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ABSTRACT TERMS AND AMBIGUOUS COMPARISONS: IDENTIFYING ṢELEM AND DĚMUTH IN THE PRIMEVAL HISTORY

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INTRODUCTION

Historically, an intense point of theological and interpretive contention[1] has revolved around two short verses, Gen 1:26-27. The passage reads:

> 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 air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.[2]

The passage is embedded in obscurity and abstraction, with little explanation or description detailed. It is likely that the passage would have stimulated cognitive triggers in the mind of the emic audience for whom the passage was originally intended,[3] however, modern interpreters are left to fend for themselves. When at one time particular words would have brought forth clear mental pictures in the reader's mind, the modern exegete is left with blanks. The passage begs several pressing questions: What is inferred by "image" and the similar term "likeness"? To whom is God speaking when he says "Let *us*…"? Theologically, what does it mean to be created in God's image?[4] The word "image" (*ṣelem*) is utilized several other times in the Primeval History[5] including Gen 5:1-3 and 9:6. In this paper, I intend to investigate the biblical writer's use of *ṣelem* in the Primeval History in order to shed light on the inferred meaning and reception of that meaning by the emic audience. I contend that the biblical text is relatively silent on the

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[1] Nahum M. Sarna, as late as 1966, notes that "The phrase 'in the image of God' is a difficult one and its origin and exact import have not been satisfactorily explained." Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), 15.

[2] Biblical quotations come from the Revised Standard Version (RSV), unless stated otherwise.

[3] For the purposes of this paper, the terms "emic" audience and "original" audience refer to the same concept and are used interchangeably.

[4] At this point I must clarify my intentions. I will not attempt to develop a theological study of *ṣelem*/*dĕmuth* in the Primeval History; to do so is beyond the scope of this paper. Several quality studies exist in this manner, including Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Vol. 2; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967); William Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979); and Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created* in *God's Image* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986).

At the same time, however, I cannot diminish importance of theological scholarship: the Hebrew Bible is a *religious* text for both Christians and Jews and thus theological studies are both warranted and necessary at times. For this reason, I will briefly address the theological implications brought forth as the results of my research at the end of the paper.

[5] Genesis 1-11:26.

issue and propose that an understanding of the writer's intent is discernable only through a survey of neighboring Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) peoples' employment of the term.

ṢELEM IN THE PRIMEVAL HISTORY

Genesis 1:26-27

In Gen 1:26 the implied author[6] expounds on the creation of humankind in contrast to his previous creations of all sorts of life (vv. 3-25). There is a sharp distinction in detail between the descriptions given for all other created life to that given for humankind. After listing a portion of God's created animals the implied author states "And God saw that it was good" (וירא אלהים כי-טוב). The subsequent phrase, "And/then God said" (ואמר אלהים), is the eighth member of a set of announcements delineating the steps of God's creative acts (vv. 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29) and marks the last (and arguably, most important) act of creation: the creating of the human beings. Claus Westermann movingly describes the rhythm and movement of the passage:

> The first chapter of the Bible strikes one who reads it for the first time like a mysterious song, like a festal celebration—one could almost say, like a heavenly liturgy. With a solemn, ponderous rhythm the same phrases keep reappearing throughout the entire chapter. It affects one as a litany. The great rhythm which

[6] Generally, there are two main theoretical camps concerned with the authorship of this portion of the book of Genesis. On the conservative side, the passage is attributed to Moses (some allow for post-Mosaic adaptations), along with most of the rest of the Pentateuch. For a fairly convincing form of this argument see Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 21-9. In the other direction, critical scholars have built on the work of Hermann Hupfeld and Documentary Hypothesis by ascribing the text to the "Priestly Writer," more commonly known as "P." This writer was concerned with sacred institutions and cultic laws, but most important s/he was concerned with "the origins of the people of God . . . [and] the creation of the world" (Richard N. Soulen and R. Kendall Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001], 127). For all practical purposes, the intent of the Priestly Writer was etiological: s/he attempted to establish a history of beginnings and origins for his or her people.

The term "implied author" has been chosen primarily with the intention of avoiding the complexity surrounding authorship issues. Both sides make plausible arguments, and I find it hard to rule one or the other completely out. For this reason, the "implied author," as defined by W. Randolph Tate as "a literary entity who is found only within or constructed from a text," will allow me to avoid citing "Moses" or "P Writer" directly. Tate defines this entity further: "The implied author is not the same as the real author but is only a partial and incomplete reflection of the real author" (W. Randolph Tate, *Interpreting the Bible: A Handbook of Terms and Methods* [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006], 176. By implementing the term "implied author," it gives the writer of this paper a mutual understanding with the reader(s) concerning authorship. To put it simply, the verdict is still out. Terminology such as "implied author" or "biblical writer" will be used synonymously.

> governs the chapter has the character of a tremendous monotone, comparable to the monotonous breaking of the sea on the shore . . . . A basic rhythm, common to all the acts, controls the presentation of each.[7]

He goes on to describe the separate movements within the overall rhythm as made up of several elements: an *announcement* ("And God said"), *command* ("Let there be..."), *report* ("And it was so."), *evaluation* ("And God saw that it was good."), and finally, *temporal framework* ("And there was evening, and there was morning, the . . . day.").

