

“VERA IUSTITIA ET SANCTITATE PRAEDITUM...”
– THE CONTENT OF IMAGO DEI ACCORDING TO THE 6TH ARTICLE
OF THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM –

DOI: 10.14232/jp.pgy.2021.4

GENERAL REMARKS

As stated in the Biblical narrative in the Book of Genesis, God created man according to his own image and similitude. If we browse through the dogmatic and ethical works written from the earliest period of Christianity until most recent times, we can find a large variety of answers concerning the content of the image of God. All of these attempt to explain what the writer of the Genesis meant by the expression *na^ašēḥ ’ādām b^ešalmenu kid^emutenu*. Before we examine what the Catechism teaches concerning this topic, we consider it necessary to present a brief analysis of the biblical text. The most important biblical passage in the writer’s view is Genesis 1:26–28, as it asserts that humankind was created in God’s image and similitude. Besides, there are two other passages in the whole Bible which point out the fact that God created the first humans in his own image: Genesis 5:3 and Genesis 9:6. The last one sets the problem of imago Dei in an ethical context, namely the prohibition of homicide. Nevertheless, none of these passages talk about the inner content of imago Dei. The two Hebrew words used by the biblical narrative to describe the imago Dei are *šēlem* (18 times in the OT, but only 4 times in the context of imago Dei) and *d^emut* (25 times in the OT, but only 3 times in the context of imago Dei: Genesis 1:26–28; 5:1; 5:3). These terms in the LXX are translated as **εἰκόν** and **ὁμοίωσις**. In the relevant biblical scholarly research, there is no consensus as to whether these terms should be considered as having a semantic difference or merely as synonyms. By looking at the context of these expressions, we might observe that both of them are suitable to express both specific and abstract things. As a conclusion of the biblical introduction, we could state that the biblical text, although abstaining to discuss the “how” of creation or the inner content of the imago Dei, still suggests that a human being is a separate, distinct and unique creation of God’s hand,⁴³⁸ and sets humankind apart from everything else that God made, thus giving dignity and worth to all people.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁸ De Jong, Jerome: *The Misery of Man*. In: Bruggink, Donald (ed.): *Guilt, Grace and Gratitude. A Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism Commemorating Its 400th Anniversary*. The Half Moon Press, New York 1963. 28.

⁴³⁹ See: Curtis, Edward: *Image of God*. in: Freedman, David Noel (ed.): *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Doubleday, New York 1992. CD-Rom Edition.

The New Testament sets the problem of *imago Dei* into a different context. Only James 3:9 – like Genesis 9:6 – refers to the question of *imago Dei* in an ethical context: we praise our Lord and Father with the same tongue we curse human beings with, who have been made in God's image. Other passages of the New Testament speak about the question in a Christological context: Christ is the true image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15; but see: 2Corinthians 4:4; Hebrews 1:3) and Christians put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator (Colossians 3:10). Furthermore, in Ephesians 4:24 Paul suggests that this new self is created to be in true righteousness and holiness like God – *κατὰ θεὸν κτισθέντα ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ καὶ ὁσιότητι τῆς ἀληθείας*.

We would suggest that the laconism of the biblical narrative concerning the content of *imago Dei* resulted in this manifold character of theological interpretation – which sometimes turn into speculation. Now, only as a general survey, we turn to the list of the main definitions which influenced the approach of Christianity to the question of *imago Dei*:⁴⁴⁰

- Those who think that *imago Dei* describes people's similarity to God belong in the first group. Some proponents of this view focus on physical similarities people have with God, while others expand the definition to incorporating non-physical components.
- Another view suggests that the *imago Dei* describes people as God's counterpart in the universe and focuses on humans as creatures in relationship with God.
- The third definition of the *imago Dei* asserts that it describes people's dominion over the Earth. In this view, the focus is on the application of the *imago Dei*. Ruling over creation is the essence of the *imago Dei* to some who agree with this definition.
- The fourth definition of the *imago Dei* proposes that the term describes people as God's representatives on earth.

We hold that these very different approaches do not contradict one another but rather add to or amplify previous ones.

