

# Men and Women: the image of God

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## Genesis 1

### 1. Our Current Uncertainties

'Restless and uncertain' might be a good phrase to sum up our world at the moment. I've noticed it—and perhaps you've noticed it too—on the national and international scale. There have always been those who are alarmist, who see disaster around every corner. But just in the past few months I've heard a number of leaders—people respected for their measured judgment, their integrity and their extensive expert knowledge—speak of 'the end of capitalism'. An entire economic system is convulsing and many are unsure of what will, or what can, take its place. Uncertainty about how we order our lives in the economic sphere is no longer the preserve of radical activists.

Then again, the triumphalist hype surrounding the election of Kevin Rudd as Prime Minister of Australia in 2007, and of Barack Obama as President of the United States a year later, has now crumbled into dust. We should have known that neither of these men could have lived up to the messianic expectations heaped upon them at that time. They were both to lead us into a new age of fairness, integrity, peace and prosperity. In the wake of their failure to do so, even more voices are proclaiming the need for something radically different in national and international politics.

However, this restlessness is not just associated with the current uncertainties of political and economic life. Personal relationships are under great strain all around our world. Economic pressures contribute to this, of course. But there is something far deeper. A profound uncertainty about how we should relate to each other, what is appropriate and what is not, is in evidence right across the globe. Spectacular errors of judgment in this area still scandalise us. You just can't—or shouldn't—treat human beings the way prisoners at Abu Ghraib were treated. No one can be allowed to get away with locking up another human being in a cellar for fifteen years as their personal sex slave. We won't tolerate attempts at ethnic cleansing. But not everything draws our collective attention in this way, even some things which cut just as deeply into the lives of ordinary

people. The betrayals of trust demonstrated by an accelerating divorce rate; the state sanctioning of the termination of inconvenient human lives, whether they be the unborn, the invalid or the terminally ill; a relentless workaholism and obsession with achievement which steals away the childhood of countless boys and girls in our cities; the publicity and momentum which seems to attend the gay agenda — all of this largely uncommented upon but further evidence, it seems to me, of a very profound restlessness and uncertainty. Many of us don't know what it means to be human anymore and perhaps the first among many casualties is the relationship of men and women. Feminism, taught openly and without embarrassment in our schools for decades now, has transformed the lives and careers of many women, but increasingly it might be asked whether the benefits have entirely been worth the cost. If the research is any guide, many women have little or no idea of what it means to be a woman and, as you might expect, men are even more clueless.

In such a climate, I wonder whether we really appreciate as much as we should the kind gift of God's word to us. The Scriptures are the kind gift of a generous God. He hasn't left us to stumble around in the dark trying to sort out the meaning of life, the nature of relationships, and the difference between behaviour and perspectives which enhance life and those which destroy it little by little from the inside. We are in the privileged position of having God's perspective given to us in the Bible. Of course it's still possible for us in our selfishness and fear to distort and misuse what God has given us. It is worth saying that through the centuries people have tried to justify all kinds of abuse with appeals to the teaching of Scripture. The crusades, the negro slave trade and Apartheid come to mind as the most obvious examples. Did you pick up on the furore last week as American Atheists and Pennsylvania Nonbelievers produced billboards with a negro slave, complete with collar and chains, a quote from Colossians 3:22 and the slogan 'this lesson in Bronze Age ethics brought to you by THE YEAR OF THE BIBLE and the House of Representatives'?<sup>1</sup> Yet a careful reading of what is there in the Bible, rather than what we might read into what is there, makes clear that the negro slave trade, and these other notorious examples as well, were in fact abuses of Scripture just as much as they were abuses of people. So it's a very good thing that we are taking the time to look carefully at what the Bible teaches this morning.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/atheist-groups-vandalized-billboard-attacking-year-bible-slammed-racist-article-1.1035430?localLinksEnabled=false> accessed 11/03/2012

## 2. Genesis 1–3

If there is one part of the Bible that has shaped Christian understanding of what it is to be human—and what it is to be human as men and women together—more than any other, it is the first three chapters of the book of Genesis. As one important study on the subject remarks, ‘as Genesis 1–3 go, so goes the whole Biblical debate [on manhood and womanhood today]’.<sup>2</sup> That debate has found a focus in these three chapters, with questions looming large about God’s original intention for the relationship of men and women, what exactly went wrong, what are the consequences for the conduct of relationships between men and women today, and what is the hope that is held out for us in the gospel.

