Nothing "Mere" about a Man in the Image of God

Biblical Anthropology as a Response to Psilanthropism

Abstract

Trinitarians consider psilanthropism (defined as the belief that Jesus is a mere man) to be heresy. I will cite a modern example where two authors argue that Jesus cannot be a man because—these authors contend—in the biblical worldview no mere man can represent God in the way that Jesus does. I will respond to this by first showing that biblical anthropology describes humankind as 1) royalty, 2) priesthood, and 3) representatives of God. Then we will explore New Testament texts that explicitly and implicitly compare Jesus to Adam. I will conclude by contending that we moderns should account for the cultural context of the Bible and acknowledge that in a biblical worldview, it is acceptable and even fitting for a human to represent God.

Introduction to Psilanthropism

Derived from the Greek roots *psilos*, or "mere," and *anthropos,* meaning "man," psilanthropism is simply the belief that Jesus is and was a man. Since the composition of the creeds of the so-called ecumenical councils, Trinitarians have called Psilanthropism heresy.

In their classic work *Kingdom Through Covenant,* Peter J. Gentry and Stephen Wellum briefly summarize their perspective on the issue. They explain what, to them, requires Jesus' divinity:

> Scripture … teaches that this Messiah is more than a mere man, since he is *identified with God.* How so? Because in fulfilling God's promises, he literally inaugurates *God's* saving rule (kingdom) and shares the very throne of God—something no mere human can do— which entails that his identity is organically tied to the one true and living God.[1]

To Gentry and Wellum, since Jesus 1) is identified with God; 2) fulfills God's promises; and 3) "shares" the throne of God,[2] there is no other possible conclusion: he must be God.

These authors conclude with a list of accomplishments that, apparently, no mere man could have completed (mainly the inauguration of the New Covenant).

> In him, as fully human, the glory and radiance of God is completely expressed, since he is the exact image and representation of the Father.… It is crucial to point out: to say that Jesus has done all this is to identify him *as God the Son incarnate,* fully God and fully Man.

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[1] Emphasis theirs. Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 770.

[2] Gentry and Wellum could be more precise as to what they mean by "sharing" the throne of God. In a footnote, they point the reader to David F. Wells' *The Person of Christ: A Biblical and Historical Analysis of the Incarnation*. I was unable to find clarification of "sharing God's throng" there other than a quotation I include in the conclusion of this paper.

It is for this reason that the New Testament presents Jesus in an entirely different category from any created thing. In fact, Scripture so identifies him with Yahweh in all his actions, character, and work that he is viewed, as David Wells reminds us, as "the agent, the instrument, and the personifier of God's sovereign, eternal saving rule."[3]

Trinitarians and Unitarians can agree that, in Jesus, "the glory and radiance of God is completely expressed." But the second claim here, that Jesus "is in an entirely different category from any created thing" because he is the "agent, instrument, and personifier of God's saving rule," flies in the face of the culture in which the Bible was written. In fact, in the ANE (ancient Near East), kings and image statues were seen as the "agents," "instruments," and "personifiers" of divine "rule." The book of Genesis gives this role to all of humanity. Therefore, despite historical Trinitarian concerns to the contrary, in the biblical perspective a human being can—and does—serve as the "agent, instrument, and personifier of God's saving rule."

ANE Background of the Imago Dei

In the Old Testament, humankind is referred to as the image and likeness[4] of God just three times, all in the primeval history of Genesis. At each instance, the significance of the statement—though perhaps not its meaning—is apparent: the first thing God says about humanity is, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." (Gen. 1:26)[5]. The next two uses of the phrase summarize God's creation (5:1) and clarify the gravity of murder (9:6), respectively.

The relative scarcity of image-of-God texts, coupled with the idea's obvious massive significance, have led to centuries of speculation.[6] Comments Gavin Ortlund, "The image is notorious for both its theological significance and its ambiguity in meaning."[7] Christian commentators living in the centuries after Christ interpreted the *imago Dei* through the

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[3] Ibid., 773–74.

[4] There is a temptation for many scholars to draw some distinction between the words rendered "image" and "likeness," but there are two significant reasons not to distinguish between these terms in a strong sense: First, inadequate Old Testament linguistic dadta exist to draw a clear distinction between the two words. Second, Genesis 9:6 summarizes the creation of man using "…in his own image" as a stand-in for "image and likeness." This paper will follow the example of Genesis 9:6 and use "image of God" in the same way.

