CHAPTER 15

Theological Anthropology in the Hebrew Bible

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Theological anthropology in both Jewish and Christian tradition has looked to Gen 1:26–27 as a foundational text. Here, in the Bible's first reference to humankind, humans are described in their "original" or "essential" nature as created "in the image of God." This striking correlation of the human with the divine is unique, and isolated, within the Hebrew scriptures, but it generated a history of speculation that has continued unabated since the first centuries BCE.[1] A critical factor in this history is the distinctive interpretation given to the text in early Christian writings, which combined it with Genesis 2–3 in speculation on the problem of sin and the effect of the "fall" on the image. In New Testament writings of the Pauline school, Christ was identified with the image (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 11:7; 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18; 4:4; Col 1:15; 3:10; Heb 1:3), and cast as a "second Adam" (Rom 5:12–21). Continuing speculation in the early church produced a doctrine of the *imago Dei* in which the Genesis text was read through the eyes of Paul – as interpreted by Augustine and other church "fathers."[2] As a consequence of this Christian dogmatic appropriation of the text, the theological anthropology of the Hebrew Bible has long been subordinated to a biblical anthropology in which the Old Testament[3] witness was selected, and distorted, to fit the needs of a Pauline trajectory.

Although the concept of the divine image had an important place in Jewish theology – and ethics – it did not dominate Jewish anthropology in the same way as the *imago* symbol in Christian theology.[4] And while modern biblical scholarship attempted to free itself from dogmatic constraints, it has nevertheless been shaped in large measure by Christian (and post-Christian) agendas. The legacy of Christian theological speculation still weighs heavily on contemporary biblical interpretation – in the disproportionate attention devoted to the "*imago*" text and in the focus of the exegesis, which has been directed especially to questions of gender and dominion, and debate concerning the content of the "image." It has also penetrated deeply into western culture, fueling contemporary

debates over such issues as evolution, the role of women, environmental ethics, population control, and sexual orientation.

This essay is shaped by awareness of these contemporary debates, but its primary aim is to present the testimony of the Hebrew Bible as the testimony of ancient Israel and explore the meaning of its statements in and for their own time(s). As a work of descriptive theology, it adopts the perspective and tools of historical criticism. In attempting to articulate the theology of the ancient authors in their own historical settings, it recognizes multiple and conflicting voices and perspectives. But it also recognizes a canonical context, or contexts, in which these voices are brought into dialogue with one another and with external traditions. Different canonical boundaries establish different arenas of discourse, and different reading communities give differing weight to the various sources. Thus Christian interpreters will set the theological anthropology of the Old Testament in relation to that of the New Testament, while Jewish interpreters will relate the same textual evidence to the ongoing tradition of rabbinic interpretation.

Genesis 1:26–28 in its Historical and Canonical Context

Genesis 1:26–28, with its concept of the *ṣelem ʾelōhîm* ("image of God"), is too narrow a base upon which to construct a full theological anthropology of the Hebrew Bible, but it is a fitting starting point in its canonical position as the Bible's first word about the nature of humankind. It commands particular attention for its attempt to position humans within the created order, through explicit terms of relationship to other creatures and to the divine. But it is the claim of God-likeness, expressed in the language of divine image, that is most arresting. The history of interpretation of the passage has been dominated by attempts to specify the content of this "likeness" or "image." Proposals range from physical interpretations that equate the image with upright stature or some other aspect of bodily nature or appearance, to psychosocial or spiritual interpretations that identify the image with such attributes as language, mental capacity, or ability to communicate with God. Attempts have also been made to understand the image in terms of the divine plurals of v. 26 or the gender dualism in v. 27. But the text, viewed in its larger literary context and according to the normal rules of Hebrew grammar, excludes all of these interpretations. To understand the meaning of its theological affirmations as an expression of Israelite theology it must be considered in its primary exegetical context, the Priestly account of creation.[5]

Genesis 1:26–28 within the Priestly Account of Creation

The account of creation that opens the Hebrew scriptures moves in a six-day progression from formless void to ordered universe, capped by a seventh day of

rest for the Creator (Gen 1:1–2:4a). Through a series of solemn proclamations, God summons into being all of the elements of the ancient cosmos and all forms of life, both animal and vegetable. Compared with the creation myths known from the ancient Near East, it is an exceedingly spare account, and devoid of drama, resembling liturgy more than story. Modern scholarship has attributed it to a Priestly author or "school," whose distinctive style and theology can be traced through the first four books of the Bible. Thus it forms the first chapter of a distinct literary work, or edition of the Pentateuch, as well as an introduction to the scriptures as a whole. This same literary source or stratum continues in the genealogies that punctuate the book of Genesis and in the Flood story, which contain the only other references to the divine image, or likeness, in the Hebrew Bible.

Within this opening account of origins, the creation of humankind (*'ādām*) is presented as the final and climactic act: *'ādām* is the crown of creation.[6] This message of human exaltation is conveyed not only by the sequence of acts, which represents a hierarchy of being, but also by changes of diction, elaboration and expansion of basic themes, and explicit statements of divine likeness and earthly dominion.

