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WE SHALL LOOK; WE SHALL BE RADIANT
AN EXPLORATION OF THE ESCHATOLOGICAL BEATIFIC VISION

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The enjoyment of heaven is in the first place the enjoyment of God, the *visio dei*, a “beholding of God”... The nearness of God will affect every capacity of man, and every capacity will react to it.

-Geerhardus Vos¹

¹ Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics: A System of Christian Theology*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Single volume edition. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020). 1153-1154

WE SHALL LOOK; WE SHALL BE RADIANT

David asked for many things from the Lord. Reading only a few of his psalms will show that to be the case. He prayed for safety (Psalm 5:10), sanctification (51:7, 10), victory over enemies (60:11-12). And yet, David, the chief of all askers, has the audacity to say in Psalm 27:4 that he *has asked* for (and *will seek* after) one thing.² That one thing is “[to] dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of [his] life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.” There is a certain *priority* and *telos* in David’s religion, and it is to dwell in the house of the Lord, gaze upon his beauty, and inquire in his temple.³ The priority, then, is a theocentric one at its very core and it is cast in clear tangible categories. At root, the communion with and enjoyment of God, in David’s religion, involve gazing upon his beauty. It involves the beatific vision.

Though Psalm 27 is among the most overt of the psalms in this respect, it is this beatific vision religion that qualifies a significant portion of the psalter. As Geerhardus Vos describes in *The Eschatology of the Psalter*, “the psalmists could not conceive of the communion between themselves and their God as other than endless...[they] projected it into a future life.”⁴ And yet, one might ask why it is the case that this eschatological beatific vision religion qualifies the psalter so pervasively. What is the ground for such a theme? It is this question with which I will be concerned in this paper. Though I am not limiting the scope to the Psalter. Rather, I aim to make

² Emphasis is added to the phrases “have asked” and “will seek” so as to draw attention to their tense distinction as it is in the text. The first phrase comes from the Hebrew שָׁאַלְתִּי which is the qal perfect of שָׁאַל. The second phrase comes from the Hebrew אֶבְקֶשׁ which is the piel imperfect of בָּקַשׁ. This is significant to note as it demonstrates that David qualifies all his prior objects of request in light of this one request.

³ This concept of inquiring should not be seen as qualifying the previous two elements of the one request in an oracle-seeking light as the word conveys in texts such as 2 Kings 16:15. Rather, the sense conveyed is a theocentric sense. That is, inquiring in the temple is a statement of trust in the only-wise character of God himself. David seeks to enjoy the God in whom wisdom is hid (cf. Isa 30:1, Col 2:2-3). Nancy L. deClaisse-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2014). 170-171.

⁴ Geerhardus Vos, “The Eschatology of the Psalter,” *Princeton Theological Review* 18, no. 1 (January 1920): 1–43. 40.

the case that there lies in the essence of the Christian religion a hope of an eschatological beatific vision and that this hope is embedded into the essence of the Christian religion for the most basic reason that *it corresponds in a consummative relation to the image of God* and that by necessity *the redemption accomplished by Christ is within that very context*.

Defining Terms: The Beatific Vision and the Image of God

It is a sorry reality that the term *beatific vision* (elsewhere, *visio dei*) has fallen out of vogue in much of protestant and even confessionally reformed circles.⁵ One can only speculate so much why that is the case.⁶ In this section, it is sufficient to merely give a definition of the beatific vision.