The passage in focus is part of the "first creation narrative" as opposed to the "second" dictated in Gen 2.[8] As the last creative act in a series of events, the making of the humans undoubtedly draws emphasis and anchors its importance in the mind of the reader. In fact, it is this portion of the creation litany that serves as the climax.[9] The use of particular Hebrew words demonstrate this as well: *bara'* ("create") is used for the special creative acts of the last two days, whereas *'asah* ("make/made") is used for the previous days of creation.[10] Where the previous creative acts take up only two or three verses, the forming of humankind takes up five (vv. 26-30). Special prominence is given to humankind, and both man and woman (v. 27) find themselves at the center of creation, the pinnacle of all God's created beings. It is safe to assume that this exaltation of the human beings above all other creations is tied closely to God's *ṣelem*, as the term itself is located in the first phrase of the subnarrative. No other creation is formed in God's *ṣelem*, and no other creation is described in as much detail. God's *ṣelem* seals the uniqueness of humankind. One final element bolsters the implied author's emphasis on the creation of man, including his relation to the image of God: Gen 1:26-27, complete with its

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[7] Claus Westermann, *The Genesis Accounts of Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 6-7.

[8] Critical scholars have pointed to discrepancies among the two creation narratives, arguing for the existence of two separate authors or the combination of two separate accounts. Although the argument rests outside of the scope of this paper, it is interesting that the concept of the "image" is completely absent in the second narrative.

[9] See Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (ICC; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 30.

[10] Verse 1 is the exception (it uses *bara'*), which can be taken as a type of general preview statement of the verses to follow. This, however, does not seem to detract from the emphasis that is placed on days five and six (especially six). See Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 44-5.

reference to the creation of humankind and the *ṣelem* of God, is located in the very center of a chiastic structure.[11] Clearly the biblical writer wished to emphasize not only the creation of the human beings, but also their relationship to God through the *ṣelem*.

Genesis 5:1-3

Genesis 5 lists the generations from Adam to Noah, the protagonist of the Flood Narrative (Gen 6-9). In the first three verses of the chapter, *dĕmuth* (likeness) is utilized twice by the biblical writer, and *ṣelem* once:

> This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness [*dĕmuth*] of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. When Adam had lived a hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness [*dĕmuth*], after his image [*ṣelem*], and named him Seth.

This passage serves as a clear intertextual echo[12] of the primary 1:26-27 text. Here, the order of the term in question is reversed. The uniqueness of this passage, however, is that Adam's son Seth is said to mirror Adam in the way humankind mirrors God. Seth is made in Adam's *ṣelem*/*dĕmuth*, as Adam is made in God's. Although the passage conveys a sense of transference, the ambiguity remains; the inferred meaning behind the terms' uses go without explanation.

Genesis 9:6

The final use of the term in the Primeval History occurs at the end of the Flood narrative when God blesses Noah and his sons (v. 1) and relates to them the new commands to live by

[11] Hartley, *Genesis* (NIBC 1; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 48.

[12] For an interesting explanation of the literary "echo" see G. R. O'Day, "Intertextuality," in *Methods of Biblical Interpretation* (ed. John H. Hayes; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 155.

concerning food consumption (v. 3-4) and the sanctity of life-blood (vv. 4-5).[13] In v. 6, directly after demanding an account for human life, God states that "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image [*ṣelem*]." Here we see that a prohibition concerning the shedding of the blood of a fellow human being is given. For what reason? Humankind is fashioned in God's *ṣelem*.

Summary

Strictly from reviewing the uses of the terms in the biblical text, several important points can be surmised. First, the *ṣelem* places humankind into a position of elevation in creation (1:26-27). Second, although the terms *ṣelem* and *dĕmuth* appear to be distinct concepts in the first passage, they are used interchangeably in 5:1-3. Lastly, *ṣelem* is important enough that its relationship with the human identity solidifies the sanctity of human life-blood. Although *ṣelem* is never explained and the implied author gives no details, it is a critical concept. Humankind's very identity and purpose as a created being on this earth are wrapped tightly in its position as an "image-bearer" of some sort. Although the Primeval History does not give details concerning the *ṣelem*, perhaps meaning can be found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (HB).

ṢELEM IN THE BROADER HEBREW BIBLE CONTEXT

Ṣelem is used sixteen times total in the HB, but only five times in the Primeval History. It remains to be questioned: How is the term utilized outside of the Primeval History? In a fascinating narrative following the capture of the Ark of the Covenant, the Philistines plan on

[13] Additionally, Waltke writes that Gen 8:1-9:2 constitutes a "Re-creation" account, in which the successive creative acts listed in ch. 1 are reflected. In his perception, 9:6 directly reflects 1:26-28, thus explaining the repetition of the *ṣelem* term. See Waltke, *Genesis*, 128-29.

sending the Ark back to the Israelites and inquire of "the priests and diviners" who in turn suggest the Ark is sent back in addition to five golden images of both tumors and mice. In this way they hoped that God would "lighten his hand" from upon them and ease their affliction. Although the passages are referentially obscure, the images are surely representational forms:

> So you must make images [*ṣelem*] of your tumors and images [*ṣelem*] of your mice that ravage the land, and give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps he will lighten his hand from off you and your gods and your land….And they put the ark of the LORD on the cart, and the box with the golden mice and the images [*ṣelem*] of their tumors. (1 Sam 6:5, 11)

In 2 Kings 11:18, following the covenant to God made by Jehoiada the priest, the people destroy the temple of Baal. This includes slaying the priest, tearing down the temple, and breaking the altars. Interestingly, the "images" are also broken into pieces. In this passage *ṣelem* is representational of Baal himself ("his altars and his images they broke into pieces"). A parallel passage follows in 2 Chron 23:17.

