

MAN AS THE IMAGE OF GOD: ITS MEANING AND THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE IN NARSAI

History has bequeathed Narsai a strange legacy.¹ It extols his reputation as a theologian and poet, while consigning his works, for the most part until recently, to unedited manuscripts and an obscure Syriac edition. Narsai is heralded as the outstanding Syriac theologian in the fifth century, at least in the East Syrian tradition.² He was a devoted first-generation disciple of Theodore of Mopsuestia, the head of the School of Edessa after it had supplanted Antioch as the center of Diophysitism,³ and the founder of the celebrated School of Nisibis from which later radiated the ecclesiastics, missionaries, and doctrines of the East Syrian Church. Narsai is also hailed as his Church's foremost poet, acclaimed in fact as "the harp of the Spirit."⁴

The present paper restricts itself to Narsai's view⁵ on the "image of God." This deceptively simple-sounding phrase, appropriated from Scripture,⁶ has become a mine into which theologians have probed deeply and from which they have extracted a thought-provoking, if not a rich, lode of theological speculation concerning the natures of the human person and salvation. Since studies have amply documented the Alexandrian tradition on how the image of God is to be understood theologically,⁷ I hope that the present study will portray, at least in broad strokes, the legacy of the Antiochean tradition as represented by Narsai.

¹ For contemporary studies that treat of Narsai's life, works, and teaching cf. P. Gignoux, ed., *Homélie de Narsai sur la création* (PO 34/3-4; Turnhout, 1968), and F. McLeod, S.J., ed., *Narsai's Metrical Homilies on the Nativity, Epiphany, Passion, Resurrection and Ascension* (PO 40/1; Turnhout, 1979). All future citations to Gignoux and McLeod will refer to these works.

² The East Syrian Church is popularly known as the Nestorians or Assyrians. The term "Nestorian," however, appears in official documents of the East Syrian Church only in the thirteenth century. Cf. G. P. Badger, *The Nestorians and Their Rituals* (London, 1852) 49-51.

³ This term refers to the Christological position of those who emphasize—and, in the opinion of their adversaries, overemphasize—the two natures in Christ.

⁴ Cf. A. Scher, ed., *Histoire nestorienne (Chronique de Seert)* (PO 7, 114).

⁵ I believe that Narsai is actually propagating Theodore of Mopsuestia's teaching on image. To substantiate this, I will cite in appropriate footnotes texts that have survived from Theodore's works and that proclaim the same doctrine as Narsai.

⁶ Gen 1:27 simply states the fact that God made man in His image and likeness. It does not explain why this is so. From the context, it would seem to mean that man shares in God's dominative power over creation. Or it may simply refer to the dignity of the human person in so far as it rests upon a person's special relationship with God. Though both are possible and likely interpretations, neither is certain.

⁷ For a recent and felicitous summary of these positions, with an extensive bibliography in his footnotes, cf. Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., "Free Like God: Recapturing an Ancient Anthropology," *TD* 26/4 (Winter 1978) 343-64.

I

First, in a notable contrast with the Alexandrian tradition which situates God's image in the spiritual part of the human person, Narsai affirms categorically in Homily 56: "In the beginning, when He [the Creator] fashioned our nature, He called it His image";⁸ and more sharply in Homily 66: "The Creator willed to call it [the soul] and the body His image."⁹ Image, therefore, for Narsai applies to the whole human composite, body as well as soul.

But in what sense can man's whole being be an image of God? Specifically, how can the corporeal element in man "image" the spiritual nature of God? Narsai acknowledges the problem when he asserts in Homily 4: "He [the Creator] called him [Adam] an image of His majesty in a metaphorical sense, because everything created is vastly inferior to the divine essence. His [God's] nature is [so] immeasurably exalted over that of creatures [that] it does not possess, as corporeal beings do, a visible image."¹⁰ Thus, because the divine nature is absolutely transcendent, Narsai emphatically excludes any possibility of a "natural" likeness of God, in the sense of a photographic image of God.

