

Imago Dei in Thomas Aquinas

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In speaking of the image of God in human beings, Saint Thomas, following Augustine, focuses on that element of the human being which distinguishes us from the animals—the rational soul, which includes the intellect and will. Such a position is not altogether harmonious with Scripture and with some theological principles articulated by Thomas elsewhere. In the first part of this paper, I examine Thomas’s professed doctrine on the imago dei drawn from the two passages in which he is most explicit and systematic, Summa theologiae 1.93 and De veritate 10.1. In the second part, I consider Thomas’s position on the relation between faith and reason, and how they come into play in our understanding of the Trinity. In the third part, I take up four particular arguments that Thomas makes in Summa theologiae 1.93, in the light of these principles, and argue for a broader interpretation of the imago dei, one that includes the entire human person. I conclude with some reflections on why this matters.

When it comes to understanding the human being as *imago dei*, Thomas Aquinas is much influenced by Augustine, in particular by Augustine’s discussions of the Trinitarian elements found in human beings: existence, life, and reason; and memory, intellect, and will. Thomas is also influenced by Aristotle and the Neo-Platonism of Pseudo-Dionysius. In his articulation of the image of God in human beings, he focuses on that element of the human being which distinguishes us from the animals—the rational soul, which includes the intellect and will. Given his sources, such a position is understandable, but it is not altogether harmonious with Scripture and with some theological principles articulated by Thomas elsewhere. In the first part of this paper, we shall examine Thomas’s professed teaching on the *imago dei* drawn from the two passages in which he is most explicit and systematic, *Summa theologiae* 1.93 and *De veritate* 10.1. In part two, we shall examine Thomas’s position on the relation between faith and reason, and how they come into play in our understanding of the Trinity. In the third part, we shall consider four particular arguments that Thomas makes in *Summa theologiae* 1.93, in the light of these principles and argue for a broader interpretation of the *imago dei*, one that includes the entire human person. Finally, we shall conclude with some reflections on why this matters.

Part I

Thomas’s most systematic discussion on the issue of the *imago dei* occurs in Question 93 of the first part of the *Summa theologiae*, entitled: “The End or Term of the Production of Man.” Every article of the question refers to the *imago dei*. The key text from Scripture is Genesis 1:26-28, where it is said that “God created humankind in his own image.”¹ Thomas follows Augustine in holding that there is an imperfect likeness of God in human beings. “Since the perfect likeness to God cannot be except in an identical nature, the Image of God exists in His first-born Son; as

¹ NRSV.

the image of the king is in his son, who is of the same nature as himself; whereas it exists in man as in an alien nature, as the image of the king is in a silver coin.”² Such an image of God, even as imperfect, only exists in rational creatures. Thomas quotes Augustine from *Gen. ad lit.* vi. 12: “Man’s excellence consists in the fact that God made him to His own image by giving him an intellectual soul which raises him above the beasts of the field.”³ In article 6, Thomas asks whether the image of God is in man as regards the mind only, and he answers affirmatively. All creatures possess some likeness to God, which Thomas calls a trace, for all things come from God; but only the human being is said to represent God by way of image. Therefore, it must be that what makes us in the image of God is what we have that the other animals do not have—a mind.⁴ In the mind we have a likeness of the Trinity, as there is a procession of the word as we understand and a procession of love as we will. However, as there is only likeness to God as a trace in the other animals, so there is only likeness as a trace in our animal nature, that is, everything about us except the intellectual soul. “So we find in man a likeness to God by way of *image* in his mind; but in the other parts of his being by way of *trace*.”⁵

Thomas’s focus on the intellectual soul as the locus of the image of God is so strong that he says the angels are more in the image of God than we are. “Thus the image of God is more perfect in the angels than in man, because their intellectual nature is more perfect.”⁶ He does admit that, in some ways, we better image God. For example, like the Trinity, there is a procession through the generation of human being from human being, and every part of the human soul is in every part of the body as God is present to the world. However, these likenesses are accidental and “do not of themselves belong to the nature of the Divine image in man, unless we presuppose the first likeness which is in the intellectual nature.”⁷ So absolutely, angels are more in the image of God than we.

