

# Idols, Images, and a Spirited Anthropology

## Connecting Christology, Pneumatology, and the *imago Dei*

Marc Cortez  
Wheaton College

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Christian theology has long been guided by three convictions: (1) the *imago Dei* is central to a properly Christian understanding of the human person; (2) the *imago* can only be fully understood in light of the person and work of Jesus Christ;<sup>1</sup> and (3) Jesus Christ himself can only be properly and fully understood in light of the person and work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> Taken together, these convictions would seem to lead necessarily to the conclusion that the Holy Spirit should form an important aspect of our understanding of the *imago Dei*. After all, if Christology is essential to the *imago*, and if pneumatology is essential to Christology, then it seems reasonable to conclude that pneumatology would inform the meaning of the image in some essential way.

Despite the apparent obviousness of this conclusion, however, biblical and theological studies on the image of God have generally not paid sufficient attention to the relationship between the Spirit and the image. Instead, in many such studies, the Spirit acts a lot like I do at large family gatherings: he shows up late, sticks around just long enough to get noticed, and then quickly heads out the back door to find a quiet place to curl up and read a good book. Specifically, there is a tendency to relate the Spirit to the image either through his work in renewing the image and/or through some kind of reference to the Trinity. As we will see, both approaches raise significant questions regarding the extent to which we have truly integrated pneumatology into our understanding of the *imago Dei*.

In this paper, then, we will explore the possibility that pneumatology has more to do. After briefly summarizing some pneumatological weaknesses in many theological interpretations

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<sup>1</sup> Such a claim, of course, raises a number of important questions about the extent to which we should use NT concepts to interpret OT passages. Nonetheless, the clear NT claims about Jesus Christ being the true image of God has led most theologians to conclude that Christology is essential to any theologically robust account of the *imago Dei* (see Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:4).

<sup>2</sup> Colin Gunton thus speaks for many when he says, “Christology which is abstracted from a discussion of the relation to it of pneumatology is not Christology rooted in the actual human career of the incarnate Lord” (Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 1997), xxx. This is true regardless of whether you affirm a kind of spirit Christology or merely want to recognize the close link between the Spirit and Christ in the NT.

of the image, we will turn our attention to two modern theologians known for having placed a greater emphasis on the role of pneumatology in theological anthropology in general: Colin Gunton and Yves Congar. And we will see that both of these theologians offer robust frameworks for relating the Spirit to the image, but they do so in ways that raise significant questions. Thus, the last half of the paper will focus on a different way of relating pneumatology to the *imago Dei*, one that draws on a strong consensus among biblical scholars that has not yet received sufficient attention from systematic theologians.

## Part 1: Can I Get a Side of the Spirit with That?

There are two real problems with many recent treatments of the *imago Dei* and its relationship to the Spirit, which I will refer to as the *eschatological addendum* and *pneumatological abstraction* problems. The eschatological addendum problem refers to any approach to the *imago Dei* that locates the role of the Spirit primarily in the Spirit's work of restoring the image. Thus, for example, in his important text on the image Anthony Hoekema says little about the Spirit when discussing the nature and meaning of the *imago*, focusing the majority of his pneumatological reflections in a section on "The Renewed Image."<sup>3</sup> Similarly, in Stan Grenz's *The Social God and the Relational Self* the Spirit makes few appearances in the first half of the book, not showing up in force until Grenz discusses the Spirit's role in bringing about our eschatological transformation.<sup>4</sup> And F. LeRon Shults, despite referring to the Spirit extensively throughout his *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, also focuses most of his pneumatological reflections on the transformative role of the Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

I could multiply examples, but this suffices to establish that theologians routinely focus on the Spirit's transformative work, an understandable move given the New Testament's emphasis on the renewal of the image.<sup>6</sup> However, the difficulty lies in the lack of reference to the Spirit when developing the *meaning* of the image itself. Intended or not, this leads the reader toward the inevitable conclusion that the image is an essentially *non*-pneumatological concept. The Spirit simply restores something that we can and usually do understand apart from the Spirit himself. As important as the Spirit might be for the restoration of the image, he appears to be an eschatological addendum, something we add to the story of an already-understood image only after we have moved into the sphere of transformation. In other words, the eschatological addendum treats pneumatology like dessert. It is a delicious add on, but offers nothing of substance to the meal itself.