Narsai understands image more in the contemporary sense of a symbol. In his explanation of how a symbol is the language of experiential faith, Paul Tillich describes, among others, three characteristics. The symbol participates in the power and dignity of the object to which it points, and it provides deeper insights into the reality not only of its object but of the individual being moved by it.¹¹ These three characteristics of a symbol are fully applicable to Narsai's use of image.

The first characteristic, that a symbol participates in the power and dignity of the object to which it points, is highlighted in Homily 71: "Man is an image of God and Lord of all creatures."¹² The same idea is more clearly stated in Homily 1, where God is portrayed as saying: "With the name of a nature not constituted by a maker, I have called the image of man when I fashioned him. For his sake I have created everything that is invisible and visible, and I have set him as a steward over my fashioning."¹³ In other words, man is God's image in the sense that he

⁸ The citation is from an unedited homily whose text still remains in unpublished manuscripts. Here, as in all the following excerpts from Narsai, the translation is my own.

⁹ A. Mingana, ed., *Narsai doctoris syri homiliae et carmina* 2 (Mosul, 1905) 251.

¹⁰ McLeod 39.

¹¹ P. Tillich, *The Dynamics of Faith* (New York, 1957) 42.

¹² The text is contained in an unpublished manuscript.

¹³ Mingana 1, 17. The idea that image signifies dominion is prevalent among the Antiocheans. This can be seen in the following quotations, for which I am indebted to Walter J. Burghardt. Diodore of Tarsus: "How, then, is man God's image? By way of dominion, in virtue of authority. . . . Just as God rules over the whole universe, so too man rules over the things of earth" (*Fragmenta in Genesim*, Gen 1:26 [PG 33, 1564-65]). John

shares in God's dominative power and exercises this as a viceroy or an official representative empowered to act in the name of his Lord.

Secondly, besides participating in the power of the object to which it points, a symbol also reveals dimensions and elements of the object which would otherwise remain unapproachable. Specifically, this means that man as image should manifest more clearly who God is. Narsai does so in the following quotation from Homily 6: "By his visible appearance [man's] image proclaims [God's] royal authority, and by his [external] features shows the beauty of the One who fashioned him."¹⁴ A similar idea is expressed in Homily 49: "The Creator set His image in the world, the city of the kingdom, and by a visible image He makes known the power of His hidden divinity."¹⁵ Then, in Homily 66, which will doubtless strike most as an arbitrary interpretation, Narsai asserts: "A figure signifying the name of the divine essence is found in the generation of [man's] soul. . . . His soul resembles the Father; and [his] reason, the Son; and [his] life, the Spirit."¹⁶ In brief, man as image reveals God's authority, power, beauty, and triune nature.

Thirdly, a symbol also unlocks dimensions and elements of a person that correspond to the dimensions and elements of reality. In the present matter, this means a deeper knowledge of who man is and what constitutes his nature. In this sense, the doctrine of image is an important part of theological anthropology. It is here that Narsai connects or perhaps better telescopes the doctrine of man as God's image and that of man as the bond of the universe. This union is expressed clearly in Homily 66: "He [the Creator] fashioned and skilfully made a double vessel, a visible