Thomas insists that the image of God exists most perfectly in the acts of the soul, for the soul is that which is most perfect in us and so best images God, and the soul in act is more perfect than the soul in its potentiality. Following Aristotle, Thomas holds that we only know the essence of the soul by knowing its powers; we only know the powers of the soul by knowing the habits of first principles; and we only know the habits of first principles by reflecting on the acts of the soul and the objects of those acts. As the Trinity is not static but a procession of the Son and the Holy Spirit, so the image of the Trinity in our souls consists of the active processions of word and love.

² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (hereafter *ST*), trans. Fathers of the English Dominica Province, in five volumes (Allen, Texas: Christian Classics, 1981), 1.93.1ad 2, p. 469. The texts in Augustine are *QQ.* 83, qu. 74 and *De decem Chordis* (*Serm.* ix. al. xcvi, *De Tempore*).

³ Aquinas, *ST* 1.93.2.on the contrary, p. 470.

⁴ “An *image* represents something by likeness in species, as we have said; while a *trace* represents something by way of an effect, which represents the cause in such a way as not to attain to the likeness of species” (Aquinas, *ST* 1.93.6, p. 473).

⁵ Aquinas, *ST* 1.93.6, p. 474.

⁶ Aquinas, *ST* 1.93.3, p. 471.

⁷ Aquinas, *ST* 1.93.3, p. 471.

First and chiefly, the image of the Trinity is to be found in the acts of the soul, that is, inasmuch as from the knowledge which we possess, by actual thought we form an internal word; and thence break forth into love. But, since the principles of acts are the habits and powers, and everything exists virtually in its principle, therefore, secondarily and consequently, the image of the Trinity may be considered as existing in the powers, and still more in the habits, forasmuch as the acts virtually exist therein.⁸

Given that we know acts by reference to their objects, Thomas declares in the next article that we are most perfectly in the image of God when we are knowing and loving God, who is the most perfect object of the acts of intellect and will. Again, Thomas quotes Augustine: “The image of God exists in the mind, not because it has a remembrance of itself, loves itself, and understands itself; but because it can also remember, understand, and love God by Whom it was made.”⁹ As Aristotle notes in his discussions of God as self-thinking thought (*Metaphysics* XII) and of human happiness (*Nicomachean Ethics* X), the best human act will be the act of the highest power engaged with the highest object; thus, we are most in the image of God when we remember, know, and love God.

Thomas returns in the final article of the question to the distinction between likeness and image, and he notes that likeness is a kind of unity and that unity, like the other transcendentals, is common and particular. In one way, likeness stands to image as a kind of preamble insofar as likeness is common to all things. “Likeness may be considered in the light of a preamble to image, inasmuch as it is something more general than image.”¹⁰ Thus, other creatures have a likeness to God but are not in his image. But in another way, likeness stands to image as its perfection. “Again, it may be considered as subsequent to image, inasmuch as it signifies a certain perfection of image.”¹¹ In this case, the particular acts of knowing and loving, especially when such acts are trained on God as their object, are more like God than just their potential existence in the capacity of the rational soul, and thus through these activities our image becomes more like God.

Part II

Although it is clear that our intellect and will set us apart from the other animals, it is not clear that we are the image of God “as regards the mind only,” as Thomas says in *Summa theologiae* 1.93.6.¹² Since Christ is the perfect image of God (more perfect than any angel), and he is image not just through his intellect and will but in his whole person, fully human and divine, and since we are likenesses (albeit imperfect) of Christ, there is no clear theological

⁸ Aquinas, *ST* 1.93.7, p. 475.

⁹ Aquinas, *ST* 1.93.8, on the contrary, p. 476. The Augustinian text is from *De Trinitate* xiv. 12.

¹⁰ Aquinas, *ST* 1.93.9, p. 477.

¹¹ Aquinas, *ST* 1.93.9, p. 477.