There are two reasons why this should be the case, why Genesis 1–3 has been so prominent. In the first instance, the theological significance of Genesis as the starting point of the biblical story and, more precisely, of a biblical theology, is rather obvious. Here is the ultimate beginning as far as the Bible is concerned and it is a beginning in which the entirely sovereign and gracious God is at work. Precisely because God himself is ultimate reality, bringing all other things into existence, and because his sovereign wisdom and power are such that his purposes are put in train at the beginning with absolute confidence that they will be fulfilled in the end, we can turn to the beginning for help in understanding ourselves and our relationships as God intended. These chapters are the word of God to us, given, not just to satisfy a human thirst for knowledge about what has happened in the past, but to call us into the knowledge of God with all that this entails. In the light of this knowledge, this relationship with the living God, we have a radically different perspective on the past, the present and the future. God’s word teaches us how to live now as those who know and love him just as it describes God’s activity in the beginning. But, every created thing *has* a beginning and all beginnings can be traced to Genesis 1–3.

The second reason is quite simply that Jesus and his apostles point us to these chapters for an understanding of God’s intention for men and women today. On the one hand, it is undoubtedly

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<sup>2</sup> R. C. Ortlund, ‘Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1–3’, pp. 95–112 in J. Piper & W. Grudem (eds), *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 95.

right to insist that the heart of the Bible's message is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. In the Bible, all roads don't lead to Rome, they lead to Jesus. We understand God in light of the person and work of Jesus, who makes known the Father in the power of the Spirit. We understand ourselves in light of the person and work of Jesus, the incarnate Son, thoroughly and genuinely human, made like us in every way yet without sin. We understand the seriousness of our sin in the light of his cross. We see the future in the light of his resurrection. All the spiritual blessings that are ours now are blessings 'in him'. He is our one and only Saviour. He is the one and only Lord. Yet on the other hand, when Jesus himself expounded the mind of God he regularly pointed all who would hear back to the Old Testament. When confronted with a question over the propriety of divorce (Matt. 19), he drew the attention of his questioners to God's creational intention as recorded in Genesis 2. When his apostle Paul wrote of how men and women should conduct themselves among God's people, how and under what circumstances they were to share the ministry of the gospel (1 Tim. 2), he pointed back there as well. The New Testament urges us to learn from Genesis 1-3 if we are to understand who we are, what we've become, and how we should relate to each other, particularly as men and women.

So Genesis 1-3 is vital if we are to think rightly, and behave rightly, as those who take God's word seriously and seek to live as disciples of Christ. But before we get stuck into these chapters, there are three brief things I want to say. Firstly, what I am aiming at in these talks (which you'll quickly see are not so much two distinct talks as one talk in two parts) is not an extensive running commentary on Genesis 1-3. There are great commentaries on Genesis out there—I still find Gordon Wenham's among the most helpful—and I'm not going to duplicate all that work here. Which means I am not going to attempt detailed exegetical comment on all the issues of interest or even importance that arise in these chapters. Instead, I have a much more focused aim in these two talks this morning: to consider what these chapters have to say about the relation of men and women and in particular what they say that has a bearing on how men and women live and serve together in the context of Christian ministry. Inevitably my own approach to these chapters will be shaped to some extent by my interests and concerns as an evangelical systematic theologian.