> Then all the people of the land went to the house of Ba'al, and tore it down; his altars and his images [*ṣelem*] they broke in pieces, and they slew Mattan the priest of Ba'al before the altars. And the priest posted watchmen over the house of the LORD. (2 Kgs 11:18)

> Then all the people went to the house of Ba'al, and tore it down; his altars and his images [*ṣelem*] they broke in pieces, and they slew Mattan the priest of Ba'al before the altars. (2 Chron 23:17)

In one Psalm, the term is used to demonstrate the "fleetingness" or "frailty" of human life and existence. Edward M. Curtis argues that it "refers to the insubstantial nature of human life".[14]

> Surely man goes about as a shadow [*ṣelem*]! Surely for nought are they in turmoil; man heaps up, and knows not who will gather! (Ps 39:6)

A similar passage follows in which *ṣelem* is used to describe one's chaotic mind upon waking from a dream:

[14] Edward M. Curtis, "Image of God (OT)," *ABD* 3:389.

> They are like a dream when one awakes, on awaking you despise their phantoms [*ṣelem*]. (Ps 73:20)

Several other passages make use of the term as well, although in each the word is portrayed ambiguously and without description or detail:

> Their beautiful ornament they used for vainglory, and they made their abominable images [*ṣelem*] and their detestable things of it; therefore I will make it an unclean thing to them. (Ezek 7:20)
>
> You also took your fair jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself images [*ṣelem*] of men, and with them played the harlot… (Ezek 16:17)
>
> But she carried her harlotry further; she saw men portrayed upon the wall, the images [*ṣelem*] of the Chalde'ans portrayed in vermilion… (Ezek 23:14)
>
> You shall take up Sakkuth your king, and Kaiwan your star-god, your images [*ṣelem*], which you made for yourselves. (Amos 5:26)

Although the focus of this paper is the Primeval History, the passages listed above must be taken into consideration to shed light on the term's broader usage. From the passages, several meanings/uses can be determined. First, *ṣelem* refers to a representational figure, either two or three dimensional. These figures represent pagan deities (2 Kgs 11:18; 2 Chron 23:17; Ezek 7:20; Amos 5:26). Second, the *ṣelem* can also refer to men (Ezek 16:17; 23:14; Amos 5:26) or simple sculpted objects (1 Sam 6:5, 11). Lastly, the term is used in the Psalms to address the insubstantial part of human life, and in particular a "dream image" of some sort (39:6; 73:20). This brief survey of HB terminology is helpful when determining the meaning of the word in the context of the Primeval History and 1:26-27 in particular.

DĚMUTH IN THE HEBREW BIBLE CONTEXT

The term "likeness" (*dĕmuth*) occurs in twenty-one passages in the HB.[15] Again, because the non-monolithic nature of words and signification, there are multiple uses for this term. A brief survey of the twenty-one passages reveals that in the HB, *dĕmuth* may refer to a pattern,

[15] See Gen 1:26; 5:1, 3; 2 Kgs 16:10; 2 Chron 4:3; Ps 58:4; Isa 13:4; 40:18; Ezek 1:5, 10, 16, 22, 26, 28; 8:2; 10:1, 10, 21, 22; 23:15; Dan 10:16.

plan, or model drawing of an altar (2 Kgs 16:10), representational art forms (2 Chron 4:3), metaphorical links between two objects (Ps 58:4; Isa 13:4), comparisons of form with God (Isa 40:18), and explanation in human language of the experiences of certain Israelite prophets (Ezek 1:5, 10, 16, 22, 26, 28; 8:2; 10:1, 10, 21, 22; 23:15; Dan 10:16).

The words *image* and *likeness* occur in close proximity and are nearly synonymous in denotative meaning to the casual English reader. After closer scrutiny, however, several questions present themselves: Is there a difference between image and likeness because they are stated separately? If so, what does "image" imply in contrast to "likeness"? How are the two compared to one another? What is their relationship? These answers do not come easily; this passage is enveloped in obscurity. The implied author puts forth the two terms without an explanation and leaves it for the reader to make the mental connections to what is being addressed or stated here. The exegete, then, is left to fend for his or herself; the reader must ascertain the meaning behind such abstraction.

Some theologians in the past have tended to separate the two into distinct categories. Irenaeus, for instance, equated image with humankind's rationality, freedom, and responsibility. Likeness, however, had to do with the spirit which was given to believers, granting them a tripartite existence of body, soul, and spirit, in contrast to unbelievers who had only body and soul.[16] Additional interpretations exist in this manner as well. As alluded to above, I part with such an interpretation. The phrase "in our image, after our likeness" could be a simple case of Hebrew poetic repetition. This would be in keeping with Hebrew literary style and its implementation of repetition and restatement of similar terms used for emphasis. Anthony A.