(26) And God said:
"Let us make *'ādām* in our image, according to our likeness, And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and the cattle and all the earth and everything that creeps upon the earth."
(27) And God created *'ādām* in his image, in the image of God he created him; Male and female he created them.
(28) And God blessed them, and God said to them:
"Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, And have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every living creature that creeps upon the earth."

Despite the elaborations and distinctions in this account of the final act of creation, it shares a common literary structure with the other reported acts and incorporates themes belonging to the larger composition. The account as a whole is dominated by an interest in stability and order; each element or class has its place, and its nature and function are determined at creation. Thus the firmament is to separate the cosmic waters; the heavenly bodies are to mark times and seasons and govern day and night; and humans are to rule over the realm of living creatures. This ruling function of the human species is specified in the opening announcement that introduces the final act of creation. And it is in relation to this specification that the divine image must be understood, for it is the precondition of that rule. Humans are to be God's vice-gerents on earth.

The Hebrew phrase *ṣelem 'elōhîm* ("image of God") is the exact counterpart of the Akkadian expression (*ṣalam* [God's name]: "image of Enlil [Marduk, etc.]"), which appears as an epithet of Mesopotamian kings. The king in ancient Babylonia and Assyria was understood to be a special representative of the god or gods, possessing a divine mandate to rule, and hence divine authority; but he

was not himself divine. The epithet "image of the god" served to emphasize his divinely sanctioned authority and god-like dignity.

The Hebrew term *ṣelem*, like Akkadian *ṣalmu*, is used elsewhere to designate a statue or picture, a representation (of a god, animal, or other thing) that brings to mind, or stands in for, the thing it depicts or represents. Its biblical uses are mostly concrete, and mostly negative – describing foreign deities (Num 33:52; 2 Kgs 11:18; 2 Chr 23:17; Ezek 7:20, 16:17; Amos 5:26), golden images of mice and tumors (1 Sam 6:5, 11), and painted pictures of Babylonians (Ezek 23:14). It could also be used figuratively, to describe the insubstantial nature of life (Ps 39:6 [Heb 39:7]) or a dream image (Ps 73:20). It is a term of wholistic representation based on form. Thus when the expression "image of God" is applied to human beings, it suggests a notion of physical resemblance. Its meaning, however, is determined by its context of use – and its use here has no parallel within the Hebrew Bible. That is why the ancient Near Eastern parallels are critical; they evidence the identical phrase *and* similar associations.

"Image" and "Likeness"

The Priestly author has made use of a Mesopotamian royal epithet, but he has qualified or elaborated it in two ways. He has coupled it with the abstract noun, *demût*, meaning "likeness,"[7] and employed both terms in adverbial constructions that describe the activity of the creator, rather than the nature of the creature. Thus, according to Gen 1:26, 27, humans are not the image of God, nor do they possess it; rather they are created "in" or "according to"[8] the divine image and/or likeness.

Despite these qualifications, however, the basic sense of the characterization remains one of form or appearance; the one who is modeled on the divine, must be understood as modeling the divine in the world of creatures. And although the noun *demût* is used figuratively (Ezek 1:5, 26; 8:2; 10:1; cf. Isa 13:4), it is also used to describe a model of an altar (2 Kgs 16:10) and the "likeness" of oxen holding up the molten sea (2 Chr 4:3). Thus the two nouns are essentially synonymous, as suggested also by their interchange in Genesis 5:1, 3. It would appear then that a God who elsewhere prohibits the making of any image as a representation of the divine (Ex 20:4) here accords this function and dignity to the whole of humankind; and a God to whom nothing can be likened (Isa 40:25; 46:5, 9) creates humankind in his own likeness. Such comparisons move outside the Priestly writer's own thought, as do the speculations about the meaning of the two terms that preoccupied Jewish and Christian interpreters through the ages. The latter require brief mention because of their influence in past exegesis.

Jewish interpretation generally recognized the two nouns as equivalent in meaning and accepted the corporeal nature of the image, resulting in speculation about the nature of the divine body and the "original" body of "Adam." In contrast, Christian interpretation associated both nouns with spiritual and/or mental faculties,[9] making a further distinction between a "natural" and a "supernatural"

likeness. According to Irenaeus, the "image" (Latin *imago*) represented the human nature that was unaffected by the Fall – identified as rationality and freedom – while the "likeness" (Latin *simultudo*) represented the original relationship with God – which was lost in the Fall and restored through Christ. Both Jewish and Christian interpretation focused on the distinguishing and enduring qualities of the original creation, and both assumed some degree of diminution or loss of the image as they sought, in different ways, to reconcile the claim of God-likeness with the realities of sin and death[10] (see below). Both abstracted and absolutized the idea of the divine image, or likeness, removing it from its literary context.

It is context, however, that determines meaning in historical–critical interpretation. Thus while the notion of corporeal resemblance appears to stand behind the Priestly writer's use of the language of "image" and "likeness" in his account of origins (especially in Gen 5:1), it plays no role in the understanding of human nature or duty in the rest of the Priestly writings, and it has no echo or parallel elsewhere in the Hebrew scriptures. Its theological significance is in the place it gives to humans within the created order, not in any physical or moral attribute of the species, in either its present or "original" state.

