

IN RESPONSE – IMAGO DEI, PART 1

by Dennis Prutow

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The following articles offer my response to a second question posed to me on the floor of the 170th Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. In essence, since I do lean toward the classic side in apologetics, how will my apologetic stance affect my teaching? This is a fair question and deserves a thoughtful answer.¹

I shall seek to answer this second question by looking at the image of God in human beings as described for us in Scripture. This is biblical anthropology. Such a discussion of necessity deals with the effects of sin on the human mind, the so-called noetic effects of sin. A proper and biblical anthropology informs our apologetic and other areas of endeavor such as preaching, counseling, and evangelism.

We begin by looking at the Westminster Larger Catechism, Question and Answer 17.

Question: How did God create man?

Answer: After God had made all other creatures, he created man male and female; formed the body of the man of the dust of the ground, and the woman of the rib of the man, endued them with living, reasonable and immortal souls; made them after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness; having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfil it, and dominion over the creatures; yet subject to fall.

After forming the body of Adam and Eve from the stuff of creation, “God,” says the catechism, “endued them with living, reasonable and immortal souls.” The proof texts the Westminster Divines utilize help us. Genesis 2:7, “Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the

breath of life; and man became a living being.”² God breathed. This breath was life. “Man became a living soul.”³ The Westminster Divines include Matthew 10:28 at this point. “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Christ appears to differentiate soul and body. Genesis 2:7 describes the soul as *living*.

The word translated *soul* has several connotations. “Life, soul, creature, person, appetite, and mind are the more common....”⁴ The soul is the “seat of the appetites” and the “seat of the emotions and passions.”⁵ It “is used occasionally for mental acts.”⁶ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, although mentioning it, indicates references to soul “for acts of the will is dub[ious].”⁷

The soul is therefore, in addition to other characteristics, also *reasonable*. God “teaches us more than the beasts of the earth and makes us wiser than the birds of the heavens” (Job 35:11). God differentiates us from the animals. We are rational beings.

Finally, the catechism indicates the soul is *immortal*. Once created, the soul does not die. At death “the dust [body] will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7). For believers this means life in heaven with Christ. “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). For unbelievers this means eternal torment.⁸

Coming from the hand of God, Adam and Eve have “the law of God written in their hearts.” The Westminster Divines reference Romans 2:14-15. “For when

Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them.” At the very least, this indicates human beings, having living souls, are also *moral* beings. Human beings have consciences. They operate in the moral sphere. Although fallen human beings may be immoral, they are not amoral.⁹

Finally, the catechism indicates our first parents had the “power to fulfil” the law and “yet” they were “subject to fall.” The proof texts are Ecclesiastes 12:7 and Genesis 3:6. Solomon confesses, “Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices.” God is “just and [up]right” (Deuteronomy 32:4). Made in His image, Adam was also upright. As Genesis 3:6 relates, Adam was subject to change at this point. According to Westminster, the power to fulfil the law is in Adam’s uprightness.

On one hand, this uprightness has to do with the inclination of heart or the will to do right. As created, Adam had an inclination or disposition to do the will of his Father. At the same time, Adam and Eve were “left to the freedom of their own will.”¹⁰ The proof text is once again Ecclesiastes 7:29. They were subject to change and they inclined against God.

We note three things. First, Adam and Eve had wills. They made choices. Second, the attitude of their wills was toward God. Third, Adam and Eve were able, in God’s providence, to change in attitude and disposition. For our immediate purpose, we see that God created Adam and Eve as volitional beings. This is standard Reformed teaching regarding the image of God in man.

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¹ In the context of this question, my views concerning the man in Romans 7 also arose. I hold the man in Romans 7 to be one under conviction by the Holy Spirit but not necessarily regenerate. In Response (May 1997) gives my exposition of Romans 7. In Response (June 1997 and July 1997) gives extensive interaction with John Murray. I would be glad to send copies of the articles to those who request them.

² הָיָה; וַיְנַחֵם. ~dah’ yijw

³ Authorized Version.

⁴ Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:587.

⁵ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1968), 660-661.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 661.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Compare Luke 16:23-26 with Matthew 10:28.

⁹ We must discuss this point further.

¹⁰ Westminster Larger Catechism, Answer 21.

