



"Anthropology" and the "*Imago Dei*" as (related) problematic concepts when considering technology: suggestions towards greater cross-disciplinary understanding¹

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Abstract

In this contribution an interdisciplinary contribution from Theology on the unfolding relationship between humanity and technology, is considered. In order to contribute with validity to these academic and societal reflections, two moves are required on the part of Theology. Both the external communicability of the in-house concept within Theology of "anthropology" and the internal coherence within Theology disciplines of the term "*imago Dei*", have to be improved. On both these matters, Theology has been remiss, for different reasons. In the rising post-secular intellectual climate, Theology is sure to be heard more influentially outside of its recently more limited circles. For this reason it is important that these two moves be effected.

Keywords: Interdisciplinarity, techno-humanism, theological anthropology, *imago Dei*, Bible and Humanities

A methodological pre-quel

Because of the interdisciplinarity of the theme as much as my own intellectual composition (first in the Humanities and then in Theology), and because of the clearly multifaceted nature of the subject matter here, I also draw on different kinds of sources in this contribution. Apart from the usual academic sources, here from quite a variety of disciplines, is also draw substantially on journalism. The reason for the latter is that the newest of technologies and the earliest reactions to them often find first expression in this format of writing; academic publications take a longer time to write, to be evaluated and then to be published. Such journalism includes at times quite brief notes; other news media pieces are however more considered, written by either specialist journalists or by academics or researchers who also write non-academically about their topic in order to keep broader society both informed and critically inclined, as they track and try to steer matters related to their specialism. Each of these genres of publications bring their own strengths, on which I hope to draw in what follows.

¹ Paper at the "Techno-Humanism? North-South critical theological discourses on technology" conference, presented by the Faculty Religion and Theology, University of Pretoria, and the Protestant Theological University, 2-4 November 2022, in Pretoria and online.

This contribution was presented from Riga, Latvia, during a research period at the University of Latvia. Coincidentally, at the same time and related to the topic of this conference, the Riga Technoculture Research Unit presented at the *Kim?* Contemporary Art Centre its inaugural exhibition titled "Under the Hood" (www.rtru.org/curatorial-note.html), in which artistic expression related to technology and humanity were featured.



As an opening minute, an advertisement played at a major sports event in the USA in 1984 serves well. It prominently places into focus the relationship between new technology and a good society, and does so by suggesting a different kind of *deus ex "machina"*: www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zfqw8nhUwA. This advertisement is referred to once more below, by way of illustration. However, it serves even better to introduce the topic here, given its apocalyptic tone with clear messianic thematics.

See(k)ing the future

In a prescient article already two decades ago, De Villiers (2002:16–21) made the significant point that in dealing with such a powerful medium as the internet was already then, it is incumbent upon us to think ahead (cf. Huber, 2012:1–6; Umaru, 2021:1–18; more generally, cf. recently Suddendorf, Redshaw & Bulley, 2022); to foresee, as it were, what it is that will be brought our way by such a truly mass medium. Yet, as De Villiers (2002:16; italics here added) wrote, "There is a widespread and paralysing unwillingness, even inability, to bear moral responsibility for the past, the present *and the future*."

It would in this respect do us well to keep in mind here that, even though most of the "Big 5" — here a different meaning than usual in Africa; now related to internet companies (listed here in alphabetical order): Alphabet (= Google), Amazon, Apple, Meta (= Facebook) and Microsoft, which had come into being respectively in 1998, 1994, 1976, 2004 and 1975 — had been in existence 20 years ago, their influence had then not reached the strengths that they have since attained. In our time, "It's almost impossible to function without the big five tech giants" — as Naughton, specialist on the public understanding of technology, titled his journalistic piece on this matter (Naughton, 2019, based strongly on what might perhaps be termed the e-gonzo journalism of Hill, 2019; more thoroughgoing, cf. Naughton, 2011). The 2020 Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated a few things, one of which is that it is economically as much as personally unthinkable for intellectual peers, as for any economically significant region of the world, to live without the e-media of our time.