¹² “So we find in man a likeness to God by way of an *image* in his mind; but in the other parts of his being by way of a *trace*” (Aquinas, *ST* 1.93.6, p. 474).

reason for limiting our imaging of God to our intellect and will. Thomas himself seems to admit this when he says in article 3 that the image “chiefly consists” in our intellectual nature. It is also not clear that the original presentation of humanity as in the image of God can be adequately captured by referring only to our intellectual and volitional nature; for, as Genesis says, we are in the image of God as male and female, and these categories are at least ambiguously related to our intellectual nature and clearly related to our animal nature.¹³ Let us take a minute to put the issue in focus by reflecting on the relation between faith and reason as Thomas understands it. Then, in the next part, we shall revisit the arguments from *ST* 1.93, showing that there are reasons, even philosophical reasons why Thomas could have and perhaps should have revised his thinking on the *imago dei*.

In Question 2 of the *Summa theologiae*, Thomas makes the distinction between preambles of faith and the faith itself.¹⁴ The former can be explored and even proved by natural reason, that is, philosophy. However, the doctrines of the faith itself, such as the Incarnation and the Trinity, are not able to be proved by natural reason, but must be accepted on authority based on Scripture and the Church’s teaching.¹⁵ Thus, the kinds of arguments from the trinity within the mind (memory, intellect, and will) are but fitting arguments for the existence of the Holy Trinity. At best, they support what the faith teaches, and nowhere does the faith teach that we are in the image of God by our intellectual nature alone.

On this point, Thomas explicitly states in his discussion of the Trinity that the doctrine is not known by natural reason but only by faith. “It is impossible to attain to the knowledge of the Trinity by natural reason.”¹⁶ We can know some things of God through philosophical reason, such as that God exists and is one. This knowledge refers to God as cause but not to the interior life of God which is what is revealed by the doctrine of the Trinity. As Thomas himself insists, no amount of reflection on the traces of the Trinity in creatures or the image of the Trinity in the human mind is sufficient to conclude that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.¹⁷ To claim that it is both derogates from the transcendent dignity of the gift of faith and stands in the way of preaching the gospel since such arguments are not cogent. “Therefore,” Thomas concludes, “we must not attempt to prove what is of faith, except by authority alone, to those who receive the authority; while as regards others it suffices to prove that what faith teaches is not impossible.”¹⁸ In addition, Thomas admits that our knowledge of God’s essence is extremely limited. So the

¹³ Thomas responds that the passage in Genesis is “not to imply that the image of God came through the distinction of sex, but that the image of God belongs to both sexes, since it is in the mind wherein there is no sexual distinction” (Aquinas, *ST* 1.93.6ad2, p. 474). It is true that the image is in both sexes, but this does not mean that it is only in the mind.

¹⁴ Aquinas, *ST* 1.2.2ad1.

¹⁵ Aquinas, *ST* 1.1.8ad2.

¹⁶ Aquinas, *ST* 1.32.1, p. 169.

¹⁷ Thomas admits this. “Natural reason does not force us to say that God, in understanding, begets something distinct from Himself.” Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate* (hereafter, *DV*), trans. James V. McGlynn (Chicago: Regnery, 1953), 10.13ad2, vol. 2, p. 75.

¹⁸ Aquinas, *ST* 1.32.1, p. 169. Although there are no sufficient arguments, there are fitting arguments which can be offered. Thus reason can confirm “an already existing principle, by showing the congruity of its results” (Aquinas, *ST* 1.32.1ad2, p. 169).

analogy between our way of knowing and choosing (the activities of memory, intellect, and will) and God's fails. That is, the image of the trinity found in the mind is at best only a weak suggestion of what might be in God. "Nor is the image in our mind an adequate proof in the case of God, forasmuch as the intellect is not in God and ourselves univocally. Hence Augustine says (*Tract. xxvii. In Joan.*) that by faith we arrive at knowledge, and not conversely."¹⁹ Thus, if we are to be successful in working the analogy between ourselves and God, it must go in the opposite direction: from the revealed truth about God to truth about ourselves.²⁰

Part III

However, although faith is foundational, Thomas, following Augustine and Anselm, is ever insistent that reason and faith do not contradict each other: thus, there are often grounds within reason to deny what goes against the faith. Let us revisit, then, some of the arguments in Question 93 to see why reason might question the general conclusion that we are in the image of God through our minds only. Here I propose to consider four central ideas in Thomas's explanation.

