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John Zinkand
Dordt College

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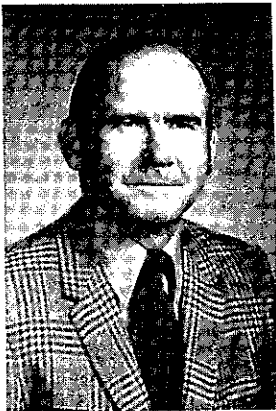
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Perspectives on Man's "God-Image"

by John M. Zinkand
Professor of Classical Languages



Dr. Zinkand is a graduate of Wheaton College and received his M.A. in Classics from Johns Hopkins University. He holds the B.D. and Th.M. degrees from Westminster Theological Seminary and his Ph.D. was earned, in Near Eastern Studies, from Brandeis University. He has been on the Dordt faculty for 16 years and has also been involved in translation work for the New International Version of the Bible.

Reformed creeds, and their theologian-explicators, have given the *imago dei* concept an almost exclusively ethical connotation. The *Heidelberg Catechism*, for example, states in the answer to Question Six: "God created man *good* and after his own image—that is, in *righteousness* and

true *holiness*."¹ (emphasis added)

In this article an attempt will be made to view the *imago dei* in its setting in Genesis.² Our thesis is that the Biblical account provides much information about God, in whose image-and-likeness (or image =likeness) man was created. This has often

been overlooked, especially in more recent days, when Christian theologians direct their attention to such questions as the length of the creation days and whether there are two (conflicting) creation stories.

Indeed, it is startling to realize that so many theologians have not observed what Genesis has to offer about God as a God who *works*. That He is Creator has been recognized, but the sustained emphasis on God's working as indicative of God's nature (or more precisely, an aspect of His nature) has not been given proper notice. Perhaps this is due to the dominance of systematic or dogmatic theology; Biblical theology is still regarded with some suspicion. For those who assent to the inspired character of the Bible, there should be no fear that following the record as it develops, is an improper *modus operandi*.

As we read the first chapter of Genesis, we encounter a succession of "activity words" associated with God: God *created* (v. 1), God *said*—in command (v. 3), God *separated* (v. 4), God *called* (twice), (v. 5), God *said* (echoing verse three) (v. 6), God *made* (v. 7), God *called* (v. 8), God *said* (v. 9), God *created* (v. 21), and God *pronounced a blessing* (involving a command) (v. 22).

Between the beat of divine activity—God created, made, set, said, called—are the intervening responses: earth was, light came to be, the waters separated, (various elements of creation) were named—and it was good.

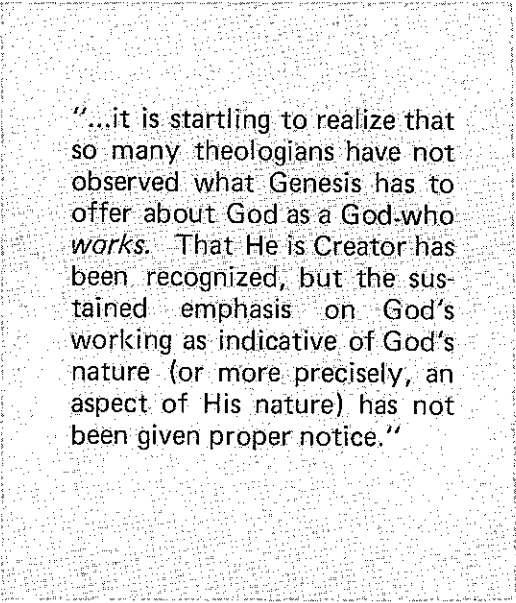
When Moses reflected on what he had written, or even earlier, when the Patriarchs contemplated the accounts they had of this divine activity, the question "Why did God do this?" must have arisen. It is a natural response to the majestic account given here. Why did God create the heavens and the earth, the sea, the animals, and especially, why man? It is the question anterior to the psalmist's "What is man that you are concerned about him?" (Psalm 8:4a). The ultimate *why* is usually answered thus by theologians: "for God's own glory." (Such an answer is found

even in a catechism for pre-school children!)

"For God's own glory" is a difficult concept for thoughtful adults. What this expression means to small children is difficult to ascertain. Likely, it helps stifle curiosity regarding such matters.