The definition presented in the *New Dictionary of Theology* is quite a useful one as it presents the beatific vision to be the notion that “God himself is the ultimate goal of human life, that he will be known by the redeemed in heaven in an immediate relationship involving their whole persons.”⁷ This definition is helpful as it casts the beatific vision in its eschatological nature in terms of pure human telos. One cannot understand the primacy of the beatific vision without understanding the telos of the image of God.⁸ Additionally significant in this definition is the

⁵ Some theologians take this critique too far. Some such as Hans Boersma lodge critique at Bavinck and others in the Neo-Calvinist tradition for establishing the theological soil for modern occupation with “the use and enjoyment of this-worldly goods in the eschaton.” See Hans Boersma, “Neo-Calvinism and the Beatific Vision: Eschatology in the Reformed Tradition,” *Crux* 56, no. 3 (2020): 25–29. For a balanced critique of Bavinck’s seemingly inconsistent dogmatic approach to the subject of the beatific vision see Michael Allen, *Grounded in Heaven: Recentering Christian Hope and Life on God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018). 61-62.

⁶ One can only speculate so much concerning why it is the case that the *term* ‘beatific vision’ has not enjoyed a corresponding priority in theological dialogue as the *concept* enjoys in biblical revelation itself. In my personal correspondence, the term carries a great deal of Roman Catholic baggage for many. However, it cannot be said that this alone has caused the beatific vision to exit theological dialogue. Some have argued that because the Westminster Standards (rightly) hold to a God who is in his essence spirit, that such a vision cannot be the case. This concern in particular will be addressed later on.

⁷ Martin Davie et al., *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic*, vol. Second edition (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2016). 370.

⁸ This is ultimately the case because all theological loci, rightly understood, must be placed within an eschatological framework. Louis Berkhof writes, “[Eschatology] is the one locus of theology, in which all other loci must come to a head, a final conclusion.” in Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Expanded edition. (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth Trust, 2021). 695.

notion of “whole persons”.⁹ The beatific vision can, in a sense, be a misleading term. That is, the beatific vision is not a betrayal of the biblical conception of the God whose *being* is spirit and, thus, invisible (WCF 2.1). Rather, as Michael Allen describes, the beatific vision is cast in these visual categories because, as biblical revelation testifies, it is face-to-face communion which presents in the most visceral categories, the *experience* and *enjoyment* of God himself.¹⁰ This is precisely what Vos communicates in his Reformed Dogmatics when he describes the beatific vision as the state of glory wherein “the nearness of God will affect every capacity of man, and every capacity will react to it.”¹¹

Concerning again the *telos* category of the beatific vision, we must turn our attention to the image of God. Geerhardus Vos in his Reformed Dogmatics provides a definition of the image of God (which he terms *the deeper protestant conception*) wherein he describes the image in the context of its original possession, namely, the covenant of works. Vos writes, “That man bears God’s image means much more than that he is spirit and possesses understanding, will, etc. It means above all that *he is disposed for communion with God*, that all the capacities of his soul can

⁹ The image of God itself qualifies the whole person. It is not accurate to say that the image of God is something man has but, rather, it is *what he is*. Herman Bavinck says as much, “[Man is the image of God] totally, in soul and body, in all his faculties and powers, in all conditions and relations. Man is the image of God because and insofar as he is truly human, and he is truly human because, and to the extent that, he is the image of God.” in Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Volume 2: God and Creation*, trans. John Bolt, Reformed Dogmatics (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2004). 555.

¹⁰ Allen says, “The Bible seems to say things on the one hand that make God visually available and on the other hand seems to warn about or describe reasons why God wouldn’t be visually available. If it was just one or the other it would be a little more straightforward but the Bible is actually communicating in both registers... [the account of the transfiguration of Jesus, for example] seems to convey that somehow now this mystery of the Old Testament that we would have a longing and a yearning to experience God to the full, to see him, to take him in... this is now going to be mediated by Jesus Christ.” in Michael Allen and Matthew Barrett, “Why Is the Beatific Vision Our Hope?,” Credo Podcast, n.d.

