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Creation

Union with Christ rests on the basis of the creation of man to be compatible with God. This is at the heart of the message of the first chapter of Genesis, which highlights the creation of man as male and female, and his rule over the created order. So as to see how this relates to our great theme, we will look first at the overall context of the chapter. In summary, it points to God the Creator as a relational being, with man made in his image reflecting this characteristic in himself. Ultimately it points forward to the coming of Jesus Christ, who *is* the image of the invisible God.

The Trinitarian Basis of Creation

The first chapter of Genesis portrays the creation and formation of the world, and the ordered shaping of a place for the human race to live. It presents man as head of creation, in relation to and in communion with God his Creator. The act of *creation* itself is direct and immediate (vv. 1–2), distinct from the work of formation that follows.¹ The result is a cosmos formless, empty, dark, and wet—unfit for human life. The rest of the chapter describes the world’s *formation* (or *distinction*) and *adornment*, God’s introducing of order, light, and dryness, making it fit for life to flourish. First, God creates light, and sets boundaries to the darkness (vv. 2–5). Second, he molds

1. Herman Bavinck, *In the Beginning: Foundations of Creation Theology*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 100ff. (subsequently published in volume 2 of Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics*). See also the discussion in *ST*, pt. 1a, Q. 66, arts. 1–4, and the entire section QQ. 66–74 in general.

the earth into shape so that it is no longer formless (vv. 6–8, 9–10). Third, God separates the waters and forms dry land, so that it is no longer entirely wet (vv. 9–10). Following this, he populates the earth, ending its emptiness (vv. 20–30), first with fish and birds, then with land animals, and finally, as the apex of the whole, with human beings made in his image. This God is not only almighty but also a master planner, artist, and architect supreme. This order is clear from the parallels between two groups of days: the first three and the second three.² In all this God shows his sovereign freedom in naming and blessing his creation, and sees it as thoroughly good. At the end comes the unfinished seventh day, when God enters his rest, which he made to share with man, his partner, whom he created in his own image. There is an implicit invitation for us to follow.³

Particularly striking is God's sovereign and variegated ordering of his creation. In particular, he forms the earth in a threefold manner. First, he issues direct fiats. He says, "Let there be light," and there is light (v. 3). So, too, he brings into being with seemingly effortless command the expanse (v. 6), the dry ground (v. 9), the stars (vv. 14–15), the birds and the fish (vv. 20–21). Each time it is enough for God to speak, and his edict is fulfilled. Second, he works. He separates the light from the darkness (v. 4), he makes the expanse and separates the waters (v. 7), he makes the two great lights, the sun and the moon (v. 16), and sets them in the expanse to give light on the earth (v. 17), he creates the great creatures of the seas and various kinds of birds (v. 21), he makes the beasts of the earth and reptiles (v. 25), and finally he creates man—male and female—in his own image (vv. 26–27). The thought is of focused, purposive action by God, of divine labor accomplishing his ends. But there is also a third way of formation, in which God uses the activity of the creatures themselves. God commands the earth to produce vegetation, plants, and trees (vv. 11–12). He commands the lights to govern the day and night (vv. 14–16). He commands the earth to bring forth land animals (v. 24). Here the creatures follow God's instructions and contribute to the eventual outcome. This God who created the universe does not work in

2. This pattern was discerned at least as long ago as the thirteenth century. See *Robert Grosseteste: On the Six Days of Creation: A Translation of the Hexaëmeron*, trans. C. F. J. Martin, Auctores Britannici Medii Aevi (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1996), 160–61 (5:1:3–5:2:1); *ST*, pt. 1, Q. 74, art. 1. See my article "In the Space of Six Days: The Days of Creation from Origen to the Westminster Assembly," *WTJ* 61 (1999): 149–74.

3. Cf. Heb. 3:7–4:11.

a monolithic way. His order is varied—it is threefold but one. His work shows diversity in its unity and unity in diversity. This God loves order and variety together.⁴

This reflects what the chapter records of God himself. The triadic manner of the earth's formation reflects who God its Creator is. He is a relational being. This is implicit from the very start. We notice a distinction between God who created the heavens and earth (v. 1), the Spirit of God who hovers over the face of the waters (v. 2), and the speech or word of God issuing the fiat "Let there be light" (v. 3). His speech recurs frequently throughout the chapter. While it is most unlikely that the author and original readers would have understood the Spirit of God in a personalized way, because of the heavy and insistent stress in the OT on the uniqueness of the one God, Gordon Wenham is sound when he suggests that this is a vivid image of the Spirit of God.⁵ The later NT personalizing of the Spirit of God is a congruent development from this statement.

