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Franklin, Patrick S. Review of *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God*, by John F. Kilner. *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith: Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 69, no. 1 (March 2017): 56-59.

Note: The original format of this article may be viewed free of charge on the ASA web site: <https://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2017/PSCF3-17BookReviews.pdf>

earth and its inhabitants, with the villainous Tubal-cain on the other, who believes that bearing God's image entitles him to seize, dominate, consume, and control.

Aronofsky's film vividly portrays the problem that John F. Kilner, Forman Chair of Christian Ethics and Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, seeks to address in his important new book, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God*. Specifically, Kilner addresses the issue that has plagued numerous interpreters of the *imago Dei* through the ages: "Rather than people being in the image of God, God is remade in the image of people" (p. 50). This happens when interpreters define the image in terms of attributes that people presently possess. The reasoning seems natural to many: we humans are uniquely made in God's image, so we can unpack that image by looking at attributes uniquely characterizing human beings, and even come to a better understanding of God in the process. But this, says Kilner, reverses what the biblical authors understand the image to be and how they employ it throughout scripture.

The book is divided into three major parts. Part I addresses "The Human and Divine Context" and sets the stage by discussing the importance of the image of God, why interpreting it correctly is so crucial (and incorrectly so harmful), and the basic meaning of the term in the Bible. Part II is entitled "Human Dignity" and explores the image of God in light of its connection to the inalienable, God-given dignity that all human beings have by God's decree. Part III, "Human Destiny," explores the renewal and consummation of the image of God in human beings, through their union with and transformation in Christ, who is the definitive and ultimate Image of God.

The book is comprehensive in gathering the scriptural and historical texts that directly reference the image of God. Four major themes are prominent. First, Kilner exposes the tendency of interpreters to view the image of God in terms of how people are presently like God, especially in terms of human attributes. (This charge is repeated many times, to the point of being repetitive.) At best, interpreters with this tendency are well intended but still misconstrue the biblical data while pursuing their own theological aims. At worst, this tendency leads to abuses of image language with horrific consequences, in support of discrimination (of the disabled, the mentally impaired, women, etc.), racism, colonialism, slavery, and genocide (see pp. 18–37). Such abuses ensue when interpreters first equate the image of God with certain human attributes, and then notice that these are diminished or absent in some people, leading to

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**DIGNITY AND DESTINY: Humanity in the Image of God** by John F. Kilner. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015. 402 pages, including bibliography and indices. Paperback; \$35.00. ISBN: 9780802867643.

What does it mean to say that human beings are created in God's image? This question has fascinated and puzzled biblical commentators and theologians for centuries. It has been of interest recently in pop culture as well, for instance, as one of the running themes of Darren Aronofsky's 2014 film *Noah*. The film juxtaposes two contested interpretations of the image of God, contrasting Noah's family on the one hand, whom God had charged with caring for the

the conclusion that the latter are not in God's image, or are so to a lesser degree than others, and thus are less worthy of dignity and rights.

Second, Kilner points out that the true, definitive, and ultimate image of God is Jesus Christ alone. Christ *IS* the image of God in terms of being an exact image-imprint of God. Humans, similarly but not exactly, are created "in" or "according to" the image of God, which is to say that they are created from the mold of the prototype (so to speak), Jesus Christ. Creation in the image of Christ implies both a status (due to a special connection with God) and a goal for humanity: "Christ's connection with God is one essential aspect of what it means for Christ to be God's image. Yet Christ's reflection of God demonstrates what God intends for humanity to be as well" (p. 72). Christ is the prototype (p. 80) and the standard (pp. 143, 145); he is the second Adam (p. 74), being both the exact imprint of God and yet also (according to Phil. 2:6-8) formed in the likeness of human beings (pp. 69-73). Since Jesus Christ is the image of God, Kilner stresses that it is improper to say that the image of God is ever lost, diminished, damaged, or destroyed. I return to and reflect critically on this point below.

Third, Kilner everywhere unpacks the basic meaning of the image of God in terms of a twofold definition: the image refers to (a) a special *connection* with God (a given status) that entails human dignity and (b) an intended *reflection* (a destiny or goal, intended, not necessarily actualized presently) that human beings are to be and become like Christ. As Kilner puts it, "It [the image] assures human dignity and sets the stage for human destiny" (p. 229). Kilner gives priority and prominence in the book to the first part of the definition (a). He likens the image to the doctrine of justification; as the latter concerns an objective reality (God's declaration that we are in the right), so the image of God is located objectively and, in a sense, simply declared and given. I wonder, however, if this is truly an apt analogy? Justification captures the first aspect of the image well (connection, status), but it fails to do justice to the second aspect (reflection, goal, task). Perhaps "salvation," more broadly conceived, provides a better analogy. Salvation has both objective and subjective components; it concerns both a given status (justification) and a call to participate by the Spirit in pursuing a goal or destiny (transformation into the image of Christ).

Fourth, the image of God is not lost or damaged in any way due to human sin and rebellion. Kilner makes this strong claim in a number of places in the book (e.g., pp. 93, 139, 141-42, 216). While it is true to say that *people* become corrupted, distorted,

damaged, diminished, and lost because of sin, Kilner argues that such cannot be said of God's image. Having surveyed all of the biblical texts that employ image-of-God language, he points out that the Bible never attributes distortion or diminishment to God's image, though it does attribute such to human persons. Rather, sin covers much of the evidence that human beings are made in God's image; it does not destroy that basic connection of all human beings to God.