¹¹ Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*. 1153-1154. cf. Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (P&R Publishing, 1994). 349.

act in a way that corresponds to their destiny only if they rest in God. This is the nature of man.”¹² Thus, for Vos the image of God is understood in teleological terms; in covenantal terms. For no teleological progression is made in the creator-creature relation but by covenantal advancement which, in the case of the covenant of works, was focused on Adam’s probation. The progress to be had, as Vos notes being embedded in the very substance of the image, is a consummate enjoyment of God which is the beatific vision itself. This understanding of the image of God will be employed henceforward and it is at this precise point of the covenantal, teleological progression that we see the image’s relation to the beatific vision. It is this connection which will be further explored and argued in this paper.

The Eschatological Beatific Vision and the Image

As Vos presents, there is embedded in the nature of the image a consummate goal. This lies not only in the substance of the image but the moment in covenant history wherein the image is bestowed. Adam the protological image bearer was, in the moment of his creation and at the very first special-revelatory condescension of his God, placed in a covenant relation to God (WCF 7.1).¹³ In that very covenant relation, Adam’s hope was not a mere maintenance of the state which he presently enjoyed. Rather, his hope was that the state he presently enjoyed would be advanced.

This can be noticed in the sense that Adam’s present state is most precisely described as being a yet-perfected communion with God. It is understood as a communion with God because the garden in which he dwells is the garden *of God*. Eden was first and foremost God’s and God’s abode wherein the reception of his image bearer could take place.¹⁴ After all, God walks in the

¹² Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*. 231. Note the striking similarity in language between Vos’ presentation of the beatific vision (which he refers to as the *visio dei*) and the deeper protestant conception. To understand them is to have in view man’s capacities which are seeking to rest in something/someone.

¹³ The Westminster Confession understands that all of God’s condescension to man in the creator-creature relation is qualified in a covenantal context.

¹⁴ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1975). 27.

garden just as he is said to do in the temple (2 Sam 7:6).¹⁵ Additionally, it was in the midst of the Garden of Eden that God's special-revelatory acts were focused.¹⁶ Thus, Adam's first conscious experience would have taken place in a context where the capacities of his soul were resting, albeit not-yet-consummatively, in God himself in whose abode Adam's first breath existed.

And yet, it is also abundantly the case that the communion which he enjoyed was not yet the best. There are many angles which can express why this is the case. Yet, there are two that of chief importance. The first is that there was a covenantal reward of life itself, which should be understood certainly in covenantal communion categories (Psalm 42:8, Rom 5:17, 2 Cor 2:16, Col 3:3-4, 2 Tim 1:1), held out in the tree of life.¹⁷ Additionally, there was the threat of loss of communion in two, albeit very distinct, ways in the probation tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the deceiving serpent whose lies aim to attack the communion bond between God and his image bearer.¹⁸ By all of these signs it is evident that advancement of estate (one corresponding to the image) was Adam's embedded desire and this advancement of estate – an advancement in communion with God which, as Francis Turretin notes, “is not to be sought apart from the beatific vision which can be looked for only in heaven.”¹⁹

¹⁵ G. K. Beale and Mitchell Kim, *God Dwells Among Us: A Biblical Theology of the Temple*, Essential Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021). 6.

¹⁶ Ibid. 7. Beale and Kim display the setting for this implication when they write, “The ark in the Holy of Holies, which contained the Law (which led to wisdom), echoes the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (which also led to wisdom). Both the touching of the ark and the partaking of the tree's fruit resulted in death... Both Eden and the temple are characterized by the holy presence of God that brings wisdom.”

¹⁷ Vos, *Biblical Theology*.

¹⁸ Victor P. Hamilton alludes to as much when he comments, “Apart from this claim being unadulterated distortion, it is an attempt to create in the woman's mind the impression that God is spiteful, mean, obsessively jealous, and self-protective... by this one statement of the snake God has moved from beneficent provider to cruel oppressor.” in Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1990).