The Heidelberg Catechism turns to this topic in the 6th answer where the authors attest that God did not create the first human being godless and malicious. After stating that in fact God created man according to his own image and likeness, the Catechism explains the term of *imago Dei* in a twofold way: first, it seeks to define the inner con-

⁴⁴⁰ The undermentioned summary of the four most important views on the content of *imago Dei* is almost a word for word quotation from an article entitled “*Imago Dei*”, which can be found on the following website: <http://www.religionfacts.com/christianity/beliefs/imago-dei> (accessed on: 15. 05. 2013). A very useful summarizing on this topic can be found in the following books: Hoekema, Anthony: *Created in God's Image*. Paternoster Press, Grand Rapids 1986. 33–101.; Erickson, Millard: *Christian Theology*. Baker Books, Grand Rapids 1998. 520–31.

tent of the image and similitude of God, and secondly, it expounds upon the goal of man given to him by God as the image of his creator within the creation. In the following survey we shall develop the meaning of this definition of *imago Dei*.

According to the laconic definition of the Heidelberg Catechism, the term *imago Dei* denotes first of all God's creation of the first man in true righteousness and holiness – as we could read it in the commonly accepted translations. As a first step of our survey, we shall compare the original Latin and German texts of the catechetical answer, then we shall try to point out the difference in theological ways of thinking between these two languages. On the one hand, the German text (*in wahrhaftiger Heiligkeit und Gerechtigkeit*) suggests that the *imago Dei* is an inner human characteristic which humans acquired during the act of creation. So, the *imago Dei* could be understood as an inseparable (but not *sui generis*) element of human life, which – paraphrasing the words of Jeremiah – was written in the heart of the first humans. On the other hand, the Latin text emphasizes the external origin of the *imago Dei*. It says: *vera sanctitate et iustitia praeditum* – [man] had been crowned with real and genuine justice (or righteousness) and holiness. So, *imago Dei* could be interpreted as an external factor which gives dignity to humans and makes them able to be an authentic representative of God's values on Earth. But the different meanings of the German and Latin texts do not suggest any contradiction, they rather point out two different aspects (perspectives) of the question.

SOURCES OF THE APPROACH OF THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

If we search for the roots of this approach, we have to read first the 1536 edition of Calvin's *Institutes* which states as follows, right at the beginning of the first chapter:

Parentem omnium nostrum Adam esse creatum ad imaginem et similitudinem Dei (*Gen. 1*), hoc est, sapientia, iustitia, sanctitate praeditum, atque his gratiae donis Deo ita haerentem, ut perpetuo in eo victurus fuerit, si in hac integritate naturae, quam a Deo acceperat, stetisset.⁴⁴¹

Adam, parent of us all, was created in the image and likeness of God [*Gen. 1:26–27*]. That is, he was endowed with wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and was so clinging by these gifts of grace to God that he could have lived forever in Him, if he stood fast in the uprightness God had given him.⁴⁴²

In the latest Latin edition (1559) of the *Institutes*, he develops this view even further, stating that if we want to define the inner content of the *imago Dei* we have to approach the question from the renewal of the distorted human nature (the remedy pro-

⁴⁴¹ Calvinus, Joannes: *Christianae religionis institutio*. Basileae 1536. In: *Calvini Opera Database 1.0*. Instituut voor Reformatieonderzoek, Apeldoorn 2005.

⁴⁴² Calvin, John: *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (translated and edited by Ford Lewis Battles). Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1995. 15.

vided for the corruption of nature – *Inst I 15,4*). So, the goal of the renewal that Christ provided us with is to form us anew in the image of God. Thus, Calvin concludes that the main elements of the *imago Dei* are those described in Ephesians 4:24.

The direct source of Calvin’s approach can be found in the Augustinian interpretation of the *imago Dei*. From the statistics of Anthony Lane, we learn that Calvin used Augustine’s book *On the Holy Trinity*, he quotes it in about 10 instances⁴⁴³ and in his *Institutes*. Although there are more passages in the Augustinian life-work which approach the question of *imago Dei* in that manner, we shall point out only the most obvious one. This is a latent reference that is not kept on among the word-for-word quotations or the references where the bishop of Hippo Regius is explicitly named but one that undoubtedly shows his influence:

Qui vero commemorati convertuntur ad Dominum ab ea deformitate, qua per cupiditates saeculares conformabantur huic saeculo, reformantur ex illo, audientes Apostolum dicentem: *Nolite conformari huic saeculo, sed reformamini in novitati mentis vestrae*: ut incipiat illa imago ab illo reformari, a quo formata est. Non enim reformare se ipsam potest, sicut potuit deformare. Dicit etiam alibi: *Renovamini spiritu mentis vestrae, et induite novum hominem, eum qui secundum Deum creatus est in iustitia et sanctitate veritatis*. Quod ait, *secundum Deum* creatum; hoc alio loco dicitur, *ad imaginem Dei*. Sed peccando, iustitiam et sanctitatem veritatis amisit; propter quod haec imago deformis et decolor facta est: hanc recipit, cum reformatur et renovatur.⁴⁴⁴

