

Image of God and Apologetics

Introduction

1st Peter 3:15 provides the Biblical impetus for doing Christian apologetics: “*but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and respect.*”¹ Yet, as clear and as plain as this verse of God’s Word is, the Christian Church has struggled to apply its meaning. This struggle is epitomized in the divergent schools of thought for doing apologetics. For example, if one adheres to presuppositionalism, that Christian will respond to the unregenerate inquirer in a way radically other than the technique of the Christian grounded in evidentialism. At the same time, these schools of thought and theological systems are themselves affected by the analysis of reason – sanctified or not – and have thus experienced the contributions of the queen’s handmaiden, that is philosophy. My question is this: How have theological and philosophical systems affected one of the most crucial starting points for keeping 1st Peter 3:15? That is, how do we view and understand the unregenerate? What provides our connection to them? What kind of common ground do we share with them? What does the unbeliever have about their constitution – physically, mentally, spiritually, etc. – that enables them to receive the message of the hope that is in those born again by water and the Spirit? Are we to share the Word precisely because there is nothing within the unregenerate making them receptive to the Word, but the Word itself that we must give to them? But, what is it that makes them seek and ask in the first place? If they are without the Word of God in their hearts and minds, why do they sometimes ask about the hope?

I will be the first one to admit that these are scattered and soon enough, annoying questions, but I believe there is one way of narrowing them down and that is through reducing

¹ NASB

them to the question on the *imago Dei*. It seems to me, that while considerable work has been done on this topic and while as of late much more has been done on apologetics, that work on putting the two together might be somewhat lacking. This is a situation that ought be remedied.

The *imago Dei* is the starting point of Biblical anthropology. If we want to be faithful in giving an answer, then we ought be clear not only in regards to the message of the Gospel, but also in regards to those who ask. We need to understand our audience so to speak according to the Biblical revelation. Of course, “understand” is a cold reductionism. Christ commands that we *love*, but if we are to truly put others before ourselves, we will also commit ourselves to knowing all we can about their condition that we may more effectively serve them through our giving answer to their immensely important questions. Let us begin to understand those who ask and let us answer them more carefully by understanding how the *imago Dei* applies to them.

Thus, I conclude this introduction by asking a more precise question: “Is the *imago Dei* in any way still in existence within those without Christ and – depending on the answer – how ought this guide our doing Christian apologetics?”

Diversity in Christendom on the *Imago Dei*

Genesis 1:26 states that Adam was created “in the image of God.” “Belief in and speculation about the nature of this ‘image’ runs through much of Western thought...Bonaventure held that there is an image of God in man which leads to the concept of the Trinity as the divine exemplar of the human trinity of powers; and Calvin held that despite man’s sin, part of God’s image still remains in him.”²

Bonaventure was actually infatuated with trinitarian semblances and taught that while unaided man could not know “the Trinity of persons,” he could know “the trinity of unity, truth, and goodness as attributes” so rich was Bonaventure’s anthropology.³ As a result, “only the

² Reese, William L., *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, (Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 1999), p. 331.

³ Pelikan, Jaroslav, *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 283.

rational creature is an *imago Dei*, for it resembles God in the possession of spiritual powers through which it can become ever more and more conformed to God.”⁴

As for Calvin, though man is fallen and corrupted through sin entering into the world, “even so, part of God’s image still remains in man. What remains is not sufficient for salvation.”⁵

This *imago Dei* “is God’s action on man by the imprint of the Truth upon his mind, and becomes man’s possession only in the active response of love and obedience. Therefore the strength of the *imago Dei* and its continued maintenance in man lie in the Word of God and not in the soul of man.”⁶

These two examples alone -- that of Bonaventure (13th century AD) and Calvin (16th century AD) – represent the tremendous diversity of Christian views on the *imago Dei*, especially in that Bonaventure seems to be much more optimistic about the potential for man to develop the *imago Dei* (while still requiring God’s grace), while Calvin relies much more on the action of God. For both of them, however, notice that the *imago Dei* is not completely lost.

These ought not be seen, however, as necessarily representing extreme poles for there are further minority views that are fundamentally different from both Bonaventure and Calvin. For example, consider the view of Gordon Clark: “No, the image is not something man *has*, man *is* the image.”⁷ Clark likes the description that the *imago Dei* is primarily a religious relationship between man and God; this did not cease after the Fall, so that the image is retained, man *is* – *and is always* – *the image of God*. So this much is clear, there is tremendous diversity in Christendom on this subject, let us try to be a little more systematic as we approach the issue.