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<sup>3</sup> Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 85–91.

<sup>4</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 2001), 225ff.

<sup>5</sup> F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 58–59, 77–93.

<sup>6</sup> According to several New Testament texts, the image was tainted in some way by the Fall and in need of renewal (e.g. 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10). And since the Spirit is always portrayed as the agent of renewal in the process of salvation, it seems reasonable to conclude that the Spirit's role relative to the *imago* is that of returning the image to its original state of perfection.

Some might object at this point that I'm not being entirely fair. All three of the theologians I have mentioned, in addition to many more contemporary theologians, explicitly relate the *imago Dei* to the doctrine of the Trinity. We do not image just any God, but one who is eternally constituted as three persons in mutual interrelationship. The image of God thus refers to the relationality of human persons. And insofar as the Trinity is essential to the *imago* and the Spirit is essential to the Trinity, then the Spirit must be essential to the *imago* itself, not just its restoration.

Setting aside for a moment the question of how the Trinity relates to the meaning of the image, this objection leads us to our second concern: *trinitarian abstraction*. The difficulty with most such appeals is that they say little about what the Spirit in particular offers this trinitarian understanding of the image. If the *imago* is all about relationship between persons, then would not the Father and Son alone suffice to establish the requisite relationality? To be clear, I am not saying here that these theologians have no answer to this question. Indeed, as we will see in the next section, there is a prominent tradition in western theology that offers an explicit answer to this very question. Nonetheless, many discussions of the *imago Dei* appeal to the Trinity without offering any real explanation of precisely what the Spirit in particular contributes to our understanding of the image. Such appeals, then, are overly abstract, gesturing at the Spirit without providing any real explanatory depth. Rather than treating pneumatology like dessert, then, such proposals present the Spirit more as a garnish. It adds some color and flair, but again has little to do with the real substance of the meal.

## **Part 2: A Little Too Much Oregano**

Let us now turn to our two case studies. Yves Congar and Colin Gunton both offer theological anthropologies that avoid the addendum and abstraction problems, thus presenting the Spirit as part of the main course of the *imago Dei*. Nonetheless, we will see that the way in which they have strengthened the pneumatological content of the *imago* creates its own problems, specifically with respect to their interpretation of the image in Genesis 1. Thus, although these theologians have prepared the right dish, something still tastes funny.

### **1. Integrating the Eschatological Addendum**

Congar and Gunton both avoided the eschatological addendum problem by relating the Spirit's transformative work to the meaning of the *imago* itself. For Congar, this occurred through his concept of the Spirit as the one who lifts up human capacities to a higher function. According to Congar, the image of God refers at least partly to the psychic capacities of the human person, particularly the intellectual capacity for knowledge and the volitional capacity for love,<sup>7</sup> both of which need to be oriented toward their proper end by the human capacity for free

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<sup>7</sup> Yves Congar, "Perspectives Chrétiennes Sur La Vie Personnel et La Vie Collective," in *Socialisation et Personne Humaine--Semaines Sociales de France--47ième Session* (Lyons: Chronique sociale de France, 1961), 205.

choice.<sup>8</sup> These are all natural capacities inherent in the human person since creation. But Congar rejected any attempt to bifurcate nature and grace, contending that even unfallen human persons were open and receptive to divine grace, including the indwelling Spirit, from the beginning.<sup>9</sup> Although the natural capacities of unfallen humanity were good, they needed to be lifted up to an even greater good by the work of the Spirit.<sup>10</sup> And thus, the soteriological work of the Spirit, which involves renewing the image by lifting up our capacities so they are again oriented toward their proper end, is a repetition of his creational work. Rather than a mere addendum, then, the Spirit's transformative work, alongside his creational work, informs an important aspect of our understanding of the image itself: human capacities oriented by the Spirit toward their relational end.

