

Is Culture a Reflection of the *Imago Dei*?¹

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Introduction

It is axiomatic in theological studies that the less information in Scripture on a given subject, the more numerous and varied are the theories put forth to explain it. This is true concerning the *imago Dei*—the image of God in man.² The vigorous debate over the *imago Dei*, however, only serves to underscore its importance. In fact, for Lewis and Demarest, “The most important matter in Christian anthropology concerns the meaning of the proposition that God created the human person in his own image and likeness.”³

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, I will revisit the matter of the definition of the image of God in man, focusing on the opening chapters of Genesis. Second, I will explore the relationship of the image of God in man to culture. In most of the systematic theologies I use there does not seem to be a lot of interaction between the doctrine of man, particularly the *imago Dei*, and the concept of culture.⁴ This paper is an attempt in a very preliminary fashion to integrate these two concepts. Our understanding of the *imago Dei*, culture, and the relationship between the two will impact how as Christians we view culture and our relationship to it.

¹ This paper was presented at the ETS Eastern Region Annual Conference, 2004.

² Throughout this paper I will use the word “man” to represent the human race. I agree with Grudem that not only does this usage have divine warrant, but a theological issue is also at stake. God’s naming the human race “man” in Gen 5:2 indicates that this is an appropriate choice that we shouldn’t avoid. Furthermore, His naming the race “man” and not “woman” “probably has some significance for understanding God’s original plan for men and women” (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* [Leicester: IVP; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 440, cf. 454–68; see also Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1–3,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem [Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1991], 98).

³ Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, three volumes in one (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), vol. 2, 124.

⁴ In a very brief and in no way exhaustive survey of some dozen single and multivolume systematic theologies on my shelf I found that very few even have one entry for culture in their subject indexes. I only found one passing reference to the cultural mandate in Erickson (Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999], 529) and several scattered references to culture in vol. 1 of *Integrative Theology* by Lewis and Demarest, the most relevant being a brief discussion of culture and missions (89–90). However in vol. 2, where they treat anthropology, there is no entry for culture in the subject index. Only in Buswell did I find an extended discussion of pre- and post-fall culture as presented in the opening chapters of Genesis (James Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962], vol. 1, 360–81).

Theories Attempting to Define the Image of God in Man

Few passages relate man to the *imago Dei*.⁵ Nevertheless, the Bible is clear enough on the fact itself: “God created man in His own image” (Gen 1:27a).⁶ While all may agree with Scripture’s assertion that man is—or at least originally was—created in the image of God, many theories crowd the field in attempting to define just what it *means*.

Theories that attempt to define the nature of the *imago Dei* fall into three general categories.⁷ The first are substantive theories. Such theories seek to identify some human *quality* or *characteristic* as that which defines the image of God in man. Some of the human qualities that theologians have suggested through the centuries are intellect, reason, morality, will, and spirituality. Early Church Fathers defined the *imago Dei* along these lines.⁸

The second set contains functional theories. These theories hold that the image of God has to do with the special *functions* that man performs. Functional theories usually focus on man’s responsibility to exercise dominion over the earth. The Socinians of old as well as certain scholars of late have defined the image in terms of function.⁹

⁵ Three OT passages use “image” terminology to describe man as the *imago Dei*. In Gen 1:26–27 God deliberates and creates man in His image (צֶלֶם) according to His likeness (דְּמוּת). Similarly, Gen 5:1 relates that God made man in His likeness (דְּמוּת). According to Gen 9:6 a murderer must forfeit his life because God made man in His image (צֶלֶם). The Apocrypha makes similar statements: God made man according to His image (Sir 17:3); and God made man an image of His own eternity (Wis 2:23). Two NT passages use “image” terminology in this way. 1 Cor 11:7 declares man to be God’s image (εἰκὼν). Jas 3:9 states that men are made according to God’s likeness (ὁμοίωσις). Three Pauline passages use the terminology differently in relation to believers: God predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29); we are being transformed into the image of the Lord (2 Cor 3:18); and we are being renewed according to the image of God (Col 3:10; cf. also Eph 4:24). These distinct sets of passages (man created in God’s image; man renewed to God’s image) help to clarify why theologians have offered a variety of explanations as to the precise nature of the image of God in man (James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 394).

⁶ Scripture citations are from the NASB.

⁷ The categories are from Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 520–27.

⁸ According to Justin Martyr, God created humanity with the power to think, choose the truth, and do what is right (*First Apology of Justin*, 28, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1; available from <http://www.ccel.org/fathers2>; Internet; accessed 24 March, 2004). For Irenaeus, God gave reason to man, who “in this respect [is] like to God, having been made free in his will” (*Against Heresies*, IV.4.3, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1). Augustine insists that we locate the image of God in the rational/intellectual and immortal soul of man (*On the Holy Trinity*, 14.4, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3).

⁹ The Racovian Catechism drawn up by Polish Socinians in 1609 declares the image of God to be “the authority of man, and his dominion over all inferior creatures, which result from the reason and judgement communicated to him” (Thomas Rees, trans., *The Racovian Catechism*, reprint ed. [Lexington, Ky.: American Theological Library Association, 1962], 21). Gerhard von Rad more recently asserts, “The divine likeness is not to be found either in the personality of man, in his free Ego, in his dignity or in his free use of moral capacity etc.” Rather, “man in his sphere of rule as God’s vice-gerent [*sic*] is summoned to represent the dominion and majesty of God” (“εἰκὼν,” in *TDNT*, vol. 2, 391–92). Similarly, D. J. A. Clines holds that although “man’s dominion over the animals cannot be definitive of the image ... since dominion is so immediate and necessary a consequence of the image, it loses the character of a mere derivative of the image and virtually becomes a constitutive part of the image itself” (“The Image of God in Man,” *TynBul* 19 (1968): 96). Clines later concludes, “The image is to be understood not so much ontologically as existentially: it comes to expression not in the nature of man so much as in his activity and function.

The third set contains relational theories. These define the image of God as the unique interpersonal *relationships* that people enjoy. These relationships may be vertical (man to God) as well as horizontal (man to woman in marriage, or man to man in society). Karl Barth is perhaps the best-known representative of this sort of view.¹⁰

These theories are interesting and not without merit, but which if any is correct? Must we choose only one? How can we decide? We can debate the theories, but we must start with Scripture, particularly Genesis. As Barth says, it is one thing to discuss which of the many theories is the “finest or deepest or most serious.” But it is another matter to discuss the true explanation of the image of God in Gen 1:26.¹¹ Since Gen 1:26 is where Scripture first and explicitly states that God created man in His image, I will focus on this text and its context.

The Image of God in Genesis 1:26

God declares in Gen 1:26, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.” In the vast amount of literature generated by this statement, discussion has focused on three questions. First, why does God speak in the plural? Second, what is the force of the prepositions “in” (בְּ) and “according to” (כְּ)? Third, what do the words “image” (צֶלֶם) and “likeness” (דְּמוּת) mean?¹² I will examine these three questions in order.

The Plural

Concerning the first, Gordon Wenham lists six ways that interpreters through the centuries have understood the plural of Gen 1:26: (1) reference to the heavenly court (i.e. angels); (2) reference to Christ; (3) vestige of polytheism; (4) plural of majesty; (5) plural of self-deliberation; and (6) reference to the Spirit.¹³ For various reasons the first, third, and fourth views appear least likely.¹⁴ The fifth view, plural of self-deliberation, seems possible in light of similar constructions (e.g. Gen 11:3–4, 11; Ps 2:3); however, it seems inadequate in the context of Gen 1–3. In Gen 3:22 God claims after the fall that sinful man “has become like one of Us, knowing

This function is to represent God’s lordship to the lower orders of creation. The dominion of man over creation can hardly be excluded from the content of the image itself” (“Image of God,” 101).