Fortunately for our time too, Theology / faith / the church is not caught between the two historically-occurring extremes of outright rejection of a new technology and uncritical appropriation thereof, amongst the other options (cf. Lombaard, 2019a:216, Lombaard, 2007:3), which seems often to accompany the arrival of some new technology. Those options (in parallel in these two earlier publications) may be summarised, simplified, as follows, with the two extreme reactions in each instance being the first and last of the four:

1. Technology encourages an a- or anti-religious society	1. New technology of itself undermines known Christianity
2. Reflexes against technology create a search for religious meaning	2. Technology elicits a reactionary search for faith
3. Technology is to be carefully adapted / adopted or avoided	3. Critical employment or avoidance of technology by religious people
4. New technological possibilities should be keenly employed for religious extension	4. Enthusiastic missiological / evangelical use of the new technology

Although all four of these options, along with nuances of them and perhaps other options additionally, should always be kept in mind, it remains the possible repressive, including exclusionary (cf. e.g. Rushkoff, 2022; Lombaard, 2001:43–61), dimensions of our technologised world which require closest scrutiny. In such aspects we sense the greatest hazards to our wellbeing. To be sure, in the kind of world in which we in fact live, the e-reality is part of the reality; however, some do (should...?) always fear a future in which that order will be reversed: that reality will be subsumed as only a part of the e-reality (reviewed recently



again in Keen, 2022; cf. Keen, 2018). However, such foreseen *Brave New World*² fearsome scenarios clearly do not always turn out to have understood correctly the worst possible futures (cf. e.g. Benford, 2010; Toffler, 1970; recently Sevilla & Burden, 2021 versus Alfonseca et al., 2021:65–76, centred on Rice, 1953:358–366, in journalistic reception: Mind Matters News, 2022; in less alarmist tone and from within South Africa, Steyn, 2022).

This is not to say that large technology companies are to be trusted. As just some common examples, the questions on privacy and on users' browsing and buying patterns being sold to marketers, are well known — the latter which in essence reduces users to unpaid labourers whose (albeit voluntary) "work" is being sold as data patterns which can be used for, *inter alia*, sales (along with other matters — cf. Smith, 2002). In the much-vaunted world of zeros and ones in computer programming, the "end user" — a technocratic term if ever there was one — thus becomes a merest minion amongst millions, a simple sellable unit (usually as an almost-zero within the mass of media users; these days, though, ever more personally targeted – cf. Candinell, 2022 – yet still as simply a potential source of money).

The subsequent critiques, on alienation and of instrumentalism and such dehumanisation practices, almost present themselves. Such appraisals do not have to be in only the impressively developed Marxist analytical tradition, as has become the mainstay of critical social engagement (with its by now largely predictable corollaries). Such analyses can namely also draw directly, cogently and as powerfully from core concepts in Christianity (such as faith; cf. e.g. Sands, 2018; cf. Schrijvers, 2016) or from ideas-and-ideals that are self-evidently related to Christian essentials, such as the "deficit of care" (Rabe, 2018:1–8) experienced within societies, in order to communicate broadly in society.

Drawing on ideas-and-ideals such as care or love or open community, aspects of practice can indeed be criticised. The major technology companies of our time have no doubt been guilty (and have been found as such by processes in law) of conspiring to keep their employees' salary artificially low. This was done by covertly agreeing not to employ workers from each other's ranks (cf. Caves & Singer, 2015, Lee, 2020:197–220). Apart from such deliberate corporate collusion, all the more disturbing because of the size of these institutions, to disadvantage their own workforce, there is also the less intentional but nevertheless equally material corporate culture that pervades large parts of the ICT (Information Communication Technology) industry. In a just-published interdisciplinary study, from the perspective of Philosophy, University of Pretoria colleague Benda Hofmeyr (2022) offers a thoroughgoing analysis of how "knowledge workers" – employees in ICT companies – are by the very nature of the industry exploited, by an inherent compulsion to work that is operative in this industry. The norms of the industry are, for various reasons, such that knowledge workers are oftentimes pushed to the limits of human endurance abilities, in the pursuit of an edge above competitors in the industry, which edge may just make the difference in attaining success, a widely-recognised reputation and financial rewards. Analogies to the slave trade or to the gambling industry may well be pursued in order to characterise this industry culture. The theological resources in the vocabulary, insights, virtues and history (the "conceptualature") of Christianity, could as much be drawn on for such a critique. (Hofmeyr, 2022 draws strongly on the ancient Greek concept of θυμός, an energising spiritedness inherent to us as humans which relates to deep commitment.)

² "Brave New World" is an expression often used in e.g. journalism to refer to the exciting, positive new possibilities brought about by new technologies. That however constitutes a misunderstanding of the 1932 novel of that name by Huxley, in which a decided repressive society is foreseen, in which technology is used by government to repress the citizenry, who lead a bleak, controlled existence in the service of the state.