Secondly, we need to acknowledge some of the difficulty in addressing our subject from these chapters. You will be well aware, I'm sure, of the important theological, historical and literary questions that have been raised about these chapters, not just in the last two hundred and fifty years but right through the history of the church. For example, even Augustine of Hippo, in the early fifth century (so, long before the advent of modern science), asked how we should best understand the framework of six days when talking about God's creative activity. But much more than that, in the first instance, the central character of Genesis 1-3 is God himself, just as in the rest of the Bible. In other words, the primary interest of these chapters is theological. We want to focus on what they say about us; they want to tell us first and foremost about God. They don't stop there, of course. But that is where the theological centre of gravity lies — with God.

One often asked question concerns the type of events these chapters describe. It is clear—at least it is clear to me—from here and how these chapters are referred to in the rest of the Bible, that we are dealing with real events, events that really happened and characters who really lived and really did what they are said here to have done. There was a real Garden, a real Adam and Eve, a real grasp at autonomy and fall into sin. And yet there are significant hints along the way that there is *more* than simple historical narrative here. In days 1-3 there is evening and morning without a sun and a moon. Not impossible—the Lord is not dependent upon these things for the creation of light—but clearly something more is happening than just recording a sequence of events. Or take the account of God 'walking' in the Garden in the cool of the day (Gen. 3:8). Since we are not meant to imagine God with arms or legs, or needing exercise, or anything like that, we are being taken beyond simple history. God was there, enjoying his creation, delighting in the world he had made and the relationships he had set in motion. These events were real, real history, but symbolism is present too as a way of conveying the reality of what has happened. I am not for a moment suggesting these events are mythological; but neither are they simple, straightforward history. More is going on, not less, and I take it that this is tied to the point I made a moment ago: that the primary interest of these chapters is theological.

Of course reading these chapters has been complicated by our regular habit of getting sidetracked by the incidental features of this account. We sometimes ask questions that the Bible is not in the

least bit interested in answering, like the length of the days of creation, or the origin and nature of the serpent, or where Cain's wife came from. And then there are the exaggerated claims of some well meaning Christians on one side and the secularists and new atheists on the other. It really is quite easy to be distracted and focus on the things the text is *not* saying, and in so doing, to miss what it *is* saying. These are some of the difficulties we face when approaching these early chapters of Genesis—real difficulties, but, I hasten to add, not insurmountable ones.

And I say 'not insurmountable' because of my third introductory comment: I, like so many Christians before me and beside me, love Genesis 1–3! I was struck again as I prepared these talks by just how wonderful this part of God's word really is. The magnificence of its picture of God, the all-surpassing goodness of his creation, the effortless purpose with which he puts all things in place. The vision of relationship with God, with the environment he has made for us, with each other—it's truly breathtaking and meant to be breathtaking. Read these chapters and you can't help but step back in wonder at God's extraordinary mercy, not least in the face of the perversity and absurdity of human sin. Christian faith and life has been nourished by these chapters as the word of God to us, right through the last two thousand years. And the questions thrown at them and the difficulty some see in them should not blind us to that. I'm excited by Genesis 1–3 and I hope you are as well.

So, a quite circumscribed agenda, a tight focus, on the question of God's created intention for men and women, how this was impacted by the Fall, and the implication of these things for the exercise of ministry by men and women in the churches. But the creation of men and women has a context in Genesis 1 and 2, and that context cannot be ignored entirely.

### **3. God the Creator**

The creation of the man and the woman in Genesis 1–2 fits within the universal creating activity of God. As the very first verse of Genesis 1 proclaims: 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'. I don't know whether you've ever pondered the deep significance of the fact that the first and last actors in the biblical story are the same. Genesis 1 begins with God. Revelation 22 ends with God. It is not too much to say at the outset that the entire Bible is about God, first and

foremost. Of course it will also tell the story of the creation, more particularly the story of humankind, most particularly the story of the redeemed people of God. But this is done within the broader context of God's story. Creation is God's work just as redemption is God's work just as the culmination of all things is God's work. All things owe their origin to God. All things are sustained in their existence by God. All things are brought to their proper destiny by God.