[5] Verse references are from the English Standard Version.

[6] For early Christians coming from a platonic background, the image had something to do with reason. Augustine provides us a famous example. As a former Platonist, he came to Christianity with a pre-conceived understanding of man as composed of two things: a body and a mind. From his perspective, the body must be totally evil. He even comments on the image of God, saying, "For not in the body but in the mind was humanity made in the image of God. In his own similitude let us seek God, in his own image recognize the creator." (*Augustine, In Joannis evangelium tractatus* CXXIV, quoted in David J. A. Clines, "Humanity as the Image of God," in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series*, On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1967–1998 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1967–1998), 36.) J. Richard Middleton writes, "The notion of the rational, substantial soul mirroring its divine archetype … is nuanced or supplemented in the Latin West by notions such as conscience, spirituality, immortality, freedom, and personhood and by Augustine's famous proposal of various intrapsychic trinitarian structures (particularly memory, intellect, and will), which correspond to the triune nature of God." (J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 19.)

[7] Gavin Ortlund, "Image of Adam, Son of God: Genesis 5:3 and Luke 3:38 in Intercanonical Dialogue," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 4, no. 57 (2014).

anthropology of their own culture *ad nauseum.* Hendrikus Berkhof goes so far as to say, "by studying how systematic theologies have poured meaning into Gen. 1:26 … one could write a piece of Europe's cultural history."[8]

In the last century, however, a consensus has been building about the meaning of the image of God in Genesis. J. Richard Middleton, in his evaluation of a 1988 doctoral dissertation by Gunnlaugur A. Jónsson, says, "Jónsson's survey of a century of research … shows that the degree of consensus among Old Testament scholars … is close to unanimity."[9] Old Testament scholars are almost all on the same page about the image of God. But what is that page?

According to Middleton, the consensus takes two factors into account:
1. Royal aspects of the creation account
2. The ANE thought world behind "image of God" language

The royal tone is found first in Genesis 1:26–27: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'" This is *the first statement* about God's creation of humanity. It is composed of essentially two parts: first, mankind is to be made in God's image and likeness; and second, mankind is to have dominion over "all the earth."

Many Hebrew scholars believe the second is the function of the first. David J. A. Clines writes in "Humanity as the Image of God," "Gen. 1.26 may well be rendered: 'Let us make humanity as our image . . . so that they may rule.'" Clines justifies this reading first by pointing out that the Hebrew text's *waw*, or "and," can carry the force of "so that." Gentry and Wellum concur, "The correct translation, therefore, is 'Let us make man … *so that* they may rule…'"[10]

A similar text may prove illustrative. Clines points to the creation of the sun and the moon in Genesis 1:16–18,: "And God made the two great lights … And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness." Here, the creation of the two great lights is immediately followed by their purpose, their function, what they do. Taking this verse into consideration when looking at the creation of humanity just ten verses later, there is a similar construction that follows creation with purpose: What do the sun and moon do? They give light. What do humans do? They have dominion. In sum, Middleton writes, "…The *imago Dei* designates the royal office or calling of human beings as God's representatives and agents in the world, granted authorized power to share in God's rule or administration of the earth's resources and creatures."[11]

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[8]   Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith*, trans. Sierd Woodstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 179.
[9]   Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*, 25.
[10]   Emphasis theirs. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 223.
[11]   Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*, 27.

'Ādām as Ruler

Without elevating secular or pagan sources to the authority of Scripture, Christians can gain insight into the cultures that shaped Israelite language and metaphor. When it comes to the *imago Dei*, it so happens that these sources are particularly helpful.

David J. A. Clines puts it succinctly: "The terminology of the image of God … is understood in the ancient Near East almost exclusively of the king."[12] Ancient Egypt[13] offers a proverbial multitude of texts referring to the pharaoh as the image of a deity. In Acts 7:22 Stephen says that "Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." And the biblical book of Exodus describes Moses' childhood among the Egyptian nobility, so these Egyptian inscriptions—which coincide with the generally accepted range of dates for the Exodus—probably represent norms that influenced the language of the tribes of Israel and the Tanakh, whether directly through their period of enslavement, or through oral history that shaped Israel's later worldview.[14]

In a text from the fourteenth century B.C., the god Amon (associated with Amon-Re, though these relationships changed over the centuries) addresses Pharaoh Amenhotep III as "My living image, creation of my members."[15] A text from the same period has the same god address the pharaoh:

> 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.[16]

A Bible student may feel surprised when first encountering phrases common to the Bible in an Egyptian text. But the New Kingdom of Egypt is replete with similar references to the pharaoh.[17]

Teasing out the exact nature of the relationship between the pharaoh and the god in these texts is difficult—and perhaps fruitless. In Egyptian dynasties preceding these inscriptions, pharaohs did not claim to be the image of a god, but that they were the god's incarnation: the god itself. But

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12   Clines, "Humanity as the Image of God," 42.