¹⁰ For Barth, Gen 1:26–27 provides the key to understanding the nature of the *imago Dei*. First God reveals His own plurality—“the differentiation and relationship of I and Thou”—when He declares, “let us make man in Our image” (*Church Dogmatics* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958], 3.1.192). Then God creates man as a plurality, showing that “the divine likeness of man [consists] in his existence as man and woman” (*Church Dogmatics*, 3.1.195).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3.1.193.

¹² Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC (Waco: Word, 1987), 27.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 27–28.

¹⁴ Concerning the first, angels, “any implication that others had a hand in our creation is quite foreign to the chapter as a whole and to the challenge in Isaiah 40:14: ‘With whom took he counsel?’” (Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, TOTC [Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1967], 51). Furthermore, Gen 1:27 makes it clear that God alone created man (Clines, “Image of God,” 67) and that He created man “in His image” and “in the image of God,” not in the image of Himself and angels (John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in *EBC*, vol. 2 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990], 37). As for the third, polytheism, “Gen 1 is distinctively antimythological in its thrust, explicitly rejecting ancient Near Eastern views of creation” (Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 28). The fourth, plural of majesty, seems doubtful since the plural of majesty is not used with verbs (Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 28).

good and evil.”¹⁵ The self-deliberation view for the plural in Gen 1:26 cannot account for the plural in Gen 3:22. Because of the similarity and literary proximity of Gen 1:26 and 3:22, there must be a view that can account for both of these intriguing plurals.

This leaves us with the second and sixth views, the plural as a reference either to the Spirit or to Christ.¹⁶ In light of Gen 1:2, the former seems more promising, but it may be that both options are too precise. I would rather take the plural more generally as that of the divine fullness, as Kidner does, realizing that “this fullness, glimpsed in the Old Testament, was to be unfolded as tri-unity” in the NT.¹⁷

The Prepositions

The second issue in Gen 1:26 is the force of the prepositions כְּ and כַּדְּמוּתֵנוּ . While these prepositions differ in their basic senses, their semantic ranges overlap.¹⁸ This seems to be the case in Gen 1:26. The vast majority of translators and commentators take the כְּ as that of norm, translating בְּצַלְמֵנוּ “in Our image,” and the כַּדְּמוּתֵנוּ as denoting agreement in norm, translating “according to” or “after Our likeness,” making them virtually synonymous here.

Clines rejects the majority view with its attending notion that God has an image and He created man in conformity with it, for God has no physical image or form after which to pattern man (Deut 4:15–18). Clines considers but rejects the possibility that God’s image is a spiritual quality, since צֶלֶם almost always refers to an actual physical object in the OT. In rare cases when it’s metaphorical it still carries the idea of a shape or figure (Ps 39:6, 73:20).¹⁹

¹⁵ The serpent had earlier enticed Eve by promising that she would become “like God, knowing good and evil” (v. 5). It seems clear that “like one of Us” means “like God.” Wenham argues that the “Us” here refers to God and the angels, based on his preferred view on Gen 1:26 (*Genesis 1–15*, 85). But that doesn’t align well with the deliberate connection between Gen 3:5 and v. 22, or with the most likely understanding of the knowledge of good and evil as the divine prerogative to decide for man what is good and what is evil (see Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 45). Sinful man became like God by deciding for himself what was good and what was evil. For more on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, see footnote 48.

¹⁶ Clines argues for the plural as including the Spirit, already introduced in Gen 1:2 as the Spirit of God at work in creation (“Image of God,” 68). The Epistle of Barnabas asserts that the Lord is speaking to the Son (*The Epistle of Barnabas*, VI, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1). Justin Martyr claims the same, adding the plural of Gen 3:22 as further support (*Dialogue with Trypho*, LXII, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1).

¹⁷ Kidner, *Genesis*, 52. Sailhamer sees v. 27 as the key contextual clue that divine plurality is in view in v. 26, which anticipates the human plurality of man and woman created in God’s image (“Genesis,” 38; see also Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3.1.195). Some claim that this view “imposes later trinitarian concepts on the ancient text” (The NET Bible, in loc.; available from <http://www.bible.org/netbible/index.htm>; Internet; accessed 20 February, 2004), but this is not the case. This view merely recognizes the implications of this verse and others like it (e.g. Gen 3:22) for understanding God: “God’s unity is not monolithic.... In the Old Testament nothing is made of this paradox, but it should not surprise us that the apparent absurdity disappears in the New Testament” (Kidner, *Genesis*, 33–34).

¹⁸ The basic senses of כְּ are spatial and temporal. However, כְּ also has a variety of circumstantial senses, one being norm—“in the manner of.” The basic sense of כַּדְּמוּתֵנוּ is comparison and correspondence. One type is agreement in manner or norm—“in the manner of” or “according to.” It is here that we see the semantic overlap between these two prepositions (Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990], 196–203).

¹⁹ Clines, “Image of God,” 74.

Clines takes the \aleph as denoting essence or identity, meaning “as” or “in the capacity of.”²⁰ The proper translation would then be “let Us make man *as* our image,” or, “*to be* our image.” Clines concludes, “Thus we may say that according to Genesis 1 man does not have the image of God, nor is he made *in* the image of God, but is himself the image of God.”²¹ This is possible if we take Gen 1:26 in isolation; however, the interchangeability of the prepositions in Gen 5:1 and 3, especially in connection with the same words \aleph and \beth , makes Clines’s view untenable.²² However we take the meaning of God’s image, God created man “in” it, or after its pattern.²³

The Words Image and Likeness

The third issue in Gen 1:26 is the meaning of “image” (\aleph) and “likeness” (\beth). Beginning with \aleph , the word occurs seventeen times in the OT, denoting either some physical object, mere semblance, or a likeness of some sort.²⁴ But what does it mean here in Gen 1:26? Based on the word’s literal sense as a physical object, and the ANE custom of using images to represent the presence of a deity or king, Clines argues that man in his physical existence is the image of God.²⁵ As a psychosomatic unity man is “the flesh-and-blood image of the invisible God.”²⁶ As God’s image, man is the physical, visible representative of the invisible God on the earth, whom God placed here to rule the earth as His vizier.²⁷

Without doubt Gen 1:27 links the *imago Dei* with man’s function as God’s royal representative on the earth. One only has to read the remainder of the verse to see that. However, Clines overstates the case when he insists that this is all the image is. Because Clines can only understand \aleph literally as a physical object in Gen 1:27, he cannot envision a figurative sense

²⁰ For support Clines turns to the classic example of this usage in Exod 6:3: “I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, *as* God Almighty” (\aleph).

²¹ Clines, “Image of God,” 80, emphasis original.

²² Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 29. Gen 1:26 speaks of God making man “in Our image” (\beth) “according to Our likeness” (\beth).” Gen 5:1 places the \beth with the other noun from 1:26: God made man “in [His] likeness” (\beth). Gen 5:3 is a complete reversal of 1:26: Adam fathered a son “in his own likeness” (\beth) according to his image” (\aleph). The only way to explain this is to realize that \beth and \aleph in these verses mean basically the same thing. Virtually the same is true for \aleph and \beth , as we will shortly see.

²³ We find a closely parallel usage of \beth in Exod 25:40, where God tells Moses to build the articles of the tabernacle “after the pattern for them” (\beth) shown to Moses on the mountain (Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 29; cf. The NET Bible, in loc.).

²⁴ *BDB*, 853–54. As a physical object \aleph refers ten times to idols (Num 33:52; 2 Kgs 11:18; 2 Chron 23:17; Ezek 7:20; 16:17; Amos 5:26), pictures of men (Ezek 23:14), or models of tumors (1 Sam 6:5 [2x], 11). Two times it means the mere semblance or shadow of a man (Ps 39:7; 73:20). Five times it occurs in Genesis for man in God’s (1:26, 27 [2x]; 9:6) or another man’s image (5:3).