Similarly, Gunton emphasized the importance of the Spirit's eschatological work for informing the nature of the image, but he did so primarily by emphasizing the Spirit's role in perfecting creational realities in general. Gunton emphasized that God works in creation through the mediation of the Son and the Spirit,<sup>11</sup> and one of the Spirit's particular functions is that of bringing all of God's works to perfection.<sup>12</sup> The goodness of the original creation should be understood as a kind of "imperfection," in the sense that it is not yet fully complete. And the specific work of the Spirit is to bring all of creation toward its divinely intended end.<sup>13</sup> To understand creational realities, then, we have to view them in the light of eschatology, in light of their *telos*. As Gunton says, "it is the Spirit who enables all things to be what they are particularly created to be."<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, we can only understand the *imago* fully from an eschatological perspective. Thus, the Spirit does not merely restore an already complete image; rather, the Spirit is the one who takes that which was begun in creation and carries it to its always-intended *telos*.

For both Congar and Gunton, then, we avoid the eschatological addendum by providing a robust dogmatic account of how the Spirit's soteriological work informs our understanding of the image. It is not that the Spirit merely renews an image that we should understand in essentially

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<sup>8</sup> Yves M J Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985), 425.

<sup>9</sup> Yves Congar, "L'Homme Est Capable D'être Appelé," *Vie Spirituelle* 120 (1969): 377–378. For Congar, the "indwelling" of the Spirit should not be understood in causal rather than spatial terms. Spatially, the Spirit is already present in all creatures. The unique "indwelling" of the Spirit involves the elevation of human life in the state of grace (see Yves M J Congar, *The Mystery of the Temple: Or the Manner of God's Presence to His Creatures from Genesis to the Apocalypse* (Westminster, Md: Newman Pr, 1962), 237 and Yves M J Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Repr ed (New York: Crossroad, 2004), 2:100-101).

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth T. Groppe, *Yves Congar's Theology of the Holy Spirit*, American Academy of Religion Academy Series (New York: Oxford University, 2004), 95.

<sup>11</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 196. See also Colin E Gunton, *Father, Son & Holy Spirit: Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology* (London: Continuum, 2003), 80.

<sup>12</sup> Gunton, *Father, Son & Holy Spirit*, 81.

<sup>13</sup> See esp. Gunton, *The Triune Creator*.

<sup>14</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002),

non-pneumatological terms. Instead, we must read the story back-to-front, allowing the Spirit's eschatological work to instruct us about the meaning of the *imago* itself.

## **2. Filling in the Trinitarian Abstraction**

Congar and Gunton also offer theologies of the *imago* that avoid the trinitarian abstraction problem. Although they clearly affirm an essentially relational understanding of the image grounded in the doctrine of the Trinity, they take the extra step of explaining the precise contribution the Spirit makes to this relational framework.

Congar does this once again by appealing to the Spirit's work relative to human capacities. For Congar, the capacities that comprise the image (intellect and volition) are designed to lead us into relationship with others. As Elizabeth Groppe explains, "The human intellect and will through which we image God lead us *beyond* the self toward knowledge and love of another. We are created with the capacity to speak to another, to strive to know another, to love one another, and to receive one another in love."<sup>15</sup> Thus, the very capacities that make us human as individuals are the same capacities that necessarily lead us toward the kind of community and relationality that truly images a triune God. As creationally intended, then, human persons were to be God's image bearers as the Spirit indwells and enlivens their natural capacities for love and knowledge such that they form societies in which people love one another with God's own love. To live in the image of God, then, is to live as both a particular individual who instantiates a common set of human capacities through the indwelling power of the Spirit, and to be led by those Spirit-empowered capacities into real community with other Spirit-indwelt humans who love and glorify God.

Gunton approached the question from a slightly different perspective, appealing to *personhood* as the constitutive link between the Spirit and the image. For Gunton, the Trinity reveals that "[t]o be a person is to be distinct from other persons, and yet inextricably bound up with them: to be 'other' only in 'relation'."<sup>16</sup> Personhood is thus constituted in the "personal space...in which three persons are for and from each other in their otherness."<sup>17</sup> And since human persons were created to image that kind of tri-personal God, he concludes that this should also inform our understanding of the image: "Likeness to God consists in the fact that human beings are persons, while the remainder of the created world is not."<sup>18</sup>

Even though Gunton thinks the *imago* is unique to humans, he does not exclude the rest of creation. Instead, he argues that the relationality of the *imago* includes the relationship between humans and non-human creatures.<sup>19</sup> Human personhood is constituted not only in the personal space between us and God but also that which exists between us and the rest of creation.

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<sup>15</sup> Groppe, *Yves Congar's Theology of the Holy Spirit*, 88.

