

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

^{28: 18} And the LORD God said, "*It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.*" ¹⁹ Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought *them* to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that *was* its name. ²⁰ So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.

²¹ And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. ²² Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.

May the words of my mouth and the mediations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord our strength and redeemer.

There are two books in the Bible that have opening passage that I find thrilling.

Genesis 1 with the words:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

The Gospel of John:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

In 2019 I undertook an on-line course in Art History and one of the first works of art that I studied was Michaelangelo's *The Creation of Adam*. I was privileged over 40 years ago to visit the Sistine Chapel and see that wonderful masterpiece. Since then I have seen the image many times but never looked beyond the figures of God and Adam. It was not until this art history course that I really studied the image. What I saw for the first time was that God had his left arm around another figure. His right arm was extended to Adam.

I believe that the person held by God was the Word – Jesus. His demeanour was not joyful. His expression was one of apprehension. Was He looking down the future at His own fate? Is that what Michaelangelo saw in his vision of his masterpiece? I have in mind here the film *The Agony and the Ecstasy* with Charlton Heston which depicted him having a vision that led to the creation his most famous work.

You may be wondering what this has to do with the text, apart from its being the opening of Genesis.

In any study of the Bible and what it tells us, we must begin with the Creator, God. All that follows the seven words of the opening of Genesis, and of the Bible, are founded on those words. Without those words, there would be nothing. We would not exist. The world would not exist. There would be nothing.

We read further in Genesis that over the next six days God created all. First, there was light which was separated from darkness. That was the first day. Then, on the second day, God separated the waters, creating dry land. On the third day came the vegetation. The fourth day is interesting for that was when God created day and night. The creatures of the earth came on the fifth day. Finally, on the sixth day, we come to humankind:

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So, we reach the text for today.

God created humankind. There is an important difference in this act of creation. The previous acts of creation are stated that *"and God said."* It is reporting what God did, but, now, God speaks. He says:

"Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness."

Let us. This is a statement in the present. It is also a statement in the plural. It is not Let me.

Going back to the first verse of Genesis, we read again that God created the heavens and the earth. Verse 2 reads, in part, that *"the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."*

Going forward to the Gospel of John, we read,

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

In the combination of these verses we have the Holy Trinity, not spelled out as such – that would take millennia – but present from the beginning – actually from before the beginning.

Here we have the first relationship – that of the Holy Trinity. It is not one that is easily explained, especially to unbelievers. However, many years ago, I did find an explanation that helps.

The English writer, M M Kaye, who wrote a book called *The Far Pavilions*, made into a TV mini-series in the 1980's, was the daughter of a Colonel in the Indian Army. Asked by a Muslim soldier to explain

the Holy Trinity, he took a plate, put three drops of water onto the plate and gently tipped the plate so that the drops merged. The Muslim understood but did not convert.

We now come to verse 26 where *"God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness."*

This raises the question – what does God look like, if humankind is made in His image?

Throughout the Old Testament, God is often described in human terms. Take Psalm 10:13, for example –

"Arise, O God, lift up your hand."

And, Psalm 18:9 –

"Smoke went out from His nostrils"

Michaelangelo illustrated this view with his work on the Creation with God depicted as an elderly grey-bearded man.

Yet, we also have to consider Genesis 1:27 –

*²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.*

Clearly the Michaelangelo image is incorrect as are many other such images.

We need to consider the words of St Paul in his Epistle to the Philippians where in Chapter 2 verses 5b to 8 we read –

Christ Jesus:

*⁶ Who, being in very nature^[a] God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature^[b] of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!*

And John 1:14 –

¹⁴ And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

These words attest that, although God made man and woman in His image, it was not His physical image. It must, therefore, have been in His spiritual image. Jesus, born of a woman, Mary, was born as any human child is born. Only at that point did God, in the form of His Son, assume human form.

In Genesis 1 we hear only of God creating man in His own image, male and female. In Genesis 2 we hear the details. God had made man first and Adam wandered alone through the Garden of Eden. God knew, though, that this was not a good thing and said, *"It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."*

Now, until this time, all the creatures on the earth, including man, God had formed from the ground. To create a woman, Eve, he did something different. He put Adam into a deep sleep, removed one of his ribs, and made the woman from the rib.

Why the difference?

If God had made Eve from the ground, as He had made Adam, she would have been a different creature. There would have been no chance of breeding. By taking a rib from Adam, God enabled the human race to grow into the multitudes of today.

There is another point to consider and that is the place from where God took a part of Adam. He did not take it from Adam's foot. He did not take it from Adam's back. He took it from Adam's side.

Consider what that means and what the alternatives would mean. From the foot would mean that a woman was under a man. From the back would mean that a woman should walk behind a man.

From the side shows that God wanted men and women to walk side by side through life, sharing all that comes.

As a slight aside, I am going to mention something I read in a book years ago. A female character was assessing a male she had met. She decided that he was one to ride the river with. It may sound strange but consider this.