[16] For excellent reviews of historic interpretation on the image of God, see Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), especially ch. four (pp. 33-65) and Clines, "The Image of God in Man," *TynBul* 19 (1968): 54-61. Whereas Hoekema's focus is primarily theological, Clines surveys both theological interpretation as well as scholarly research on the subject. Hoekema provides a summary and critique of Irenaeus' views on pp. 33-35.

Hoekema supports this interpretation and writes that

> The Hebrew text…makes it clear that there is no essential difference between the two: "after our likeness" is only a different way of saying "in our image." This is borne out by examining the usage of these words in this passage [Gen 1:26] and in the two other passages in Genesis. In Genesis 1:26 both *image* and *likeness* are used; in 1:27 only *image* is used, while in 5:1 only the word *likeness* is used. In 5:3 the two words are used again but this time in a different order: *in his own likeness, after his image*. And again in 9:6 only the word *image* is used. If these words were intended to describe different aspects of the human being, they would not be used as we have seen them used, that is, interchangeably.[17]

Image and likeness, when viewed in this manner, are one and the same. Although some scholars find fault with this interpretation,[18] Curtis agrees:

> Gen 1:26 introduces the account of humanity's creation with God's statement, "Let us make man in our image (*besalmenu)* according to our likeness (*kidmutenu*)." Gen 5:1 talks about humanity's creation "in the likeness of God" (*bidmut elohim*), and this suggests that the prepositions used with the nouns "image and likeness" are interchangeable in meaning.[19]

It seems, then, that when the phrase is read in the context of the nature of Hebrew literature (involving repetition, restatement, and emphasis),[20] there is no need to separate out *ṣelem* and *dĕmuth* into distinct categories bearing differences in meaning.

INTERPRETIVE DIFFICULTIES

The passages in focus pose several critical problems not only for interpretation/exegesis but ultimately theology. First, the implied author portrays God's words through first person plural cohortative forms of speech. This is a controversial form that has reached no easy conclusions among scholars. Second, the passages at hand bear haunting resemblance to the cultic prohibition of image-crafting in Israel. Third, the preposition (ב; *beth*) tagged on to the

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[17] Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 13.

[18] Waltke, *Genesis*, 66. See footnote 51. Waltke insists that "the word *likeness* serves to clearly distinguish God from humans in the biblical worldview" (66). From his theological position, such a conclusion is expected: Waltke does not wish for mankind to position themselves too close to God.

[19] Curtis, "Image of God," 389.

[20] Clines states that "We understand the term כדמותנו [*kidemutnu*] 'according to our likeness' to be an amplification and specification of the meaning of the image." Clines, "The Image of God in Man," 90.

image term (צלם; *ṣelem*) can take one of two uses, influencing the English translation itself. All three of these difficulties are examined below.

The Problem of "Let us…"

Four verses in the HB employ the (divine) first person plural cohortative form besides Gen 1:26-27, and include Gen 3:22; 11:7; and Isa 6:8. As Waltke aptly notes, these references "do not seem to refer to the Trinity."[21] In Gen 3, God says "Behold, the man has become *like one of us*, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" (emphasis added). The last use of the divine form in the Primeval History is found in 11:7. Here, God surveys the intent of the people settled on the plane of Shinar and decides to take action against them: "Come, *let us* go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech" (emphasis added).[22] The oft-quoted Isa 6:8 uses similar terminology: "And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and *who will go for us*?'" (emphasis added). Scholars are divided concerning how to interpret this plural language. For Waltke, "God refers to 'us' when human beings are impinging on the heavenly realm and he is deciding their fate."[23] In this way, God is addressing either the angels or the heavenly court.[24] Derek Kidner mentions that the divine plurality may refer to the "sons of God" or "gods" (*elohim*) but is hesitant that this interpretation may contradict Isa 40:13-14: "Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or as his counselor has instructed him? Whom did he consult for his enlightenment, and who taught him the path of justice, and taught him

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[21] Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis*, 64.

[22] For a convincing interpretation of this passage and its relation to the Creation narrative, see John T. Strong, "Shattering the Image of God: A Response to Theodore Hiebert's Interpretation of the Story of the Tower of Babel," *JBL* 127 (2008): 625-34.

[23] Waltke, *Genesis*, 64.

[24] See 1 Kgs 22:19-22; Job1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Ps 29:1-3; 89:5-6; Isa 6:8; 40:1-6; Dan 10:12-13. Ibid., 64.

knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding?" He in turn limits "us" to "plural of fullness," evidenced by the plural identity of the word *elohim*.[25]

Other interpretations are proposed,[26] but D. J. A. Clines offers a convincing argument for the referential identity of the divine plurality. He dismisses the interpretations listed above, and also argues against a new possibility, that "let us" may be "an unassimilated fragment of myth." Clines is convinced that the phrase is purely intentional on behalf of the implied author, and quotes theologian Gerhard von Rad to solidify his argument:

> Nothing is here by chance; everything must be considered carefully, deliberately, and precisely. It is false, therefore, to reckon here [Gen 1] even occasionally with archaic and half-mythological rudiments. . . . What is said here is intended to hold true entirely and exactly as it stands.[27]

For Clines, the plurality remains a difficult (if not unsolvable) issue.[28] In the end, he proposes that the best interpretation involves a "duality within the Godhead" in which God addresses his partner or Spirit, attested elsewhere in the HB (Job 33:4; Ps 104:30; Ezek 37). Both Yahweh (יהוה) and the Spirit of God (רוח-אל) fit neatly under the plural designation of the title *elohim* (אלהים).