IN RESPONSE – IMAGO DEI, PART 2

by Dennis Prutow

The Westminster Larger Catechism shows us that human beings have living souls. In other words, we are *spiritual* beings. These souls are reasonable. In other words, we are *rational* beings. We have minds. These souls do not die. We are *immortal* beings. At the same time, endowed with consciences, we are *moral* beings in contrast to being amoral. Finally, we are beings endowed with wills. We are *volitional* beings.

“The Reformed distinguish between the natural and the moral image of God. The former is the broader of the two, and is generally said to consist in man’s spiritual, rational, moral, and immortal being. This was obscured but not lost by sin.”¹ Fallen human beings still have immortal souls. Fallen human beings still have minds. Fallen human beings still have consciences. Fallen human beings still exercise their wills and make choices. “Since man retained the image of God in the broader sense, he can still be called the image bearer of God.”²

“The latter is the image of God in the more restricted sense, and consists in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. This was lost by sin and is restored in Christ.”³ The catechism uses similar language. God made man “after His own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.” The proof texts are well known. “Put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Ephesians 4:24). “Put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him” (Colossians 3:10).

Before their sin, Adam and Eve had a true knowledge of God as the Creator and of themselves as creatures. They were able to judge justly. They were righteous in their choices and conduct. This point overlaps with what I said concerning the will. Adam and Eve had wills inclined toward God. They were disposed to righteousness. Not only so, they followed

through. They lived righteously. They were also holy. They were pure in heart. As created, they were wholly without sin.

When Adam and Eve sinned, they lost true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. They no longer had a true knowledge of themselves or of God. They were no longer holy but sinful. They were no longer able to judge justly.

Adam and Eve continued to make judgments and to make decisions. However, they were now inclined to follow the devil. They still had wills but they were evil rather than righteous. They loved evil and hated righteousness. They formerly loved God. Speaking of this love, W. G. T. Shedd observes, “Love is inclination.”⁴ An inclination of heart and will toward God *is* love for God. The opposite is hatred for God. This is the prime difficulty, hatred for God, enmity with God, hostile inclinations against the things of God.

Paul points this out in Romans 8:6-8. “For the mindset of the flesh is death, but the mindset of the Spirit is life and peace, because the mindset of the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”⁵ Notice, the mindset of the flesh *is* enmity with God.

Adam and Eve passed their evil dispositions to their children along with guilt for their sin. “So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men.... For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners...” (Romans 5:18-19). We call this guilt and pollution, passed to us by Adam and Eve, *original sin*.

As already noted, the pollution of sin extends to the image of God in the broad sense. The mind, for example, is not unaffected. Paul warns of futility of mind and darkened understanding. “So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles

also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart” (Ephesians 4:17-18).

Note the connections and the progression within the text. There is futility of mind. This is described as darkness of the understanding. There is exclusion from the life of God because of ignorance of the things of God. Why does this ignorance exist? It exists because of hardness of heart. There is enmity toward God. The will opposed to God discards information relating to God, hence the ignorance, darkness, and alienation.

Fallen human beings still have minds. They are darkened. Sin does not destroy the thinking apparatus. “Sin blinds and darkens the understanding, by destroying the *consciousness* of divine things.”⁶ Fallen human beings can and often do have a formal understanding of the things of God and of the Bible. This formal and academic understanding of the Bible is possible because the image of God in the broad sense is damaged but not destroyed. Fallen human beings are not *conscious* of God in that they have no conviction regarding the reality of the things they know intellectually. Christianity is no more to them than any other religion people may follow.

Opposition to God is at the root of the fallen nature. Fallen human beings love the world. They are at enmity with God. In the beginning, Adam had a will. Adam had a will inclined toward God. Adam’s will inclined toward God was also subject to change. Adam could and did incline toward evil. Fallen human beings continue to have wills. However, fallen human beings have wills inclined to evil. Here the situation differs significantly. Fallen human beings *cannot* incline to good or to God. In the nature of the case, fallen human beings *cannot* incline to God because they *will not* incline God.

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¹ Louis Berkhof, *Summary of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 69.

² *Ibid.*, See Genesis 9:6, 1 Corinthians 11:7, 15:49, and James 3:9.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), 2:208.

⁵ My own translation. I render *to. frõnhma thj sarkoj* as *mindset of the flesh* and *to. frõnhma tou pneumatoj* as *mindset of the Spirit*. See F. F. Bruce, Robert Haldane, and W. G. T. Shedd on Romans 8:6-7.

⁶ Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2:197.

