

Genesis 1:26-28

The rediscovery of true humanity

Author: Evert Jan Hempenius

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Introduction

- ❖ It is important in this age of technological developments, environmental problems and cultural tensions, that mankind rediscovers his true humanity. “True humanness is found in personal communion with God—it is in such personal communion that his glory is reflected, his image is seen.”¹
 - The belief that God has created mankind in his image is fundamental in many discussions.
- ❖ How can man rediscover this unique position in the created order? Jesus Christ is the image of God. “If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him” (Jn 14:7).
- ❖ Not all aspects of this text in Genesis 1:26-28 will be addressed. Many books have been written on the subject: “The image of God.”

The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from Genesis. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a “stand-alone”. You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons.

Context

- ❖ An outline of the Book of Genesis:

¹ Atkinson, D. (1990, p.38).

| <i>THE CREATION</i> | |
|--|---|
| Genesis 1:1-2:3 | "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." |
| <i>THE HISTORY OF HEAVEN AND EARTH</i> | |
| Genesis 2:4-4:26 | "account of the heavens and the earth" (2:4) |
| Genesis 5:1-6:8 | "account of Adam" (5:1) |
| Genesis 6:9-9:28 | "account of Noah" (6:9) |
| Genesis 10:1-11:9 | "account of Shem, Ham and Japheth, Noah's sons" (10:1) |
| <i>THE HISTORY OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JAKOB</i> | |
| Genesis 11:10-26 | "account of Shem" (11:10) |
| Genesis 11:27-25:11 | "account of Terah" (11:27) > Abram/Abraham |
| Genesis 25:12-18 | "account of Abraham's son Ishmael" (25:12) |
| Genesis 25:19-35: | "account of Abraham's son Isaac" (25:19) |
| Genesis 36:1- | "account of Esau" (36:1) |
| Genesis 37:2-50:26 | "account of Jacob" (37:2) |

❖ The Book of Genesis consists of three main parts:

1. Genesis 1:1-2:3: In the beginning;
2. Genesis 2:4-11:9: The history of heaven and earth;
3. Genesis 11:10-50:26: The history of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

❖ Genesis 1:1-2:3 is beautifully structured:

| In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. | | | | | |
|---|---------|----------|--------------------------------|-------|--------------|
| <p>Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.</p> | | | | | |
| Formless (days of forming) | | | Empty (days of filling) | | |
| DAY 1 | Light | Darkness | DAY 4 | Sun | Moon & Stars |
| DAY 2 | Waters | | DAY 5 | | |
| | Expanse | | | Birds | |
| | Waters | | | Fish | |

| | | | | |
|--|------|------------------------|-------|---|
| DAY 3 | Seas | Plants & Trees Land | DAY 6 | (food) Living creatures according to its kind Man in the image of God |
| <p>And it was very good.</p> <p>By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.</p> | | | | |

- DAY 1 – DAY 3 are the days of forming or separation.
- DAY 4 – DAY 6 are the days of filling.
- The following correspondences can be noted:
 - DAY 1 – DAY 4 light and the lights
 - DAY 2 – DAY 5 expanse – birds
waters – fish
 - DAY 3 – DAY 6 land + green plants – living creatures according to its kind (food)
+ seed-bearing plants & trees – man in the image of God (food)

Form and structure

❖ Genesis 1:26-28 is beautifully structured:

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <i>Plan/announcement</i> | Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, (and) over the livestock, (and) over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” |
| <i>Creation of man</i> | So God created man in his own image, (in) the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. |
| <i>Blessing/command</i> | God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every |

| | |
|--|--|
| | living creature that moves on the ground.” |
|--|--|

Technical and hermeneutical notes and background

Verse 26

- ❖ Man = “אָדָם” *’adam*: 1. collective **mankind, people**.² Gen 1:26; 9:5; distinctly = men + women Gen 1:27; 5:1 Nu 5:6; given as name (Gen 5:2).³ “It is understood primarily as an image or representation.”⁴

Verse 26, 28

- ❖ Subdue = “כַּבַּשׁ” **subdue, bring into bondage**.⁵
 - The Greek Old Testament translates = “κατακυριεύω”:
 - 1. **to bring into subjection, become master, gain dominion over, subdue.**
 - 2. *to have mastery, be master, lord it (over), rule*.⁶
- ❖ Rule = “רָדָה” **to rule** (with the associated meaning of oppression).⁷
 - The Greek Old Testament translates = “ἄρχω” **1. to rule or govern, with implication of special status, rule**.⁸

Verse 27

- ❖ Created = “בָּרָא” *shape, fashion, create, always of divine activity, with*.⁹
 - This word is used three times(!) in verse 27.

² Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, electronic ed., p. 14).

³ Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977, p. 9).

⁴ Westermann, C. (1994, p. 146).

⁵ Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977, p. 461).

⁶ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 519).

⁷ Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, electronic ed., p. 1190).

⁸ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 140).

⁹ Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977, p. 135).

Exposition

Verse 26

- ❖ The second work of the sixth day stands apart from what has gone before both by its length and the solemn introduction. In total it comprises 5 verses.
- ❖ **“Let us make”**
 - **“us”** = God is one! (Dt 6:4) “Us” indicates that there is communion within God. Genesis 3:22 (after the fall) reads:
 - “And the Lord God said, ‘**The man has now become like one of us**, knowing good and evil.’” (Compare Gen 11:7.)
 - “It is rather the plural of fullness, which is found in the regular word for God (*’ēlōhîm*) used with a singular verb; and this fullness, glimpsed in the Old Testament, was to be unfolded as triunity, in the further ‘we’ and ‘our’ of John 14:23 (with 14:17).”¹⁰
- ❖ **“in our image, in our likeness”**
 - “The words *image* and *likeness* reinforce one another: there is no ‘and’ between the phrases, and Scripture does not use them as technically distinct expressions.”¹¹
 - Man represents God in the created world and is responsible to God.
 - **“True humanness is found in personal communion with God**—it is in such personal communion that his glory is reflected, his image is seen.”¹²
- ❖ **“man”** = mankind. Genesis 2-4 “man / adam” refers to an individual and representative of all living humans. Adam is a proper name from Genesis 4:1 onwards when he becomes the father of Cain (and Abel). “Man” is collectively used: “let **them** rule.”
 - “man” includes both male and female:
 - “He created **them male and female** and blessed them. And when **they** (plural) were created, he called them ‘**man**’” (Gen 5:2).
 - Being “the image”:
“When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son **in his own likeness, in his own image**; and he named him Seth” (Gen 5:3). The same words are used as in Genesis 1:26. The principle of “likeness” and “image” hasn’t been dissolved by the fall.
- ❖ **“and let them rule”**
 - The **“rule”** as a representative of God is characterised by:

¹⁰ Kidner, D. (1967, Vol. 1, p. 56).

¹¹ Kidner, D. (1967, Vol. 1, p. 55).

¹² Atkinson, D. (1990, p. 38).

- “Do not rule over them (fellow-Israelites / slaves) ruthlessly, **but fear your God**” (Lv 25:43; 25:53).
- The wisdom of God;
- The righteousness of God;
- The creativeness of God;
- The mercy and forgiveness of God;
- The love and faithfulness of God.
 - This rule implies feeding the birds: “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and **yet your heavenly Father feeds them**. Are you not much more valuable than they?” (Mt 6:26; Job 38:41).
 - “He makes springs pour water into the ravines; it flows between the mountains. They give water to all the beasts of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst” (Ps 104: 10, 11).
 - “These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things” (Ps 104: 27, 28; Ps 147:9).
- “Probably the three kinds of animal in 24 are, broadly, what we should call domesticated animals, small creatures and game.”¹³

Verse 27

❖ **“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”**

- This is poetry. It is interesting that the plural of verse 26 is followed by a singular. There is just one image of God. It might be said, that man is the portrait of God (Mt 22: 20, 21).
- This “chiastic arrangement highlights the emphasis on ‘image’”.¹⁴

Verse 28

❖ **“God blessed them”**

- A ‘blessing’ is not the same as ‘good luck’. “Bless/blessing has been most frequently understood in terms of benefits conveyed—prosperity, power, and especially fertility. This focus on the content of the benefit is now being viewed as secondary. **The primary factor of blessing is the statement of relationship between parties.** God blesses with a

¹³ Kidner, D. (1967, Vol. 1. p. 54).

