Zeitschrift: Theologische Zeitschrift
Band: 65 (2009)
Heft: 2

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-877633

Theologische Zeitschrift

Jahrgang 65 2009 Heft 2

Humankind as the «Image of God»

On the Priestly predication (Gen 1:26–27; 5:1; 9:6) and its relationship to the ancient Near Eastern understanding of images*

In Gen 1, humankind is predicated to be the «image of God». Over the centuries, exegetes and theologians have debated the sense and significance of this predication. They have offered many different interpretations, some based closely on the Priestly text, others quite speculative. The broad range of interpretations reflects the difficulties of the Priestly formulations. Even though humans are said to be the «image of God» three times in P (Gen 1:26–27; 5:1; 9:6), the spare formulations and diverse contexts have helped to obscure rather than clarify the meaning of the predication. Unfortunately, the rest of the Hebrew Bible provides no further help: the idea that humans are the «image of God» is not found elsewhere in the OT.[1]

A major breakthrough in the understanding of the Priestly idea that humans are the «image of God» was achieved with the discovery of ancient Near Eastern (ANE) texts. These texts give insights into the ancients' understanding of images of deities and provide other examples of «image of God» predications of humans.[2] For many scholars, the ANE texts resolve the mysteries surrounding the «image of God» statements in P: through the «image of God»

* My thanks go to my colleagues Annette Weissenrieder and Bob Coote and my students Ben Clarke and Katie May. They have helped me to sharpen my argumentation and improve my English.

1 This is different in the deuterocanonical and New Testament books, in which the «image of God» idea occurs often (see Sir 17:3–4; Wis 2:23–24; Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 11:7; 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18; 4:4; Col 1:15; 3:10; Heb 1:3; Jas 3:9). These passages are instructive for how the Priestly idea was interpreted in its early reception history. For the understanding of the Priestly idea itself, however, they are less relevant, having reinterpreted it for new contexts and thus departed from its original sense.

2 For an overview, cf. Middleton: Liberating Image, 93–145.

predication, they conclude, the Priestly writer describes humans as being appointed by God as God's deputies, an honor elsewhere in the ANE restricted to cultic images and kings. However, an overview of the exegetical literature on the Priestly idea about humans being the «image of God» shows that many questions are still controversial. Thus, recent advances in the understanding of the traditio-historical context of the Priestly formulations do not exempt exegetes from further investigations into the Priestly text itself.

In this article I will look more closely at the relationship between the Priestly idea about humankind being the «image of God» and the ANE understanding of images of deities. After a short survey of the three aspects of the idea of a privileged human position (section 1), I will focus each aspect in turn: the human-animal relationship (section 2), the divine-human relationship (section 3), and the human-human relationship (section 4). For all three aspects, I will ask where and to what extent the Priestly «image of God» idea is shaped by the ANE understanding of divine images and where and to what extent it departs from the tradition on a new course. The results will be summarized in a brief conclusion (section 5).

1. The idea of a privileged position of humankind and its three aspects

In both scholarly and popular settings, the Priestly statements about humankind being the «image of God» are discussed from varying interests and perspectives. Often it is not clear how one claim about the concept might relate to another. For example, some criticize the Priestly statements for their anthropocentrism, or for their devastating consequences for nature.[3] Others contrast the Priestly depiction of humans as kings to the depiction of humans as slaves in Babylonian texts.[4] Others praise the gender awareness of a text that asserts that both «male and female» are created as the «image of God».[5]

To understand how these and still other ostensibly incommensurate views relate to one another, one must recognize that the Priestly idea that humankind is the «image of God» is a variant of the notion that humans hold a privileged position—an idea prominent not only today, but also in antiquity. Generally speaking, the notion of humanity's privileged position can be looked at in three aspects, or in terms of three relationships: human-animal, divine-

3 Most influential in this regard was Lynn White's article «Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis» (1967). For more recent examples, cf. Keel: Anthropozentrik, 221; Uehlinger: Schrei, 413.

4 Cf. Clifford: Creation Accounts, 143; Frevel, Wischmeyer: Menschsein, 49; Koch: Imago Dei, 14f.; Neumann-Gorsolke: Herrschen, 303.

5 Cf. Bird: Male and Female, 329–361; Horowitz: Image, 175–206; Schüngel-Straumann: Mann und Frau, 161–165.

human, and human-human. The first two aspects concern the vertical dimension of the idea of a privileged human position, namely *how* privileged the position of humans is compared with the animals below and the gods or God above. These aspects are two sides of the same coin, defining human superiority over animals (and nature) and human inferiority—tending to proximity—to the divine. The third aspect concerns the horizontal dimension, or how one human person or group might be privileged in comparison with another. It is related to the general reference to «humanity»—in the Priestly text אדם—that does not privilege *one* group of human beings over another but implies that *all* humans are equal in privilege.