13   Image of god texts abound in Egypt, but here I reference ones that coincide most closely with the range of dates scholars usually agree upon for the Exodus (that is, some time during the 18th and 19th dynasties of the New Kingdom) *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, ed. John H. Walton, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

14   Middleton states, "Given that the ideas in biblical texts were likely passed down by oral tradition within Israel prior to their reduction to writing, the relevant Egyptian or Mesopotamian influence may have taken place long before the actual text of Genesis 1 was written." Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*, 123.

15   Werner H. Schmidt, *Die Schöpfungsgeschichte der Priesterschrift*, Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament (Neukirchn-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1964).

16   Ibid.

17   I counted 55 statements that a pharaoh was the "image of (god)" occurring within the commonly-accepted early and late dates for the Exodus event (59 if we include Hatshepsut, who reigned in the decades before the early Exodus date). See Edward Mason Curtis, "Man as the Image of God in Genesis in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Parellels" (University of Pennsylvania, 1984), 226–27; Bruce Wells, "Exodus," in *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, ed. John H. Walton, Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 210.

texts like the one above demonstrate both a close relationship and a distinction: in the Egyptian mind, Amenhotep III is a close relative of Amon, but not necessarily Amon himself. Edward Curtis says, "The fact that the king is described as the image of god seems to presuppose his creation or procreation by the god."[18] This aspect of image of god language will come to light in the Gospel of Luke.

Another Egyptian inscription shows a functional aspect to image-of-god language: "While you [Amon] are in heaven and illuminate the world, he [Amenhotep III] is on earth to carry out your kingship."[19] From the perspective of the royal cult, this pharaoh's kingship was actually enacting the rulership of his god—but on earth, instead of "in heaven." Middleton summarizes this representative aspect: "as the deputy and representative of the god on earth, the king's exploits *were* the god's exploits." The Genesis account of man's creation in God's image—especially in light of the dominion mandate that follows—communicates that Adam and Eve (and humanity) are to do for Yahweh what Amenhotep III (and all ANE kings) supposedly did for his god: humans carry out Yahweh's rulership on earth.

Genesis responds to and critiques the ANE conception of the image of god first by democratizing it: in Genesis the entirety of humanity is made in God's image, not just the king.[20] Second, where early pharaohs and other ANE depictions of kings as the image of god imply that the king is the literal incarnation of that god, the Genesis text makes it clear that Adam is a created being.

Clines says that to have a mortal being represent the creator to his creation allows God to be immanent without compromising his transcendence:

> In this juxtaposition of two aspects of the divine nature the author of Genesis 1 has both freed God from bondage to the world-order by asserting the creaturehood of all that is not God, and has ensured that the statement about the immanence of God firmly excludes any possibility of humanity's divinization, for humans too are explicitly said to be creatures of God. [21]

Clines goes on to say that through the creation of mankind, "In a sense, the Word becomes flesh. The word calls the creation into existence; but the image of God is the permanent link between God and his world."[22] According to Clines, Adam's clear status as a created being precludes any claim that he (or all humanity) is God incarnate.

Psalm 8 well represents the biblical worldview on the creation of man. Gentry and Wellum point out that in Psalm 8,

> verses 5–8 constitute a word-by-word commentary and meditation on Genesis 1:26–28. … Psalm 8:6–8 … details and unfolds the rule of mankind specified in Genesis 1:26b. It

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[18]   Ibid., 148.
[19]   Ibid., 152.
[20]   I'm interpreting Genesis 1:27 as a summary statement that refers to the entirety of humankind: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."
[21]   Clines, "Humanity as the Image of God," 38.
[22]   Ibid.

is clear and obvious that the psalm writer has the text of Genesis 1:26 before his mind. Note in particular that the terms in Hebrew for "crowned" (עטר), "glory" (כבוד), and "honor" (הדר) are all royal terms. This shows that the psalm writer understood "image" to speak of royal status.[23]

'Ādām as Priest

To moderns, Adam and Eve's duties in the garden of Eden can seem demeaning: "Gardeners could be considered some of the least valuable members of society,"[24] point out Gentry and Wellum.

