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Created in the Image of God: The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the *Imago Dei*

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In 1500, the German artist Albrecht Dürer painted a self-portrait. The result is striking because Dürer chose to portray himself in a manner that had hitherto been reserved for devotional figures of the divine. The artist is shown half-length, staring intensely at the viewer (e.g. himself). Although the facial features do resemble those of the sitter, Dürer idealized his own physiognomy, conforming it to late medieval depictions of Christ. Moreover, the positioning of the artist's right hand in the scene imitates the iconography of the act of blessing by the *Salvator Mundi*, the "Savior of the World."¹

While the *Self-portrait of 1500* has been derided as an example of personal vain-glory,² sympathetic critics have attempted to cast their analysis in a more "theological" manner. It is argued that to Dürer's way of thinking, "the creative power of a good painter derives from, and to some measure is part of the creative power of God. . . ;" the artist himself writing, "God is honored when it appears that He has given such insight to a creature in whom such art resides."³

For Dürer, *experientia*, or "observation of nature," was the "noblest of the five senses," and that which most clearly reflected the "insight" of God.⁴ In fact, one art historian goes so far as to label the work, a "confession" and a

"sermon." "It states, not what the artist claims to be, but what he most humbly endeavors to become: a man entrusted with a gift which implies both the triumph and tragedy of the *Eritis sicut Deus* ('You shall be like God')."⁵

In many ways, Albrecht Dürer's work epitomizes the church's continual grappling over the *imago Dei*, "the image of God."⁶ For some, the "image of God" is in the eye of the beholder: that aspect of one's own personality, character, or talent, which—in their view (*experientia*)—is uniquely reflective of the "divine in us."⁷

However, with the rise of historical-critical study of the Bible in the late nineteenth century, a different venue to dealing with the issue was opened.⁸ Upon the discovery of thousands of texts by archaeologists, scholars turned to ancient Near Eastern parallels to try to explain the *imago Dei*.⁹ And on this basis, it is now generally accepted that the phrase is derived from "royal language" attested from Mesopotamia and Egypt, wherein a king or pharaoh is sometimes called the "*image of (a) god*." While supposedly being "democratized" in the Genesis account, such an observation readily lends itself to the idea that human beings function as the divine image through the exercise of "dominion" and "rule."

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Still, even though there is something of a consensus in current biblical scholarship that the “exercise of rulership” is to be equated with the *imago Dei*, a number of questions must be addressed:

* What does the term “*image*” actually denote in the Ancient Near East?¹⁰ More pressing, *what* was an “image” and *how* did it *function*?

* Secondly, what are the immediate and broader biblical contexts in which this phrase “the image of God” occurs, and what bearing does a narrative reading have on the discussion?

* Finally, what does it mean that humanity was “*created in the image of God?*” It is often assumed that this clause refers to the making of human beings *as* “an image,” or fashioning men and women *into* an image, e.g. as somehow reflecting /mirroring God or some aspect of God’s own act or being. But some serious theological and grammatical difficulties arise despite the widespread acceptance of such translations and interpretations.

The Image in the Ancient Near East

Addressing the first point, in the Ancient Near East, the primary purpose of an image (Heb. *selem*) was to demarcate the boundaries and limits in, and from which, a higher power exercised legitimate rule: the “image” transmitted the message and claim of its owner. Thus, in the ancient world, an image is best described as a *sign* or *herald* which *pointed back* to its original author and promulgator.¹¹

Despite the overwhelming association of the term with an inanimate object—a stela, a standard, a carved or cast figure—human beings also functioned as “images.” We have already mentioned that kings were called the “image of a deity.” But it must be quickly stated that monarchs, when so named, were themselves regarded not as autonomous beings, but rather as serving the god, e.g. the Divine King, who appointed the individual to their office. This is no minor point, for it shows that mundane royal power was derived from, and circumscribed by, divine *fiat*.¹² As a result, a king or pharaoh was not so much the “(mirror/physical twin) image of a god”—as is usually understood—but was an “image/instrument for a deity,” e.g. one who acted on behalf of, and by, the consent of the divine. More precisely, the ruler was a *retainer* whose foremost duty was to uphold a way of life that was regarded as transcendent in origin.¹³ Theoretically, a king as the “*image for a god,*” had no inherent authority: power was (temporarily) invested in the person upon the occupancy of an office (Kingship) which had been *granted* to them. No matter a monarch’s boasts to the contrary, his hierarchical position in ancient society was *penultimate*: it was the sovereign’s task to testify to, and carry out, the word and intention of The Ultimate (the Divine Realm).

Not surprisingly, beneath such rulers stood their own officials who served in a similar representative capacity as “royal images.” Judges, priests, ambassadors, and vassals,

were placed in power by the grace of the sovereign, and the recipients of such largesse were to be entirely subservient to the command of their patron. Officers were obliged to transmit the king’s word, and not their own. Initiatives were to be guided and approved by the throne. Rumors—no matter how trivial—were to be reported back to the capital for the ruler’s decision.

What must be stressed in all of this, is that the “image” is to be understood as a *legal and political* concept. It expressed the reality of a very specific arrangement: an “image” was thought of, and described in terms of responsibility—of “*obedient servanthood.*” In the Ancient Near East, this ideal was exemplified by the title, *arad kitti*, “the faithful servant.”¹⁴

The *arad kitti* was the figure who was loyal to his sovereign’s command even in the face of great temptation to desert to another lord; or to rebel and go one’s own way; or who, because of adversity, was tempted to override the counsel of the superior because of the risk to one’s immediate safety or personal satisfaction. Essentially, the individual appointed as “an image of/for” a king or deity was in a *covenantal relationship*: a person’s duty being the carrying out of the bond which tied the parties to one another as *Lord and Servant*.

If one accepts that the reading “God created man *in his image*” in Genesis 1 has its origins in “royal ideology” of the Ancient Near East, then, it is against, and within, this symbolic world of *Office and Obligation* that the biblical concept of the *imago Dei* should be considered.

The Immediate Biblical Context of Genesis 1:26-27

The Scriptural context in which the phrase, “the image of God” appears, is the making of humanity by God—the penultimate act of creation, occurring on the sixth day. This event is part of, and culminates, a much longer sequence which is marked by a sense of “orderliness,” conveyed by the general pattern of:

- 1) God speaks;
- 2) The accomplishment of the divine command;
- 3) God recognizes the result as “good;”
- 4) Date.

Commentators have long acknowledged the deliberate nature of the account of chapter 1, and have noted parallels between the Genesis narrative of the formation of the cosmos, and a type of text found elsewhere in the Ancient Near East known as the “building” or “dedicatory” inscription.

This rather broad characterization—while useful—needs to be elaborated further: the creation of the world in Genesis 1:1-2:4 describes the construction of a particular type of architecture—a *temple*.¹⁵ God, acting in the role of a king:

- * First designates by decree the spot acceptable for a cult-shrine (Gen. 1:3);

- * Followed by the formation of the roof and floor (Gen. 1:7, 10);
- * Next, God provides a place for ritual ablution and cleansing (Gen. 1:10);
- * Then, he furnishes appropriate illumination and timetables for the tasks to be carried out within the edifice (Gen. 1:14-15);
- * Finally, God stocks the sanctuary with materials for use within the designated area (Gen. 1:20-25);
- * At each juncture, the work “in progress” is inspected and approved (“It was good”).

Within this literary scheme, the subsequent formation of human beings as “male” and “female” “in the image of God,” would parallel the installation of “images” within an ancient shrine. Presupposing the conceptual background offered above, the purpose of these human “images” would have been regarded in functional terms: *to represent, bear witness to, and to serve under*, the authority of the Divine/Royal Patron.

These *images*—just like the personnel of a sovereign in the Ancient Near East—are to speak and act on the basis of their commission. Established in their office—in their position as “*image for God*”—they are to be nothing more, and nothing less, than the *arad kitti*, “the loyal servant” of their Lord, *bound to, constrained, and defined by, His Sovereign Word alone*.

Taken in this way, the biblical specification of humankind “in the image of/for God” as “male” and “female” is not just a designation of gender, but should be considered as the assignation of mutual *responsibility and duty, e.g. ethics*.¹⁶ Both *men and women—as such*—are chosen for their position to acknowledge faithfully the sovereignty of their Creator over them and their office.

The precise role given to corporate humanity of male-female “in the image of/for God”—best understood as “in the service of God”—is announced by the Deity in Gen. 1:26, and reiterated in Gen. 1:28-30:

And God blessed them, and God said to them: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” And God said: “Behold, I have given to you every plant yielding seed. . . you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every plant for food.”

Here, blessing is the act of *investiture*: humanity’s tasks are both assigned and effected by Divine Mandate, with God’s benediction being cast in the form of a threefold *royal grant*:

1) Servant/herald-humanity is given the ability to reproduce; the intended emphasis being that the office of “image” is to be filled and exercised in perpetuity, a common motif in the awarding of royal posts.¹⁷

2) Servant/herald-humanity is allowed to “subdue” and “have dominion” over the rest of Creation and its inhabitants. The phraseology is very subtle here: while seemingly having the implication of unlimited power, the terms “subdue it” (Heb. *kivsuaḥ*) and “have dominion” (Heb. *redu*) may also be rendered in a more benign fashion, as “domesticating” and “shepherding.”¹⁸ The exercise of such prerogatives, thus, is to be directed towards, and contributes to, the primary task of humanity’s “image/office” of “servanthood” under the jurisdiction of the Divine.

3) Humankind—as with any officeholder or vassal in the Ancient Near East—is granted victuals and provender: a salary and pension as benefit of its position of being in relationship to its lord.