⁴ Copleston, Frederick, *A History of Philosophy, Volume II, Medieval Philosophy*, (New York: Doubleday, 1950), p. 268.

⁵ Reese, William L., *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, (Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 1999), p. 102.

⁶ Torrance, T.F., *Calvin’s Doctrine of Man*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), 52.

⁷ Clark, Gordon H., *The Biblical Doctrine of Man*, (Jefferson, Maryland: The Trinity Foundation, 1984), p. 9.

In his *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine*, Wayne H. House provides this helpful overview (to which I have added the preceding numbers and bracketed filler, but the main descriptions belong to House and quote him directly):

1. Substantive View: The image of God consists in a definite physical, psychological, and/or spiritual characteristic within the nature of man. [This is supported by the fact that the word “image”] in Genesis 1:26 can be translated as “statue;” [so that a possible rendering of the translation is,] “Let us make man look like us.” [Furthermore, those who would advocate this view will be quick to point out that God did in fact have a human body through Christ.] [This view, however, shows its weaknesses as it] defines God by defining man. God is spirit (see John 4:24). In what way, then, does our physical body represent God?
2. Functional View: The image of God consists in what man does. Genesis 1:26-28 clearly says that man is to rule or have dominion over the rest of creation [and] God clearly rules. [The weakness here, however, is that] Genesis 1:27 indicates that God created man in his image before he gave man dominion. Therefore the *Imago Dei* may be other than the capacity for dominion.
3. Relational View: Only when we have faith in (i.e., “interact with”) Jesus Christ do we fully possess the image of God. God created “man” male and female, indicating the relational aspect of God in humankind. Also Exodus 20; Mark 12:28-31; Luke 10:26-27 suggest the relational dimensions of God and humankind. [In fact,] the entire Word of God records God’s relational nature. [The problem, here, however seems to be in] Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9 [that] make it clear that the unregenerate has also been created in the image of God. [This is a crucial point, so let us reflect on the Scriptural revelation:]

Genesis 9:6: ***“Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man.”***

James 3:9: ***“With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God;”***

4. Reformed View: The image of God in man is man’s conscious propensities and man’s true knowledge. Part of the image of God in man (i.e., his “natural image”) is obscured, but not destroyed by sin; and part of God’s “moral image” is lost to man as the result of sin but is restored by Christ. Part of the image of God in man is man’s spiritual, moral, and immortal being, which has been “defaced but not erased.” (See Gen. 8:15-9:7; Ps. 8:4-9; 1 Cor. 11:7; 15:49; James 3:9; Heb. 2:5-8.) Man’s knowledge of righteousness and holiness is lost because of sin and restored by Christ. (See Eph. 4:22-25; Col. 3:9-10.) God is conscious and possesses true knowledge. [The weakness to this view is that] Genesis 1:26 simply does not refer to divisions of the image of God; rather it speaks of a single image of God.⁸

In my opinion, the first two viewpoints appear especially weak. The substantive view while intriguing by virtue of its simplicity, by definition rules itself out. While it is true that in Christ, God took on flesh and that in Christ the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form, the pre-incarnate Christ did not have a body. The Father and Holy Spirit never did and never will. Thus, for God to mean, “Let us make man look like us” could have in no way referred to a non-existent physical body. As for the functional view, this basic fact is glaring: the *imago Dei* is clearly announced as in effect in Genesis 1:27 *before* the granting of dominion in Genesis 1:28. Image and dominion are two distinct aspects.

What is left according to House then, are the relational view and Reformed view. The difference between these, however, includes this vital distinction:

1. The Relational View limits the image of God to man pre-Fall and post-conversion.
2. The Reformed View allows at least a partial image of God in man at all times.

⁸ House, H. Wayne, *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), p. 84.

Thus, on the relational view, unbelievers do not have the image of God in that they have no love for God and do not know the Lord. On the other hand, the Reformed view maintains that unbelievers still have attributes relating to a “defaced but not erased” image, such as knowledge and a sense of morality.