Ancient Near Eastern Context

According to Gen 1:26, humans are in some unspecified but essential way "like" God, and this is related to their position or function within the created order, as exercising dominion over their fellow creatures. In adopting this metaphor of ruler, couched in the language of ancient Near Eastern kingship, the author has constructed a portrait of human dignity and responsibility in creation that counters the picture presented by the creation myths of surrounding cultures. In those traditions, human beings were created to be slaves of the gods. They were to do the hard labor needed to maintain the functioning of the universe; they were to relieve the gods from their toil.[11]

The Priestly account of creation is a "counter-myth" that redefines the nature of both God and humankind in its alternative view of the cosmos. God in the Priestly creation account is not only the sole actor and designer of the universe, who accomplishes everything that he proposes and recognizes it as good. The God of Genesis 1 has also designed a universe that does not require subsequent divine intervention or human petition to maintain its stability and course. It is not in danger of disintegrating or dying; it does not need to be revived or recreated in an annual New Year's ritual. Its orders are fixed and unchanging, and each form of life, both plant and animal, is endowed with the means of reproducing its kind. Plants are constituted with seed-bearing organs for "automatic" reproduction, while living creatures are designed as sexual pairs (implied by the blessing) and enjoined to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (vv. 22, 28). This word of blessing and command applies to humans as well as other creatures. Like them, but unlike God, humans are sexual beings. That is the meaning of the statement that is added in v. 27 to the report of the final act of creation; *'ādām* is created in the image of God, but *also* male and female.

Male and female

Humans are understood as a distinct order of creature with a unique resemblance to God; but they are not divine. Like all other creatures they share the capacity and the duty to perpetuate their kind. But while sexual differentiation could be assumed of the other creatures and did not need to be specified, it could not be assumed of humans; for they have been defined only by their resemblance to God (v. 26) – and God for the Priestly author possessed no gender or sexuality.[12] The specification of creation as male and female is the necessary prerequisite to the blessing pronounced in v. 28.[13] The terms used here are identical to those used for the animal species in 6:19 and 7:9: *zākār* ("male") and *neqēbâ* ("female"). They are biological terms, not social terms – in contrast to the "man" and "woman" of Genesis 2–3.

Some interpreters have sought to explain the divine image through correlation of the "male-and-female" of v. 27 with the plural references to God in v. 26. Such correlation ignores the structure of the account, with its double theme of order and reproduction and its progressive articulation of the two. It also misinterprets the Priestly theology. The divine plurals of v. 26 ("Let us make *'ādām* in our image") are no unreflective remnant of an earlier polytheism encompassing male and female deities, but a rhetorical device of the author to emphasize the solemnity and deliberative nature of this final act of creation. The author draws on the mythic notion of the divine council, in which the voices of the heavenly court join that of the Deity without revealing their identity or compromising the authority of the sole God (cf. Isa 6:8). Analogous to the familiar "royal 'we,'" it claims universal authority and assent for its proclamation. But the word of Gen 1:26 does more. For the first time in the series of creation decrees, the form of the divine announcement shifts from indirect command ("Let there be X" or "Let Y bring forth X") to first-person speech. "Let us make" replaces the decrees of a distant monarch. The creature who will bear a divine resemblance cannot be conceived apart from divine self-involvement.

The divine plural indicates divine deliberation that sets this creature apart from all others, but it also serves to guard the boundary between *'ādām* and God. For the image that likens the human to God is the image of *'elōhîm*, a plural noun. Israel distinguished its God from the gods of the nations, not only by the name YHWH, but also by using the plural of the common noun for "god." As *the* God, *'elōhîm* incorporated the powers and attributes of all the gods of the nations, representing the entire pantheon in one. The image of such a God cannot be identified with any known representation. The plural guards the one within the many, so that the human representation cannot simply be "read back" to reveal the divine prototype.

The concept of the divine image is unique to the Priestly source in Genesis and finds no further theological elaboration within the Hebrew scriptures. But it does appear in two other texts belonging to the Priestly account of origins. In Gen 5:1–3 and 9:6 allusions are made to the original creation account, in which attention is drawn to the continuing significance of the divine likeness as a mark of the species.

Image and likeness of God in Gen 5:1–3 and Gen 9:6

Genesis 5 is a genealogical table, in which the species *'ādām* is personified in an individual, "Adam." But the tension between the class term of Genesis 1 and the individual of Genesis 5 is preserved in the author's attempt to connect them. The chapter begins with an introductory title, "This is the book of the generations of *'ādām*." Here *'ādām* may be read either as a name or as a collective noun (Hebrew writing does not distinguish names from common nouns). This is followed by a recapitulation of Gen 1:26–28 before the line of descent begins:

> In the day that God created *'ādām*, he made him in the likeness (*demût*) of God. Male and female he created them and he blessed them and called their name *'ādām* in the day when they were created. (Gen 5:1–2)

Here the idea of the divine likeness is conveyed through the single term *demût* ("likeness"). The collective understanding of *'ādām* is preserved by the plural pronouns and the explicit identification of the name with the plural representation: "and he called *their* name *'ādām*." This passage leaves no doubt about the gender inclusiveness of the term in Genesis 1; both male and female are named *'ādām*.