The stress of the text is that whatever authority humanity has to yield, does not arise out of any natural ability in Man, but has its sole basis in the mercy, generosity, and permission of the Divine Suzerain towards it.

Following humankind’s installation “in the image/service of God,” within the world which has been purposefully fashioned as the Temple of God, the Lord of the Sanctuary declares everything that he has done to be “very good.” “Good/goodness” (*tov*) is characteristic of juridical language in the Ancient Near East.¹⁹ The term denotes that which is “fitting and proper as effected by the action of the superior in the formulation of a binding relationship between two parties.” This biblical “good,” therefore, is not to be derived from some neutral point, nor is it to be regarded primarily as an aesthetic quality; but it, too, is “legal” in nature. “Good/goodness” is “*that which is agreeable to the initiator and author of the covenant*.”

The acknowledgment that “everything that he has made—behold—it was very good,” is the declaration that each aspect in God’s creative plan is duly suited for its respective role: the parts contribute to the proper fulfillment of the whole. And significantly enough, Creation concludes—not with the making of humanity—but with the institution of the Sabbath: the great festival in which God is to be honored, is established as the true goal of the divine *acta*.

Within this immediate scriptural context, the making of human beings “in the image of God,” would denote that all mortal action is to be directed towards the glorification of the Lord of the Covenant and Builder of His Sanctuary. Importantly, human beings—*male and female, equally and together*—are granted a sacral responsibility. They are, by expressed decree, to be “priests,” servants, and heralds for their Divine Suzerain.

The formation of humanity in Gen. 1:26-27, “in the image/service of God” above all else, would refer to the inauguration of a particular post and tenure. Analogous to historical practice in the Ancient Near East, such a contractual office is to be regarded as a privilege: it is not to be seized, taken over, or arbitrarily changed by, the occupants on their own terms. Rather, it is to be received in

gratitude, carried out in humility, and—bound to the Lord of the Covenant, and guided by his Word—*its sole purpose is revealed* to be the joyful service and exaltation of God.²⁰

Another Reading of Genesis 1:26-27

One of the difficulties in dealing with the *imago Dei* is the rarity of the phrase itself in the Bible. Other scriptural references to it are largely dependent upon its initial usage in Gen. 1:26-27, and this scarcity has readily lent itself to speculation. Nevertheless, explanations of the term which posit some sort of “resemblance” between God and humanity—whether ontologically or analogically—have to overcome the problem of the utter transcendence of God in his Being and Act from that which he has created: God is God, and human beings are human beings.

Moreover, there are also other peculiarities of Gen.1:26-27 with which one must reckon. Contrary to usual Hebrew syntax, the verb *bara*, “to make, create,” normally does not take the preposition *be-*, “in,” to signify a secondary object, as the translations of these verses would suppose (“Let us make man *in* our image. . .so God created man *in* his own image”).²¹ Only in the Genesis passages referring to the *imago Dei* is such a formulation in evidence. But both its exceptional grammar, as well as the theological objections raised above, serve to caution us that such a rendering is not to be automatically assumed.

In this regard, however, it should be pointed out that the phrases, “in the image of,” and “according to the likeness (of)” are attested frequently in extra-biblical writings from the Ancient Near East as idioms. In ancient Egyptian, for example, “in the image of” is a simple designation for “oneself;” while “according to the likeness of” expresses the notion of “completeness” or “totality,” e.g. “totally.”²² These phrases are used as adjunct or appositives to nouns, and emphasize the idea of “one’s own self.” Thus, the lexical arrangement—Proper Name + qualifier “in the image of PN”/ “according to the likeness of PN”—means, “an individual *himself, completely* (did something); or “someone—*on their own*—(did something).” The terminology is self-referential, and is used to convey the concept of *sui generis*, or uniqueness.

Despite the complex interpretative history of the *imago Dei*, it is quite attractive to take Gen. 1:26-27 in this fashion: the Hebrew phrases *besalmenu*, “in his (lit. our) image,”²³ and *kidmuthenu*, “according to his (our) likeness” are to be seen as idiomatic, parallel to similar constructions attested in other Ancient Near Eastern languages.

Furthermore, we would suggest that these figurative expressions belong not to the predicate “man/humanity” (*adam*), but are to be linked, instead, to the subject “God:” lit. “God-in God’s-own image/according-to-God’s likeness created man.” Such a possibility is supported by the Hebrew word order, and is, in fact, quite plausible in light of Gen. 1:27, where “in the image of” is placed at the beginning of the clause, being closely bound to the subject “he,” i.e. “God:” “It is in- his- image, that God created humanity.”²⁴

What would “*God-in-the-image of God/God-according to his likeness*” signify? On the one hand, it would merely be a formula for saying: “God himself, totally (or accordingly).” Yet, this would have great significance within the overall discussion of the *imago Dei*, since it would be an attempt by the biblical witness to stress that God had undertaken the creation of humankind in his complete and utter sovereignty: it is God alone, by his grace, that he made this *adam*.

“God-in-God’s image, according-to-his-likeness,” e.g. “God’s own self—completely,” is the revelation that this deity has freely undertaken the formation and commissioning of man: it is God who acts out of, and in, and from, his own authority. If such a reading is valid, several implications may be drawn from the text:

* Gen 1:26-27 would be stating that humans are not formed “into” or “as” “the divine image,” at all. Rather, this “image” and “likeness”²⁵ is entirely self-referential, self-defined, and self-applied to God: *divine being is not transferred to humanity in any manner at creation*. There is no natural correspondence between humanity and its character, and God, other than the reality of God’s granting to Man the ability to exist and function as this creature before Him.²⁶

* However, the formulation, “God, God’s self, totally created humanity” in no sense, is a denial of Man’s status within the created scheme. Male and female are brought into being for a specific purpose: to serve as bearers and holders of a sacral post, sharing in the benefits granted to them by their Suzerain. They are to live with, and by, the revelation that God alone is, and has declared Himself, to be this, their Sovereign Lord.

* The Creation of Man by “God’s own self, totally,” is a biblical refutation of an idea then current in the ancient world, that human existence is an accident, or originated out of chaos. Gen.1:26-27, affirms that the formation of Man is the result of God’s own intentional and free act—not as an afterthought, compulsion, or forced necessity.

Wisdom and the *Imago Dei*

We are not unaware that the proposed “*God-in-God’s image (e.g. God himself) created humanity*” is a departure from tradition, and an immediate question arises as a result: Does it eliminate the earlier rendering, discussed above, of “*God created humanity in the image/office of/for God?*”

Not necessarily; while a tension exists between the two statements, there is also the real possibility that *both* meanings were intended to be conveyed by the text. The Creation narratives in Genesis bear distinct affinities with a type of literature from the Ancient Near East known as “Wisdom.”²⁷ “Wisdom” has to do with proper discernment and judgment. And one of the major lessons that this genre imparts, is that a “truth” based on human reason or experience is often faulty and short-sighted. Only that Word which is given from God forms the proper basis for living a meaningful life in the midst of a contradictory and

paradoxical existence. The very manner in which such “wisdom” is formulated is intended to reveal the sagacity—or the lack, thereof—of its recipient. Proverbs and propositions often use puns and expressions that are multi-valent in meaning. A statement will apparently, say one thing, but simultaneously, intends something quite different to be understood—even the exact opposite. The “wise individual”—the “sage”—is able to discern what is actually being transmitted by the author.

Given the ambiguity of the Hebrew, Genesis 1:26-27 may be regarded in this way, with four distinct meanings implied:

1) **“God created man in God’s own image.”**

Whatever the *selem/imagen* is, the most important aspect to note about it, is that it is *determined by*, and *subject to*, the decision and action of its Creator, alone.

2) **“God created man in/into God’s image.”**

The “image” is used in its technical meaning of a “marker/servant/office-holder” *on behalf of, or for, God*. Though linked to “royal ideology,” the function and role of the “image,” or “instrument,” is subordinated to the intention and desire of its Sovereign Lord.

3) **“God- in-God’s (own)-image created humanity.”**

This stresses the transcendence of God as Creator. God alone defines God’s self and act over, and against, those whom he has fashioned as human-beings.

4) **“God created man in/as God’s image.”**

By contrast to the preceding readings, humanity, *on the basis of its own judgment*, views itself as a *direct reflection* of God, having the ability to declare its own sovereignty, interpret the divine will, and define itself apart from the oversight of its Creator. Man equates some aspect of its “creatureliness” as a direct correspondence with a divine attribute, or “divinity”—that it is *just like God*.

Despite some differences, the first three examples are closely related. The stress—in one way or another—is that the fashioning of human beings is the freely chosen act of the Divine Sovereign; man’s existence is determined both by the divine claim, and by its “occupation,” which is subordinate to, and shaped by the decision of God for it. Whether the “image” is to be applied to God idiomatically (#3), or to man, functionally (#1-2)—*and we would argue that both readings (# 2-3) are valid and implied*—the creation of the latter is overwhelmingly realized in terms of “*obedient servanthood*,” a task and role clearly formulated within the narrative logic of the canonical text as being based on, and explicated as, a “covenantal relationship.”

Ironically enough, #4 has been hermeneutically prevalent throughout history, even though it is the very essence of the temptation offered by the “serpent,” “to partake of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. . . (for) when you eat of it. . . *you will be like God*, knowing good and evil.”

“To be like God” (*sicut Deus*) will be proven demonstrably, to be the false understanding of the *imago Dei*. Through its misguided interpretation that “being created in the image of God” means asserting the right to displace divine command with its self-derived knowledge about itself, and how it is to live, humanity will gain the unfortunate experience (*experientia*) of death.

