

ARTICLE

Homo adorans: exitus et reditus in theological anthropology

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Abstract

Thinking with and beyond Alexander Schmemmann, this essay constructs a theological anthropology that conceives of humans as standing as priests at the centre of the cosmos. Within the *exitus et reditus* framework of neoplatonic thinking, the cosmos proceeds from and returns to the one God. Recent biblical theology has interpreted the *imago Dei* in a royal-functional sense. However, this essay argues for a priestly-functional interpretation of the *imago Dei* that comports better with the conceptual schema of Genesis 1–2 when read through an *exitus et reditus* lens. Ramifications for worship and work follow the constructive portion of the essay.

Keywords: Christian Neoplatonism. *imago Dei*; *exitus*; *reditus*; Alexander Schmemmann; theological anthropology

Alexander Schmemmann's mid-twentieth-century monograph, *For the Life of the World*, was a call to re-enchant the Christian conception of the cosmos in response to the secularising programme of modernism. In this and other works, Schmemmann encouraged the Orthodox to retrieve a theological interpretation of their liturgical worship and encouraged all Christians to retrieve an ontologically thicker picture of reality than was presently on offer. These two themes converge in his pithy statement on theological anthropology from whence I draw the title of this essay, "*Homo sapiens*", "*homo faber*"... yes, but, first of all, "*homo adorans*". The first and basic definition of man [*sic*] is that he is *the priest*.¹ Schmemmann holds that the fundamental feature of humanity is that humans are worshippers – specifically priestly worshippers – of the one God from whence the cosmos came. What follows in this essay is not an exercise in exegesis of the Orthodox theologian's corpus; rather, it is a constructive probing of the suggestive framework Schmemmann sketches. I will here argue for a theological anthropology that conceives of humans as priests at the centre of the cosmos.

This essay will progress – like many a sermon – with three points and a practical application. First, I will sketch a cosmological framework utilising the neoplatonic

¹Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988), p. 15.

schema of *exitus et reditus*, procession and return.² I do not argue that this is precisely the framework that Schmemmann has in mind, although I suspect it is not entirely foreign to Schmemmann's thought. Second, I will pivot from neoplatonic cosmology to biblical theology, appropriating some recent work explicating a functional interpretation of the *imago Dei*. However, rather than emphasise the royal-functional aspect of the *imago Dei* that has been popular in the recent literature, I probe a priestly-functional motif for understanding the image of God in humans. I then fuse these two conceptions into a third point that describes the fundamental priestly role of the human being as one who stands as the hinge of the cosmos, gratefully offering the creation back to the creator. Finally, I conclude with some reflections concerning the practical application of this perspective on the areas of liturgical worship and the relation between faith and work.

The *exitus et reditus* cosmological framework

I turn to the first plank in the model, the *exitus et reditus* cosmological framework as it is found within the broadly neoplatonic tradition. Neoplatonic thought has as a central concern the perennial philosophical problem of the one and the many. Typically understood, neoplatonists prefer to prioritise the one over the many. One area this prioritisation is manifest is in a cosmology that emphasises the overall unity of reality. This unity of reality is primarily derived from the cosmos' origin in singularity; that is, all of reality owes its origin to the One (or the Good, those terms are largely interchangeable in most of the neoplatonic tradition³). Since all of reality starts in unity, all of reality retains the vestiges of this unity. This, of course, is despite the apparent diversity perceivable in our present experience of reality. One vestige of this unity of reality becomes evident when we attend to the nature of causality, to which I turn with the help of Proclus.

Proclus on causality

In Proclus' *The Elements of Theology* the fabric of *exitus et reditus* is apparent throughout. This theme is evident not just with respect to ultimate causes like the One; rather Proclus sees this dynamic in any and all causality. For instance, he writes, 'All things proceed in a circuit, from their causes to their causes again.'⁴ Yet, what applies in mundane causality applies to all causality. 'For out of the beginning all things are, and towards it all revert.'⁵ Now, 'beginning' here is *arche*, which can mean 'principle' as well, a helpful nuance when it applies to the cosmic sphere so as not to necessarily

²In this essay I use 'neoplatonic' and 'neoplatonism' in lowercase to refer rather generally to forms and habits of thinking derived from Plato and those capital 'N' Neoplatonists like Plotinus, Porphyry and Proclus. Whether certain of my interlocutors like Pseudo-Dionysius or Thomas Aquinas are properly categorized as Neoplatonists is not of concern to me. I am simply interested in the broadly neoplatonic ideas discernible in their thought. In my examination of this motif, I am indebted to Paul Rorem's very helpful, "'Procession and Return" in Thomas Aquinas and his Predecessors', *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* (1992), pp. 147–63.

