preparation for the end of times through creation and elimination of imperfections (Ranft 2006:77). Thus, much like Augustine before him, Damian forges a connection between *imago Dei* and eschatology, but whereas Augustine italicises the soteriological role of Christ, Damian accentuates the functional role of all humans.

Unlike Damian, St. Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109) adheres very closely to the theological views of Augustine. It is little surprising, then, that he subscribes to Augustine's substantial view of *imago Dei* as rationality that is 'relationalised' in remembering, knowing and loving God. Anselm (2005) writes:

> Lord, I acknowledge and I thank thee that thou hast created me in this thine image, in order that I may be mindful of thee, may conceive of thee, and love thee.' (p. 8)

This relationality is then functionalised in remembering, knowing and loving the natural world (Anselm 2005). In the same way as Anselm, the Protestant reformer Martin Luther (d. 1546) was influenced by Augustine and believed the substantial position that the image of God was human rationality (Oberman 1992; Tarus 2016). Nevertheless, it was the relational aspect of *imago Dei* that was of paramount importance to him. He argued that the pristine, prelapsarian relation to God was forfeited because of original sin and so even though rationality remained, the relational aspects of faith, love of God and the zeal for holiness were relinquished (Tarus 2016). The pristine relation to God is the *imago Dei* that enables humankind to execute the plan of God for it (Butler 2021). The plan for God, according to Luther, can be instantiated through an active righteousness, as opposed to the passive righteousness of faith (Kolb 1999). In other words, Luther functionalises the relational aspect through active righteousness that is service to the creation (Kolb 1999).

The close association between the substantial, relational and functional views of *imago Dei* is even more conspicuous in the theology of John Calvin (d. 1564). For Calvin, the image of God is anything that mirrors the glory of God (Calvin 1845). However, he bifurcates the image into two types: the general image is the substantial image of all creation as *imago Dei* (Torrance 2001). This is adduced by contemporary scholars as proof that humankind has a responsibility to take care of nature as it, too, is in the image of God (Deane-Drummond 2012). But there is the particular view as well, which is only

for humankind and is inextricably bound with soteriology (Torrance 2001). The relation between God and humankind is only restored, according to Calvin, in Christ through the Holy Spirit, and this restoration and regeneration are gradual and progressive with actions that are aligned with the divine will and that make God's glory manifest (Calvin 1845). Stated otherwise, it is only in the execution of the responsibility to glorify God through protection of all things or the functional view that regeneration of *imago Dei* can occur (Calvin 1845).

Even though Calvin's works demonstrate a somewhat composite view, it was the relational aspect of his thought that many reformed theologians, such as Karl Barth (d. 1968) and Gerrit Berkouwer (d. 1996), followed. Barth underlined the vertical relationship between God and man, and the horizontal relationship between man and woman (Barth 1958). Further, he functionalises this relational aspect by explaining that Christ is both the lord who serves and the servant given lordship (Allen 2012:144), and so it is only in the service of the creation that humankind dominates that *imago Dei* is realised. Berkouwer, on the other hand, does not see *imago Dei* as being represented in dominion or in the man-woman relation. Instead, he interprets *imago Dei* as residing in imitation of God through imitation of Christ, which imposes a strong functional interpretation of humankind being in God's image (Berkouwer 1962).

This functional view is very much at the forefront of Johann Von Herder's (d. 1803) interpretation of *imago Dei*. He believes that creation in the image of God is an ultimate goal towards which humankind strives. This teleological rendering of *imago Dei* is only realised when humankind makes full use of the divine gift of rationality and fulfils its potentiality through toil (Grenz 1994:172–173; Von Herder 2016). Von Herder finds an acolyte in the contemporary scholar Daniel Migliore who stresses that humankind can only become *imago Dei* if it fulfils the obligations of the vertical relationship with God and the horizontal relationship with nature by taking care of the latter because humankind is given this responsibility by God. Concern for the natural world, therefore, simultaneously nurtures both the vertical relationship with the divine and the horizontal relationship with the world (Migliore 2014).

Table 1, which makes no claims to exhaustivity, demonstrates that the substantial, relational and functional views of *imago Dei* are intimately connected and have been so from the time of the early Church Fathers. While the substantial view of an ontological connection with God is manifested through just dominion or caretaking of the world, the relational aspect of humankind's relationship with God is reflected in humankind's relationship with the creation, which itself is reflective of the internal trinitarian relationship within the divine (see Figure 1).The substantial view can be divided into the physical aspect of *imago Dei*, presented as the upright posture of humankind, or the psychic or spiritual aspect of humankind that is widely acknowledged as its rationality and free-will. The relational aspect, too, may be divided into the intra-human relations (i.e., memory-will-intellect and/or remembrance-love-knowledge, etc.) and the inter-human relations (i.e., man-woman-son). Finally, the functional view reflects this relationality through human-human responsibility, as well as human responsibility to the rest of the natural world (see Figure 2). It may be the case that because of the current ecological crisis, the latter aspect of the functional view of *imago Dei* is highlighted more as the increasing dereliction of humankind's responsibility to the rest of the creation becomes apparent, yet this is by no means a departure from the original implicit denotation of *imago Dei*.

