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RENEWAL IN LOVE

Living Holy Lives in God's Good Creation

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RENEWAL IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have
stripped off the old self with its practices
and have clothed yourselves with the new self,
which is being renewed in knowledge according to
the image of its creator.
—Col. 3:9-10

You know that the great end of religion is
to renew our hearts in the image of God. . . .
You know that all religion which does not answer this end,
all that stops short of this, the renewal of our soul in the image of
God, after the likeness of him that created it,
is no other than a poor farce and a mere mockery of God.
—John Wesley, "Original Sin"

THIS BOOK will explore the biblical and Christian teaching that human beings are created in the image of God. It will also explore the New Testament proclamation that Jesus Christ *is* the image of God—and that we human beings, having fallen away from our calling and purpose to reflect God's character, can be renewed in the divine image through Christ.

All three of these biblical convictions are crucial to a Christian theological anthropology (i.e., teaching about what it means to be a human being, created by God and in God's image). But exploring these convictions immediately leads to a bevy of questions. For example, what does the phrase "image of God" actually mean, or even imply, in the relatively rare biblical passages in which it appears? What does "image of God" suggest about our relationship to God on the one hand, and to the rest of God's vast creation on the other? How, why, and to what extent have we humans failed in these relationships? And why is Jesus necessary to the renewal of human beings? What exactly is being renewed, and why? How does this renewal or restoration occur? Further, how ought our answers to questions like these shape our everyday behaviors in this world—a world that Scripture affirms to be God's own good creation? Indeed, every attempt to answer one question seems to lead to several more.

For all of its complexity, this idea that we are created in God's image is affirmed in both Judaism and Christianity. It is, after all, clearly stated in the opening chapter of Genesis (1:26-27). But what it actually *means* for us to be created in God's image is far less clear. The list of possible interpretations is considerably long. While along the way we certainly shall consider some of the most influential interpretations, the one we will offer in this book will focus particularly on *the human role and responsibility to protect and to nurture the world's well-being, fruitfulness, and beauty,* in the great hope that God's good creation may enjoy a viable, even rich, future. It will be important, also, that this theme be explored in the light of the New Testament proclamation that Jesus Christ is the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3).

Even as we affirm the teaching that we humans are created in the image of God—or, as we shall explore later, that we are created *to "image" God*—it is tragically obvious that we have distorted, marred, or perhaps even entirely effaced this image through resistance against our Maker. If Jesus Christ is truly *the* image of God, it

becomes all the more evident that the rest of us fall short. Differing traditions within Christianity (to say nothing of Judaism) have disagreed about the extent to which the disintegrating power of sin has damaged human existence and thus compromised the human vocation to be the image of God. Nonetheless, it is a central and universal teaching of the Christian faith that we all stand in deep need of reconciliation, redemption, and renewal. Jesus is the very embodiment of our renewal in the image of God (Eph. 4:20-24).

If Christianity aims for such a renewal of human lives—or, in John Wesley's famous words, if "the great end of religion is to renew our hearts in the image of God"—then surely it is important for us to try to comprehend what "the image of God" actually entails. Even as we insist repeatedly that in Christian Scripture and tradition Jesus Christ is identified as "the image of God," this still begs the question of how we ought to interpret the teaching of Genesis 1 regarding our calling. We seek "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6) to enlighten our understanding of the biblical idea of humanity created in the divine image. We will attempt to interpret Genesis 1 in that light, but we must nonetheless do the work of interpreting Genesis 1.

Created in the Image of God

What does Genesis mean in its teaching us that human beings, male and female, are created in the image of God? Presumably, the more light that can be shed on that question, the better we will also comprehend what it means to be *renewed* in God's image. In this opening chapter we will attempt to understand "the image of God" by interpreting it within the context of the creation story of Genesis 1 as a whole.[1] Allow us to explain. Too often in Christian tradition, unfortunately, readers have cited the language of "the image of God" as though it were an abstract principle, unrelated to its immediate (to say nothing of its larger) scriptural context. Once the phrase "in the image of God" is unloosed from the narrative of Genesis 1, it

becomes terribly convenient to import one's own presuppositions about what "in the image of God" must mean. Granted, all reading involves interpretation and all interpretation involves presuppositions and prior commitments. We cannot avoid these realities. Acknowledging this, we will nonetheless attempt to soften the problem by trying to interpret Genesis's teaching about human beings within its immediate context, the first creation story (1:1—2:4).