²⁵ In the ANE kings were the image or representation of a deity. Kings often placed images of themselves in the territories they ruled to represent their presence in those occupied territories (Clines, “Image of God,” 83). In the OT we read of pagan idols functioning as images or representations of a particular deity (e.g. Baal’s images in 2 Kgs 11:18).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

for the word here.²⁸ But if the understanding of the preposition כִּי that I argued for earlier is accurate, then God did create man after the pattern of His own image. And since Clines is right that God has no physical form (Deut 4:15–18) after which He might pattern man,²⁹ the *imago Dei* must communicate something of the immaterial or spiritual reality of God’s nature.³⁰ This leads us to consider the word “likeness” (דְּמוּת) in Gen 1:26.

In contrast to צֶלֶם, the meaning of דְּמוּת is transparent. It is obviously related to the verb דָּמָה, “be like, resemble.”³¹ The OT uses the noun to describe a thing’s being similar to something else.³² For example, Ps 58:4 declares that the venom of the wicked is “according to the likeness of” (כְּדְמוּת), or “similar to,” the venom of a serpent. Thus it seems that the second descriptor of man in Gen 1:26, דְּמוּת, helps to clarify somewhat the meaning of the first, צֶלֶם. What does it mean that God created man in His image? It means that He created man after His own likeness.³³

The Meaning of the Image of God

I have concluded from Gen 1:26 that God created man after the pattern of His own image and according to His own likeness. But what is the image and likeness of God? It cannot be physical, for God has no physical form after which to pattern man (Deut 4:15–18). What, then, is it? Commentators exhort us to keep reading in Genesis 1, and rightly so, for Gen 1:26b–27 provides vital information for understanding what the *imago Dei* actually is.

Man as Ruler

In Gen 1:26 God deliberated not only to make man in His image, but likewise to “let them rule” over His creation. After creating man in His own image as male and female (v. 27), God blessed them to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth (v. 27b)—the same blessing He had bestowed

²⁸ According to Lewis and Demarest, because Clines “begins with the common non-evangelical judgment that the person is not a composite of various parts, but is a psychosomatic unity,” Clines invariably concludes that “the whole person, not merely some higher reality, is the image of God” (*Integrative Theology*, vol. 2, 128).

²⁹ Clines, “Image of God,” 72–73.

³⁰ Besides insisting on only the literal understanding of צֶלֶם as a physical object, Clines also places too much weight on this one word in Gen 1:26. He argues that it must be the key term, since דְּמוּת follows it merely as further explanation, and דְּמוּת doesn’t have to be repeated in the summary statement of v. 27 or later in Gen 9:6 (“Image of God,” 70). However, as with Clines’s interpretation of כִּי, the interchangeability of צֶלֶם and דְּמוּת in Gen 5:1 and 3 casts doubt on Clines’s view that צֶלֶם is the key word in the debate over the meaning of the *imago Dei*.

³¹ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*; cf. *BDB*, 197–98. The verb and noun appear together in Isa 40:18, “To whom then will you liken (תְּדַמֶּינֶיךָ) God? Or what likeness (דְּמוּת) will you compare with Him?”

³² Out of twenty-five usages, sixteen occur in Ezekiel, where the prophet sees visions of things having the “appearance” or “likeness” of things familiar to him—things like humans (Ezek 1:5, 2x), burning coals of fire (v. 13), wheels (v. 16), a throne (v. 26, 3x), and a rainbow (v. 28; cf. 1:10, 22; 8:2; 10:1, 10, 21, 22; 23:15). Likewise, Daniel sees a being who has the appearance of a man (Dan 10:16) and Isaiah hears a sound similar to that of many people (Isa 13:4). In 2 Kgs 16:10 the word refers to a pattern of an altar, and in 2 Chron 4:3 to figures like oxen. The last three occurrences are in Genesis, where God creates man according to His likeness (1:26) and in His likeness (5:1), and Adam bears a son in his likeness (5:3).

³³ While דְּמוּת seems to clarify צֶלֶם in Gen 1:26, their meanings overlap to the extent that one can still stand in the place of the other (cf. 1:27; 5:2).

upon the animals (v. 22). But to mankind God added the commands to subdue the earth and rule over the animals (v. 28b).³⁴ Psalm 8:3–8, which many take as a poetic commentary on Gen 1:26, declares the majesty and dignity of man as God’s appointed ruler over creation. God crowns man with glory and majesty (v. 5). He causes man to rule over the works of His hands; He has put all things under man’s feet (v. 6). Gen 1:26–28 makes a clear connection between man’s creation in the image of God and his rule over creation.

But what is the connection between the image of God and man’s dominion? Is man’s dominion *definitive* of the image itself, or rather a *consequence* of the image? Clines argues that although “man’s dominion over the animals cannot be definitive of the image ... since dominion is so immediate and necessary a consequence of the image, it loses the character of a mere derivative of the image and virtually becomes a constitutive part of the image itself.”³⁵ Thus for Clines it is not a matter of dominion being *either* definitive *or* a consequence of the image, but rather both.³⁶

It is better, however, not to blur the line between man’s constitution and his function. Who man is and what man does are two distinct things, as the grammar of Gen 1:26–28 bears out. Verse 26 contains two separate clauses containing distinct volitional forms, the first a cohortative (“let us make”) and the second a jussive (“let them rule”), joined by the conjunctive *wāw*.³⁷ God deliberated to create man in His image and *then* assigned man his role over creation. The two are related, but separate.³⁸ Likewise, it is *after* God created man in His image (v. 27) that He blessed them and commanded them to subdue and rule creation (v. 28). God created man in His image and commanded them to rule, but the rule “merely describes the function or the consequences of the divine image; it does not pinpoint what the image is in itself.”³⁹ Thus a more fundamental question needs to be answered: what is it about man that *enables* him to rule over creation? It is this question of man’s *capacity* to rule that gets us closer to defining the image of God in man.

Man as Male and Female

The second contextual element that commentators point out to us from Gen 1:26–28 appears in v. 27: God created man in His image *as male and female*. I agree with Sailhamer that v. 26 contains an expression of God’s plurality as He sets out to make man in “Our image,” which

³⁴ Chapter 2 follows up with specific examples of man carrying out his God-given task to subdue the earth and rule the animals. God planted a garden in Eden (v. 8) and placed Adam into it to cultivate it and keep it (v. 15). Then God brought to Adam all of the animals He had created so that Adam would name them (vv. 19–20). To rule and subdue the rest of creation are obviously royal tasks (cf. e.g. 1 Kgs 4:21, 24) (Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*).

³⁵ Clines, “Image of God,” 96.

³⁶ While Clines argues here that dominion is a consequence and a constitutive part of the image, he later leans more toward an essentially functional definition of the image. “The image is to be understood *not so much ontologically as existentially*: it comes to expression *not in the nature of man so much as in his activity and function*” (“Image of God,” 101, emphasis added). For all practical purposes this amounts to a functional definition of the image.

³⁷ Waltke and O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 653–54.

³⁸ Lewis and Demarest observe that “the existence of a simple *wāw* (“and”) between the statement of the person’s creation as image and the command to exercise dominion suggests that the latter is a consequence of the former ... by virtue of his ontological status as God’s image, the person is divinely entrusted with the special function of dominion-having” (*Integrative Theology*, vol. 2, 135).

³⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 32.

anticipates His creation of man as a plurality of male and female in v. 27.⁴⁰ The link between man in God’s image and man as male and female seems clear in light of the structure of v. 27:

- A so God created man (וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם)
- B in His image (בְּצַלְמוֹ)
- B’ in the image of God (בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים)
- A’ He created him (בָּרָא אֹתוֹ)
- B” male and female (זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה)
- A” He created them (בָּרָא אֹתָם)

We see that B” parallels B’ and B—i.e., the phrase “male and female” parallels the phrases “in the image of God” and “in His image.” Therefore, this verse seems to forge an intentional link between God’s creation of man in His image and God’s creation of man as male and female. This pattern holds true in the parallel summary statement of Gen 5:1b–2a:

- A when God created man (בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אָדָם)
- B in the likeness of God (בְּדְמוּת אֱלֹהִים)
- A’ He made him (עָשָׂה אֹתוֹ)
- B’ male and female (זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה)
- A” He created them (בָּרָאָם)

While differing from 1:27 in some incidentals (image vs. likeness, create vs. make), this passage contains the same structure: the phrase “male and female” parallels the phrase “in the likeness of God.”