The distinction among these three aspects, while helpful for making comparisons among different texts involving the idea of a humanity's privileged position,[6] is introduced here in order to facilitate a fuller appreciation of the complexity of the Priestly idea that humans are the «image of God». This will be especially important when considering to what extent the Priestly notion is shaped by the tradition and to what extent the image metaphor is used in new ways.

2. The non-confirmation of humans as rulers and the perpetuation of their godlikeness

Many scholars consider the human-animal relationship as the essence of the Priestly idea about humankind being the «image of God». This view stems from the tradition, especially in Europe, of interpreting the Priestly «image of God» predication as purely functional. In particular, Walter Gross argued that the Priestly predication does not attribute to humans a special quality, but «only» describes their function: namely as God's representatives to rule over the animals.[7] Gross' primary evidence is the context of the «image of God» statements in Gen 1:26–28. He correctly observes that this context makes no reference to a special quality of humanity, but connects the predication directly to God's appointment of humans to rule over the animals. This functional interpretation was given further support by Bernd Janowski, Ute Neumann-Gorsolke, Christian Frevel and others. They all reject the possibility that the Priestly «image of God» predication could also attribute to humankind a sim-

6 I am currently working on such a comparison, i.e. a book on the Priestly idea about humankind being the «image of God» and other OT and ANE texts conveying the idea of a privileged human position.

7 Cf. Gross: Gottebenbildlichkeit/Kontext, 244–264; Gottebenbildlichkeit/Diskussion, 37–54; Gen 1,26; 9,6, 11–38.

ilarity to God,[8] as others have suggested, whether a physical similarity in appearance or an essential similarity in nature or competence.[9]

The proponents of this view are all well aware of the traditio-historical background of the Priestly idea that humanity is the «image of God». They stress that in the ANE understanding of images the aspect of representation plays an important role. They are right: according to the ANE understanding cultic images are placeholders of the deities, and it is their function to represent those deities on earth. Even more noteworthy is the importance of the functional aspect in the Egyptian texts in which the pharaoh is predicated to be the «image» of Re or other Egyptian gods. There are many examples in which the «image» predication occurs in a context dealing with the pharaoh's function of executing the god's rulership on earth. For example, in a stele inscription of Amenophis III, Amun-Re addresses the pharaoh as «my image (*ḫn.tj=j*) which I have placed on earth», and continues with the reminder: «In peace I let you rule (*dj.n=j ḥq3=k*) over the country in erasing the heads of all foreign countries». Similarly, in an inscription of Sethos I, the pharaoh is described as the «image» (*tj.t*) of Re, installed by Amun as the sole lord, to execute his kingship (*ns.yt=f*) [at the top of] both countries». Many centuries later, the same idea appears in an Egyptian inscription on a statue of Darius. Here the Persian king is described as «living image» (*twt.w ʿnḫ*) of Re, «whom he had placed on his throne to finish what he had begun on earth».[10] All these texts focus on the king's role as ruler, as maintainer of order and peace on behalf of the creator god.

However, these observations are only half of the picture. The other half does *not* support a purely functional understanding of the «image of God» predication. Rather, the ANE understanding of images shows that the likeness between image and deity cannot be reduced to the image's function, but is very much also about its qualities and capacities (see section 3). The first generation of scholars to interpret the Priestly predication in relation to its traditio-historical background recognized that in the ANE understanding function cannot be separated from capacity.[11] Nowadays, however, many OT scholars ignore this point and draw on the traditio-historical background for its insights solely for its contribution to the notion of representation.[12] With regard to the notion of a likeness between image and deity, they either downplay its role in the ANE understanding of images, or they argue that here the

8 Cf. Janowski: Gottebenbildlichkeit, 1159f.; ders.: Statue, 194–196; Neumann-Gorsolke: Herrschen, 202–204; Frevel, Wischmeyer: Menschsein, 51f.

9 Cf. Kaiser: Mensch, 101–104; Koch: Imago Dei, 24ff.; Wagner: Gottebenbildlichkeitsvorstellung, 344–363; Weippert: Tier, 42–44.

10 Ockinga: Gottebenbildlichkeit, 21f.113.

11 Cf. Ockinga: Gottebenbildlichkeit, 152–155; Schmidt: Schöpfungsgeschichte, 143f.; Wildberger: Abbild, 138f.

Priestly text modifies the tradition. Admittedly, this latter possibility must be considered; indeed, insights into the ancients' understanding of images of gods cannot by themselves falsify a purely functional interpretation of the Priestly understanding of the «image of God». However, one must take the discrepancy seriously and ask whether a purely functional interpretation of the «image of God» predication really is justified in the Priestly text.