One of the initial benefits of such an approach is that it helps keep our ideas about humanity in the image of God strongly connected to the reality with which Genesis 1 is concerned: this world in which we live. Too often the popular assumption is that Christianity is not really concerned with this earth upon which we human beings live and depend, nor with the atmosphere above us from which we receive our breath and our warmth. And yet, of course, that is precisely what "the heavens and the earth" are in Genesis 1:1—the very first verse in Jewish and Christian Scripture. Our Bible—thanks to the Jewish tradition's ancient, divinely guided wisdom—begins not in some other world, some far-off spiritual realm of angels and demons, but with the creation of this material world of trees and seas, light and night, moon and monsoon, fish and fowl, whales and quails. Further, the Creator repeatedly offers a highly positive evaluation of what is coming into being: over and over, "God saw that it was good." Indeed, that little phrase is announced six times before human beings have even made their appearance in this story of creation. God sees that creation is good prior to—and thus quite apart from—the creation of *adam*, humankind.

The goodness and integrity of creation, entirely apart from human presence and activity, is not only a theme in Genesis 1 but also a truth approachable by the sciences. Many people are surprised to find that interactions between living organisms and the environment allow earth's natural ecosystems to function quite well without human involvement (and in many cases much better without human

involvement). It is the interactions between living organisms and the environment that allow matter and energy to flow and sustain life.

For example, just as water cycles through living organisms and the environment, biological processes are the mechanisms through which various elements like carbon and nitrogen cycle in nature. Photosynthesis transforms the energy from the sun into carbohydrates (such as carrots, lettuce, and tomatoes), and it is these carbohydrates that provide energy for almost all of the other living organisms on earth. Other biological processes, including cellular respiration and decomposition, also facilitate the cycling of elements through an ecosystem. This flow of energy and elements sustains the community of organisms that live in an ecosystem, all quite apart from the involvement of humans. While human agricultural practices such as irrigation and fertilization have made significant progress in recent decades, our interaction often results in a change in the environment, altering the functioning of any one of these core ecosystem processes and thereby changing the functioning of the others, since they are all interconnected aspects of the same system. It is increasingly incumbent upon us human beings to be aware of the differences our presence and activities make; indeed, we shall argue that developing such awareness—and acting accordingly—is an important dimension of what it means to be created in God's image.

Reading Genesis 1 Theologically

Before proceeding further, it should be mentioned that our purpose in engaging the text of Genesis 1 is not to glean scientific information about the universe or human beings. We hope in the process to offer reasons for why this is the case.[2] But we can state at the outset that we respect the purposes of both the Holy Scriptures and the natural sciences far too much to allow them to become confused with each other. Rather than reading the text for scientific information, we will undertake this reading of Genesis 1 with hopes of gaining a richer *theological* understanding of the world in which we

live, and of ourselves within it. Our guiding question is, What does it mean to be created in God's image? That is a theological question, not a scientific one. Our assumption is that Genesis 1 is a critical text for addressing this theological question.

We first read that the world we inhabit has a Creator, identified as God (Heb., *elohim*). In the beginning of God's act of creating, the "earth" or "land" (*ha'arets*) was formless and empty. It was not functioning yet as a place for life and growth. Indeed, the land could not yet be seen—only the (sur)face of "the waters" or "the deep." All was dark, deep, formless: chaotic, unpredictable waters. Yet even here there is one significant note of hope: the *ruach* of God hovered or stirred over the face of the deep waters. *Ruach* can mean breath, wind, breeze, or spirit. It is what we and many other living creatures breathe in order to live. Our first impulse might be a desire to distinguish between *ruach* as wind and *ruach* as spirit, especially God's Spirit. But this is exceedingly difficult to do, and probably impossible; throughout the Scriptures *ruach* denotes God's own life-bestowing breath, God's Spirit of life. A striking example of this idea is found in Psalm 104, a remarkably apt poem to accompany Genesis 1, that great "Hymn of Creation"[3]:

> These all [creatures of sea, sky, and land] look to you
> to give them their food in due season;
> when you give to them, they gather it up;
> when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
> When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
> when you take away their breath [*ruach*], they die and
> return to their dust.
> When you send forth your spirit [*ruach*], they are created;
> and you renew the face of the ground. (Ps. 104:27-30)

The salient point here is that it would be misleading to make an overly tidy distinction between "naturalistic" and "supernaturalistic" interpretations of *ruach*. For the Scriptures, God's "breath" animates all that lives and breathes. This seems to be reflected well

in the description of the Holy Spirit as "the Lord, the Giver of life" in the Nicene Creed (381 version). To read of God's *ruach*, God's breath-wind-spirit, blowing or hovering over the face of the formless deep is to encounter, at the very beginning, a subtle but hopeful promise of life and creativity to come. Accordingly, the divine *ruach* consistently bespeaks hope in the midst of hopelessness, life in the face of death, new possibilities where none could be imagined (cf. Ezek. 37). In the very opening of our Bible, then, we are struck by a great expectation that the *ruach* of God is brooding over new possibilities even in the face of the chaotic darkness of the deep.

Beyond the hopeful presence of God's "wind" or "spirit" breathing the possibilities of life, the first step the Creator takes to address the dark, chaotic waters is to call forth light. "And God saw that the light was good" (Gen. 1:4). It should be noted that the darkness is not described as "not good"—let alone as evil—but only that the light *is* good (Heb., *tov*). Where there was in the beginning only undifferentiated, chaotic, dark churning waters, now there is a distinction made by God between light/day and darkness/night. But as many other readers have observed, there is no sun. Yet "there was evening and there was morning, the first day" (1:5). The very least we can say at this point is that this "first day" of creation is not a typical day as we now understand a day: this is not planet earth making a twenty-four-hour rotation in relationship to the star we call the sun.

Next, the Creator begins to address the problem of all that water. As light was separated from darkness, so now a "dome" or "vault" (Heb., *raqia*, something stamped down or flattened) is created that will separate waters from waters—above and below. This is the work of the "second day"—again, of course, with no sun yet in the picture. This water-separating dome is the sky, with vast amounts of water above and below. This cosmology was rooted in everyday observation of the world: the waters of the Mediterranean, for instance, were a blue that closely matched the blue of the sky above. Further, water fell from that sky above, so it was reasonable for people of

the time to assume that there was a very large (perhaps virtually infinite) storage of water above, held in check by the sky-roof. When the water is let through in small amounts, it is beneficial as rain; however, as we will explore further in chapter 3, the Creator will later open the "windows of the heavens" so widely that the work of the second day is virtually undone (cf. Gen. 7:11).

It is safe (and correct!) to assume that this notion of the sky above us as a kind of domed ceiling holding back a gigantic body of chaotic waters, the vestiges of a primeval act of creation, is not what we now understand to be the case, scientifically speaking. In other words, this is not how we picture the world.[4] If we seek answers in Genesis to scientific questions about the earth and its atmosphere, we seek in vain. Granted, it is believed by at least some "creationists" that Genesis 1 describes the original composition of the earth and its sky-dome sealing off these primordial waters—a composition, they would argue, that was forever changed by the great flood in the time of Noah. Unfortunately for this line of argument, it is clear that the Bible generally continues to assume this watery cosmology not only as the world's original state but as its present condition. So, for example, Psalm 104 (written well after the presumed time of Noah) praises God, "You stretch out the heavens like a tent, you set the beams of your chambers on the waters" (vv. 2-3)—and it is clear that these are the waters believed by the psalmist still to be looming and churning beyond the heavens.