First, let us consider Thomas's claim that we are more in the image of God in our acts than in our powers. Following Aristotle, Thomas says that we only know the essence of the soul by knowing its powers, that we know the powers by knowing the habits of first principles, and that we know these habits by knowing the acts.²¹ Thus, we remember, know, and love God in act, not just in the potential structure of the soul. But the acts of remembering, knowing, and loving are the acts of the person, not the mind and will. Thomas admits elsewhere that although we say that the mind thinks and that the will chooses, it is more proper to say that the person thinks and chooses.²² And the person is not just the soul. As Thomas says in his commentary on Paul's letter to the Corinthians, "I am not my soul."²³ Again, "Not every particular substance is a hypothesis or a person, but that which has the complete nature of the species. Hence a hand, or a foot, is not called a hypostasis, or a person; nor, likewise, is the soul alone so called, since it is a part of the human species."²⁴ Thus, insofar as we are the image of God in our acts, we are the image of God as persons, and our personhood includes everything about us, not just the intellect.

Second, let us consider the passage in which Thomas discusses the object of our acts of memory, thought, and will, which can be other things, ourselves, or God.²⁵ Of these three

¹⁹ Aquinas, *ST* 1.32.1ad2, p. 170.

²⁰ Ultimately, this means beginning with Christ, rather than the Trinity, since we only know about the Trinity because Jesus reveals this to us.

²¹ Aquinas, *ST* 1.93.7. Although Thomas is interpreting Augustine here, he makes use of the Aristotelian psychology in his explanation.

²² "But if anyone says that the intellectual soul is not the form of the body he must first explain how it is that this action of understanding is the action of this particular man; for each one of us is conscious that it is himself who understands" (Aquinas, *ST* 1.76.1, p. 371).

²³ Thomas Aquinas, *Super I Epistolam B. Pauli ad Corinthios Lectura*, 15.L2.924 (my translation).

²⁴ Aquinas, *ST* 1.75.4ad2, p. 366.

²⁵ Aquinas, *ST* 1.93.8.

objects, we are most in the image of God when the object of our knowing and loving is God, directly known. We can know that God exists through our understanding that the things that we know do not sufficiently explain themselves; but this is indirectly to know God, and it is really only to know that God exists, not what He is. Likewise, we can know God indirectly by knowing ourselves. Such arguments can arise from recognizing something in us—our intellectual and free volitional nature—that cannot be explained by any cause in the universe; or they can arise from our recognition that the procession of word and love in us has an efficient and exemplary cause, which ultimately must be God. But these arguments really only take us to the point of affirming that what we find in the world and in us must have an ultimate cause, and that we call this ultimate cause “God.” They do not take us to God himself, either in his essence or in the relations of persons. So when Thomas says that natural reason can only take us to the essence of God (as distinct from the three personal relations in God), he is not quite consistent with his insight elsewhere that we only know *that* God exists, not *what* God is (God’s essence). Additionally, the relations in God are not like relations in us, that is, accidents inhering in an substance. As Thomas says, the personal relations are the essence of God.²⁶ Thus, the project of considering the persons of the Trinity as taking roles in an intellectual nature (roles that are like our remembering, knowing, and loving) is misleading insofar as it leads us to view the divine persons as having distinctive functions within a more essential whole, which is theologically inaccurate.²⁷ We only know God in his personal life, which is His essence, by revelation.