³E.g. Proclus writes that it belongs both to the Good to unify and to the One to unify, hence, 'if unification is in itself good and all good tends to create unity, then the Good unqualified and the One unqualified merge in single principle ... Goodness, then, is unification, and unification goodness; the Good is one, and the One is primal good.' *The Elements of Theology*, ed. E. R. Dodds, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), nos. 13, 17.

⁴Ibid., nos. 33, 37.

⁵Ibid.

include chronological connotations. As Rorem comments, 'For Proclus, procession and return were simultaneous and complementary aspects of the relationship between cause and effect, and between the various levels of causes and effects which constitute the interlocking "chain of being"'.⁶ This would be required if one is to preserve divine atemporality. Hence, the flow of all things out of the One need not be seen as a temporal ordering, but a logical one.

When the logical relations of cause and effect are teased out, Proclus shows the return as being a necessary feature of the procession. Proposition 31 states that, 'All that proceeds from any principle reverts in respect of its being upon that from which it proceeds.'⁷ That is, effects revert or return to their cause because effects are brought about in order to satisfy their causes. If this were not the case, says Proclus, then nothing would move towards any end. 'But', he goes on, 'all things desire the Good, and each attains it through the mediation of its own proximate cause: therefore each has appetite of its own cause also'.⁸ This is to say that every cause is a move for and towards the Good, and the effects are a return to their cause, which caused them to move in the first place.

Moreover, Proclus says that, 'Every effect remains in its cause, proceeds from it, and reverts upon it.'⁹ This is true, so he argues, because if an effect were only to remain in its cause, it would not be an effect, because it would be impossible to distinguish it from the cause. However, if the effect 'should proceed without reversion or immanence', that is, without returning and also remaining, then 'it will be without conjunction or sympathy with its cause, since it will have no communication with it'.¹⁰ This is to say that the effect cannot be completely disconnected from its cause, otherwise it would cease to be; for effects are dependent on their causes. He then proceeds to eliminate all the combinations of remaining, proceeding and reverting aside from the headlining combination of an effect remaining, proceeding and returning to its cause.

Pseudo-Dionysius on the beginning and the end

Proclus' discussion of the procession and return motif applies to mundane causality as much as it does the dynamics of the cosmos. His emphasis on the beginning of the cause and the return to the *arche* (beginning/principle) can be a thread we pick up in Pseudo-Dionysius' work. Given the neoplatonic framework within which Pseudo-Dionysius expresses his ruminations on the structure of the heavens, it is not surprising to see the *exitus et reditus* motif at the very beginning of his *Celestial Hierarchy*.

The Areopagite opens his treatise with a famously provocative excerpt from the first chapter of the epistle of James: 'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights' (Jas 1:17). For Pseudo-Dionysius, this passage is an impetus to seek epistemic assistance from the Father of lights in his effort to understand the fabric of the heavens. 'The Dionysian thought-world ... is thoroughly oriented around the motif of procession and return, above all in the interpretation of Christian symbolism. The biblical and liturgical symbols are God's condescending

⁶Rorem, 'Procession and Return', p. 149.

⁷Proclus, *Elements*, nos. 31, 35.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., nos. 35, 39.

¹⁰Ibid.

revelation in our lower sphere for the uplifting purpose of returning us to the higher and divine realm'.¹¹ Hence, the light of divine revelation exits from the divine to return the minds of humans back to the contemplation of these heavenly realities.