Chrysostom: "What is this 'to our image and likeness'? An image of sovereignty is signified. As no one is superior to God in heaven, so let no one be superior to man upon earth" (*Homiliae de statutis* 7, 2 [PG 49, 93]). See also *Homiliae in Genesim* 8, 3 (PG 53, 72). Severian of Gabala: "In what does the image consist? Again, in authority" (*De mundi creatione* 5, 4 [PG 56, 475]). Ephraem: "Moses explained wherein we were God's image when he said, 'That they may rule over the fishes of the sea and the birds and the herds and the whole earth.' It was, therefore, by the power which Adam received over the earth and over all things which are in it, that he was the likeness of that God in whose power were the things which are above and the things which are below" (*Commentarius in Genesim* 1, 29 [CSCO 152, 23; Latin tr., CSCO 153, 17]). Isidore of Pelusium: "Man is an image of dominion and kingship, not of essence. . . . Just as God rules over all things, so too man rules over the things on earth" (*Epist.* 3, 95 [PG 78, 801]). Theodoret of Cyrus: "Some have said that man was made to God's image with respect to dominion; and they have made use of a very clear proof, the fact that the Creator added, 'And let them have dominion. . . .' For, just as He holds absolute sway over the whole universe, so He has given to man authority over the irrational animals" (*Quaestiones in Genesim* 20 [PG 80, 105]). See also Theodoret's *De incarnatione domini* 17 (PG 75, 1445).

¹⁴ McLeod 72.

¹⁶ Mingana 2, 239.

¹⁵ Mingana 2, 100.

body and a hidden soul—one man. He depicted the power of His creatorship in him as an image: mute beings in his body and rational beings in the structure of his soul.”¹⁷ In other words, the universe is an organic whole whose members are partly rational and partly irrational. By his soul man is akin to the angelic world, and by his body to the corporeal world (both organic and inorganic). Both worlds are bonded together, summed up, and viewed in man as the image of God’s creative intent.

In the following passages Narsai indicates more exactly how man’s role as the bond of the universe also functions as an image of God for the rest of creation. First, in Homily 4: “He [the Creator] has exalted His image with the name of image, in order to bind all [creatures] in him, so that they might [thus] acquire love by knowing Him [the Creator] through knowledge of His image.”¹⁸ Perhaps in a less awkward way in Homily 62, “I [the Creator] set him like an image for creatures, so that they might consider him in order that by love to him everyone might know me.”¹⁹ Man, therefore, is the divinely appointed way for other creatures to know, love, and serve God. By loving and serving man, other creatures love and serve God. The reality of the bond, therefore, fuses with the function of the image. As bond of the universe, man horizontally unites the spiritual and corporeal worlds and, as image, vertically unites both with God.²⁰

Man, however, qua man or even qua Adam, is not God’s image in the primary sense. Doubtless reflecting the teaching of Colossians 1:15, Narsai carefully distinguishes in Homily 62: “He [the Creator] called the first Adam by the name of image in a secondary sense. The image in reality is the Messiah, the second Adam. Thus ‘Come, let us make man in our image’ was fulfilled when the Creator took His image and made it a dwelling place for His honor. The promises to Adam came to be in reality in the Messiah.”²¹ The bestowal of image on Adam, therefore, is a foreshadowing of the time when God will dwell within His primary image, Christ.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ McLeod 39.

¹⁹ Gignoux 599.

²⁰ This view of man as both the bond of the universe and the image of God is present in Theodore of Mopsuestia. See the following fragment that has survived from Theodore’s *Commentary on Genesis*: “. . . so he [the author of Genesis] has written in this place ‘He created him to the image of God,’ in order that he might indicate that this is the distinguishing mark of his constitution, namely, that all things are gathered in him. For they [creatures] go through him as an image to God, [and] by their ministry to him they fulfil the laws that have been given. Thus by diligence towards him they reconcile the Legislator. Since God needs nothing and is not visible, they offer the glory that is due Him by the attention they show this one who needs [it] and is visible to everyone” (E. Sachau, *Theodori Mopsuesteni fragmenta syriaca* [Leipzig, 1869] 15).

²¹ Gignoux 603.