But textual hints show that the garden of Eden is sacred space. Gentry and Wellum draw parallels between the garden of Eden and the Jewish temple to argue that Eden, too, was where God dwelt and ruled. Daniel Lioy, in his article "The Garden of Eden as Primordial Temple or Sacred Space for Humankind," summarizes: "an examination of the creation narrative points to Eden as the earliest-occurring sacred space, as well as a prototype and archetype of future temples."[25]

If Eden was a sacred space, then Adam and Eve were its priests. God's directions to "work and keep" (לְעָבְדָהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ) the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15) use the same Hebrew verbs that describe the work of the temple priests in Numbers 3:7–8; 8:26; and 18:5–6. Lioy concludes, "A theological analysis of the biblical data indicates that God intended Adam and Eve to serve as His sacerdotal vice-regents in the garden."[26]

'Ādām as Icon

Biblical historians and theologians tend to make much of Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian examples of image of god language, but in fact it's difficult to find many image of god texts in Mesopotamia.[27] This could be because, as Middleton says, "the geographical region corresponding to ancient Mesopotamia is notorious for the relative rarity of manuscript finds."[28]

That said, physical images of gods were ubiquitous in nearly all the cultures surrounding Israel and should be included in any serious study of the meaning of the image of God. Most of the later Old Testament occurrences of the Hebrew word rendered "image" in Genesis (צֶלֶם, *tselem*) refer to idols. When Hillel (a contemporary of Jesus) refers to himself as the "image of God" in a

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[23]   Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 232.
[24]   Ibid., 246.
[25]   Daniel T. Lioy, "The Garden of Eden as a Primordial Temple or Sacred Space for Humankind," *Conspectus* 10:1 (2010): 43.
[26]   Ibid.
[27]   For all the space given them in the books on the topic, Curtis was only able to find five texts using image of God language. What's more, it's difficult to prove a close connection between these texts and inscriptions and early Hebrew culture, since the Jews would have come into contact with them only later, during the deportation to Babylon.
[28]   Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*, 123.

midrash, he compares himself to an idol statue in a temple.[29] For both second-temple period Judaism and the Old Testament, images of idols form a parallel to the image of God.

Cult images in Mesopotamia, says Middleton, were first made in a workshop and then consecrated "by means of an elaborate ritual … typically known as the 'mouth-washing' or sometimes the 'mouth-opening' ritual."[30] Idols in Egypt and Mesopotamia were thought to be alive because they contained some refined material from the god (called "fluid," "spirit," or "breath"), animating them to become the living representative of the divine being.[31] Perhaps this forms a backdrop for Genesis 2: "then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature" (Gen. 2:7).

Statue images of kings represented the authority of the king. Assyrian kings left statues of themselves in territories they conquered. Clines states that in Neo-Assyria, "An injury done to the image is a crime against the deity and is punished as such; hence images were seldom destroyed in war, but rather carried into captivity, where the image still remained a deity."[32]

The significance of images continued into the Roman Empire that formed the backdrop of the New Testament. Morten Warmind writes,

> The significance of the picture of the emperor can be illustrated by the fact that all depictions of the emperor were cult-images and therefore sacrosanct. At the foot of the emperor's statue, a person was unpunishable. When a slave was sold, the seller was obliged to inform the prospective buyer about … whether the slave had ever run to an image of the emperor.[33]

Unlike the early pharaohs, who claimed they were the incarnation of Horus,[34] no one believed that an image of Caesar was Caesar himself. But that any statue image of Caesar represented the emperor and carried his authority—in all the Roman Empire—was assumed to be fact.

Jews living in the first-century cultural context would be surprised at the modern American paucity of image veneration. For them, living in a world where kings claim representative status of gods and idol statues abound, the biblical creation account clearly honors and exalts humanity to the status of divinely-ordained viceroys and priests of God.

Jesus as the New Image

In the New Testament, writers both designate Jesus as the image of God and compare Jesus to Adam (explicitly and implicitly). In Colossians, Paul writes, "He (Jesus) **is the image of the**

[29]   "Vayikra Rabbah," (Sefaria, Talmudic Israel/Babylon (500 CE)), Midrash, 34.3. https://www.sefaria.org/Vayikra_Rabbah.34.3?ven=Sefaria_Community_Translation&vhe=Midrash_Rabbah_--_TE&lang=bi&with=About&lang2=en.