"For God's own glory" is probably, in many minds, paraphrased "just because God wanted to do it." In other words, the expression does not really answer the question, but leads us to realize that God's ways are inscrutable, or in Biblical poetry: "past finding out."

But need our admission that ultimately we can not *comprehend* God's ways leave us without any useful, *proximate* answer to the irrepressible *why*? Are there no indications, leads, or "hints" in the Genesis account of a nearer-to-hand reason for the cosmos? Let us examine that refrain "and God saw that it was



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For what purpose was that clause included in Moses' account of the creation? Certainly not to indicate that God had to wait to see what the creation would be like, and wonder of wonders—it turned

out remarkably well! No, Moses uses this very human analogy, this expression of satisfaction, admiration, even affection that we use when our finished product lives up to our expectations so that we may glimpse something of the *why*. Step by step in the creation account we read "it was good." After the creation of man on day six, the expression is heightened: when God "saw" all that He had made, He saw that it was *very* good. God delighted in His creation!

God's delight in creation is the clue to understanding *solī deo gloria*. God's purpose in creating is not a cold, abstract

be, to refer to the whole creation. The first chapter of this gospel consciously imitates Genesis: "In the beginning was the Word" and "In the beginning God created. . . ." Therefore, this *locus classicus* of the good-news-in-Christ can only be understood by recalling the original *κβσμσς* creation account. The love of God provides not only the answer for the "why" of *redemption*, but also an understanding of the "why" of *creation*.

Love is something we human beings can understand; it characterizes our existence. Often it is shallow, always imperfect, and at times it is grossly perverted. But

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What is evident in re-creative (redemptive) activity, namely, that God's love is central, must be seen in the original creative activity. The well-known John 3:16 is freed from an exclusively personalistic view when *κβσμσς* is understood, as it should

again, among Christians it can be deep, enduring, and genuine, for they have experienced the re-creation that is accomplished through Jesus Christ.

To say that the love of God gives us a workable, proximate reason for God's creating all things is not meant to substitute for, or detract from, God's sovereignty, or the ultimate inscrutibility of His ways. We have seen these themes in Moses' creation account: a God who is active, whose creative *modus operandi* at times is simply voicing a command, and a God who creates as an expression of his love. As the creation story unfolds, God is seen to pause prior to the creation of man. Earth does not produce man as if some inherent forces were summoned to action by a

divine imperative. Man, the crown of the cosmos, is the result of God's interpersonal exhortation "Let us make man in our image and after our likeness." A picture of divine consultation precedes man's creation. The Architect-Builder, the Sovereign Creator, designs that which will, more than anything else, exhibit His own nature.

The God-likeness of man does not consist in his having a *soul* of divine origin. Some of the blame for such an erroneous view must be laid to a misreading of Genesis 2:7. In the Authorized Version it is translated:

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

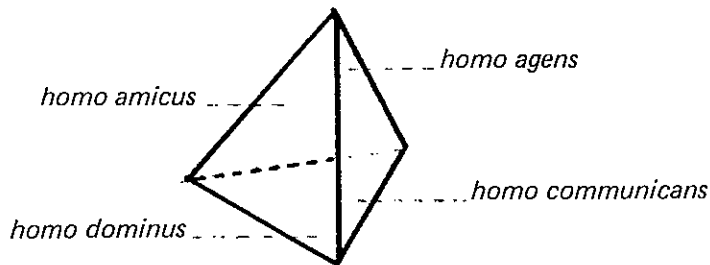
With undue emphasis on the last clause, some Christians have understood the *soul* as more important than the body. Greek dualism has been read thereby into the Biblical creation account. *σῶμα σῆμα* ("the body is a tomb") has no place here. Man did not "become a living soul,"³ but a living *being*, a unity. God created man from the dust of the ground,⁴ but that "dust" was God-made as well. A post-fall view of a cursed earth must not bias the understanding of the pre-fall account. Man as an integrality was made in the image=likeness of God.⁵

Anthropologists, biologists, and others desiring to use a specific taxonomic designation for man, call him *homo sapiens*, literally "man the wise (one)," or "man the knower." Although we cannot obli-

terate this term from the vocabulary of these disciplines or withdraw it from common usage, we must oppose the implications of the term. Man is classified just as other flora and fauna are, and his particularity, his specificity, is the intellectual, rational activity in which he can engage. Despite these limiting connotations of *homo sapiens*, it is a term with which we have to live.

