

emphasis upon “piety” at the expense of “social ethics,” ignoring the role of the church and monasteries in developing hospitals and other services for the poor and downtrodden. Gerhardt’s account lacks any engagement with Christian ethicists, such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Oliver O’Donovan, and Stanley Hauerwas, who see “rights” language as inadequate because of its complicity in liberal social orders, and instead understand justice as right order and/or mutual obligation within particular virtue-forming communities. She also accepts the view popular in the twentieth century that God suffers in God’s nature.

Despite these weaknesses, Gerhardt’s work has much to commend, and her own experience with victims of gendercide only bolsters her scholarship. She correctly identifies abuse

and oppression of women and girls due to their gender as sin and heresy, and provides churches with resources to confront gendercide locally and globally.



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Book Review

Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God

By John F. Kilner (*Erdmans, 2015*)

REVIEWED BY CHRISTA L. MCKIRLAND

In his book, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God*, bioethicist John F. Kilner sketches the theological history of the image of God, critiques prominent viewpoints from this sketch, and offers a robust formulation of what it means to be in God’s image. Since the understanding of this theological doctrine has both dignified and vilified certain human beings, Kilner astutely asserts the importance of explicating this doctrine well. All human persons, regardless of sex, ethnicity, class, ability, etc., must be valued, and this book gives the theological underpinning for the imperative nature of this valuation.

Kilner begins with stark examples of how the image of God has been used as a weapon to oppress certain human beings. Such oppression was especially prevalent, for example, during the time of slavery in the United States and has been used throughout church history to subordinate women to men. He specifically notes how women have borne the brunt of a misunderstood image of God, especially when it has been associated with rationalism and the soul. Women have been caricatured as being less rational, less spiritual, and consequently, less in the image of God and even less human. Kilner argues this is the necessary consequence of basing the image of God on the manifestation of certain attributes believed to be the possession of males rather than females.

The second chapter proffers that the starting point for understanding the image of God is Jesus Christ since he *is* the image of God. Here, Kilner offers the thesis of his book: “*actual* likeness to God is not what being created in God’s image involves. Creation in God’s image is God’s expressed *intention* that people evidence the special connection they have with God through a meaningful reflection of God” (79). This approach differs

markedly from most theological approaches throughout church history. Instead of claiming that humans intrinsically possess the image of God, Kilner affixes the divine image to God’s intention that all people *become* like Christ. Furthermore, humans are created in this image as whole beings—including the physical and non-physical. This formulation ensures that everyone is equally in the image of God, regardless of attributes, and it also inhibits sin from damaging the image.

Knowing that many theologians have argued for an attributive understanding of the image of God, Kilner shifts to exegetical support for all persons being in the image of God, regardless of their attributes. A helpful distinction he articulates in ch. 3 is between image and glory. Being in the image of God cannot be degraded, but how well someone reflects God’s glory can be degraded. A potential concern might arise here for an egalitarian reader since Kilner claims that men and women reflect God’s glory differently (94). Although he is clearly making the point that men and women share the same image, his argument could be interpreted as “equal in image (essence), different in glory (function).” For this reason, a more complete elaboration of what this means would strengthen his argument.

Chs. 4 and 5 focus on the impact of sin on the image of God and also on misunderstandings about the image that have pervaded church history. Since Jesus Christ is the image of God and humans are in this irrevocable image, sin cannot mar it. This remains true for all human beings, regardless of whether they are being conformed to the image of Christ. Furthermore, maleness and femaleness do not constitute the image of God. Kilner argues, focusing on the Hebrew syntax of Gen 1:27, that the statement “male and female he created them” gives the means by which

the image continues. This language parallels the words given for animals since this is their means of reproduction as well.

However, humans are intended to move beyond Eden and be conformed to the image of Christ, which can only happen through trust in Jesus. Thus, chs. 6 and 7 explain how God's intention is enacted through special connection with God which then meaningfully reflects God. Such intention can only occur through the power of the Holy Spirit and will look like certain attributes (rulership, relationship, reason, righteousness) being cultivated in the believer's life. Ultimately, the intended destiny of all human beings is to become the actual image of God through imitation of Christ's humanity and to be perfected in glory.