On the next day, the third, God now addresses the waters below the sky-dome. Those waters are rolled back so that land may appear. The land, apparently, is assumed to have been submerged beneath all this water. With each creative step, the Creator moves creation from chaotic formlessness toward increasing order and structure. The waters that are gathered back—separated, we could say, from the land—are the "seas." This rolling back of the waters is a prominent motif in biblical pronouncements about creation. God the Creator "set a boundary that [the waters] may not pass, so that they might not again

cover the earth" (Ps. 104:9). We encounter this theme again, for example, when the divine Voice proclaims to Job from the whirlwind, "[I] said [to the deep waters], 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped'" (38:11). God, we might say, holds the waters at bay.

It is important to note, once again, that this description of God's creative labor need not, and should not, be understood to conflict or compete with contemporary scientific understanding. For ancient peoples near the Mediterranean, biblical passages like these probably helped to explain "why the sea comes up to the shore and no further"—which was experienced as a happy arrangement, undoubtedly! Today we would probably understand this in terms of phenomena such as ocean tides (which in turn behave in relationship to the moon's gravitational pull), wind and ocean currents, and the plate tectonics of the earth's crust. While we certainly can understand these physical phenomena and relationships theologically as important elements of God's creation, there would be no reason to assume that a theological understanding of creation would eliminate the need for, or an appreciation for, the hard work of scientific description.

It is apparent that Middle Eastern peoples assumed, naturally, that the waters "gathered together into one place" (Gen. 1:9) flowed also beneath the land. This notion would readily account for underground springs that created streams or oases. The water believed to be above the sky-dome *is* the water of the (Mediterranean) sea, which *is* the water beneath the land, because it is all that primeval water that God the Creator separated into "above" and "below" and holds in place. Thus, as Genesis puts it in the story of Noah, it is not only heaven's windows that are opened but "the fountains of the great deep burst forth" (7:11)—and this can only be the same as "the deep" of Genesis 1:2.

With the appearance of land, there is now a place for vegetation. The Creator invites, "Let the earth put forth vegetation" (1:11), and the earth's response is seen by God to be good. The language and

imagery of Genesis repeatedly portrays God as One whose Word calls to the world to offer its own God-given creativity back to the Creator. It is a tantalizing possibility that the Hebrew text uses a play on words to illustrate, and virtually embody, this co-creative labor: the earth is called upon by God to *tadshe deshe* ("put forth vegetation"). An English parallel might be to say that the earth is called upon to produce produce or to implant itself with plants. The created realm is invited to contribute its divinely gifted, distinctive capacities to God's creative labor; indeed, God's creative power is expressed precisely in this empowering invitation to the earth. The issue here is not to press a scientific point. The issue is a theological one regarding the nature of God's creativity: God has no need to undo or negate the creatures but is in fact pleased to co-labor with them.

We should note, by the way, that the plants and trees are sprouting without the benefit of sunlight—enough of a problem for a strictly literal interpretation of the text, but a real problem for the day-age interpretation of Genesis 1.[5]

A lovely symmetry begins to emerge with the fourth day. We recall that on the *first* day God called forth light and separated that light from darkness. On the *fourth* day, correspondingly, the actual, visible lights in our sky are called forth "to separate the day from the night" (1:14). We recall that "day" and "night" were said to have been created on the first day, so they already exist in some sense; but now, the "greater light" and the "lesser light" will function to separate day and night from one another. Today, of course, we do not think of night and day as having existence independently of our planet's relationship to the sun; in other words, rather than "separating" day and night, the sun in its relationship to our planet is what *makes* what we call "day" and "night."

More importantly, scholars suspect considerable significance in Genesis's usage of the terms "greater light" (Heb.) and "lesser light" (Heb.) instead of "sun" and "moon." In Gerhard von Rad's words, "These created objects are expressly not named 'sun' and 'moon'

so that every tempting association may be evaded, for the common Semitic word for 'sun' was also a divine name."[6] In other words, Genesis discourages any tendency to identify these two prominent heavenly bodies as deities; they are only "lights," a lesser and a greater, that have been created by God along with everything else. This is an important consideration, for it suggests the possibility that a fundamental purpose of this creation story is to discourage idolatry—the human tendency to worship various elements within the creation rather than the Creator of it all (cf. Rom. 1:18-25).