IN RESPONSE – IMAGO DEI, PART 3

by Dennis Prutow

The position I am espousing is standard Reformed thought. It is biblical and confessional. The criticism made of this position is that it does not give due weight to the effects of sin, especially the effects of sin on the mind. Because this is the case, my position gives too much credit to the capacities of the fallen human mind. Giving such credit to the capabilities of the fallen human mind is compromise with apostate thought as found in Romanism and Arminianism.

Here are three examples of the type of thinking standing behind this criticism. Several years ago, when speaking of an unbeliever in the community in which our church was ministering, one of the ruling elders offered the following comment. “There is no sense giving this man a Bible. He cannot understand it anyway.”

Again, several years ago, when discussing sexual infidelity in high government places, the issue of the unbeliever’s understanding arose. I asked this question, “Can an unbeliever understand the Seventh Commandment?” The response was a simple, “No.”

Several years prior to either of these incidents I overheard another conversation. A pastor asked a college professor the following question. “Can a person truly know an orange without God.” The professor said, “Yes.” The pastor said, “No.” If you do not know the orange as a creation of God you do not truly know anything about the orange.

Texts such as 1 Corinthians 2:14 seem to bolster this position. “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”¹ Unbelievers cannot understand the world given by the creative work of the Spirit. Only the regenerate know, “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands” (Psalm 19:1). So-called natural theology is impossible. Unbelievers cannot understand the Scriptures either. If a person understands the Bible, this is wit-

ness to his or her regeneration. All of this sounds quite right at first reading.

What about 1 Corinthians 2:14? Paul makes two points. The natural man is the person devoid of the Spirit. This unbeliever “does not accept the things of the Spirit of God.” Literally, does not receive, “i.e. rejects.”² Paul’s words are “not, *cannot receive*.... For we may well *understand* that which seems folly to us, but we *reject* it as unworthy of our consideration.”³ This is the first point.

Paul goes on to say of the unregenerate person “and he cannot understand them,” the things of the Spirit of God. Does this contradict the interpretation of the first part of the text? Hodge helps us. “*To know [understand in the NASB] is to discern the nature of anything, whether as true, or good, or beautiful.*”⁴ Spiritual appraisal is necessary.

If the effect of sin on the human soul is to make it blind to the truth, excellence and beauty of divine things; if, as the apostle asserts, the natural, or unrenewed, man is in such a state that the things of the Spirit are foolishness to him, absurd, insipid and distasteful, then it follows that he can discern them only through the Spirit. His inward state must be changed by the influence of the Spirit before he can apprehend the truth and excellence of the gospel.⁵

On one hand, fallen human beings may have a certain formal understanding of the truths of Scripture. However, without the work of the Spirit, they see no good, beauty, or excellence in what Scripture says.⁶ This is an important distinction to grasp and to make.

As we shall see, the Westminster Standards make this distinction as well as others. From my perspective, it is taking too broad a sweep to simply declare unbelievers incapable of understanding the

gospel. We must take sin seriously. We must also take the biblical anthropology seriously and make the distinctions Scripture makes and not brush them over. If it is useless to give unbelievers a Bible because they cannot understand it, we have come to the end of evangelism, apologetics, and teaching.

We now look at two sets of distinctions the Westminster Confession makes along with the place of the will in the Confession. First, the Confession makes a distinction between the saving understanding of Scripture and ordinary study that leads to formal understanding.

Westminster Confession 1:6 states, “Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the *saving understanding* of such things as are revealed in the word” (italics added). The previous sentence speaks of deductions made “by good and necessary consequence.” The implication of the necessity of our having saving understanding of the gospel is that we may have understanding that is not saving.

One of the proof texts is John 6:45. “It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught of God.’” To be taught by God is to receive the illumination of the Holy Spirit and apprehend the truth and excellence of the gospel. Another proof text is 1 Corinthians 2:12. “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God.” A. T. Robertson comments. “God gave the revelation through the Holy Spirit and he gives us the illumination of the Holy Spirit to understand the mind of the Spirit.”⁷ Such illumination is necessary. We study Scripture and, through ordinary means, come to grips with what Scripture says. Westminster 1:7 says the learned and the unlearned understand Scripture through the use of ordinary means. Illumination teaches us the beauty and goodness of the gospel.