But those who, by being reminded, are turned to the Lord from that deformity whereby they were through worldly lusts conformed to this world, are formed anew from the world, when they hearken to the apostle, saying, “Be not conformed to this world, but be ye formed again in the renewing of your mind;” that that image may begin to be formed again by Him by whom it had been formed at first. For that image cannot form itself again, as it could deform itself. He says again elsewhere: “Be ye renewed in the spirit of your mind; and put ye on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” That which is meant by “created after God,” is expressed in another place by “after the image of God.” But it lost righteousness and true holiness by sinning, through which that image became defaced and, tarnished; and this it recovers when it is formed again and renewed.⁴⁴⁵

RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HOLINESS – THE IMAGO DEI IN THE TEACHING OF URSINUS

If we want to identify the exact meaning of these two words, we should allow Ursinus himself to speak. Our primary sources for the interpretation of these terms are the col-

⁴⁴³ Lane, Anthony: *John Calvin – Student of the Church Fathers*. T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1999. 56.

⁴⁴⁴ Augustine: *De Trinitate* 14, 16.22.

See: http://www.augustinus.it/latino/trinita/trinita_14_libro.htm (accessed: 18. 05. 2013.);

⁴⁴⁵ Augustine: *On the Holy Trinity* 14, 16.22. In: Schaff, Philip (ed.): *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Volume 3*. Books for the Ages – The Ages Software, Albany, OR, USA 1997. 375.

lections of his own catechetical explanations, published by David Pareus several times with the following titles: *Corpus doctrinae orthodoxae* (1612; 1616); *Corpus doctrinae christianae* (1602; 1621; 1634); *Explicationum catechetiarum* (1591; 1593; 1598; 1600; 1603; 1607) and *Doctrinae christianae compendium* (1584; 1585).⁴⁴⁶

First of all, Ursinus states that the righteousness and true holiness constitute the main parts of the imago Dei, presupposing the other components of God’s image in man.⁴⁴⁷ According to his interpretation, righteousness and true holiness could be understood in a twofold way: they may either be taken simply as synonyms or distinguished from each other.⁴⁴⁸ Thus righteousness could denote those “inward and outward actions and motions” which are in harmony with God’s Law, and “a mind judging correctly”, whilst true holiness would refer to the quality of these actions and motions. Simultaneously, this means that where “righteousness and true holiness are found, there is an absence of all evil, whether of guilt and punishment”.⁴⁴⁹

In the same place he defines imago Dei the following way:

Imago Dei in homine est mens recte agnoscens Dei naturam, voluntatem & opera; & voluntas libere obtemperans Deo, omniumque inclinationum, appetitionum & actionum cum voluntate Dei congruentia: ac denique spiritualis et immortalis animae natura, totiusque hominis puritas & integritas, perfecta beatitudo, & laetitia acquiescens in Deo, & dignitas hominis ac majestatis qua caeteris naturis antecellit ac dominatur.⁴⁵⁰

The image of God in man, is a mind rightly knowing the nature, will and works of God; a will freely obeying God; and a correspondence of all the inclinations, desires and actions with the divine will; in a word it is the spiritual and immortal nature of the soul, and the purity and integrity of the whole man; a perfect blessedness and joy, together with the dignity and majesty of man, in which he excels and rules over all creatures.⁴⁵¹

From this definition, it is clear that the image of God does not refer to any likeness or equality of essence but merely that of “certain properties which have a resemblance to the Godhead, not in degree or essence, but in kind and imitation” – as Ur-

⁴⁴⁶ For more editions and for more details about this work see the website of Post-Reformation Digital Library: http://www.prdl.org/author_view.php?s=20&limit=20&a_id=54&sort= (accessed: 27. May 2013). Preparing this paper we used beside the 1593 Latin edition an English translation from 1852, also accessible online: Ursinus, Zacharias (author) – Williard, G. W. (translator): *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*. Scott & Bascom Printers, Columbus 1852. (In the followings: Ursinus, Zacharias: *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*.) <http://archive.org/stream/commdrza00ursi#page/n9/mode/2up> (accessed: 27. May 2013).