With the creation of man is the unique deliberation "Let us make man in our image," which expresses a plurality in God (vv. 26–27). Gerhard Von Rad says that this signifies the high point and goal to which all of God's creative activity is directed.⁶ Since Scripture has a fullness that goes beyond the horizons of the original authors, the many church fathers who saw this as a reference to the Trinity were on the right track. While this was concealed from the original readers and from the OT saints as a whole, and was not how it was understood then, the fathers were certainly not at variance with the trajectory of the text. Rabbinical commentators were often perplexed by this passage and other similar ones referring to a plurality in God (Gen. 3:22; 11:7; Isa. 6:8). The NT gives us the principle that the OT contains in seed form what is more fully made known in the NT, and on that basis we may look back to the earlier writings, much as at the end of a detective mystery we reread the plot, seeing clues that we missed the first time but are now given fresh meaning by our knowledge of the whole. In terms of the *sensus plenior* (the "fuller meaning") of Scripture, these words of God attest a plurality in God, which later came to be expressed in the doctrine of the Trinity. The original readers would not

4. See Francis Watson, *Text, Church, and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 142–43.

5. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 15–17.

6. Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961).

have grasped this, but we, with the full plot disclosed, can revisit the passage and see there the clues.⁷

I have written elsewhere, commenting on Genesis 1:26–27, that “man exists as a duality, the one in relation to the other. . . . As for God himself . . . the context points to his own intrinsic relationality. The plural occurs on three occasions in v. 26, yet God is also singular in v. 27. God is placed in parallel with man, made in his image as male and female, who is described both in the singular and plural. Behind it all is the distinction God/Spirit of God/speech of God in vv. 1–3 . . . This relationality will in the development of biblical revelation eventually be disclosed as taking the form of a triunity.”⁸ I refer there to kindred comments by Karl Barth.⁹

Christ as Mediator of Creation

Flowing from the biblical presentation of creation as a work of the whole Trinity comes the NT assertion of the creation mediatorship of Jesus Christ. I have discussed this theme elsewhere.¹⁰ It is found in John 1, where the Logos is described as existing “in the beginning,” a phrase strongly reminiscent of Genesis 1:1. This Logos, who was with God and who was God, who became flesh and lived among us, is also described as the Creator of all things (John 1:3). This follows from his being life itself; he is not merely the Author of life, as if life were something independent and autonomous, but he himself *is* life (v. 4). His creating is free, but it is also an expression of who he is.

Paul expounds a similar theme in Colossians 1:16–17, where he affirms that “all things were created in him, things in heaven and on earth, things visible and invisible; whether thrones and dominions, rulers and authorities, all things were created through him and to him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” In this Paul argues that Christ as the preexistent Son (cf. v. 13) is the Creator of the universe. “All things” is comprehensive, excluding nothing. Personal and impersonal, angelic and human, animal and plant—all owe their existence to the Son. Moreover, not only did he create them all, but he did so in such a way that he is their head.

7. Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 17–22.

8. Robert Letham, “The Man-Woman Debate: Theological Comment,” *WTJ* 52 (1990): 71.

9. *CD*, 3.1:196.

10. Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 197–209.

Creation was made *in Christ*. In turn, the cosmos has a purpose. It is held together by the Son. He sustains it at every moment and directs it toward the end he intends for it. That end is himself. All things were created and are sustained *for Christ*. The reason the universe exists is for the glory of Christ, the Son of God. The goal toward which it is heading is conformity to him. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, all things will be under the headship of Christ for eternity (Eph. 1:10).¹¹

The author of Hebrews describes the Son in whom God's final word has been given as the One who created the ages (Heb. 1:2) and who continues to uphold all things by his powerful word, directing them to the end he has eternally intended (v. 3). As has been widely noted, the imagery is not static, as if he were carrying the world as a dead weight, but dynamic, directing it purposefully to its destined goal. There is more than a hint here that the author is identifying Christ, the Son, with the word spoken at creation (cf. Gen. 1:3).