Now we must address the same issue that arose in the case of man’s dominion: what is the connection between God’s creation of man in His image and His creation of man as male and female? Is man as male and female *definitive* of the image, or a *consequence* of it? For Barth it is definitive. After pointing out the connection in Gen 1:27 and 5:1 between man in the image of God and man as male and female, Barth asks,

Could anything be more obvious than to conclude from this clear indication that the image and likeness of the being created by God signifies existence in confrontation, i.e., in this confrontation, in the juxtaposition and conjunction of man and man which is that of male and female, and then to go on to ask against this background in what the original and prototype of the divine existence of the Creator consists?⁴¹

⁴⁰ Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 38.

⁴¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3.1.195. Barth goes on to ask, “But what is the original in which, or the prototype according to which, man was created? We have argued already that it is the relationship and differentiation between the I and the Thou in God Himself. Man is created by God in correspondence with this relationship and differentiation in God Himself: created as a Thou that can be addressed by God but also as an I responsible to God;

There are several problems with Barth's relational view of the *imago Dei*, chiefly the existential philosophy behind it. Existentialism deemphasizes essences or substances. The important question to ask of anything is not "What is it?" but simply "Is it?" It is not the substance but the experience of a thing that defines it. This is why for Barth the image "is not an entity that a human possesses so much as the experience that is present when a relationship is active."⁴² A related problem, then, is that Barth's view fails to address the more fundamental question: what is it about man that *enables* him to have relationships with God and his fellows that no other creature can have?⁴³ As with the functional view, this question exposes the inadequacy of the relational view in defining the image of God. The underlying *capacity* that man possesses to rule God's creation and relate to God and his fellows is what brings us to the heart of the matter of God's image.

Important as the concepts of man's rule and relationships are to the discussion of the image of God, they do not finally define it for us. Granted, Gen 1:26–28 bypasses a concise definition of the image of God in order to focus our attention on the *results* of God's creating man in His image, which reveal His *purposes* for thus making man: that man might rule God's creation and relate to God and his fellows in a special way. Nevertheless, there is plenty of evidence in the opening chapters of Genesis to point us to a substantive approach in defining the image of God in man.

Man's Capacity to Rule and Relate

The opening pages of Scripture present a sharp contrast between God's creation of man and the animals. The creation of the animals appears indirect and impersonal. God declared, "Let the waters teem," "let birds fly," and "let the earth bring forth living creatures" (Gen 1:20, 24). In contrast, God created man directly and personally. God deliberated, "Let us make man" (v. 26), and personally formed an individual man and an individual woman (v. 27; 2:7, 22). Also distinct from the animals, God created man in two stages. First He formed man's body from the ground, and then He breathed into him the breath of life (2:7).⁴⁴ Furthermore, God apparently did not create animals individually. He created them *en masse* and blessed them corporately to procreate. However, God formed only one man and one woman, and brought them together in a unique, one-to-one, one-flesh relationship (2:7, 20–25). Finally, God's blessing of man differs markedly from that of the animals. While God blessed them all equally to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth (1:22, 28a), He blessed man further to rule over the animals (1:26, 28) and subdue the earth (v. 28). But we can go beyond these basic distinctions to describe the immaterial *nature* of the man God created.

in the relationship of man and woman in which man is a Thou to his fellow and therefore himself an I in responsibility to this claim" (*Church Dogmatics*, 3.1.198).

⁴² Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 527.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 530.

⁴⁴ The text reveals some similarities between man and animals: like the animals, man's body came from the earth (cf. 1:24; 2:7a); and like the animals man was a "living being" (חַי נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה); cf. 1:21, 22, 24; 2:7b). Man was special but still an earthly creature (cf. 1 Cor 15:45–49).

Intelligence

God gave man *intelligence*, the human faculty of knowing and reasoning.⁴⁵ God made man a rational creature. God commanded man to rule the animals and subdue the earth (1:28). God put man into the garden to cultivate it and keep it (2:15). God brought the animals to man for him to name (v. 19). These all demanded intelligence. Hand in hand with intelligence came language.⁴⁶ God spoke to the man (2:16–17; 3:9, 11) and to the woman (3:13a). The woman and the man spoke with God (3:10–13) and with each other (2:23; 4:1, 25). God created man with intelligence, which included language.

Volition

Along with intelligence God gave man *volition*—the ability to will or choose a course of action or an end for which to strive.⁴⁷ The same tasks that required intelligence called for volition. Adam needed to make thoughtful choices as he tended the garden (2:15), named all the animals (vv. 19–20), and named the woman (v. 23). God’s commandment regarding which fruit to eat and which fruit not to eat likewise required Adam and Eve to make thoughtful choices (1:16–17). God created man with volition, the power of thoughtful choice.

Morality

God made man morally responsible. This is related to volition. God not only endowed man with the ability to make thoughtful choices generally, but also specifically to make moral choices—choices “capable of being judged as good or evil or in terms of principles of right and wrong action.”⁴⁸ In the world God created there was potential for good and evil choices. God permitted man to eat from many trees in the garden (1:16), but prohibited him from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (v. 17a).⁴⁹ It was a moral choice and a matter of life or death for man (v. 17b; cf. v. 9; 3:22). God created man morally responsible for his choices and actions.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Intelligence is the ability to “use one’s existing knowledge to meet new situations and to solve new problems, to learn, to foresee problems, to use symbols or relationships, to create new relationships, to think abstractly ... to perceive one’s environment, to deal with it symbolically, to deal with it effectively, to adjust to it, to work toward a goal” (Philip Babcock Gove, ed., *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary of the English Language*, unabridged ed. [Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, 1993], 1174).

⁴⁶ Language is the “systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized signs, sounds, gestures, or marks having understood meanings” (Gove, *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*, 1270).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 2562.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1468.

⁴⁹ There are two usual interpretations of the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” First, by eating the fruit, man would come to know by experience the good he had given up and the evil he had earlier known only by name. Second, the tree was God’s test of Adam’s obedience, so that God would know whether Adam would cling to the good (obedience) or choose the evil (disobedience). Shedd sees both as true (William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, reprint ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971], vol. 2, 154). Chafer concurs (Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, [Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947], vol. 2, 211–12). However, in 3:22 God states that by eating the fruit Adam became like God, knowing good and evil. This cannot mean that God had likewise committed evil and thus knew it by personal experience. Furthermore, 3:22 also shows that Adam’s knowledge is at issue, not God’s. Thus, a third view is better: by eating the fruit Adam took to himself the divine right to declare what is good

Spirituality

God formed man from the ground and “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (2:7). Animals were also “living beings” (1:21, 22, 24) “in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life” (7:22). Therefore, the last clause of 2:7 probably means no more than “man came alive” or “man started to live.” Nevertheless, it seems significant that only man, not the animals, received the breath of life from God directly.⁵¹

There are other indications in the text of man’s spirituality or affinity to God.⁵² God had person-to-person fellowship with man alone, not with the animals (1:28–30; 3:8–9). God commanded man alone to obey His moral directives, not the animals (2:16–17). God held man alone accountable, not the animals, for his moral choices (3:9–13). God offered to share eternal life with man alone, not with the animals (2:9, 16; 3:22).⁵³ Hand in hand with granting man intellect, volition, and moral responsibility, God made man a spiritual being, possessing the ability to commune with God and share in His very life.⁵⁴

Summary of the Image

God created man “metaphysically as a complex material-immaterial unity.”⁵⁵ The creation narrative paints a functionally holistic portrait of man, suggesting a “functional integration or unity of the psychophysical totality” which is man.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, man is

constituted from two different and mutually irreducible sources, elements, ingredients, “stuffs,” or principles. First, Adam is *adamah*, from the earth, the dust (*'apar*) of the ground. . . . Earth is the “stuff” or substance, if you will, of which our bodiliness is made. . . . But that body is still lifeless. Thus a second ingredient must be added: the *ruach* or *neshama*,

and evil. The underlying idea of the tree and the command is that only God knows what is good and evil. Man’s task is not to decide for himself what is good and evil, but to follow God’s assessment of good and evil. By eating what was forbidden by God, Adam rejected God’s knowledge and decided for himself what was good and evil. It is in this sense of moral self-determination that Adam became like God (see Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 45).

