



# Anthony Hoekema on the understanding of the Image of God

Reymand Hutabarat<sup>1</sup>, Franklin Hutabarat<sup>2</sup>, Deanna Beryl Majilang<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Theology, Universitas Advent Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia.,

<sup>2</sup>Instructor, Faculty of Religious Studies, Asia-Pacific International University  
*marasitua@yahoo.com*

## ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the understanding of Anthony Hoekema on the image of God. Anthony Hoekema's theology as a whole is a Reformed theology. The core and the very foundation of the Reformed theology is the sovereignty of God. Hoekema saw that the creation of man in God's image is "the most distinctive feature of biblical understanding of man" (Hoekema 1988). This was why he understood that "the concept of the image of God is the heart of Christian anthropology" (Hoekema 1988). Hoekema's concept of the image of God in man is examined in this paper, which is divided into the following five parts: the meaning of being created in the image of God, the structural and functional aspects of God's image, Jesus as the true image of God, the image of God in man's threefold relationship, and the image of God in four different stages. Hoekema maintained that the image of God in man must contain both structural and functional aspects, for "the image of God includes the whole person" (Hoekema 1987). The structural aspect means "what kind of being man is" (Hoekema 1976, while functional aspect means "what man does." For Hoekema, these two aspects of God's image in man are inseparable, for "one cannot function without a certain structure" (Hoekema 1989). Hoekema asserted that "there is no better way of seeing the image of God than to look at Jesus Christ" (Hoekema 1987), for he believes, based on Colossians 1:15, that He is the "image of the invisible God" (Hoekema 1988). In Christ, who is God incarnated, one sees "clearly what is hidden in Genesis 1: namely, what man as the perfect image of God should be like" (Hoekema 1976). In other words, Hoekema understood that the perfect image of God that man possessed at creation, is found in the the life of human Jesus.

**Keywords:** Image of God, Sovereignty of God, Jesus Christ

## INTRODUCTION

Anthony Hoekema was born in Drachthen, Friesland, Netherland, in 1913. During his childhood, Hoekema immigrated to the United States with his parents and two brothers in 1923 (Hoekema 1988). He received a B.A in from Calvin College in 1936, an M.A. in

psychology from the University of Michigan in 1937, a Th.M. from Calvin Theological seminary in 1944 and finally, a Th.D. from Princeton Theological seminary in 1953. Following his ordination for the gospel ministry in 1944, Hoekema served as a pastor in three reformed churches: Twelfth Streets Church in Grand Rapids, Bethel Church in Paterson, and Alger Park Church in Grand Rapids. In 1946, he was called for a teaching ministry at Calvin College. Then, Hoekema moved to Calvin Seminary in 1958, where he worked as a professor of systematic theology until his retirement in 1978 (Hoekema, 1989). He died on October 17, 1988. During his 44 years of ministry, Hoekema was active in his works as a preacher, teacher and writer (Hoekema, 1989). Among his most outstanding reformed viewpoints are *Created in God's Image The Four Major Cults*, *What About Tongue-Speaking?*, *The Bible and the Future*, and *Saved By Grace*.

Hoekema's theology as a whole is a Reformed theology. The core and the very foundation of the Reformed theology is the sovereignty of God. Hoekema saw that the creation of man in God's image is "the most distinctive feature of biblical understanding of man" (Hoekema, 1989, p. 55). This was why he understood that "the concept of the image of God is the heart of Christian anthropology" (Hoekema, 1989, p. 56). His concept of the image of God in man is examined in this paper, which is divided into the following five parts: the meaning of being created in the image of God, the structural and functional aspects of God's image, Jesus as the true image of God, the image of God in man's threefold relationship, and the image of God in four different stages.