While this might be taken as merely an epistemic project, this verse from James' letter fits snugly in a neoplatonic cosmological framework. What is true regarding one's cognitive efforts is also true on an ontological and cosmic level within the procession and return framework. All things process from the Father, constantly flowing in a bounteous outpouring from God. This fills humans 'anew as through a unifying power ... leading us to the unity of the Shepherding Father and to the Divine One'.¹² Pseudo-Dionysius then alludes to Paul's statement: 'For from him and through him and to him are all things' (Rom 11:36). Hence, not only knowledge of God runs along an *exitus et reditus* pathway, but even the framework of reality can be seen to do as much.

Thomas Aquinas on the end of creation

I can here take Pseudo-Dionysius' appropriation of Paul's 'from him and ... to him' schema and fuse it with the ruminations on causality from Proclus above. This I do by way of identifying the *exitus et reditus* motif in Thomas Aquinas' discussion of God's motive for creation.

In his discussion of creation in the *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas entitles the question on the nature of God as first cause of the cosmos, 'The procession of creatures from God, and of the first cause of all things'. However, Thomas is keen to show not only that God is the first cause – the first agent – but also that God is the final cause. He writes in the *responsio*:

Every agent acts for an end ... Now the end of the agent and of the patient considered as such is the same, but in a different way respectively ... [I]t does not belong to the First Agent, Who is agent only, to act for the acquisition of some end; He intends only to communicate His perfection, which is His goodness; while every creature intends to acquire its own perfection, which is the likeness of the divine perfection and goodness. Therefore the divine goodness is the end of all things.¹³

Except for the first cause, all agents – all causes – act or cause for some end. This is the appetite in Proclus' thought, or the fourth and final cause in Aristotelian ideology. Within the latter schema, the act/potency combination is a conceptual constituent of all causes subsequent to the first. However, the first cause is a special case in the Thomistic worldview. It is not fitting that the first cause be an act/potency mix; the first cause is *actus purus*. As such, it does not act for some end, rather the effects that come from this act are simply an overflow of goodness, and the implicit or analogous intention of this overflow is the communication of its perfection. Or we might say in more personalistic terms, the overflow is God both creating and inviting the creation to participate in God's own goodness. But, given the conjunction of the cluster of concepts around the 'Good' in the neoplatonic framework, this invitation is an invitation to

¹¹Rorem, 'Procession and Return', p. 152.

¹²Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, ch. 1, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/dionysius/celestial.ii.html>.

¹³Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* [hereafter *ST*] 1.44.4, <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1044.htm#article4>.

participate in God's goodness/perfection/unity, for the Good, the Perfect and the One are all ultimately identical.

For Thomas, the first cause is also identical to the final cause. As he states in the reply to objection 3 in this same question, 'All things desire God as their end'.¹⁴ Hence, in Thomas' conception of God as first and final cause, we have an ontological grounding for the biblical ascription to God of the status of 'Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning (*arche*) and the end (*telos*)' (Rev 22:13).¹⁵ Therefore, to round out this *exitus et reditus* section, all things come from God, and all things are returning to God. What starts in unity, and is now manifested in diversity, will eventually – though not necessarily temporally – return to unity.

A priestly-functional explication of the *imago Dei*

What is the case according to neoplatonic cosmology regarding the One as the first cause can be layered over the Genesis narrative that is the Christian account of the origin of all things. Regardless of how one understands the genre of the first chapter of Genesis, the procession motif can be easily utilised to describe God's act of creation *ex nihilo*. Beginning with only God in the beginning (v. 1), God speaks forth the entire created realm, with each day adding greater diversity and multiplicity arising out of God's unity. Moreover, in an *exitus* vein, each day brings about entities that are dependent in some sense on the entities of previous days. Plants (v. 11) are dependent on the distinction between land and water (v. 9); sea and land animals (vv. 20, 24) are dependent on plants and the distinction between land and water for their life; and finally humans utilise both plants and animals. Yet, the dependent relation of the entities created on subsequent days on the entities created on earlier days also has a teleological trajectory. The land is *for* the plants, the plants are *for* the animals, both are *for* the humans. As the last entity created in the creation week, the *exitus* of creation culminates in the creation of the humans, who – unique among the creation – are created in the 'image' and 'likeness' of God.¹⁶

The royal *imago Dei*

Interpretations of the image of God ascription to humanity abound in the history of theological and exegetical reflection. Largely, these interpretations have tended to fall into one of four categories – although the categories are not mutually exclusive – interpreting the image of God either: (i) structurally, as some feature or characteristic of humans; (ii) relationally, such that humans attain their quiddity vis-à-vis God or one another; (iii) functionally, as some sort of commission uniquely given to humans; or (iv) christologically, as such that the incarnate Christ is the paradigm image of God.¹⁷

¹⁴Aquinas, *ST* 1.44.4.3.