Biblical Prohibition of Images

There is a strong hesitancy surrounding image-crafting in ancient Israelite society. The Decalogue in Exodus 20:4-5 seems to abolish not only the worship of images in Israel, but also the crafting of them:

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[25] Derek Kidner, *Genesis* (Downer's Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1967), 51-2.

[26] John E. Hartley lists a wide range of interpretive possibilities. Other than the abovementioned interpretations, several other possibilities exist: 1) God is consulting Wisdom personified (see Prov 8:22-31). 2) The plurality may be "a polite manner of self-expression." 3) It may refer to a certain "majesty" (see Gen 11:7; Isa 6:8). 4) It is a self-address in the form of an ancient literary type. Hartley, *Genesis*, 52-3. For a similar listing, see Clines, "The Image of God in Man," 63-9.

[27] Ibid., 64.

[28] "It is only because other solutions prove so unsatisfactory that we suggest, with some hesitation, an explanation which raises as many problems as it solves, but nevertheless seems no worse than the other possibilities, and may furthermore be turned to good account in our exposition of the meaning of the image, as we shall later see." Ibid., 68.

> You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me.[29]

Theologian Francis Schaeffer argues, however, that regardless of the above passage God intended only to ban the *worship* of representational art (Lev 26:1), not the crafting of it. Referring to the construction of both the Tabernacle and the First Temple, Schaeffer then points to the numerous commands of God to the craftsmen to create a wide variety of representational images.[30] Regardless of Schaeffer's modern interpretation,[31] the Decalogue still appears to contain the abolition of image crafting so it is unexpected that the Primeval History would utilize a word bearing negative connotations. Although the word employed by the writer is *pecel* (פסל), not *ṣelem* (צלם), it is plausible that a negative connotation was shared between the two words.[32] The terms address the same issues. Why would the biblical writer employ a taboo item in his etiology of humankind's origins and purpose? Perhaps, as will be demonstrated below, the controversial wording was chosen purposefully, with the intention of making a particular point.

Beth of the Norm or *Beth* Essentiae?

Clines divides interpretive renderings of the phrase *beṣelem elohim* (בצלם אלהים;"in the image of God") into two distinct categories: the *beth* (ב)[33] preceding *ṣelem* (צלם) can either be "a

[29] See also Jer 10:3-5 and Hos 11:2.

[30] Francis Schaeffer, *Art and the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 11-18.

[31] Schaeffer, as a modern philosopher/theologian, writes solely for the sake of Christian living and ethics. His intent is to legitimize the arts (of all forms, but specifically the visual arts), for the Christian. His goal is to prove that one can be a Christian *and* an artist, even with the supposed "prohibition." Yet, one must wonder: Just because Schaeffer can interpret the passages conveniently for modern Christians, was this the true intent of the biblical writer? Did the biblical writer really only intend for Exodus 20:4-5 to address images in regards to idolatry?

[32] Curtis writes that "even though this word is not used in the legislation that specifically condemns the use of images, the same negative connotations are almost certainly associated with the word." Curtis, "Image of God (OT)," 390.

[33] Commonly translated into English as "in" or "with."

beth of the norm" or "a *beth* of essence."[34] He argues that the most "natural" meaning for the phrase situates the *beth* as one of the norm, and translates the phrase as "according to the pattern, or model, of our image." This interpretation, however, is further complicated: the "image," in ANE conception, must either be a literal, physical representation or metaphorical comparison having to do with spiritual qualities or character.[35] In summary, Clines denies the "*beth* of the norm" interpretation on several grounds. First, he concludes that the HB conception of God is without any particular form, thus denying the literal interpretation.[36] Second, he demonstrates that *ṣelem* is rarely used metaphorically, and when it is, "the idea of physical shape and form is [still] present."[37] Clines discredits the interpretation of the phrase according to the grammatical rules of the *beth* of norm; it is the *beth* of essence that he finds most plausible.[38] He then works to reinterpret the passage accordingly:

> Our conclusion thus is that Genesis 1:26 is to be translated "Let us make man as our image" or "to be our image", and the other references to the image are to be interpreted similarly. Thus we may say that according to Genesis 1 man does not have the image of God, nor is he made *in* the image of God, but is himself the image of God.[39]

Clines' argument is plausible. John T. Strong builds on this line of interpretation, and describes humankind as God's *ṣelem* in terms of stelae set up by a military victor over a newly conquered people or territory.[40] The stelae often bore the image of the conquering king along with his inscribed name. In Strong's opinion—which I find convincing—humankind is that very image. "Humans, as the image of God and the pinnacle of his creating acts, testify to Yahweh as the

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[34] Clines, "The Image of God in Man," 70, 75.
[35] Ibid., 70.
[36] One must take note that this conclusion follows a lengthy discussion of the various anthropomorphic descriptions of God throughout the HB. Clines, quoting H. H. Rowley, emphasizes the fluidness of God's being, and ability to assume any form necessary for a certain task: "In the teaching of the Old Testament God is nowhere conceived of as a essentially of human form. Rather he is conceived of as pure spirit, able to assume a form rather than as having in himself physical form." Ibid., 73.
[37] Ibid., 75.
[38] For Clines' specific reasons, see pp. 73-75.
[39] Ibid., 80.
[40] Strong, "Shattering the Image of God," 625-34.