In the following sentence, however, the name describes an individual: "When *'ādām* had lived a hundred and thirty years he became the father of a son in his own likeness (*demût*), after his own image (*ṣelem*)" (v. 3). The compound expression for likeness reappears, with the terms in reversed order – not, however, with God as the point of reference, but Adam. The notion of physical resemblance seems unavoidable, but the meaning is to be found in the preceding words (vv. 1b–2). What this notice asserts is that the divine image identified with humankind at creation also characterizes successive generations. This distinguishing feature of the species is not lost or diminished, nor can it be won; it is a birthright. That it is immutable is brought out in Gen 9:1–7.

Here, following the Deluge, the blessing of procreation is repeated,[14] and the theme of human dominion is restated – now, however, with new provisions and new consequences. Dominion after the flood includes the use of animals for food, and hence killing, thereby altering the relationship between ruler and ruled. The language of holy war replaces the language of governance: "fear" and "dread" will fall upon all creatures, who are "delivered into the hand" of humans (vv. 2–3). But the new order that is announced to Noah and his sons is accompanied by restrictions: while humans may eat the flesh of other creatures, they may not eat the "life" (*nepeš*), identified here with the blood, which belongs to God (v. 4).

Verse 5 shifts attention to the human as victim, and the divine speech shifts to first person as God declares that he will demand the life of any creature, beast or "brother," who takes a human life. The principle of retribution is then stated in poetic form, and grounded in the notion of the divine image:

> Whoever sheds the blood of the human (*hā'ādām*),
> by the human (*bā'ādām*) shall his blood be shed,
> for in the image of God [God] made the human (*hā'ādām*).
> (v. 6)

Here is the basis for the notion of the sacred worth of every human being and the prohibition of taking a human life. If the Priestly writer envisioned circumstances in which God might permit or demand the taking of human life (as here in retribution), it is as a socially and historically conditioned response to a violation of the divine in the human. In this pronouncement, the terms of creation (ontology) are confronted by the circumstances of history, bringing anthropology into the realm of ethics and law.

Exaltation and dominion in Psalm 8

The view that the human is creature yet elevated above all other creatures is associated in Genesis 1 (and 9) with the unique concept of the divine image, but the same idea is also found in Psalm 8. There the psalmist, contemplating the heavenly bodies as testimony to God's handiwork, asks, "What is the human (*'enôš*) that you are mindful of him/a 'son of humanity' (*ben 'ādām*)[15] that you take note of him?" His answer, like Gen 1:26, involves a comparison with God and employs a royal metaphor.

> You have made him little less than God (or divine beings, *'elōhîm*),
> And crowned him with glory and honor.
> You have made him rule (*mšl* hiphil) over the works of your hands,
> Put all [creatures] under his feet.
> (vv. 6–7)

Rule here is spelled out as subjugation through the image of the conquering suzerain placing his foot on the neck of the conquered (v. 7). The sense is close to that conveyed by the verb *rdh* ("have dominion") in Gen 1:26, 28 – a verb that describes the exercise of authority or power over an individual, group, or territory, often in contexts that specify harsh or illegitimate rule. When used of kings, *rdh* is usually to describe their subjugation of other nations or peoples, or rule over their own people as though they were foreigners (1 Kgs 4:24 [Heb 5:4]; Ps 110:2; 72:8; Isa 14:2, 6; Ezek 34:4; Lev 25:43, 46, 53). Thus both Genesis 1 and Psalm 8 view humans within the created order primarily in terms of superiority and control over other creatures. In a hierarchy of being, humans stand next to God, to whom they are likened.

This exalted view of humans as the God-like among creatures and as rulers of the inhabited earth was, for its ancient author, a declaration of faith in the wisdom and power of God – not a claim of special entitlement, nor a theological justification for human exploitation of the environment. The commands given to humans at the conclusion of the Creator's work are initiating commands

that envision a newly formed earth empty of human inhabitants and not yet brought under cultivation. Thus it must be filled ("be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth"), made livable ("subdue the earth"), and ordered ("have dominion over . . . every living creature"). The terms of the commands reflect Israel's world as a world of peasant farmers, attempting to secure a precarious existence from a hostile land. For the earth to support life in this region of marginal rainfall it had to be "subdued," which entailed a constant battle. A recurring theme in the Hebrew Bible is the threat of land returning to "wilderness," where only thorns and briars grow, and inhabited only by wild animals (e.g., Isa 32:13).[16]

Gen 1:26–28 in canonical context

The image of God that defines humans in Genesis 1 serves there as a royal metaphor, but the image itself has no content. Although it appears to originate in anthropomorphic conceptions of deity, it does not reveal the shape or character of the One it images. As a term for likeness it is concrete, formal, wholistic – and empty; it cannot be identified with any organ, attribute, or capacity – however distinctive or desirable. But because it expresses a notion of correlation or correspondence, it is open to continued reinterpretation in relation to changing understandings of God and humankind.

One early line of interpretation combined elements of the Bible's two creation accounts, identifying the image of Genesis 1 with the man of Genesis 2–3. Emphasizing the secondary nature of the woman, as possessing the image only in a derived manner, it identified the "fall" of Genesis 3 with a loss of the image, for which it held the woman responsible. It is this interpretation that provided the background for NT and patristic speculation and underlies views of women's nature and place in the "order of creation" that are still current today.[17] But this manner of combining the texts violates the terms of both OT accounts, in which the image is not lost or effaced and the man and the woman are held equally accountable for their disobedience to the divine command.