There are innumerable places²² in Narsai where the Word's power, authority, and love are said to dwell within the man Jesus.²³ I would like to cite only two passages which highlight Jesus' role as God's primary image. The following is taken from Homily 4:

He is entirely a man because of the wholeness of [his] body and soul; he is also God because he became the dwelling place for the God of the universe. He is a son of a woman because from her is the nature of his [bodily] structure, but he is the Son of the [divine] essence because he is equal to this by the power of his Assumer. In body and soul he is like to his corporeal brothers; but in authority he is equal with the Word, the Offspring of the Father. In [his] conception and birth and bodily sufferings he is entirely a man; but in the glorious things that he has received and inherited he is God of the universe.²⁴

In the next quotation Narsai is describing how and why angels and men are worshiping the risen Christ in heaven.

By the yoke of his love will be united together angels and men, and they will celebrate him as the image of the hidden king. . . . They continually worship in

²² To cite only a few references, cf. McLeod 43, ll. 67–96; 45, ll. 111–22; 49, ll. 171–86; 63, ll. 409–18; 65, ll. 431–38.

²³ For Narsai's view on how the Word and the man Jesus are united, cf. McLeod 22–29. Suffice it to say here, Narsai conceives nature in a concrete existential sense and as the source of personal activity. In the Trinity there can be three Persons operating through one nature. He encounters a problem, however, with the Incarnation: How are the two natures, the divine and the human, to be maintained integral and yet united? According to his conception, to say that the Word suffers in His human nature is blasphemy. Since actions flow from one's nature, this means that the Word suffers in His nature, not in man's nature. For this reason, Narsai believes that the correct way of affirming the above is to state that the man Jesus in whom the Word dwells in power and love suffers. In response, the Orthodox position (which I suspect Narsai never fully understood or at least could never separate from an extreme Monophysitism) objects that activity should rightly be attributed to the person operating in and through the nature and that Narsai's position does not safeguard the substantial union that needs to exist between the two natures and inexorably leads, despite objections to the contrary, to the existence of two persons morally united. Another way of conceiving this—which is applicable to the present matter on image—is to realize that Narsai is espousing a functional Christology. As the true image, Jesus functions as the mediator between God and the universe and as the one in whom God's power, authority, rank, name, and love are really present and manifested. When the question turns to his views on essential Christology, he cannot answer in a simple, straightforward way that Christ is God. He must distinguish, as he does in the Homily on the Epiphany (McLeod 99): "and He anointed him with the Spirit; and he became in power the God-man. By the name of 'man' I call him because of his body; and the name of God I give him because of his rank." His attempts at affirming a personal (*parsopic*) union founders in the view of his adversaries because it is never affirmed as the subject of an active verb. According to the Orthodox conception, Narsai's view, while admirably protecting the integrity of Christ's humanity, fails to assert and maintain the substantial union between the divine and human natures existing within the divine Person of the Word.

²⁴ McLeod 65.

the temple of his body that One who is hidden in him and offer therein the pure sacrifices of their minds. In the haven of his body come to rest the impulses of their thoughts, as they become worn out in [their] search for the incomprehensible hidden One. For this reason, the Fashioner of the universe chose him from the universe, that by his visible body he might satisfy the need of the universe. A creature needs to seek out what is hidden and to discover the meaning and intent of what is secret. Because it is impossible that the nature of the hidden One appear openly, He limited their inquiries to His visible image.²⁵

II

So far we have considered image in its anthropological sense to understand the nature, dignity, and functional role of man and Christ in the divine plan for creation. Image also has a soteriological significance. By his sin Adam tarnishes man's image, and by his death Christ restores it to its pristine beauty.²⁶ Narsai, however, never explains explicitly what he means by the tarnishing of man's image. But he does describe in poetic terms what happens to man because of Adam's sin:

For a short time there remained the beauty of the temporal image, but [when Adam sinned] there arose a vile-like iniquity over its features. The beautiful colors of his soul faded because of his desire for fruit, and he acquired the color of mortality by his eating of it. Sin effaced the name of life [belonging to] the royal image and inscribed on his name corruption, and on his limbs death. He [the image] became tarnished and wasted away for a long time in [his] mortal condition, and death trampled him and corrupted the beauty of his rational being.²⁷