⁵⁰ Not only did God make man moral in the sense of morally responsible, but also in the sense of morally good (1:31). Nevertheless, man’s goodness was creaturely and unconfirmed; he could and did lose this moral goodness when he chose to disobey God (Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* [Winona Lake, In.: BMH Books, 1986], 202).

⁵¹ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 60–61. There may also be a connection between God’s creating man in His image in 1:27 and His breathing life directly into him in 2:7. To bear God’s image is to possess something of the very nature of God Himself.

⁵² Man is spiritual in the sense that he can “act in ways that are significant in the immaterial, spiritual realm of existence” (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 446).

⁵³ Though not yet revealed in the opening narrative of Genesis, another clear scriptural indication of man’s spiritual life in God’s image is his immortal soul (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 446; Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity*, 14.4, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3).

⁵⁴ According to Genesis, “Man is made for personal and endless fellowship with God, involving rational understanding (Gen 1:28ff), moral obedience (2:16–17), and religious communion (3:3)” (Carl F. H. Henry, “Image of God,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984], 548).

⁵⁵ Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, vol. 2, 134.

⁵⁶ John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate*, reprint ed. (Vancouver: Regent College, 1995), 48.

the life-force or power of breath which comes from God. . . . Aside from their both being created by God, dust and life-breath may have no properties whatsoever in common. But whatever each is, they amount to a mutually irreducible duality which God puts together to get one person.⁵⁷

This immaterial “life-breath” from God, which made man not only a living and breathing creature, but also a thinking, speaking, volitional, moral, and spiritual being, constitutes the *imago Dei*. God created man after the pattern of His own nature, for the Creator God is likewise a living (1:1), thinking, speaking (v. 3), choosing (v. 5a), deliberating, creating (vv. 26–27), evaluating, and morally judging (v. 31a) spiritual being (v. 2). It seems defensible just from the opening pages of Scripture that the *imago Dei*, the “likeness of God,” according to which God created man, was the complex of uniquely personal characteristics that God imparted to man at creation, which together comprised the immaterial aspect of man’s being.⁵⁸

Man’s rule over creation and his relationships with God and his fellows are important corollaries of the image, since they reveal God’s purposes in creating man to bear His image. The corollary of relationship shows us that God did not create man “for existence in isolation, but . . . in community, with his mate, with other human beings, and with God.”⁵⁹ The corollary of rule shows us that God desired that man, “as the unique representative of God, should exercise stewardship over the lower forms of earthly life.”⁶⁰ Thus man’s rule and relationships are “consequences or applications of the image rather than . . . the image itself. Although very closely linked to the image of God, experiencing relationships and exercising dominion are not themselves that image.”⁶¹ Rather, they reveal God’s purposes in creating man in His image.

The Post-Fall Image of God

How did the fall affect the image of God in man? According to Pelagius it had no affect. The *imago Dei* was man’s reason to rule creation and his free will to serve God, and Adam’s descendents possess the same intellectual and moral capabilities as he did before the fall.⁶² For Pelagius, then, the *imago Dei* was unaffected by the fall. Clines takes the same view, but for a

⁵⁷ Ibid., 52.

⁵⁸ Garrett claims this view is “incompatible with the Pauline texts relative to the *imago Dei*, which uniformly presuppose that the image must be renewed or restored” (*Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, 400). However, Garrett himself acknowledges earlier that 1 Cor 11:7 seems to refer to the image as something humans have by virtue of creation. Either Paul is incoherent, claiming in one place that the image remains after the fall and in another that the image was lost and needs to be restored, or perhaps we ought to understand Paul’s renewal passages in terms of redeemed man’s restoration to a complete or full expression of God’s image (see Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 445). This is what Paul seems to mean when he describes our future conformity to Christ, the perfect image of God (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10; cf. Eph 4:24).

⁵⁹ Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, vol. 2, 135.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 532.

⁶² Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1910), vol. 3, 802–9.

different reason.⁶³ But for whatever reason it's held, the view that the fall didn't affect the image of God in man doesn't hold up against Scripture. Man's death (Genesis 5) and moral corruption (Genesis 6) are enough to show that the fall affected the image of God in man.⁶⁴ Furthermore, if the image didn't even suffer a partial defacement by the fall, why do the redeemed need renewal to the image of God in Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10)?

At the other end of the spectrum was Luther, who defined the image exclusively as the righteousness, holiness, and wisdom which God granted man at creation. When man sinned he forfeited this original state of holiness, thus losing entirely the image of God.⁶⁵ For Luther, then, the *imago Dei* was obliterated by the fall. But how can we reconcile this with Gen 9:6, 1 Cor 11:7, and Jas 3:9, which imply that fallen man remains in the image and likeness of God?

Early Fathers took a mediating position that the fall marred but did not obliterate the image. Irenaeus did this by distinguishing image from likeness. The image was the endowments of reason and free will, which persist at least to some degree after the fall.⁶⁶ The likeness, however, was a spiritual endowment of grace which man lost in the fall but regains through redemption.⁶⁷ But this view does not hold up under scrutiny. There is no evidence in Gen 1:26 and its context for such an understanding of these terms. The words "image" and "likeness" and the prepositions "in" and "according to" are interchangeable in Gen 1:26, 5:1, and 3. Furthermore, post-fall man remains in the likeness of God, not just the image (Jas 3:9).

Following Irenaeus, later Catholic theologians defined the image as the natural powers of reason and will retained after the fall, and the likeness as the *donum superadditum*, the added gift of righteousness, lost at the fall and regained in salvation.⁶⁸ However, because mankind retains the image intact, everyone is capable of gaining true knowledge of God through reason alone (natural theology) and doing good deeds apart from grace.⁶⁹ But this Catholic development of Irenaeus's view does not agree with the testimony of Scripture that the fall has seriously marred the human faculties of reason and will to the extent that fallen man actively suppresses the truth of God (Rom 1:18), does not know God or seek Him (3:11), and cannot subject himself to God (8:7) or please Him (v. 8; Heb 11:6).

⁶³ For Clines the whole man is the *imago Dei*, the "visible corporeal representative of the invisible, bodiless God." Passages like Gen 9:6, 1 Cor 11:7, and Jas 3:9, which prove that man is still the image of God, afford "no indication of a loss, or even a partial defacement of the image" ("Image of God," 100–101, emphasis added).

⁶⁴ Pelagius argued that physical death was a law of nature that man would have experienced without sin, and that passages mentioning death as the consequence of sin speak of moral corruption or eternal damnation (Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, 804). But there was only life, not death, for man before the fall. Furthermore, spiritual death, or man's separation from life with God, was the natural inheritance of the entire race from Adam (Eph 2:1–3; Rom 5:12).

⁶⁵ Jaroslav Pelikan, ed., *Luther's Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), vol. 1, 61–63.

⁶⁶ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV.4.3, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, V.6.1

⁶⁸ See Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, vol. 2, 126 for supporting quotations from Lombard, Bonaventure, and Aquinas.

⁶⁹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 523.

Scripture teaches that man remains in the image of God after the fall (Gen 9:6; 1 Cor 11:7; Jas 3:9). However, fallen man “is certainly not as fully like God as he was before.”⁷⁰ Earlier I defined the *imago Dei* as the complex of uniquely personal characteristics that God imparted to man at creation, which together comprised the immaterial aspect of his being. How did the fall affect these characteristics? Starting with intelligence, man is still a thinking and speaking being after the fall (Gen 3:10). But something is wrong: he does not think or speak the truth. Adam and Eve both deflect blame through rationalization, a hallmark of intellectual depravity (vv. 12–13).⁷¹

As for volition, man retains the power of thoughtful choice, but he tends toward wrong choices (4:8, 23; 6:5; 8:21). Morally, fallen man remains responsible for the moral choices he makes (3:11, 13; 4:7), but he lost the moral goodness of his character (6:5). Spiritually, sinful man cut himself off from face-to-face personal communion with God (3:10). Furthermore, he forfeited the enjoyment of eternal life in fellowship with God (vv. 22–24). Nevertheless, his soul remains immortal after the fall, and though fallen he is redeemable.