The Yahwist's Account of Creation (Gen 2:4b–3:24)

The account that begins in Gen 2:4b is the older of the Bible's two creation stories, known as the "Yahwist's" account for the author's use of the divine name YHWH (pronounced "Yahweh"). Like the Priestly account, it introduces a larger composition that spans the first four books of the Bible. In its present form it is composite, presenting a story imbedded within a larger story and moving in successive episodes from creation to "fall" and finally to "history." The frame story, which appears in 2:4b–8 and 3:23–24, tells of a human being (*hā'ādām* "the human") who is formed from the dust of the ground (*'adāmâ*) and placed in a garden; at the end he is driven from the garden to till the ground

from which he was taken. The opening and closing scenes have only two actors: God YHWH and "the human." This story is a story of a lost paradise and a lost opportunity for immortality (3:22), told as the story of the first human. It is a story that explains the terms of human existence at the point where "history" begins, that is, the conditions under which we (author and readers) live.

The author has personified humankind in a single representative, to whom he has given the name of the species; and as in Genesis 1, his model is male – here a peasant farmer. In place of the solemn declarations and liturgical cadences of the Priestly composition, the Yahwist's account exhibits the features and form of a folktale, describing a time "when the world was very young," when God walked the earth and animals could speak. It makes the same essential points about human nature as Genesis 1, but it does so through narrated actions, rather than declarations. Here the human is formed from dust like the animals, enlivened by divine breath, given the plant world for food, and set over all other creatures, who are brought to him to name. The theme of sexual differentiation is here too, but the way in which it is introduced gives unique attention to the relationship between the sexes – in the "original" order and in the "fallen" state that describes life as we know it, "outside the garden."

The story begins with a solitary human, bearing the name of the species. But there is something defective about this representation; as God YHWH observes, "It is not good that the human should be alone." What he needs is a "help suitable (or 'fit') for him" (2:18).[18] God then proceeds to create each of the animal species, from the same ground as his first creation, and present them to "the human." But none proves to be a "suitable help." Only one of his own kind can meet that test. And so God extracts a rib from "the human," which he "builds up" into a woman. On seeing her, "the human" exclaims:

> This one at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh;
> She shall be called *'iššâ* ("woman"),
> because she was taken from *'îš* ("man").
>
> (2:23)

In his recognition of the woman as his own kind, he is revealed as "man." The woman who confronts him is not a separate creation, formed from the ground like the animal species, but of the very same substance. The "help suitable for him" has been found, but in the moment of recognition she is no longer identified as a "help." Rather she is presented as one to whom the man is drawn, so that he leaves even father and mother to be united to her.

The author clearly intends to speak of the sexual drive and the institution of marriage (v. 24), as the means by which the species will be perpetuated. The message is essentially the same as Genesis 1. But the story has introduced new elements into the portrait of human existence that are not simply requirements of the story form; they belong to the essence of being human. Human life, in this account, is characterized by interactions – with other creatures, with others of the same species, and with God (elaborated as the story continues). Humans

are relational beings in their fundamental nature. And these relationships have both social and psychological dimensions. Social institutions, represented here by the primary family unit, are essential to human survival and the fulfillment of human needs, and the relationship of the sexes is not simply physical but psychological. Being alone is "not good"; finding the one who will satisfy the need for a "suitable help" elicits an exclamation of recognition; a man will henceforth leave father and mother to "cleave" to his wife (2:24); and the woman's "desire" will be for her husband (3:16). Social terms ("man" and "woman") replace the biological terms ("male" and "female") of Genesis 1.

The story is told from the man's point of view, reflecting the male-centered society in which it arose; but the message is one of mutuality, of man and woman made for each other and bound together, in joy and (in the next episode) in pain. There is no time in this account, unlike the Priestly narrative, and sequence has no ontological meaning – either in creation or fall. Only when the man and woman appear onstage together is the creation complete, and the drama of life may begin. In the following episode the man and the woman are united in sin and bear equal shares of punishment. There, however, the woman has the lead role in the opening scene, speaking for the pair.

Sin and its Consequences (Genesis 3)

The terms for the action in Genesis 3 have been set in the preceding chapter, in a prohibition announced when God placed "the human" in the garden (2:15–17). The prohibition carries the message that human life is limited; it has boundaries that may not be transgressed, and these are both physical and moral in nature. Although the boundaries change in chapter 3, the notion of limits does not. Humans are finite and bounded creatures, and the boundaries are set by God. In Genesis 2, the boundary is marked by a divine command: one tree of all the trees in the garden may not be eaten, on penalty of death. The prohibition assumes the freedom to disobey and the capacity for moral discrimination – to know right from wrong and to weigh the consequences of actions. Thus the "knowledge of good and bad (evil)"[19] represented by the forbidden tree is not the ability to distinguish between good and evil, but the ability to know all things, both good and bad – a divine attribute according to 3:22. The prohibition is presented as a test – and the outcome is known, for a prohibition in a story will always be violated. The story presented in Genesis 3 is an etiology; it seeks to explain why life as we know it is not as it was intended, or might have been.