## LITERATUR REVIEW

### **The Meaning of Being Created in the Image of God**

What does the Bible intend when it states, man is created in God's image (Hoekema 1988, p. 122). For Hoekema, this statement intended "to say that man at the time of his creation was obedient to God and loved God with all his heart" (Hoekema, 1989, p. 123). But Hoekema did not understand that this is all that this statement intends. He believed that this statement "sets man apart from the rest of God's creation, by indicating that he was formed in a unique way (Hoekema, 1989, p. 122)." Then, what is the "unique way?" Hoekema answered this question by stating, when God created man, he wanted man to reflect Him and be His representative (Hoekema, 1989, p. 177)

First, man was created to mirror God. The function of a mirror is to reflect. Likewise, when man was created, he was to God. Hoekema (1989) observed the following: whenever we look

at people, we need to see how that people mirror God. In other words, God should be seen in the world in man's life. Through man people can see God. (p. 85).

In this statement, Hoekema emphasized that man is the only creature who reflects God himself. All other creatures, though they are also God's revelations, merely show His presence, power, and dignity. For this reason, Hoekema believes that "being an image of God who made him" (Hoekema, 1989, p. 75). is the greatest privilege and the highest honor given to man.

Hoekema connected the fact that man was created in the image of God to God's prohibition of image making found in the second commandment of the decalogue (Hoekema, 1989). He explained on why God has given this commandment with the following: God did not instruct his people to create images of Himself, because he has made creatures, that can live, talk and walk to represent him. (Hoekema, 1986, p. 54).

Second, man was created to represent God. Hoekema understands that the image not only reflects but also represents the original. He pointed out the image in Daniel 3 as an example, understanding that the image set up on the plain of Dura represented King Nebuchadnezzar (Hoekema, 1986). As to the meaning that man was created as the representative of God on earth, Hoekema (1976) wrote the following, in order to be God's representative, man was created in the image, this is similar to the function of a country's ambassador. So people should be the representative of God's authority. People should be the one who defend and support the will and purpose of God. (p. 111).

In brief, in Hoekema's theology, to be created in God's image means to be the mirror and representative of God. As a mirror, man must show God himself to other creatures, and as a representative, he or she must do God's work on earth.

### **Structural And Functional Aspects of the Image of God**

Hoekema maintained that the image of God in man must contain both structural and functional aspects, for "the image of God includes the whole person" (Hoekema, 1987 p. 122). The structural aspect means "what kind of being man is" (Hoekema 1988. 122), while functional aspect means "what man does" (Hoekema, 1976, p. 210). For Hoekema, these two aspects of God's image in man are inseparable, for "one cannot function without a certain structure" (Hoekema, 1979, p. 154), supported with the following statement, People are created with certain functions: to love one another, to take care of God's creation, to worship Him, etc. But people would not be able to perform these duties if they are not given the structural capacities by God. (Hoekema, 1989, p. 114).

### **Structural Aspect**

By the structural aspect of the image of God in man, Hoekema referred the aspect as “the entire endowment of gifts and capacities that enable man to function as he should in his various relationships and callings” (Hoekema, 1986, p. 114). He understood that the main features of God’s image in this aspect are man’s intellectual and rational powers, his moral sensitivity, and his responsibility. He stated: one of the strong qualities of man’s duties is the ability to give response to God and His people, and man is responsible to the actions that he made (Hoekema, 1963, p. 66)

Hoekema also included man’s volitional powers, aesthetic sense, and even the gifts of speech and of song, in the structural aspect of God’s image (Hoekema, 1989). Hoekema then raised the question on the reasons behind these gifts and capacities should be thought of as belonging to the image of God. His answer was simple. It was because “in all of these capacities man is like God, and therefore images him” (Hoekema 1988, p. 99). As to this matter, Hoekema further explained: The rational power of man is the to reflect the reasoning of God, in other words to be able to think the thoughts given by God. This comes to prayer (Hoekema 1988, p. 155).

Our ability to make decisions reflects in a small way the supreme directing power of him that is working out things according to His will and purpose (Ephesians 1:11). Our sense of beauty profusely over snow-crowned peaks, lake-jeweled valleys, and awe-inspiring sunsets. Our gift of speech is an imitation of him who constantly speaks to us, both in His world and in his word. And our gift of song echoes the God who rejoices over us with singing (Zephaniah 3:17).