¹⁹ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, vol. 1 (Phillipsburg, N.J: P&R Publishing, 1992). 584, 465, 470. In the inclusion of “heaven”, Turretin displays that there is an external reality which is yet to be actualized and is, in Adam's present moment, to be looked for. The heavenly reality, as Turretin presents here, is that reality which involves “the fullest and most perfect communion with God, in whom [man's] highest good resides.” Adam, by the

Though it is certainly the case that the image (and the communion with God it entails) was marred by the fall.²⁰ Original righteousness, as came with the image by definition, was lost.²¹ Yet, the image in its essence was not altogether lost from man. Though the image propelled man to seek God in whom his highest good resides. Under the regime of sin, no one seeks after God (Rom 3:11, cf. 1:18). And yet, it remains ever the case that man is image-bearer. This is that the eschatologically thrust image does ever remain as a sort of *sensus divinitatus* and it is still so that the consummate enjoyment of this very God can be sought for only in the eschatological beatific vision. This very *sensus divinitatus* qualifies much of biblical revelation concerning the eschaton; the age to come.

The Eschatological Beatific Vision and the Religious Hope

The religious hope of Old Testament religion is pervasively beatific-vision oriented. This makes good sense as it is pervasively an eschatologically-oriented religion which looks toward the estate held out to Adam.²² It is the religious hope that awaits the full reality of the Aaronic blessing which was for the Lord to make his face to shine upon his people and lift his countenance upon them thereby bestowing the name of the Lord upon the people of Israel (Num 6:23-27). This very same hope then blossoms more fully in the New Testament in advent of Christ (1 Cor 4:6) In this section, I will explore this beatific vision religious hope by examining key exemplary texts from the various epochs of redemptive history.

nature of the image and his original righteousness, “looks at heaven”. See also Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Volume 3: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2003). 225.

²⁰ The Hebrew of Gen 3:8 displays the hiding of Adam and Eve to be from the face (פָּנֶיךָ) of God.

²¹ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 1, p. . 612. See especially Col 3:10 for the linking of righteousness and the image.

²² *Ibid.* 584.

In the hope of the prophets, two time periods are presented; *this age* and *the age to come*.²³ There are a multitude of aspects concerning the age to come that the prophets declare. Prophetic revelation presents multiple eschatological themes such as the wrath of God (Isa 13:13, Zeph 1:10-11, :15-18, Zech 9:4, Ezek 38:18) and kingship (Isa 9:7, 55:3, Jer 33:15, Zech 9:9, 14:9). Yet, what the eschaton is for true Israel is a purely theocentric reality of blessed; a beatific vision reality of a consummatively mended communion bond. A few texts are exemplary.

Among the prophetic revelation, Hosea 11:10 is quite significant. Verses 1-11 of chapter 11 present the prodigal son who has come home.²⁴ This son (the corporate Adam) who, like the original Adam, transgressed the covenant (Hos 6:7), would indeed be brought back to be with God himself. They will be brought back to their God the roaring lion as a member of his pride. On this eschatological occasion, there is a reception of the adulterous Israel into consummate communion with their God. This stands well as the Bible presents emphatically that the reward of the believer is God himself. There is perhaps no better presentation of this fact outside of Scripture itself than in the Westminster Confession which presents God himself as the blessedness and reward of the believer (WCF 7.1). This fits well with what how saw Turretin understood the eschatological religion of Christianity as protologically presented in the Covenant of Works wherein the reward of obedience in the probation is God himself and that the seeking of such a theocentric reward is a beatific vision *hope*.

²³ Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*. 1095.

²⁴ J. Andrew Dearman, *The Book of Hosea*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2010). 154.

It then shows itself in the Psalter through not only the overtly beatific vision texts of Psalm 27:4, but in toto the prize of the religion of the psalter is God himself.²⁵ We will examine two psalms to this end – Psalms 17 and 73.