⁴⁴⁷ Ursinus, Zacharias: *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*. 30.

⁴⁴⁸ Ursinus, Zacharias: *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*. 30.

⁴⁴⁹ Ursinus, Zacharias: *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*. 30.

⁴⁵⁰ Ursinus, Zacharias: *Explicationum catechetiarum*. Volumen I. Neostadii Palatinorum 1593. 83.

⁴⁵¹ Ursinus, Zacharias: *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*. 30.

sinus himself states.⁴⁵² For further clarity, he enumerates the properties in his explanation which could be understood as the manifestation of *imago Dei*:

Complectitur ergo:

1. Ipsam animae substantiam incorpoream & immortalem cum potentiis intelligendi & volendi.
2. Omnes notitias naturales de Deo & eius voluntate atque operibus, hoc est perfectam sapientiam in mente.
3. Justas & sanctas actiones, inclinationes & motus partis volentis, hoc est perfectam iustitiam & sanctitatem in voluntate & corde & externis actionibus omnibus.
4. Ipsam felicitatem, beatitudinem & gloriam, cum summa laetitia acquiescente in Deo, & copia omnium bonorum conjunctam, sine miseria & corruptione.
5. Dominium hominis in reliquis creaturas.

His omnibus creatura rationalis creatorem tanquam *imago archetypum* aliquo modo referebat, etsi non aequabat.⁴⁵³

The image of God therefore, comprehends:

1. The spiritual and immortal substance of the soul, together with the power of knowing and willing.
2. All our natural notions and conceptions of God and of his will and works,
3. Just and holy actions, inclinations, and volitions, which is the same as perfect righteousness and holiness in the will, heart, and external actions.
4. Felicity, happiness, and glory, with the greatest delight in God, connected, at the same time, with an abundance of all good things, without any misery or corruption.
5. The dominion of man over all creatures, fish, fowls, and other living things.

In all these respects, our rational nature resembles, in some degree, the Creator; just as the image resembles the archetype; yet we can never be equal with God.⁴⁵⁴

The Fall of Adam caused tragic consequences in the nature of human beings. Some components of God’s image remained in them, while other components got lost, and they were transformed into the “hateful image of Satan”⁴⁵⁵ through their absence. In this very strong phrasing, we could see one formulation of the doctrine of total depravity which played a very important role in the Arminian debate in the early 17th century. We would assert that the Reformers and the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism use this dark anthropological image in order to clarify the renewing work of the Holy Spirit and the only way of salvation: *sola gratia per fidem in Christo*. Ursinus gives a list of the components of *imago Dei* which, in spite of the Fall, remained in humans and of those which were lost.

⁴⁵² Ursinus, Zacharias: *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*. 31.

⁴⁵³ Ursinus, Zacharias: *Explicationum catecheticarum*. Volumen I. Neostadii Palatinorum 1593. 83–84.

⁴⁵⁴ Ursinus, Zacharias: *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*. 30.

⁴⁵⁵ Ursinus, Zacharias: *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*. 31.

Which components of the imago Dei remained in humans after the Fall – in spite of being greatly obscured and marred by sin?⁴⁵⁶

1. The incorporeal, rational and immortal substance of the soul together with its powers, of which we would merely mention the liberty of the will, meaning that whatever man wills, he wills freely.
2. In the understanding, there are many notions and conceptions of God, of nature and of the distinction which exists between things proper and improper, which constitute the principles of arts and sciences.
3. There are some traces and remainders of moral virtues, and some ability to regulate the external deportment of life.
4. The delight in many temporal blessings.
5. A certain dominion over other creatures. Man did not lose completely his dominion over the various creatures which were put in subjection to him; many of them are still subject to him, so that he has the power to govern and use them to his own advantage.

In opposition, the most important components and benefits of the imago Dei were lost are:⁴⁵⁷

1. The true, perfect, and saving knowledge of God and of the divine will.
2. Correct views of the works of God, together with light and knowledge in perception; in the place of which we now have ignorance, blindness, and darkness.
3. The regulation and governance of all the inclinations, desires, and actions; and a conformity with the law of God in the will, heart, and external parts; in place of which there is now a dreadful disorder and depravity of the inclinations and motions of the heart and will, from which all actual sin proceeds.
4. True and perfect dominion over the various creatures of God; for those beasts which at first feared man now oppose, injure, and wait for him; whilst the ground which was cursed for his sake brings forth thorns and briers.
5. The right of using the things that God granted not to his enemies but to his children.
6. The happiness of this and of a future life; in the place of which we now have temporal and eternal death, with every conceivable calamity.

