

The likeness between Gods and humans is so basic to the primeval history (Gen 1–11) that there is even the possibility of blurring the categories. In Genesis 6, the divine “sons of God” are anthropomorphic (more precisely, andromorphic) enough to have intercourse with human women. There is no talk of their transformation to *become* men. “Sons of God” and men are already of the same species, as evidenced by the ability of both to fertilize human females. A similar point can be made about those who build the Tower of Babel. They are already theomorphic in the range of their power (as demonstrated by the scope of their building). They need not transform themselves into Gods; they are already showing the (almost omnipotent) power of Gods: “nothing will be lacking for them,” says God, “which they set their minds to do” (11:6). In an earlier story, humans needed only to eat from the tree of life to become (in the words of Yahweh himself) “one of us” (3:22). To be sure, the blurring of divine and human is frowned upon in later Jewish literature (see esp. 1 En 12:4, 15:3–6). Yet the very fact that such stories *were* written and sacralized indicates that humans crossing over into the category of the divine was a real possibility inherent in Hebrew thought.

These stories are evidence of a way of thinking in Hebrew culture often neglected by exegetes who rigorously maintain a creator-creature binary across the entire Hebrew Bible. But this binary does not take into account the mediation of categories: i. e., the divine-human approximation (God in human form; humans in divine form) assumed by many texts in the Hebrew Bible. Yet even if we posit an inseparable barrier between creator and creatures, God the creator has still shared his form (or image) with human creatures (Gen 1:26). Their difference is never final.

### The Meaning of Iconic Similarity

Let us follow the thread of humanity’s iconic likeness to God in more depth. In Genesis, what the “image” (εἰκών) of God consists of may never (and may never have been *meant* to) be reduced to a single element. A range of characteristics and functions have been proposed in medieval and modern theology: sexuality, relationality, reason, etc.<sup>28</sup>

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28 For a survey of Old Testament research on this topic, see Gunnlaugur A. Jónsson, *The Image of God: Genesis 1:26–28 in a Century of Old Testament Research*,

Initially, I am less interested in pinpointing the specific divine quality possessed by humans than in stating the basic fact: human beings, according to the first chapter of the Bible, are iconically like God. This fundamental likeness provides (as we see in Gen 3, 6, and 11) the basis for the further step: mixing with and potentially entering the class of divine beings.

Those who were part of the class of divine beings were, as we noted, called “the sons of God” (οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ) (Gen 6:2; Ps 28[29]:1; 88:7 [89:6]; 81[82]:6). Divine sonship links back to the divine image, as is indicated in Gen 5:3. Here Adam begets a son “in his likeness, according to his image” (כְּצַלְמוֹ בְּדְמוּתוֹ; κατὰ τὴν ἰδέαν αὐτοῦ καὶ κατὰ τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ). The language in Gen 1:26 is similar, except for the prepositions, which appear to be interchangeable: “in our image, according to our likeness” (בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ; κατ’ εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ κατ’ ὁμοίωσιν).<sup>29</sup> It seems, then, that even in Gen 1:26, Yahweh wants to draw humankind (אָדָם; ἄνθρωπος) into a kinship relation with himself. As an image of God, the human is a son of God. Accordingly, the author of the Gospel of Luke can write that Adam, created in God’s image, is genealogically (and genetically?) speaking, “son of God” ([υἱός] τοῦ Θεοῦ) (3:38; cf. 17:28b). By making humankind in the image and likeness of himself and the other divine beings (note “Let us”), Yahweh makes humans his children and thus strikingly close to the “sons of God” who in Gen 6 and Ps 28(29):1 are part of the class of divine beings.

When we turn to the historical meaning of human iconicity, Hebrew Bible scholars have allowed us to see it at least in part as a *morphological* and thus *physical* similarity to Godself.<sup>30</sup> In the words of Benjamin Sommer, Genesis 1:26–27 “assert that human beings have the same form as God and other heavenly beings.” The words צֶלֶם (εἰκῶν) and דְּמוּת (ὁμοίωσις) refer to the “physical contours of God.”<sup>31</sup> To share

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Vol. 26 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1988), 253; Edward Mason Curtis, *Man as the Image of God in Genesis in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Parallels* (Ph.D. Diss., University Of Pennsylvania, 1984), 40–50.

29 T. N. D. Mettinger, “Abbild oder Urbild?” *Zeitschrift für alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 86 (1974): 406–407.

30 J. M. Miller, “In the “Image” and “Likeness” of God,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91 (1972): 291–93.

31 Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 69. Classical rabbinic texts often understand the צֶלֶם in Gen 1:26–27 to refer to the human body (Alon Goshen-Gottstein, “The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature,” *Harvard Theological Review*