<sup>16</sup> Gunton, *The Christian Faith*, 43.

<sup>17</sup> Colin E Gunton, "Trinity, Ontology and Anthropology : Towards a Renewal of the Doctrine of the Imago Dei," in *Persons, Divine and Human* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 56.

<sup>18</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, 208.

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This is where Gunton incorporates the idea of the image as dominion/authority in his account. Although the image is fundamentally about relationality, there is a particular shape to the human/non-human relationship, one characterized by humans ruling over and stewarding the rest of creation.<sup>20</sup>

If Gunton had stopped here, though, we would still have the kind of pneumatological abstraction we discussed earlier, appealing to a vague relationality in which the Spirit plays no unique role. However, Gunton also argues that it is precisely the role of the Spirit to constitute this personal space by creating an openness for the other. In his Bampton lectures, *The One, the Three and the Many*, he frequently appeals to spirit as that which “is able to be open to that which is other than itself, to move dynamically into relation with the other.”<sup>21</sup> Drawing on a long-standing theological tradition, he views the Spirit as the bond of love between the Father and the Son, and correlatively as the one who enables individuality *and* multiplicity in the world, establishing the possibility of real relationality.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the Spirit plays a fundamental role in Gunton’s relational *imago* precisely as the condition for its very possibility.

Both of these theologians thus avoid the Trinitarian abstraction problem as well, offering dogmatically rich accounts of the Spirit’s unique role in creating the relationality necessary to their view of the image.<sup>23</sup>

### **3. An Exegetical Difficulty**

The strength of such an approach, however, is also its liability. The relational view provides Congar and Gunton with a robust framework for relating the Spirit and the image, but it does so at the expense of laying itself open to objections about the exegetical adequacy of this interpretation of the image. Now Gunton was surely correct when he argued that the scarcity and inherent ambiguity of references to the *imago* in Scripture means that “We need more than an extended exegesis of Gen. 1.26f, and in particular a broader treatment of the topic, if we are really to make more satisfactory use of the concept of the *imago Dei*.”<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, he also recognized that such a broader treatment must “do justice” to the specific texts involved.<sup>25</sup> And

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<sup>21</sup> John Webster, “Gunton and Barth,” in *The Theology of Colin Gunton*, ed. Lincoln Harvey (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 25. And this openness to the other which characterizes the human spirit is only made possible through the work of the Divine Spirit.

<sup>22</sup> Gunton, *The Christian Faith*, 14. Like Barth, Gunton finds a clear indicator of this relational *imago* in the fact that humans were created as male and female: “If, first, to be created in the image of God is to be made male and female, what is implied is that in this most central of all human relatedness is to be found a finite echo of the relatedness of Father, Son and Holy Spirit” (Colin E Gunton, *Christ and Creation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1992), 101).

<sup>23</sup> Even though both integrate other views of the *imago* into their relational approach—Congar’s use of capacities and Gunton’s emphasis on our functional dominion over creation—both prioritize the relational dynamic as the essence of the image. And it is this relational aspect that does most of the work in connecting the Spirit to the *imago Dei*. He is the one who creates the possibility of real image-bearing relationality.

<sup>24</sup> Gunton, “Trinity, Ontology and Anthropology,” 58.

<sup>25</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, 195.

the difficulty with any straightforwardly relational view of the *imago* lies in the texts themselves. As J. Richard Middleton points out in his recent study of the *imago*:

What is problematic is that most contemporary proposals of either substantialistic or relational interpretations—which tend to be found in the writings of systematic theologians—simply ignore the massive literature in Old Testament scholarship on the *imago Dei* that developed in the past century.<sup>26</sup>

Gunnlaugur Jónsson (Günlower Yohnsohn) states the difficulty even more strongly at the end of his extensive survey of modern OT research: “Were it not for the fact that a few influential OT scholars such as Barr and Westermann do not agree with this dominant understanding, we would be able to speak of a complete consensus among OT scholars on this problem.”<sup>27</sup>

We do not have time here to rehearse all of the exegetical arguments against the relational view of the *imago*. Rather than address whether the relational view does justice to the image texts, then, we will focus on another question. If the vast majority of OT scholars are correct and the relational view as it stands is exegetically inadequate, is there another way of relating the Spirit to the image that is more viable?