This corrupted image is to be restored in Christ (see question and answer 86 of Heidelberg Catechism), who on the one hand is the perfect image of God (see Colossians 1:15), and on the other hand, God *has made him unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctifi-*

⁴⁵⁶ Ursinus, Zacharias: *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*. 31–32.

⁴⁵⁷ Ursinus, Zacharias: *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*. 32.

tion, and redemption⁴⁵⁸ (1 Corinthians 1:30) (see question and answer 17–18, 21, etc. in the Heidelberg Catechism). Lyle Biema summarizes that

Ursinus makes very clear that the misery from which humanity is delivered consists, first, in the loss of righteousness and in inbred corruption, or sin; and secondly, in the punishment of sin. His deliverance, therefore, from this misery requires, first, the pardon and abolishing of sin, and a restoration of the righteousness lost; and secondly, a release from all punishment and misery.⁴⁵⁹

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE APPROACH OF THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

The presentation above makes it clear that on the one hand, the two words used in the Catechism cover a large spectrum of human capacities which are theological components of the *imago Dei*, and on the other hand, they point out the patristic heritage of the interpretation of *imago Dei*, amplified with the special tone of the Reformation. While the main question focused on the structural content and the seat of *imago Dei* in the Early Church, the Reformation kept this interpretation, but the main stress was moved into an ethical direction. If we wish to paraphrase the Christological question, we could say that the Early Church explored the nature of the *imago Dei* (*natura imaginis Dei*) and the Reformation explored its benefits or consequences (*beneficia imaginis Dei*).⁴⁶⁰

By setting forth this interpretation in connection with the way of human nature's restoration, the Catechism states and echoes the original integrity and rectitude⁴⁶¹ of human nature, and strives with all its strength to point out that God is not the cause of sin with an emphatic denial⁴⁶² (*nequaquam – nein – by no means*). For this reason, the Catechism summarizes the content of *imago Dei* with these two terms, and in the 9th question and answer it speaks about the voluntary character of the Fall, calling it a wilful disobedience. In other words – as Hoeksema says –, the hatred of God and of our neighbours to which we are inclined is not only a matter of a sinful deed, nor does it arise from a sinful habit we have formed but what arises from the perversity and wickedness of our nature.⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁸ Ursinus, Zacharias: *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*. 32–33.

⁴⁵⁹ Bierma, Lyle D.: *The Theology of the Heidelberg Catechism. A Reformation Synthesis*. Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky 2013. 39.

⁴⁶⁰ In the Early Church the basic Christological thesis was: *Christum cognoscere natura ejus cognoscere est*, and in the Reformation this thesis was changed into *Christum cognoscere beneficia ejus cognoscere est*.

⁴⁶¹ De Jong, Jerome: *The Misery of Man*. In: Bruggink, Donald (ed.): *Guilt, Grace and Gratitude. A Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism Commemorating Its 400th Anniversary*. The Half Moon Press, New York 1963. 28.

⁴⁶² Hoeksema, Herman: *Triple Knowledge*. Volume I. Reformed Free Publishing Association, Grand Rapids 1990 (3rd edition). 81. (In the followings: Hoeksema, Herman: *Triple Knowledge*. Volume I.)

⁴⁶³ Hoeksema, Herman: *Triple Knowledge*. Volume I. 80–81.

Wishing to unfold the original rectitude and integrity of human nature, we could agree with Hoeksema's interpretation⁴⁶⁴ who emphasizes that not any acquired purity is meant by holiness but that original rectitude of human nature, according to which they were consecrated to God in love with all their mind, heart, soul and strength. The same way, true righteousness was not an imputed righteousness, nor was it acquired but it was that virtue of their whole nature, according to which they were in perfect harmony with the will of God, being completely able of doing the will of God with delight and pleasure. In this place Hoeksema speaks about the knowledge of God as about a third spiritual virtue (besides holiness and righteousness) which was not some mere intellectual or natural knowledge concerning the person, nature and essence of God, nor was it a "readily made system of theology or dogmatics with which Adam was endowed from the beginning", but it was the original rectitude of his mind by virtue of which immediately and spontaneously knew God, and through which he had a living contact with his Creator.⁴⁶⁵ We judge it unnecessary to speak about the integrity of the knowledge of God as a third spiritual virtue which amplifies the holiness and righteousness within the content of *imago Dei*, because the Catechism places this straight knowledge among the consequences or purposes of the *imago Dei*. God scilicet endowed humans with holiness in order that they – among others – are able know (or recognise) him rightly.