God who controls the powers of chaos, and has life-giving power and authority over this world."[41] After God brought order to the formless void (Gen 1:2), "humankind…was set up after God's victory and to declare God's dominion in a conquered region."[42] Both Clines and Strong together create a clear and plausible illustration of the intention of the implied author. Humankind is God's representative on earth, his declaration of supremacy over all of creation.

[41] Ibid., 629. "Water chaos" is an important theme in Israel's conceptions of its origins. Sarna effectively demonstrates the notion: "The forces of the watery chaos, variously designated Yam (Sea), Nahar (River), Leviathan (Coiled One), Rahab (Arrogant One) and Tannin (Dragon) were subdued by God [Isa 27:1; 51:9-10; Job 26:12-13]. There does not seem to be any unanimity in these accounts about the ultimate fate of these creatures. According to one version, they were utterly destroyed. According to another, the chaotic forces, personalized as monsters, were put under restraint [Ps 104:9; Prov 8:27; Job 26:10; 38:8-11]. It must be remembered, however, that this combat myth, once fully developed, appears in a very attenuated and fragmentary form in the biblical sources and the several allusions have to be pieced together into some kind of coherent unity. Nevertheless, there is ample witness to the fact that the myths to which these allusions refer found literary expression in ancient Israel and were sufficiently well known to be used as reference points in literary compositions." *Sarna, Understanding Genesis*, 2, 33. For possible parallels of the biblical creation narrative to pagan "cosmic battles," see pp. 21-3.

Concerning the ANE chaos myth and its influences on the Primeval History, Victor Harold Matthews and Don C. Benjamin write that "Originally, the Hebrews celebrated Yahweh as the Divine Warrior whose armies, commanded by Moses, armed with a staff and the east wind, confront the armies of Egypt commanded by Pharaoh (Exod 15:1-10). However, once the Hebrews began to understand Yahweh as both the deliverer who liberates the Hebrews from slavery and the creator who calls the cosmos from chaos, the cosmological language common in ancient Near Eastern creation stories began to appear in the Bible." Victor Harold Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East* (Harold, NY: Paulist Press, 2007), 11 (see introduction to "Enuma Elish Stories").

[42] Ibid., 631. Strong takes his argument further to conclude that the Tower of Babel narrative, at the end of the Primeval History, describes God as metaphorically "shattering his image" because of humankind's hubris (i.e. scattering the people and multiplying the languages). Whether or not one follows Strong's argument, several important implications are brought up: If the human is God's image, can s/he lose it? Can the image be taken away? Strong obviously argues that it can be and is done in the Babel narrative, only to be reinstated with a particular family, that of the patriarch Abraham (see pp. 633-34). What about the fall in Gen 3? Does humankind "lose" the image at this point? Although the presence and reiteration of the terms in passages to follow the fall (Gen 5:1-3; 9:6) may suggest that this is not the case, scholars and theologians are divided. For a study of this contention, see Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 33-65.

A striking parallel between Strong's study of the divinely instituted "shattering of the image" has to do with the "execration texts" found in ancient Egyptian culture and literature. Execration texts were often written on clay figurines (similar to later Latin American voodoo dolls) and then shattered on the ground in order to demonstrate the symbolic destruction of one's enemies. The particular name of the enemy was inscribed on the figurine or object. See William M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 27-9. It is difficult to determine whether or not the biblical writer had such a practice in mind. However, as will be demonstrated below, the writer was offering a critique of Egyptian society and religion. The connection between execration texts and the shattering of the image remains plausible but uncertain.

BRIEF ETYMOLOGY & ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN PARALLELS

A look at similar words in neighboring languages is particularly important to this study due to the word's obscurity in biblical Hebrew. *Ṣelem* is believed to be a derivative of the root word *slm* from Jewish Aramaic, Palmyrene, and Syriac languages and bears the meaning of "add images" or "to chop off, hew, cut, carve."[43] Other constructs of the word occur variously in Ugaritic, Phonecian, and Arabic languages and refer to likeness, statue, idol, image, form, figure, and semblance.[44] *Ṣelem* may also be related to the Akkadian *salmu(m)* ("statue, figure, image").[45] Clines summarizes these lingual relationships concisely: "צלם (*ṣelem)* and its cognates in other Semitic languages are used predominantly in a literal sense, of three-dimensional objects which represent gods, men, or other living beings."[46] One plausible theory of origin for the word points to Egypt. Here the pharaoh was described as a particular god's image "because he was believed to be the earthly manifestation of the deity, and thus he functioned on earth exactly as the image functioned in the temple."[47] Numerous points of interaction between Egyptian and Israelite culture are attested to by the biblical text, attesting to the plausibility of this argument.[48] The implications concerning the Egyptian origins of this term and usage will be demonstrated below.