In short: it is not. The Priestly text gives strong indications that a purely functional understanding of the «image of God» predication is mistaken. Besides the jussive of Gen 1:26[13] and the theme of Gen 5:1–3,[14] it is the changes between Gen 1 and Gen 9 that are especially important in this regard. While the «image of God» predication in Gen 1 indeed aims at humankind's rulership over the animals (cf. 1:26b after 1:26a, and 1:28 after 1:27), the continuation of P shows that this rulership cannot be the only reason why humans are said to be the «image» of God. This conclusion is inevitable if one takes the repetition of the «image of God» predication in 9:6 seriously (and as original part of P). In this verse, the statement that humans were created as «image of God» functions as an explanation of the prohibition against shedding human blood[15]—in contrast to shedding animal blood, which the new rules of Gen 9:3–4 in some cases allow. The context clearly implies that as the «image of God» humans enjoy a special dignity or status that makes their life more valuable than the life of animals. Furthermore, the flood story and the new regulations in 9:1–7 indicate that humans have failed to meet God's expectations and are no longer appointed as God's deputies.[16]

This last conclusion is indicated by the Priestly text at different points. In 6:9–13, the introduction to the flood story, one is informed that the whole earth was corrupt and filled with «violence» (חמס), and that God decided to

12 For a recent example of an OT scholar who stresses the *functional* similarity between deity and king in the ANE understanding of images, cf. Middleton: Liberating Image, 93–145. His discussion of the ANE examples, however, makes clear that function cannot be separated from behavior, capacities and qualities.

13 A volitive with a waw (cf. the jussive «and let them rule») after another volitive (cf. the cohortative «let us make humankind») often conveys the notion of purpose or consecution; cf. JM § 116.

14 In Gen 5:1, the «image of God» predication occurs without reference to the human-animal relationship or the topic of rulership. Rather, the larger context (cf. 5:3), which concerns Adam's genealogy, implies that the likeness of humans to God is similar with the likeness of son to father.

15 In 9:6, the beth in באדם has to be understood as beth pretii (cf. Jenni: Probleme, 179–183). Also the second time, the word אדם refers to the victim and not to the one that executes the death penalty.

16 Cf. Schüle: Prolog, 113–115; Uehlinger: Segen, 396. With a different emphasis cf. also Görg: Ebenbild, 22.

destroy «all flesh» (כל־בשׂר). The text implies that the situation on earth was so severe that God could not help but destroy most of God's creatures. Whoever was responsible for peace and order on earth had failed completely. The formulation in v.12, which states that God «saw» (ראה) the earth, indicates that this peace-keeping task was the task of humanity and not God. Apparently God did not closely guide earthly developments since creation, but was surprised by them. Gen 1:26–28 makes clear the reason why: God made humans God's deputies as rulers on earth. *They* were the ones who should have maintained order and peace on God's behalf. But humanity failed.

With this background, it occasions no surprise that according to P humans received no confirmation in their office as deputies after the flood. While this is not stated explicitly, it is indicated both tacitly and verbally: (1) A first indication is given in the flood story itself. According to this story, Noah builds the ark and rescues one pair of every kind of animal. However, he does so not on his own initiative, but because he is instructed to do so by God. (2) That God takes over the reins again after the flood and does not leave the animals under human rule is further confirmed by the absence of the verb רדה in 9:1–7. In these verses, the orders from 1:26–31 are adjusted to the new situation of a «broken» world, which needs further regulations to prevent the further spread of violence. While this adjustment is commonly recognized, only a few scholars notice the non-repetition of the verb רדה.[17] Most simply observe that the subordination of animals under humans takes on a violent character in this passage and that human privilege over animals now also includes the right to kill them. Though this is true as far as it goes, many scholars miss an important point by describing the differences between Gen 1 and Gen 9 as a change in the *character* of humanity's *rulership* over the animals.[18] It is not human rulership that changes in Gen 9 but the human-animal relationship itself. It is crucial that this relationship is *no longer* defined as rulership—as much as humans remain privileged and animals subordinated. (3) That Gen 9 is no longer about human *rulership* is further confirmed in 9:2. According to this verse, humans are allowed by God to treat animals as opponents of war—a dispensation that might qualify as rulership in our time and culture, but not in the ANE. Both the OT and cognate ancient texts leave no doubt that effective rulership can include the use of violence, but essentially it requires peace and order. (4) A final indication that God did not reappoint humans as God's deputies after the flood is found in 9:5 with the threefold repetition of the verb דרשׁ, «to call to account», spoken by God in the first person. Three

[17] Cf. Bosshard-Nepustil: Sintflut, 117; Koch: Erde, 235f.; Lohfink: Erde, 23f.; Schüle: Prolog, 113.

[18] This is the case with the many scholars who use terms like «dominion», «rulership», and «ruling» to characterize the human-animal relationship implied in Gen 9:1–7.

times God designates himself as the one who maintains order and implements the new rules. God does not rely on deputies anymore.