The point is underlined again and again in Genesis 1. The God of Genesis 1 is not an abstract principle. He is not just the intelligible core of a cosmic process. He is one who acts and speaks. And his acting and speaking meets no resistance. When he speaks it is so. The creation of all things proceeds according to his design. There is order: distinction and separation, form first then content, sequence and climax. Vegetation and animal life are created 'according to their kind' (vv. 11, 12, 21, 24, 25). God's delight in differentiated unity, in variety and the synergy of properly ordered activity is obvious right from the beginning. For example, the animals are not created before the vegetation on which they must feed in order to survive is in place.

At each point leading up to the creation of the man and the woman it is God who names things (vv. 5, 8, 10). It is God who pronounces all things good (vv. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25): they conform to his purpose and the character that lies behind it. Even when the first climax is reached with the creation of the man and the woman—a second climax is yet to come with God's rest at the beginning of chapter 2—God remains the central character in this drama. God initiates it: 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness' (v. 26). God creates (v. 27), God blesses (v. 28), God speaks (vv. 29–30) and God evaluates (v. 31).

This one simple observation—so simple it is almost transparent—ought to give us pause for thought. Whatever understanding of ourselves we might come to on the basis of this passage, whatever basis for an understanding of men and women in ministry we discern in this passage, we must take notice of this: the point of reference for all reality is God. Christian ministry, like Christian living, is conducted in the presence of the God who made all things and who has a claim on all things for precisely that reason. We are on dangerous ground if we should ever seek to determine for ourselves conditions of status in God's creation. Just as dangerous would be insisting on an

inviolable right to do this or that, as if the good of all things depends on the freedom I have to pursue my own goals and dreams. Imagine how much sting would have been taken out of the debates over how men and women exercise a Christian ministry if we—men and women alike—had always remembered that we are part of a much larger narrative, one in which, important though we are, we are not the chief character but God is. How compatible really is the pursuit of God's proper glory and a quest for self-fulfilment?

God effortlessly determines the existence of all things. The ordered nature of our universe is not the product of a happy coincidence but the power and goodness of God. In fact, the unfolding story of Genesis 1 & 2 emphasises repeatedly the sovereignty of God, his wisdom and his benevolence. It also stresses the importance of God's word. The agent by which God orders all of creation is his word. He speaks and it is so. His word calls life into existence. His word of blessing ensures the future of the creatures he has made. He blessed the sea creatures and birds just as later he will bless the man and the woman. When these chapters are meditated upon later in the Old Testament, it is not surprising that the creative power of God's word is often a major consideration.

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host. He gathered the waters of the sea as a heap; he puts the deep in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded and it stood firm. (Psalm 33:6-9)

By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. (Hebrews 11:3)

We'll need to come back to this prominence of God's word in the origin and ordering of all things. Only as life is ordered by God's word can it be described as good, and in the case of human beings, very good. His word orients us towards the purpose and future God has lovingly planned for us. His word points us in the right direction and shapes both the journey and the destination.

#### **4. Created human beings**

It was on the sixth day that the word was uttered which signalled the climax of creation:

Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Gen. 1:26-27)



These are words rich with meaning and many of you will have an idea of how many million other words have been written as reflection upon them. In fact they will be filled out, even in the book of Genesis, by a more detailed account in chapter 2. But here, in these two verses, four things stand out.

*1. The creation of the man and the woman is a climax in the creation account.* There had in fact been a few anticipations of this in the record of the days leading up to this one. The most obvious was in the record of the fourth day when we are told that the stars and planets, the 'lights in the expanse of the heavens' (v. 14) will be 'for signs and seasons and for days and years' and 'to give light upon the earth'. Hardly a scientific explanation of the function of the heavenly bodies that, but it points to the way all things were ordered as a proper environment for the man and the woman God will create. Human beings are not an afterthought, even the result of a sudden and unexpected stroke of divine genius. God has had the man and the woman in mind from the beginning. The deliberation 'Let us make', whatever else it conveys—and theologians tend to go weak at the knees contemplating the possibilities of what is conveyed by this one Hebrew word—it signals a major point of departure in God's creative timetable. No statement like this was necessary before the creation of the living creatures or the birds or the fish or the vegetation or the planet itself. But now is the time for which all that has been done so far has been done. The moment has arrived. Now all is ready. 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'. Already the distinction between humanity and the created order is beginning to come into focus. Here is something special: connected to all that has been made, certainly — more of that when we get to Genesis 2; but something new, something different, something special. This is taken further in our second observation.