TABLE 1: A chronological summary of the substantial, relational and functional views of important Christian thinkers.

Variable	Substantial	Relational	Functional
Irenaeus (d. 202)	✓	✓	✓
Clement of Alexandria (d. 215)	✓	-	✓
Origen (d. 253)	✓	-	✓
Basil the Great (d. 378)	✓	-	✓
Diodore of Tarsus (d. 390)	✓	-	✓
Gregory of Nyssa (d. 394)	✓	✓	✓
Ambrose (d. 397)	✓	-	✓
John Chrysostom (d. 407)	✓	-	✓
Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428)	✓	-	✓
Augustine of Hippo (d. 430)	✓	✓	✓
Nestorius (d. 451)	✓	-	✓
Theodoret (d. 457)	✓	-	✓
St. John Damascene (d. 749)	✓	✓	✓
John Scotus Eriugena (d. 877)	✓	✓	✓
St. Peter Damian (d. 1072)	✓	-	✓
Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109)	✓	✓	✓
Peter Lombard (d. 1160)	✓	✓	✓
Aquinas (d. 1274)	✓	✓	✓
Martin Luther (d. 1546)	✓	✓	✓
John Calvin (d. 1564)	✓	✓	✓
Johann von Herder (d. 1803)	-	-	✓
Paul Tillich (d. 1965)	-	✓	✓
Emil Brunner (d. 1966)	-	✓	✓
Karl Barth (d. 1968)	-	✓	✓
Rudolf Bultmann (d. 1976)	-	✓	✓
Anthony Hoekema (d. 1988)	✓	✓	✓
Gerrit Berkouwer (d. 1996)	-	✓	✓
Wolfhart Pannenberg (d. 2014)	-	✓	✓
Jürgen Moltmann (d. 2024)	-	✓	✓
Ian Hart	-	-	✓
Edward Curtis	-	-	✓
Deane-Drummond	-	-	✓
Bruce Ware	✓	✓	✓
Daniel Migliore	-	✓	✓

Imago Dei and ecological preservation

A general survey of the views of important Christian theologians (Table 1) shows that the functional view of *imago Dei* has always been implicit in what it means to image God, whether it was properly underscored or not. The contemporary emphasis on this issue is not a move away from the original signification, yet the shift in emphasis is understandable because it is only in the industrialised world that the flagrant violation of the functional aspect of *imago Dei* has become manifest