Kilner's book exhibits several strengths. It offers a fresh exposition of the relevant biblical passages, in conversation with both contemporary biblical scholarship and with commentators and theologians of the past. It puts forth what I judge to be an important corrective to abuses of the term: insofar as the image of God refers to a connection with God and a status of having a God-given, inalienable dignity, we should avoid saying that God's image is ever lost, damaged, or destroyed. On the other hand, I think there needs to be an acknowledgment that insofar as the image refers to a calling and a destiny to be like God, with respect to our character and our vocation as God's representatives and stewards, the conclusion that the image of God can be diminished, and often is, remains sound.

Another strength is the recognition of development and destiny implied by the image of God. Our intended destiny as human beings involves much more than just a return to Eden. Something new, always intended by God, is taking place. The Incarnation, therefore, was not a secondary plan or new initiative on God's part in response to human sin, but necessary to the fulfillment of God's plan all along (with or without the Fall). This theme is relevant to contemporary scientific discussions about the nature, origins, and destiny of human beings and thus should be of great interest to readers of *PSCF* (the question of the historicity of Adam is never addressed, but it seems to be assumed by the author). Finally, the author's insistence that the image of God refers to human beings in their entirety (and not just to certain isolatable attributes) is important and can provide balance to lop-sided approaches to defining the image.

Some shortcomings of the book need to be mentioned as well. First, while the author cites many past and present theologians in the footnotes, there is little to no actual engagement with those theologians in the body of the text, no attempt to take the broader contexts of their writings into account (in terms of both historical context and the development of their arguments). This sometimes gives the book a "biblicist" feel. Eminent theologians through the

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ages—Irenaeus, Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Cyril of Alexandria, Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Owen, Wesley, Barth, Brunner, Bonhoeffer, John Paul II, and many others—all get it wrong, whereas Kilner has gone back to the Bible to finally get it right. This raises suspicion.

Second, Kilner has the tendency to equate God's image with human dignity. While dignity is a legitimate theological implication of being created in God's image, it is neither the primary sense of the term nor is it even in view in most of the relevant biblical texts. In my estimation, Kilner has allowed Genesis 9:6 (NIV), "Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind," to overdetermine his interpretation of the image of God. He criticizes those that interpret the image in terms of rulership and representation (strangely and mistakenly referring to rulership as an "attribute," rather than a "calling" or "vocation"), because "rulership is not consistently present in other biblical passages about God's image" (p. 45). But this reveals three errors on Kilner's part: (1) one cannot simply determine the meaning of a word by reducing it to a lowest common denominator, such that it can only mean what it is associated with in every occurrence; (2) applying the same faulty criterion renders Kilner's own association of the image with dignity problematic, because this meaning is not itself present in every occurrence of image language in the Bible; and (3) Kilner does not sufficiently allow the historical (Ancient Near East) context and narrative flow of Genesis 1 to define the meaning of the image of God. This goes against the grain of Old Testament scholarship on Genesis 1 (e.g., Brueggemann, Clines, Longman, Merrill, Middleton, von Rad, Waltke, Walton) without adequate warrant. Kilner seems to read Genesis 9:6 into Genesis 1, again allowing it to overdetermine the meaning of the image.

This leads to a third problem in the book, which is that Kilner overstates the claim that the image of God is never damaged, diminished, corrupted, or lost. With respect to image as a status linked with basic human dignity (based on Gen. 9:6), there is some justification for the claim. But with respect to the image being a reflection, a goal, and a destiny, his assertion is too simplistic and becomes misleading and contradictory. Kilner himself writes,

People retain a special connection with God (though their relationship with God is badly damaged), and God still intends for people to reflect likenesses to God (though in actuality they largely fail to do so). (p. 134)

Kilner acknowledges that humans fail to reflect God's likeness but largely avoids the logical implication of this—that the image is thereby diminished in some sense—by conflating the two senses of image (as connection and/or reflection) and then arguing by equivocation.

Another way that Kilner attempts to make the claim that the image is never damaged is by pointing out that, properly speaking, Jesus Christ alone is God's image. While true in itself, Kilner draws from this observation a conclusion that does not follow. Yes, Jesus is God's image par excellence (Col. 1:15); it is precisely because of this that we are supposed to imitate Christ and grow into his likeness through our participation with/by the Spirit. We fail to do that, sometimes drastically so (e.g., think of Hitler and Stalin). How then can it be the case that the image remains uncorrupted in human beings, as Kilner claims? He evades this logical consequence by insisting that Jesus himself is the Image and Jesus is never corrupted (of course, all agree on this), but this again equivocates two senses of the image of God. Moreover, it makes his doctrine of the *imago Dei* seem almost Platonic, the Image operating like one of the forms: we are made according to the Image, in some vague sense we shadow it, and we are moving toward reflecting it fully (when we are glorified). But the Image itself [Christ] never changes; it remains totally Other. "People are in God's image—God's image is not in people" (p. 150).

Finally, Kilner nowhere defines what a human being is. Perhaps he thinks the answer is obvious and so a definition is unnecessary. But it seems to me that defining what it is to be human is at least as important as defining the *imago Dei*. One could theoretically agree with the author that the image of God is never damaged or diminished in humans but then still regard certain individuals, or whole groups of people, to be subhuman and thus exempt from image of God status (intact or not). To cite one of several examples, Kilner suggests that victims of the Nazi holocaust suffered the consequences of a distorted interpretation of the image of God (p. 311). While there may be a correlation at play here, Kilner overstates the causal connection and drastically oversimplifies the problem. At issue was not the definition of the image of God as such, but the failure to regard certain people (Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, etc.) as fully human and thus entitled to *imago Dei* status.

Despite its shortcomings, Kilner's *Dignity and Destiny* is an important recent study of what it means to be created in/according to God's image. Widely refer-

encing biblical texts, touching on theological history, relevant to contemporary faith-science conversations about human origins and destiny, and passionately attuned to the importance of its subject matter for the oppressed and the vulnerable, it deserves a wide readership.

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