As I understand Narsai's position, Adam cannot lose the essential nature of his image as such. For man is by nature the bond of the universe

²⁵ McLeod 177. Narsai's view on how Christ is the true image of God is present in the following excerpt that has survived from Theodore's treatise *On the Incarnation*: "And he [Christ] holds the place of image on two accounts. Those who love certain [people] very often set up images of them after [their] death [and] consider they have sufficient solace of [their] death; and by looking, as it were, upon an image, they think that they see the [loved] one who is not seen nor is present, thus appeasing the flame and force of [their] desire. Also, those who have images of emperors within cities seem to honor by cult and adoration those who are not present as though they were present and seeing [everything]. Both of these [examples], however, are fulfilled through him [Christ]. For all those who are with him and pursue virtue and are prompt returners of debts to God love him and greatly honor [him]; and although the divine nature is not seen, they indeed pay love to him as God, seeing through him and always being present to him. Indeed, they ascribe all honor [to him] as though to an imperial image, since the divine nature is, as it were, in him and is seen in him. For if the Son is indeed the One who is said to inhabit, the Father is also with Him and is believed by every creature to be altogether inseparable from the Son; and the Spirit, moreover, is not absent, in so far as He has come to him in place of an anointing and is always with him who has been assumed" (PG 66, 991-92).

²⁶ Cf. McLeod 37.

²⁷ Ibid. 73.

and the visible, divinely chosen way for creatures to attain to knowledge and love of God. He also foreshadows the true image who will be born of Adam's race and in whom will dwell the Word of God. Though he cannot destroy his image, Adam can nevertheless distort and corrupt it. When Adam sins, he not only turns his image into a sign of contradiction by his disobedience but corrupts it by introducing actual²⁸ death into the world. Death sunders the twofold nature of the image and prevents man from entering into heaven and fulfilling there his revelatory function as image. It is no wonder, then, that when death enters into the world, in the words of Homily 4, "rational and dumb beings became strangers to the race of men and lost hope because of his [man's] fall that he would ever rise again."²⁹

Thus, when the second Adam ushers in the last times, he must conquer death as well as Satan. This is expressed in Homily 40 in a speech attributed to Christ: "By death he [Satan] sealed the bond of mankind's debts, and through [my] death upon a gibbet I will tear it up. In the sight of spiritual and corporeal beings I will void that sentence of condemnation about which he [Satan] boasts as a conqueror. To heavenly and earthly ones I will show the redemption of life and the renewal that will be fulfilled in me."³⁰

Besides winning forgiveness of sins for the soul and restoration of life for the body, Christ also gains immortality and entrance into heaven both for himself and for those who share in his nature. This is the sense of the following exclamations uttered as the risen Christ ascends into heaven: "O earthly one who has left the earth, the mother of his body, and entered so as to dwell in the womb of a mother who is not [such] by nature! O inferior one who has deserted his own region, a temporal dwelling, and ascended to a region where there is no end to its perpetuity!"³¹ That this immortal state is to be shared by all is seen explicitly in the following: "He [the Word] assumed him [Christ] for the peace of rational beings as the first fruits for us all, in order that He might bind in him the love which Adam loosened by [his] transgression of the [divine] command.

²⁸ Narsai clearly affirms that Adam was created mortal. Cf. Gignoux, "L'Etat primitif de l'homme: La doctrine de la mortalité originelle" (PO 34/3-4, 488-95).

²⁹ McLeod 39.

³⁰ Ibid. 143.

³¹ Ibid. 181. The same thought is expressed in Theodore's catechetical homilies: "and we are, as it were, at the beginning in the image of God. We had lost the honor of this image through our carelessness, but by the grace of God we have retaken this honor; and because of this we have become immortal and we will dwell in heaven. Indeed, it is in this way that the image of God ought to rejoice and acquire the honor that is due to the one who by promise was to be called and was to be in His image" (A. Mingana, ed., *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord's Prayer and on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist* [Woodbrooke Studies 6; Cambridge, 1933] 30).