¹⁵See also Rev 1:8; 21:6.

¹⁶One might think that the sabbath is the last creation and hence is the terminus of the teleology of the creation week. However, Gen 2:2 does not say that God *created* the seventh day, just that *on* the seventh day God finished God's work and rested, and God blessed it (declaration, not creation) to bring about its status as the sabbath.

¹⁷A helpful survey can be found in Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005), pp. 19–24. See also Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), pp. 18–27. For christological interpretations, see,

Some in the biblical studies guild have pointed out that systematic theological reflection on the meaning of the *imago Dei* has not often taken into consideration the illumination that linguistic and cultural studies have shed on the concept. For instance, Bernard Batto claims that the examination of ancient Near Eastern literature and iconography yields an interpretation of the *imago Dei* such 'that God created humans to serve as his regents in administering the world. If God is the divine sovereign, then humankind is his viceroy on earth.'¹⁸ Likewise, Catherine McDowell takes a novel route to a similar conclusion in holding that the creation narrative is an attempt to 'identify Yahweh as the father of Israel and the Israelite king'.¹⁹ In light of being the offspring of God, then, 'humanity is king ruling at God's behest as his representative ... the image of God carries with it the responsibility to represent God and his standards in the realm of law and justice'.²⁰ These realms of 'law and justice' clearly indicate royal connotations to this interpretation of the term 'image' (*tselem*) in the pericope.

Richard Middleton has done much to propagate the royal-functional interpretation of the *imago Dei*. He writes concerning this concept, 'Although its semantic range is broader than this single meaning, we need to account for *selem* in many contexts clearly referring to a cult image, which in the common theology of the ancient Near East is precisely a localized, visible, corporeal representation of the divine'.²¹ This does not eliminate structural or relational explications of humanity in a full-orbed anthropology, but it does call into question the grounding of those perspectives in the text of Genesis 1–2 itself. However, rather than exploring the ambiguity surrounding the use of idols in the religio-political milieu of ancient Near Eastern societies, Middleton emphasises the political implications of this conceptual scheme by attending to the terms surrounding *tselem* in the periscope: 'Such exegesis notes the predominantly royal flavor of the text, beginning with the close linkage of image with the mandate to rule and subdue the earth and its creatures in 1:26 and 1:28 (typically royal functions)'.²² Despite the association with *cultus* and the temple/ritualistic locales of idols, Middleton pivots to the royal connotations of this term. He goes on to summarise, 'Humanity is created like God, with the special role of representing or imaging God's rule in the world'.²³ Consequently, Middleton and others have averred that the image of God in humanity is a royal image, and humans live into their function as images when they properly exercise dominion or authority over the rest of creation as the royal representatives of God.

The sacerdotal *imago Dei*

I do not wish to argue that this is all false. Nevertheless, I do not think that it tells the whole story. While clearly the *adam* is charged in Genesis to 'have dominion over' (1:26, 28) and 'to subdue' (1:28) the creation, there are other aspects of the picture

Marc Cortez, *Christological Anthropology in Historical Perspective: Ancient and Contemporary Approaches to Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2016).

¹⁸Bernard F. Batto, *In the Beginning: Essays on Creation Motifs in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), p. 97.

¹⁹Catherine L. McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden: The Creation of Humankind in Genesis 2:5–3:24 in Light of the *mis pi pit pi* and *wpt-r* Rituals of Mesopotamias and Ancient Egypt* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), p. 136.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 137.

²¹Middleton, *Liberating Image*, p. 25.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 26.