Psalm 17:15 stands as particularly illustrative from within the Davidic psalms. In Psalm 17, David sings that the Lord is the refuge for the righteous against the attacks of adversaries. In the conclusion of the Psalm David pens, “As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness.” Significant for our purposes is to note that the “as for me” statement positions the forthcoming content as being in contrast to the lot of the wicked. It is the righteous and the righteous alone who behold God’s face (cf. Psalm 11:7). Additionally significant is that David positions this beholding and being satisfied as taking place “when I awake”. Some have taken this to mean, at least in part, that an evening trial is in view.²⁶ Whether or not this is the case does not alter the fact that, as Vos notes, the Psalmists consistently project their communion with God into a future life.²⁷ Though immediate situational salvation may have been David’s *sitz im leben*, he no less conceived of the ultimate beholding of the face of God to be “in the land of the living” (27:12-13). Thus, we have good reason to liken David’s conception of awaking from sleep to the sense of sleep presented in David’s Psalm 13:3 wherein he describes sleep as death.²⁸ Psalm 11:17 then displays David’s eschatological hope of a beatific vision. The hope of the beatific vision is the hope of David’s religion.

²⁵ Psalm 4:6, 11:4-7, 17:15, 24:5-6, 26:8, 27:4-9, 31:16, 34:4-5, 40:16, 42:1-2, 43:3-4, 44:8, 50:2, 61, 63:1-3, 65:4, 67:1, 68:18, 73:23-28, 80:3, 84, 89:15, 90:1, 91:1-2, 119:135, 122:1-2, 132, 140:13, 142:5, 150, cf. 69:35-36, 74:7

²⁶ Nancy L. deClaisse-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*. 126.

²⁷ Vos, “The Eschatology of the Psalter.” 40.

²⁸ Herman Bavinck includes Psalm 11:17 in a series of Old Testament references on a post-death life of fellowship with God in Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Volume 4: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2016). 602.

Psalm 73 similarly presents a God-centered prize. This is a Psalm of Asaph who himself was a Levite (1 Chron 6:31-32, 36). In the Psalm, Asaph presents a movement from religious knowledge of intellectual assent not-yet quite experienced (Psalm 73:1) to experienced trouble at the sight of the prosperous wicked (73:2-16) to a religious knowledge of certain experiential quality (73:17-28). Two elements here are worth noting for the sake of this study.

First, the conduit for the shift between the second to the third movements is Asaph's being in the sanctuary of God (73:17). In drawing near to God, clarity comes for Asaph.²⁹ This clarity as such is *first* with respect to understanding the certain demise of the wicked. Their prosperity is hollow and is but for a time. Yet, arguably, the foremost clarity afforded Asaph has less to do with the status of the wicked and more to do with Asaph's own religion.³⁰ In fact, it is this nearness factor that qualifies the Old Testament religion intensely. In the Song of Moses which he sang after the redemption from Egypt, he says, "you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode." It is a nearness to God *himself* in his own dwelling place that is afforded the redeemed. This brings us to the second element which is that in the religious clarity of Asaph, he sees God himself as his prize. He writes, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." (73:25-26) Invoking themes of the Canaanite land allotments, he states that God is his eternal portion just as he was in the allotments for the Levites (Num 18:20, Deut 10:9).³¹ Who or what lies in existence that is to be desired more intensely and basically than God? God

²⁹ Daniel J. Estes, *Psalms 73-150: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, vol. New international version, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2019). 36.

³⁰ Ambrose comments concerning the "right hand" imagery of 73:23 and places it in square in its covenantal context. He writes, "Had Adam chosen to have the Lord at his right hand, he would not have been deceived by the serpent." See Quentin F. Wesselschmidt, *Psalms 51-150*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Old Testament (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2007). 109.

³¹ Estes, *Psalms 73-150: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, vol. New international version, p. . 37-38.

himself is the prize for Asaph and all of his capacities correspond to their destiny only as they rest in God. The hope of the beatific vision is the hope of Asaph's religion.