The Reclamation and the Repristination of the *Imago Dei*

Over the centuries, one of the most pressing questions regarding the *imago Dei* has been: What became of the “image” subsequent to the eviction of Man-Woman from the Garden? Earlier commentators—seeking to identify the “image” as the human possession of a divine attribute—were faced with the insurmountable problem: How could that which God had created “in perfection” dissolve into decay? Calvin’s famous description of the “deformation” of the “image” implanted in the soul is an attempt to come to grips with such a difficulty.

However, if one takes “*in the image*” as a reference to “God’s self,” such inquiries about the “loss of the *imago Dei*” become irrelevant: God does not stop being the God who created humanity out of his own gracious will. Still, there can be little doubt that the sinful arrogance of human beings “to be like God” (*sicut Deus*) is a continuing theme of the Genesis narratives, if not most of the Bible. Clearly, the later Reformed emphasis on the sinful depravity of Man is not entirely misplaced, having its roots in the Scriptures themselves. Nevertheless, this negative depiction of human fallenness is counterbalanced in the book of Genesis with the portrayal of individuals who remain obedient to the guidance of God and his Word: Noah and Abraham. Because of their faithfulness, they are recipients of special covenants²⁸ from God; these individuals will provide prototypes and models who exemplify the concept of the *imago Dei* in its instrumental and vocational sense as “servants/images for God,” who recognize the utter sovereignty of God over them, outside of the rarified confines of Eden.

This idea of “special election” of a loyal vassal eventually reaches a climax in the Pentateuch in the formation of the pact between God and Moses, where the entire community is to “become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:5). Through *Torah*—the covenantal instruction centered around the Decalogue—comes the opportunity for humanity to live out the Divine Intention for it from the Beginning, even in a Fallen World—acknowledging, as the corporate entity of Israel, that “God is Lord, and we are his people.” This declaration represents the reinstatement of Gen. 1:27, in its two-fold sense, both as divine claim upon, and commissioning of, humankind: in the wilderness, Israel accepts the role and task of *arad kitti*, “the faithful servant,” recognizing the title of its Divine Suzerain over all of Creation.²⁹

Indeed, this emphasis upon service to YHWH as entailing the office, and election, of Israel is an important theme in the Scriptures, receiving its most vivid treatment in the

exilic prophets, particularly the second half of the book of Isaiah.³⁰ After the announcement that their captivity is to end, God—in an act reminiscent of both Creation and Exodus—summons his people forth from the “chaos” of Babylon, and declares it to be his “servant” anew. The identification of “servant/vassal-Israel” culminates in the description of a figure, who, in his loyalty, bears the “transgressions” and “iniquities” of the nation upon himself, despite terrible cost to his own life. The acknowledgment that YHWH—in his sovereign freedom—has fashioned Israel *for this task* alone—to be radically obedient to the Lord and his covenantal command—exemplifies the re-Creation of humanity “*in-the-image of God*” following the destruction of the Temple and the return of the nation to its homeland.

This prophetic language wherein the “image” and “servanthood” are linked, ultimately converges in the apostle Paul’s description of the *kenosis*, “the pouring out” of the pre-existent Son of God, an act which is requisite to the drama of salvation:

(Christ Jesus) who—though he was **in the form of God**— . . . emptied himself, **taking the form of a servant**, being born **in the likeness of man**. And being found **so formed—as a man**—He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, (namely) death by a cross (Philippians 2:6a, 7-8).

In Pauline theology, the *story* of Jesus’ radical faith and faithfulness—e.g. the history of his obedient servanthood which demonstrates his true lordship—represents authentic humanity as intended by God from the beginning. The denial and deformation of man’s vocation by the first Adam, is reversed through the One who submitted himself in humility to God’s Word and plan.³¹ The restoration of the proper understanding of “being-created-in-God’s image” in all of its aspects—denoting the unique Lordship of God as Creator, and subservience of Man thereto—is manifested and effected by God’s great, and once-for-all act of mercy in, and through, his Son, his life, death, and resurrection.

Humanity’s “being conformed” and “conforming” to Christ and his witness—both ontologically and ethically—henceforth specifies the content and meaning of the *imago Dei*. Christology defines anthropology: the “Second Adam” is the re-creation and re-creation of the “Old (Fallen) Man” and his corrupting of his office.

The election—the commissioning and claiming of humanity by covenant—through the free and gracious act of the Electing and Covenanting God—revealed in, and as, Jesus Christ will mark the “two-fold” reality underlying the biblical phrase “God’s created man-in-his-image/ God-in-God’s-own-image created man.”³²

Re-integrating the *Imago Dei*

We would conclude our survey, by affirming that both textual and linguistic material available from the Ancient

Near East, is quite valuable in illuminating the background of the biblical “*imago Dei*.”³³

We have argued that, rather than denoting the “exaltation” of a particular talent or characteristic of human nature—as is frequently the case in popular debates of this topic—the *imago Dei* has to do with *the Creation, Commissioning, and Claiming of Man by God in covenant*. It is as “Lord” of this Bond, and as Author and Initiator of this *specific binding relationship*, that God defines both himself, and his creature. Such an arrangement, we would suggest, is signified by the “*double meaning*” of the phrase “God-in-God’s-image created man/God created Man in God’s image.”

This dialectical expression contains within it the *revelation* that first and foremost, God is the Electing God who acts out of his own Sovereign Will (e.g. “God-in-God’s-image created man: God himself, completely created humanity”); and secondly—but importantly—humanity has been brought into existence, and appointed to occupy and carry out a sacral office (e.g. “God created man in his image/in service for him”).

Man is the consequence of God’s purposeful decision, and has been called into being for a particular task: to glorify its Sovereign, being empowered by *grant*, to fulfill its station within the divinely ordered world. Critically, both the form and function of this office are entirely dependent upon, and realized in, God’s Word, alone. Humanity’s action within the Cosmos-as-Temple, on behalf of its Suzerain, is itself, described and circumscribed by decree—God’s Self-Disclosure.

As a result, we would assert that any “anthropological” interpretation of the *imago Dei* as “*in the image/office of/for God*” has to do with *ethics*. However, the *ethics* implied in the biblical account of Creation are of a certain type: they are the obligations placed upon the *arad kitti*—the faithful servant. Humanity is not “enthroned” as an autonomous autocrat, but is installed as a beloved vassal, whose trustworthiness is signified by reverence for, and obedience to, God and His Command.³⁴ For it is literally “God’s Word” which will determine the parameters of the relationship between the two parties. That which leads to “life and good” is to be derived neither from humanity’s evaluation of itself, nor from its *experientia*—not even from its potential or ability to act within the sphere of Creation—but by Divine Ordinance.³⁵

Simply put, the “image” of the *imago Dei* is expressed in the continuing witness and validity of God’s declaration of partnership, “I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” God is faithful in his covenantal promise as Creator and Lord, and Mankind is to occupy its rightful place as His Servant in the world, being guided by, sustained, and bearing witness to, that Divine Word spoken to it from the Beginning. Likewise, this will be the essence of the office subsequently given to the community of Israel in the midst of the Fallen World; as *Torah*—Covenantal Instruction—will define anew the original commissioning of, and commission to, humanity to “rule/shepherd” a Creation, now broken and reeling from sin.

And, according to the testimony of Scripture, this service to, and for, YHWH, is decisively revealed in the actual embodiment of the Divine Word—the Word which was at, and from, the Beginning, and which has become flesh in history—in, and as, Jesus Christ. It is through This One—who brings to Man the Light which shone forth at Creation, and who announces the Sabbath of the Lord to the world—that Israel’s mission, and humanity’s original and eternal vocation and purpose are both demonstrated and consummated.

In and through Christ Jesus—He who was, and is, with God as Son and Servant of YHWH—we hear once more, and finally, that it is “in-the-image-of-God that God made Man;” and that Man-and-Woman, *adam*—equally and together—have been fashioned by God Himself to be holy and free for God, and thus, wholly free for one another in the responsibility of a covenantal community.

We would suggest that it is this interplay between the Creating and Commissioning God, and Created and Commissioned Humanity which constitutes the biblical concept and reality of the *imago Dei* for the church. Hopefully, it is from such a point—the recognition that humanity is defined by the Sovereign Word and Act of God as *homo foederis Dei*, “man of, and by, God’s covenant”³⁶—that further discussion may proceed.

¹. Erwin Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, (Princeton, 1955) 43. The portrait (Ill. 110) is in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

². See the detailed discussion of Joseph Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago-London, 1993) 40ff.

³. Panofsky, *op cit.*, 43.

⁴. Jane Campbell Hutchinson, *Albrecht Dürer: A Biography* (Princeton, 1990) 68.

⁵. Panofsky, *op cit.*, 43. From the Biblical viewpoint, the attempt to be “like God” is an unmitigated disaster. It is interesting that Dürer also portrayed himself as the suffering Christ, “the Man of Sorrows,” in a drawing of 1522, *ibid.*, Frontispiece.

⁶. The term *imago Dei* is itself derived from the Latin translation of Genesis 1:26-27: “Then God said, “Let us make humanity in our image (*ad imaginem . . . nostram*). . . in the image of God, he created them (*ad imaginem Dei*). . .”

⁷. Such thinking is especially evident in the controversies surrounding sexuality; cf. the report of the General Assembly Special Committee on Human Sexuality, *Keeping Body and Soul Together: Sexuality, Spirituality, and Social Justice: A Document Prepared for the 203rd General Assembly* (1991), 59ff. In virtually every debate on such matters, Gen. 1:26-27 is invoked to justify “lifestyle” choices. The literature on the *imago Dei* is enormous, but cf. Gunnlaugur A. Jonsson, *The Image of God: Genesis 1:26-28 in a Century of Old Testament Research* (Lund, 1988); James Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology* (Oxford, 1993) 156ff.; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 3.1: The Doctrine of Creation* (Trans. J. W. Edwards, et al.) (Edinburgh, 1959) 191ff.