Third, let us consider Thomas’s claim in article 1 that it is Christ who is the perfect image of God, and that the image of God is in us as in an alien nature. Here, it is important to make a distinction. It is true that, since the fall, we find ourselves alienated from God. In this sense, one might speak of the *imago dei* that is perfect in Christ and imperfect in us due to sin. But it does not make sense to consider human nature itself as alien, for Thomas says that this nature is not substantially changed by the fall.²⁸ True, we have lost the original justice by which we always turned promptly to do God’s will. However, our nature itself has not changed. We still can and should turn to God (with, of course, God’s grace). Moreover, if our nature had changed substantially, how could Christ’s humanity redeem us as Thomas says it does?²⁹ All things are created in Christ, who is fully human—body, mind, and spirit. “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of creation; for in him all things in heaven and earth were created” (Col 1:15-16). It would be more proper to say that the image is imperfect in us because it is clouded by sin than because it is in an alien nature.

²⁶ “Thus it is clear that in God relation and essence do not differ from each other, but are one and the same” (Aquinas, *ST* 1.28.2, p. 153).

²⁷ Thomas also says that we only know that we love God by grace, that we have no natural knowledge of this. “One cannot know with certainty that he has charity unless it be revealed to him by God” (Aquinas, *DV* 10.10, p. 56). Aristotle’s God is a final cause, loved by all other things, but not loving them or sharing his love with them by grace.

²⁸ “The good of human nature is threefold. First, there are the principles of which nature is constituted, and the properties that flow from them, such as the powers of the soul, and so forth. . . . The first-mentioned good of nature is neither destroyed nor diminished by sin” (Aquinas, *ST* 1-2.85.1, p. 966).

²⁹ “Now man is in potentiality to the knowledge of the blessed, which consists in the vision of God; and is ordained to it as to an end; since the rational creature is capable of that blessed knowledge, inasmuch as he is made in the image of God. Now men are brought to this end of beatitude by the humanity of Christ, according to Heb. ii. 10” (Aquinas, *ST* 3.9.2, p. 2077).

Finally, let us consider Thomas's answer to the question in article 4 about whether the image of God is in every human being. He says that it depends on how the image is considered: whether as to nature, grace, or glory. Insofar as it is natural for the human mind to have an aptitude for knowing and loving God, the image of God is in all human beings. The image is more perfectly in us by grace, which is in those who habitually know and love God. The image is most perfectly in us by glory in those who share the beatific vision. "The first is found in all men, the second only in the just, the third only in the blessed."³⁰ Thomas says that the first universal level of presence is in us as "a natural aptitude for knowing and loving God"³¹; thus, Aristotle says that we are born with the ability to know and will, but that all content depends on experience and personal choices. However, later in the *Summa*, when considering the question of whether pagans are blameworthy for their rejection of God, Thomas realizes that this could only be the case if they rejected something that they know somehow should not be rejected. Thomas calls it "*instinctus dei*," and it is more than just the capacity to know and love God; it is some natural presence of Christ in the person given in creation. "To have the faith is not part of human nature, but it is part of human nature that man's mind should not thwart his inner instinct, and the outward preaching of the truth. Hence, in this way unbelief is contrary to nature."³² In other words, there is an actual presence of God in the soul, drawing us to Him; and this is more the *imago dei* than is the mere capacity to know and love God. "Belief of some kind in the mystery of Christ's Incarnation was necessary at all times and for all persons . . . [B]efore the state of sin, man believed explicitly in Christ's Incarnation, insofar as it was intended for the consummation of glory."³³ This belief remains in all human beings and is not obliterated by sin. It is a good creation, and its goodness cannot be destroyed by sin. This instinct for God, which

³⁰ Aquinas, *ST* 1.93.4, p. 472.

³¹ Aquinas, *ST* 1.93.4, p. 471.