### **Functional Aspect**

The functional aspect of the image of God in man, for Hoekema, means that man functions properly according to the will of God in his life (Hoekema, 1989, p. 211). In this aspect, he included God’s image based on the traditional Reformed theology, which is of “true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness” (Hoekema, 1989, 201). Then, Hoekema presented several descriptions previously suggested on this aspect of image such as the correct answer given to God by man, the living of love by man toward his neighbor and toward God, the correct relationship to God, fellow human being and environment lived by man (Hoekema, 1989, p. 109).

Hoekema insisted that the two aspects of the image of God, structural and functional, can never be separated (Hoekema, 1989). At creation, man possessed both aspects of the image

of God. According to Hoekema, whenever one “looks at human person, both aspects must always be taken into account” (Hoekema, 1989, p. 58).

In other words, the image of God in man can be seen in the task and the gifts of man (Hoekema 1988, p. 91). However, for Hoekema, the task is the first one, and the second one is the gifts, because the gifts are used to complete the task (Hoekema, 1989, p. 76).

In Hoekema’s understanding, even after the fall, man still bears the image of God, for he has not totally lost the image. But this image is not the same as the original one. That is to say, although the image of God in man after the fall has not been completely lost, it “has been perverted or distorted by the Fall” (Hoekema, 1989. 65). For Hoekema, what has been lost between the above mentioned two aspects, while what has been maintained, is the structural aspect. In the process of redemption, this lost portion of God image is being renewed and restored. Hoekema (1986) wrote the following:

When man was created, he possessed the image of God in the structural or broader sense, and at the same time imaged God properly in the functional or narrower sense, since he lived in perfect obedience to God. After man had fallen into sin, however, he retained the image of God in the structural or broader sense but lost it in the functional or narrowed sense. This is to say fallen human beings still possess the gifts and capacities with which God has endowed them, but they now use these gifts in sinful and disobedient ways. In the process of redemption God by his Spirit renews the image in fallen human beings . . . at least in principle. After resurrection of the body, on the new earth, redeemed humanity will once again be able to image God perfectly (p. 45).

### **Christ as the True Image of God**

Hoekema asserted that “there is no better way of seeing the image of God than to look at Jesus Christ” (Hoekema 1988, 87), for he believe, based on Colossians 1:15, that He is the “image of the invisible God” (Hoekema, 1989, 74). In Christ, who is God incarnated, one sees very clear what Genesis 1 is saying: the perfect image of God in man (Hoekema, 1986, p. 41). In other words, Hoekema understood that the perfect image of God that man possessed at creation is found in the the life of human Jesus. He believed that “the heart of the image of God must be love” ((Hoekema 1988, p. 124), for “no man ever loved as Christ loved” (Hoekema, 1986, p. 41). The love of Christ, in his observation, was manifested in his relationship to God, to the fellow men, and the nature” (Hoekema, 1979). This is why he concluded that “the proper functioning of the image includes being directed toward God, being directed toward the neighbour, and ruling over nature” (Hoekema, 1979, p. 90).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Hoekema is one of the most well-known Reformed theologians. As to Hoekema's doctrine of the image of God, it is thought that his own summary is the best.

The image of God . . . describes not just something that man has, but something man is. It means that human beings both mirror and represent God. Thus, there is a sense in which the image includes the physical body. The image of God . . . includes both a structural and a functional aspect, though . . . in the biblical view structure is secondary, while function is primary. The image must be seen in man's threefold relationship: toward God, toward others, and toward nature. When originally created, humans imaged God sinlessly in all three relationships. After the Fall the image of God was not annihilated but perverted, so that human beings now function wrongly in each of the three relationships. In the process of redemption, however, the image is being renewed, so that man is now enabled to be properly directed toward God, others, and nature. . . . In the life to come the image of God will be perfected; glorified human being will then live perfectly in all three relationships. After the resurrection, the redeemed will be in a higher state than man before the fall, since he will no longer be able to sin and die (Hoekema, 1986, p. 124

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