### **Part 3: A Little Cumin Goes a Long Way**

At the risk of stretching my metaphor too far, and I should probably stop talking about eating the Spirit at some point, my proposal is best understood as preparing the same dish with a different spice. The Spirit should be fundamental to our understanding of the image, but there is a better way of making the connection, one that draws on a broad consensus among Old Testament scholars that the image language in the Bible is best understood against the background of its broader use in the ancient Near East. More specifically, I will suggest that understanding the image in light of ANE concepts of idolatry and divine presence provides resources for linking pneumatology and the *imago Dei* in a way that is both exegetically and theologically satisfying. (It also tastes good, helps you lose weight, and prevents hair loss.)

#### **1. Idols in the Ancient Near East**

Let us begin with the clear consensus among biblical scholars that “image” (*selem*) and “likeness” (*demut*) need to be understood as part of the semantic domain of language used to refer to idols in the ancient Near East.<sup>28</sup> As Clines states, “פְּלִמָּה and its cognates in other Semitic languages are used predominantly in a literal sense, of three-dimensional objects which represent

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<sup>26</sup> J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos, 2005), 24.

<sup>27</sup> Gunnlaugur A. Jónsson, *The Image of God: Genesis 1:26-28 in a Century of Old Testament Research* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1988), 219.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example Num 33:52; 2 Kgs 11:18; 2 Chron 23:17; Eze 7:20; 16:17; Amos 5:26.

gods, men, or other living beings.”<sup>29</sup> And Middleton similarly concludes that *selem* “primarily designates three-dimensional cult statues of various false gods,” going on to state that “any Old Testament scholar worth her salt will acknowledge that the semantic range of *selem*...includes idols.”<sup>30</sup> *Demut* is a somewhat less common term for idolatry, but it too functions in that same semantic domain.<sup>31</sup> And although *demut* has occasionally been read as weakening the meaning of *selem* to reduce its associations with physical idols, most biblical scholars now view the two as largely synonymous in the context of Genesis 1.<sup>32</sup> Thus, James Barr concludes: “There is an antecedent probability that the term ‘image of God’ might suggest, and might therefore require some delimitation against, the then familiar use of images or idols of the divine.”<sup>33</sup>

Although there are various lines of inquiry we might pursue in delimiting the image of God against the broader notion of idolatry, our purposes here require us to focus only on the idea of divine presence and how it relates to a physical idol. And here it may help if we push back on the common notion that idols were mere “symbols” of divine beings. According to common biblical rhetoric, idols are nothing but metal and wood, physical emblems with no true power. An idol may “represent” a divine being in some abstract way, similar to the way a painting might be said to represent Peter Pan, but there is nothing intrinsically significant about these objects that human hands have created to worship their false gods.

Such rhetoric may be theologically justified, but it can also lead us to miss the true significance of idols in the broader theology of the ancient Near East. In that context, an idol was far more than a mere symbol; it was a real manifestation of divine presence.<sup>34</sup> Although the idol might appear to be of purely human origin, it became more through a ritual of consecration common through the region.<sup>35</sup> In this “washing” or “opening of the mouth” ceremony, the physical idol was imbued with the presence of a divine being such that it became a “living idol.”<sup>36</sup> By pouring himself or herself into the idol, the divine being became so closely associated with it that actions taken against the idol were considered blasphemous and whoever had

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<sup>29</sup> David J. A. Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968): 73. Although Clines goes on to note that *selem* and its cognates can be used metaphorically, even in those contexts the notion of physical form remains prominent (Ibid., 75.).

<sup>30</sup> Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*, 25.

<sup>31</sup> James Barr, “The Image of God in the Book of Genesis - A Study of Terminology,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 51, no. 1 (1968): 11–26; Edward Mason Curtis, “Man as the Image of God in Genesis in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Parallels” (Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania, 1984).

<sup>32</sup> The fact that *demut* itself is often used with reference to physical form also suggests that it is not used here to weaken that aspect of *selem*’s meaning (John F. Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth: Divine Presence and Absence in the Book of Ezekiel* (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2000)).

<sup>33</sup> Barr, “The Image of God,” 15. See also Curtis, “Man as the Image of God in Genesis in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Parallels”; Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth*.

<sup>34</sup> For a good discussion of this, see José Faur, “The Biblical Idea of Idolatry,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 69, no. 1 (1978): 1–15.