³² Aquinas, *ST* 2-2.10.1.ad1, p. 1208. "The believer has sufficient motive for believing, for he is moved by the authority of Divine teaching confirmed by miracles, and what is more, by the inward instinct of the Divine invitation" (Aquinas, *ST* 2-2.2.9.ad3, p. 1181). Thomas, in *ST* 1.2.1.ad1, says that we naturally desire happiness and therefore must know that in which our happiness consists. But this is Christ, and hence we must naturally know him in some way. Donald Keefe stresses the importance of this point for a proper understanding of Thomistic metaphysics as theological. See Donald J. Keefe, SJ, *Covenantal Theology: The Eucharistic Order of History*, 2 vols. in 1 (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1996), 176-78. This attraction to God is given substantially to all from the beginning insofar as all are created in Christ. It is free creation; we are never without grace. Keefe points out that this interior orientation to God is referred to by Thomas as instinct of God (*instinctus Dei*) and an attraction to God (*trahi a Deo*). Keefe says, in *Covenantal Theology*, fn. 24, 184-85, that Thomas inherits the idea of the attraction to God (*trahi a Deo*) from Augustine. Augustine mentions it in his work on the gospel of John (*Tract. In Jo.* 26); and Thomas uses the phrase in his commentary on John (*Comm. in Joann.* 5.6.8-9). As Augustine explains it, this being drawn to God is free and operates on a preconceptual level as something delightful. "Do not think that you are drawn unwillingly, because the mind is also drawn by love. . . . There is a certain pleasure of the heart to which this heavenly Bread is sweet. Indeed if the poet can say, 'His pleasure draws each man' (Virgil, *Eclogues* 2), it is not necessity but pleasure; not obligation but delight. Should we not then say more forcefully that a man is drawn to Christ, who delights us with truth, delights us with happiness, delights us with justice, delights us with eternal life—all of which Christ himself is?" *Tract. In Jo.* 26, 4, quoted in James T. O'Connor, *The Hidden Manna* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 2. And Thomas writes: "But because not only does exterior or objective revelation have the power to attract, but also an interior instinct (*instinctus*) impelling and moving to believe; thus the Father draws (*trahit*) many to the Son through an instinct of the divine operation moving interiorly the heart of man to believe." Thomas Aquinas, *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis Lectura*, 6.5.3 (my translation).

³³ Aquinas, *ST* 2-2.2.7, p. 1178.

draws us to God, and this knowledge of the Incarnation are not just volitional or intellectual potentialities of our natures; rather, they exist actually in our full human nature, body, mind and spirit.

Part IV

What difference does it make whether we consider the *imago dei* to be found in the human mind or whether we think of it as pertaining to the whole human being? It matters because there are dangers to the faith if the *imago dei* is said to be found merely in the intellect; and it matters because the faith authentically interpreted can shed light on our understanding of human nature and the world.

As to dangers to the faith, in the first place, the claim that the *imago dei* is found merely in the intellect is the product of faulty reasoning about the relation between us and God, with the result that those who see the faulty reasoning might reject the faith, thinking that the doctrine depends on the reasons given. No doubt our intellectual and volitional nature is a window on God in the sense that our nature cannot be explained by anything else in creation. However, as Thomas makes abundantly clear, there is no implication from our essence to God's essence. What we know philosophically of God is that he exists and that, in some analogical sense, existence and its attributes (the transcendentals) are found in creatures and the Creator. The danger is that we read God in our image, that we make the human intellect the prime analogate for understanding how intellect exists in humans, angels, and God.³⁴ Reflecting on our reflecting, we find that it involves remembering, knowing, and loving. Since God, as the source of our intellectuality, must also be analogically intellectual, we begin to think of God as a mind with internal relations like our own. But there are no philosophical grounds for making that move. In the first place, God's way of knowing is not our way of knowing. In the second place, knowledge that the internal relations in God are persons (and not accidents of a nature as they are for us) is known only by revelation.³⁵

In the second place, and ultimately more importantly, there is the danger that, by seeing the Trinitarian *imago dei* as referring to the mind, we remove Jesus Christ from the center of the faith. The danger is that we view Christ fundamentally in terms of our understanding of immaterial processions within the Trinity: he is really the immaterial second person, who happens to be made incarnate. Yet it is only from Jesus that we have any direct information about the Trinity, for he speaks of his Father and the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in his name.³⁶ Viewing Jesus in the light of a more fundamental abstract immaterial Trinity has

³⁴ Thomas is clear that, when it comes to such transcendental characteristics as wisdom and love (and such activities as knowing and willing), God must be prime analogate (Aquinas, *ST* 1.13.6). The problem is that philosophically, we do not have any knowledge of God's inner life, of His essence. Only a properly theological prime analogate based on revelation has content that could inform our understanding of ourselves and the world. This will be explained below when we move from the negatives in having the wrong idea of the *imago dei* to the positives in having the right idea.