He honored the whole nature of rational beings by assuming him, because He made those akin to him by nature share in his honor."³² In other words, by assuming our nature and enabling it to attain immortality in heaven, the Word has affected the nature of all humans and, because man is the bond of the universe, all created natures: spiritual and corporeal beings because of their union with man, and all mankind because of their union to Jesus in a common humanity. All are brought to God through Jesus' union with the Word.

III

As is evident, Narsai's doctrine on image is not only logically consistent but very rich in its theological import. It reveals what is the anthropological nature of man and is intimately connected with the central drama of salvation. It is very Pauline in the way that it emphasizes how Christ is the mediator and, in the words of Colossians, "the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. . . [who] is before all things, and [in whom] all things hold together. . . . For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross."³³ It is, in brief, the Pauline theory of recapitulation.

I also believe that Narsai's doctrine on image is significant because it reveals the faith framework in which it was conceived. Because Scripture is not clear on what the phrase "image of God" means and how man specifically images God, Narsai (and I believe that in this he is dependent on Theodore of Mopsuestia³⁴) explains it in light of what he sees is central

³² McLeod 131.

³³ Col 1:15, 17, 19-20.

³⁴ Išo'dad of Merv is a ninth-century "Nestorian" commentator who is acknowledged to be a faithful disciple of Theodore of Mopsuestia. In a section dealing with "what are the obvious reasons why man is called an image and likeness of God," Išo'dad offers several reasons. Comparing them with what has already been seen as Theodore's teaching (nn. 20, 25, and 31 above), I believe one can legitimately presume that Išo'dad has drawn these reasons from Theodore. "1. But he [man] is called image because in him alone there is the representation of the Persons of the Trinity and of the unity of nature. . . . 2. Likewise, he is called image because he is the synthesis of the world, because in him is enclosed and united the entire creation of spiritual and corporeal beings and because he is placed as an image in the city of the world so that by him the entire creation may show its love towards its Creator. . . . 3. Likewise, he is like to it by intelligence, whose thought attains, with the blink of the eye, the whole of creation in heaven and on earth, as the [divine] nature is entirely everywhere. . . . 4. Likewise, he is called image because he is like to God by his royal and judiciary power. . . . 5. Likewise, he is called image because it is from his race that later will be taken the man Jesus Christ, to be the image of the invisible God" (Ceslas van den Eynde, ed., *Commentaire d'Išo'dad de Merv sur l'Ancien Testament* [CSCO 96-97, 50-51]). The above certainly indicates a closeness of views between Narsai and Išo'dad and most probably both with Theodore.—Narsai's view of image also shows similarities with a number of passages in Irenaeus; cf. David Cairns, *The Image of God in Man* (rev. ed,

to faith. Faith not only is a divine gift that establishes a special relationship between God and an individual person; it involves communal and cosmic dimensions. Faith is a total personal act, embracing all that is human. It also relates a person horizontally with others, both other men and women as well as other creatures.

The other aspect of faith that Narsai emphasizes is its functional expression. Faith must be expressed in a visible, symbolic way enlightening others concerning God and His will. There are two "images," as it were, that highlight this aspect: faith as "the light" and "the way." As such, it reveals who God is, who man is, and how all are to know, love, and attain to God.

This approach can be further exemplified and heightened by setting it against the backdrop of the Alexandrian approach to the image of God. Because of limited space, I can only highlight this approach in an admittedly superficial and overgeneralized way. For the Alexandrians, image refers to the spiritual element in man that is located somewhere, as it were, in the higher region of his soul. It concerns the way that a person can participate in God's life and activity and, with the action of the Spirit, become more fully authentic and perfect. It is the dynamic process whereby a person becomes, in a real spiritual sense, divinized, more conformed to Christ, and more fully rational, free, and holy.