The genre, which in some respects has its roots in the biblical apocalyptic literature, continues; Greenaway & Oram, 2022 is one of the newest offerings in this regard.



These are only two examples of the kinds of practices which require vigilance. Clearly, as depictions such as these two mentioned in the previous paragraph indicate, world society is not blind to what is e-occurring around us. In legislation, for instance, the European Union has been influential on data privacy (see for example, inter alia, online at 2022, https://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/consumers/internet-telecoms/data-protection-online-privacy/index_en.htm); the "Bill of Rights" on artificial intelligence recently proposed by the Biden administration in the USA (2022; www.whitehouse.gov/ostp/ai-bill-of-rights/) shows similar legislative awareness; the vaunted POPIA Act – the Protection of Personal Information Act (2019-2022, <https://popia.co.za>) – in South Africa, much the same.

These matters are however too important (again, De Villiers, 2002:16–21) to be left to just some sectors of society to negotiate or to determine; this cannot be a matter of, for instance, only politics and law, to the exclusion of other humanities. The idea that technology itself would solve such problems (as in the famous 1984 Apple Macintosh promotion video, www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zfqw8nhUwA; cf. Coulson, 2009:106–115) would amount to making the wolf the shepherd. Based on the now ever more appreciated recouped insight that there is no important concept in law that does not have a complement in theology (springing from Schmitt, 1922 [1934] & Schmitt, 1970 [2008]), mirrored in some respects by the increasingly influential concept of "implicit religion" (Bailey, 1997, Bailey, 2001 and Bailey, 2002; cf. Lombaard, 2019b:1–6) as the tacitly present faith dimensions in many aspects of (also seemingly secularised – here understood as something akin to "faith-free"; see however Vanhoutte, 2020:1–9) society, religion, respectively Christianity, respectively Theology have their part/s to play too.

Refining the use of two related concepts: "Anthropology" and "*Imago Dei*"

In order to contribute to the latter in a small manner, for the sake of greater intellectual coherence, I would like here too, to propose refinement in the use of two key concepts that are often employed within Christian circles when considering matters of humanity. With these two oft-related concepts clarified, I hope to assist Theology / the church / Christianity in our communication on the matter of also techno-humanism, as within Theology so without, with greater clarity as much as validity, and hence, with all-round greater efficacy.

I summarise these two related thoughts first in a table, after which I will clarify them:

The concepts	"Anthropology"	" <i>Imago Dei</i> "
We are...	... too much theologians in our relations with other human sciences;	... too much theologians in our relations with Bible sciences;
We are...	... too little like our human science scholars;	... too little like our Bible scholars.

I take these two concepts in turn, first discussing below "anthropology" and then "*imago Dei*"; both all too sketchily and compactly, yet hopefully with sufficient clarity to convey the intended views.

Anthropology

This point was first advanced for the "Being Human in a technological age: rethinking theological anthropology" conference (Leuven Centre for Christian Studies, Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven, Belgium, 22-23 February 2019; published as Lombaard, 2019a:213–238, most specifically pp. 218–224), which conference was a forum that had in many respects the same aims as the conference for which the present contribution was prepared. The argumentation (from Lombaard, 2019a:218–224) is here summarised and in some respects expanded.



In Theology, what is meant by "anthropology" relates most directly to what may be dated as the already pre-modern consideration of human beings in our relationality to, usually primarily, God. This centre is then expanded, foundationally, to our relationships with each other and to the rest of creation. These views are clearly confessionally derived and mandated (which is here indicated not as a criticism, but as a characterisation), with as confessed primary source the Bible (which explains the link in this contribution between 3.1 and 3.2), though this is read in the Christian tradition through mostly ancient Greek philosophical concepts. The latter were developed philosophically in parallel to how these concepts unfolded in the Christian-Western thought through the centuries, and then further in the eras and geographies that in time would follow in the highly influential historical wake of this the Greek-Christian-Western thought (cf. Oviedo, 2013). "Anthropology", when used within Theology, is manifestly and deeply embedded in this heritage, which wholly colours the meanings that the term "anthropology" carries amongst theologians.