⁸. Throughout history, numerous interpreters have concluded that the “divine image” consists in some “essence” or “capacity” innate in human beings, although it seemingly is not defined in the biblical text: this has ranged from the ability to walk upright, to sexually derived characteristics. In some cases, it has been suggested that the “physicality” of humanity ontologically corresponds to God’s own appearance and action (cf. the summary comments of Barr, *Biblical Faith*, 158). Certain rabbinic authorities, by contrast, asserted that the “image” was humanity created as *male and female*: “neither man without woman nor woman without man, and neither of them without the Divine Spirit” (*Midrash Rabbah Bereshith* [8.9], [ed. H. Freeman] [London-New York, 1983] 60). Other Jewish sources held that the “likeness of God”—*whatever it was*—had once been granted to human beings, but was either changed or removed after the Fall.

Nevertheless, important strands of this religious tradition—based on Gen. 9:6—maintained that the image of God continued to abide with humanity even after the Expulsion from the Garden of Eden (for a convenient overview, see *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 2 [Grand Rapids, 1964] 392ff).

Various Christian writers from the early church—most prominently, Augustine—held that the *imago Dei* resided in the human intellect—memory, mind, and will/love (cf. Jonsson, *op cit.*, 13; also Barth, *CD 3.1*, 192ff.). Later on, Thomas Aquinas posited a similar correspondence, or *analogia entis*, between human reason and divine thought (*Summa Theologica*, 1. Q. 93 [Chicago, 1952] 492ff.). Martin Luther, on the other hand, disputed such interpretations, basing his objections on the reality of the Fall. Still, he did note that the image of God had been possessed by Adam—“in its moral substance, or nature; that he not only knew God and believed Him to be good, but that he lived a life truly divine; that is, free from the fear of death and all dangers, and happy in favour of God” (*The Creation: A Commentary on the First Five Chapters of the Book of Genesis* [Edinburgh, 1858] 90). Through Original Sin, this entity—“something excellent above all things: in which was included eternal life, eternal security, and all good”—was lost (*ibid.*, 93). Significantly enough, John Calvin claimed that the *imago Dei* was yet to be found in the human soul and was primarily spiritual; however, it was “so corrupted that whatever remains is frightful deformity” (*Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1 [Philadelphia, 1960] 186ff.).

In marked contrast to Reformation theology, liberal thought of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries linked the divine image to the “feeling” of transcendence and striving supposedly inherent to humanity (cf. the comments and critique of Barth, *op cit.*, 192ff.). Unfortunately, such speculation eventually led to the formulation of the “Ordinances or Orders (*Ordnungen*) of Creation,” which became central to the heretical doctrines of the so-called German Christians upon the rise of Hitler (cf. E. Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* [New York, 1970] 179; E. Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life From Letters and Autobiographical Texts* [Philadelphia, 1976] 188). The “Orders of Creation” held that certain institutions or human conditions—e.g. exalted concepts of “nationhood” or “race”—had been fixed from the beginning of the world as the “image of God,” and therefore had to be upheld in obedience to divine rule and intention. Utilizing this position, the Third Reich sought to justify and gain the approval of the church for its anti-Semitic policies. This viewpoint, often linked to the idea of “natural theology,” is typified by the writings of Emil Brunner. Though it must be strongly stated that Brunner—a Swiss—was no supporter of the German Christians or the Nazis, nevertheless, he did hold that certain institutions such as “the state” had been given by God, a scheme that could be known to human beings without benefit of special revelation, but rather by instinct. Brunner stated that—even given the Fall—there was still a “*natural point of contact*” between God and man; and it was this “point” which he identified as the *imago Dei* (cf. the remarks of Jonsson, 70f.).

Theologians of the Confessing Church Movement in the 1930’s, such as Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer adamantly opposed such thinking. Barth argued that “on the basis of instinct and reason one may proclaim one thing to be ‘an Ordinance of Creation’, another another thing—according to the liberal, conservative, or revolutionary inclinations of each” (in “Nein! Antwort am Emil Brunner” in *Natural Theology* [London-Bles, 78ff.]). Barth instead posited that the “image of God” was humanity created “in community,” as “male and female,” in analogy to God’s inter-Trinitarian existence (*CD 3.1*, 201ff.). Bonhoeffer, too, warned that “the danger of the argument (e.g. utilizing the ‘Orders of Creation’) lies in the fact that just about everything can be defended by it. One need only hold out something to be God-willed and God-created for it to be vindicated for ever” (in *No Rusty Swords* [New York, 1965] 165). For Bonhoeffer, such “ordinances” could not be maintained due to the fallen nature of both the world and humanity. In place of the “Orders of Creation,” he proposed the conceptual term, “Orders of Preservation”: all aspects of life were to be judged only on the basis of the freely given revelation of God—who, in Jesus Christ—has acted in freedom (*ibid.*, 166). The “freedom of God” in Creation forms and informs the central focus of Bonhoeffer’s christological discussion of the *imago Dei* as “humanity in freedom” (*Creation and Fall/Temptation: Two Biblical Studies* [New York, 1959, 35ff]; Bonhoeffer argues on the basis of an *analogia relationis*).

⁹. In addition to the convenient summary of Jonsson, *op cit.*, 126ff., see the comments of Jon Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*:

The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence (Princeton, 1988) 112ff.; and the studies of H. Wildberger, "Das Abbild Gottes Gen 1:26-30," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 21 (1965) 245ff., 481ff.; and B. Ockinga, *Die Gottesbildlichkeit im Alten Aegypten und im Alten Testament* (Wiesbaden, 1984).