Besides the image itself, the important corollaries of rule and relationships were affected by the fall as well. Ruling a cursed and uncooperative creation was now toilsome and futile (3:17–19). Bearing children was now painful (v. 16a). Man still sought relationships in marriage and society, but they were now marred by sin (v. 16b; 4:8, 19, 23).

The fall affected the entire man, body and soul. His body dies, returning to the dust from whence it came (v. 19). The personal qualities that liken him to God formally remain, but are twisted and corrupt in their operation.⁷² The cause was the sinful desire to “be like God” (v. 5) and the ensuing rejection of God’s authority through disobedience. Though created in God’s image, man sought the impossible: equality with God. By thus cutting himself off from God, man gained only death and the distortion of all he was meant to be in fellowship with his God.⁷³ Fallen man now uses the bent tools of his heart and mind to serve himself instead of God. He goes astray from the womb (Ps 58:3). His heart is deceitful and desperately wicked (Jer 17:9). His mind and conscience are corrupted (Titus 1:15). He is darkened in understanding, excluded from the life of God, ignorant, and hard-hearted (Eph 4:18). He is foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved to lusts and pleasures (Titus 3:3). Yes, the image of God in man remains after the fall, but it is badly marred and in need of restoration and renewal in Christ.

⁷⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 444.

⁷¹ To rationalize is to “provide plausible but untrue reasons or motives for a course of conduct” (Gove, *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*, 1885).

⁷² Carl Henry distinguishes the formal and material image of God. The fall is not destructive of the formal image (man’s personality, i.e., his moral responsibility and intelligence), but the material image (man’s knowledge of God and God’s will for man) suffers distortion though not demolition (“Image of God,” 547). The recovery of what Henry calls the material image is presently taking place in the believer’s renewal to a true knowledge of God and to the righteousness and holiness of the truth (Col 3:10; Eph 4:24).

⁷³ God made man for personal and endless fellowship with Him, which is why He gave man rational understanding, a moral character, and spiritual life (Henry, “Image of God,” 548). Cutting himself off from God could only bring about a distortion of those qualities in man.

The Image of God and Culture

I have defined the image of God as the complex of personal characteristics which God imparted to man at creation. Together these characteristics comprise man's immaterial nature, which along with his physical nature suffer the effects of the fall. Now before exploring the relationship of the image of God to culture I wish to define the latter.

Definition of Culture

Simply put, culture is the "way of life" which people pass on from one generation to the next.⁷⁴ That way of life includes thought, speech, and behavior. Regarding thought, culture includes the beliefs, attitudes, values, and ideals that are characteristic of a particular people.⁷⁵ As for speech, language and culture are closely intertwined. In fact, language is culture in miniature. Just as we learn to speak by imitating others and mastering the rules which make communication with others possible, so in a broader sense we learn the vast array of rules that enable us to live with and relate to the people around us.⁷⁶ Language, a shared system of spoken, symbolic communication, is vital to culture since it is by language that people learn and transmit culture.⁷⁷ Finally, culture includes learned and shared ways of behaving.⁷⁸ In summary, culture is "the learned system of beliefs, feelings, and rules for living around which a group of people organizes their lives."⁷⁹

Creation and Culture

Grunlan and Mayers propose a biblical approach to the study of humanity, culture, and society which they call functional creation. Based on the Genesis account of creation and subsequent history, their approach begins with the premise that God created three major systems within which He wanted man to live. God created a natural system composed of the material universe, earth, and plant and animal life. God wanted man to live in harmony with creation; thus, the

⁷⁴ Richley H. Crapo, *Cultural Anthropology*, 5th ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2002), 48.

⁷⁵ Carol R. Ember and Melvin Ember, *Anthropology*, 9th ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1999), 173.

⁷⁶ Paul G. Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 48.

⁷⁷ Ember and Ember, *Anthropology*, 175.

⁷⁸ Stephen A. Grunlan and Marvin K. Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 39.

⁷⁹ Crapo, *Cultural Anthropology*, 48. Culture is both shared and learned. Culture is commonly shared by a population; however, not everything they share is culture. Only those things that are both learned and shared are culture. For example, eating is a necessity we all share, but it is not a learned behavior. However, what, when, and how we eat is learned and therefore part of culture (Ember and Ember, *Anthropology*, 173–74). Bronislaw Malinowski has devised a model for relating human needs to culture. Humans share seven basic biological and psychological needs, which Malinowski calls impulses to act. They are: (1) metabolism (oxygen, liquid, food); (2) reproduction; (3) bodily comforts (met by housing and clothing); (4) safety (prevention of injury by accident or attack); (5) movement (games, sports); (6) growth (movement from infancy, childhood, adulthood, old age); and (7) health (maintenance and repair of biological organism). The act taken to meet each impulse is a cultural response, which leads to biological and psychological satisfaction. Malinowski called this process from biological/psychological impulse, to cultural act, to biological/psychological satisfaction the Permanent Vital Sequence (Bronislaw Malinowski, *A Scientific Theory of Culture and Other Essays* [Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1944, cited in Grunlan and Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology*, 40–50).

natural system concerns the relationship of man to his environment. God also created a social system. God wanted man to live in harmony with his fellows; thus, the social system concerns the relationship of man with his fellow man. Finally, God created a spiritual system. God wanted man to live in harmony with his God; thus, the spiritual system concerns the relationship of man with God.⁸⁰

Underlying the functional creation theory is the idea that God's creation is functional or purposeful. Each system is orderly, with underlying principles or laws for their proper governance. This is what makes science possible. Thus, as Grunlan and Mayers point out, the natural sciences seek to discover God's order in the natural realm, while the behavioral sciences seek to discover God's order in the realm of human behavior.⁸¹ In line with the third system God created, I would further add that theology, as the queen of the sciences, seeks not only to discover God's order in the spiritual realm, but also to bring together the natural and behavioral realms under the umbrella of the spiritual realm for the formulation of a unified Christian worldview.⁸²

Image of God and Culture

The functional creation theory fits well with what we read in the opening pages of Scripture. God created the heavens and the earth. God filled the earth with plants and animals, preparing it for man to utilize and rule. God created man as male and female for human companionship, procreation, and socialization. Most importantly, God created man in His own image so that man

⁸⁰ Grunlan and Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology*, 38.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁸² Along these same lines, I would add a spiritual impulse or need to the biological and psychological impulses of Malinowski's Permanent Vital sequence. The spiritual impulse leads to the cultural act of religion, resulting in spiritual satisfaction. As far as we know, all societies have had religion as part of their culture (Ember and Ember, *Anthropology*, 421). Secular scholars take either a subjective or evolutionary approach to human religion. In the former, religion is taken to be the product of man's addressing various psychological needs. In the latter, religion is viewed as part of the overall development of human culture from simple to complex. The evolutionary stages of religion are fetishism, animism, polytheism, henotheism, and finally monotheism. A third approach is original monotheism. While the subjective approach cannot explain the origin of religion, and the evolutionary approach fails to describe what we actually observe happening in human religion, the approach of original monotheism does both. It locates the beginning of religion in God Himself. It also explains why, in spite of the great complexity of human religion, virtually every religious culture carries a vestige of monotheistic tenets found in the early chapters of Scripture: there is one personal, masculine God; He resides in heaven; He has great knowledge and power; He created the world; He is the author of standards of good and evil; man is God's creature and is expected to abide by God's standards; man has become alienated from God by disobeying God's standards; God has provided a method of overcoming this alienation. All the stages of religion in the evolutionary model are found in reality, but there is constant change in all directions. Under the model of original monotheism, several inferences can be drawn. First, there is an initial, decisive movement away from monotheism—a falling away from or corruption of true belief. Second, while there is no clear pattern, one thing holds true: as monotheism is left behind, ritual and magic increase. Third, once monotheism is abandoned, change usually continues to occur. Thus, a spiritual principle of increased randomness appears to operate in human religion, somewhat akin to the second law of thermodynamics in the physical world: "*A religious culture, left without strong guidance, will tend toward ritual and magic*" (Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions* [Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1998], 21–35, emphasis original).

could fulfill God's purposes of enjoying intimate fellowship with God, ruling and subduing God's creation, and interacting with his fellows as God intended.