Now, before I go on to mention some other contributions to the possibilities as to the nature of the *imago Dei*, we ought note that at this juncture the two possibilities above have fantastic ramifications for doing Christian apologetics! Here is the division thus far:

1. When the unregenerate asks for the hope that is within the Christian, the Christian in the relational view must answer in terms of keeping in mind that the *imago Dei* is lost. Among other considerations, we need to realize that the Christian and unregenerate are on two, different plains – not simply pertaining to spiritual condition – but also pertaining to relational ability. Can this believer even relate to the God we speak of? If not, it seems that we have a good rationale for some of the tenets of presuppositional apologetics.
2. When the unregenerate asks for the hope that is within the Christian, the Christian in the Reformed view must answer in terms of keeping in mind that the *imago Dei* is NOT lost. Among other considerations, we have several more tools and resources available in our apologetic enterprise: Knowledge and the sense of morality are common links we share in regards to the *imago Dei* universal in all men. Here, it seems to me that many of the considerations we make in studying philosophy of religion are welcomed and even encouraged when communicating for the sake of the Gospel. Here, we seem to have a model that welcomes the basic tenets of evidential apologetics.

However, it does not seem that we may end the analysis here. Recall that the seeming problem with the relational view is that AFTER THE FALL, we have both Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9 teaching that the unregenerate still possess the image of God. For conservative, evangelical

Christians, this would seem to be the end of the debate, but there are other distinct views that hold to the presupposition that the image of God is lost. How do these claim to have Scriptural justification? It will be important to answer this, before we proceed with comparisons on the nature of the *imago Dei*.

Christian Views That Say The *Imago Dei* Was Lost

In classical Lutheran theology the image of God was lost as of the fall of man. In the explanation section of *Luther's Small Catechism* (not an actual part of the catechism), it says, "The image of God was this: Adam and Eve truly knew God as He wishes to be known and were perfectly happy in Him. They were righteous and holy, doing God's will."⁹ Then within this catechism, the question is asked, "Do people still have the image of God?" Answer: "No, this image was lost when our first parents disobeyed God and fell into sin. ***Their will and intellect lost the ability to know and please God.*** In Christians God has begun to rebuild His image, but only in heaven will it be fully restored."¹⁰

Notice the emphasis portrayed above: "Their will and intellect lost the ability to know and please God." This is a startling statement. Still, the commentary comes in a modern appendix to the Lutheran small catechism, so its orthodoxy to Lutheranism might be questioned. I went therefore to a more authoritative source: Johann Gerhard who is considered one of the fathers of Lutheran orthodoxy.

Upon closer inspection, it becomes enormously evident, that House's summary above is quite limited. There is more to the classical Lutheran view than at first meets the eye. It is related to the relational view above, but is not at all synonymous with it. Still, the Lutheran view also clearly teaches that the image of God was lost. Let us summarize Gerhard's presentation and then give the Lutheran answer to Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9:

A Legitimate Alternative Within Christendom

⁹ *Luther's Small Catechism*, (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), p. 111.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 112.

There are more ways to approach the *imago Dei*. Gerhard quotes Pererius a Jesuit philosopher, theologian, and exegete of the late 16th and early 17th centuries:

This divine utterance can be understood in two different ways, i.e., either of the image which is in God, so that the essential nature of God would be like an original pattern after whose likeness man was made, or of the created image which is in man. According to the former interpretation, the meaning of the divine utterance would be: 'Let us make man such as we ourselves are,' whereas according to the latter the meaning would be: 'Let us make man so similar to us that he himself might be an image and a likeness reflecting our own nature, power, wisdom, etc.'"¹¹

Either way, Pererius goes on to rightly analyze the Hebrew: "The Hebrew word *selem* [image] properly means a shadow or a shady likeness, that is, an imperfect image, a representation, whereas the Hebrew word *demuth* [likeness] indicates a perfect likeness."¹² So, in either of the above two contexts presented by Pererius on the divine utterance, "man was originally made so that in him the image of the Creator should appear in every respect like the Creator."¹³ Thus this image is not a mere reflecting of God through intellect and will, but something much more, it is bearing the ability to understand God and to desire the things which God desires. Genesis 5:6 describes a monumental shift in things after the Fall of man had occurred. The Scriptures state that Adam begot his son Seth in his own image and likeness. In the fuller and pregnant sense of these words, this means that the understanding and desire of man after the Fall had drastically changed. That original desire, righteousness and holiness was now gone.

What is so redeeming about this view in classical Lutheranism is that it does not deny a legitimate use of reason, the will, etc. in unregenerate man. It does, however, recognize how all of these are affected "because of the divine image, the reason of man would be surrendered to God; his will to his reason; his feelings and all the other faculties to his will. Hence all the

¹¹ Preus, Herman A. and Smits, Edmund, *The Doctrine of Man In Classical Lutheran Theology*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1962), p. 32.