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¹ *yucikoj de anqrwpoj ouv deçetai ta tou pneumatoj tou qeou(nwria gar autw|estin kai ouv dunatai gnwhai(ofi pneumatikw| anakrinetai*

² *Alford’s Greek Testament*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Guardian Press, 1979), 2:488

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 43.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁶ Compare Shedd, Part 2, note 6.

⁷ A. T. Robertson, *Bible Works for Windows*, Version 4.0, 1998.

IN RESPONSE – IMAGO DEI, PART 4

by Dennis Prutow

Unbelievers can detail many aspects of an orange including its color, shape, and nutrients. Unbelievers may read and understand the Bible. They will never know the beauty and excellence of the gospel without the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. Unbelievers can understand the words: “You shall not commit adultery.” They will not grasp the import of these words without the Holy Spirit.

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, *in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them* (italics added).

The Westminster Confession also draws a distinction between common and saving operations of the Holy Spirit. The Confession points out the distinction in the chapter on Effectual Calling. Paragraph 10:4 states, “Others not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, *and may have some common operations of the Spirit*, yet they never truly come unto Christ, and therefore cannot be saved...” (italics added).

The proof texts are Matthew 7:22, 13:20-21, and Hebrews 6:4-5. Hebrews 6:4-6 speaks of people “who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit,” who then fall away and *cannot* subsequently repent. They are therefore unregenerate.

How can this be? “Though they do not experience the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit, yet they are subject to certain special operations and influences of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit strives with them in a special manner, convicts them of sin, enlightens them in a measure, and enriches them with the blessings of common grace, Gen. 6:3; Matt. 13:18-22; Hebrews 6:4-6.”¹ This important biblical and

confessional point is lost on the majority of those who profess to be Reformed.

This understanding informs the definition of effectual calling given by the Westminster Standards. The short version is in the Shorter Catechism, Answer 31. “Effectual calling is the work of God’s Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.” Westminster zeroes in on the conscience, the mind, and the will. Biblical anthropology is in the background.

With reference to conviction, the proof text is Acts 2:37. To display enlightening of the mind, the proof text is Acts 26:18. Paul’s mission was “to open their eyes.” The proof text for *renewing the will* is Ezekiel 36:26-27. “Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.” For Westminster the *new heart* referred to the *renewing of the will*. When God gives people new hearts, He reorients their wills giving them an attitude of heart inclined positively toward God. This is the consistent use of the proof texts.²

Regeneration includes conviction of sin; men and women sense their lost condition. Regeneration includes illumination; men and women understand the beauty of the gospel. Regeneration includes the renewing of the will; the Spirit inclines men and women toward Christ. However, we must remember the Spirit may convict and illumine without regenerating. The root, core, and heart of regeneration is the altering of the will. God inclines men and women toward Himself.

In apologetics it is too simplistic to simply assert unregenerate men and women *cannot* understand the gospel. It is too simplistic to state that the minds of

the unregenerate are darkened and we must therefore seek another point of contact with them. This is a battle line between classic apologetics and presuppositionalism. Thankfully this is an intramural debate. The debate, at this point, has to do with biblical anthropology and the effect of sin on the mind. Part of the classic apologetic stance is the biblical anthropology I have presented. How will this apologetic stance affect my teaching? The biblical, theological, and confessional position I espouse is foundational. It provides firm footing for teaching. It is my duty and obligation to present the truths of Scripture in the classroom with vigor, challenging the intellectual and mental capabilities of students. These students will no doubt also challenge my mental and intellectual capacities. Debate and discussion are welcome and desirable. God has been pleased to give us minds. We *can* read, study, and learn using ordinary means.

I may pray for and expect God’s illuminating work in the classroom. Men may grasp lessons academically. They may also begin to see the beauty and excellence of the truth. This is the beginning of men learning to minister with urgency and fervor.

I may also pray for and expect to see God change dispositions, attitudes, hearts, and wills. A recent graduate of RPTS was converted in and through his studies at the Seminary. As Paul plainly tells us in 1 Timothy 1:5, “But the goal of our instruction is love.”³

Finally, I may teach young men to vigorously present the truth in congregations praying for and expecting the Holy Spirit to enlighten minds and change hearts. This is an immediate outworking of the teaching of biblical anthropology in homiletics and pastoral theology.

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¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), 289.

² For a more complete study, see “Westminster’s Will,” *In Response*, Vol. IX, No. 10, October 2000.

³ See Part 2, note 4.