*2. One thing more than any other differentiates human beings from the rest of the creation and it is summed up in the expressions 'in our image, after our likeness' (v.26).* Neither expression is spelt out in any detail either here or elsewhere in the Bible. There are hints in the context here, to be sure, just as there are in the later account of the birth of Seth (Gen 5:1-3), a number of injunctions in the New Testament (Eph. 4:24; James 3:9), and the New Testament description of Jesus Christ as the glorious 'image of God' (2 Cor. 4:4) or 'the image of the invisible God' (Col. 1:15). The three main

lines of explanation, each picking up one or other of the hints I've just mentioned, locate the image and likeness of God in our function with regard to the rest of creation (having been granted 'dominion'), in the differentiated unity of male and female, or in the appropriateness of human life as in time a fit vehicle for the incarnation of the word of God — human beings 'are so created that God himself could become one'.<sup>3</sup> I suspect the truth is that all three of these things are to one degree or other caught up with our creation in the image of God and after his likeness.

Despite rather sophisticated attempts over the centuries to distinguish the expressions 'image of God' and 'likeness of God', it is not at all clear what the difference between them is. As long ago as the second century, Irenaeus, a bishop in Gaul, suggested that 'the image of God' refers to natural qualities such as reason and the capacity for relationship, while 'the likeness of God' refers to supernatural graces such as righteousness and other-centred love. Such a distinction would allow Irenaeus and others to explain both the continuity and the discontinuity that exists between human beings before and after the Fall. We continue to be in the image of God in the sense that we are still able to reason and we are still able to relate (to others and to God) but our likeness to God has been profoundly affected by the first decision against God and it will take the work of the Spirit to restore it. The image of God is indelible — it is true of believer and unbeliever alike. But the likeness of God has been lost apart from the regenerating work of the Spirit. Yet the problem with too hard and fast a distinction between 'image of God' and 'likeness of God', is that at points these expressions seem interchangeable. For instance, the order is reversed when Genesis 5 speaks of Seth as Adam's son 'in his own likeness, after his image'.

But while the distinction between image and likeness might not be entirely clear to us, what is clear is that no other aspect of creation is described like this. No fish, bird or animal is described as 'in the image of God' or 'after his likeness'. In each of those cases the most we hear is 'according to their kind'. The man and the woman are related to God in a way that no other creature is. There is a unique dignity and indeed a unique value accorded to human life which finds its real warrant here in every one of us being created in the image of God.

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<sup>3</sup> J. C. Lennox, *Seven Days that Divide the World: The Beginning according to Genesis and Science* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), p. 74.

Here the teaching of Scripture stands in stark contrast to the insistence of some that human beings aren't all that different from the animal creation. More evolved, most certainly; able to manipulate our environment, including the animal creation, in extraordinary ways, surely. But in the end the differences are incidental rather than fundamental. One renowned historian of European thought has described 'Christianity's cardinal error' as 'the belief that humans are radically different from other animals'.<sup>4</sup> It's because they will no longer accept that human beings have a unique value conferred upon them by their creation in God's image and likeness, that some environmentalists refuse to privilege continued human existence over the preservation of other species. Human life is expendable — there are too many of us anyhow — and we must do all we can to protect natural biodiversity. Secular ethicist Peter Singer of Princeton spells out the reasoning quite clearly:

Whatever the future holds, it is likely to prove impossible to restore in full the sanctity-of-life view. The philosophical foundations of this view have been knocked asunder. We can no longer base our ethics on the idea that human beings are a special form of creation made in the image of God, singled out from all other animals, and alone possessing an immortal soul. Our better understanding of our own nature has bridged the gulf that was once thought to lie between ourselves and other species, so why should we believe that the mere fact that a being is a member of the species *Homo Sapiens* endows its life with some unique, almost infinite value?<sup>5</sup>

Put aside for the moment his assertion that this particular biblical claim is no longer credible. After all, he seems to overlook the simple fact that the same biblical text which speaks of our uniqueness and value as human beings also speaks of a substantial continuity with the rest of creation by virtue of being created out of 'dust from the ground' (Gen. 2:7). But what is significant is the way he recognises that the great Western value of the sanctity of life has been anchored at precisely this point: 'human beings are a special form of creation made in the image of God, singled out from other animals, and alone possessing an immortal soul'. All species aren't created equal in the end. There is a uniqueness and value to human beings, a uniqueness and value reflected in every human life, and the only way someone like Peter Singer can ignore it is by casting aside God and his word.

3. *As God's image human beings are given responsibility for the creation of which they are a part.* The prominence of this idea in Genesis 1 is what has led most biblical scholars to conclude that this is the essence of what it means to be in the image of God. Just as the conquerors in the Ancient Near

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<sup>4</sup> J. Gray, *Straw Dogs* (London: Granta Books, 2003), p. 37. Quoted in Lennox, p. 69.

<sup>5</sup> P. Singer, 'Sanctity of Life or Quality of Life?', *Pediatrics* 72/1 (1983), pp. 128–9. Quoted in Lennox, p. 68.

East set up images as a reminder of their rule and authority over a particular territory, so the man and the woman are to operate as God's vice-regents on the earth. They are to exercise God's authority. So immediately after the deliberation, 'Let us make man in our own image ...', God speaks of the dominion he intends to grant them over all other earthly creatures. The idea is repeated a few verses later, when after another fuller reference to creation in the image of God, God blesses the man he has just created and confers this responsibility upon him:

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 heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth (1:28)

It is after this that God looks at everything he had made and declares it 'very good'. Human dominion over the creation is a good thing, something planned from the beginning. Of course this good thing, like all good things on this side of the Fall, can be abused and distorted into something grotesque. Dominion can degenerate into exploitation. But when it is ordered by God's word, when God's own character determines the nature and the exercise of this dominion, it is a good thing. God's rule over all things is characterised by his commitment to the welfare of all. He cares about insignificant sparrows, Jesus told his disciples, and even the vegetation which is here today and gone tomorrow (Matt. 6:25-30). And most of all he cares for men and women made in his image. Human dominion over the creation is meant to see it flourish and serve the end for which it was designed. Human dominion is meant to reflect God's dominion and is in the end answerable to it.

But our immediate concern lies with the fourth thing to be observed in these two verses.

*4. God's image is inseparable from the reality of men and women in relationship.* The three poetic lines of verse 27 each have their own emphasis. In the first line, 'God created man in his own image', the emphasis seems to be on the creative activity of God: *God* created. The corollary of this is simply that human beings are first and foremost creatures. We haven't shared eternity with God in the past. We come into existence in a moment of time. We are creatures and God is the Creator. And this simple fact sets certain boundaries. God is not our equal. We are not in a position to evaluate God, his activity, his motives, his purposes. This distinction between God and his creation is something that must be honoured. Only God himself is able to cross that line — and once again we are brought to Christ and that glorious moment when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

The second line places the emphasis in a slightly different space: 'in the image of God he created him'. In ways we have already explored, this creature bears a resemblance to God. We are made to be like God, to stand in the world doing the work of God. As God's creative activity reaches a crescendo, the spotlight falls on this creature who will display the wisdom and goodness of God to the rest of creation.