¹² Ibid. p. 34.

¹³ Ibid. p. 34.

powers and faculties in man would constitute a perfect harmony.”¹⁴ It is not that will, feelings and faculties are lost, but that they are not now utterly out of sorts, no longer at all working in harmony. Thus, the *imago Dei* is not a substance or exceptional trait, it is not a faculty, and it is not to be confused with the soul or the parts of man himself. It is rather “an uprightness, integrity, and perfection inherent in the whole human nature and in all the faculties of the human soul.”¹⁵

This view cannot and does not say that the intellect nor will was lost; nor does it say that spirituality, intelligence, and to a certain extent, free will are lost; nor does it deny this:

If the image of God refers to some moral principles which are born in us and with us and which consist in some tiny remnants of the divine image in the mind and will of man, then too with regard to these most minute particles we maintain that the image of God was not utterly lost. In fact, the work of the Law is still written in the hearts of men, even of the unregenerate.¹⁶

Instead, the orthodox Lutheran view again is that the image of God refers to “that righteousness and holiness, integrity and uprightness of all faculties, in which man was originally created,” and this is what is said to be lost.¹⁷

Still, we have not answered the claim by House that such a view would be contrary to Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9. There are two major answers within classical Lutheranism. First there is the answer on the side of Martin Luther himself. These two passages “describe man as the noble creature who once bore the image of God and in whom God would recreate this image through faith in Christ.”¹⁸ The other view is that these passages simply describe man as he is after the Fall in regards to their endowment with intellect and will and that these represent a certain similarity to God. This view distinguishes “between the image of God in a wider sense, according to which man, in distinction from the animals, is still a rational being even after the

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 38.

¹⁵ Preus, Herman A. and Smits, Edmund, *The Doctrine of Man In Classical Lutheran Theology*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1962), p. 43.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 62.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 62.

¹⁸ Pieper, Francis, *Christian Dogmatics, Volume I*, (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p. 519.

Fall, and the divine image in the proper sense, consisting in true knowledge and service of God, which was lost through the Fall.”¹⁹ In either view, however, the Lutherans never deny that man does not retain his intellect and will, nor do they deny that these are “remnants of the divine image in the mind and will of man.”

This view, while answering the main problem of House against it, also highlights a tremendous strength. Again, as House cites above, the *imago Dei* does not seem to suggest a division of facets as in the Reformed view, but a singular thing. Original righteousness that pervades all aspects of man’s faculties is that singular thing; this is the nature of the *imago Dei*.

Ramifications For Christian Apologetics

The ramifications of this view are exciting for Christian apologetics. One reason for this is that this view of the *imago Dei* supports evidentialism. Some would suggest that Luther himself was a fideist, especially as one who called reason the devil’s whore, but Luther said other things about reason too. For example, “Now Christ is apprehended not by the law, not by works, but by reason or understanding enlightened by faith.”²⁰ Now this does not cancel the fact that Luther put forth the bondage of the will and the sinner who will fight against the faith at every turn, but this insight does lead us to see that the believer is very much using reason in their wielding of the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. This Word of God is therefore presented as Christ Himself presented it. It was presented with all of its proofs, all of its historicity, with all of its logic and with all of its reasonableness. These attributes were not strained out of the Word, but neither was the Word strained out of these attributes, rather we see that these characterize the very Word of God.

Professor Craig S. Hawkins lists several examples of this reasonable presentation of the faith through his outline “God and Logic”. For example, both Peter and Paul use objective evidence (e.g. Acts 2:14-32-39 and Acts 26:26); there is a Biblical appeal to objective eyewitness

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 519.

²⁰ Preus and Smits, p. xv.

testimony (e.g. Luke 1:2-4); there is also the clear use of reason-rationality (not to be confused with rationalism) as when the Greek word *Dialegomai* is used where Vine translates this as “to converse, argue, dispute” (see Acts 17:2, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8-9; Jude 9); and most impressively our Lord and Savior Himself used reason and argumentation. In Matthew 12:24-30 alone, He uses an argument from analogy (vv. 25-26), the law of logical or rational inference (v. 26), *reductio ad absurdum* (vv. 25-26), argument from analogy (vs. 27), the law of logical or rational inference (vv. 28, 29), argument from analogy (v. 29); the law of contradiction (vs. 30), and the law of excluded middle (vs. 30).²¹

