

# In the Beginning

A Collection of Essays and Bible Studies  
on the Sanctity of Early Human Life

Foreword by Matthew C. Harrison

**LCMS World Relief and Human Care**

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# Foreword

In 2001, the former “President’s Commission on Life” (now known as the “Sanctity of Human Life Committee”) found a home in LCMS World Relief and Human Care, by LCMS convention action. Amazingly, a few voices expressed consternation at the move. From our perspective, nothing could have been more appropriate. The work of LCMS World Relief and Human Care is to demonstrate mercy and compassion in the name of Christ on behalf of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Every fiber of our institutional being is about mercy toward the suffering, the needy, the least—and all this in the blessed name of Jesus. And if it is to be mercy upon the least, then let us indeed include the smallest and least.

The advance of science and technology has brought head-spinning changes and bioethics challenges. The future only promises greater complexities at a more rapid rate. This little book is a tool to help the Church to remain faithful along the way. May the very Christ who sanctified life from its beginning by taking upon Himself our flesh at every early stage and redeemed all of life—from conception to natural death and beyond—grant us wisdom and faith for this day. May He grant us courage to speak unambiguously to a world that relishes ambiguity. May He grant us courage to speak forthrightly for those who cannot speak for themselves. May He grant us love for the unloved. And may He ever have mercy upon us where we fail and bring us repentance and conviction to bear witness to life—His life—precisely where death appears to reign.

Rev. Matthew C. Harrison

Executive Director  
LCMS World Relief and Human Care

## Lesson 1

# Creation: Made in God's Image

Albert Collver

When the Lord God creates, He creates in His image, in His likeness. When man makes, fashions, and molds, he also does so in his image and in his likeness. Herein is the problem when we reflect on the image of God (*imago dei*). Our reflections on the image of God inevitably make the Lord God look something like us. On the surface, this may seem to be obviously true. After all, if we confess that the Lord made man in His image, it would stand to reason that a person can get an idea about God by looking at human beings, who were made in His image. Such thinking can lead us to the conclusion that we can come to know God better by knowing ourselves better. Some seek to find the image of God by looking at what is best in human beings. Others speak of the evolution of human beings as man becoming more like God. To some, the fact that human beings create, speak language, exercise dominion over the world, and have multiplied to fill the earth proves that man has the image of God. Celebrating such qualities and abilities in man tells us less about the Lord God and His image, and more about the idol we have fashioned for ourselves in our own image and likeness. We cannot discover what it means to be made in the image of God by looking to ourselves.

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). The Father created the heavens and the earth and all the living by speaking His Word, who is Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the Lord and giver of life. The Holy Trinity created all that exists. But the creation of man was not like the creation of all the other living things. All other living creatures came into existence when God spoke them to life. However, when it came

to the creation of man, the Holy Trinity had something like a conversation that we are privileged to hear. The Scriptures only record such a conversation among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit a few times, one of which is the creation of man. The Lord God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness” (Genesis 1:26). Here we see that the creation of man is different than the creation of all the other living things. The Lord even gave this “man” a name when He called him Adam.

In the creation of man, we notice the patterns that recur throughout the Scriptures. We see the Lord making something holy and setting it apart for His use and delight. When He created man, He set man apart and made him in His image and likeness, naming him Adam. The Scriptures record such special care and concern for no other creature besides man. Human beings were made in the image of God. Calamity came when man rejected that image through sin.

After the Lord God made man in His image, we are told that the serpent came to Eve. Here again we see recurring patterns. Satan tempts Eve to add or subtract from the Word of God. Specifically, he tempts her to add to what the Lord had commanded. We read that Eve adds to God’s command, saying, “Do not touch the fruit.” But notice that the Lord had only commanded, “Do not eat of it.” Then Satan tempts her to forget a portion of the Lord’s Word, namely, “Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness.” He tempts Eve by telling her she will be “like God” (3:5). She already had been made “like God,” but Satan tempted her to forget her Lord’s promise. So it goes with us in our lives. We are tempted to add and to subtract from the Lord’s Word. Man’s desire to be like God apart from His Word caused him to lose the perfect image of God. Because man has lost the original image of God, we cannot reliably learn about that image by examining ourselves.

The true image of God can only be found in Christ Jesus, who is “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). Jesus, “the image of God” (2 Corinthians 4:4), created man in His image (John 1:3) and now restores that image in His people. Earlier, we learned that the Scriptures occasionally record the conversations between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and that one of those places is the creation of man. Another place this occurs is when Jesus, nailed to the cross, cries out, “My God, My God

why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46). Jesus, the very image of God, is forsaken by His Father. Here, Jesus is forsaken because in His passion He became just like us who have lost the image of God. We see Him take our lost and fallen image upon Himself. Now He restores the lost image of God by setting us apart and putting His name upon us in the waters of Holy Baptism. In the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, the Christian is given the image of Christ—the image of the crucified Christ in this life, and the image of the resurrected Christ in the life to come (Romans 6).