And then the crucial third line: 'male and female he created them'. The sexual differentiation of the race as men and women is tied in with the deliberate creative intention of God. At one level, of course, this is nothing extraordinary. Birds, fish and animals share this sexual polarity as well. However, it is on centre stage only when it comes to the creation of humanity. In fact, it not explicitly mentioned in Genesis 1 as a feature of animal life more generally. It may well be assumed in the blessing of God in verse 22: 'be fruitful and multiply ...' but there nothing more is said. However, this creature that *God* created, this creature created *in God's image*, exists as man and woman, male and female. The inference is clear: this particular instance of differentiated unity is significant in a way that others are not. This 'oneness with difference' in one way or other patterns God. It is bound up with what it means to be in the image of God. As one contemporary writer puts it '... one aspect of the image of God in humanity is the unity, compatibility, and complementarity of these two similar but different beings ... these two non-identical halves of humanity'.<sup>6</sup> Now perhaps that's saying a little more than can be established just from Genesis 1:27, but I have no doubt that is where you must end up by the close of Genesis 2. The point here is that the dignity, value and responsibility which God bestows upon the human race at the outset is something shared by men and women. Men and women are both created in the image of God, but more than that, they are created to be *together* the image of God. The mere duplication of males (or females) would not suffice here. There is something about the sameness and difference of men and women which uniquely represents or even resembles God.

Perhaps we should be reminded at that this is the image *of God* that we are talking about and the only God there is, is eternally triune. In his eternal being there is a differentiated unity. The Father,

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<sup>6</sup> C. Smith, *God's Good Design: What the Bible Really Says about Men and Women* (Kingsford, NSW: Matthiasmedia, 2012), p. 166.

the Son and the Spirit are not three separate entities, three gods. But neither are we free to talk about an undifferentiated oneness, as if God's identity as Father, Son and Spirit doesn't really matter. We are bound by the teaching of Scripture to speak of God as one and three at the same time. There has only ever been one true and living God. And he has only ever existed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Perhaps the idea that 'created male and female' is a crucial element of what it means to be in the image of God has more going for it than some have realised. In this differentiated unity we display something about the very being of God.

## **5. On the edge of history**

Before we break perhaps it would be good to sum up where we've come so far.

In a world confused about what it means to be human, let alone what it means to be a man or to be a woman, God has given us this good word. Human beings are creatures, the product of God's own deliberate activity. We are not the result of an accidental collision of molecules, without reason or direction. We are not simply the next step in the endless diversification of matter. The God who makes all things good, which means entirely in keeping with his character as sovereign, wise and benevolent, created humanity in his own image, after his likeness. God is able to make all things good because he is sovereign; he knows how to make all things good because he is wise; and he wants to make all things good because he is benevolent, lovingly concerned for his creatures.

Men and women are the intended climax of God's creative activity. They are distinct from the rest of creation, though related to it. They are granted a unique role and bear a unique dignity. As much as anything else, according to Genesis 1, this is all tied to creation in the image of God. Integral to all this is the sexual differentiation of the race. Neither male nor female can be bracketed out from this critical role in God's purposes and all that is involved in it. Both owe their existence directly to God. Both have been made in God's image. Together they represent God to the creation. Life as God meant it to be is diminished when they are at odds with one another or cut off from one another.

It might be a little early to start to tease out implications for men and women in ministry at this point, but one thing is already clear. While there is order at point after point in God's narrative of

creation, while there is differentiation and even separation of one thing from another as God's creative activity proceeds, the dominant note as far as men and women are concerned is one of unity. Differentiation, yes, but differentiated unity. It is obvious that God loves variety — plants according to their kinds, animals according to their kinds. Big, small, colourful, bland, simple and complex. And the real differences between the sexes are undoubtedly something God delights in as well. Nevertheless, those differences are most evidently not differences of value or status and they exist within a much more fundamental unity. The order in the relationship which becomes evident in Genesis 2 actually enhances and nourishes that unity. We can and should, then, delight in the differences between men and women rather than trying to blur the boundaries in the name of some illusive ideal called 'equality'. The partnership in evidence in the beginning, a partnership that delights in difference and doesn't just settle for duplication, should find its echo in our churches. It is not only men and women as individuals who are the image of God, but more importantly men and women together.