By far one of the most comprehensive studies on "the image" has been done by Clines. In one portion of his study, he compares ANE "image" references to that of the HB. The parallels are compelling. The following quotes are the most pertinent to this study:

> The father of the king, my lord, was the very image (*salmu*) of Bel, and the king, my lord, is likewise the

[43] Stendebach, "Selem," *TDOT* 12:386.
[44] Stendebach, "Selem," 12:387.
[45] Ibid., 389. See also D. J. A. Clines, "The Image of God in Man," 74-5.
[46] Ibid., 73.
[47] Curtis, "Image of God (OT)," 391.
[48] Gen 12:10-20; 37:25 – 50 and Exod 1 – 14 are the most pertinent examples.

> very image of Bel.[49]
>
> A (free) man is as the shadow of god, the slave is as the shadow of a (free) man; but the king, he is like unto the (very) image (*mussulu*) of god.[50]
>
> O king, thou art the image of Marduk, when thou art angry, to thy servants![51]
>
> A prince like Re, the child of Qeb, his heir, the image of Re, whom he created, the avenger (or the representative), for whom he has set himself on earth.[52]
>
> You are my beloved son, who came forth from my members, my image, whom I have put on earth. I have given to you to rule the earth in peace.[53]

Concerning ANE/Israelite parallels of "the image," Clines concludes: "It is the king who is the image of God, not mankind generally.[54] The image of the god is associated very closely with rulerhood. The king as the image of god is his representative. The king has been created by the god to be his image."[55] The first two quotations above are from the broader Mesopotamian context, but the second two are from Egypt. Again, it seems that the term is best explained in relation to Egypt. It is most plausible that the biblical writer's conception of the terms he employed in the Primeval History are rooted in Israel's neighbor's uses and understanding of the word.

Still, at this point, several questions remain unanswered. Why would the biblical writer make use of a word which hearkens to a cultural/religious taboo? A prohibition against images existed in Israel, although the extent of this prohibition is debatable. This lack of a substantial definition or exhaustive usage in the biblical text itself is a strong indication that the word is a loanword. But from which language does the word derive? Although cognates are found

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[49] Assyrian king Esarhaddon as addressed by astrologer and official Adad-shum-usur in a letter.

[50] Adad-shum-usur to Esarhaddon in a separate letter.

[51] An unnamed Assyrian king as addressed by astrologer Asharidu the Greater.

[52] This quote is a reference to Amosis I, pharaoh of Egypt. Interestingly, Clines notes that "it is of interest that the pharaoh is several times said to have been begotten or created by the go whose image he is."

[53] Amon-Re (the god) to Amenophis III.

[54] One must question how far Clines' statement can be pressed. Although he is convinced that for the most part image is attributed to rulership, the Egyptian "Hymn to Ptah" may demonstrate otherwise: "The *ka*-souls of all the living were created in the image of Ptah. All formed in his heart and by his tongue." See Matthews and Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels*, 5. For the information surrounding this particular hymn, see p. 3.

[55] Clines, "The Image of God in Man," 85. Concerning the quotes listed above, see pp. 83-5.

throughout the various ANE languages, most of the evidence points to Egypt.

The biblical writer intentionally chose the loanword in order to demonstrate a point: humankind is the image of God on earth. But this is not where the purpose of the writer ends. In labeling *humankind* as God's image, the writer is dramatically parting with ANE conceptions of the word.[56] From the perspective of the Israelite audience, the passage would have been seen as deliberately slandering the Egyptian religious/political elite, in particular the pharaoh. Mere man and woman, in the Genesis passage, are elevated to the position of the god-king. Such an interpretation makes perfect sense in the light of Israel's negative history with Egypt (Exod 1-15). The argument is strengthened in comparison to passages such as Exod 1:15-22, where the name of Israelite midwives (Shiphrah and Puah) are detailed but the name of the "king of Egypt" is not mentioned. Surely, with the importance of names in Israelite society, this is a huge disservice to the pharaoh. The writer demonstrates that it is not only the royal king figure (in particular Egyptian pharaohs) who is the image of divinity, but all of humankind.[57]

CONCLUSIONS

Summary

In this paper several arguments have been proposed which hold the potential to adjust the modern exegete's perception of the passages in question:

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[56] One might point out that God's act of creation resulting in humankind's existence demonstrates God's implied intent to have some sort of communion or interaction with that creation. This concept departs dramatically from ANE perceptions of the divine and the interactions that occur between humankind and the divine.

[57] Sarna contends that "The Hebrew version [of the Flood narrative] is an expression of the biblical polemic against paganism" (59). He explains that the narrative is an "anti-creative" act "directly connected with Creation." Further, the Flood account is the antithesis of the Creation account: "It is, in fact, the exact reversal of it. The two halves of the primordial waters of chaos which God separated as a primary stage in the creative process were in danger of reuniting" (55). Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*. As Sarna demonstrates, this portion of the Primeval History (Gen 6-8) is a polemic against polytheism and ANE religious culture. Could it not be the same for Gen 1:26-27? This would mean that the biblical writer drew extensively from ANE culture, but departed dramatically with its forms when it came to issues of theology.

1. *Ṣelem*, in its limited biblical uses, has multiple meanings: It may refer to representational figures (pagan deities, mankind, or simple objects) or to a more insubstantial part of human life, namely the "dream image."

2. *Ṣelem* and *dĕmuth* are synonymous terms and do not refer to two distinct categories of description.

3. The first person plural cohortative, although it remains an unsolvable issue, is best described as some sort of duality in the Godhead.