For our understanding of man created in the likeness of God, I propose to use four terms similar to the term *homo sapiens*. These are *homo agens*, *homo communicans*, *homo amicus*, and *homo dominus*. The first two employ a participle as does *homo sapiens*, and refer, respectively to man the doer or the worker (from Latin *ago*, compare English *agent* and *actor*), and man who expresses himself, man who communicates. The latter pair use nouns in apposition: man as *friend* and man as *lord* or *master*.

The use of four separate terms must not be construed as compartmentalizing man. Rather, they are meant to demonstrate interaction and complementation. Let us describe these aspects of man as image-bearer of God in terms of a geometric figure. Imagine a four-sided solid, i.e., a regular tetrahedron. Each face is equal, including the "base," that is, each of the four faces is an equilateral triangle, and the figure most common outside the world of mathematics that takes this form is a pyramid. Our meaning here, however, is not to suggest a figure with a "foundation" or a notion of "higher-built-on-lower."



Without any one face the form could not exist. One face, two, or even three faces may be viewed at the same time, depending on the perspective. None has priority or is less, or more than the other three.

Earlier, we began considering Genesis chapter one, noting the various actions that God engaged in: creating, making, separating, calling, etc. In chapter two, the first activity predicated of man (vs. 19ff.) is naming the cattle, birds, and wild animals. This obviously parallels the divine name-givings of the previous chapter: light is named *day*; darkness, *night* (v. 5); the expanse, *sky* (v. 8); dry ground, *land*; and the collected waters, *seas* (v. 10). What Adam called the creatures became their designations, their God-approved *names*. No expressed command to Adam to do this is recorded; he seems to have responded spontaneously as God had the animals "pass in review" before him.

Adam's naming the creatures should not be seen as a capricious selection of vocables which the first man somehow associated with this or that animal or bird meeting his glance. The Old Testament, as well as the New, attaches greater significance to names—both for God or men—than we customarily do. Adam's first recorded work involved communicating to the non-human living things in creation the names appropriate to their nature, shape, and function.

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But this communication was limited to the animals' ability to respond. Animals can respond to signals given by humans (words, whistles, gestures, etc.) by showing

displeasure, affection, or by performing certain actions which, in turn, will lead to their being rewarded. At best, such "communication" is minimal. In the "review of the creatures" there was none found that could respond, fully communicate, with man. So God made a *person*, a companion suitable for man. This person, like Adam, was made God-like, although the process of creation was different. Instead of using earth-dust for the body, God used part of Adam himself. In this way God structured the unity of our first parents; and when he woke from his sleep to see what God had done, Adam rapturously exclaimed: "This is bone from my bone, flesh from my flesh!" He designated her *woman* because she came from man.⁶ Man's communicating could now be full, for the woman was made to (*cor*)respond to man.

With the creation of woman, man obtained not only a "communication partner," but also a friend, another God-like person.⁷ Man, the supreme expression of God's love, now had someone to assist him in expressing God's love in the cosmos. In their relation to each other, in their taking care of creation, and in their loving, spontaneous response to God's commands, Adam and Eve could and did reflect God's nature as *Amicus*, Friend.

At the pinnacle of creation, the first human pair exercised dominion over all that God had made. "Dominion" must be understood without the corrupting influence that we associate with the word. *Homo amicus* is not incompatible with *homo dominus*, for it was through loving obedience, in that pre-fall period, that man, under God, was lord over creation. Unlike our modern associations of dominance with manipulation and exploitative control of underlings, the dominance (lordship) then exercised was, by nature, a harmonious relationship, pleasurable rewarding work for Adam and Eve, as they provided a beneficent ordering for the creatures.

Between man and woman existed mutual trust and co-operation. The lordship of Adam over Eve reflected their differences in form, in order of being

created, a fact often disregarded today in the furor of egalitarianism. Woman was created because man, without her, could not demonstrate the fullness of love, of communication, or of proper creation-rule.

This four-sided view of man's God-likeness is not merely to be employed when we wistfully contemplate Eden, the paradise that was. Our view extends beyond the Fall also; for these rubrics function equally well as we view the tragedy of Genesis three, the work of re-creation by *Deus-Homo Christus*, and the present situation where the Christian struggles to live a meaningful life in a stress-filled world.