Such too is the religious hope presented by the New Testament letters. Paul himself understood his religion as involving a looking to the things that are unseen which he described as being a weight of glory (2 Cor 4:17-18, cf. Col 3:1-3).³² It is a *looking* towards that glorious reality to come where we will consummatively behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 4:7). John notes that this vision of God (who is himself glory) is a consummate enjoyment of God which for the inter-advent believer promotes a hope which purifies (1 John 3:2-3). The writer of Hebrews qualifies faith itself in strikingly clear beatific vision categories in describing it as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” (Heb 11:1) He'll then call on believers to run a race wherein their eyes are fixed, as it were, on the resurrected Jesus Christ (12:1-3).

All of this then touches upon the biblical religion in such basic terms. As Bavinck notes, “what makes human beings religious is that they are related to God in a way that specifically differs from all their other relationships.”³³ In other words, it is only God in the biblical religion, that is due to receive love with all of one's heart, soul, and strength (Deut 6:5). And it is the eschatological reality of such religion consummated in the beatific vision that qualifies its hope.

This then brings fresh light to the nature of the new heavens and new earth; the better country (Heb 11:16). Though there is a much that can be said about the new heavens and new earth (and a great deal more than *cannot* yet be said on this side of the *parousia*) one thing is strikingly

³² It is not unlikely that an intentional play on words is taking place in this text. For Paul to say weight of glory is likely to bring to remembrance Hebrew categories for glory (כְבוֹד) which consist in a sense of weightiness.

³³ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Volume 1: Prolegomena*, trans. John Bolt (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003). 242.

significant in the biblical witness of it; that in its center is God himself (Rev 21:1-4; 21:22-25, 22:4; 22:5, cf. Ex 15:13-17, Joel 3:21, Zech 2:10). Such a portrayal explicitly witnessed in Revelation is a part of the eschatological hope throughout the whole scope of redemptive history. Finding its origin in that Eden itself was first and foremost the abode of God, it is understood that the consummate place for which Israel longed was defined by the presence of God and the new heavens and new earth are presented as such. No more emphatic instance of this fact is found throughout Old Testament revelation than in the last words of Ezekiel. After painting such vivid imagery of the eschatological city in all of its measurements and gates, Ezekiel ends by declaring the name of the city which is “The Lord is there” (Ezek 48:35).³⁴ This same imagery is then appropriated by John in Revelation as he presents the reality of the new heavens and the new earth precisely in this theocentric sense. The new heavens and the new earth is where God will consummatively dwell with his people (Rev 21:3). So great will this communion be, that the glory of the face of God (which Moses could not bear) would shine on them in and through Jesus Christ and his name will be written on them (Rev 22:4-5, cf. Psalm 34:5, Num 6:24-27). It is the beatific vision in all its fulness.³⁵ It is in that estate of glory that all of the capacities of the redeemed correspond to their destiny as they rest in God.

The Eschatological Beatific Vision and the Person and Work of Christ

These concepts of the beatific vision as holding a primary category in biblical religion sets the scene for the person and work of Jesus Christ. In this section, I will explore how the person and work of Christ is presented in the context of the eschatological beatific vision.

Perhaps the most obvious instances of such a connection in the New Testament is found in the prologue to John’s Gospel (and corresponding prologue to his first letter). John’s prologue

³⁴ The name comes from the Hebrew *יְהוָה שָׁמָּה*.

³⁵ Allen, *Grounded in Heaven*. 75.