10. The use of material roughly contemporary with—or even predating—the formulation of the biblical Creation account has considerable merit. After all, the people of ancient Israel were familiar with, conversant in, and utilized the language, idioms, and metaphors of the Levantine world in which they resided. As the *Confession of 1967* has stated, "the church. . . has an obligation to approach the Scriptures with literary and historical understanding" (*The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.], Part I, Book of Confessions* [Louisville, 1991] 9.29). It must be quickly added, however, that although "conditioned by the language, thought-forms, and literary fashions of the places and times at which they were written" (*ibid.*), the message of the Biblical texts and their testimony to the Word of God, is by no means restricted by, or to, their age of origin. Likewise, neither does the recognition that the Scriptures belong to a time and place different from our own, signify that we may tailor them to justify our needs. Current judgements about "coherence" and "contingency" of various passages (e.g. that which is central to the community of faith, and that which is time-bound and may be disregarded as "normative" or binding), are just as historically conditioned by present circumstances and academic fashions— if not more so— than the Old and New Testaments. (One need only point to the seemingly endless stream of speculation coming from various members of the so-called "Jesus Seminar.") While scholarly speculation is useful within limits, and may lead to further understanding, the biblical texts—as they have been handed down to us by, and within, the community of faith—must be treated with the utmost respect. Various hypotheses about form-critical considerations, the identification of "redactional strands," "authorial intentions," proposed situations for writing beyond and behind the text, *et al.*—are, at best, of relative importance and secondary value. Historical reconstructions do not, and cannot, replace the testimony of the received word of Scripture for us, and the reality of That Word for us, as witnessed by the Holy Spirit. These canonical strictures will be assumed in this discussion of the *imago Dei*.
11. In Ancient Egypt, terms for "image," "inscription," and "decree," i.e. that which bears and proclaims the king's word and deed are often interchangeable, cf. Anthony Spalinger, *Aspects of the Military Documents of the Ancient Egyptians* (New Haven-London, 1982) 46ff.
12. See the remarks of Wolfram von Soden, *The Ancient Orient: an Introduction to the Study of the Ancient Near East* (Trans. Donald G. Schley) (Grand Rapids, 1994) 63ff.; S. Morschauser, "The Ideological Basis for Social Justice/Responsibility in Ancient Egypt," in K. D. Irani and Morris Silver, *Social Justice in the Ancient World* (Westport-London, 1995) 101ff.
13. In this clearly subordinate role, a monarch was to maintain the divinely ordered scheme by: 1) Transmitting and exercising the "law" in a proper manner; 2) Safeguarding the weak and powerless through the administration of "justice"; 3) Guarding the territory allotted to him/her by the gods, and keeping intact the boundaries of the city/state; 4) Furnishing cult-places for worship, and ensuring that deities were sufficiently honored by appropriate offerings; and 5) Being vigilant against forces which might upset social equilibrium. This would include the suppression of banditry and rebellion, and protecting the citizenry in case of attack through the legitimate waging of war. In this regard, the king as "image for a god" was often seen as a "shepherd" on behalf of the true owner(s) of the flock, i.e. the Heavenly Sovereign.
14. See William L. Moran, "Rib-Hadda: Job at Byblos?" in Ann Kort *et al.*, *Biblical and Related Studies Presented to Samuel Iwry* (Winona Lake, 1985) 177ff.
15. Levenson, *op cit.*, 78ff., notes the similarity in the language of the Genesis account of Creation and the construction of both the Tabernacle and the Jerusalem Temple.
16. There is no doubt that the parties are regarded as sexual beings: the terms *zakar* (male) and *neqevah* (female) refer to distinct gender characteristics, and this pairing is seen to be as normative within the Biblical model of Creation. However, the naming of both "male" and "female" within the context of the receipt of the divine commission should be compared to the function of the Israelites who witness and freely accept the covenantal obligations placed upon them by Moses at Mt. Horeb in Deut. 29:10-13: "You stand this day, all of you, before the Lord your God; the heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers; all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and the sojourner. . . that you may enter into the sworn covenant, which the Lord your God makes with you this day; that he may establish you this day as his people. . ." One could also cite royal decrees from ancient Egypt where "all people" (male and female) are invoked as bearing responsibility for upholding legal statutes.
17. Procreation alone is not the point, but rather the sharing of the benefits of a tenured position. The wish that a family have offspring to assume an inherited seat is a common blessing throughout the ancient Near East, being an element in the so-called "covenant of grant."
18. Cf. the pertinent remarks of Waltger Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta, 1982) 32.
19. Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and the Old Testament* (Rome, 1978) 171, n. 28., W. L. Moran, "A Note on the Treaty Terminology of the Sefire Stelas," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 22 (1963) 173ff.
20. The term *imago Dei* is not used in the rest of the Creation story; however, the concept of humanity's being designated to carry out an assigned role for God is clearly implied. Indeed, the "covenantal" aspects of Creation are equally evident—if not moreso—in the subsequent narrative of Gen. 2:4ff. Following the formation of man (*adam*) from the earth, God grants him residence within a territory having fixed boundaries—described as a garden: Eden will correspond to the land promised to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 12:7). There, the man is "to till/serve" and "to watch/maintain" the land; a task which corresponds to the duties assigned to humankind in Gen. 1:28. In this capacity, the Man names/catalogues the rest of created life, under the vigilant and interested eye of God (Gen. 2:19). The subsequent creation of Woman, in which she is to be an *ezer kenegdo*, "a helper-corresponding-to-man," i.e. a full covenantal partner and ally, once again stresses the idea of mutual responsibility of "male and female" in fulfilling the divine commission. Noteworthy is the fact that tenure-rights of the pair are entirely dependent upon the decree of God (Gen. 2:16-17). Usurpation of the divine prerogative in deciding what is fitting and proper within the created order will result in the eviction of Man-Woman from royal property. The expulsion of humanity from its place in the Garden of Eden furnishes a prototype for Israel's later Exile, due to its failure to adhere to the instruction of its Suzerain.
21. One would have expected *le-*. T. N. D. Mettinger, "Abbild oder Urbild? 'Imago Dei' in traditionsgeschichtlicher Sicht," *Zeitschrift für alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 86 (1974), 406ff., argues that *be-* and *ke-*, respectively, "in" and "as, according to," are virtually synonymous, both meaning "according to."
22. The expressions are *m ki/mi'ki*, "in the form of/according to the form of" (cf. A. Erman and H. Grapow, *Wörterbuch der Aegyptischen Sprache* 4,16.12-16 [Berlin, 1982]); *m kd/mi'kd*, lit. "in the form of" (*ibid.*, 76.10-77.2); *r mitt*, "according to the likeness of" ("accordingly") (*ibid.*, 2, 41.6-7). The usual idiom is *m ki*, "in the form of."
23. The "our" of the divine pronouncement has been explained in a number of ways: 1) It is a remnant of polytheism; a suggestion that should be eliminated, not only on theological grounds, but logically—it is hard to believe that a reference to "gods" escaped editorial notice. 2) It is a "plural of majesty." 3) It is a reference to the "Divine Council"—God surrounded by the court of heavenly beings (cf. for example, Isa. 6:8, "Whom shall I (God) send, and who will go for us?") This explanation has gained many adherents. 4) It should be seen referring to the Trinity; a view favored by the early church and championed by Barth (*CD* 3.1, 192ff.). One might offer that #3 does not necessarily preclude #4, and *vice-versa*, especially in light of the Heavenly Enthronement scene of Revelation 4-5.
24. In the Semitic and Hamito-Semitic languages of the ancient Near East, prepositional phrases are used not only adverbially—to modify a verbal clause—but also may be adnominal, qualifying a noun. The phenomenon occurs in Exodus 23:19 (//Deut. 14:21) in the command: "You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk" (*bahalev 'immo*). Usually this is taken as a humane admonition not to cook the offspring of an animal in/within the lactic fluid of its parent. The reference, however, is not to a mode of food preparation (e.g. boiling in milk). Rather, the prepositional phrase applies to the state of the young beast itself: *a kid-in-its-mother's milk* describes a young goat that is still being suckled and in the condition of nursing. Another use of a prepositional phrase introduced by *beth* (*b-*) to explicate a noun may be found in Jeremiah 10:12: "(Yahweh) is the one, who (being) in-his-strength (*behoho*) made the earth; who (being) in-his-wisdom

(*be hokmatho*) established the world; and (being) in his understanding (*ubithhunatho*) stretched out the heavens.” The prophet is not stating that God is creating the earth “in strength,” or the heavens “in wisdom,” e.g. as if these things were endowed with a specific attribute of divine power, or some divine force was transferred to their being. Instead it is God in God’s own peculiarity—God-in-his-strength, in-his-wisdom, in-his-understanding—who has achieved such deeds. The phrases denote the uniqueness of God as Creator, as does Gen. 1:26-27.

- ²⁵. In this connection, it should be noted that the “likeness” (*demuth*) of God is a particular concern of Ezekiel, a book which bears many theological and literary affinities with the so-called “Priestly” writer(s) (P); Genesis 1:1-2:4 has been assigned to P since the time of Julius Wellhausen in the 19th century with his formulation of the “Documentary Hypothesis.” Ezek 1:4-28 contains a lengthy and enigmatic description of God and the awesomeness of the Divine Presence. According to the prophet, God’s “likeness” is *sui-generis*, totally unique and other. This strengthens the probability that *kidmuthenu* in Gen. 1:26a (“according to our image”) should be taken in a similar fashion.
- ²⁶. The passage in Gen. 9:6 containing the prohibition against murder must be understood as an offense against God’s divine action in Creation and therefore a violation of God’s sovereignty (cf. the discussion of Barth, *CD 3.1*, 197ff.). Similarly, Gen. 5:3b actually has no bearing on the *imago Dei* question, although the Hebrew formulation is somewhat parallel to that of Gen. 1:27: “And he (Adam) (being)-in-his-likeness, according-to-his-image (*bidmutho kesalmo*) (e.g. in his entirely human nature) fathered” (cf. Barth, *ibid.*, 198ff.).
- ²⁷. See the general remarks of Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (New York, 1992) 22; Roland Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature* (New York, 1990) 1ff., 118ff.
- ²⁸. The so-called “covenant of grant” (or covenant of promise); cf. M. Weinfeld, “The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90 (1970) 184ff. It might be argued that it is this sort of covenant which underlies Genesis 1:1-2:4.
- ²⁹. We have noted that the “image of God” has often been linked to the idea of human “dominion;” and Gen. 1:26-27 is frequently explicated through the lens of the Davidic monarchy by commentators, relating it to the covenant of grant establishing that royal dynasty (cf. Levenson, *op cit.*, 112f.). Without a doubt, the Old Testament—especially some of the Psalms (Ps. 89)—portrays David as exercising power upon the throne of Israel. Yet, it must be stressed that such a “rulership” is to be viewed not in terms of independence and autonomy, but of absolute and utter reliance upon the Word and Command of Israel’s God and Lord. Whatever the disparity between actual historical practice and

the scriptural ideal, the promise to David and his heirs is correlated to the obligations of the Mosaic covenant. The king’s primary duty above all else, is “to fear the Lord, his God, by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them. . . that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or the left” (Deut. 17:19-20). There is, in fact, a palpable constraint enjoined upon monarchs against doling out their own personal brand of “justice,” or acting out of arbitrary privilege. Guided by the “Spirit of the Lord” in the “knowledge and fear of God,” the anointed king of YHWH—“Shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips, he shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins” (Isa. 11:3-5). Bearing witness to, and executing responsibly, the Divine Mandate, is the mantle—and burden—of rule. The “image” of, and for, the Davidic “viceroy,” ultimately is that of vassal to, and for, his Sovereign Lord, as much as the nation as a whole is subservient to covenantal statute. In this regard, Psalm 8 is often cited—rightly—as indicative of the exalted position of humanity; some of its language is clearly derived from “royal terminology” (Ps. 8:5-6). However, the psalm also speaks of human beings as existing under the utter sovereignty and verdict of God, whose title extends over all. The exercise of human rule itself is relativized and confined by divine *fiat*, and again, has its origin and legitimization in the *grant* of God.

- ³⁰. Isa. 40-53.
- ³¹. See the comments on the Adam-Christ parallelism, in N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis, 1993) 90ff.
- ³². This would nicely support the Chalcedonian and Athanasian christological formulations, “fully God, fully human.”
- ³³. As an “adjunct” to, not a control over, the canonical Scriptures.
- ³⁴. Some might find such “feudal” imagery disturbing in the modern world; however, we would argue that such language and concepts are not “contingent to” the biblical message, but part of its “coherency.”
- ³⁵. We are arguing here for a scripturally based understanding of the *imago Dei*, and for the corresponding ethical scheme; cf. the remarks of Richard B.Hays, “Salvation by Trust? Reading the Bible faithfully,” *The Christian Century* 114.7 (Feb. 26, 1997) 218ff.; *idem.*, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco, 1996) 187ff.
- ³⁶. We would contend that such a covenantal view of the *imago Dei*, has very little to do with defining humanity by its “physicality,” “sexuality,” or “potentiality.”