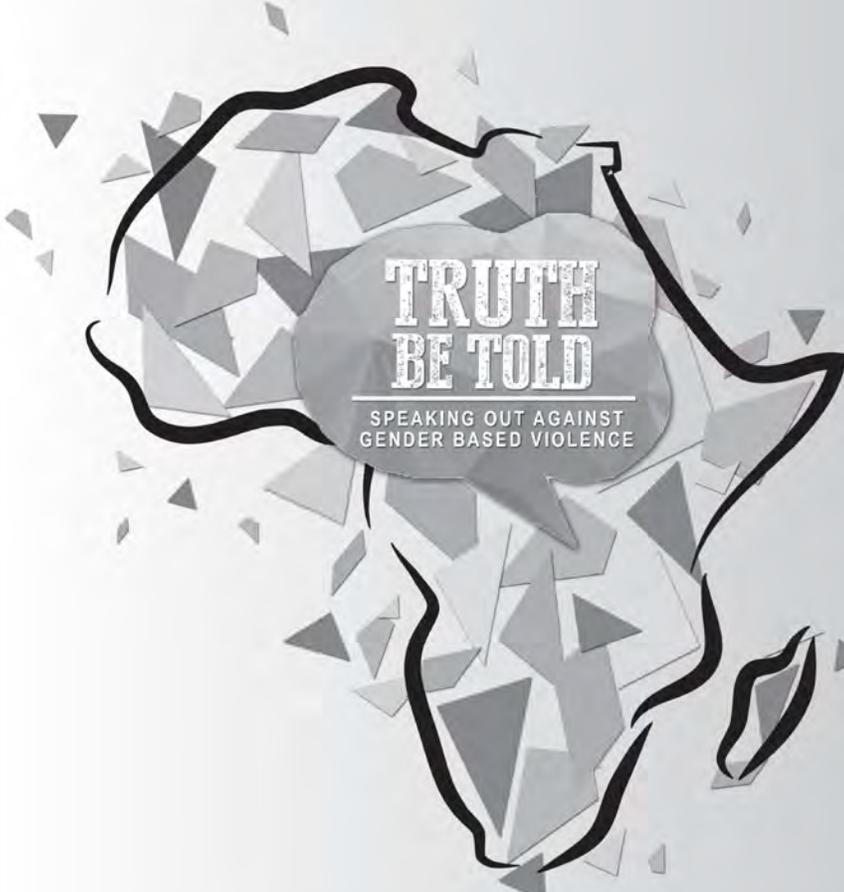
Kilner concludes with an exhortation to adopt such an understanding of the image of God and to allow this theology to permeate one's life. He makes a strong appeal to men, specifically in light of this doctrine, that "overcoming gender bias requires more than acknowledging women as created in God's image" (326). Even though this book is not expressly related to advocacy for gender equality, this appeal is a clear consequence of having a non-attributive view of being in the image of God.

Kilner makes a strong argument that all people are in the incorruptible image of God. However, a few questions remain that warrant clarity. For instance, how is the image of God connected to human personhood? Since this is a major question

in bioethics, clarity of terms and the relationship between the two would be beneficial. Also, Kilner addresses the value of the body since it is part of the whole person being in the image of God. However, a statement about how this impacts being in the image during the temporal, disembodied existence of the dead prior to Christ's return would also be helpful. Finally, if the reader is strongly Reformed, the idea that God intends that all human persons spend their destinies being conformed to the image of Christ will seemingly contradict some persons being predestined for destruction. Because he assumes that all humans are intended to commune with and reflect God, this concern is not addressed. While these questions may arise for certain readers, this book remains a solid contribution to understanding theological anthropology and a wonderful basis for advocacy on behalf of all human persons.



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The graphic features a stylized map of Africa composed of many small, grey, irregular shapes. A thick black outline of the continent is overlaid on this. In the center of the map, the words "TRUTH BE TOLD" are written in a bold, white, sans-serif font. Below this, in a smaller white font, is the subtitle "SPEAKING OUT AGAINST GENDER BASED VIOLENCE".

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