<sup>35</sup> Michael B. Dick, *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 1999).

<sup>36</sup> Faur, “The Biblical Idea of Idolatry.”



possession of the idol in some way had possession of the god's own presence.<sup>37</sup> José Faur thus concludes, "The fundamental principle... was the identification of a god with his idol."<sup>38</sup> No mere symbol, the idol has become the physical medium through which that god manifests his or her own divine presence in creation.

## 2. *Idols and the imago Dei*

In the ancient Near East, then, an idol is a physical medium through which a divine being manifests its presence in the world. Consequently, if that is the proper context for understanding the image-language of the Bible, we should hear the declaration that God will make humans in his "image" as an indication that he intends for them to be the means through which he will manifest his own presence in creation.

And that would in turn mean that the image is inherently pneumatological since the Spirit is precisely the one who manifests divine presence in the world throughout the OT. At the very beginning of Genesis we see the Spirit "hovering over the waters" (Gen. 1:2), which Middleton describes as "God's creative presence."<sup>39</sup> And throughout the Old Testament, wherever the Spirit goes, there God is for blessing or judgment. The psalmists offer some of the most explicit statements, asking, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?" (Ps. 139:7). And again, "Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me" (Ps. 51:11). Elsewhere God assures Israel of his covenantal faithfulness by promising that his Spirit will remain among them (Hag. 2:5). And God routinely "sends" his Spirit into the world as an expression of his presence (e.g. Ps. 104:30). Throughout the Old Testament, then, there is an inseparable link between the Spirit and the divine presence.

We may be able to find additional confirmation in the second creation narrative. Some scholars have pointed out a number of interesting parallels between the creation of the *adam* in Genesis 2 and the mouth washing/opening ceremony in which idols are animated by a divine spirit. Andreas Schüle helpfully summarizes some of the points of comparison, saying:

Similarities occur in the general pattern—the material shaping of a body, its being brought to life, the change of environment from some desert place to the garden—but also in details like the furnishing of the garden with plants and animals and the fact that God himself is present there and joins with Adam and Eve in the early evening hours when there is a nice breeze coming in from the Mediterranean sea.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Faur points out the significance this had in the ancient world for protecting your idols from being captured by your enemies (Ibid., 8.).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>39</sup> Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*, 86.

<sup>40</sup> Andreas Schüle, "Made in the 'Image of God': The Concepts of Divine Images in Gen 1-3," *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 117, no. 1 (2005): 13. See also Catherine McDowell, "Selem ('image') and

If this is correct, it would mean that even though the second creation narrative does not employ explicit image language, it still utilizes the conceptual framework of idolatry to describe the creation of humanity. And this would in turn suggest that even though Gen. 2:7 does not refer explicitly to the *ruach*, we are justified in understanding this as a story of God filling his designated image-bearers with the Spirit of his presence.<sup>41</sup> Thus, despite using entirely different terminology to describe the creation of humans, the second creation narrative seems to be utilizing the conceptual framework of idol/image, strengthening the argument for seeing such a framework in the first creation account with its explicit use of idol-related terminology.

And John Kutsko makes a similar argument for seeing the *imago Dei* as an important part of the theology of the book of Ezekiel.<sup>42</sup> Although Ezekiel does not refer explicitly to the image of God, he is fully aware of the concept and uses it actively in his polemic against idolatry. Thus, Ezekiel uses the framework to disparage idols as images created by humans and to highlight humans as images created by God.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, once we have identified the root of the *imago* as God manifesting divine presence in humans through the Spirit, we are equipped to see that concept functioning in any number of contexts where explicit image-language itself is absent.

And although I think we can establish this understanding of the *imago* from the Old Testament alone, we should also note the ways in which it is confirmed and strengthened in the New Testament. There as well we see the motif of the Spirit enacting divine presence in the world. Indeed, this link is so strong that Gordon Fee can define the Spirit in Paul's theology simply as "God's Empowering Presence."<sup>44</sup> And, of course, no theology of the *imago* would be complete without looking to Jesus as the fullest expression of what it means to be made in the image of God. And there we see Jesus as the one who was both uniquely filled with the Spirit and who uniquely manifests God's presence in creation.