This view of image certainly emphasizes the gift aspect of faith. But what strikes me as at the heart of its approach is its stress on the union aspect of faith. Faith is a relationship in which a person is elevated, transformed, and, as it were, deified in a supernatural way and thus enabled to enter into a graced union with God. This sharing in God's life is, moreover, a dynamic power seeking to know, will, and act in truth and love. In brief, it expresses the mystery of how a person can not only be united with God but be one with Him and like unto Him.

As one compares and contrasts Narsai with this approach, several points emerge in sharp relief. First, Narsai emphasizes how man's image involves the total person, corporeal as well as spiritual. Though the corporeal is seen as the source of weakness, its integrity and importance are nevertheless maintained and defended. For it is both the visible way for the divine nature to reveal itself and to be worshiped in reality and an essential copartner with the soul in bonding together the universe in union with God. The Alexandrians, however, limit image to the spiritual

London, 1973) 83-86. This parallelism may indicate that the original patristic tradition understood "image" in a functional way. If so, the Antiocheans continued the tradition. The Alexandrians, however, perhaps because of a philosophical and theological concern for understanding what is the nature of reality, evolved an essentialistic interpretation of image. This contrast between a functional and essentialistic approach highlights, in my opinion, a major focal point of difference between the two "schools."

part of man's nature. They view it as the way mankind shares in the divine nature and grows towards perfection in spiritual activity.

Secondly, Narsai stresses the communal and cosmic dimensions of man's image. Man, particularly in his highest expression, Christ, recapitulates the universe. The union between the spiritual and corporeal must continually function together on every level, so that all creation can know and love God. The Alexandrian emphasis is centered on the individual way that a person is spiritually and substantially united with God. Its approach leads to an understanding and development of the doctrine of grace and also to an unfortunate dichotomy in which the corporeal is seen as having little or no value in a person's union with God.

Thirdly, Narsai conceives of image as fulfilling a functional symbolic role. He does not explain how the spiritual and corporeal are substantially united between themselves. He accepts this and allows that they can function together in love.³⁶ The role of the corporeal in man and Christ is to reveal and represent the power, authority, rank, name, and love of God. The Alexandrians, on the other hand, are concerned with how a person's spiritual nature can be raised to share in God's nature and how a person's spiritual powers can grow to their fulfilment and perfection and be truly similar to God's.

Finally, the two approaches are complementary rather than necessarily opposed to each other. Each raises questions about the nature of man and his salvation and, in so far as they propose the positive aspects of their theories, are insightful. Narsai insists on the totally personal, communal, and functional aspects of man's special relationship with God. The Alexandrians stress the essentially spiritual nature of an individual's union with God. Together both fill out the major elements of man's faith relationship with God. They raise questions for each other and for all seeking to understand man's nature, dignity, and role in the divine economy of salvation.

I hope that the above study has at least etched in broad terms Narsai's view on the image of God. His position is logical, consistent, and sophisticated. He stands as an exemplary proponent of a functional approach to, and interpretation of, man's role as God's image. He offers a key for unlocking and bringing forth some of the riches concerning mankind's unique and privileged relationship to God and to other creatures in the universe.

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³⁶ Each nature is the source of its own activity. What is predicated of one cannot be formally attributed to another. This is seen in the following, where Narsai is comparing the union between the Word and Jesus to that between the body and the soul: "The soul does not suffer in the body when its limbs are scourged, and the divinity did not suffer in the sufferings of the body in which it dwelt. And if the soul does not suffer, although it [too] is

something created like the body, how does the divine essence suffer, whose nature is exalted above passions? The soul suffers with the body in love and not in nature! And the sufferings of the body are also predicated of the soul metaphorically" (from an unpublished ms.). In other words, both natures can join their actions together in an activity of love, but what pertains to the formal or proper activity of one can be assigned only in an applied or metaphorical sense to the other.