It is noteworthy, too, that the Creator announces another function for these lights: "for signs and for seasons and for days and years" (Gen. 1:14). To put it simply, Genesis here suggests that the reason for the sun and the moon is to help human beings keep track of what day and month it is. While it is certainly true that our ancestors learned long ago to track the seasons and such by observing the signs in the skies, it hardly seems reasonable to assume that this is why the sun and the moon exist. It is true that their movements across the sky in relation to human observers, especially the various phases of the moon during any given month, have become markers of time's passage; this is a function of the heavenly bodies that has emerged as a result of long and careful human observation. It would hardly do, though, to say that this is why God created the sun and the moon.

Let us pursue this line of inquiry a little further. We read in verse 16 that "God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars." Had this verse said something like, "And the great light is itself a star, but just much closer to us human observers," this would have been a remarkable bit of scientific information. Or if it had said, "And the lesser light is not itself truly a light, but only reflects the light shone upon it by the greater light," this too would have been a rather surprising scientific detail. But of course Genesis 1 does not offer scientific data such as this, nor ought we to expect that it should. The purpose of Genesis 1 is to put those lights in their place: they are not deities to

be worshipped but simply elements in God's good creation "to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness" (v. 18).

The symmetry of Genesis 1 continues: as the second day provides the stage for separating the waters into "above" and "below" by the creation of a sky-dome, so now, during the fifth day, the waters below are invited by God to *yishretsu sheres*—perhaps another Hebraic play on words that finds a rough equivalent in "swarm with swarms of swimmers"—and birds are called forth to fly up there above us (but, of course, beneath the dome). In other words, the living spaces that were created by God's imposition of the sky-dome now become inhabited with creatures appropriate to each space. It is important, too, that among the "swarms of living creatures" of the waters (v. 20), "God created the great sea monsters" (v. 21). These "sea monsters" (Heb., *tannin*) were an ancient symbol, a scary personification, of "the deep"—those primeval, threatening dark waters. Where it might be natural and even expected that people would fear these mysterious monsters of the great unknown—or perhaps even offer them a kind of fearful worship—Genesis 1 calmly proclaims that they, too, are simply good creatures of the good Creator (cf. Ps. 104:25-26).

Even as we move ever nearer to the creation of human beings, it is critical to note that in this creation story God speaks to nonhuman creatures before humanity exists. "God blessed [the creatures of sky and sea, including the sea monsters], saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth'" (Gen. 1:22). All of God's creatures are blessed by their Creator to thrive, to produce generations of offspring far beyond themselves.

We remember that on the third day the waters below were rolled back so that dry land might appear, providing a place for plants and trees to grow. Following the symmetrical arrangements of the chapter, now the Creator invites the land on the sixth day to "bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild

animals of the [land]" (v. 24). The plant life called into being on the third day will provide nourishment for these earthen creatures of the sixth day.

The Image of God as a Divine Calling

Surely it is noteworthy that the creation of *adam*—the Hebrew word for "human," "humanity," "humankind," or "human beings"—also occurs on the sixth day. Perhaps contrary to our expectations and prejudices, there is no special day set aside uniquely for the creation of human beings, male and female. Indeed, since the term *adam* derives directly from the Hebrew term for ground, *adamah*, it makes all the more sense that humanity is created with the rest of the land animals on the sixth day. This is a theological commentary on human existence, the rudimentary beginnings of a theological anthropology, that roots us deeply in earth with all of our fellow creatures. "You [shall] return to the ground [Heb., *adamah*], for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19).

On the other hand, it is obvious that Genesis describes human beings as unique among God's earthy creatures in certain important ways. One obvious hint of this lies in the fascinating shift in the nature of God's speech: from "Let there be" and even "Let the earth bring forth" to "*Let us* make humankind in *our* image, according to *our* likeness" (1:3, 6, 11, 14, 24, 26). We will attempt to explore this fascinating shift in divine language in the following chapter; for now, we will simply begin to attempt to unpack this mysterious statement, "So God created humankind [again, *adam*] in his image" (1:27).