I think we can say with some confidence, then, that if this interpretation is correct, the *imago* is an essentially pneumatological concept. And we can make this argument without

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Demut ('likeness') Revisited: The Divine-Human Relationship Defined in Terms of Kin, King and Cult" (presented at the Institute for Biblical Research, November 23, 2013).

<sup>41</sup> This link becomes even clearer when we note the frequent biblical association of the "breath" (*nishamah*) with God's Spirit (*ruach*) (Gen 2:7; Job 4:9; 33:4; 34:14; 2 Sam 22:16; Psa 18:15; Isa 42:5).

<sup>42</sup> Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth*.

<sup>43</sup> Although C. A. Strine agrees that Ezekiel has a robust theology of the *imago Dei*, he thinks that it is the prophet alone who is presented as being in the image of God rather than all humans. And Herring limits the *imago* in Ezekiel to the nation of Israel (Stephen L. Herring, *Divine Substitution: Humanity as the Manifestation of Deity in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013)). For our purposes, though, it is enough to note that Ezekiel has a theology of the *imago Dei* in which God does in fact manifest his presence through (at least one) human persons. In other words, Ezekiel confirms the essential concept of the *imago* that we have seen in this study, even if there is some difference regarding the scope of the image.

Strine argues that the very structure of Ezekiel is meant to echo the mouth washing/opening ceremony (C. A. Strine, "Ezekiel's Image Problem: The Mesopotamian Cult Statue Induction Ritual and the *Imago Dei* Anthropology in the Book of Ezekiel," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (April 1, 2014): 252–72).

<sup>44</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1994).

relying in any straightforward way on utilizing trinitarian concepts to understand the *imago* as it is presented in Genesis 1. As we have seen, the idea of a divine being pouring its spirit into a creaturely reality was well established in the ancient world. So regardless of what interpretive moves we might want to make with respect to the “Let us” of 1:26, we do not need to posit some kind of proto-trinitarianism in the creation narrative to develop a robustly pneumatological account of the *imago Dei*.<sup>45</sup>

### 3. Some Objections

Before concluding, though, we need to deal with a few possible objections. First, the real “consensus” position among biblical scholars that I mentioned above has to do not with this idol-framework in general, but with the idea that the *imago Dei* refers explicitly to the exercise of dominion/authority over creation. Many scholars point to ANE texts that also associate image language with human persons, most of which refer to kings who rule over their kingdoms as “images” of divine beings.<sup>46</sup> Given that the *imago* texts also emphasize dominion, we have a clear basis for identifying this as the real meaning of the image.

In response, it is important to note that these interpretations are not exclusive. And it may help to make a distinction between the primary and secondary functions of an image. What we have been discussing in this study is what we can label as the primary function: manifesting divine presence. That function holds for anything that we would call an image. But images may have more particular purposes as well: ruling, revealing, representing, etc. Thus, it may well be the case that the *imago Dei* has the primary purpose of manifesting God’s presence in the world *as well as* a secondary purpose of ruling over creation. The primary function would still have a kind of logical priority—humans would exercise dominion *in virtue of* the divine presence—but in a way that still allows the secondary function to be an important aspect of the overall understanding of the image.<sup>47</sup> Many studies that identify the image with dominion tend to move quickly past the notion of divine presence, focusing almost all of their attention on the dominion motif. That has the unfortunate consequence of downplaying the more fundamental aspect of the image as well as making it more difficult to locate the Spirit properly with respect to the meaning of the image.

From a different perspective, others might object that this interpretation completely misses the importance of relationality and community as essential to being human. What do we do with the emphasis on “male and female” in Genesis 1, the “not good” and “one flesh” of Genesis 2, and the obvious importance of persons in community that we see in the Christological

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<sup>45</sup> Thus, Clines is rightly hesitant to suggest a robustly trinitarian reading of Gen. 1:26, suggesting instead that the divine plural involves God addressing the creation Spirit of 1:2 and “summoning Himself and His Spirit to co-operate in the creation of the image” (Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 89–90.). In this way, it might be legitimate to see an implicit reference to the Spirit as the “vivifying element” in Genesis 1, something made more explicit in Genesis 2.

<sup>46</sup> Discuss here the fact that this can run the spectrum from representation to divinization.