If 9:6 did not repeat the «image of God» predication, one could hold on to a purely functional understanding—though only by simultaneously concluding that humanity's godlikeness was lost according to P (an idea often discussed by systematic theologians). With 9:1–6, however, such a possibility is eliminated.

3. The character of humans' likeness to God

The conclusion drawn in the previous section leads to further questions. If the Priestly «image of God» predication is not only about humanity's appointment to rule over the animals, but rather remains valid also detached from this appointment, the question about the sense and significance of the Priestly predication arises anew. Given the discussion so far, it is clear that the question cannot be answered within the confines of the human-animal relationship. Rather, in light of the ANE understanding of images it becomes clear that one has to examine the aspect of the divine-human relationship. The question becomes whether and to what extent the Priestly predication posits a human likeness to God.

As mentioned above, in the ANE both cultic images and royal «images» were thought to be «like» their respective deities not only as regards *function*, but also as regards *being*. With cultic images, this is most evident in their form, which mirrors ideas about an anthropomorphic appearance of deities. More fundamentally, however, the likeness between image and deity was assumed with regard to the divine nature or divine capacities of the image. The studies of Angelika Berlejung and others have shown that cultic images were considered earthly manifestations of the deities. They were regarded not as symbolic substitutes, but as real representations. They were regarded not as dead tokens pointing to living gods and goddesses but as living gods and goddesses, and were treated accordingly: fed, clothed, worshipped, or—as in most of the relevant OT texts —fought against.[19]

A similar understanding about the likeness between image and deity can be observed in texts in which image terminology is used to describe human beings—most often kings. It is no coincidence that the image metaphor was employed frequently in the royal ideology of Egypt[20] but only rarely in Assyria and never in Israel.[21] All ANE kings were held responsible for maintaining

[19] Cf. Berlejung: Theologie, esp. 7.65f.281–283; Curtis: Idol, 376–378; Lorton: Theology, 123–210?

[20] Cf. Hornung: Mensch, 123–156; Ockinga: Gottebenbildlichkeit.

order and peace, and in that role were considered deputies of the gods, the ultimate rulers. However, it is mostly in Egypt that the close relationship between king and deity is defined in terms of «image». The reason for the difference is obvious: the idea that kings were divine was much more distinct in Egypt than elsewhere in the ANE. An examination of all Egyptian passages in which the pharaoh is predicated to be the «image» of a deity (most often Re and Amun-Re) confirms that the image metaphor entails not only to the pharaoh's function to represent a deity as ruler on earth, but at the same time his or her qualitative likeness to this deity. In contrast to cultic images, whose likeness to their respective deities constituted their very nature, for the Egyptian kings the likeness to a deity was an assertion of royal propaganda. The image metaphor was used to *stress* the king's likeness to the divine. Accordingly, the image predications often occur just before or after the pharaoh is called a «perfect god» (*nṯr nfr*).[22] Some texts also mention specific qualities reflecting the pharaoh's likeness to Re or other gods, not only in function but also in essence. In an inscription of Thutmosis III, for example, the pharaoh is predicated to be «perfect god» and «image» (*mj.tj*) of Re and then praised for his artistry and skillfulness. Even more conclusively, the birth legend of Hatshepsut explains that Amun has given his Ba, his power, his reputation, his magical power and his crown to Hatshepsut, his «daughter» (*ẖ3.t*) and «image» (*tj.t*).[23] Obviously, the aspects of functional likeness and qualitative likeness are complementary and cannot be separated: the pharaoh can act as ruler on earth on behalf of the creator god only because he or she is equipped with the required capacities.[24] The same, of course, is true for all other ANE kings. That their sovereign rule and close relation with the gods is only very seldom described in terms of «image» is a further, less direct, indication that this royal metaphor denotes a qualitative likeness between deity and «image».[25]

How does the Priestly use of the image metaphor relate to the ANE understanding of a likeness between image and deity? To what extent is this understanding part of the Priestly «image of God» predication? Many OT scholars stress that both OT anthropology in general and Priestly monotheism in particular contradict the notion of a divine nature of humans. At

21 Cf. Angerstorfer: Ebenbild, 47–58; Garr: Own Image, 139–149; Middleton: Liberating Image, 111–118.

22 Cf. Ockinga: Gottebenbildlichkeit, passim.

23 Cf. Ockinga: Gottebenbildlichkeit, 95.114.

24 Cf. Ockinga: Gottebenbildlichkeit, 130; with regard to the Priestly statements cf. ibid., 152.

25 This is further confirmed by the Mesopotamian examples in which the king or a priest is predicated to be the «image» of a god, and the Egyptian examples that apply this predication to ordinary people (cf. Ockinga: Gottebenbildlichkeit, 82–91.101–106).