In Genesis three, the question of *homo dominus* versus *Deus Dominus* is introduced. The snake, usurping the communication prerogative of God and man, mysteriously tricked Eve into doubting the Word of God. Making the serpent her friend, she listened to the half-truths and insinuations of the Evil One. The act forbidden, namely, eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, became the *desideratum*, and then followed the fatal reality, the Fall and the Curse.

It is not necessary to catalog the results of Eve's lust and Adam's willful disobedience; they are too well-known to us all. What *is* important to understand, however, is that the fall did not dehumanize man. Or to use the standard theological idiom, he did not, through the Fall, lose the "image of God." Each aspect of man's God-reflection became marred, misaligned, and distorted. Yet God still

spoke, and man answered. Now, however, man's response was in fear instead of trust, and with evasive, self-justification: "the woman you gave me. . . ; the snake tricked me. . ."

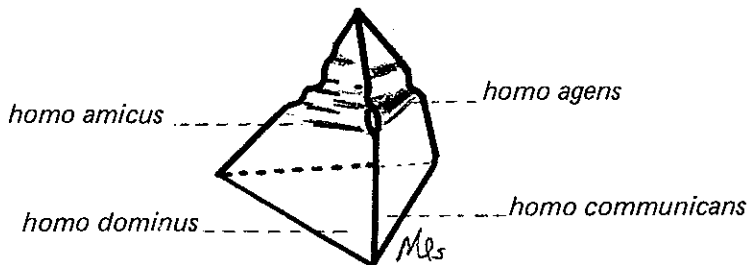
Man had become friendly with God's enemy, and God's first communication of the Gospel was that He would sever that relationship.

Eve refused to obey God, her *Dominus*; consequently, her punishment involved submission to her lord, Adam.

The relation between man and the environment changed from harmony and support to opposition (thorns, thistles) and fear (wild animals and humans both fear for their lives).

Work became toil and frustrating effort, ultimately resulting in destruction of the body, recycled to dust. Satisfaction and delight in creative work, a reality before the fall, became a tantalizing ideal, only sporadically and imperfectly achieved. Cain, son of promise in Eve's eyes, grew up only to dash, brutally, her hopes to be rescued from the disaster that she and Adam had initiated. Cain stands as an index of what coming generations would be like. "Brotherly love" perverted led to fratricide. Momentary domination over Abel led to the slavery of perpetual wandering. Cain's own sneering reply, "Am I my brother's keeper?" haunted him till death, as no community sheltered him for long. The prism of God-likeness, bent and marred, refracted the light of the Creator at odd angles and in somber hues.

Distortion Resulting from The Fall



The Old Testament records a number of "fresh starts" for man: Seth, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Ezra, to mention several. The background is the failure of the immediate predecessor, or the dismal condition of men (especially those who had been favored by God). Every Old Testament hero, prophet, sage, or king showed that God's promises of change and restoration would finally be realized. A son of Eve would lead (at least some of) her

temptation so intense that angelic assistance was provided at its conclusion. Yet the suffering Christ is Lord (*Κύριος*) and Master (*אָדוֹנָי*, 'adonay) the Jewish substitution for the ineffable (*יהוה*). Divine titles parallel human designations for the Christ since He is not only God-like man, but God as well.⁸

Christ's mission to the world (John 3:16, *et passim*) according to The Apostle, is His love for the cosmos, whose crown is

"The figure suggested in this article helps us to see, if only in barest outline, Christ restoring man in all the facets of his nature. In Jesus Christ there is that which true man reflects (the image of God), as well as the perfect reflection. He is *Amicus* and *homo amicus*, *Dominus* and *homo dominus*. He communicates God's message, for He is the *λόγος* (John 1:1), the Word of God *par excellence*."

children back to Eden.

The person and work of Jesus Christ, true man and very God, continue to baffle Christians, theologians and non-theologians alike. It would be presumptuous to suggest that we can ever comprehend what is essentially a mystery. The figure suggested in this article helps us to see, if only in barest outline, Christ restoring man in all the facets of his nature. In Jesus Christ there is that which true man reflects (the image of God), as well as the perfect reflection. He is *Amicus* and *homo amicus*, *Dominus* and *homo dominus*. He communicates God's message, for He is the *λόγος* (John 1:1), the Word of God *par excellence*. Yet, unlike the spokesmen of God in the Old Testament, He brings the word not only as teacher or prophet, but above all as the God-man who works: healing, feeding, leading, weeping, suffering, and being cursed, work so demanding, that it pressed "bloody sweat" from him,

God-like man. To save the world, Jesus had to give Himself for it. Though *Dominus*, He became *servus* and forewent the assistance of legions of angels when taunted by Caesar's puppet, Pontius Pilate.