²³*Ibid.*

that indicate a priestly-functional motif undergirds or is more fundamental than this royal-functional implication of the *imago Dei*. For while I agree that the prologue to Genesis communicates God's authority or dominion over the created realm, this role is not immediately exercised by humans in the narrative. Rather, when we come to the first actions that the *adam* undertakes in Genesis – coming all the way in 2:19 – we see that the *adam*'s first act is to name 'every living creature'. Is naming a royal task or a priestly task? I would suggest that naming is an instance of differentiating and the tasks of dividing, differentiating and designating are centrally priestly jobs. For instance, Leviticus 10:10 includes God's delivering to Aaron fundamental aspects of his priestly vocation: 'You are to distinguish (*badal*) between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean'. Naming – especially in the sense Schmemmann outlines (more on this below) – is an act of distinguishing and differentiating, and hence is at the conceptual core of the priestly task.

Why do priests differentiate? Why do priests divide between clean and unclean or in fact bring about the designation of some object as holy by an act of consecration (i.e. the making clean)? They do so in order to offer the object back to God, as God has first done in the prologue of Genesis. In Genesis 1, God has divided and differentiated the created realm into various kinds: celestial and terrestrial bodies, flora and fauna. These are priestly functions. No doubt these functions show a measure of authority; priests are the authorised members of the community to do the differentiating. But then God undertakes another priestly activity. After the dividing and differentiating in the initial creative acts, God then offers all that God has created to the *adam*. By charging the humans to rule, to subdue and to name, God offered creation to the human. Note that it is God in Genesis 2:19 who brings the animals to the *adam* 'to see what he would call them'. The *adam* functions similarly by differentiating what God has offered to him and then (or so I argue) is to continue to image God by offering these back to God. In sum, God divides and distinguishes, then offers the creation to humans; humans respond in an imaging fashion by likewise dividing and distinguishing, and then offering the creation back to God.²⁴

Humans: the hinge of the universe

In this next section, I fuse the neoplatonic cosmology outlined at the outset with the preceding conception of the *imago Dei* as a fundamentally sacerdotal vocation. What I suggest, then, is that humans in their priestly role can and ought to be seen as the hinges of the cosmos, the very turning point at which God completes the *exitus* of creation and begins the *reditus* of the cosmos back to God. We humans, then, function as the locus of the pivot from *exitus* to *reditus*, and our vocation is to join with God in the cosmic project of returning all things back to their source.

²⁴A larger biblical-theological case for a priestly functional interpretation of the *imago Dei* could be made from the conception of Eden as temple. For this move, see especially G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004). Particularly instructive is Beale's discussion of Ezek 28, wherein, Beale argues, Adam is there portrayed as a priest in the Edenic temple (p. 75). A similar case for humanity's priestly vocation is made from Gen 1 and Ezek 16 by Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, 'God's Image, his Cosmic Temple and the High Priest: Towards a Historical and Theological Account of the Incarnation', in T. Desmond Alexander and Simon Gathercole (eds), *Heaven on Earth: The Temple in Biblical Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004), pp. 81–100.

Schememann's human

In order to join these two conceptual schemes, I turn back to Schememann. Recall the passage that forms the basis for my title, “*Homo sapiens*”, “*homo faber*” ... yes, but, first of all, “*homo adorans*”. The first and basic definition of man [*sic*] is that he is *the priest*.²⁵ But Schememann goes on to specify just what is entailed in this ‘first and basic definition’ of humans. For Schememann, the human

stands in the center of the world and unifies it in his act of blessing God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it to God – and by filling the world with this eucharist, he transforms his life, the one that he receives from the world, into life in God, into communion with Him. The world was created as the ‘matter’, the material of one all-embracing eucharist, and man was created as the priest of this cosmic sacrament.²⁶

First, Schememann specifies that humans stand at the centre of the cosmos. We could imagine this centre to be the centre of a circle or sphere, and perhaps an interpretation like this is warranted. However, in light of the *exitus et reditus* cosmological framework, I think we ought to imagine humans as the centre of the *exitus et reditus* circuit. Indeed, humans are at the centre because, as Schememann intimates, their vocation is to be the hinge-point in the creation that actively participates in the return. Humans receive from God, but they are also able to image God in offering the world back to God.

