

Humanity as the Image of God

A exegetical – theological reflection on Genesis 1:26 – 31 and Psalm 8.

Assignment 1

Student: Bill Versteeg

#227358

The concept of the “image of God” is fundamental to not only what it means to be human, it is fundamental to any understanding of what it means to be spiritually formed. The following paper will look at Genesis 1:26 – 31 and Psalm 8 focusing on the import of the concept of the *imago dei* on humanities role within the cosmos with a focus on the ethical implications of our status and the concept of spiritual formation. For the sake of organization, I have included exegetical work at the footnote level. Substantial arguments regarding the exegesis will be within the footnotes. Genesis 1:26-31 Exegesis:

26 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ³ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ⁴ וַיְרִדוּ⁵ בְּדִנְתָּם⁶ הַיּוֹם⁷ וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם
וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל־הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל־הַרְמֵשׁ הָרֹמֵשׁ עַל־הָאָרֶץ:

¹ “And he said” Waw conjunction (commonly left out in English), רמא– qal imperfect verb, “to say”, third person, masculine, singular. The fact that this is third person singular is important. It indicates that the original writer regarded אֱלֹהִים as a singular, monotheistic deity even though אֱלֹהִים is plural and could be interpreted “gods.” אֱלֹהִים at least speaks as “one.”

² “we make” or “let’s make.” The qal first person plural of הַשָּׁע is once again significant. Though the אֱלֹהִים speak as one, the אֱלֹהִים act as a plurality. Though this is no demonstration of the Trinity in this passage, it is at least a demonstration of plurality in the deity in the work of creation, indicative of the role of the Spirit in the creative process (Genesis 1:1), and if one looks forward, the Word (John 1:1).

³ “according to our image” taking כ as “kaph of norm.” “as our image” taking כ as *kaph essentiae*. I very much appreciated Cline’s discussion of this important distinction (Cline, David, “*Humanity as the Image of God*,” *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1967-1998*, JSOT 293. Sheffield Academic Press, 1998. Vol. 2, pp. 473f). Kaph as norm leads to the question “How are we like God?” and results in numerous philosophical speculations according to the *zeitgeist* of the day as to what God is really like and how humanity is similar. *Kaph essentiae* leads to the question “How would humanity, as God’s representative on earth, act in accordance with that position?” The alternative theological focus is profound. Regarding צלם, once again Cline’s research (Ibid., pp. 475f) is very helpful. Though I appreciate and agree with the holistic themes of many contemporary theologians, the theme that an image contained the fluid, or spirit, of the deity in its wholeness has profound resonances with 2 Corinthians 3:17f (NIV) where it is the profound work of the “Lord, who is the Spirit” to transform humanity “into his likeness with ever increasing glory.” Taking צלם with the *kaph essentiae* moves the work of Lord’s Spirit from divine attributes in humanity to divine delegated action through humanity.

⁴ “something like the likeness of us (our likeness)” The כ before תומוך compounds the distance. Cline notes the Hebrew revulsion to human divination as the reason for the compound distance in likeness. One again, the suffix is 1st person plural. Though אֱלֹהִים speaks as one, the likeness is that of a plurality, a plurality continued and imaged in the dual gender nature of the image (verse 27).

⁵ “they shall rule” or “let them rule” verb, imperfect 3rd person plural of הִרְדָּ. Rulership lies at the heart of the image and likeness function and it is in the plural, done by both male and female (vs. 27).

⁶ “let them multiply” כ prep with הִרְדָּ. The אֱלֹהִים want their delegated rulership actions throughout the earth.