Naturally, there is nothing wrong with such subject-specific terminologies; technical talk serves well in any academic field as instrument for efficient subject-interior discussions, oiling the wheels of professional communication and hence aiding more deeply-specialist speech and research, in which superficialities or commonalities do not have to be defined in every instance they are employed. Scientific sociolect or jargon thus serves positive purposes. However, when communicating externally, either within broader, non-academic society or with other academic disciplines, keeping to such specialist language leads to miscommunication of various sorts. (A good example of this is the term "schizophrenic", which is in popular discourse used to indicate being of two minds, or experiencing cognitive dissonance, which use draws in roughly equal parts also on popular misunderstandings of the concept of "split personality". Technically, though, in e.g. Psychology and Psychiatry, schizophrenia refers to a dissociative experience in which a person, as it were, loses touch with reality. Miscommunication thus frequently follows when the term "schizophrenic" is for instance used in a radio broadcast. Irrespective of whether the speaker hails from such specialist circles or not, misunderstandings ensue; explanations and clarifications are required; often, though, still with disappointing effect.) This is the case too with the term "anthropology" as employed within theological circles (cf. e.g. Steenberg 2009), in which, furthermore, the technical distinctions between for instance a Genesis-creational, an eschatological or different Christological views (cf. e.g. Woznicki, 2021:21–41) in this regard within Christianity make matters no simpler.

In the Bible sciences, this is not much different, even if the probable ancient meanings of the texts tend to carry greater critical weight than is practically (though not confessionally) the case when other fields within Theology consider Christian "anthropology". Here the focus is on what Bible texts say (or can be said to say) about the nature of humanity (us-as-humans; us as special, created beings). In most usually Systematic Theology / Dogmatology within the theological encyclopaedia, but also in for instance liberation theologies, the referential spectrum explicitly drawn on, is wider: what Christianity, from its various sources and dialogically, can be said to say about the nature of humanity (of which Simango, 2016:172–190 provides an overview), is brought in to theologise on "anthropology".

Implied either directly or indirectly in such theologising, is that this is how God sees us as humans (or how God can be said sees us as humans) – in our essence, our origins / provenance, our purpose / destiny, the various relations in which we stand; and as corollaries, how we are to view ourselves, what we therefore ought to do and what we also ought not to do. In a sense, what is provided by such a kind of argumentation, is an inclination that at least tends towards the universalistic. The theologising is something akin to a view from above; it ought to be adhered to. A principled stance leads to pronouncements on expected behaviour, meaning, and so forth.



In the Human Sciences, what is meant by Anthropology is something quite different to the above; something much more concrete, less universalistic and without pretense towards (anything approaching) philosophical principles, is in view. Also consisting of internal pluralities (with focuses on the social, the cultural, the biological, the linguistic, and so forth), humanity is studied in an inductive manner, with abstraction springing from comparisons. As important as theories are in Anthropology (which explains its placement in many universities in the same department as the discipline of Sociology, albeit awkwardly, given that the place afforded theory and is far from identical in these two disciplines), what is seen in civilisations or cultures in the prime focus. A non-universalistic inclination towards the opposite, the specific, is the dominant orientation; something akin to a view from the ground, so to speak. The approach is observational, whence pronouncements on perceived behaviour, meaning, and so forth could be found.

The problem is evident: with the latter the strongly dominant understanding of the term "anthropology" within academic life as much as in broader society, how can Theology communicate well within these contexts? With the different meanings attached to this term, miscommunication of various sorts is to be expected, to the detriment of all. Valuable publications on crossing this Theology - Humanities divide regarding "anthropology" have over the last two decades or so seen the light (cf. e.g. Robbins, 2006:285–294), with their arguments that cannot be traced here. For the moment, for the sake of more effective cross-disciplinary communication, my suggestion remains that within Theology the expression "view(s)-of-humanity" (or something similar, possibly with some variance in order to indicate provenance and/or inclination) be adopted, rather than "anthropology". The latter leaves too much room for misunderstanding by other academic disciplines, in the Humanities or Social Sciences fields and more widely.

Imago Dei

The point here is not to trace the development of the concept of the *imago Dei* throughout history; that has been amply done (cf. e.g. Van Huyssteen, 2006:111–162 and Simango, 2016:172–190). From overviews such as these, it is clear that the theologising that accompanies by far the larger part of meaning-making from *the imago Dei* concept, in academic disciplines such as Systematic Theology and Practical Theology as much as in the hermeneutics of the different liberative theologies of our time, owes much to the interpretations of the early church, and much less — almost nothing other than the source concepts — to the Bible itself.