Secondly, as Schememann describes, humans stand at the centre of the cosmos in order to unify it in their act of blessing God. Unification – bringing things back to the One – is at the heart of the neoplatonic project. Humans are ‘receiving the world from God’ through the *exitus* and then are unifying the world by ‘offering it to God’ through the *reditus*. At this point, the neoplatonic concern for the one over the many comes back to the fore. The charge to the human priests is to participate in the cosmic unification or, better, *reunification* project that God is already engaged in. God is returning all things to their source and humans join with this in their blessing God and offering the creation to God.

Moreover, in this selection ‘offering’ to God and ‘blessing’ God stand in apposition to one another. Elsewhere Schememann defines blessing in this manner: “To bless ... is to give thanks. In and through thanksgiving, man [*sic*] acknowledges the true nature of things he receives from God, and thus makes them to be what they are. We bless and sanctify things when we offer them to God in a Eucharistic movement of our whole being.”²⁷ Blessing God, for Schememann, is giving thanks to God. This giving of thanks occurs when humans offer the creation back to God. Engaging in the priestly office of offering the creation back to God culminates in the priestly function of offering eucharist, that is, thanksgiving. This, then, is how humans participate in the *reditus*, through their grateful offering the cosmos back to God, the first cause from which the whole creation flows.

In this vein, we can bring back the naming task that is the first task the *adam* undertakes in Genesis 2:19–20. Schememann offers this theological interpretation of the phenomenon of naming:

²⁵Schememann, *For the Life of the World*, p. 15.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid., p. 73.

Now, in the Bible a name is infinitely more than a means to distinguish one thing from another. It reveals the very essence of a thing, or rather its essence as God's gift. To name a thing is to manifest the meaning and value God gave it, to know it as coming from God and to know its place and function within the cosmos created by God. To name a thing, in other words, is to bless God for it and in it.²⁸

Naming is differentiating, but it also 'reveals the very essence of a thing'. This is just as in blessing God, one 'acknowledges the true nature of things', which then unifies the things as 'coming from God'.²⁹ Hence, the naming that is the blessing that is the thanksgiving is the swinging of the hinge wherein the *reditus* is achieved. When the humans recognise that the creation – the many – comes from God and is God's gift to humanity, they return it – unify it – by offering it back to God in thanks. In this circuit, not only do humans achieve their *telos* by being priests, all of creation reaches its *telos* by being offered back to its source.

In fact, at this juncture we can reappropriate the lessons of the other functional interpretation of the *imago Dei*, the royal-functional explication. Commentators in this stream of interpretation point to key terms in the Genesis 1 pericope such as *radah* ('to rule' or 'to have dominion') or *kabash* ('to subdue'). These terms cannot be ignored, for they are as intimately connected to *tselem elohim* as any. However, the question certainly has to be raised as to the *telos* of the subjection or dominion that God charges the *tselem* to execute. Are we to think that God set humans up as arbitrary rulers, simply ruling for ruling's sake? No, rather the priestly function provides a cosmological *telos* for the subduing mandate within the royal function. That is, the naming of Genesis 2:19–20 – a dividing and distinguishing priestly function – is a prerequisite, and hence more fundamental, to the ruling or subduing mandates of the royal connotations of the *imago*.

The priestly function of the *imago Dei* is an imaging relation of God's priestly function because God is offering the whole cosmos and returning it to God's self. Humans image God by joining with what God is doing. God offers the cosmos to humans, yes, but God is also offering the cosmos to God's self by means of the human. Because of the radical contingency of the cosmos and the nature of God's aseity, God is in no need of the cosmos, much less does God need to offer the cosmos back to God's self, and even much less does God need humans to do the offering. However, in the gracious overflow of his goodness and perfection, God invites humans to participate in what God could do without humans. Therefore, when humans participate in the *reditus*, they participate in God's bringing all things back to God's self. Or, in Thomist language, human priests participate in the process by which all things are being united with the perfection and goodness that is their first and final cause.³⁰

²⁸Ibid., p. 15.