¹⁴ Mathews, K. A. (1996, p. 160).

benefit on the basis of the relationship. The blessing makes known the positive relationship between the parties.”¹⁵

- ❖ **“Be fruitful and increase in number.”** This doesn’t mean that man and his wife should beget as many children as possible.
- ❖ **“Subdue” and “rule.”** The use of these words indicates that the creation is in need of subjugation and rule. That means that the creation is not a self-organizing world that could do without man.
 - Psalm 8:1-5:
“You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:
all flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.

O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Application (See also exposition)

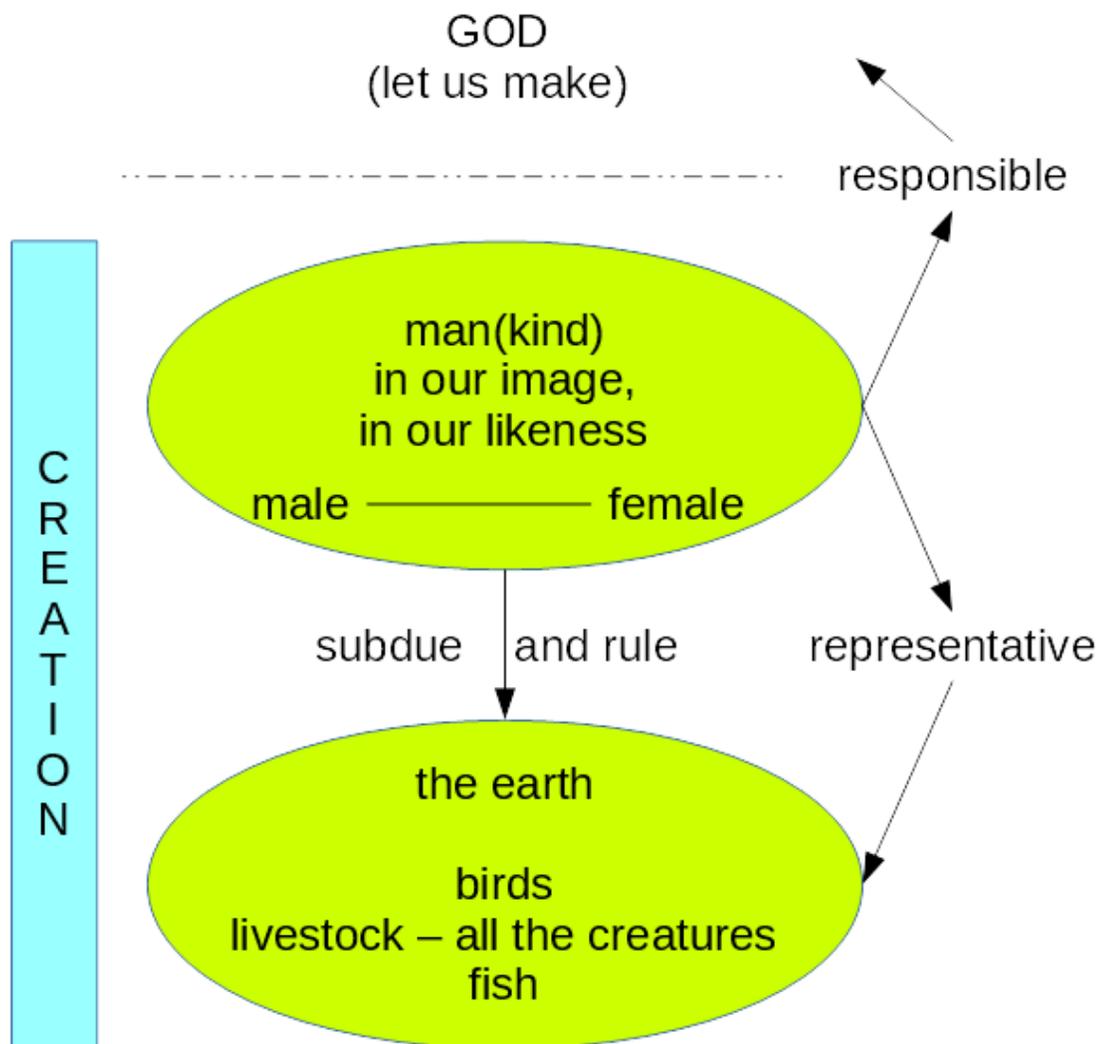
❖ HUMAN LIFE IS A WONDERFUL CREATION AND GIFT OF GOD

Verse 26

- ❖ There is only one humanity!
 - The difference between the animal kingdom and humanity:
 - Genesis 1:24: “And God said, ‘Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind.’ And it was so.”
 - Genesis 1:26: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’”
- ❖ Jesus Christ is the image of God!