The latter assertion too is not new. In academic commentaries on the book of Genesis, this has often been stated (in e.g. the earlier standard historical commentary by Westermann, 1984:144–160, in the Genesis commentary most popular outside of Old Testament circles by Brueggemann, 1982:77, or in newer commentaries such as that by Fischer, 2018:115, to name but three examples). Moreover, in articles on this particular matter of the exegetical, contextual interpretation of the *imago Dei* texts in Genesis (e.g. McDowell, 2021:29–44, Jančovič, 2019:183–206, Schellenberg, 2009:97–115, Middleton, 1994:8–25), this point has been amply and clearly made too. What is offered here, therefore, is simply the briefest of summaries of the applicable long-held insights, with the intention again to assert that what is made of these texts often lies much beyond the possible meaning range *within* these Bible verses; the ascribed connotations much transcend the textual denotations.

That is not to say, to be sure, that such theologising on the *imago Dei* ought in any way to be curtailed or halted. The form of argumentation in such theologising ought however to be more restrained, so as not to (seem to) imply that the Bible texts themselves convey these extended interpretations. As even this brief summary that follows indicates, they do not.



The texts concerned

The texts from which *imago Dei* theologising spring, are just four, but could better be indicated as only three, given that the first two verses are immediately adjacent to one another. There are of course other texts in the Bible that contain ideas on human worth: most usually referred to is Psalm 8; the text of Deuteronomy 13 is, outside the circles of Old Testament scholars, perhaps the most surprising of these, yet is more productive than most (cf. e.g. Otto, 2004:181–188); in the non-canonical Hebrew Bible and in the New Testament, the idea is picked up, though quite differently. As Schellenberg, 2009:97¹ notes in this regard:

This is different in the deuterocanonical and New Testament books, in which the "image of God" idea occurs often (see Sir 17:3–4; Wis 2:23–24; Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 11:7; 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18; 4:4; Col 1:15; 3:10; Heb 1:3; Jas 3:9). These passages are instructive for how the Priestly idea was interpreted in its early reception history. For the understanding of the Priestly idea itself, however, they are less relevant, having reinterpreted it for new contexts and thus departed from its original sense.

Mostly in interpretations by later, including current, readers, are such extended connections made, at times to quite a baroque extent. The *imago Dei* idea in the Bible itself is however restricted to these few texts indicated below.

Based on the rarity of the occurrence of this idea in the Bible, *Hermeneutical Question 1* may here be posed as follows: Does it seem prudent to build such large bodies of theology on so slim a biblical base? (That is, if a biblical base for theologising is at all required. As has been suggested above, an alternative could be that the "form of argumentation in such theologising ... be moderated...".)

Besides this hermeneutical question, in briefest review, then, I offer a review of the Genesis texts concerned. All four (or, really, three) texts here are recognised as Priestly texts (the exegetical arguments on — these days — "P texts" and "non-P texts" in the Pentateuch are for the moment left unreviewed). These texts certainly post-date the beginning of the Babylonian exile, which period started in 586 BCE, and possibly post-dates the end of the Babylonian exile, which period commenced in 539 BCE.

The texts, the product of literary elites probably in the empire capital of Babylon or, less likely, a little later in Jerusalem-under-reconstruction, are therefore in active discussion with the dominant Babylonian culture. This includes both the widely prevailing ideational constructs and the prominent texts. Not to go into the implications of this significant geographic and social situatedness, but simply to restrict the case here to the "image of God" terminology, these references are found as now indicated (with the specific Hebrew terms related here; with the verse translations taken from the New Jerusalem Bible, given the literal nature of this translation, which thus renders a closer sense of the original; the italics added to the translation refer to the Hebrew terminology related here, with the roughly synonymous Hebrew root lexemes *צלם* and *דמה* which occur in these verses):

1. Genesis 1:26 – *בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ* (both lexemes occur)
¶ God said, 'Let us make man *in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves*, and let them be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all the wild animals and all the creatures that creep along the ground.'
2. Genesis 1:27 – *בְּצַלְמוֹ ... בְּצַלְמֵנוּ* (only the *צלם* root is found, but twice)
God created man *in the image of himself, in the image of God* he created him, male and female he created them.
3. Genesis 5:1 – *בְּדְמוּת* (only *דמה*, here)



This is the roll of Adam's descendants: On the day that God created Adam he made him *in the likeness of God*.

4. Genesis 9:6 – םלצ (only צלמ, here)

He who sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for *in the image of God* was man created.