The Image of God: Clarifying the Confusion

by James R. Edwards

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One of the most sublime statements in the Bible is surely Genesis 2:7, “And the Lord God fashioned the human from the dust on the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the human became a living being.” In one sentence the ancient Hebrew writer succeeds in defining the

relationship of human beings to God and the world. On the one hand, we are very much part of the earth. In a humble Hebrew play on words, we are *adam* (humanity) from the dust of the *adamah* (ground). The earth supplies the material from which we are made, the same material from which the animals are also made (2:19). God “fashions” and “shapes” the earth into humanity, like a potter fashions clay, according to the Hebrew vocabulary. In an equally

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ergonomic image, God later “builds” or “reconstructs” the rib of the man into a woman (2:22). Thus, one part of the human equation is a very earthy anthropology. We come from the earth, and whatever else we are or become, we never escape our earthly origins.

But there is more to the human equation than matter. What we are made of does not account for what we are. It is not earth that determines our nature, but the Lord God, the Divine Craftsman. The ground becomes plastic in his hands and is given new form. God infuses into it his own breath. It becomes an animate earthling, something that earth itself could not produce. The result is an entirely new order of creation, an enhanced creature, doubly alive, in fact. The human is a *nephesh*, an “alive being,” but more than that, a *nephesh chayah*, an “ensouled being.” The life that characterizes God himself is now imparted into matter, and the result is a human being.

By virtue of his creation, the human is a citizen of two realms—the mundane and the celestial, the city of man and the city of God. Genesis 1 signifies this difference by noting that all animal life is made “according to its kind,” but the human is made “in God’s image.” We share life in common with animals, but life itself, not even life as a gift of God, is not our distinguishing characteristic as human beings. The uniquely divine image in humanity is the very life of God in us. The Lord God is indeed the Lord of all life, but we as humans know this in a way that the rest of creation knows it, if at all, only inchoately or instinctually. The human is an earthling, to be sure, but an inspired earthling, a God-breathed creature.

In order rightly to understand our original nature—and it is this nature that the whole program of redemption is out to restore—we must remember that earth and heaven were not polar opposites before the fall. They were complementary then, perhaps similar to the way my muscles respond to my will, rather than in combat as they are now. The image of the garden in Genesis 2:8 completes the pristine story. The earth is our place of residence, but the earth was not a place of wild, untamed nature. Before it became unkempt as it is now, it was a place of divinely ordered beauty, a garden, literally, planted by the Creator and tended by a steward, the inspired earthling.

Genesis 2:7-8 answers the two greatest needs we have as humans: it tells us our place, and it identifies our purpose. Earth is our home, but God is our maker, and not only our maker, but since the fall our redeemer, and thus our eternal companion and our destiny. Genesis 2:7-8 is truly a life-ethic, indeed, a life-ontic.

What a contrast the modern world presents to this sublime understanding of life! How experimental, how arbitrary, how confused we have become, yes even in the church, on the meaning of personhood. The boundaries and markers of life that were so clear and sacred to the ancients have been moved in our day, and in some cases, removed. Naaman, a leprous Syrian commander, once implored the king of Israel to heal him. The king responded, “Am I God, to kill and make alive?” (2 Kings 5:7). Would that we observed such

reverence for life. The human womb, the grandest workshop in all creation, is now regarded as a mere cavity of uterine material to be legally (though certainly not morally!) invaded and “evacuated of its contents.” In place of the respect and honor once shown to the aged, the modern world places on their shoulders, and on the shoulders of their families and society at large, the terrible question of “death with dignity,” the inhuman task of trying to presage the future to determine whether the procedures now available to prolong life can ensure a life worth prolonging. Like the unborn, the aged are no longer guaranteed life if they pose too great a burden on the living.

On the one hand, then, we find it strangely beyond ourselves fully to acknowledge and honor, both legally and morally, God-created life. Our confusion about life has another and equally perilous side to it, however. In the midst of our hesitancy to affirm human life as it is given to us, we are becoming ever bolder in attempts to produce new life forms. I’m not only thinking about obvious attempts like cloning, which seems to me to carry a plethora of unanswered questions, but also attempts to impute human minds and even personhood to inanimate objects. A dramatic example was last July’s Mars landing, during which the scientists involved repeatedly referred to Sojourner, the Martian crawler, in personal terms. Sojourner received “wake up calls,” each morning, “sent greetings from Mars to Earth,” and was referred to by its controllers as a “being.” We have reached a new stage of confusion about human personhood when we deny it to the living and impute it to hardware.

All this would be awfully gloomy if the whole world were as misguided as we are. But fortunately it is not. God has seen to it that there is still one person bearing his image who has not succumbed to the world’s madness and evil. It is his Son Jesus Christ. You can read all about it in Colossians 1:15-20. Thank God for the truly Good News we read there! All things were made through God’s Son, they consist in him, they are made for him, and they will be redeemed by him! He overcame death itself, so nothing in this world can stop him. He intends nothing short of reconciling all things to himself, and his plans include using you and me!

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“The Bible and the Practice of Homosexuality” by James R. Edwards; and

“Why We Believe in Heresy” by Thomas C. Oden

Why We Should NOT Approve Amendment A

and An Analysis of Some of the Other Amendments Before the Presbyteries

1. Is Amendment “A” “common ground?” NO Will Amendment “A” bring healing to the denomination? NO

There is no common ground on the question “will the Presbyterian Church (USA) ordain people who practice sexual relationships outside of marriage?” The answer must be either “yes” or “no.” A majority of the presbyteries have already said, “NO” and passed the Book of Order statement G-6.0106b.

2. Is there any sexual relationship which would be prohibited by Amendment “A?” NO.

Nowhere does this amendment limit sexual expression to marriage. Instead, it speaks of *all* relationships: “in marriage, in singleness and in all relationships of life.”

3. Wouldn’t “integrity” and “fidelity” convey a marriage covenant? NO

The 1991 Sexuality Report defines “integrity” and “fidelity.” Although the report was rejected by the 1991 GA, the PCUSA continues to print and distribute the report. The report rejects the biblical mandate which bars sexual expression outside of marriage labeling it a patriarchal construct that oppresses people. Instead the report advocates all sexual expression which is mutually agreed upon and evidences “justice-love.” The report explains what it means by “fidelity” saying, “the precise conditions required by such fidelity of commitment and purpose cannot be prescribed in a legalistic or static fashion. . . .we must learn to pay primary attention to the substance and quality of our relations, not to matters of form or so-called respectability.”

The report explains “integrity” saying, “At the very least moral maturity requires an acceptance—and a celebration—of a diversity of sexual relations with integrity and moral substance.” It further explains, “self-naming strengthens self-affirmation and personal integrity.” In other words, to live with integrity is to live a self-affirming life. If a person self-names himself or herself a homosexual, integrity would demand living joyfully according to that understanding. In contrast, biblical faith calls us to recognize our sinfulness as defined by God, affirm Christ and his work on our behalf, and look to Christ to transform our lives and conform us to His.

4. Doesn’t saying “under Jesus Christ” mean that there are boundaries to behavior, even if those boundaries are not spelled out? NO.

By calling for “obedience to Jesus Christ” the amendment separates Christ from His Word and creates a hierarchy with Jesus Christ at the pinnacle, followed in descending

order by Scripture, and the Confessions. This is wrong both theologically and historically. In the Reformed tradition, authority begins with the Scripture. We cannot know Christ apart from the scriptural witness to Him. Scripture is the source of all true knowledge of Jesus Christ. By separating Christ from Scripture, liberal theology then claims that Christ has “spoken a new word” apart from Scripture or that only certain portions of Scripture represent the true Christ.

5. Is there any way we can know how this amendment will be interpreted? YES.

The United Church of Christ had an almost identically worded resolution before their national Synod on July 7 and they approved it. The UCC openly ordains practicing homosexuals. The Presbyterian News Service reported “The Synod [UCC] has also encouraged the denomination to be ‘open and affirming’ to gay and lesbian people.” (PNS 9731)

6. If the Amendment is approved, wouldn’t “authoritative interpretation” remain in place and bar the ordination of anyone who practices sexual relationships outside of marriage? NO

Cliff Kirkpatrick, stated clerk of the General Assembly, has written, “This Amendment (Amendment A) may make it easier to change that authoritative interpretation in future years since it will not require a new constitutional amendment. . . .”

First, the “authoritative interpretation” that bars ordination of those who practice sexual relationships outside of marriage was established by the 1993 General Assembly. The Constitution on which that interpretation was based no longer exists—it was modified by the inclusion of G6.0106b (Amendment “B”) in 1997. If Amendment “A” passes, it will be modified again. It would seem logical, therefore, that a new and different authoritative interpretation would likely be made immediately upon passage of Amendment A to bring it in line with the constitution as it would then exist.

Second, “authoritative interpretation” is established in either of two ways: by a majority vote of the commissioners to any General Assembly or by a majority vote of the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission. All it takes to establish a new authoritative interpretation is for a majority vote of either the GA or the PJC. Seven of the members of the PJC, in response to a case before them in 1995, wrote a “concurring opinion” in which they said they believe the GA’s authoritative interpretation barring ordination of those who engage in homosexual practice is not valid and if clear language is not written into the Book of Order, they would no longer support the barring of

practicing homosexuals from ordained ministry. There are 16 members of the PJC. The seven who signed the concurring opinion remain on the PJC today. With the addition of several new members, the PJC may now have a majority that supports the ordination of homosexuals.

7. How can there be healing in the denomination on this issue? There is one remedy the Bible gives us for dealing with sin. That is to repent, turn from our sinful ways, and receive the mercy of God in Christ. The first step in that process is to acknowledge that our behavior is indeed sinful. Sexual expression outside of marriage is not the only sin. However, it is the sin we are dealing with in this amendment. Until our brothers and sisters who desire to practice sexual relationships outside of marriage acknowledge that they need to repent, they will not experience God's healing.