Speaking of the concept of *imago Dei* in the Heidelberg Catechism, we have to consider that the Catechism itself does not offer a detailed unfolding of the true or genuine righteousness and holiness but rather stresses its consequences. According to the 6th answer of the Heidelberg Catechism, God created man good and in (or according to) his own image so that they are able to

- truly get to know their creator God,
- love him with all their heart,
- live with God in eternal happiness,
- and to praise and glorify him.

Eberhard Busch interprets these consequences of being created into God's image and similitude on the one hand as "a destiny" of human race that "is blocked by the Fall" and needs to be renewed by Christ through His Holy Spirit,⁴⁶⁶ and on the other hand as a divine act of protection for man to "have no occasion to sin".⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁴ Hoeksema, Herman: *Triple Knowledge*. Volume I. 98. We have chosen to highlight Hoeksema's interpretation of *imago Dei* from all the scholarly interpretations, because in his commentary on Heidelberg Catechism comes explicitly forth that the original integrity of man was not one acquired, but one which has had its origin in God.

⁴⁶⁵ Hoeksema, Herman: *Triple Knowledge*. Volume I. 98.

⁴⁶⁶ Busch, Eberhard: *Drawn to Freedom. Christian Faith Today in Conversation with the Heidelberg Catechism*. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 2010. 23. (In the followings: Busch, Eberhard: *Drawn to Freedom*.)

⁴⁶⁷ Busch, Eberhard: *Drawn to Freedom*. 24.

Another aspect of the Catechetical approach to the question of *imago Dei* is its strong emphasis on fellowship or community. We can state without fear of exaggeration that, apart from their theological and ethical meaning, righteousness and holiness have a social and psychological semantic field as well. This is because

the image of God includes the whole man⁴⁶⁸ as he stands in a relationship of loving total dependence upon his Creator. Man is truly man only as he stands in the whole of his being related to his Creator.⁴⁶⁹

Human beings, in their holiness and true righteousness, were thus able to enter an “I-You” relationship with God, and the Catechism points out this relationship as the inevitable result and purpose of the *imago Dei*:⁴⁷⁰ *that he might rightly know God his Creator, heartily love him and live with him in eternal happiness to glorify and praise him.* According to the opinion of Allen Verhey, God’s praise and glory would be enhanced if people were able to know him, love him and live with him. This is the reason God created man in his own image.⁴⁷¹ As a result of this approach to the question of *imago Dei*, we could state that redemption is the restoration of this interpersonal relationship or community with God. Of course, this re-established community – in which, of course, God is the initiator – is not perfect, but on account of God’s community-creating grace, all believers can enter upon a road which leads to God’s eternal and perfect Kingdom, and at whose end there are the gifts of seeing face to face and of knowing fully (1Corinthians 13:12). With the words of Lyle Bierma, the restored community with God “is a new quality or state of existence, a renewal in holiness and fellowship with God through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit”.⁴⁷² This renewal – based on the 86th article of Heidelberg Catechism – could be seen as the prerequisite for our thankful doing of “good works”.⁴⁷³

The community between God and the man created in His image is thus a relationship full of responsibilities. Eberhard Busch emphasises that being created into God’s image means that we belong to God as God’s children. But as God’s children “we are brought into solidarity with one another. For there are children of God always only in

⁴⁶⁸ As we saw in the definition of Ursinus [note by Papp György].

⁴⁶⁹ De Jong, Jerome: *The Misery of Man*. In: Bruggink, Donald (ed.): *Guilt, Grace and Gratitude. A Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism Commemorating Its 400th Anniversary*. The Half Moon Press, New York 1963. 29.

⁴⁷⁰ De Jong, Jerome: *The Misery of Man*. In: Bruggink, Donald (ed.): *Guilt, Grace and Gratitude. A Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism Commemorating Its 400th Anniversary*. The Half Moon Press, New York 1963. 30.

⁴⁷¹ Verhey, Allen: *Living the Heidelberg*. CRC Publications, Grand Rapids 1986. 36.