Genesis 3 is a complex account, exhibiting internal tensions and interwoven with themes and characters from ancient Near Eastern myth and legend: a tree of life, a serpent, and a woman who imparts knowledge. But the Israelite author has used these traditions to create an entirely new story, with a new theological message. Israel's ancestors and neighbors had also speculated about the limits of human life and the qualities that distinguished humans from gods and other

creatures. Their accounts focused on knowledge and death. The gods were characterized by superior wisdom and immortality; and while humans possessed a degree of knowledge that distinguished them from the animals, immortality eluded them. Ancient Near Eastern myth accounted for human mortality either as tragic loss or divine withholding.[20] Gen 3:22–23 contains an echo of the latter tradition.[21] In the final form of the account, however, interest in immortality has been eclipsed by another concern, which focuses on the tree of knowledge, not the tree of life. For the Yahwist, the primary problem of human existence is not death, but disobedience – here associated with the desire to obtain God-like wisdom.

Whence arises the impulse to disobey the divine command and question its motive? The author of Gen 3:1–7 is unwilling to lodge it within the human creation, and so he finds an instigator among the other creatures God has made: the snake, whom ancient lore endowed with quasi-divine powers. A symbol of immortality in its ability to rejuvenate itself by shedding its skin, it was also ascribed special wisdom and associated with magic and the healing arts (Joines, 1975). The Yahwist has tamed him; here he is only the "most crafty"[22] of the creatures God had made (3:1), and his power is only the power of suggestion. While this displacement of the impulse to disobedience does not absolve the human pair nor solve the problem of the origins of sin within a divinely ordered creation, it does suggest that sin is not a defect of creation, but arises in the exercise of God-given powers.[23] It arises in interactions involving external partners and internal conversations in which alternatives are envisioned and weighed. The snake plants the question that initiates the conversation and then claims to know God's mind: "God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and bad" (3:5).

The snake's words are addressed to the pair (the second-person verbs are plural in Hebrew), but it is the woman who weighs the arguments and the evidence. Observing that the fruit of the forbidden tree was good for food, pleasant to look at, and desirable to make one wise, and heeding the snake's assurance that they will not die, she eats – and gives to her husband, who also eats. Although the woman speaks and reasons, both man and woman eat, in knowing disobedience. And the divine sentences that follow draw no consequence from either the order of disobedience or the rationale offered. Neither reasoned reflection nor unreflective trust excuse the pair, who have each chosen to heed the voice of another in place of the voice of God. That is the common crime addressed in the following judgment scene.

But divine judgment is not the first consequence of disobedience. Shame, not death, follows this act of human self-assertion, the pained recognition of altered conditions of life. It appears that the snake was right, at least on two counts: the violators of the prohibition do not die, and their eyes are opened. But their opened eyes do not give them the omniscience they desire, only acute self-consciousness of their own vulnerability. Now they know themselves to be naked, before one another and God. The nakedness of their created state has become cause for shame; God's good gift of sexuality is transformed by human self-interest into a source of pain and exploitation. With this act of disobedience

the "original" state of trusting relationships is broken; the couple now cover themselves and attempt to hide from God.

The judgment scene that concludes the story spells out the consequences of the broken relationship to God in every other relationship. As etiologies, the terms of the punishment are formulated in relation to the terms of creation – not the terms of the crime – and they are presented in close parallelism for the woman and the man. For the man, estrangement from God brings painful and incessant toil – in estrangement from the ground, from which he was taken; it no longer yields fruit freely but brings forth only thorns (3:17–19). For the woman, estrangement from God brings painful and repeated labor in childbirth – in estrangement from the man, from whom she was taken; he no longer yields freely to her desire, but instead rules over her (3:16).

One of the most remarkable features of this account is its view of the male domination that characterized the world of ancient Israel. For the Yahwist, this "given" order is the primary sign of disordered relationships in a creation estranged from God. Such was not the intended relationship of the sexes, he insists, but a tragic consequence of human rebellion. If he could envision no alternative under the prevailing social and economic conditions of his day, he could still identify this order as a distortion of the Creator's original design. In his story of origins it serves as the root expression of estrangement within the human community, which will soon extend to the relationship between brothers – and occupational groups (Genesis 4), father and son – and competing ethnic groups (Gen 9:20–27), and finally nations and peoples (Gen 11:1–9).

The Priestly and Yahwistic Accounts Combined and Compared

The Yahwist's story of creation complements the Priestly account by focusing on the social and psychological aspects of human nature and the human condition and by giving an essential role to the mind and the will. But it also stands in tension with the Priestly view, for it envisions a different world. The world of the Priestly writer is an ordered world in which history proceeds according to divine plan, and neither human ignorance nor arrogance can keep it from its intended course. In successive covenants with Noah and Abraham, God's purposes for the world are focused in a single people, who at Sinai are given the means in cult and law to maintain their identity and calling as a holy people.

The Yahwist's world is not so ordered. It is a world of human striving and failing, a world of violence that grieves the heart of its Maker (6:5–6). But it is also a world in which a righteous man can affect the Creator's decision to destroy (6:9; 18:16–33). And it is a world in which divine punishment is always followed by divine grace – beginning with the act of clothing the naked couple. For the Yahwist, a "fallen" human creation survives only through the grace of God – and by its wits. For the knowledge obtained from the forbidden

fruit is essential to life outside the garden. The Yahwist, like the Priestly writer, knows that humans share some attribute of the divine, but he identifies this with the superior knowledge that sets humans apart from animals. The wisdom possessed by humankind is indeed a God-like quality (3:22), but under the conditions of human existence it is not an unmixed blessing. It is susceptible to distortion and manipulation, and it can hurt as well as heal.