On the latter (the text numbered 4 immediately above, with its ominous contents), *Hermeneutical Question 2* may be posed as follows: Why do theologies that make much of the *imago Dei* idea, not make equitably widely use of this Genesis 9:6 occurrence?

The implication operative in this second hermeneutical question can be explicated as follows: if proof texting theology in favour of capital punishment (countless informal arguments that draw this inference are freely available; researched considerations include Wilson, 2017:263–273 and Jančovič, 2020:191–206) is as abominably unacceptable as it indubitably is (the counter-arguments too are however at times astonishingly contrived), with Genesis 9:6 which conspicuously bases the *lex talionis* creed, straightforwardly, on the *imago Dei* concept, why do liberative theologies tend to ignore this biblical "base"?³ The answer is of course clear: there is nothing liberative to say on capital punishment (the death penalty does not know grace), nor then from a theology that would draw on such a linkage to the *imago Dei* concept as made in Genesis 9:6 (because of guilt, or perhaps illegitimacy, by association). Yet, that linkage is made – "straightforwardly", as just pointed out – in this Bible text.

The next question then commonsensically presents itself: Does such an interpretative strategy – highly required as liberative theologies are! (– lest my intentions here are misunderstood or misconstrued...) – then not render the resulting theology itself also guilty of proof texting; that is, of using only Bible texts that seem directly productive in relation to the previously decided on flow of argument?⁴ If so, that would have frightful consequences for the quality of such theologising, given the commendable ideas and ideals that inform liberative theologies.⁵

On each of these texts, of course, much more can be said (and has, amply, in the published exegetical and hermeneutical literature); as however indicated above, only the merest mention required is made here of the matters concerned, in order to convey the intention.

³ Underlying these questions is the sense that perhaps some Bible verses are made to serve, *de facto*, merely a legitimating purpose. Were that indeed the case, therein too would lie this irony (here quoted from Lombaard, 2022:214):

The Bible is held in high regard – particularly in religious circles, but even if for only cultural-historical reasons – but then, when speaking on or from these texts, that esteem seems to have little validity. The text is namely almost immediately departed from, left behind to various degrees, as if it had served as an inspirational moment, perhaps akin to the impulse that unleashes the creativity of a painter or poet. However, after that initial moment, the Bible is treated with scant regard for what the particular text could conceivably have said to its time and – by means of parallels and analogies – into ours.

⁴ In Afrikaans church culture, sermons along these lines are called "kapstokpreke": the message had been decided on beforehand, and only then, almost as an afterthought, a Bible text is sought onto which, all too easily, the sermon can be hooked. (Naturally there is theology operative in the minds of ministers who practice such kinds of sermons and which props up this kind of homiletic practice. This theology usually wavers between a naïve inspiration theory and a reflex-pragmatist approach in which the urgency or the relevance of the topic is such that of itself it is already, in a sense, hallowed — both, superficial theological constructs.)

⁵ The liberative theologies are therefore not regarded as a problem here; the Bible usage however is problematic. Something better is required, given the highly positive nature of liberative theologies.

The meaning of these texts

Here to start off with *Hermeneutical question 3*: Can the historical meaning of *imago Dei* at all be translated fruitfully into current times?

The quick answer to the third and last of the explicitly stated hermeneutical questions in this contribution, is: yes. Cross-contextual readings — that means, readings from within the ancient contexts into later or current contexts — are indeed possible, "by means of parallels and analogies" (Lombaard, 2022:214), if both contexts are analysed consistently and sensitively historically (with none of the naïve forms of reading either contexts implied here). That has indeed been done substantively (cf. e.g. Levinson & Otto, 2004), albeit in such technical formats that it is probably not consulted widely outside of the circles of specialist exegetes. For the moment, therefore too, the simpler line of argument, consistent with the unfolding of the argument so far, relates to the understandings of *imago Dei* that are possible; here, again, summarised. It is remarkable how the historical-contextual (and, it must be stressed, interpretatively and religiously highly productive) understandings of the reference to divine likeness in these Genesis texts, runs more or less counter to what is usually stated in church catechesis as much as in most parts of the non-exegetical theological work within Theology on this topic. If not stated explicitly (though it often is), then at least it is strongly implied that the *imago Dei* concept in Genesis has nothing to do with the visage of humanity and Divinity; the *imago Dei* concept — in such kinds of understandings — is thus said not to relate to the countenance or appearance of either the human being or God. That God and *homo sapiens* do not look alike, is however a conceptualisation from ancient Greece, outside of the direct textual originating geographies of the Bible. This understanding was incorporated into the early church quite naturally by the hegemonic cultural influence of Hellenism, and has thus been foundationally operative in the Christian-Western(ised) religio-cultural stream of the past two millennia. That understanding is also 180° wrong, given the ancient Near-Eastern context of origination of the expression בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ and its variations.

