

Position Paper 1

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According to Genesis 1:27 we are all created in the image of God, also known as the *imago dei*; so God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them (NIV, 2001). According to Sonessa, W. L., biblical scholars have proposed different solutions regarding what should be recognized as the “image” of God in humanity. Some identify it with the natural qualities in human beings that make them resemble God, while others argue that it refers to mental and spiritual faculties that human beings share with God (2021). It is my belief and understanding that we were not created in resemblance to God, but rather in connection to God.

I do not believe that God created us to be like him in virtue of our characteristics, but rather in connection to him through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. When asked about one's identity, we often share attributes about ourselves with regard to our accomplishments. For example, in Fall 2021 I took social and cultural foundations of counseling; when asked to write a paper about my identity I wrote about being a mother and a wife. I discussed my cultural background as being Puerto Rican and my religious beliefs about being a Christian. I did not share characteristics of humbleness, being loving, or being self-sacrificing; characteristics that would be indicative of someone who is Christ like. Although I identified as a mother, a wife, a Christian, and a Puerto Rican woman, according to Peterson, R. S., none of these roles [are] necessarily conceived as fundamental to my very existence as a human creature in the way that the *imago Dei* is portrayed to be in Genesis 1 (2016).

From our theological perspective, people are thriving or flourishing when they are intentionally moving toward who God created them to be as unique individuals by investing in their personal development; contributing to the lives of their family, friends, and society; and

becoming more like Christ- whether they are intentional about the latter or not (King, P. E. & Whitney, W. B., 2015). Although our culture and worldviews are not indicative of the *imago dei*, there is a connection between our beliefs and walking in connection to God through our works and the image of God. For many of us, we are taught that being a good mother and/or wife, getting a good job, and going to church on Sunday's brings us closer to God, but according to King, P. E. & Whitney, W. B., the imago is not located in one particular capacity or attribute; the imago involves the whole person as one relates to God and others (2015).

My religious beliefs and my cultural background do not represent the image of God, nor do my accomplishments of my employment or my degree; rather those aspects of my life contribute to the relationship that I share with God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. As a result of my culture, I was raised Catholic and later became a Christian. If I were from a different culture, I may instead be Jewish or Muslim. My socioeconomic upbringing taught me to cling to God in times of need and during traumatic events in my life; if I were an atheist I would not have looked to God for answers during those difficult moments in my life.

I believe that God destined these things for me and it is important to understand his purpose for me here on Earth. By understanding God's purpose for my life, I can walk in the image that He designed for me according to Jeremiah 29:11; for I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future (NIV, 2001). Keeping this in mind, I am able to understand that being in the image of God means walking with a mindset that all that I do is to glorify God, and that my life has already been predestined according to His will. That is to say that my children are not my own, but rather children of God that I am blessed to love and raise with his direction. That the finances or status that I have are according to His plan, even when I want or feel that I deserve more. And, when

working with a client, or being in the company of a friend, it is important to know that it is God's plan that those people be in my life for a purpose and in turn that I am in their lives for a purpose as well.

When working with a client it is also important to understand that the *imago dei* is a representation of all people, even when interpreted differently. According to King, P. E. & Whitney, W. B., from this perspective, [thriving] is both having the capacity to relate to God and actively relating to God. Because they are created in the image of God, non-Christians also have the capacity for a relationship with God, though they may not exercise this capacity (2015). As individuals come from different cultural backgrounds and have different worldviews, we need to keep these aspects in mind when working with our clients and how it informs their spiritual or religious beliefs. To be an effective counselor it is important to learn about our client's culture and worldviews, and to not impose our own beliefs upon our clients. According to section A.4.b. Of the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics, counselors are aware of- and avoid imposing- their own values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (2014).

In conclusion, we are all created in the *imago dei*; God had a clear purpose for creating humankind, which can be fulfilled only if it maintains its relationship with God as God's image-bearer and representative (Sonessa, W. L., 2021). Although my culture and worldview may differ from that of others, causing our religious views to differ, there is one common denominator which is that we all believe in something. This is to say that God, or what the imago is, does not change; rather, human understanding and apprehension changes (King, P. E. & Whitney, W. B., 2015).

## References

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