The Problem of Gendered Existence

The creation accounts of Genesis 1–3 present two Israelite attempts to describe human beings in their essential nature. As accounts of origins, they attempt to look behind the features of history and culture and individual variation, while betraying these very particularities in their composition. Both accounts give pointed attention to sexual differentiation as an essential feature of human existence, but neither spells out the implications of this bifurcated nature for the common nature that both sexes share. In Genesis 1 this common nature is symbolized by the divine image. Although the model is male, the grammar makes clear that it characterizes the species as a whole. But gendered existence under historical conditions of life means gender-differentiated roles, values, and authority. In the male-oriented systems of authority and honor that characterized ancient Israel and the early Church, the male was taken not only as the model of the human, but as the norm. The female was legally and conceptually subordinate – or "other" – so that even in her most elevated image, as mother, she could not represent the species in the same way as the male.

Thus despite wider and more positive employment of female models and metaphors than is commonly recognized, the Hebrew Bible draws most of its generalizing statements about human nature and destiny from male experience. Tension between attempts to discern the meaning of human existence common to all members of the species, and recognition of biological and cultural differences (including age, race, gender, and class) as equally characteristic of the species, pervades the biblical writings and challenges contemporary theologians. But it went largely unrecognized until recent times. As a consequence, the theological anthropology in the Hebrew Bible and the theological anthropology derived from the Hebrew Bible both perpetuated a view of humans in the image of God as explicitly or implicitly male.

Creation in Context: The Witness of History, Prophets, Wisdom, and Psalms

The two creation accounts each served to introduce a history that placed Israel's origins in a global context. In their combined and augmented form (the

Pentateuch), these sources offer a rich and varied portrait of life as divine–human interaction, in which human freedom and responsibility is always exercised within the guiding, chastening, and renewing providence of God. In this history, God not only acts, but speaks. Thus large blocks of the Pentateuch consist of instructions, presented as divine speech, mediated by Moses (Deuteronomy, Leviticus, and portions of Exodus and Numbers). The corpus of prophetic writings further attests to Israel's belief in the continued speaking of God in its history and the need to attend to that word. To be human, according to the Hebrew scriptures, is to know oneself addressed by God; to be a member of the covenant people is to know the name and history of that God and the meaning of the address.

The creation accounts do not exhaust Israel's theological reflection on the nature of the human being or the meaning of human existence, but they do identify key elements that are assumed by other writings. The Yahwist's account of events in the garden assumes that humans are created with the capacity and freedom to make moral judgments. This capacity is also assumed by the Deuteronomist, who pleads with Israel to choose life and good – by obeying the commandments (Deut 30:15–19) – and by the prophets, who condemn evildoers and exhort to acts of justice and mercy. Although neither creation account spells out the content of the God-likeness shared by humans, both authors assume, with other biblical writers, that humans are capable of exhibiting God-like qualities and are most true to their own nature when they exercise these capacities. Thus Israel is exhorted to be holy as God is holy (Lev 19:2); to do justice and act mercifully, as God is just and merciful; to love God and neighbor, as God has loved them. It is in showing such divine qualities that humans reflect the nature of their maker and distinguish themselves from other orders of creation. Thus the limited focus of each creation text on a particular point of correlation between the human and the divine serves to alert readers to broader areas of correspondence assumed by other texts and writers.

If the creation texts point to a correspondence between the human and the divine, they also recognize an absolute distinction, emphasized in the Yahwist's account: "Dust you are and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19).[24] This too correlates with testimony found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Gen 18:27; Ps 22:29 [Heb 22:30]; Job 10:9). Humans are frail as well as sinful. Their days are limited,[25] and full of sorrow. They strive for what they cannot attain. Their work finds no reward. These themes come to the fore in the Wisdom literature.[26]

The creation texts introduce us to normative, or at least dominant, currents of thought within ancient Israel, but there were dissenting voices and alternative views. Within the Wisdom writings (including the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and certain psalms), we encounter skeptics who believed that the ways of God are unknowable and that humans are cut off from God, left to make their way unaided in a hostile or indifferent universe. Possessing both knowledge and moral instinct, they find no confirmation or reward in the exercise of these capacities; injustice prevails and ignorance is rewarded. Moral discernment reveals an unjust world. This skepticism confronts another view of the human

cultivated in Wisdom circles, one that correlates right action with success and views wisdom as the key that unlocks the secrets of the divine.[27] Thus correlation between the human and the divine is exaggerated in this literature, both in its affirmations and in its denials.

Finally, there is the testimony of the heart, as it reveals the human condition in its ecstasy and its despair. The Psalms portray the human being in conversation with God – in every condition of life, and in individual and collective voice. Expectation of a hearing and a sense of absolute dependence on God are revealed here as fundamental to Israel's understanding of human existence. For the psalmist, divine silence only heightened the demand for a response. The thirst for God was implanted in the soul. The heart seeks refuge and rest in God – and finding it, rejoices. Humans are created for praise of their creator. That is their primary vocation.