The functional creation theory likewise fits well with what I've argued concerning the image of God in man. The image of God is that complex of personal characteristics (intelligence, volition, morality, spirituality) which God imparted to man at creation. These characteristics comprise man's immaterial nature and bear resemblance to God's own nature. God designed man purposefully, creating him first and foremost for personal and endless fellowship with his God. This is the spiritual system. God also created man in His image to carry out two corollary functions: to subdue the earth and rule the lower creatures; and to enjoy relationships in marriage, family, and society. These are the natural and social systems.

Therefore, culture lies at the intersection of man's nature as God's image-bearer, and the assignments God has given man to commune with his God, to rule and subdue God's creation as His royal representative, and to enjoy harmonious relations with his fellow man. Man and culture are inseparable. It is by means of intellect and language that culture is both learned and transmitted. Thus, man cannot speak or think at all without the aid of culture.⁸³

The relational nature of man likewise necessitates culture.

He must procreate children, not because the sex urge is unconquerable by reason alone, but because he was made for this end among others, and cannot be disobedient to the requirement given with nature prior to any culture without denying what nature affirms and he affirms by living. He must organize social relations, because he is created social, intelligent, and free, inescapably a member of a group yet never an ant in its hill or a molecule in the crystal.⁸⁴

Every facet of man's activity is by divine purpose, carried out in the realm of culture.

In his sex life, in eating and drinking, in commanding and obeying other men, he is in the realm of God by divine ordering under divine orders. Since none of these activities can be carried on without the use of human intelligence and will, on a purely instinctive level, since man as created is endowed and burdened with freedom as he moves among necessities, culture is itself a divine requirement.⁸⁵

The opening chapters of Genesis bear this out. God created man in His image for fellowship with God, dominion over the earth, and relationships with his fellow man. God created man as male

⁸³ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951), 69. Buswell notes that "the first human pair could not possibly have survived without at least some aspects of what we call human culture. Of the necessary aspects of culture for human survival, the power to communicate by language would naturally be of the first rank" (*Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, 360–61). Buswell also sees in Adam's naming the animals and tending the garden the beginnings of animal husbandry and agriculture and horticulture before sin came into the world (*Systematic Theology*, 362–63).

⁸⁴ Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 122.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

and female, blessing them to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, and rule over the animals of the earth (Gen 1:27–28). The image of God in man was not destroyed by the fall, neither were the divine mandates to fill the earth and subdue it retracted. Post-fall man remains in the image of God (9:6), and his God-given tasks to fill the earth and subdue it are repeated (vv. 1–3, 7). Man’s job of living within the natural and social systems God created for him remains, as does his responsibility to keep God’s laws in the spiritual realm (vv. 4–5). Culture is part of the very fabric of who man is and what he is to be about in this world, and the fall has not changed this.⁸⁶

Genesis 4 mentions the development of culture after the fall. Cain and his descendents built cities (v. 17), married and had families (vv. 17–22), dwelt in tents and tended livestock (v. 20), made musical instruments (v. 21), forged metal implements (v. 22), and developed systems of legal justice (vv. 23–24).⁸⁷ None of these cultural activities are presented as being evil in themselves, or the sinful results of the fall. There is nothing intrinsically evil about building cities, dwelling in tents, marrying and having families, tending livestock, playing musical instruments, forging metal implements, or developing legal systems.⁸⁸ On the contrary, these cultural elements came about precisely because man, though fallen, continued on the earth in God’s image to rule over it and relate to his fellows according to the creative purpose of God.

What we do find in Genesis 4 and beyond is “the development of technology and arts on the one hand and the growth of violence on the other.”⁸⁹ Although Lamech claimed self-defense and demanded protection from vengeance, he nevertheless murdered a man for merely wounding him, and made it a point of boasting to his two wives (vv. 23–24).⁹⁰ As man multiplied (6:1) so did his sin, so that before long “the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and ... every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (v. 5). The earth became corrupt and full of violence (v. 11).

But in spite of man’s sinfulness, the cultural elements of Genesis 4 are not evil in and of themselves, as later Scriptures bear out. Building cities is not evil. God builds cities (Heb 11:10; Rev 21:2). Marriage and families are not evil. Children are a gift from God (Ps 127:3), and marriage is honorable and its bed undefiled (Heb 13:4). Dwelling in tents and herding livestock are not evil. God Himself dwelt in a tent among men (2 Sam 7:6), and gave animals to man for sacrifice (Gen 4:4) and food (9:3). Musical instruments are not evil. God is praised with the

⁸⁶ Psalm 8 confirms this. In vv. 3–8 the psalmist ponders how the majestic God of creation has crowned lowly man with glory and majesty, making him to rule over the works of His hands, and putting all of creation under his feet. The psalmist is not reminiscing about what man once was, but declaring what he still is before God on this earth.

⁸⁷ Even before this presentation of the cultural achievements of Cain’s descendents we read that Cain himself was a tiller of the ground and his brother Abel a keeper of flocks (v. 20).

⁸⁸ It is interesting that according to the pseudepigraphal book of 1 Enoch, fallen angels who cohabited and reproduced with human women (cf. Gen 6:1–4) are the ones who introduced to mankind the knowledge of plants, “the cutting of roots,” “magical medicine” (7:2), the art of making weapons and ornaments out of metal, of ornamentation and cosmetics (8:1), and the use of precious stones (v. 2) (James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983], vol. 1, 16).

⁸⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 116.

⁹⁰ Lamech’s polygamy also appears to be a corruption of the marriage ideal as the one-flesh union of one man and one woman from Genesis 2.

music of man-made instruments (Ps 150:3–5). Forging metal is not evil. With various metals God’s tabernacle was constructed (Exod 38:21–31), and plowshares and pruning hooks will be the implements of God’s kingdom (Isa 2:4). Developing legal systems is not evil. God gave Moses His law for Israel (Exodus 20–23), and we are under Christ’s law (1 Cor 9:21) as well as human governing authorities by divine command (Rom 13:1–7).

No, Scripture does not present culture itself as evil, but rather condemns the making of evil culture. This is because culture-making is bound up in being human, and being human is not evil. Even fallen man bears the image of God. By the same token, then, Scripture does not fault a man for thinking, speaking, and acting, for to cease them is to cease being human.⁹¹ Rather, it is a man’s evil thoughts, evil speech, and evil actions that Scripture condemns.

Likewise, returning to the cultural elements of Genesis 4, it is the building of cities for self-glorification that God condemns (Gen 11:4–8). It is the breaking of the marriage covenant that God hates (Exod 20:14; Mal 2:16). It is the coveting and stealing of another’s possessions (Exod 20:16, 17) and the improper use of animals (Gen 9:4) that God forbids. It is music employed for debauchery and idolatry that God condemns (Exod 32:6, 18–19; Dan 3:14–18). It is metal idols (Isa 46:5–7) and murder weapons (Matt 26:52) that God forbids. It is unjust laws (Isa 10:1) and unjust judges (Deut 16:19) that God hates.

Man in God’s image and man-made culture are inseparably linked. Man can no more escape culture than undo his humanity. To denounce all culture would require a man to cease thinking altogether and remain forever mute.