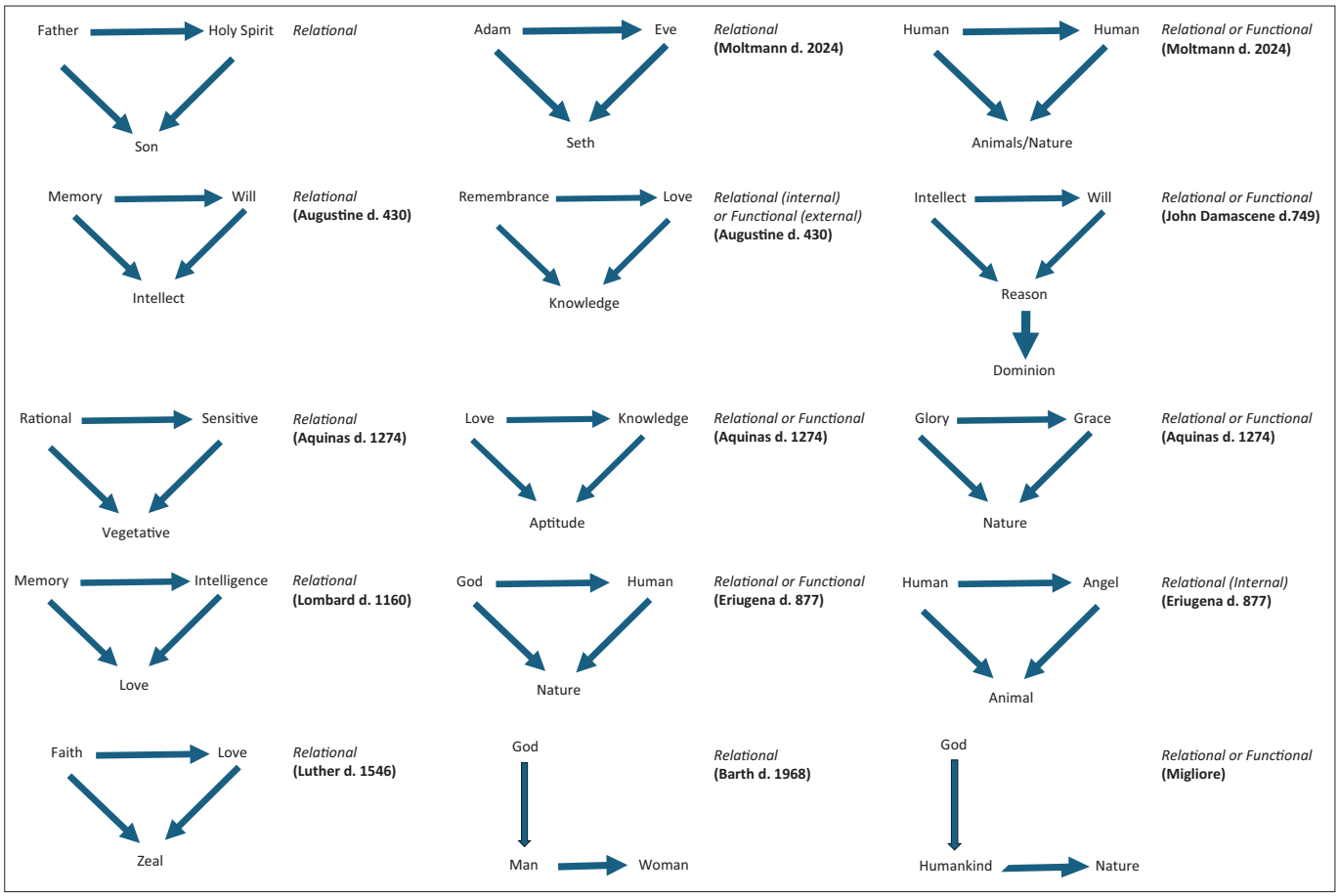

FIGURE 1: The nexus of the relational and functional views of *imago Dei*.

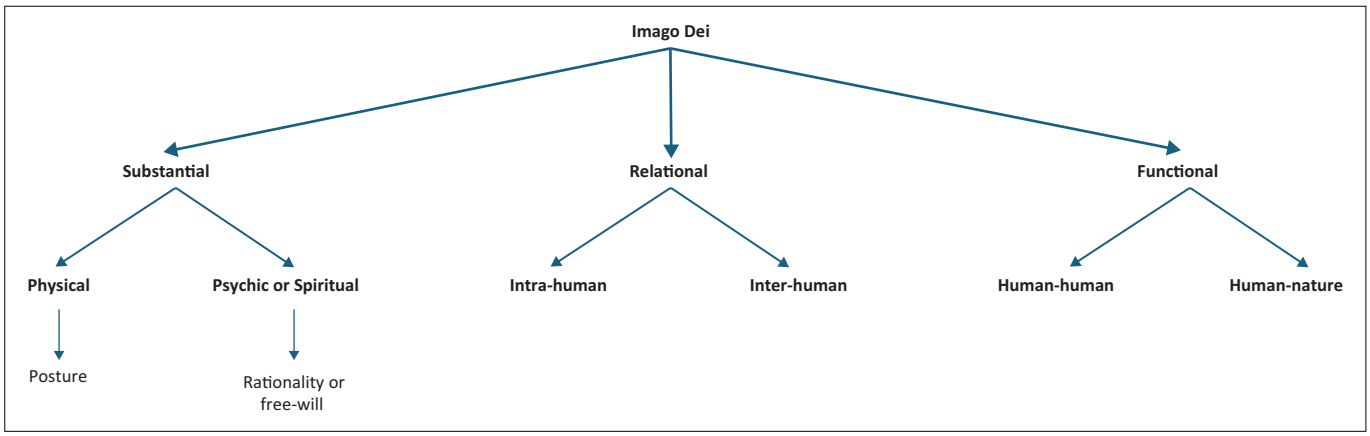

FIGURE 2: The substantial, relational, and functional views of *imago Dei*.