the same time, however, it has often been observed that already in Gen 2–3 one finds a similarly audacious statement of a fundamental likeness between God and humans (cf. 3:22). Should the recent trend in scholarship be substantiated and Gen 2–3 proved to be a response to Gen 1, the reference in Gen 3 to a godlike cognitive ability of humans was an interpretation of the statement about humankind being the «image of God».[26] Regardless, with the statement that Adam and Eve became «like God» (cf. כאלהים in 3:5; כאחד ממנו in 3:22) with regard to the knowledge of good and evil (but not «life» or immortality), the garden story shows that the idea that humans might share capacities with gods was not foreign to OT thinking. This is further corroborated by other OT passages that attribute *some* divine qualities to *particular* human beings,[27] and especially by Ps 8:5 where the notion of an (almost) divine nature of humans is expressed straightforwardly. On this background it is difficult to dispute that the notion of a certain qualitative likeness between the «image» and the deity was part of the Priestly statements as it was part of the ANE understanding of such «images». [28]

Accordingly much exegetical attention has been given to the question *in what regard* humans are godlike according to P. To answer this question, the formulation of Gen 1:26 came under scrutiny, both with regard to the two nouns צלם («image») and דמות («likeness») and with regard to the two prepositions ב and כ. As for the nouns, it is clear that צלם is a concrete noun with a specific meaning («image, statue») and דמות an abstract noun with a range of meanings («shape, likeness»).[29] Beyond this, the discussion remains controversial. Some argue that with the combination of two terms «image» (צלם) and «likeness» (דמות) the functional aspect comes to the fore in both of them.[30] Others see the aspect of representation primarily expressed with צלם and augmented with the aspect of likeness by דמות.[31] Still others argue the opposite and understand דמות as a mitigation of צלם, which by itself would connote the

[26] Cf. Arneth: Adams Fall, 144–146; Bosshard-Nepustil: Sintflut, 191; Sawyer: Image, 62–73; Schüle: Prolog, 164. The direction of dependency, of course, could also be the other way round; cf. Blum, Gottesunmittelbarkeit, 16; Carr: Reading, 62–68; Vervenne: Genesis, 55–64. In this case, Gen 1:26–27 was an interpretation of Gen 3:22, which made the above argument even stronger. That there is indeed a link between the Priestly «image of God» predication and the non-Priestly statement that human beings became «like God» regarding the knowledge of good and evil is already reflected in Sir 17.

[27] Cf. Ex 4:16; 7:1; Ps 45:7; Isa 9:5; Zech 12:8; also 2 Sam 14:17.20; 19:28.

[28] Cf. Dohmen: Bilderverbot, 282 («quasi-göttliche Qualitäten»); Koch: Imago, 28 («innere Wesensähnlichkeit»).

[29] Cf. Garr: Own Image, 118–165; Neumann-Gorsolke: Herrschen, 187–189.

[30] Cf. Janowski: Statue, 194–195.

[31] Cf. Dohmen: Statue, 91–101; Koch: Imago, 28.

unwelcome idea that humans are manifestations of God and as such divine themselves.[32] Some scholars support their argument with an Akkadian-Aramaic bilingual inscription from Tell Fekherye in which both terms, צלם and דמות, are used to denote the same statue.[33] Others refer to the study of Boyo Ockinga, who argued that in the Egyptian texts there are two groups of words to predicate the pharaoh and others as the «image of God».[34] Both of these comparisons, however, have their weaknesses and neither offers a parallel to the construction in Gen 1:26, where the two terms are juxtaposed and introduced with two different prepositions.

Regarding the prepositions, so far no one has convincingly explained why one term is introduced with ב and the other with כ. Scholars either leave the question open or «explain» that the prepositions are interchangeable. In the following grammatical excursus, I would like to present another explanation, suggesting that it is no coincidence that in all formulations ב is used (first) and כ only if a first prepositional phrase is supplemented with a second (cf. 1:26; 5:3).

Grammatical excursus on the prepositions ב *and* כ *in Gen 1:26 and 5:3*

The starting point of this excursus is the syntactical relationship of כדמותנו in 1:26 (and כצלמו in 5:3) to the preceding prepositional phrase בצלמנו (cf. בדמותו in 5:3), and the realization that this relationship is ambiguous. The second phrase can be explained as an attribute to the entire preceding phrase (preposition + noun + pronominal suffix) or just to its nominal part (noun + pronominal suffix).[35] While this difference as such has not yet, to my knowledge, attracted scholarly attention,[36] both alternatives have their «supporters», as indicated mainly by differing translations.