[30]   Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*, 127.

[31]   Clines, "Humanity as the Image of God," 30.

[32]   Ibid., 32.

[33]   Morten Lund Warmind, "The Cult of the Roman Emperor before and after Christianity," *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* (2014): 213.

[34]   Curtis, "Man as the Image of God in Genesis in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Parellels," 144.

invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." (Col. 1:15–17; emphasis mine; see also 2 Cor. 4:4). What did Paul mean when he called Jesus "the image of the invisible God"?

Colossians is not just using flowery language; this phrase is deliberate. When Paul applies image of God language to Jesus and uses the same designation given to Adam and Eve in the creation account, he uses terminology familiar to readers of the Old Testament to categorize Jesus as a member of the human race, even if in context he exalts him as the apex of it. Kittel points out that the statement is deliberate: "Paul equates Christ with the Adam intended in Gen. 1:27."[35]

Anyone in ancient Israel would recognize that an image of a god (or king) represents or stands in for that god (or king); in the same way, Jesus represents God on earth through his authority. Indeed, he *must*; Paul emphasizes God's transcendence—and with it, the need for a representative—with the words "invisible God." For us, this text should now call to mind an earlier Egyptian text: "While you [Amon] are in heaven and illuminate the world, he [Amenhotep III] is on earth to carry out your kingship."[36] When Paul calls Jesus God's image, he is classifying him as the immanent representation of the transcendent God.

Here, the New Testament designates Jesus as the one vested with God's authority, designated and empowered to represent him to the parts of the world under God's control. Like a statue left in a conquered land, Jesus' presence in our hearts shows that here, God rules.

Further, when Paul uses image of God language of Jesus, he is deliberately making use of the first designation for all humanity and applying it to the Christ. Explicit New Testament comparisons between Jesus and Adam show just as Adam was the first progenitor of humanity, Paul thinks of Jesus as the progenitor of a new kind of human race. 1 Corinthians 15:21–22 reads, "For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." Paul does not compare a divine Jesus to a mere man Adam. On the contrary, the similarity between them is explicit: Paul refers to Adam and Jesus each as "a man," without apology. To Paul, the difference between the two is outcome: in Adam, all die; but in Christ, all will be made alive.

A similar comparison takes place in Romans:

> …Death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.… For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. (Rom. 5:14, 17)

In the first verse quoted here, Adam is the "type" of the one who was to come, referring to Jesus. The word rendered "type" in the ESV is the Greek word *tupos*, and it means "type, die, pattern, print, or stamp."[37] Here again, Paul binds Jesus and Adam together in their status as "the first

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[35]   *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. G. Bromiley, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), v. 4, p. 396.
[36]   Ibid., 152.
[37]   James Strong, in *Strong's Greek Dictionary of the Bible* (Accordance), Web, 5180. tupos.

man" and draws a distinction between their respective outcomes: death through Adam, and life through Jesus.

It isn't just Paul who draws comparisons between the two figures. The author of Hebrews interprets Psalm 8 (the meditation on Genesis 1:26–28) by applying it to the Christ in 2:5–9, concluding, "We see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone" (Heb. 2:9).

Luke, in his Gospel, notably bestows the title "son of God" on two figures. Of course, Jesus receives the appellative multiple times.[38] But Adam, too, is referred to as the "son of God." His designation is found in Jesus' genealogy, which goes backwards from Jesus all the way to creation. The genealogy ends, "the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God" (Luke 3:38).

Gavin Ortlund in his article "Image of Adam, Son of God," argues that Genesis 5:3, where "[Adam] fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth," draws a parallel between Adam and God on the one hand and Seth and Adam on the other. If Seth, in Adam's image and likeness, is his son, then Adam, in God's image and likeness, is *God's* son.[39]

Trinitarian commentators struggle with this detail. Why would Luke call Adam the son of God immediately following Jesus' baptism, where "A voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased'"[40] (Luke 3:22)? Referring to Adam by one of Jesus' titles—especially in such close proximity in the text—seems to put Jesus and Adam on a plane. From a Trinitarian perspective, Luke 3:38 presents a problem because Adam cannot possibly be a member of the godhead.