Critical to the overall argument of this book is that, while what precisely defines "the image of God" is not described in the passage, there is definitely a particular function that is assigned to this creature, *adam*. This should not surprise us. We have already seen repeatedly in Genesis 1 that the elements of creation have been described in what might be called functional terms, that is, in terms of how things (are supposed to) work in relationship to other things.[7]

Generally speaking, the Scriptures are far more interested in describing how things and people (and even God) function—how they act and interact—than in offering precise descriptions of their nature or definitions of their essence. So, to return to the Genesis depiction of humanity's creation, we find no attempt to define "the image of God" in terms of a set of abilities or capacities that are stipulated to be unique to human beings. Genesis 1's description of humanity's creation includes no mention of reason, freedom, creativity, imagination, capacity for language, and so forth—the sorts of capacities that have often been listed among the leading human attributes explored in the history of Christian interpretation. Instead, in Genesis 1 we encounter a description of function, a divine calling or task for which we human beings are assumed to be suited.

Of course, our function may very well depend upon our possessing certain features or capacities. What a being is able to *do* usually will depend strongly upon what a being *is*. So in this instance, this human role, given by God, to "fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion" over earth's creatures does inevitably imply that we must exercise certain critical abilities. Perhaps the list of abilities will not differ much, if at all, from the list offered in the previous paragraph. Nonetheless, the point would be that Scripture does not identify as "the image of God" these or any other capacities supposedly unique to human beings; instead, "the image of God" is simply described in terms of this calling to "subdue" and "have dominion." Indeed, the recurring temptation in interpreting this passage is to identify some set of abilities as the image of God, and then invert the biblical language to talk about "the image of God in humanity." The simple fact, however, is that "the image of God" is never described in the Bible as some power or attribute or capacity "in" us; instead, we are created *in God's image*. And that is immediately described in functional terms.

Psalm 8 provides a wonderful angle on this very idea. While the phrase "image of God" is not employed—the phrase is, after all,

exceedingly rare in the Bible, a point that should give us pause—the psalmist does ask God the perennial question, "What are human beings [*adam*] that you are mindful of them, mortals [*ben adam*, or the offspring of humanity] that you care for them?" (v. 4). The query is posed in the light, we might say, of "the moon and the stars" (v. 3); given the vast expanse of "your heavens" (v. 3), how can you, O God, really take notice of us puny human creatures on earth?

This question packs a much heavier punch now than it could ever have in the time of David. While certainly the night sky reveals an overwhelming expanse of stars—once you escape the big city!—the facts that lie beyond the observation of our naked eye are utterly astounding. We now understand that our planet revolves around a medium-sized star that is one of many billions of similar stars within our Milky Way galaxy alone. Traveling at the speed of light, it would take about ten thousand years to traverse just this one galaxy. Beyond our Milky Way, astronomers estimate that there are billions more galaxies, each with billions of stars, some of unimaginable magnitude. Surely it is literally the case that our minds cannot comprehend these numbers, nor the possible size of the universe. Meanwhile, back on our grain-of-sand planet Earth, we ask again with the psalmist: "What are human beings that you are mindful of them?" (v. 4).

The reply is astonishing. "Yet you have made them a little lower than God [the Hebrew term here is *elohim*, the same one used throughout Gen. 1 for God], and crowned them with glory and honor" (v. 5). This Hebrew song of praise to God does not shy away from a shockingly high estimation of God's creature, *adam*. We should note, accordingly, that God's glory is not compromised or lessened by human greatness, for indeed it is God who has "crowned [us] with glory and honor." What sort of God, what kind of Creator, is this? Further, what can it possibly mean that God has made human beings "a little lower than God"?