Furthermore, in the great vision in Revelation 5, John sees that the Lamb alone is both able and worthy to open the seals and so to govern world affairs. He is sovereign over all that happens in the world and to his church. The rest of the book spells this out in terms of judgment on the world and ultimate victory for the persecuted church.¹²

Man Created in Christ, the Image of God

As we noted, the high point of the chapter is the creation of the first Adam *in* the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27); it is the only place here in which the self-deliberation of God is recorded. It is as though the author were taking a highlighter and marking these statements as absolutely crucial to a grasp of the whole. In short, this is the focus of the chapter, the goal to which it is moving. What does it mean? In the NT, Paul says that believers are being renewed in the image of God in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). The question whether fallen man is still the image of God and, if so, in what sense this is true has been debated at great length through the years. Some statements in the Bible suggest that

11. *Ibid.*, 198–202.

12. See, *inter alia*, G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

this is true of all people, regardless of their relationship to God,¹³ whereas these Pauline passages imply that it is true only for those renewed by the Holy Spirit. Reformed theologians have understood this dilemma in terms of a dual aspect to man as the image of God, speaking of the image in the broader sense, in which all participate, and in the narrower sense, which relates only to Christian believers. This has appeared unsatisfactory in a range of ways. The resolution is to be found in terms of redemptive history. In doing so, we are retrieving what the Greek fathers had taught centuries earlier.¹⁴

The text of Genesis states that the man and his wife were created *in* the image of God. The image of God itself is identified for us in the NT. Paul points out that it is Christ who *is* the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15). In discussing the resurrection of the body, he compares Adam with the risen Christ. From Adam we inherit the image of the earthly, in weakness and mortality, whereas in the risen Christ we receive the image of the heavenly, under the direction and domination of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45–49).¹⁵ In Paul's thought, Christ as the second Adam *is* the image of God. Adam was created *in* Christ and then fell from that condition, but now, in grace, we are being renewed in the image of God, *in Christ the second Adam*, and thus in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. This teaching is also presented by the author of Hebrews. In the first paragraph, the letter states that the Son by whom God has spoken his final and ultimate word is “the brightness of his [God's] glory and the express image of his being” (Heb. 1:3).

Therefore, from the very first, God's ultimate purpose was foundational to all that he did—all things were heading, under his direction, to the goal he had set for them, to be headed up under the lordship of Christ. The incarnation was planned from eternity as an integral part of the whole work of salvation in Christ. This is quite different from the speculative claim that Christ would have become incarnate even if Adam had not sinned; if the incarnation and atonement were determined eternally, as the Bible testifies, so, too, was the fall of Adam.

13. See 1 Cor. 11:7; James 3:9.

14. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 281–86.

15. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *The Centrality of the Resurrection: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978).

God and Man: Distinct yet Compatible

Because man was created in the image of God, he was made for communion with God, to rule God's creation on his behalf. This is clear from Genesis 1, where the man and his wife were given dominion over the earth, over all that God had created. Psalm 8:3–8 reflects on this truth poetically:

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
 the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
 what is man that you are mindful of him,
 and the son of man that you care for him?

Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
 and crowned him with glory and honor.
 You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
 you have put all things under his feet,
 all sheep and oxen,
 and also the beasts of the field,
 the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,
 whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

Man is therefore a creature, made by God, not eternal or intrinsically immortal but the highest creature, to whom and for whom the world was made. As a finite creature, he has been given the great privilege of governing the earth on behalf of his Creator. At the same time, he was also connected to God, made in his image and living in communion with him. The implication of Genesis 2 is that there was regular communication between God and Adam before the fall. God gave the man and the woman verbal charge to multiply and have dominion (Gen. 1:28–30), instructed Adam to abstain from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, while being free to eat of all other trees in the garden (2:16), and brought to him the woman he had made for him (2:21–22). In rather different circumstances, after the fall, he addressed the errant pair (3:8ff.).