²⁹A similar line of thought from the ancient Near Eastern context of Genesis corroborates Schmemmann's conception: 'It was believed that the name of a living being or an object was not just a simple or practical designation to facilitate the exchange of ideas between persons but that it was the very essence of what was defined', from J. M. Plumley, 'The Cosmology of Ancient Egypt', in Carmen Backer and Michael Lowe (eds), *Ancient Cosmologies* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1975), p. 30; cited in John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), p. 188.

³⁰A much larger project could at this point bring the christological interpretation of the image of God into the conversation. Colossians 1 would be an apt place to start, as there Christ is referred to as 'the image of the invisible God' (v. 15), in whom 'all things hold together' (v. 17) and 'the fullness of God was pleased to dwell' (v. 19), and through whom God works 'to reconcile all things to himself' (v. 20). The latter clause

Practical application

The foregoing lays a rather abstract conception of the place of humans in the cosmos. I want to here connect this perspective to some areas of practical expression.³¹ The first area of practical application is our worship – specifically our communal liturgical worship – and the second area of application is our conception of the nature of work.

Worship

Homo adorans means humans as worshippers. What it means to worship can take diverse and varied interpretations.³² Yet, one aspect of worship that has a specifically priestly resonance is the manner in which worshippers offer thanks to God. I have already mentioned the eucharist as an act of thanksgiving, and there are clear trajectories of practical application to that practice. However, here I want to focus on the offertory as a component of the eucharist, although it comes before the *sursum corda*, on the grounds that some features of the offertory manifest the hinge nature of humanity particularly clearly.

Aspects of the script of this portion of the liturgy can be interpreted with an *exitus et reditus* overlay.³³ When the minister invites the congregation to come to the eucharist in the transition from the liturgy of the word to the liturgy of the sacrament, the minister will typically speak an offertory sentence, which is often drawn directly from scripture. One such is a quotation from Psalms: ‘Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and make good your vows to the Most High’ (Ps 50:14).³⁴ Here, then, the people are invited to these twin, or nested, actions of offering to God – specifically offering thanks to God – as they fulfil their vows to God. The people typically follow this mandate by offering gifts of money placed in the offering plates. These gifts are then brought to the altar with those other gifts – the bread and wine that will be used for the eucharist.

At this point in the service, in some liturgical traditions, these offerings then participate in a particularly hinge-worthy action. This is manifested in a reference to 1

would then be a jumping off point for a discussion of Christ’s role as high priest, a notion that pervades the Letter to the Hebrews. However, this essay more modestly attempts the probing of the priesthood of all humanity by attending to humanity’s Edenic situation. For recent discussions of the nexus of christology and theological anthropology see, among others, Stanley Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), esp. ch. 5; Ian A. McFarland, *The Divine Image: Envisioning the Invisible God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), esp. ch. 3; Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), esp. ch. 1; Oliver D. Crisp, *The Word Enfleshed: Exploring the Person and Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), esp. ch. 4; Marc Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology: A Constructive Account of Humanity in the Light of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), esp. ch. 3; and Haley Goranson Jacob, *Conformed to the Image of his Son: Reconsidering Paul’s Theology of Glory in Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018). This christological pivot would also benefit from Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 41, in *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. Nicholas Conzas (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), esp. pp. 113ff.

³¹This section could be taken either as an instance of *lex orandi, lex credendi*, whereby the liturgy corroborates my theological interpretation of the *imago Dei*, or as an instance of attempting to infuse already in place liturgical practices with further theological underpinning.

³²For a recent and provocative discussion, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship: An Exploration of Liturgical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2015).

³³‘Script’ is Wolterstorff’s term in *The God We Worship*. In addition, I am speaking here from within the Anglican liturgical tradition, so my comments will reside most comfortably in that framework.

³⁴This is the first sentence listed in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer from the Episcopal Church, which arranges the sentences by canonical order.