<sup>47</sup> If I have a critique of the emphasis on dominion as the meaning of the *imago*, it is that

fulfillment of the image: the church. Such an objection, though, errs in thinking that this approach to the image is inherently individualistic. There is nothing in what we have said that precludes God from choosing to manifest his divine presence through a plurality of human persons rather than a single human individual. Indeed, it seems quite reasonable to take the command to be fruitful and multiply as a declaration that God's creational intent was to fill the world with his presence through the proliferation of his people. In the end, then, we may, and probably should, still end up with a robustly relational understanding of the image. But we will again develop this as a secondary aspect of the image. Thus, although relationality may not be inherent in the idol-framework itself, we must allow a full understanding of the *imago Dei* to be informed by God's creation of his specific image and the narrative of his interaction with it.

A third possible objection comes the OT critique of idolatry. The biblical authors so consistently rejected any form of idolatry,<sup>48</sup> that some have argued that they would never have viewed idolatry as an appropriate framework from which to understand the human person.<sup>49</sup> As we saw with Ezekiel earlier, though, it is entirely possible to combine a strong polemic against idolatry with a clear affirmation that God manifests his presence through human persons as his images. Indeed, for Ezekiel at least, the latter was an important basis for the former.<sup>50</sup> The biblical critique of idolatry focused not on the question of whether humans could be images but on the specific problems associated with the worship of false gods or the idea that the physical media could be used to control or manipulate God's presence and power.

## Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper, I suggested that there is an implicit logic that should lead us to connect the Spirit and the *imago Dei*. If the *imago* is thoroughly Christological, and if Jesus cannot be understood apart from the Spirit, then the *imago* should be thoroughly pneumatological. Nonetheless, we have seen that although theologians often connect the Spirit to the image, they frequently do so by presenting the Spirit as an eschatological addendum or a Trinitarian abstraction. Our two example theologians offered a more pneumatologically satisfying approach to the image, but they did so by relying on a relational view of the image that runs counter to the consensus among biblical scholars that such an approach is exegetically untenable.

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<sup>48</sup> See esp. Richard J. Clifford, "The Function of Idol Passages in Second Isaiah," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (1980): 450–64; Edward M. Curtis, "The Theological Basis for the Prohibition of Images in the Old Testament," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 28, no. 3 (1985): 277–87; Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth*.

<sup>49</sup> This is particularly difficult for those editorial approaches to the Pentateuch that associate the *imago* text with *P*, a strand of the Pentateuch well known for its strident criticism of idolatry in any form

<sup>50</sup> Some have also suggested that this polemical context is precisely why the biblical author chose relatively neutral terms like *tselem* and *demut* to describe the image, rather than terms more consistently used perjoratively to describe pagan idolatry (Charles A. Kennedy, "The Semantic Field of the Term 'Idolatry,'" in *Uncovering Ancient Stones: Essays in Memory of H Neil Richardson*, ed. Lewis M. Hopfe (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 193–204).

Rather than relying on one of these approaches or drawing the unfortunate conclusion that maybe pneumatology has nothing to do with the meaning of the *imago* itself, I have argued that we need to understand the Bible's image-language as functioning within the broader conceptual framework of idols and divine presence in the ancient world. From this perspective, we can see that being made in the image of God suggests that human persons are the creaturely entities God has chosen as the vehicles into which he will pour his Holy Spirit and through which he will manifest his divine presence in the world. Obviously this does not mean that this is the *only* way that God manifests his presence in the world. The nature of divine presence is a complex topic that we cannot engage here, but the biblical narratives require us to say that God can be present in certain creaturely realities in a way that differs from his presence in creation as a whole (e.g. temple, incarnation, church). The image of God falls into this category. Human persons are a unique and powerful expression of God's own presence.<sup>51</sup> To put it simply, we are his idols.

We have thus linked the Spirit to the *imago Dei* in such a way that pneumatology is essential to the very meaning of the image, part of the main course itself. And, consequently, we have a robust framework for seeing how pneumatology is essential to the nature of humanity in general and to the person and work of Jesus Christ in particular. And we have done so in a way that seems to have ample exegetical support, while, at the same time, leaving room for many of the insights of other approaches to the *imago Dei*: particularly relational and functional interpretations. That seems like the right combination of spices for a tasty pneumatological meal.

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<sup>51</sup> See esp. Herring, *Divine Substitution*.