The answer lies, we propose, in the functional description that immediately follows in verses 6-9:

You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,
all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the sea.
O LORD, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

It appears that God's majesty "in all the earth" is to be reflected—it is to be re-presented or *imaged*—throughout earthly creation by humans who otherwise very easily might feel small and insignificant in the face of this unspeakably vast universe. In other words, as in Genesis 1 we read that *adam* is created in God's image, so in Psalm 8 we find that humanity's "glory and honor" lies in a God-granted task to exercise "dominion over the works of [God's] hands." Our Creator calls us to a task, entrusting us to be those creatures whose lives willingly magnify the divine majesty on this planet. This is what it means to be "made a little lower than God." It is not an ontological [Gk., *ontos*, "being"] description of our inner essence as lying only a few degrees below the divine nature. Scripture repeatedly reminds us that we humans are no more than creatures of dust, feeble and frail. Instead, we are "a little lower than God" simply, and precisely, in terms of the godly task assigned to us: we are created and called to *function* as God's representatives. It is critical to note that this psalm was penned well into human history; *adam* is, at the time of its writing, deeply entrenched in the powerful reality of sin. But nothing in this psalm even hints that human sin—our constant falling short of the calling to which we are called—has discouraged God from continuing to create us to be the divine image, crowning us with glory and honor. This is nothing short of miraculous.

There is one other biblical illustration of this notion of humanity *functioning* as God's representative that we hope will drive the idea home as we bring this chapter to a close. It is the story of the calling of Moses to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt (Exod. 3:1—4:17). First, we should note the somewhat surprising desire of God that a human agent even be necessary to Israel's liberation: "The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt" (3:9-10). Surely the Creator of the heavens and the earth can accomplish this liberation apart from any human agent; and yet, we encounter again the mystery of a Creator who intends to accomplish the divine purposes by way of a representative. God even respects Moses's ability to raise objections, ask questions, throw up roadblocks, and invent excuses, patiently dealing with Moses's dodges one by one (3:11—4:13).

Finally, however, the text narrates that God's holy anger burned against Moses. We might expect Moses to be reduced to ashes. Instead, the Voice from the burning bush next patiently proposes,

> What of your brother Aaron, the Levite? I know that he can speak fluently; even now he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you his heart will be glad. You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do. He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him. Take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs. (4:14-17)

How is it that God, Creator of the universe, can be so humble as to enter into conversation with Moses, and finally even offer a compromise with Moses? The Voice from the burning bush agrees to alter the plan for redeeming Israel to include Moses's brother Aaron in this mighty work of redemption. Most critically for our purposes, we note that the Voice proclaims that as Aaron will serve as a mouth for Moses, Moses will serve as God for Aaron. This is striking lan-

guage, and it means that Moses will *function* as God, will *represent* God, to Aaron. Of course, this is essentially what God has been trying to get Moses to do all along: to *function for God*, to *represent God*, to the people of Israel and even to their Egyptian oppressors, and especially to Pharaoh.

This description of Moses, then, is simply a special case of the idea we have been exploring from Genesis 1 regarding the creation of human beings. Our Creator makes all of humanity—every human being, and particularly all human beings together precisely in their sociality—"a little lower than God" in their function as God's representatives. This is what we are made for. It is a high and holy calling, one "crowned with glory and honor." Indeed, it may seem overwhelming, too tall an order. The human family has often shown a distinct resistance to such a demanding vocation. The argument of the chapters that follow is that, despite our resistance and rebellion, God is persistent and patient, laboring painstakingly for humanity's renewal in the image of God through Jesus Christ. And if it is truly a renewal, then it is not a rescinding or denial of this calling we encounter in Genesis 1; indeed, in Paul's words, "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29). Genesis 1, then, must still be in effect. Before we delve further into the attempt to understand the nature of this calling, this vocation, it will be helpful, and probably necessary, to probe the question of who this God is who has created and called us for such a purpose.

"*Renewal in Love* has the potential to . . . register Wesley's vision in the broader theological landscape and reorient the conversation altogether."

—Amos Yong
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"This is Wesleyan theology at its best . . ."

—Randy L. Maddox
Duke Divinity School

After redemption—then what? Is there more for us to do beyond waiting for Christ's return? Has God saved us for something greater?

Renewal in Love answers this question with a decisive *yes.* Contending that humanity was created in God's image to represent his love to all of creation, the authors offer us a compelling vision of life that encompasses far more than our personal salvation. We discover that through Christ, the image of God envisioned in Genesis has been renewed in us, calling us to care not only for each other but for all that God has made. In these pages we find depicted the essence of holiness, where renewal in God's image is really renewal in God's all-inclusive love.

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