4. The use of the phrase "image of God" is unexpected and ironic due to the apparent uneasiness with images/image crafting in Israel.

5. The writer employs a *beth* of essence, not a *beth* of the norm, thus the passage should be translated: "And God said, 'Let us make man *as* our image/likeness." Thus, humankind as the *ṣelem* of God is a metaphorical statement. Humankind is God's representative, dignitary, or vicegerent[58] on earth.

6. *Ṣelem* is most likely an Egyptian loanword, and as such Gen 1:26-27 becomes an anti-Egyptian narrative,[59] dispelling the common perception of the term's connection to royalty and aligning it with broader humanity, as created by God himself.

Theological Implications

H. H. Rowley argues that the image is represented in humankind by their uniqueness in creation and that this uniqueness is to be found through the possession of a spirit.[60] Although the first part of his argument is sound, the second is not represented by the biblical text. In a similar way, theological attempts have been made to identify the way(s) humankind represents God as his image. Over time, two schools of thought evolved, one locating a person's identity in God as

[58] William Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 83.

[59] Perhaps more broadly, the passage may be an anti-polytheism narrative, slandering not only the esteemed position of the Egyptian pharaoh but also the Egyptian gods themselves, as some scholars have suggested of the Plague narrative of Exodus. One must realize that by simply stating that "God created man as his image" the biblical writer was reversing the norm of ANE society in which normally it was the human who crafted an image of a deity (for this insight I am indebted to Professor James Moyer).

Concerning authorship, the passage as written from such a perspective could apply both to Moses himself *or* the P Source. One might make the case that this interpretation supports Mosaic authorship more than it does for the Priestly Writer because of Moses' history and experience relating directly to Egypt and the pharaoh. Moses, as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and "budding official in Pharaoh's court" (Waltke, *Genesis*, 23) would have had strong anti-Egyptian sentiments once he left the royal court in Egypt and became the leader of the oppressed Hebrew slaves. This however, is speculation. Other than biblical citations and rabbinical tradition, there is no extra-biblical evidence to support this theory.

[60] H. H. Rowley, *The Unity of the Bible*, 75.

physical likeness, and the other (more common) perception is that of a spiritual or non-material likeness.[61] The image may represent man's intelligence, rationality, and ability to think and reason. It may simply represent his ability to stand on two feet in contrast to the animals.

Arguably, however, the holistic conception of life, being, and existence in Israel[62] demonstrates the futility of exalting one single aspect of man's being over the others. To borrow a phrase from Walther Eichrodt, "Man does not *have* a body and a soul, he *is* both of them at once."[63] By recognizing the holistic nature of Hebrew epistemology along with the six points listed above, one must question whether theological deliberations of this type are asking too much of the text.

Undoubtedly, man's similarity with God as bound in the *ṣelem* must have to do with his uniqueness and superiority in creation, but to identify a single aspect as the *ṣelem* is to do an injustice to the text and the biblical writer who penned the text. Eichrodt may be correct, however, in uniting identity with function: from Gen 1:27-31 we see that *as* God's image, man and woman are sexual beings,[64] capable of reproduction (vv. 27, 28), stewards of plant life (vv. 29, 30), and masters of the animals (vv. 28, 30).[65] By looking at parallel passages, we also realize that humankind as God's image is bound by certain moral stipulations regarding the sanctity of life (Gen 9:6). In the end, the strongest theological point to be made is that of dominion, on

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[61] Clines, "The Image of God in Man," 56-7.

[62] Hoekema, quoting Herman Bavink, elaborates the point: "Man does not simply *bear* or *have* the image of God; he *is* the image of God….From the doctrine that man has been created in the image of God flows the clear implication that that image extends to man in his entirety. Nothing in man is excluded from the image of God. All creatures reveal traces of God, but only man is the image of God. And he is that image totally, in soul and body, in all faculties and powers, in all conditions and relationships. Man is the image of God because and insofar as he is true man, and he is man, true and real man, because and insofar as he is the image of God." Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 65.

[63] Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Vol. 2; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 124.

[64] The way Eichrodt addresses the controversial subject of gender and authority in this passage is notable. He writes that "the verse does away with any justification for holding the female half of the race in contempt as inferior, or in some way closer to the animals. The relationship between man and woman is placed on the same basis as that between Man and God; their encounter as personal beings leads to a living for each other in responsible co-operation which draws its strength from their common encounter with God." Eichrodt, *Theology*, 2:127.

[65] Ibid., 127-30. See also Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, 15-16.

behalf of both God himself (by placing his image/stele into creation), and humankind (as God's image, over lesser forms of created life). As Dyrness observes, the underlying theological issue at hand is the authority and sovereignty of God: "Human dominion thus reflects God's own lordship over creation."[66] Humankind's identity as that image is of secondary importance to a passage which was primarily intended to demonstrate the authority and sovereignty of God over the chaos and darkness.[67] I question whether pressing the metaphor too much further is anything more than speculation. Perhaps such deliberation is best left to the theologians.

[66] Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology*, 83.

[67] Westermann writes that "we cannot attempt to discover what in man is like God's image. Actually, the primary concern of the statement is not about man, but about the creative act of God." Westermann, *The Genesis Accounts of Creation*, 21.

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