³⁵ Aquinas, *ST* 1.32.1.

³⁶ John 14:26.

negative theological implications: it suggests that Christ is really immaterial and is a fully embodied human being only because of sin.³⁷ But Thomas says that before sin, man knew of the Incarnation, for grace has always been offered man, and all grace is *gratia Christi*. As Thomas himself insists, following Irenaeus and Chalcedon, Jesus Christ is one and the same. “Since, then, sacred Scripture without distinction attributes the things of God to that man, and the things of that man to God, He of whom each class is said must be one and the same.”³⁸ If Christ is one and the same, then there cannot be a life that is Christ’s that is not incarnate. To say there is such a life is to remove Christ from the center of salvation and to lose the intimate covenantal relation between God and us.

If the *imago dei* is identified with the immaterial intellect in Christ and us, then the identity of Christ in creation, Incarnation, Eucharist, and glory is put in question. If all is created in Christ, then it is in the humanity as well as the divinity of Christ—body, soul and spirit. And the Eucharist is the only objective (sacramentally, not empirically, so) presence of God in the world that we have, the presence of the whole Christ—body, soul, and spirit. And our fulfillment in heaven, our ultimate glory, is to be in Christ—body, soul, and spirit. We did not fall into materiality, nor is our salvation a transcending of our materiality. To be in the image of God is to be in the image of Christ who is wholly divine and human. As Paul says in the Letter to the Romans, “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family” (Rom 8:29). This image, as Thomas notes, is more in act than in structure; and the act is the spiritual life of Christ, which we lost in the Fall through sin, but which is always offered to us to renew our humanity—body, soul, and spirit.

Let us turn to the positive implications of refusing to restrict the *imago dei* to an intellectual nature. If we take the scriptural foundation for the image of God as nuptial, as it seems to be in Genesis and as Pope John Paul II emphasizes,³⁹ we have an image of the

³⁷ This way of thinking is a hold-over from Platonism and Neo-Platonism in which the fall is from immateriality into matter. “This is the fall of the Soul, this entry into Matter. . . . Thus the cause, at once, of the weakness of the Soul and of all its evil is Matter. The evil of Matter precedes the weakness, the vice; it is Primal Evil.” Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Penguin, 1991), I.8, p. 69. “But,” according to Keefe, “the Fall is not, as the pagans supposed, from immateriality into corporeality; rather, it is from an offered personal integrity or free unity.” Donald J. Keefe, S.J., “*Bāśār-Nepēs: Sarx-Pneuma; Body-Soul: Death-Resurrection: An Essay in Pauline Anthropology*,” in *Christianity and the Human Body: A Theology of the Human Body*, Proceedings of ITEST Workshop, (October, 2000), ed. Robert A. Brungs (St. Louis: ITEST/Science Press, 2001), 105-152, at 136.

³⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles; On the Truth of the Catholic Faith*, trans. Charles J. O’Neil (New York: Doubleday, 1957), 4.39.1, vol. 4, p. 189.

³⁹ “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27, NRSV); In his General Audience of Wednesday, 14, November, 1979, Pope John-Paul II comments on this passage from Genesis: “In the first chapter, the narrative of the creation of man affirms directly, right from the beginning, that man was created in the image of God as male and female. The narrative of the second chapter, on the other hand, does not speak of the ‘image of God.’ But in its own way it reveals that the complete and definitive creation of ‘man’ (subjected first to the experience of original solitude) is expressed in giving life to that *communio personarum* that man and woman form. In this way, the Yahwist narrative agrees with the content of the first narrative” (taken from: *L’Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, 19 November 1979, page 1). See also, General Audience of 9 January, 1980.

