

## Week 7: Creation of Humanity

- J. Barr, *The Image of God in the Book of Genesis*, 1968
- J.F.A. Sawyer, 'The Meaning of "in the divine image" in Genesis 1-11', in: *Journal of Theological Studies* 25 (1974), 418-26
- R. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, New York 1964, vol. 1, chs.9-10
- A.A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, Grand Rapids 1986, ch. 5

# Introduction

- Creation of humanity is the climax of the biblical creation story (Gen. 1).
- It integrates this story into the context of salvation history.
- Illustrates specifically the connection between creation and other beliefs.

## Gen 1, 26-7

- *Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'*
- *So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

# Interpretation

- What is 'in the image'? Mind, free will, creativity, capacity for loving relationship?
- The relationship is not static but dynamic.
- Irenaeus of Lyon (2<sup>nd</sup> c.), *Against all Heresies* V 16,2: And then, again, this Word was manifested when the Word of God was made man, assimilating Himself to man, and man to Himself, so that by means of his resemblance to the Son, man might become precious to the Father. For in times long past, it was *said* that man was created after the image of God, but it was not [actually] *shown*; for the Word was as yet invisible, after whose image man was created, Wherefore also he did easily lose the similitude. When, however, the Word of God became flesh, He confirmed both these: for He both showed forth the image truly, since He became Himself what was His image; and He re-established the similitude after a sure manner, by assimilating man to the invisible Father through means of the visible Word.

# Theological interconnections

- Creation & Fall - how much is lost of the 'image'; how much is retained?
- Creation & Incarnation - Christ is the 'image of the invisible God' (Col 1, 15).
- Salvation as 'new creation' (e.g. 2 Cor 5, 17).

# The image as rationality

- Classical view (Augustine, Aquinas etc.):
- Augustine: 'Man's excellence consists in the fact that God made him to His own image by giving him an intellectual soul which raises him above the beasts of the field.' (*De gen. ad litteram* VI 2)
- Consequences for human self-perception and for their idea of God.
- Fall refers to intellectual limitations.
- Salvation will overcome those.
- Christian life in search of wisdom through meditation (monastic ideal).

# The Image as Free will

- John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith* II 12: 'He formed his body and by His own inbreathing gave him a rational and understanding soul, which last we say is the divine image for the "according to His image" means the intellect and free will, while the "according to His likeness" means such likeness in virtue as is possible.'
- Emphasis on the moral aspect of God and man (responsibility, freedom, personhood).
- Fall refers to moral failure; salvation reverses those failings.
- Christ is teacher and example of good life.
- Christian life ideally is action-oriented ('good Samaritan').

# The Image as creativity

- Typical Renaissance idea, e.g. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494):
- *'We have given you, O Adam, no visage proper to yourself, nor endowment properly your own, in order that whatever place, whatever form, whatever gifts you may, with premeditation, select, these same you may have and possess through your own judgement and decision.'* Oration on the Dignity of Man (1486)



# Image as Creativity

- Adam is created 'naked' so that his being will be his own work
- Notion of the Fall is suppressed - linear development from creation to perfection.
- Achievement of perfection is human work.
- Yet dynamic conception is preserved: the image is *and* becomes.

# Image and Sociality

- What is created in the image?
- Humanity - is this merely Adam?
- Traditional interpretation: it refers to humankind in its entirety.
- Society, Culture, History are relevant for understanding God's creation of humanity in his own image.

# Relation to current debates

- On the one hand, biblical anthropocentrism seems outdated.
- At the same time: human dignity and human rights are increasingly central to human self-understanding.
- These ideas betray the stamp of the Jewish-Christian tradition.
- However: why were they not introduced earlier? Why did they encounter resistance in mainstream Christianity?

## Relation to current debates II

- Ambiguous relationship between doctrines of creation and Fall.
- Individuals could be maltreated insofar as they were 'sinners'.
- There are also consequences for individual ethics - the tension between the person we are and the person we are meant to be.