In the climax of Christ's suffering, He is the object of God's curse. An echo of the curse⁹ pronounced in Eden, this malediction, paradoxically removed that curse.¹⁰ Where disobedience had brought death for ill, Christ's solitary death, the result of obedience, brought life for God's people.

What being made in the image of God means is important for properly understanding man's responsibility to his present world. This can only be sketched here for the implications are horizon-wide. Man must be viewed correctly in order that he may live properly. A Biblical expression to the point here is that "knowledge of the truth leads to godliness."¹¹

Instead of being motivated by love, man now stresses competition and manipu-

lation as the way to achieve. Such achievement is not in accord with the Biblical view of dominance. Work is scorned unless it leads to power and control of people and resources. But the eschatological perspective of the Bible views re-created men as rulers over cities, or judges over the twelve tribes of Israel. Even the "heavenly vision" has man engaged in activity! Shorter work-weeks, more leisure time, and earlier retirement continue among the leading demands of labor unions. It is one of the ironies of our society that *labor* unions have lost the concept of the value and dignity and joy of work. Yet this is not surprising to the Christian, for labor unions (as this term is used outside of Calvinistic circles) are among the clearest examples of humanistic thought producing tangible non-Christian effects in our society.

We have not attempted to take the mystery out of what it means to be made God-like. With the author of the letter to the Hebrews, we join in echoing the ancient poet's musing:

What is man that you are
concerned about him
or the son of man that you
should care for him?
You made him a little lower than
the angels;
You crowned him with glory
and honor
and put everything under his feet

(Psalm 8:4 and 5, as quoted
in Hebrews 2:6-8 NIV)

Footnotes

1. See, for example, *The Canons of the Synod of Dordt*, Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine, Article 1; *The French Confession of Faith* (1559), Article IX; and *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter IV, II.

2. In a recent article "Creation in the Image of the Glory-Spirit" (*Westminster Theological Journal* XXXIV, 2, 1977, p. 250),

Meredith G. Kline contends that answering the question "What is man?" is not precisely the same thing as answering "image of God" has been used popularly (non-theologically) to differentiate man from other creatures, it is important to specify how the term *is* being used. In my article I have attempted to focus on those aspects of human existence that are like God's. This implies, then, that there are God-man differences and that there are man-creature similarities. All three must be considered in a full treatment of "humanness."

3. *nephesh hayyah* should be translated "a living being." There are many other places in the O.T. where *nephesh* cannot be properly rendered "soul." Likewise ψυχή in the N.T. is often the equivalent of life, e.g., Matt. 16:26 and Romans 13:1a.

4. The Hebrew seems to play on the similarity between 'adam, "man" and 'adamah, "ground."

5. "Image" and "likeness" are used synonymously in typical Hebrew Pleonastic style. Compare 1:27 where "likeness" is abandoned in favor of a chiasmic structure which places the emphasis on image.

6. The English "woman—man" nicely preserves the Hebrew play on אִישׁ 'ish (man) and אִשָּׁה 'ishshah (woman).

7. Note that after Adam's expression of joyful unity, he gives his partner a *name*, as he had done for the living beings "not corresponding to him."

8. Contrast the Samaritan woman's use of Κύριε as "sir" in John 4:11 with the faith-assertion use of Κύριος in I Cor. 12:3b. ("No one can call Jesus LORD, except through the Holy Spirit.") There are instances where the nuance may shift within a section, e.g. Acts 22:8. Κύριε, possibly just "sir," but 22:10, τί ποιήσω, Κύριε... ὁ δὲ Κύριος εἶπεν (" 'what shall I do, Lord?' and the Lord said...")

9. Three Edenic curses are recorded, but I have chosen to refer to the curses affecting man in a collective. (The "curse" on the snake was a disguised blessing for man.) The removal of the curses affecting man, though eschatologically cosmic, has specific reference to the new humanity, i.e., those blessed in Christ."

10. For an example of the practice of curse-removal by benediction see Judges 17:2.

11. This is based on Titus 1:1 (NIV). The authorized version here is confusing to the modern reader.