presents a high Christology. He begins by introducing Jesus Christ (the Word) as the eternal God who created all that is (John 1:1-3, cf. Col 1:15-17). These first few verses are distinctly trinitarian in that they present a God who is both ultimate unity and ultimate diversity.³⁶ And yet, the trinitarian nature of this God being presented only amplifies as the prologue moves along. Finally, in 1:14-18, we are presented with the incarnation of this Word who became flesh and tabernacled among men. In this tabernacling and from his fullness, the Word made known (or, *exegeted*) the Father who has never been seen. D.A. Carson comments that this inclusion of the Father's not being seen is likely an allusion to Ex 33-34 wherein Moses, when he asked to see the Lord's glory, was denied.³⁷ Though he did receive *something* from the Lord as he hid in the clef of the rock and the Lord passed by *declaring* his glory (Ex 33:20-23, 34:5-7). Even that, and the following tablet inscription, was enough to cause Moses' face to shine (Ex 34:29-33). This sort of interaction is what Numbers refers to as Moses' *face-to-face* interaction with the Lord (Num 12:8).³⁸ All of this background is embedded in what Jesus, the incarnate Word, is accomplishing. It is something that only he who is of one substance (*μονογενής*) with the Father can accomplish. These themes of Christ making the Father known are then clearly assumed in the prologue to John's first letter though it is there that John uses even more sensory language of seeing and touching (1 John 1:1, cf. 1:2-3). The Son has come to bring his people to a face-to-face communion bond with God wherein all of their capacities can correspond to their destiny as they finally rest in God.³⁹

This element clearly characterizes Jesus' own messianic self-consciousness. He knew that his mission was one that consisted in him being sent by the Father and unto an elect people (Luke

³⁶ The Word both *was with* God and *was* God himself (1:1-2).

³⁷ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1991). 134.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 134. See also Heb 11:27 wherein Moses by-faith fleeing Egypt is cast as an endurance "as seeing him who is invisible."

³⁹ 1 Cor 13:2, 2 Cor 3:18, 4:6, 4:17-18, Col 1:15, 1 John 1:13, 3:2

22:29, John 6:36-39). Perhaps the most emphatic instance of this is in the upper room pericope of John 14:8-9. In this text, Philip asks a significant request of Jesus though, as Jesus will demonstrate, it shows his ignorance. He asks, assumedly on behalf of the others, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” This question is indeed significant because it demonstrates the religion of the disciples wherein to see God is *enough*. Their religion was David’s. Their religion was Asaph’s. Their religion was Moses’.⁴⁰

Yet, Jesus points out Philip’s ignorance as he responds, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” To *exegete* the Father to an elect people was right at the core of what Jesus’ mission was (1 Pet 3:18). His ministry was pervasively mediatorial in character and thus to bring about this beatific vision is right at the heartbeat of what he came to accomplish (Matt 5:8).⁴¹ The redemptive-historical entrance of his mediatorial office began in typical form in Gen 3:15, reached substance form in his first advent, and will reach an eternal consummative stage in the new heavens and new earth where we will perfectly and eternally behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.⁴²

This, of course, invites the question of what role Christ will play in the eschatological beatific vision. The question is framed as whether we will gaze upon the divine essence or upon Christ.⁴³ On this point there are a variety of views. Some, citing Aquinas, Calvin, Turretin and

⁴⁰ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*. 494. With this Carson is in complete agreement. He even makes the connection of this religious hope of Phillip to the image of God as he comments, “[Philip] thus joins the queue of human beings through the ages who have rightly understood that there can be no higher experience, no greater good, than seeing God as he is, in unimaginable splendour and transcendent glory. We have been made in his image, and however much we have defaced that image, we still yearn for the *Visio Dei*, the vision of God.”

⁴¹ Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption* (Scarsdale, NY: Westminster Discount Book Service, n.d.). 31-34.

⁴² Samuel Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened*, ed. C. Matthew McMahon, 1st ed. (New Lenox, Ill: Puritan Publications, 2005). 368.

⁴³ Will Bankston, “Seeing God’s Essence: A Teleological Coordination of the Beatific Vision and Christ’s Work of Atonement,” *Pro Ecclesia: A Journal of Catholic and Evangelical Theology* 30, no. 4 (November 2021): 539–566. 545.

others have put forth that the beholding will be of the divine essence as such.⁴⁴ Turretin writes that the beholding that will take place will be an apprehension of God with the veil removed.⁴⁵ Others argue that the divine essence, however much we can speak of it as an object of beholding, necessarily will be gazed upon with respect to the mediator Jesus Christ. Preference is given to the latter for two primary reasons.