27 וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצַלְמֵ אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:

28 וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וּכְבַשְׁתֶּם¹⁰
וַיְרִדוּ בְּרִגְתַּיִם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל־חַיָּה הַרְמֵשֶׁת עַל־הָאָרֶץ:

29 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה נֹתְתִי¹¹ לָכֶם אֶת־כָּל־עֵשֶׂב זֶרַע זָרַע אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־הָאָרֶץ
וְאֶת־כָּל־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר־בוֹ פְּרִי־עֵץ זֶרַע זָרַע לָכֶם וַיְהִי לְאָכְלָה:

30 וּלְכָל־חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ וּלְכָל־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּלְכָל רֹמֵשׁ עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־בוֹ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה
אֶת־כָּל־יֵרֶק עֵשֶׂב לְאָכְלָה וַיְהִי־כֵן:

31 וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַהֲנִיחַ־טוֹב¹² מְאֹד וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי:

פ

13

The Eighth Psalm – exegesis.

Even before exegesis, one must remember the apparent context of this psalm.

The overtone of the entire Psalm is awe and wonder, worship driven by mystery and majesty. The probably setting is that of the Feast of Tabernacles in which the worship, in awe of the heavenly array is struck by the smallness yet the exalted status of humanity.

To the degree that this Psalm address the *imago dei* issue, it must be remembered that at

⁷ The list of creatures shows that the image that humanity is given gives them distinction and rulership over all animals and the rest of creation. Though humanity is part of creation, their position is almost (but not) divine.

⁸ Verse 27 repeats the truth over two times and adds the theme that both male and female bear the role of imaging אֱלֹהִים in their rulership over creation.

⁹ “he blessed” – piel imperfect with waw consecutive, 3rd person, singular of בָּרַךְ . Interesting that here, the blessing action of אֱלֹהִים is once again in the singular, the אֱלֹהִים speak (וַיֹּאמֶר) as with one voice. Important to note is the direct connection between blessing and image. The blessing is given so that the role of image can be fulfilled.

¹⁰ “to subdue” from the verb כָּבַשׁ . The dominion theme is repeated here. This word describes the rulership of a king over his subjects. (see Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, (Augsburg Publishing, Minneapolis, 1984) p. 161

¹¹ “I give” – first person singular perfect from נָתַן . This is a divine bequeathment, in perfect tense to describe a “done deal” which involves future action (Westermann Ibid., p. 162).

¹² Here the goodness and orderliness of creation is recognized in that God (JWH) has a representative, a visible image residing and ruling on his behalf over creation.

¹³ *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia : with Westminster Hebrew Morphology*. electronic ed., Ge 1:26. Stuttgart: Glenside PA: German Bible Society; Westminster Seminary, 1996, c1925; morphology c1991.

least the realization of the *imago dei* drives one to worship, and probably, the *imago dei* is directly involved with humanity as *homo adorans*. Psalm 8:

לְמַנְצַחַּ עַל־הַגִּתִּית מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד:

יְהוָה אֲדַלְּמִינוּ מִהָאֲדִיר שְׁמֶךָ¹⁴ בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר תָּנָה הוֹדֶךָ עַל־הַשָּׁמַיִם:

מִפִּי עוֹלָלִים וְיִנְקִים יִסְדָּתְךָ עַז לְמַעַן צוֹרְרֶיךָ לְהַשְׁבִּית אוֹיֵב וּמִתְנַקֵּם:

כִּי־אֲרָאָה שְׁמֶיךָ מַעֲשֵׂי אֲצַבְעֹתֶיךָ יָרַח וְכוֹכְבֵּים אֲשֶׁר כּוֹנְנֹתָהּ:

מִהָאֲנוּשׁ¹⁵ כִּי־תִזְכְּרֶנּוּ¹⁶ וּבֶן־אָדָם כִּי תִפְקְדֶנּוּ¹⁷:

וַתַּחֲסֶרְהוּ מְעַט מֵאֱלֹהִים¹⁸ וְכָבוֹד וְהָדָר תִּעֲטָרְהוּ:

תִּמְשִׁילֵהוּ בְּמַעֲשֵׂי¹⁹ יָדֶיךָ כֹּל שֵׁתָה תַחַת־רַגְלָיו:

צָנָה וְאֱלֹפִים כָּלָם וְגַם בְּהִמּוֹת שָׂדֵי:

צִפּוֹר שָׁמַיִם וְדָגֵי הַיָּם עֵבֶר אֲרָחוֹת יַמִּים:

¹⁴ “your name” from שֵׁם with second person singular suffix. The concept of name in the scriptures is rich with nuance. Name as reputation, but symbolizing the entirety of the divine being is understood. So praise of the name is praise of the being behind it. The “name” resonates with the concept of image as divine representative in the earth, behind which the divine being stands. To what degree is humanity in his obedient behavior the name and reputation of God in the earth? Ezekiel 36:20f makes it clear that Israel profaned JWH’s name by their disobedience and by losing their status as God’s chosen people *in his bequeathed land*.

¹⁵ “mankind” אָנוּשׁ taken as a singular collective.

¹⁶ “that you remember or pay attention to him” from זָכַר “to remember.” – qal imperfect, 2nd person singular with 3rd person singular suffix (as object). The wonder of worship in this context is that God’s memory would even pay attention to something as small and insignificant as humankind in the vastness of the cosmos.

¹⁷ The sense of repetition so common to the Hebrew language goes a step further. Now פָּקַד is used not only to denote a sense of wonder at God’s attention and loving care, but also has the sense of our exalted status or *appointment*. (Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament referring to פָּקַד) The paradox that gives rise to worship and adoration is established. Humility becomes the foundation for the exaltation expressed in the next stanza (Psalm 149:4,5, James 4:6-10).

¹⁸ Preposition מִ (“than”, comparative) before אֱלֹהִים “God” or gods (plural) or those having the status of gods.

¹⁹ Related to the verb “to do” (עָשָׂה) but in this form a plural noun in the sense of “ones who exercise authority over,” thus the sense of ruler or appointed officials.

Theological Reflection

The concept of the image of God forces us to ask what the nature of that image is. With Cline (his work on his Old Testament exegesis summarized below)²² I agree that the image is essential to humanity, humanity is the image of God, functions as the image of God, rather than “contains” the image of God. Every human being functions as the image of God in this world. This is the divinely appointed status of humanity claimed in the *Kaph essentiae* interpretation of Genesis 1:26 and Psalm 8. Humanity, for all of their humbling smallness has been given a profound and exalted appointment!

“Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name!”

But this appointment celebrated in Psalm 8 leaves the worshipping singer with crushing waves of dissonance. Any singer with a knowledge of humanities failures, with any sensitivity to the convoluted machinations of the human heart, with any awareness of the history of Israel (or any other people group) will be aware that the “Name” which we were called to uphold has by us, in our exalted position, been profaned (Ezekiel 36:20f).

²⁰ The Psalm closes with the worship filled refrain repeated, reminding the singer that even in our exaltation as being made a little less than God, that exaltation leads to worshipping the one true God from whom all exaltation comes.

²¹ *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia : with Westminster Hebrew Morphology*. electronic ed., Ps 8:1. Stuttgart; Glenside PA: German Bible Society; Westminster Seminary, 1996, c1925; morphology c1991.

²² “Humankind is created not in God’s image, since God has no image of his own, but as God’s image, or rather to be God’s image, that is to deputize in the created world for the transcendent God who remains outside the world order. That humanity is God’s image means that it is the visible corporeal representative of the invisible, bodiless God; humanity is representative rather than representation, since the idea of portrayal is secondary in the significance of the image. However, the term ‘likeness’ is an assurance that humanity is an adequate and faithful representative of God on earth. The whole person is the image of God, without distinction of spirit and body. All humankind, without distinction, are the image of God. The image is to be understood not so much ontologically as existentially: it comes to expression not in the nature of humanity so much as in its activity and function. This function is to represent God’s lordship to the lower orders of creation. The dominion of humanity over creation can hardly be excluded from the content of the image itself. Humankind, which means both the human race and individual persons, does not cease to be the image of God so long as it remains human; to be human and to be the image of God are not separable.” Cline, *Ibid.*, p. 495.