Thus, when giving answer to the questions of the unregenerate, we are to use all that the Word of God itself presents the Holy Spirit using! This is exciting too because we affirm that the natural man though spiritually dead, still has these remnants of God’s image in a mental and spiritual sense, they may be convicted in other words, they may be convinced of things true, the Holy Spirit may use apologetics in such a way that the words of St. Paul receive much clarity: “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:5)

Towards A Biblical And Reasonable Practice

There are other theological systems that teach total depravity as the system we have just reviewed above does, and yet have significantly different conclusions. For example, Van Til, maintains that while one may speak of “common notions” psychologically, that this is clearly distinct from “common notions” epistemologically speaking. “As made in the image of God no man can escape becoming the interpretative medium of God’s general revelation both in his intellectual (Romans 1:20) and in his moral consciousness (Romans 2:14,15). No matter which button of the radio he presses, he always hears the voice of God...but epistemologically every sinner is atheistic.”²² Bahnsen goes onto elaborate: “sinners suppress the truth about God and

²¹ Hawkins, Craig S., “*God and Logic*,” (Santa Ana, CA: Apologetics Information Ministry, 1999), p. 1.

²² Bahnsen, Greg L., *Van Til’s Apologetic*, (Phillipsburg: New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 1998), p 409.

therefore “epistemologically” offer a distorted theoretical interpretation of these things, which invariably conflicts with the Christian’s interpretation.”²³ Based on this analysis, Van Til’s system requires that we adopt presuppositionalism. Unless the unregenerate accept the Christian presupposition of God to begin with, then the things of the faith will simply not be arrived at. We must therefore in this system encourage a form of fideism. In this system, while Van Til would agree with Calvin’s observation that some aspects of the *imago Dei* remain in man, in the final analysis, these aspects are useless for the apologetic task, we can’t tie into them to bring the sinner to God.

Now this observation presents a sort of irony. While the Calvinistic system in the case of Van Til is at first more optimistic about the *imago Dei* and the classical Lutheran view more pessimistic, it turns out that the former view limits the use of reason and apologetics more than the latter!

What is more, it appears to me, that many other theologians from significantly different traditions are really describing to a great extent what the system of Lutheranism is affirming. For example, Francis A. Schaeffer:

Moreover, a non-Christian painter can still paint beauty. And it is because they can still do these things that they manifest that they are God’s image-bearers or, to put it another way, they assert their unique “mannishness” as men. So it is a truly wonderful thing that, although man is twisted and corrupted and lost as a result of the Fall, yet he is still man. He has become neither a machine nor an animal nor a plant. The marks of mannishness are still upon him – love, rationality, longing for significance, fear of non-being, and so on.²⁴

Now notice that even though Schaeffer has a different view on the *imago Dei* and believes it not lost, if his definition is simply “mannishness,” the ability to know beauty, love, rationality, etc., then the Lutheran view does not deny these things. What the two views have in common though is that Schaeffer holds to a “twisted and corrupted and lost” condition of man’s nature that is consistent with the ramifications of the Lutheran’s view of the *imago Dei* as original

²³ Ibid. p. 409.

²⁴ Schaeffer, Francis A., *Escape from Reason*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1968), pp. 88, 89.

righteousness lost that certainly affects everything that still remains in man. The common thread though is that there is still something left to relate to and Christian apologetics – especially traditional evidentialism – is useful. Reason and philosophy used to assist theology and the Word of God are relevant and important.

J.P. Moreland also speaks to these issues:

Some argue that the human intellect is fallen, depraved, darkened, and blinded, and therefore human reason is irrelevant or suspect when it comes to becoming or growing as a Christian. Now, even if this point is granted in the case of evangelizing unbelievers, it doesn't follow that Christians should not use or cultivate their intellects once they have become disciples. Moreover, from the fact that reasoning alone will not bring someone to Christ, it does not follow that we should not persuade or reason with people. Preaching alone will not save people without the Spirit's work, but we still preach and work on our messages. We should do the same thing with our use of reason in evangelism.