The Bible's first word about human beings sets forth the presupposition of all subsequent words by defining them in relation to God. But the content and consequences of that defining relationship are the subject of never-ending theological reflection and debate.

Notes

1 For a survey of interpretations, see Westermann, 1984, pp. 147–55.
2 For a brief history of interpretation in Christian theology, see Hall, 1986, pp. 76–112. More detailed treatments may be found in Cairns, 1953, and Berkouwer, 1962.
3 The term "Hebrew Bible" is adopted in this essay as a non-confessional designation for the Christian "Old Testament." There is, however, no common term or conception for this literature when considered from the perspectives of the several religious communities that continue to regard it as sacred scripture.
4 For an introduction to Jewish theological anthropology by a modern Jewish philosopher and biblical scholar, see Heschel, 1966.
5 The following analysis draws on the author's more detailed studies in Bird, 1997, pp. 123–54; 174–93, and Børresen, 1995, pp. 5–28. Cf. Jónsson, 1988, and commentaries.
6 Hebrew *'ādām* is a collective noun (grammatically singular). It designates the species as a class, parallel to the other classes of life identified in Genesis 1 – all collective nouns in Hebrew, generally translated as English plurals ("plants," "trees," "swarms," "birds," "beasts," etc.). See Bird, 1997, pp. 141, n. 45; 161–2, 168–73. It is sometimes used for an individual to emphasize the species identification over every other distinguishing feature, such as gender or nationality.
7 The noun, like the related verb *dmh* ("to liken"), emphasizes comparison, and hence similarity in difference.
8 The two prepositions should be understood as having the same meaning, namely "according to," "like" (or "as"). Cf. Gen 5:1, 3; 9:6 and the LXX.
9 Jónsson, 1988, pp. 12–13, 175–7; Cairns, 1953, pp. 73–83. There were, to be sure, Jewish interpreters who found a spiritual meaning in the image.
10 See Heschel, 1996, pp. 154, 159–69. For Judaism, the cure for human corruption is Sinai and the covenant; for Christians, it is Christ. Both Christian and Jewish

theologians encounter difficulties when they attempt to make the divine image *the* foundational concept for anthropology. As a non-moral category it stands in inevitable tension with efforts to define the human in moral terms.

11 See, e.g., *Enuma Elish* 6.34–35 (*ANET*, 68) and *Atrahasis* 1. 194–97 (W. Lambert and A. Millard, *Atra-hasis* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1969], pp. 56–7).

12 Although the Priestly writer uses exclusively male terms to refer to God, they are to be understood metaphorically. Popular religion may have given YHWH a consort in ancient Israel, but the biblical writings consistently oppose any notion of sexuality for Israel's God.

13 A similar need to specify male and female lies behind the Priestly description of the animal pairs who enter the ark (Gen 6:19; 7:9). What may be assumed elsewhere must be spelled out there; the pairs that are to preserve their kind from the flood must be reproductive pairs.

14 The command to be fruitful is addressed here to Noah and his sons (9:1), not Noah and his wife, revealing the author's focus on the male characters in narratives as well as genealogies.

15 Here the common Semitic *'enôš* (a human, or humanity) parallels the specifically Hebrew *'ādām*. The expression "son/daughter of" is used to describe an individual member of a class.

16 The modern notion of dominion as stewardship (e.g., Hall, 1986) is a creative interpretation in a changed environment, but it introduces a sense of vocation that is lacking in the Priestly author's notion of image and dominion. See Hiebert, 1996, pp. 20–1.

17 See Bird, 1997, p. 175.

18 The Hebrew expression *kenegdô* means "like his opposite (or 'counterpart'/'*vis-à-vis*')." See Bird, 1997, pp. 181–3.

19 The Hebrew term (*ra'*) describes aesthetic as well as moral judgments and also misfortune and displeasure.

20 See Bird, 1997, pp. 184–6.

21 See Barr, 1993.

22 The Hebrew term (*'ārûm*) is chosen for the word play it creates with the word for "naked" (*'arûmmîm*) in the preceding verse (Gen 2:25).

23 Terminology for sin is lacking in this passage, appearing for the first time in Gen 4:7, in relation to murder. What the garden story seeks to explain is the disposition toward sin, which is not "original" with creation, but nevertheless characterizes every individual who goes forth from the garden or the womb. See Bird, 1997, pp. 191–3, and Westermann, 1984, pp. 275–8.

24 Notions of resurrection that find expression in later writings of the Hebrew Bible do not imply a more elevated view of human nature, but derive from eschatological reflection that emphasizes God's continuing providence and creative power.

25 Ps 144:3–4 answers the question "What is *'ādām*?" with the statement: "They are like a breath (*hebel*); their days are like a passing shadow."

26 On the anthropology of the Wisdom traditions, see Perdue, 1994, pp. 19–48, 333–6 and *passim*.

27 Skepticism becomes open revolt in Job as traditional theological affirmations are challenged and turned on their head. Thus Job parodies Psalm 8 with the complaint that God makes too much of lowly humankind. Humans are not the exalted rulers of creation but slaves, born to divine service (Job 7:1–2, 17–21). See Perdue, 1994, pp. 140–4, 335–6.

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