¹⁵ Richards, K. H. (1992, Vol. 1, p. 754). Bless/Blessing. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.).

- “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col 1:15-17; See also 2 Cor 4:4, Heb 2:5-10).
- “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (Jn 1:18). Jesus said: “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (Jn 14:9).
 - “Jesus is the image of God in this world because he is in a relationship of loving communion with his Father.”¹⁶



¹⁶ Atkinson, D. (1990, p. 38).

- ❖ The renewed humanity in Christ:
 - In Christ every believer is a new creation and is being transformed into his likeness:
 - “For we are God’s workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus to do good works**, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph 2:10).
 - “to put on the new self, **created to be like God** in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10).
 - “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, **are being transformed into his likeness** with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18). “For those God foreknew he also predestined **to be conformed to the likeness of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Rom 8:29). “And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven” (1 Cor 15:49).
- ❖ The commands of the Lord can be more fully understood in relation to man, created in the image of God:
 - “Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. **And the second is like it:** “Love your neighbor as yourself.” All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Mt 22:37-40).
 - “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother” (1 Jn 4:20-21).
 - “Be holy, because I am holy” (1 Pet 1:16).
 - “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48).

Verse 27

- ❖ Chrysostom wrote (see quotes): **“It is humanity, the greatest and most marvelous of living beings, and the creation most worthy of honor before God.”**
 - “And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. **‘Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.’**” (Gen 9:5-6).
 - “With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness” (Jas 3:9).

Verse 28

❖ **“Be fruitful and increase in number.”**

- “This stands in marked contrast to the pagan fertility cults, in which human beings tried to persuade the gods to be fruitful. God gives fertility and fruitfulness to human beings.” “Human creativity, and especially human procreativity, is part of the outworking in our histories of the creative love of God in us as his image. All life is thus seen as God’s gift. His blessing, as with all blessings, confers not only a gift, but a task.”¹⁷

❖ **“Subdue the earth”** doesn’t mean that man should exploit and abuse the earth causing all kinds of environmental and humanitarian problems. “Adam and his wife were to be responsible to God and accountable for all the ways in which they did or did not cultivate the natural world about them.”¹⁸

- God is still the owner of this world: “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters” (Ps 24:1, 2). “For every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it” (Ps 50:10-12).
- The role of man is characterised by: “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. **Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**” These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”
 - “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, **nor your animals,** nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Ex 20:9-11).

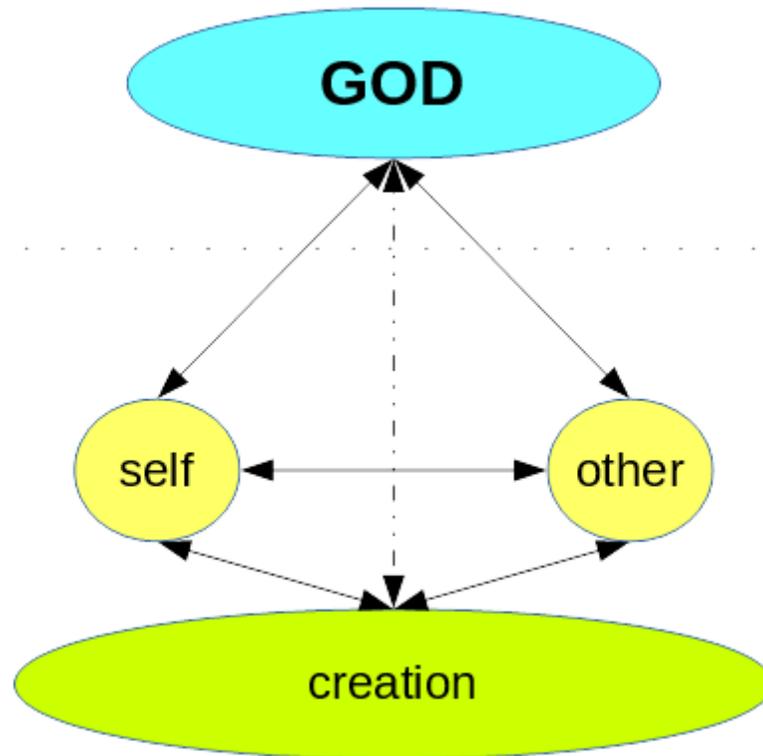
❖ Atkinson writes: “We do well to read Genesis 1:28 in the light of the way we have described God’s creative energy. He is the bringer of order out of chaos, and also is the preserver and sustainer of his world. Human ‘subduing’ of creation is a sharing in all these aspects of the divine