covenantal relationship between God and his people, and in this a richer understanding of humanity. Aside from the Eucharist, which is the adequate sign of the nuptial character of the faith, Keefe suggests that the Trinity is imaged in creation most clearly in covenantal marriage—husband, wife, and their mutual vow.⁴⁰ This is a free relation and thus a free image; rather than being structural, all parts exist only as free—in communion but irreducible to each other. Speaking of Adam and Eve and the offer of free unity given to them, Keefe writes: “This free and nuptially-ordered unity, their free imaging of the Triune God, is the plenary goodness of the Beginning, the Good Creation, which was to be have been theirs but which could only be freely accepted and appropriated—it could not be imposed upon them.”⁴¹ The real *imago dei* is of persons in communion, not of moments of the intellectual act. The nuptial image has the added advantage of being the way God describes his covenant with us.⁴²

Of course, every created image of the Trinity is imperfect, and none should become the test case for coherent explication of the Trinity and thus for the Trinitarian God’s image in us. In the end, one cannot rely on human marriage to provide an adequate image of the Trinity any more than one can rely on any other model presented by the human mind, even any theological model. There is no one-to-one correspondence between the image and the Trinity.⁴³ As Keefe says and we have noted, the Eucharist is the only adequate image of the Trinity, with the nuptial image at best secondary. “[I]t is only on this level of sacramental freedom that we image the Triune God, in the nuptially-ordered unity (One Flesh) of the Church’s Eucharistic worship.”⁴⁴ Moreover, it is Christ’s Church, the covenantal union of God and His people, that St. Paul says is referenced by the image in Genesis of male and female nuptial union (Eph 5:31-32). Human understanding, whether philosophical or theological, is always hypothetical, subject to revision before reality. It is a reach for the intelligibility of the mystery—faith seeking understanding.

⁴⁰ Of the nuptial covenanted One Flesh of the Christ and his bridal Church, Keefe writes, “within our fallen history, its recapitulation and reconstitution by the institution on the Cross of the New Covenant is historically actual and objective only *in sacramento*, primarily in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, and secondarily in the sacramental worship of the Church which flows from the Eucharist, most clearly in marriage.” Donald J. Keefe, S.J., “The Relation of Nuptial symbolism to Eucharistic Realism,” *The Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II, Issue 21 (1999), 87-119, at 108.

⁴¹ Keefe, “The Relation of Nuptial symbolism to Eucharistic Realism,” 112.

⁴² See, for example, Isaiah 61:8-10, Jeremiah 2:2, Ezekiel 16:35-63, Hosea 2:16-20, Malachi 2:11.

Speaking of the knowledge Adam must have had, Thomas writes: “He does, however, seem to have had foreknowledge of the Incarnation of Christ, from the fact that he said (Gen ii. 24): *Wherefore a man shall leave father hand mother and shall cleave to his wife*, of which the Apostle says (Eph. V. 32) that *this is a great sacrament . . . in Christ and the Church*, and it is incredible that the first man was ignorant about this sacrament” (Aquinas, *ST 2-2.2.7*, p. 1178).

⁴³ As Thomas says in *De Veritate* when responding to the fact that Augustine had pointed to a couple of different human trinities as like the Trinity, “According to Augustine and other saints, the image of the Trinity is attributed to man under diverse formulae and there is no need that the members of one formula correspond to those of another” (Aquinas, *DV 10.1ad3*, p. 7). According to Augustine, “We see, rather than believe, the trinity which is ourselves; whereas we believe rather than see that God is Trinity” (Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XV.6, quoted in Aquinas, *ST 1.93.5.ad3*, p. 472).

⁴⁴ Keefe, “An Essay in Pauline Anthropology,” 131.

In the end, it is not any human understanding of the *imago dei*—not the human mind, the human person, nor even human covenantal marriage—that is the prime analogate for understanding love in all its instances, including in the Trinity. Rather, it is the Trinity of persons, revealed to us by the covenantal relation between Christ and his Church, which must be the prime analogate. And this revealed truth of the Trinity of persons—the God who is love, sacramentally and historically present to us in the Eucharist—casts endless light on human personhood, human community, and the world.