IMAGE AND LIKENESS

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We have not made a distinction between "image" and "likeness," even though Genesis **1**:26 uses two words to compare mankind and God. **(a)** Nothing in the context distinguishes them. Furthermore, **(b)** in most other passages only one term occurs, *image* in Genesis **9**:6-7; 1 Corinthians **11**:7; James **3**:9 and *likeness* in Genesis **5**:2 in an otherwise word-for-word parallel to **1**:26. *Like* in Genesis **3**:5, 22 translates a different item than in **1**:26.[1]

(c) The safer interpretation follows the principle of minimum affirmation. The number of terms does not necessarily correspond to the number of realities because terms can overlap or offer two word-pictures for the same thing. That can be for emphasis or for enriching the perception of the item. In English we may say "various and sundry" as a way of stressing "various." Hebrew idiom is more inclined toward such "redundancy and tautology" than English is. Loose language appears in this setting because the similarity between God and man is not so exact as that between man and man (Genesis **1**:26; **5**:1-3). Similarly, Paul says that Jesus was *"found in the likeness of man"* (Philippians **2**:7). The Son was fully human, but we do not reverse the situation and say that mankind is fully God; yet "likeness" describes the comparison between them. Terminology is not always constant as we have seen in the ontic *vs.* ethical uses of <u>image</u> in the Old Testament *vs.* the New.

Interpretation should keep the burden of proof on the affirmative. Effective thought avoids proposing a viewpoint and then seeing how much information fits it. Some proposed distinctions can be disproved (<u>restrictive</u>), but others cannot (<u>neutral</u>). An interpretation should have a <u>positive</u> basis. It is not correct because it cannot be disproved because sufficient information is lacking. In this case, what disallows falsification also disallows verification. In the image-likeness discussion, some distinctions may even be <u>factually accurate</u> in themselves without being meant by "image" *vs.* "likeness." Being able to imagine even an <u>appropriate</u> distinction does not mean the author had that in mind. Distinguishing "image" and "likeness" requires finding intended difference in the meaning of <u>terms</u>, not finding an apt distinction in the real nature of mankind itself.

Accordingly, **(d)** we do not gain anything apparently by distinguishing image and likeness in Genesis **1**:26. Whatever we correlate with the terms here is true, if it is, because of whatever suggested the distinction in the first place—direct statements elsewhere in scripture, correct inference from experience, or proper understanding of God's and man's nature, relationship, and purposes.

Interpreters have set forward a number of distinctions. **(1)** Image equals the cluster of simple capacities—reason, will, affection, conscience, spirit—while likeness equals the complex capacities—communication, responsibility, love, and the like. **(2)** Image equals capacity while likeness equals possibility, that is, what is given and what is attainable with what is given. This approach would fit with Satan's temptation that Eve would become "like God" (**3**:5) and with their becoming "like one of us" in "knowing good and evil" by eating the forbidden fruit (**3**:22).

It has also been customary to correlate **(3)** image and likeness with being and behavior, anticipating the Old Testament *vs.* the New Testament use of *image*. The close relationship between human nature and human ethical behavior has prompted interpreters to relate ethics to the image, not as a capacity but in terminology.

Behavior cannot be created, however; so ethical quality cannot be created since it comes from a kind of behavior. Likeness to God in an ethical sense is not what can be given by creation, but what is done with what is given. Similarly, behavior and ethical quality cannot be physically begotten; yet Genesis **5**:3 uses this same set of terms to describe Adam's begetting Seth *"in his own likeness after his image."* So, it does not work to say that man cannot create behavior, but God can. Adam and God both can originate whatever these terms designate, Adam by begetting and God by creating. Furthermore, likeness and image in the New Testament are both used in ontic and active senses.

Another image-likeness distinction might be **(4)** same *vs.* similar aspects. Image would cover the elements we share with God while likeness would cover those analogous to him. Rationality, affection, and will would be examples of image, while sexual variance, upright gait, living longer than animals would be examples of likeness. Again, however, the fact that the same terms apply to Adam-Seth serves as a control case that eliminates this suggestion for God-Adam. In other settings, image can refer to a statue of a man (Ezekiel **16**:17; Daniel **3**:1, *etc.*); yet a statue includes aspects beyond the criterial characteristics shared with the person represented.

A related possibility is that image and likeness refer to **(5)** interpersonal capacity *per se* *vs.* the responsibility manifestation of that capacity. Image as created interpersonal capacity would then contrast with dominion, or responsibility, as appointed role. There is some plausibility in this suggestion. Even though dominion is not a creatable likeness, it is an appointable likeness. Image would address nature, and likeness would address role. God has nature and position. The word "make" (עשׂה) is general enough to cover both creation and appointment (1 Samuel **12**:6; 1 Kings **12**:31; cp. Jeremiah **12**:6). In **1**:26 *make* governs both *image* and *likeness*; but in **1**:27, which uses "create" (בָּרָא, *bara'* = **1**:1, 16, 21; **2**:3, 4),[2] the verb governs only image. The commission in **1**:27 could be a replacement for *likeness*—multiplying, filling the earth, and exercising dominion over it. Also, in chapter **3**:5, 22 becoming like God might mean determining for oneself what is good and evil. It would be exercising autonomy to

the exclusion of higher control, which is a prerogative of deity alone. In effect, becoming like God would be a denial of <u>appointed</u> responsibility.

Another way of distinguishing image and likeness may be that **(6)** <u>image has connotations about man's wholeness in comparison to God whereas likeness individuates the aspects within the whole</u> and implies that differences exist between mankind and God even while emphasizing shared characteristics. Such distinctions might be connotations resident in the normal use of the words themselves rather than in anything observed in Genesis itself.

(7) <u>Image</u> might indicate only what is the <u>same</u> between mankind and God while <u>likeness</u> would be a broader word that includes human distinctives relative to God, but there is no contextual cue for such an intended distinction between <u>image</u> and <u>likeness</u>. Another suggested distinction might be that **(8)** *image* strikes at mankind's likeness to God at the level of the whole, whereas *likeness* draws attention to the similarity or similarities between the two.

It appears more reasonable to suppose that **(9)** no intended difference corresponds with the words. Minimum affirmation suggests that we not strain to define distinctions where we have no way to verify them. The two nouns in Genesis **1**:26 emphasize one truth under two word pictures: we share likeness to God, which we have understood as interpersonal capacity.

Endnotes

[1]*Like* in **3**:5, 22 translates the inseparable preposition כְּ (*k^e*). Connecting that <u>idea</u> with **1**:26, however, could add lure or irony to Satan's temptation. In the one case, the force of it becomes *"if you really want to be like God, eat the fruit."* The other tack would make it ironic: *"If you want to be like God, eat the* fruit [of course, you already have likeness to God in any way that is legitimate for you to have it].*"* Mankind created in God's "likeness" (צֶלֶם, *tselem*) behaviorally tried to become too much "like" (כְּ) God or tried to become like him in an inappropriate way.

[2]בָּרָא (*bara'*) means "create," not so much from nothing as in "built" something new. It can apply to cases where something new is made from previously existing matter. God "created" Israel when he constituted the Israelites as a nation at the crossing of the Red Sea (Isaiah **43**:1, 15; 1 Corinthians **10**:1-2).

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