Most common is the first understanding, in which כדמותנו in 1:26 is in apposition to the whole of בצלמנו. It is expressed in translations like «Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness» (NRSV), or, more pronounced, «Let us make people in our image, to be like ourselves» (NLT). In this understanding, כדמותנו is a second object predicative to אדם, explaining *as whom* God created humankind.[37] Such an understanding is grammatically

32 Vgl. Berlejung: Theologie, 310.
33 Cf. Dohmen: Statue, 91–101.
34 Cf. Ockinga: Gottebenbildlichkeit.
35 My thanks go to Ernst Jenni who helped me to come to my understanding, both with his published explanations on the prepositional phrase of Gen 1:26 (cf. Jenni: Ausdrücke, 210f.; Beth, 79.83f.; Kaph, 44.57.101; Probleme, 183–188) as well as with additional answers to my grammatical questions.
36 But see at least Clines: Humanity, 472.487.

possible, but it raises serious questions. Normally appositions following a prepositional phrase are either introduced with the same preposition or with no preposition at all.[38] In 1:26, the first preposition is a ב, more specifically a *beth essentiae* predicating «humankind» (אדם) *to be created* as (i.e. to be) the «image of God».[39] How then could one explain the second phrase introduced with כ? As there is no *kaph essentiae*[40] and such a כ would regardless contradict the grammatical norm just mentioned, one would have to understand כדמותנו as a nominalized phrase meaning «someone who is according to our likeness». Such a nominalized use is attested in Dan 10:16, where the prepositional phrase compound from כ and דמות is used as subject (cf. 8:15).[41] According to this understanding, the preposition כ is not an equivalent to the preposition ב (i.e. not connected with the introductory verb), but together with דמותנו forms a nominal phrase equivalent to צלמנו. In its function as apposition to בצלמנו and (object)predicative to אדם, it is *not* introduced with a further preposition. While this explanation makes sense grammatically, especially since the phrase זכר ונקבה («male and female») in 1:27, which has the same syntactical function, is also not introduced with a preposition, 5:1 (cf. 5:3) makes it very unlikely. Here, the image-relationship between God and humankind is expressed with the noun דמות. Since the statement in 5:1 clearly refers back to 1:26–27, it hardly seems possible that the same image relationship should be described with a nominalized (נו)דמות in one passage but with (ו)דמות in the other. Moreover, following this line of thought one would have to explain כצלמו in 5:3 as a nominalized prepositional phrase as well; for such a nominalization, however, there is no other OT example.[42]

All these difficulties can be avoided if one understands כדמותנו in 1:26 (and כצלמו in 5:3) as an attribute to צלמנו (cf. דמותו in 5:3), i.e. only to the noun with pronominal suffix, not to the entire prepositional phrase. Such a grammatical understanding is attested in translations like «Let us make humankind in our image, (which is) according to our likeness».[43] Here, «according to our likeness» is taken as a relative clause modifying the preceding noun.[44] With such an understanding, every choice of nouns and prepositions in 1:26–27; 5:1,3 and 9:6 can be explained. The formulation in 1:26 introduces the image rela-

37 For a detailed analysis of this grammatical understanding of Gen 1:26, cf. Garr: Own Image, 111–115.

38 GK § 131h; JM § 131i.

39 Cf. Jenni: Beth, 84. An analogous construction (with an *m* of predication) is used in some of the Egyptian «image» statements.

40 But see Clines: Humanity, 473, with reference to Vriezen.

41 Cf. Jenni: Probleme, 188.

42 But cf. Jenni: Kaph, 26f.

43 Cf. Jenni: Ausdrücke, 211; ders., Kaph, 57. Adapted by Gross: Statue, 20–21; Neumann-Gorsolke: Herrschen, 197; similarly already Luther.

tionship of humans with God in detail by first reporting that God decided to create humankind «as» (ב) God's «image» (צלם) and then explaining that this «image» is «like» (כ) God's «likeness» (דמות), i.e. only similar to God but not God himself (cf. דמות in Ezek 1). In Gen 1:27 (the report about the implementation of God's decision) and in 9:6 (a reminder), this specification is left out. Once given, it does not need to be repeated. In 5:3, however, both nouns are used again—notably in reverse order. The context explains why: this verse is not about the likeness between God and humanity but between father and son. To express this idea, the noun דמות is much more fitting; it is more general and does not have the religious connotations of the term צלם, which are not part of the relationship between father (Adam) and son (Seth). The grammatical construction, however, is like the one in 1:26, and the introductory preposition ב, again *beth essentiae*, makes good sense. The formulation states that Adam engendered a son «as his likeness», i.e. as one like or akin to himself.[45] The second phrase, כצלמו, does not predicate the son as «image» of his father, either, at least not directly. Rather, it explains that a «likeness» of one's father, i.e. one like his/her father, can be compared (כ) with this father's «image». The introduction of the theologically fraught term «image» (צלם) is necessary to recall the «image of God» statements from 1:26–27. With the allusion to humankind's godlikeness, the formulation in 5:3 implies that the likeness between God and humankind is passed on from generation to generation. Looking back from 5:3, finally the intricacies of the 5:1 formulation become meaningful. 5:1 recalls God's creation of humankind as God's «image». Unlike all other statements concerning humankind's godlikeness, however, this idea is not expressed with צלם but with דמות. While this word choice is striking at first glance, especially if the analysis given above is correct and (נו)דמות(כ) was not used interchangeable with (נו)צלמ(ב) in 1:26, it makes sense in view of 5:3. By referring to the image-relationship between humankind and God with the term «likeness» (דמות), already at the beginning of chapter 5 it is implied that the likeness between God and humanity is connected with the likeness between parents and children. That the «(god)likeness» mentioned in 5:1 is indeed the same as the one described in 1:26–27 is clear from 1:26, where the term «image» (צלם) is explained with the term «like-