The Christian and Culture

Because fallen man is still in God’s image, he *must* think, speak, act, and engage himself in the God-ordained tasks of ruling the earth and relating to others in marriage and society. However, because man in God’s image is fallen, he thinks, speaks, and acts in ways contrary to God’s will, and his rule over the earth and his relations with others are corrupted by sin. To be human is not evil, but all humans are evil. Culture is not evil, but all cultures are the products of evil men and are therefore contaminated by evil. Because of this reality, believers struggle with an age-long dilemma: what is the relationship between the believer and his culture, between Christian and cultural life? Can or should we attempt to reconcile the two?

H. Richard Niebuhr explored this question in his book *Christ and Culture* and came up with five ways that Christians have understood the relationship between their faith and culture. In light of the above presentation regarding the close relationship between man in God’s image and man-made culture, and the effect of the fall on both, we can begin to eliminate some of Niebuhr’s models.

⁹¹ I am speaking here of normal human activity, not of exceptional conditions such as life in the womb, birth defect, injury, or old age, when the normal human functions of thought, speech, and activity may not be taking place.

According to the Christ against Culture model, all culture is pagan and evil; therefore, the believer must separate himself entirely from culture. But this is impossible. As we have seen, man cannot divorce himself from culture. He cannot even speak or think without it.⁹² By the very act of arguing the view, proponents of this model deny in action what they want to affirm in words: the possibility of sole dependence on Christ to exclusion of culture.⁹³

The Christ of Culture model views culture as basic and good. Proponents seek to harmonize Christ and culture, selecting from Christ's teaching that which agrees with the best of culture.⁹⁴ By interpreting Christ wholly in cultural terms they eliminate all sense of tension between Christ and culture.⁹⁵ This model has an unrealistic view of the goodness of man and culture. As a result, proponents accommodate Christ to culture to the point of distortion.⁹⁶ Cultural loyalty so qualifies loyalty to Christ that Christ is abandoned in favor of an idol called by his name.⁹⁷

Niebuhr's three remaining models fall between the extremes of devotion to Christ to the rejection of culture and devotion to culture to the mere inclusion of Christ. Niebuhr calls proponents of these mediating positions synthesists (Christ above Culture), dualists (Christ and Culture in Paradox), and conversionists (Christ the Transformer of Culture).⁹⁸

Proponents of the Christ above Culture model affirm both Christ and culture. They understand the duality of the Christian life, and seek to combine in a single structure of thought and conduct the distinctly different elements of each sphere.⁹⁹ But this model, like the Christ of Culture model, fails to recognize "the radical evil present in all human work."¹⁰⁰ It also tends to absolutize what is culturally relative, and to equate a cultural view of God's law with that law itself.¹⁰¹

The Christ and Culture in Paradox model differs from the previous one by recognizing degradation and corruption in all of man's work. However, in distinction from the Christ against Culture position, followers of the Paradox model know that they belong to culture and cannot get out of it.¹⁰² The institutions of pagan culture cannot perform the positive function of advancing the believer toward life in Christ, but they do perform the negative function of restraining wickedness in a sinful world.¹⁰³ What results is a dualism of the "How" and "What" of conduct: the believer receives from Christ the knowledge and freedom to do faithfully and lovingly what

⁹² Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 69, hereafter CAC.

⁹³ Ibid. Furthermore, Christ's demands for holiness meet resistance because of a man's nature, not his culture (CAC, 78). Sin is in man, not located somewhere outside of his soul and body (CAC, 79).

⁹⁴ Ibid., 83.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 85.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 109.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 110.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 120.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 122.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 148.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 145.

¹⁰² Ibid., 156.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 167.

culture teaches or requires him to do.¹⁰⁴ The problem with this model is that it can tend toward antinomianism and cultural conservatism. Since all the laws of society are relative and bound up in sin, the temptation to “cast aside the rules of civilized living” is always near.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, since cultural institutions belong wholly to an evil and dying world, there is little motivation to fix them or view them as positive agents for advancement in godliness.¹⁰⁶

This leaves Niebuhr’s fifth and final model: Christ the Transformer of Culture. The major difference between this model and the previous is that although it recognizes that sin is deeply rooted in the human soul and pervades all man’s work, it is more positive and hopeful toward culture.¹⁰⁷ Man’s nature is not something bad that shouldn’t exist, but rather it is something good that has become corrupted. What man needs is the transformation of his nature, not its annihilation. Likewise, man’s culture is a perverted good—an evil as perversion, not as badness of being. Like man himself, his culture needs conversion, not replacement.¹⁰⁸

In light of the close relationship between man in God’s image and culture, and the similar effect the fall has had on them as a corruption of something good, Niebuhr’s last model appears to capture what our relationship with culture should be. As an extension of man in God’s image, man’s culture, though corrupted by sin, can and should be transformed into that which brings glory to God. This is true of man himself. Although marred by the fall, he remains in God’s image. He is defective yet redeemable. Through salvation in Christ he is undergoing renewal in the spirit of his mind, in accordance with the new man who has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth (Eph 4:23–24). This new man in Christ is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the God who created him (Col 3:10). As those who are in Christ by the Spirit, we are being transformed by that same Spirit into the very image of Christ “from one stage of glory to yet a higher stage” (2 Cor 3:18),¹⁰⁹ until the day we attain the perfect state for which God chose us: conformity to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29). On that day we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is (1 John 3:2).

How does the transformation of the individual believer relate to the transformation of his culture? Well how does the apostle Paul describe the believer’s transformation? He does it in terms of the putting off of that which is corrupt and sinful, and the putting on of that which is God-honoring (Eph 4:25–32; Col 3:1–17). The transformation of culture is similar. The believer is to put off elements of his culture that are sinful and put on those that please God. I will use language as a simple illustration. Language and culture are inseparable. We learn and transmit culture by means of language. Language is culture in miniature. How does the transformed believer effect the transformation of the cultural element of language? He does not invent a new tongue. Rather, he puts off corrupt speech (Eph 4:25a, 29a, 31; Col 3:8–9) and puts on true, good, kind, edifying speech (Eph 4:25b, 29b, 32)—in a word, speech that glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ (Col 3:16–17). The Christian neither repudiates his language as evil, nor uses it exactly

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 175.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 187.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 188.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 191.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 194.

¹⁰⁹ Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, WBC (Waco: Word, 1986), 72.

like his unsaved countrymen; rather, he transforms it as he does his own heart into something that brings honor and glory to God.

The second-century “disciple” who penned the Letter to Diognetus had this to say:

Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity.... But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life.... They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh.¹¹⁰

Scholars believe this disciple’s mentor may have been Paul himself, who wrote similarly that “though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh [but] are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:4–5). Paul followed his Lord, who prayed not that His disciples would be removed from the world, but that they would remain in the world but not of the world, undergoing sanctification by the word of truth (John 17:14–17).

Conclusion

My goal in this paper has not been to delve into the many intricacies of the Christian’s relationship to culture. My more modest goal has merely been to offer a definition of the *imago Dei*, to draw a line between it and culture, and then to conclude with just a rough sketch of how the believer ought to view and relate to culture.

I have argued for a substantive view of the *imago Dei*. The image of God is that complex of uniquely personal characteristics (intelligence, volition, morality, spirituality) that God imparted to man at creation, which together comprise his immaterial nature. The corollaries of rule and relationships, while not the image itself, are important since they reveal God’s purposes in creating man to bear His image: that man would enjoy personal relationships with God and his fellows; and that man would rule creation as God’s royal representative.

Culture lies at the intersection of man’s nature as God’s image-bearer, and the assignments God has given him to relate to others and rule the earth. While man in God’s image and man-made culture suffer the corrupting effects of the fall, both man and his culture are redeemable. Because fallen man remains in God’s image, in Christ he can be transformed to reflect the true image of God. His culture, as the natural outgrowth of his life in God’s image, can likewise be transformed from that which is corrupt and fails to reflect the image of God to that which is honoring and glorifying to God. In every sphere of his life in culture—in “whatever [he does] in

¹¹⁰ *The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus*, V, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1.

word or deed”—the believer can “do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father” (Col 3:17).