In the era of post-exilic Judea, namely, among the images of royalty present in the mind of Judeans (the cultural imaginary; cf. e.g. Hall, 1997), counts one that hails from Babylon (i.e. the neo-Babylonian empire capital in Mesopotamia, roughly a thousand kilometers to the East of Jerusalem). In this then-dominant culture, the ruler is held directly to represent the (local) god, "On earth as it is in heaven" (here to misrepresent a line from the famous prayer in Matthew 6; specifically 6:10). Royalty was here understood to be the "incarnate" (adoptive) presence of divinity – which religio-political construction was concretised also in stonework, for instance as follows (from Barton & Bowden, 2004:63):





In this mural, two kings face one another. Behind each king stands his god, because this is whom the king represents ("on earth as it is in heaven", as it were): the god is the guarantor of the rulership; the ruler is the executor of the divine world order. In each instance here, royalty and divinity are identical; physically, each king looks like his god. In this intimate kind of political theology, resemblance of countenance equates directly to, in the later language of Genesis 1:26, *בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ*. God and king, divinity and human, look alike, as would identical twins.

As indicated above, this representivity stands in opposition to what later and current catechesis and theologising usually holds. The semblance is indeed physical. In the cultural framework in which the ancient Near Eastern concept of *בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ* is operative, this likeness translates symbolically to absolute power (which connection affords Genesis 9:6 its contextual meaning), but not to the positive attributes of (an often idealised) humanity found in later and current theologising and catechesis.

To reiterate also what was stated above on the implication of such insights: to elaborate theologically and philosophically on "(an often idealised) humanity" is by no means unwarranted. Precisely the opposite: there are many good reasons to do so. However, such theologising and philosophising cannot be said to explain what was meant within these few Genesis texts; nor can such understandings be placed onto these texts with the intention to elucidate them, as it were after the fact. Different, historically more congruent argumentations ought to be employed in such theologising and philosophising.

Towards interdisciplinary sequels

The intention with indicating these two instances (3.3.1 and 3.3.2) above, is to assist with moving towards greater congruence within the disciplines of Theology (3.3.2) and with moving towards coordination with the disciplines of the Humanities (3.3.1); in both cases, in order to communicate with greater clear-sightedness on topics of importance. The suggestion above is therefore that exegetically-non-specialist theologians have to be more specific in the use of the *imago Dei* concept, and less specific in the use of the concept of anthropology. This, in order to communicate more accurately *on* the Bible, which means also *from* the Bible, and in order to communicate with greater clarity outside of the fields of Theology.

The latter call applies equally to other matters as to the topic of techno-humanism. Keeping for the moment to more closely religion-related matters (even though technologies, their uses and implications evidently range beyond all provincialities), in closing, contemporary news reports include these three: *Fox News* (Reilly, 2022) recently reported on *Hallow*, "a Catholic prayer and meditation app that ... has facilitated over 100 million prayers across some 150 countries since its launch in late 2018"; for Buddhism, an Artificial Intelligence meditation app is currently being developed (*Bangkok Post*, 2022); the weekly "Bible in a Year" podcast has a subscribership of 1.5 million on the Apple podcast platform (Fenton, 2022).

These are just a few of the illustrations of what we all sense, that the world will not become any less technological (except in the case of a possible *force majeure* which destroys much of the planet and of human civilisation). Rather, we all foresee an ever more technological society that lies in our immediate future (cf. e.g. Copestake, Estefania-Flores & Furceri, 2022, Marche, 2022, cf. Possemai, 2017). At the same time, demographically speaking (cf. Pew Research Center, 2017), the world is becoming more religious and more conservatively religious. On the unfolding mutual influence and perhaps confluence of these two global trends, it is incumbent on us to track, to reflect on and to steer matters. We also — my plea — therefore have to communicate well, in both directions: within Theology and with our wider world/s, so that the certainly valid voices from Theology may be taken cognisance of in wider society.



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