8. Who should vote "Yes" for this amendment? Only those people who wish to change the constitutional standards of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and allow ordained officers to engage in sexual relationships outside of a one man, one woman marriage.

9. Who should vote "NO" for this amendment? Only those people who believe that Scripture is clear: that disciples of Jesus Christ should practice chastity in singleness and fidelity in marriage.

10. Are there other amendments to be voted on which should also be of concern? YES

***B.5. which Amends G-14.0405b regarding ordination questions should be disapproved.** This removes "discipline" from the ordination vows. At a time in the life of the church when discipline is a major issue, as some ordained officers publicly renounce the constitution, we should not remove "discipline" from the ordination vows.

***D. which Amends G-9.0404 regarding per capita should be disapproved.** These changes allow the GA, synods and presbyteries to fund their operating budgets from "general undesignated mission giving, designated mission giving, or apportioned among the lower governing

bodies in proportion to the number of members (per capita apportionment) or apportioned among its constituent churches according to some method approved by the governing body." This amendment allows operating expenses to be paid from "designated mission giving" thus opening the possibility of negating the intent of designated mission giving. In addition, the governing body can apportion its expenses according to a formula voted on by the body. In other words, if this amendment passes, the "per capita" assessment no longer needs to be based on church membership! Instead, it could also be apportioned among its constituent churches according to some other formula. The wording of this amendment would not prevent liberal members of a presbytery from voting to assess a conservative church in excess of what its member-based per capita would have been because the presbytery determines the church has certain assets. We should ask what problem exists with per capita that this amendment is attempting to remedy. Unless we clearly understand the problem and can determine whether this is an appropriate solution, we should vote against the amendment.

*** E. which amends G-11.0103 and G-12.0102 regarding domestic violence should be disapproved.** The Advisory Committee on the Constitution said, "It is tempting to add additional responsibilities for specific social issues; the list could become quite long. . . .Therefore the Advisory Committee on the Constitution advises the 209th GA (1997) not to approve Overture 97-4[the overture which became the Amendment]."

*** H. which amends G-14.0801c regarding whether Commissioned Lay Preachers must be elders should be approved.** There is currently a discrepancy in the *Book of Order*. In one place it requires that a Commissioned Lay Preacher be an elder. Yet, in G-14.0801c it allows a presbytery by a 3/4 vote to commission a lay pastor who is not an elder. It is crucial that we remove the option that allows the presbytery to commission a lay pastor who is NOT an elder. Since the lay pastor may perform all the functions assigned to an ordained minister including preaching and administering sacraments, this could be a back door to the pseudo-ordination of practicing homosexuals.

Study of the Confessions

by Rev. Theresa Froehlich, parish associate at Trinity Presbyterian Church, Clovis, CA and member of the Board of Directors of Presbyterians for Faith, Family and Ministry

(This study will continue in the next issue of Theology Matters.)

In an age of diminishing denominational loyalty, many who participate in the life of Presbyterian congregations come

from a variety of church backgrounds or, sometimes, no background at all. *The Book of Confessions*, which together with the *Book of Order* form the denomination's constitution, must be systematically taught to familiarize members as well as officers with the concept and content of "confession."

The *Book of Confessions* consists of eleven documents, including creeds, catechisms, and confessions, which were written over a period of time that spanned from the Fourth Century to the present. Creeds are generally brief statements of faith in Jesus Christ, similar to a pledge of allegiance or a collection of theological soundbites. Catechisms, written in question and answer form, encapsulate the key teachings of Scripture regarding the gospel; while confessions are extensive documents which systematically explain and expound the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Why Study the Confessions?

Three reasons for studying the confessions are: first, identity—what we confess describe as well as define who we are; second, historicity—the beliefs we confess point to as well as guarantee unity and continuity with the apostolic teachings of the past; third, authenticity—the confessions attest to whether or not our faith is the real thing.

Identity—Who Are The Presbyterians?

In the creeds, catechisms and confessions, bound together into the *Book of Confessions*, the Presbyterian Church (USA) declares to its members and to the world who and what it is, what it believes, and what it resolves to do (*Book of Order* G-2.0100).

Through the confessions, the Presbyterian Church (USA) proclaims that it embraces the faith of the Reformed tradition. “Central to this tradition is the affirmation of the majesty, holiness and the providence of God who creates, sustains, rules, and redeems the world in the freedom of sovereign righteousness and love” (*Book of Order* G-2.0500). This is an intensely God-centered theology that focuses on the purpose, intent, will, power and glory of God who gives ultimate meaning to human life.

Related to this central theme of God as the sovereign Creator-Lord are several distinctives of Reformed theology:

- * The election of the people of God, through his divine initiative for the sake of his sovereign purpose, to salvation as well as service;
- * The centrality and finality of biblical authority, with emphasis upon the whole canon of Scripture;
- * The historical continuity with the ancient catholic and apostolic church, namely the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Chalcedonian Definition¹ of the person of Jesus Christ; Reformed theologians have built upon, not apart from, the work of the ancient church;
- * The distinction between Creator and creature, between the self-existent and self-sufficient God and the dependent being of the creature;
- * The active polemic against idolatry: the attempt to get control of God, to fantasize a God different from what he has revealed himself to be, or to fasten the infinite God to

finite objects such as images, the bread and wine of the sacrament, or the ecclesiastical structures;²

* God himself is the sole and proper witness of himself, therefore Scripture as the word of God is the written revelation that defines and describes him.

Historicity—Are We Connected with the Past?

To study the *Book of Confessions* is to rediscover Christian identity and authenticity by reaching back to our roots and by digging through the thickets and bushes to unearth our foundation. The two Latin words *ad fontes*, meaning “back to the original sources,” aptly describe the need to rediscover our connections with the past.

Presbyterian theology traces its roots to the Swiss Protestant Reformation of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with John Calvin (1509 - 1564) as the representative theologian. Protestantism in general and the Reformed tradition in particular had many misgivings about numerous doctrinal developments of the medieval church. John Calvin’s goal of reformation was to restore faithfulness to Scripture as the standard for the church. For him and for the other Reformers, the Reformation was a reaching back to the original sources: the apostolic witness of the gospel given in Scriptures.

This advice to reach back into the past may immediately draw gunfire from all directions because the modern American culture believes Monday is better than Sunday and Tuesday is better than Monday—a kind of “newer-the-truer” or “latest-greatest” mentality. In this kind of contemporary conceit, labeled as “Mondayism” by G.K. Chesterton, commitment to the past is automatically suspect because of the appearance of closed-mindedness. However, commitment to a tradition is not the same as an encrusted dogmatism or rigid traditionalism, nor does it mean a denial of the freedom to think or of the importance of creativity. “To take our roots seriously is to allow the voices of the past to speak to us before turning, with a renewed and informed mind, to face the issues of the present.”³

Reaching back to the past is to look for direction in a classic: “A classic is a point of reference, a perennial resource, something whose meaning and relevance is not exhausted by and in its own day and age, but is available to others.”⁴ Accepting the confessions as standards for our faith, then, also means acknowledging the historical continuity of our beliefs with those of the saints who have gone before us, claiming solidarity with our forerunners, submitting to the timeless value of those standards and embracing their inexhaustible relevance for time past and present.

Authenticity—Is It the Real Thing?

Presbyterians accept the confessions as “authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do” (*Book of Order* G-14.0207c). As such, the confessions are the standard for measuring authenticity: whether or not a body of beliefs is in line with Scripture. The confessional standards, therefore, are authoritative

interpretations of Scripture. Serious departures from the central teachings of the confessional standards then disqualify one from labeling one's faith as "Reformed."

When the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, he referred to some "false apostles" (2 Cor 11:1-6) and "false brothers" (2 Cor 11:26). He also challenged the Corinthian church members with this command: "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourself" (2 Cor 13:5).

In the early church the creeds were used as the litmus test for authenticity. The creeds were called "symbols," a Greek word related to the verb "to put together." In ancient times when a man sent a neighbor to a faraway friend, he would break an oyster shell in half. The traveling neighbor would carry half of the shell with him on his journey while the other half was sent ahead to the faraway friend. When the neighbor arrived at the home of the distant friend he would present his half of the oyster shell as sign of identification. If his half fitted the half of the shell that had been sent ahead, his true identity was proved.

The Greek word *sumbolon* (Latin *symbolum* or *signum*) therefore meant an object or part of an object that proved the authenticity or genuineness of identity. This is the proof that "It's the real thing!" Later a "symbol" became a password used for identification among members of certain religious societies. "In ancient Christianity, however, the word 'symbol' came to mean a compendium of the fundamental facts or truths of faith that a candidate had to recite as an evidence of his faith before being baptized and accepted as a member of the church."⁵

Confessions and the Meaning of Church Membership

When a person makes a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ and becomes a member of a local congregation, he or she also publicly declares his or her adherence to a body of doctrines related to the person of Jesus Christ. When the apostle Paul writes, "if you confess with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead" (Romans 10:9), he refers to the Jesus as revealed in Scripture.

In the early church, believers were not only required to profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, but they were also to prove their identity as a true believer by "confessing" a compendium of the fundamental facts or truths of faith. In other words, their doctrinal affiliation was tested before they were baptized and accepted as church members. This provided for a kind of theological unity that has become uncommon today.

In the modern church, "one becomes an active member of the church through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and acceptance of his Lordship in all of life. Baptism and a public profession of faith in Jesus as Lord are the visible signs of entrance into active membership of the church" (Book of Order G-5.0101). A public profession of faith includes simply answering, in the affirmative:

Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Lord and Savior?