The will is fallen and depraved too, but God still commands people to make a choice to believe. The doctrine of total depravity does not mean that the image of God is effaced, that sinners are as evil as they could possibly be, or that the intellect, emotions, and will are gone or completely useless. Rather, total depravity means that the entire person, including the intellect, has been adversely affected by the Fall and is separate from God. The sinner alone cannot extricate himself from this condition and cannot merit God's favor or commend himself to God on the basis of his own righteousness. Further, the entire personality is corrupt but not inoperative, and every aspect of our personality has a natural inclination to run in ways contrary to God's ways. However, none of this means that reason, considered in itself, is bad.²⁵

Here again Moreland has a different view on the *imago Dei*, but for all intents and purposes, he also affirms total depravity as affecting man in every way *and* that reason, intellect, emotions, etc. still remain. There is a real intersection between believer and unbeliever, we may use our reason as we present the faith to the unregenerate. Yes, it will be the Spirit of God through the Word of God that brings about conversion, as Moreland says, we still need to prepare our messages!

A View Unique To Scripture, But Ancient Philosophy Hinted Around It

Early philosophers theorized in an essential divinity of man's reason or soul. It is fascinating to consider that even though these speculations were not based on Scripture, there is a

²⁵ Moreland, J.P., *Love Your God With All Your Mind*, (Colorado Springs, Colorado, 1997), pp. 59, 60.

consistent idea of something left over from the divine. Again this is not something the Lutheran view explicated above denies, though this is not the *imago Dei*. According to Heraclitus, “The soul of man is...a universal fire, the logos...the soul is not permanently separated from that fire...”²⁶ This is not a system of theism as the logos is a all-permeating principle, but the impressive natural insight here is that man as man can relate to whatever is greater than himself. In this bare claim, even Heraclitus favors the approach of retaining our reason in discovering what is higher. This is a premise of evidentialism and real dialog with the unregenerate is truly possible, as opposed to being forced into the restrictions of presuppositionalism that would foist fideism upon the unbeliever!

Socrates also affirmed this basic interchangeability. “It is certain that he taught that God seeks man’s good, and is omnipresent and omniscient, interpenetrating nature, and ruling it as the mind rules its body. His theism depends on the conviction that there is a certain community of nature between man and God.”²⁷ Again, it seems almost instinctive that what Christ reveals in His Word about the ability to truly interact reasonably with man – even with the *imago Dei* lost – is not only self-evident to all evidentialists, but was also clear to early philosophers!

The early philosophers would also have a profound effect upon some early church fathers. For example, since for Irenaeus the image of God was “nature as a rational and free being, a nature which was not lost at the fall.”²⁸ This emphasis, however, of treating the *imago Dei* as primarily being related to man’s reason and rationality was consistent with “the classical Greek philosophers...[that] taught that man’s reason was his highest and most distinctive characteristic.”²⁹

Once again, while Irenaeus shows yet another view of the *imago Dei*, the prospect of real and reasonable communication is a given. It seems self-evident. It also happens to be Biblical.

²⁶ Cairns, David, *The Image of God in Man*, (Great Britain: Collins, 1973), p. 67.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 68.

²⁸ Hoekema, Anthony A., *Created In God’s Image*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), p. 34.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 34.

Reaching The Lost And The *Imago Dei*

Gerhard asks the question: “Why did God want some remnants of that original divine image to be left in man after the fall?”³⁰ He then goes on to list four answers (per my paraphrases):

1. That we would have some idea of how glorious our image once was.
2. That we would sense how merciful God is for still reaching out to us by grace.
3. That we would know our need for discipline, teaching and most of all, Christ.
4. That the wicked would indeed be confirmed in being “without excuse.”³¹

The *imago Dei* therefore is extraordinarily important for us to grasp for the sake of dialoging with the unregenerate and conducting Christian apologetics. These offerings are for what we might consider in terms of basic guidelines flowing from the discussion above:

1. Since the *imago Dei* is either lost or totally marred, we must rely on the Holy Spirit through the Word in conducting all Christian apologetics. 1st Peter 3:15 does not invite us to go into automatic pilot, but to prayerfully and reverently use the Word of God itself and fully rely upon it.
2. Since the loss or severe impairment of the *imago Dei* does not remove rationality, intellect, will, emotion, reason, etc., we ought follow the example of the Word of God itself to prepare our message as much as possible using God’s gift of reason and philosophy. All the while using these as servants of theology. This is a ministerial use of reason as opposed to a magisterial use of reason.
3. The reason-based questions of the unregenerate ought be answered to the best of our ability. We will not be able to monitor the exact workings of the Holy Spirit in bringing the person to faith. At what stage will the person become converted and

³⁰ Preus and Smits, p. 63.

³¹ Ibid. pp. 63, 64.

indeed have the inquirer experience faith seeking understanding? We must be ever ready to make this transition by giving intelligent and reasonable answers.