[44] Clines: Humanity, 472, calls it an «explanatory of the ‹image›». Grammatically, it is an «appositionelle Näherbestimmung» to צלמנו (cf. Jenni: Probleme, 188), or an asyndetic relative clause of the type discussed in Ges § 155e and JM § 158b (see esp. Isa 66:1).

[45] «To engender X *as* Y» sounds odd in English in that it implies the power to influence the «outcome», i.e. the qualities of the offspring. This is only a translation problem; the Hebrew idiom does not carry this implication.

ness» (דמות). Moreover, it is confirmed by 5:3, where the term «likeness» (דמות) is explained with the term «image» (צלם).

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According to the grammatical considerations in the excursus, in 1:26 «likeness» (דמות) does not specify «humankind» (אדם) but «image» (צלם), and similarly in 5:3 «image» (צלם) specifies «likeness» (דמות). This understanding has the advantage of explaining why two different prepositions are used in 1:26 and 5:3 and why it is their order (ב first, כ second) and not their noun connections that remains the same. Admittedly, these considerations do not change the understanding of the Priestly «image of God» formulations concerning content. Ultimately, it makes no difference whether both terms «image» and «likeness» describe humans and their designation in relation to God (the traditional understanding) or alternatively the term «likeness» is a specification of the term «image» (the interpretation proposed here). The fact remains that humans are predicated to bear a likeness with God and that it is the combination of the two words צלם and דמות that describes this likeness. In the light of the ANE understanding of images, it stands to reason that דמות is an attempt to soften the theologically bold statement that humans are the «image» of God and to prevent misunderstanding this statement to mean equating humans with the divine.[46]

While the previous discussion is helpful for understanding how the Priestly «image of God» predication is related to the ANE understanding of images, it does not suffice for understanding its sense and significance. Much more important is the often made observation that the Priestly text does not further elaborate *in what regard* humans are godlike. The only additional information given is the reference to «male and female» in 1:27 and the analogy with the likeness between father and son in 5:3. Both can be interpreted focusing on appearance and qualities—the difference does not seem important.[47] All this indicates that the question about the extent and character of humankind's likeness to God is not pivotal in the Priestly text. This conclusion is confirmed by the continuation of the Priestly text: as much as humans failed God's expectations for acceptable rulership, this failure does not negate their designation as the «image of God». While God loses God's confidence in humanity's

[46] See above with n. 32.

[47] Among the Egyptian texts that express the idea of a likeness between pharaoh and a deity, there are examples that show that physical likeness is understood as a sign of a qualitative likeness (cf. Ockinga: Gottenbildlichkeit, 113–116). The same thinking is reflected in theomorphic descriptions and depictions of kings.

capacity to rule over the animals, God holds on to the idea that humans are God's image.[48] While the Egyptian texts glow with praise for the pharaoh's qualities, the Priestly text characterizes humans rather negatively. In P, the «image of God» predication is valid not *because of* but *despite* humanity's qualities. It is not a coincidence that all the statements about the likeness between humans and God occur with a reference to God as the creator. While in the ANE tradition it is important that an *image is* like the deity whom it represents, in P the stress is not on the image and its divine qualities, but on *God* who *creates* humans to be God's image.

4. Awareness of the horizontal dimension

The last point to be addressed in this article is the use of the image metaphor for «humanity» (אדם) in general. This general use is related with the above mentioned change of focus from the qualities of the «image of God» to God as the creator of this «image»: as only God, the creator is the creator of every human being. In P, there are many indications that the privilege of being the «image of God» is not only *said* to pertain to *all* human beings, but indeed is *meant* to.[49] Most explicit is the statement in Gen 1:27b that humanity was created «male and female» (זכר ונקבה). Similarly revealing is 9:5–6, where the «image of God» predication occurs in the context of regulations outlawing conflicts among humans. The table of nations in Gen 10 and the reiteration of the statement that humans were created as God's image after the flood are further indications that the diversity of humankind is consciously in view in P. In contrast, the ANE understanding of images does not directly address human-human relationships. Again, this difference is relevant particularly with regard to the ANE texts in which «image» is used as a metaphor. While in most of them it is exclusively the king who is described as the «image of God», in P it is humankind in general. The «democratized» use of the image metaphor is not accidental; rather, it is an important part of the Priestly statement: while it remains somehow open in what regard humans are the «image of God», P makes it very clear that every human being is such an «image».