This image of God has profound implications for how we treat our neighbor. Perhaps first and foremost is the recognition that Christ died for our neighbor, without regard to any merit or worthiness in him. In your neighbor is a person that Christ desires to restore and to remake in the image of God.

In today’s scientifically complex society, we can also see how we often strive to create in our own image. Rather than receiving our neighbor as a gift, we seek to remake (or even unmake) him according to our desired image of the human being. If our neighbor’s existence, disabilities, size, or problems offend our image of the human being, we can easily dismiss him and treat him as less than human or regard ourselves as better than him.

The basis for how we treat our neighbor is twofold. The Law of God commands us not to hurt or harm our neighbor in his body but to help and befriend him in every bodily need. This command is given to all human beings and is enforced by threat of punishment and fear. Yet the Christian who is remade in the image of Christ has the motivation of Christ’s underserved love and mercy. Just as Christ loved us and redeemed us, even though we had no merit or worthiness in us, we, too, love our neighbor and show mercy to others. Christ seeks the unlovable; He sought unlovable us and now we—who have been set apart and named in Holy Baptism—show mercy to those the world considers unlovable, unwanted, inconvenient, and unworthy of life. Because Christ has recreated us in His image, we see in our neighbor a person whom Jesus also wants to redeem and transform into His image—a person whom only Jesus can restore to the image of God.

# The Value of Life and the Image of God

James Lamb

Does human life have intrinsic value? If so, when does that value begin? Answering these two questions is critical in dealing with a variety of issues related to modern technologies and human life at its very beginnings. Anyone can postulate that human life has intrinsic value from the very beginning. But only Christians can articulate “why”—in a way no one else can. Christians can go beyond intrinsic value and talk of *God-given* intrinsic value. The answer to the question, “What has God done that gives value to human life from the very beginning?” is the focus of this series of studies.

## Image Given

1. Read Genesis 1:26–27. From the very beginning, God’s action elevates human life above all other life. What particular things in these verses testify to this?

2. Read Psalm 8. This psalm praises the majestic name of God (vv. 1, 9). The reason for this praise is the “work of Your fingers,” God’s creation (v. 3). The creation of human life is included as part of this work. Where do you find Genesis 1:26–27 reflected in this psalm?

3. Read Genesis 2:7 and 2:22. Note the action words associated with the creation of Adam and Eve in God's image. God "formed" Adam and "breathed" into him. He "made" (literally "built") Eve. How do these words help enhance the value given to the first humans?

4. Read Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9. In the next section, we will study how the original image of God was lost. Nevertheless, even after the fall, this original, lofty position of being the "work of [God's] fingers" still gives value. How would Grandma's handmade quilt that is proudly displayed although old and tattered relate to this?

### **Image Lost**

5. Read Genesis 3:1–7. The "glory and honor" of this original image, however, is short-lived. Evil enters God's perfect world and confronts His perfect people. What is the essence of Satan's temptation (v. 5)?

6. Of course, Adam and Eve already were like God. But Satan cleverly adds, "knowing good and evil." It's as if Satan is saying, "Why should God have a monopoly on what is right and wrong? Why can't you get in on that?" Satan convinces Adam and Eve, who were perfect and who had a perfect knowledge of God, that things could actually be *better!* But what did this "new

knowledge” lead to? Consider Genesis 2:17; Genesis 3:7, 10; Romans 8:7–8; and Genesis 5:3.

### **The Image of Man**

7. Read Genesis 6:5. How do things progress for those born in the image and likeness of Adam?

8. How is God treated? (See Romans 1:23.)

Not only does our fallen nature want to remake God into some other image, but, as Dr. Collver states in his essay, “If our neighbor’s existence, disabilities, size, or problems offend our image of the human being, we can easily dismiss him and treat him as less than human or regard ourselves as better than him.” Discuss this in relation to James 1:27–2:4.

### **Seeking the Lost**

9. Read Genesis 3:9. Adam and Eve lost the image of God and it was no longer part of their being to be passed along to their offspring. The pure knowledge of God and their holiness was lost. Human beings began a long, disturbing road of judging God and their neighbor in terms of their own likeness and image. That God still loves and values the human lives He created, however, is seen in His action here. What is God doing in this verse that He did not have to do?

Discuss Luke 19:10 and John 15:1–24 in relation to this.

### **Promising the Lost**

10. Read Genesis 3:15. God reveals in this promise the means He would use for humankind's restoration. Relate the word *offspring* to Galatians 4:4 and Luke 1:29–33.

11. God revealed in this promise the price He would pay for this restoration. Relate the words *bruise His heel* to Isaiah 53:3–5 and Matthew 27:45–46.

### **Conclusion**

This promise is for all humanity. Discuss the implications regarding the value of every human life and how we treat our neighbor. Dr. Collver puts it this way: “In your neighbor is a person that Christ desires to restore and remake in the image of God.” This restoration through justification is the topic of Lesson 2.

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