⁴⁷² Bierma, Lyle D.: *The Theology of the Heidelberg Catechism. A Reformation Synthesis*. Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky 2013. 125.

⁴⁷³ Busch, Eberhard: *Drawn to Freedom*. 292.

the plural”.⁴⁷⁴ Projecting this responsibility unto the created world as well, Verhey argues that

God created us with the ability to respond in love and faith to him and to exercise that response-ability in and for his world. Neither the corruption of Adam’s first sin, nor the enmity of Cain’s murder of Abel, nor the apathy of his response can change that fundamental fact about us. We are responsible.⁴⁷⁵

This way, the teaching of the *Heidelberg Catechism* concerning the *imago Dei* also leads to the idea of stewardship. The man created in God’s image and endowed⁴⁷⁶ with holiness and true righteousness was apt or competent to rule over all other creatures, to work in his environment and to take care of it (see Genesis 2:15).

CONCLUSION – THE APPLICATION OF THE QUESTION

So, is it nowadays still important to speak of the image of God in man? Can this 450-year-old shaping of the biblical doctrine in any way be applied? This writer believes that we have some basis to rediscover the teaching of the *Heidelberg Catechism* on this topic, and to re-evaluate our concept and application of the doctrine of *imago Dei*.

First, the approach of *imago Dei* in the *Heidelberg Catechism* confirms the requirement for the holiness (or consecration) of life. By pointing out that the *imago Dei* consists of righteousness and holiness, the authors of the *Catechism* – based on the teachings concerning conversion and renewing of Pauline epistles – suggest that this is the goal of human life: a Christian must achieve holiness and righteousness as a goal given to him/her in Creation. Here we have to note that in the 16th century, the meaning of holiness was mainly qualitative and included the idea of being chosen for God, which later became the primary meaning of holiness in the context of man. The authors of the *Catechism* realised that no one is able to achieve perfect holiness and righteousness in this life as they state it in the 114th answer:

In this life even the holiest have only a small beginning of this obedience. Nevertheless, with all seriousness of purpose, they do begin to live according to all, not only some, of God’s commandments.

Thereafter, the 115th answer points out that in spite of our weakness and incapability to achieve this goal, we must

⁴⁷⁴ Busch, Eberhard: *Drawn to Freedom*. 215–216.

⁴⁷⁵ Verhey, Allen: *Living the Heidelberg*. CRC Publications, Grand Rapids 1986. 37.

⁴⁷⁶ This is the translation of *praeditum* from the Latin text of the *Catechism* used by the older English translations of the *Heidelberg Catechism*.

never stop striving, and never stop praying to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, to be renewed more and more after God’s image, until after this life we reach our goal: perfection.

Secondly, this interpretation of *imago Dei* underlines the human responsibility and the idea of stewardship, helping Christians to organise their life in a way that they are able to realize that each human being is responsible not only for the created World but also for all their manifestations of the *imago Dei*. Could their behaviour and attitude be characterised by righteousness and holiness? Was man able – with the grace of the Holy Spirit – to become God’s representative in the World? The righteousness and holiness with which Adam was endowed at the beginning and which is to be restored in Christ implies not only a privileged status but also a responsibility and a well-defined duty.

Thirdly, it seems important to speak of the doctrine of *imago Dei* in the *Heidelberg Catechism* on account of its converting character. When the *Catechism* speaks about the gratitude of man, it points out that this process involves killing the old man and the assumption of the new one, which is created according to God in holiness and true righteousness (see Ephesians 4:24). Putting on the new man (by which faith becomes visible) results in a grateful life which includes both prayer and the accomplishment of good works (deeds). The 86th question is about the necessity/imperativeness of good works, and in its manifold answer it points out that good works are necessary, because:

- thus, we show gratitude with our whole life towards God for His blessings;
- and He will be glorified by us;
- thus, we may be assured of our faith by the fruits thereof ourselves;
- and also win others to Christ by our godly walk (conduct).

For our topic, the most important reason for good works is the last one: by our godly walk, we have to win also others to Christ.⁴⁷⁷ We therefore conclude that the purpose of the authors of the *Catechism* with this interpretation of the *imago Dei* was to help believers become genuine Christians, who by their consecrated and righteous way of life would be able to contribute to the growth and welfare of God’s Church – all for the glory of God alone.

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⁴⁷⁷ Busch, Eberhard: *Drawn to Freedom*. 26.

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