(Mgbemene, Nnaji & Nwozor 2016). The average global temperature has increased by 1.1 °C since 1880, with the majority of this increase coming since 1975 according to the Nasa Earth Observatory (2023). Island states such as the Maldives, Kiribati and Tuvalu are the most commonly cited potential victims of rising sea levels because of this increase in global temperature (Barnett & Adger 2003; Kelman 2008; Ödalen 2014; Yamamoto & Esteban 2010). The forced climate migration of the inhabitants of these island states, who have to move out of their homelands because of the effects of climate change, represents a glaring infringement of the human-human functional view of *imago Dei* because the people contributing the least to global warming are experiencing its detrimental effects the most (Francis 2015:20). Pope Francis draws attention to the human-human responsibility that is implicit in *imago Dei* when he (Francis 2015) says:

> The Bible teaches that every man and woman is created out of love and made in God's image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26). This shows us the immense dignity of each person, 'who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons.' (p. 47)

In addition, humankind is violating its responsibility to nature in more and more flagrant ways as the march of

industrialisation takes an increasingly heavier toll on the environment (Opoku & Aluko 2021). In fact, so egregious has the historical neglect of the environment been by humankind and so vast has its detrimental effect been on the planet, that scholars argue our planet has entered a new geological era: the Anthropocene (Crutzen 2002). The concept of the Anthropocene elaborates the extent of human neglect of the environment and how it has had such a tremendous impact on the planet that humankind 'now rivals some of the great forces of Nature in its impact on the functioning of the Earth system' (Steffen et al. 2013: 843).

Animals bear the brunt of human actions in this new geological era. Drawing on a survey that found most modern Christians in this century subscribed to the functional view of *imago Dei* as humans 'sharing in God's moral rule over creation' (Linzey 1994:186), Andrew Linzey argues that a necessary corollary of this should be that humans see themselves as a 'servant species' (Linzey 1994:45). This is because what sets humankind apart from other species is its 'capacity for service and self-sacrifice' (Linzey 1994:45). It is precisely because God suffers uniquely in the Christian *Weltanschauung* that the suffering of all living things compounds God's suffering. Linzey explains that 'God's self-definition in Jesus Christ leads inescapably to the view that God really and truly enters into suffering' (Linzey 1994:50). This leads Linzey (1994) to a stark conclusion:

> If it is true that God is the Creator and sustainer of the whole world of life, then it is inconceivable that God is not also a co-sufferer in the world of non-human creatures as well. (p. 50)

It thus behoves humankind to care for all life through the kind of 'self-sacrificial priesthood' practised by Christ (Linzey 1994:45).

Pope Francis underscores that the functional view of *imago Dei* has never been 'secondary' to the Christian experience; rather, the burden upon humankind to 'be protectors of God's handiwork' … is 'essential' (Francis 2015:159). The survey of Christian theologians bears testimony to the veracity of Pope Francis' words. Pope Francis further exhorts humankind to shun 'unethical consumerism bereft of social and ecological awareness'; instead, he advises that we image God by imitating His 'generosity in self-sacrifice and good works' (Francis 2015:160). There are explicit parallels between Pope Francis' interpretation of *imago Dei* as *imitatio Dei* and Berkouwer's view of *imago Dei* as *imitatio Christi* (Berkouwer 1962). Moreover, by declaring that the generosity of God is imitated through self-sacrifice, Pope Francis is alluding to the self-sacrifice of Christ and enjoining believers to imitate Christ just as Berkouwer (1962) had done previously.

Conclusion

It has been argued that the functional view of *imago Dei* is underscored only in the modern period (Garr 2003; Simango 2012:639; Wilson 2017). However, as the survey of influential Christian theologians has shown, the functional view has always been implicit in the way *imago Dei* was interpreted. Even to those scholars for whom to image God meant having dominion over creation as it did for the Antiochene theologians, it was not believed to entail absolute dominion, but rather dominion that reflects God's just rule and caretaking of His creation in a spatiotemporal way (see 'Diachronic analysis of imago Dei'). Indeed, Pope Francis (2015) cautions against the interpretation of *imago Dei* as absolute dominion:

> Although it is true that we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures. (p. 49)

In addition, the foregoing has demonstrated that the relational view of *imago Dei* also postulates the functional view because the vertical relationship of humankind with God is inextricable from the horizontal relationship of humankind with the rest of God's creation. Pope Francis (2015) admonishes those who segregate the vertical and horizontal:

> Our insistence that each human being is an image of God should not make us overlook the fact that each creature has its own purpose. None is superfluous. The entire material universe speaks of God's love, his boundless affection for us. (p. 61)

The boundless affection of God for us is not only to be reciprocated by humankind, but it must be reflected by humankind in its treatment of all of God's creatures.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the erudite reviewers of this article for their thoughtful and insightful feedback, which has substantially enhanced the original draft. The author would also like to thank the Gulf University for Science and Technology for their support towards this research article.

Competing interests

The author declares that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Author's contribution

I.L. is the sole author of this research article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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