Therefore, on the one hand there is a *difference* between God and man. God is the Creator, man his creature. God is infinite and eternal, sovereign and all-powerful; man is weak and finite, a creature of time and space, limited to one place at one time, subject to the rule of God his Creator, derivative, not creative in the sense outlined in Genesis. The prophet Isaiah stresses this

point on many occasions, drawing attention to the uniqueness and supremacy of Yahweh the God of Judah:

Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel
 and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:
 “I am the first and I am the last;
 besides me there is no god.
 Who is like me? Let him proclaim it.
 Let him declare and set it before me,
 since I appointed an ancient people.
 Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen.
 Fear not, nor be afraid;
 have I not told you from of old and declared it?
 And you are my witnesses!
 Is there a God besides me?
 There is no Rock; I know not any.” (Isa. 44:6–8)

On the other hand, however, there is an inherent *compatibility* between God and man. Man has been created *in* the image of God. He was made for communion with his Creator. He was given responsibility for the earth, accountable directly to God. He was placed in a situation in which word-revelation was the normal manner of communication between himself and the woman, and between himself and God. He was constituted by God a covenant partner, given the freedom of the beautiful garden, granted clear-cut responsibilities in it for the glory of God, warned about the consequences of deviating from this task and misusing the creation in defiance of his God, and so honored with moral qualities and responsibility. He was made for God, and God condescended to him to be his partner in the task of world-rule. Moreover, since all this was done with the express intention of the incarnation of the Son (we will consider this topic in the next chapter), this compatibility is demonstrably at the heart of God’s intention for his creation *and for man himself*.

The Fall: Unity Disrupted

Sin entered; Genesis 3 tells the sorry tale. Adam and his wife disobeyed God’s law and reaped the consequences, which are ultimately found in death. One of the immediate results of human sin was a disrupted relationship with

the created order. Adam had been placed in the garden to till the ground, to bring it into subjection.¹⁶ Now that sin had entered, Adam's work, intended as a blessing, became a curse. The land was to yield thorns and thistles. Work was to become hard labor. The fruits of human toil would be paltry in comparison with what they would and could have been (Gen. 3:14–19).

Hebrews 2:5–9 reflects on the poetic account of man's place in creation found in Psalm 8. God put everything under his feet. But we do not yet see everything subject to man. He has not yet achieved this goal. It is all too evident in the world around us. The environment is in a precarious position. Unwise governmental policies, unchecked exploitation of natural resources, disruptive and destructive wars, the repression of human enterprise by totalitarian dictatorships and meddling bureaucratic—these have all contributed to severe problems that affect the food chain, the quality of life, and much more. The major problem is that man cannot control himself. Constant strife, unchecked self-interest, societal breakdown, and violent religious fanaticism run rampant. Since man cannot even exercise discipline over his own inclinations, how can he bring the cosmos into godly subjection?

Yet we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels in his incarnation and in the time of his lowliness from conception to the cross. He is now seated at the right hand of God, in authority over all things, fulfilling God's purpose for the human race at creation. The focus shifts in citing Psalm 8 from man in general to Jesus in particular.

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see Jesus who for a little while was made lower than the angels so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor. (Heb. 2:8b–9)¹⁷

He is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith who is bringing us there to share with him in the rule over the renovated cosmos. This we will do in union with him. Where the first Adam failed, having succumbed to the tempter and

16. This was an agricultural task, although there is good evidence that it was not limited to that but was primarily a function of a priest-king. See J. V. Fesko, *Last Things First* (Fearn, Ross-shire, UK: Mentor, 2007).

17. I have slightly amended the esv translation and rendered the clauses in verse 9 in terms of the progression of thought of the author. The sentence is a chiasmus, with the first and last clauses connected and the inward clauses connected.

plunged himself and the race into sin, the second Adam prevailed, resisting the devil and by his obedience bringing those in union with him to the goal mapped out for them. John Henry Newman captures the idea in his hymn “Praise to the Holiest in the Height”:

O loving wisdom of our God, when all was sin and shame,
A second Adam to the fight and to the rescue came.

O wisest love, that flesh and blood which did in Adam fail,
Should strive afresh against the foe, should strive and should prevail.

Union with Christ rests on the foundation of man’s nature as created, seen in the light of God’s end purpose for man. Christ as the second or last Adam achieves what the first Adam so signally failed to do. In view of this, the incarnation of Christ is crucial. It is the Archimedean point in this grand panorama. It is the theme of the next chapter.