Do you intend to be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his word, and showing his love, to your life's end?

In the early church, acceptance into church membership required a period of extensive instruction over two to three years, known as "catechizing;" it also required proof of authenticity in the form of the "symbol." This kind of "gatekeeping" provided a greater degree of theological unity in the early church.

The standard required of *officers* in the modern Presbyterian Church (USA) is very similar to the standard required for church membership in the early church. When elders and deacons are ordained and/or installed, they are to respond to two, among many, constitutional questions that specifically point to the confessions as the "symbol" of faith (G-14.0207c):

Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?

Will you fulfill your office in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions?

In order for officers to respond intelligently and responsibly to these questions, there needs to be systematic instruction similar to the catechizing process of the early church. Diligent instruction will also be instrumental in restoring theological unity within the modern church.

Drawing the Circle

The confessions are statements of the Christian faith, specifically the Reformed Christian faith, that set the boundaries for the faith and life of believers.

When a circle is drawn, there is a center and a circumference. The center marks the locus from which the circle radiates while the circumference demarcates what is inside and what is outside of the circle.

If the person of Jesus Christ, as attested to by Scripture, is the center, then the circle is the body of essential tenets that define the Christian faith; more particularly for the Presbyterian, the circle is the body of fundamentals that define the "Reformed Christian faith." Any belief that conflicts with the essential tenets or fundamentals within the circle automatically disqualifies it from being "Christian," and more particularly disqualifies it from being "Reformed." For instance, that Jesus Christ is fully divine and fully human is an essential tenet of the Christian faith and, more specifically, an essential tenet of the Reformed teachings about the Christian faith. If an individual believes otherwise about Jesus Christ, he or she would be disqualified from identifying himself or herself as

“Christian” and more particularly disqualified from identifying himself or herself as a “Reformed Christian.”

The catch, then, is the word “essential” or “fundamental.” Who decides what is essential or fundamental? In a nutshell, the essentials or fundamentals of the Christian faith are not determined by you and me. They were determined long ago by the apostles who followed Jesus Christ while he was on this earth. The essentials or fundamentals of the Christian faith, therefore, comprise that body of apostolic teachings about Jesus Christ—his birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection—that have been passed on to us in the written revelation of Scripture.

Relating the Confessions to Scripture

The *Book of Order* states that the “confessional statements are subordinate standards in the church, subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures bear witness to him” (G-2.0200). The confessions are authoritative only to the extent that they are reliable expositions of Scripture; therefore the authority of the confessions is a derivative authority.

There is a hierarchy of authority that governs the lives of Christians and directs their actions. In this hierarchy of authority, the person of Jesus Christ is at the apex. However, to the extent that no human being can know God except by means of his self-revelation, Scripture—the written revelation that shows us God—is the final authority. A “Christ” who is divorced from Scripture as objective authority becomes merely a subjective fantasy manufactured by human imagination. Indeed, Jesus Christ himself affirmed the authority of the whole counsel of the Word of God; he never set himself in competition with or in contradiction to the Hebrew Scriptures (John 5:45-47).

For this reason, pitting the authority of Jesus Christ against the authority of Scripture is ultimately the idolatry of the human mind that dares to imagine that human fantasies about God are more accurate and authoritative descriptions about God than his self-revelation. Indeed, “. . . the confession points away from itself and to the Word of God written as the authoritative and final rule of faith and life.”⁶

Essentials and Catholicity

The Presbyterian Church (USA) is one denomination within the larger Body of Christ. While the denomination has its own theological distinctives, there are some essential tenets of faith that define Presbyterian believers as “Christians” and bind them to the other saints as one Body of Christ.

The essentials of the Christian faith are what make possible ecumenicity (Catholicity) and transdenominational fellowship; the essentials are what make it possible for Presbyterians to identify with Episcopalians, Baptists, Methodists and other Christians. This also explains why the Nicene Creed and the Apostles’ Creed are known as the ecumenical creeds. “In its confessions, the Presbyterian Church (USA) gives witness to the faith of the church catholic. The confessions express the faith of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church in the recognition of

canonical Scriptures and the formulation and adoption of the ecumenical creeds, notably the Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds with their definitions of the mystery of the triune God and of the incarnation of the eternal Word of God in Jesus Christ” (Book of Order G-2.0300).

Conclusion

To study the confessions is to rediscover who Jesus Christ is, according to the apostles, and who we are as a people who claim to put our trust in him. The confessional standards are not simply a compilation of public and private opinions, nor are they the inventions of the human mind. The confessions are expositions of Scriptures that document the self-revelation of God and the apostolic teachings about Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the Christian faith is not an invented faith but an inherited faith.

Questions

1. What are some of the ways in which the study of the confessions help us understand and grow in our faith in Jesus Christ?
2. What are the differences between churches that adopt and use confessional statements (known as “confessional church”) and those that do not?
3. The *Book of Order* emphasizes and re-emphasizes that the confessions (G-2.0200), though subordinate to Scripture, are nonetheless standards. Why are standards and boundaries crucial to the faith and life of Christians?
4. When studying the confessions, what are the benefits of connecting with the past?
5. In the First Century church, the catechetical process (2-3 years of instruction) which culminated in the reciting of the creed (“symbol”) was the mark of true faith in Jesus Christ. What do modern churches look for as evidence of authentic faith in Jesus Christ? In what ways can the modern church emulate the catechetical process of the early church?
6. During the Reformation in the 15th and 16th centuries, numerous confessional documents were written. How does this reflect the place of confessions in the Reformation movement?
7. There are divergent understandings of the saying “The church once reformed, always reforming” (“*Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*”) within the Presbyterian Church. Some interpret it as “adopting new ideas.” The *Book of Order* defines it as “The church reformed, always reforming, according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit” (G-2.0200). Compare and contrast these two views.

1. The Council of Chalcedon met in 451 A.D., confirmed the Nicene Creed and made the following affirmations about Jesus Christ: first, the Lord Christ is one, his two natures preserved in one being and essence, yet without fusion and without confusion; second, both natures, God and man, are unimpaired, consubstantial with God and man.
2. John H. Leith, *Introduction to the Reformed Tradition*, p.74.
3. Alister McGrath, *Spirituality in an Age of Change: Rediscovering the Spirit of the Reformers*, p. 17
4. *Ibid.*, p. 15
5. Paul Fuhrmann, *An Introduction to the Great Creeds of the Church*, p 12
6. Norman Shepherd, “Scripture and Confessions”, in John H. Skilton (ed.), *Scripture and Confessions: A Book about Confessions Old and New*, p.1

News from Around the World

A NEW RENEWAL GROUP called Voices of Orthodox Women has been formed by a group of Presbyterian women who attended the July Churchwide Gathering of Presbyterian Women and came away with a concern about the faithfulness to Christ in our denomination and particularly in PW. The purpose of the group is to be "a nationwide network of women committed to the renewal of the Presbyterian Church (USA) through the promotion of the doctrines and practices of historic, biblical and confessional orthodoxy against those of an encroaching culture." Their statement of faith reads in part, "In submission to the Scripture, we believe the intrusions of culture into the life of the church must be exposed and resisted; most particularly, that radical feminism is irreconcilable with biblical orthodoxy; an idolatry—in both church and culture—to be unmasked." For more information on the group contact, Sylvia Dooling, President, 2409 N. Estrella Ave. Loveland, CO 80538, (970) 669-4656, sdooling@aol.com, and www.vow.org.

ANNOUNCEMENTS are being circulated advertising the April 1998, "Re-Imagining Revival" to be held in St. Paul, MN. Leaders expect 1000 people to register. Mary Ann Lundy, who was on staff in PCUSA headquarters in 1993, and was instrumental in garnering Presbyterian funds and support for the conference, will be a speaker at the 1998

Re-Imagining Revival. Lundy is now on the staff of the World Council of Churches which is heavily supported with Presbyterian dollars. Afternoon sessions will include "denominational caucuses." Re-Imagining conferences have continued each year since 1993.

THE SPECIAL MODERATOR-APPOINTED committee on Presbyterian Health, Education and Welfare Association (PHEWA), named by John Buchanan in 1996, completed its final meeting in September without producing even a draft of its report to the 1998 General Assembly. More than half the committee members are current or former members of PHEWA, including committee moderator William Forbes. The GA's decision to form the committee was based largely on charges that PHEWA receives funds and other tangible support from denomination offices while openly defying the church constitution.

THE MODERATOR'S SPECIAL COMMITTEE on Accountable Relationships, also appointed by John Buchanan in 1996, has completed its report on special organizations related to the GA. They decided against recommending that groups of Presbyterians receiving PCUSA mission money or other tangible support be required to adhere to church constitutional standards. Their report and recommendations will be heard by the 1998 GA, the body that will finally decide on its outcome.

Come Join Us Working for Renewal in the Presbyterian Church (USA)

Join us in being a voice calling the Presbyterian Church(USA) and individual Presbyterians back to Reformed Christian faith rooted in Scripture and our Confessions while also rejecting false gods and their ideologies.

_____ **Enclosed are names and addresses of people I think would be interested in receiving *Theology Matters*.**

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The Rev. Dr. Kari McClellan is President of Presbyterians for Faith, Family and Ministry (PFFM). Rev. Susan Cyre is Executive Director and Editor of *Theology Matters*. The Board of Directors of PFFM includes eight clergy and two lay people, six women and four men. PFFM is working to restore the strength and integrity of the PC(USA)'s witness to Jesus Christ as the only Lord and Savior, by helping Presbyterians develop a consistent Reformed Christian world view. *Theology Matters* is sent free to anyone who requests it.

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