But Unitarians are in a uniquely privileged position to understand the verse—and indeed, Luke's intention in applying the same moniker to both Jesus and his ancestor. Adam and Jesus are described as fulfilling analogous roles: both are rulers of God's creation, representative images of the transcendent God, priests to God, and progenitors of humanity. God designed each of them to live in covenant with him and carry out his authority.

Changing Perspectives

A shift in understanding the image of God has taken place—almost entirely within the last century. Even now it is filtering down from the academy into the popular consciousness through resources like The Bible Project[41] and books like Michael Heiser's *Unseen Realm*. As popular theology sees Edenic humanity in the status of royal, priestly representatives of God's authority, perhaps a time is coming when we can acknowledge that a human *need not be God to represent him*.

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38   See Luke 1:35; 4:3; 4:9; 4:41; and 22:70.
39   Ortlund, "Image of Adam, Son of God: Genesis 5:3 and Luke 3:38 in Intercanonical Dialogue."
40   Luke refers to Jesus as the "Son of Man" 25 times, but as the "Son of God," only four times. Adam, of course, is only once mentioned in Luke, and it's the verse I've already quoted.
41   "Royal Priests of Eden," The Royal Priest, BibleProject.

Michael Heiser, himself a Trinitarian, explains image of God language in Genesis in a way that rings Christological:

> Humankind was created *as* God's image. If we think of imaging as a verb or function, that translation makes sense.… The image is not an ability we have, but as a status. We are his representatives on earth. To *be* human is to image God.
> This is why Genesis 1:26–27 is followed by what theologians call the "dominion mandate" in verse 28. The verse informs us that God intends *us to be him on this planet.*[42]

Writing in 2015, Heiser correctly ascertains the functional aspect of the image of God: Genesis 1:26–28 empowers humanity to be God's "representatives," on earth.

To Unitarians, the intertextual application is obvious: like Adam, Jesus was made to be God's representative to the created world order; he is empowered to be God's vizier, to represent the invisible God—through his authority—on and to the earth. Heiser's concluding statement is intended to refer to humanity, but it could easily refer to Christ: God intends [Christ] to be him on this planet, so to speak.

Some scholars stubbornly assert that only God can take on the Messiah's mantle. Gentry and Wellum contend that the whole biblical history, beginning from Adam, serves to prove that only God can keep covenant with God:

> Who is able, or what kind of person is able to fulfill all God's promises, inaugurate his saving rule in this world, and establish all that is associated with the new covenant…? The answer in biblical thought is clear: it is *God alone* who can do it, and no one else.… He must *unilaterally* act if there is going to be any redemption.[43]

Gentry and Wellum are asserting that only God can bring about salvation, which is certainly the case. Only God has the authority and the power to effect change in his world. But beyond just that, these authors argue that God could not possibly include in the process a "mere man." Certainly, the willingness these two authors exhibit to put limitations on an all-powerful, all-knowing God should surprise us.

Biblical anthropology shows that there is nothing mere about man. From the beginning, God designed humanity to represent him and to rule. Adam's failure—and the subsequent failures of other covenant heads—came *after* the creation of humankind in Genesis 1; it's a problem, not an inherent aspect of God's design.

Conclusion

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[42]   Emphasis mine. Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015).

[43]   Emphasis theirs. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 772.

In his work on the incarnation, *The Person of Christ,* David F. Wells says: "The saving and vindicating Rule of God has been born with Jesus.… Yet it is also plain that this is the Rule of *God.*"[44] To Wells, when Jesus describes his ministry in terms of the "kingdom of God" (cf. Matt. 10:14), he must be hinting that he is God because no human can reign over God's kingdom. But in the ANE mindset, even a statue could hold the authority of a king. How much more could a human image of God represent God?

ANE parallels show us that the language of the Genesis creation is filled with significance: Adam (and all of humanity) was designed to rule over, and represent God to, creation. Adam and Eve were further intended to fulfill the role of priests in God's cosmic, primordial temple space. In light of this elevated initial status of humankind, Christians should not be surprised when later New Testament texts explicitly and implicitly compare Jesus and Adam, not should we fear classifying Jesus as a man.

If mortal, human Adam—and indeed, all humanity—was created to serve as kings and priests to God, there is nothing "mere" about humanity. A human person can represent God.

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[44] Emphasis his. David F. Wells, *The Person of Christ: A Biblical and Historical Analysis of the Incarnation* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1984), 26.

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