¹⁷ Atkinson, D. (1990, p. 41).

¹⁸ Kaiser, W. C. (1988, p. 17).

task.”¹⁹ Man is called to bring order out of chaos and to preserve and sustain this world, a sustainable economy.

A Biblical worldview



❖ A Biblical worldview according to Genesis 1:26 can be summarised as follows:

- There are four types of healthy relationships, all of which were broken (distorted) at the Fall:²⁰
 - “Relationship with God: This is our primary relationship, from which the other three flow.”
 - “Relationship with self: We have inherent value and dignity because we are created in God’s image.”
 - “Relationship with others:” Corbett and Fikkert write, “We are made to know one another, to love one another, and to encourage one another.”

¹⁹ Atkinson, D. (1990, p. 35).

²⁰ Corbett, S., & Fikkert, B. (2012, p. 55).

- “Relationship with the rest of creation: We are called to be stewards of creation and sustain ourselves through work.”
 - “When these relationships are functioning properly, we experience the fullness of life God intended.”
- If the relationship with God is broken or distorted, this will affect all other relationships.
- ❖ Man(kind) created in the image of God is the most fundamental of all, so to speak, “HUMAN RIGHTS”.
 - It will help Christians to find their way in all kinds of relationships:
 - Man – natural world – ruling, not exploiting.
 - The protection of wildlife.
 - The care for domesticated animals and fowl.
 - Male – female within the context of marriage and in church and society.
 - Parents – children, Gen 5:2 is particularly instructive.
 - Employer – employee, both are created in the image of God and worthy of meaningful work.
 - Teacher – pupils at school. A Christian teacher is called to set an example of the image of God.
 - Nurse and doctor caring for the sick and the elderly.
 - Rich and the poor.

❖ **IMPORTANT!**

- Atkinson made some very important remarks: “We must beware, however, of suggesting that the infant who is not morally aware (less still the embryo in the womb), the paralysed person, the cancer patient, or the old person in whom rationality is fading, are, because of their incapacity, any less in a relationship with God just because they cannot do certain things. **For the image is a task as well as a gift, a history as well as a status.** It is a task and a history which moves through many phases from foetal life through infancy to mature adulthood and old age, from health to sickness, from incapacity through capacity to infirmity. **What matters is not the presence of certain abilities, so much as the fact that God has set us in a certain relationship to himself.**”²¹
 - Read Psalm 139:13, 14: “For you created my inmost being; **you knit me together in my mother’s womb.** I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”

²¹ Atkinson, D. (1990, pp. 40-41).

Quotes

- ❖ Chrysostom (A.D. 349 – 407, Archbishop of Constantinople): “To begin, it is worthwhile to ask why God did not say, when the heavens were created, ‘Let us make the heavens’ but instead, ‘Let there be a heaven.... Let there be light,’ and similarly for each other aspect of creation. ‘Let us make’ suggests deliberation, collaboration and conference with another person. So what is it whose pending creation is granted so great an honor? **It is humanity, the greatest and most marvelous of living beings, and the creation most worthy of honor before God...** There is here this deliberation, collaboration and communion not because God needs advice—God forbid saying such a thing!—but so that the very impact of the language of our creation would show us honor.” (Sermons on Genesis 2.1.)²²

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²² Louth, A., & Conti, M. (Eds.). (2001, p. 28).