[48] Christian theologians might be reminded of Paul's concept of a justification by grace alone and Luther's understanding of the human being as *simul iustus et peccator.*

[49] Cf. Baumgart: Umkehr, 375–378; Ebach: Bild Gottes, 26.33f.; Schüle: Prolog, 92–95; Soggin: Equality, 29.31f.; Clines: Humanity, 488f.; Zehnder: Umgang, 291–293.

5. Conclusion

Focusing on different aspects of the idea of a privileged human position, this article dealt with the question of where and to what extent the Priestly «image of God» idea is shaped by the ANE understanding of divine images and where and to what extent the Priestly text sets a new course not determined by the tradition. The answers can be summarized in four points:

(1) As in the ANE understanding images are «like» the respective deities not only in function but also in being, in P humans are predicated to be the «image of God» not only with regard to their function as God's deputies, but also with regard to their inherent nature. As much as the functional aspect is in the foreground in Gen 1, with Gen 5 and Gen 9 it becomes clear that the predication also carries the notion of a physical and/or qualitative likeness between humans and God—as might already have been supposed from the term «likeness» itself.

(2) With regard to the notion of a *functional* likeness, it is neither the only aspect expressed in the Priestly «image of God» idea, nor is it put into the foreground. In fact, it is *less* essential to the Priestly understanding than to the ANE understanding of images. In the ANE understanding, the notion that an image of a deity represents the deity is crucial. In P, however, humans remain called by God to be God's «image» even after they proved unable to fulfill their office as representatives of God on earth and were not re-appointed by God to their original function anymore.

(3) With regard to the notion of a *qualitative* likeness, P differs from the ANE understanding by not maintaining it in the foreground. This lack of emphasis stands out especially when compared to the Egyptian use of «image» as a metaphor for the pharaoh. While the Egyptian texts praise the pharaoh's godlike qualities, P appears to welcome ambiguity on the subject, leaving open exactly how humanity is like God. Even more, P makes clear that humans have fundamental shortcomings and that God therefore cannot rely on them.

(4) Finally, the Priestly use of the image metaphor differs from its Egyptian and Mesopotamian counterparts through its use to express the idea of the equality of all human beings. In the Egyptian texts, the metaphor denotes the close tie between the pharaoh and the creator god, and the pharaoh's royal-divine superiority over all other human beings. Similarly, in Mesopotamia the image metaphor is used only to represent vertical differences in power and privilege. In P, too, the vertical dimension is important, in that the image metaphor describes humans as close to God above and superior over animals. But in P this is not all. With explicit and implicit references to features that distinguish certain humans from others, the text makes clear that the state-

ments about «humanity» (אדם) being created as the «image of God» are indeed meant as universally as the general term suggests.

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Abstract

Ausgehend von der Beobachtung, dass im altorientalischen Verständnis Funktion und Wesen (Qualität) von Kultbildern und als «Bild» (eines) Gottes bezeichneten Königen nicht voneinander zu trennen sind, wird in diesem Aufsatz erneut nach den Bedeutungsdimensionen der priesterschriftlichen Gottebenbildlichkeitsaussagen gefragt. Aus Beobachtungen zum Fortgang der priesterschriftlichen Urgeschichte, in deren Verlauf sich der Mensch als unfähiger Herrscher erweist (Gen 6:9–13) und von Gott in seinem Amt entsprechend nicht mehr bestätigt wird (Gen 9:1–7), dennoch aber weiterhin als «Bild Gottes» gilt (Gen 9:6), werden folgende Schlüsse gezogen: (1) Die priesterschriftlichen Gottebenbildlichkeitsaussagen beziehen sich nicht nur auf die Funktion des Menschen als Herrscher über die Tiere. (2) Als «Bild Gottes» wird der Mensch in P nicht wegen, sondern trotz seines Wesens bezeichnet. (3) Der Fokus liegt nicht auf dem Menschen, der gottebenbildlich ist, sondern auf Gott, der den Menschen als gottebenbildlich erschafft/erachtet. (4) Weil Gott einer und damit der Schöpfer aller Menschen ist, gelten die priesterschriftlichen Aussagen über «den Menschen» (האדם) tatsächlich allen Menschen, wie mehrere Hinweise im priesterschriftlichen Text deutlich machen.

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