Chronicles 29 prior to the *sursum corda*. With the gifts placed on the altar before the minister, the minister recites portions of this chapter starting with v. 11: 'Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all': and then continuing with v. 14: 'For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you'. The inclusion of these words from scripture reinforce this moment as a hinge moment. God is here worshipped in gratitude. God's greatness is here acknowledged, as well as God's ultimate ownership of the cosmos. Then, in light of these acknowledgements, those things that God has offered to humans – the creation to rule and subdue – are offered back to God in thanks. Worshippers here acknowledge that all things proceed from God along the pathway of the *exitus*, and then humans return them in a gift to God along the path of the *reditus*. Hence, liturgical worship can function as a locus for humans returning all things to God in their vocation as the priestly hinge in the cosmic procession and return.

Work

Another way that liturgical worship functions is as a form of habituation to bring conceptual schemas to bear on other areas of life. I want to suggest that this cosmic priestly-functional theological anthropology, as manifested in our worship, can undergird a robust understanding of the relationship between faith and work. That is, the human exercise of our priestly vocation does not just occur in the liturgy, but has implications for our work Monday through Friday as well.³⁵

If we recall the offertory sentences at the hinge of the eucharistic liturgy, we see another sentence that functions in this archetypal manner of seeing our work as a cosmic offering. The minister can say, 'Let us with gladness present the offerings and oblations of our life and labor to the Lord'.³⁶ The money we might put into the offering plate is representative of the fruit of our life and labour. The work that we do on Monday through Friday is representatively transformed into the paycheck we receive. Then, in the liturgy, we gratefully offer a portion of this back to God. As Schmemmann comments regarding this point in the liturgy, 'the time has come now to offer to God the totality of all our lives, of ourselves, of the world in which we live'.³⁷ The totality of our lives is here archetypally offered to God in thanksgiving.³⁸

But what is manifested liturgically need not be just liturgical, for this conception of offering to God our life and labour can be brought to pervade our perspective on our work Monday through Friday. When we work in the world, we certainly follow the mandate to work and keep the creation as God charged the *adam* to do. Yet we also fulfil the priestly vocation of bringing into productive order the chaos of reality to offer it to God. Recall again the dividing and naming motif of the Genesis prologue. God brings order to the formless void by dividing, arranging and organising the chaos. Analogously – in an imaging fashion – the *adam* orders the animals by

³⁵I am not just here speaking as a professional theologian who thinks about God Monday through Friday. I am thinking of the small business owner, the corporate CEO, the janitor, lawyer, farmer, homemaker, etc.

³⁶Also from the 1979 Episcopal Book of Common Prayer.

³⁷Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, p. 34.

³⁸I do not at all wish to suggest that the totality of our lives culminates in the money we put in the offering plate. Rather, the money is a symbolic representation of our life and labour. Moreover, the widow's mite reminds us that the totality of our lives can be symbolically represented by the smallest offering.

distinguishing, organising and naming them. So too, then, do humans subsequent to Adam bring order and arrangement to the creation through their acts of industry.

However, this work is not an end in itself. *Contra* a connotation of the royal-functional *imago Dei*, work is not merely ultimately for the obedience of a divine command. We do not have to work simply because God said so. Rather the *telos* of these productive acts of industry is to return the creation back to God in acts of grateful offering. The *telos* is to join with God in unifying the many by returning the cosmos back to the One, to God. Consequently, the practical conclusion in the realm of faith and work of applying the *exitus et reditus* motif in a priestly anthropology is to see all our work as an outflow of the human cosmic hinge vocation, whereby all things are united back to the first and final cause.

Conclusion

In neoplatonic cosmology, the many of the cosmos begin in unity and return to unity in the One. Christian neoplatonism can overlay this motif onto the creation narrative of the prologue to Genesis. When pursuing the meaning of the *imago Dei* of Genesis 1:26–7, this cosmology adds credence to a minority report of a functional explication of the term. Humans function as priestly hinges in the cosmos, participating with God in God's grand reunification project. Humans unify creation by distinguishing and differentiating the creation, bringing order to that which has exited from God in multiplicity. Then in their blessing and giving thanks to God for the creation – rightly understood and rightly differentiated – humans offer the creation back to God and thereby fulfil their priestly function. What is more, liturgical practices surrounding the offertory of the eucharistic liturgy reflect and teach this cosmological role. In this role, humans participate with God in unifying the cosmos as they offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving and acknowledge that all things come from God and of God's own do humans give back to God.³⁹

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