Many people feel that life should be like a slow-flowing river where we drift along on a boat, eating peaches and cream and drinking champagne. Many who accept Jesus in their lives expect that to be so – but life is different. There are many rapids. One to ride the river of life with is a person who will stay shoulder to shoulder, side by side, through all the rapids of life.

That is the relationship God wanted for Adam and Eve, and for all humankind. Sadly, it is not always so. We only need consider the rates of marriage breakdowns, divorce, and domestic violence to see how short humankind falls from God's plan.

What was God's plan?

Genesis 2:24 states it –

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

And from the union of the one flesh, ideally after the sanctity of marriage, come the children, the third relationship, granted by God to populate the world. The second was, of course, the relationship of man and woman.

The reality in relationships is that nothing is easy, whether it is with God and Jesus, or with other people. All relationships need work and to be worked at. There is a long distance between heart and mind. I speak from personal experience here.

I left the Church in my teens, and I struggled with other spiritualities and no spirituality at all. Through the ups and downs in my life, I began to return. At first it was in my mind only – of course God existed. After all, how else could the world have been created. As for Jesus, well, He had to have existed. Why else would we have BC, Before Christ, and AD, after His death that split history into two parts.

The journey into my heart took many more years and it took personal and family difficulties for my heart to be opened to Jesus, to say Yes to Him, and begin to follow Him.

But it is far more than just saying Yes and then sitting on our backsides. It is extending the love He has for us to others. We do that by being active for Him, depending on the gifts that God gave us.

It is reaching out to others and developing a relationship with them. It does not have to be an intimate relationship. It may be a casual but not an off-handed relationship, warm but not effusive. Think on this, you meet someone and there is a casual chat, no more. Each time you meet that someone, maybe you say hello or maybe you wave. It is acknowledged. That someone sees you walk into a church and, one day, asks you about it. You have the opportunity to reach out to that person as Jesus reached out to many.

I recall in my first days back into the Church, speaking to the vicar at the church I attended and saying, "I don't know how to speak about Jesus." In effect, I was saying that I did not know how to witness. He said to me that every time I walk into a church I am witnessing, not in words, but in action. I was comforted and helped by those words.

However, there is more about relationships that is not in the text but which we need to consider. Adam and Eve sinned by eating fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This got them expelled from the Garden of Eden and began the journey of suffering that befell humankind. It also opened up a relationship between humankind and Satan – a relationship of evil and temptation that we all face today.

Satan's purpose in tempting Eve was to drive a wedge between God and humankind, and he succeeded. Despite Jesus' victory over Satan on the Cross, the evil one still stalks humankind. We see the results in the media every day. None of us is exempt from temptation. We may believe we are stronger, but we are not.

It was sin that broke the next relationship mentioned in the Bible. It was the sin of anger. It was worse for it broke the next relationship mentioned in Genesis – that between siblings, when Cain murdered Abel, his brother because Abel found favour with God and Cain did not.

How often do we hear of strained relationships between siblings? The answer is often and Jesus spoke of this in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5:21-24 we read –

²¹ "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder,^[a] and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' ²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister^{[b][c]} will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

²³ "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

But, beyond Cain and Abel, who is your brother or who is your sister?

In Christ we are all brothers and sisters. Yet, those who are not in Christ are still our brothers and sisters. They are the lost. Perhaps they are our own blood kin who walk apart from Jesus. Perhaps, they are our next-door neighbours. We have relationships with them, or perhaps not. We must still pray for them.

There are around 150 people living in the Village where I live. As far as I have been able to work out only about 20 are Christian. That is about 13%. I still have a relationship with most, even if it is only to say hello and, for some, that may be only once in a blue moon.

Relationships can be close. They can be distant – and that can happen even with God, not by His choice but by our choices. God is always close by, a prayer away, however we are the ones that can be distant. And there can be distance between ourselves and others, even in families. Again, it is up to each of us to reach out. It may not bring a result – but we must try.

I will end in prayer.

Dear Heavenly Father,

We know how important people and relationships are to you.

One of the greatest commandments You have given us is to love one another for this is good and pleasing to you.

Lord,

We pray for healing in any of our relationships where there has been hurt.

Where there is broken trust, may trust be restored.

Where there is unforgiveness, may there be forgiveness, and may there be abundant love where before there was devastation.

We acknowledge that it is hard to follow Your will in certain relationships. Sometimes it is hard to love the unloveable.

Lord,

We ask for Your help to be able to overcome and love the way You do.

Through that love help us to restore every broken relationship in our lives.

We pray for an increased measure of kindness, compassion, and patience, to help us with people in our lives.

We ask You to bless our relationships with those around us, family, friends and those we meet as we pass through each day and to be more considerate and understanding with all whom we meet.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen

Genesis 1:26-28; Genesis 28:18-22
God made man in His own image
Chelsea 28 February 2021