First, though it can be said that Christ entered his mediatorial office redemptive-historically, it is pervasively true that he is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8, cf. 1 Pet 1:20-21, Rev 13:8). Thus, Christ resides in his mediatorial office eternally forward into the new heavens and new earth. Second, though it certainly is the case that veil is removed in the beatific vision, this does not then imply a mediator-less gaze. Matt 17 is instructive to this end. As Matthew describes Jesus' transfiguration (*metamorphoō*) on the mountain he writes that, "his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light." The redemptive-historical significance of this event cannot be overstated as various elements such as the mountain, the six days, the cloud, and others position this as reminiscent of Ex 24:9-18 in the revelation of God's glory to Moses.⁴⁶ Thus, what takes place here in Matt 17 is itself a revelation of the glory of God in Christ.⁴⁷ The veil was temporarily removed and yet it was still Christ in his person revealing the glory of God to the disciples. A veil-free revelation does not necessarily imply a mediator-free revelation.

⁴⁴ For a recent presentation of this view see Gavin Ortlund, "Will We See God's Essence? A Defense of a Thomistic Account of the Beatific Vision," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 74, no. 4 (November 2021): 323–332.

⁴⁵ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 3 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publ, 1997). 20.8.8

⁴⁶ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2007). 333.

⁴⁷ This is precisely how Peter recalls the event in verses 16-18 of his second epistles wherein he writes, "we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,' we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain."

Such reasoning can be seen as implied in Paul's theology as presented in 2 Cor 3:18. Paul describes that the Christian, beholding the face of the Christ with their own unveiled face, is being transformed from one glory to another. The eschatological veil-free beatific vision carries an inaugurated effect in the person and work of Christ the mediator.⁴⁸ Such an effect is no less Christocentric in the consummation as John writes that "when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2) Thus, the inaugurated glory transformation that Paul describes as necessarily involving a veil-free looking upon Christ is the same one though in consummative form that John describes. A veil-free revelation does not necessarily involve a mediator-free revelation. What exactly such an experience will be like – consummatively gazing upon the beautiful glory of the God in the face of Jesus Christ – we cannot with certainty know. Such descriptions risk going further than biblical revelation guides. Yet we can say that in and through Jesus Christ we will be brought to a perfected face-to-face communion bond with God wherein all our capacities perfectly correspond to their destiny as they finally rest in God.

Conclusion

It is indeed a sad reality that the beatific vision has fallen out of vogue in modern theology. As previously stated, one can only pry so deeply to discover why this is the case. Nevertheless, though the beatific vision does not enjoy the status it deserves in modern theology, the concept is pervasive throughout the whole of biblical revelation. This is the case because, as demonstrated, it is in essence the consummation of the image of God. In that eschatologically thrust context, the religious hope of the Bible is understood in beatific vision categories and, thus, the person and

⁴⁸ Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997). 150.

work of Christ also carry with them a dense beatific vision theme. The beatific vision is the goal of redemption.⁴⁹

It is this very hope that the present Christian lies in wait for. The present Christian “waits until God appeareth”.⁵⁰ The present Christian enjoys God in such a way that corresponds to his being made in God’s image and yet the consummate enjoyment is yet to come. But it will indeed come. That day will come when the Christian is brought to enjoy a consummate face-to-face communion bond with God wherein all of his capacities perfectly correspond to their destiny as they finally rest in God. Come Lord Jesus!

⁴⁹ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1993). 682-683.

⁵⁰ Martin Luther brilliantly captures this eschatological beatific vision hope as he writes in his hymn From the Depths of Woe, “What though I wait the live-long night, and 'til the dawn appeareth, my heart still trusteth in his might; it doubteth not nor feareth: do thus, O ye of Israel's seed, ye of the Spirit born indeed; and wait 'til God appeareth.”