The author of Hebrews, experiencing the dissonance of the song, turns the eyes of the reader away from our exalted selves to “The Son... the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being...”²³ by quoting Psalm 8 and then writing

“In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. ⁹ But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”²⁴

Any attempt to understand the nature of the image of God must deal with this very apparent dissonance and the answer scripture gives to that dissonance. The writer of the book of Hebrews makes it clear that though all creation is subject to humanity, that reality is not seen. Creation has rebelled against the delegated authority of the image. The blessing is overtaken in curse by a creation that refuses to submit²⁵ and fruitfulness that multiplies pain.²⁶ Though humanity may have an exalted status, something has gone terribly wrong. The fluid of divinity²⁷ is removed and that which was to be subdued can no longer be mastered.

“But we see Jesus!” To see Jesus was to see the Father.²⁸ The likeness between the Son and the Father so perfect; their words,²⁹ their work,³⁰ are the same. Jesus subduing sickness and unclean spirits, stilling a storm and withering a fig tree are the image of God exercising divinely appointed influence over a rebellious creation. But then the image takes a profound turn. Beauty turns to

²³ Hebrews 1:3. *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. electronic ed., Heb 1:3. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984.

²⁴ Ibid., Hebrews 2:8,9

²⁵ Genesis 3:17f

²⁶ Genesis 3:16

²⁷ Cline, p. 475f

²⁸ John 14:9

²⁹ John 6:63, 14:10, 24, 17:8

³⁰ John 4:34, 5:17, 9:4, 14:10, 17:4

ugliness, form turns to disfigurement. The perfect *Imago Dei* becomes marred and powerless over his rebellious creation and his usurping incorrigible appointees. The exalted *Imago Dei* did not count that status something to be grasped... but humbled himself, becoming the image fallen³¹ - even to the death, death on a cross.³² As both Hebrews 2 and Philippians 2 point out, the self humiliation of Christ was the journey toward exaltation. Consistent with Irenaeus, this recapitulation reverses the course of humanity, and if we are like-minded³³ setting aside all within which we might boast,³⁴ turning in humility toward Christ,³⁵ we will discover the *imago dei* returned to us with ever increasing glory.³⁶ Those who humble themselves will be exalted. The journey to glory is through the valley of humility.

Both Genesis 1:26-31 and Psalm 8 give clear indication to the exalted status of humanity in creation. But Psalm 8, in placing this truth in the context of the most profound worship filled adoration demonstrates that this exaltation is only when our rightful status as humble worshipper is maintained. True humility before God, the kind of humility that unifies repentance and faith becomes the ethical *ground on which we stand* in our relations with God and one another. Actions done

³¹ "God made him who had no sin to be sin^a for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." NIV 2 Corinthians 5:21

³² If the kenosis of Christ is seen as a dynamic of the image of God, then Isaiah 53 has profound things to say about the beauty of that image that was lost as his Son emptied himself. Few artists have pictured this loss of the beauty of the image as well as Mathis Grunewald in his painting *The Crucifixion*. See detail http://www.aug.edu/augusta/iconography/iconographySupplementalImages/crucifixion/grunewald1515_feet.html (Accessed September 26, 2005)

³³ Philippians 2:2

³⁴ Philippians 3:4-11

³⁵ Gordon T. Smith sees humility as the unifying posture of conversion. (See Gordon T. Smith. *Beginning Well: Christian Conversion and Authentic Transformation*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001. pp. 46, 125, 129.

³⁶ 2 Corinthians 3:16 has very precise wording linking the restoration of the image to the humility of repentance: "But whenever anyone *turns* to the Lord..."

without humility are not done in love³⁷ and are inconsistent with divine exalted appointment we have received. Ethics are not an addendum to grace guiding our behavior; ethics are the very essence of our position in grace as the ones being glorified. What we are cannot be separated from what we do. Faith without works is dead.

With regard the spiritual formation, this study of the image has profound implications. True spiritual formation happens only on the softened clay of humility. Where pride has hardened, any formative pressures, habits or disciplines will be found ineffective in forming Christ, the *imago dei*, in us.

³⁷ 1 Corinthians 13:4-8