CHAPTER SEVEN

THE IMAGE OF GOD

Few texts in the Old Testament have aroused as much interest and discussion as Gen. 1:26ff, "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 air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (RSV). References in the Old Testament to the Image of God in man are tantalizingly few: Gen.1:26ff and 9:6 "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image" (RSV). Man is in some way like God and is the most important creature in the world, but his status is still less than that of a god. The doctrine assumes the worth and dignity of humanity, and is central to all discussion of the value of human life. In the story of the flood this is given special attention: Gen.9 grounds the prohibition of murder in the creation of man in God's image.

In what does the image consist? This question has exercised the minds of theologians from New Testament times onwards, and many interpretations have been proposed, which have often reflected the concerns of particular generations. There is, however, little in the Old Testament on this issue. Either the significance of the image was well known or the writer did not want to be specific.

A general consensus seems to have developed recently that the functional aspect of the image, (i.e. the rule over creation) is the central feature of the creation of man in the divine image, but there have been some notable dissenters from this view such as Westermann.1

The present chapter wishes to explore an aspect of the imago Dei which has received comparatively little attention: its relationship to the account of the deluge. Why is the imago Dei placed in this particular context, and what does that tell us about the value of human life? How does the imago Dei relate to the rest of the story of the flood and the issues which we have discussed so far? We shall consider the question of the image in the context of the Priestly

---

source, and ask what aspects of the divine-human relationship are manifested in its account of the flood, to see if they give any clue as to the essence of the image of God in man, and the prohibition of murder which follows therefrom. We shall examine the meaning of דמות and the two prepositions ב and ו, and their use in Gen. 1:26 and 9:6. Having looked at the question from the context of P, we shall in the final section ask what difference is made when the two sources J and P are read together.

1. דמות

The translation of דמות is by no means straightforward. The word and its cognates are primarily used in the literal sense of three dimensional objects which represent gods, men or animals. In the Old Testament over half the uses of דמות refer to physical objects—9 times in 6 contexts: of tumours and mice (1 Sam. 6:5, 11) of gods (Num. 33:52, 2 Kgs. 11:18 (= 2 Chr. 23:17), Amos 5:26, Ezek. 7:20); of men (Ezek. 16:17). Only 8 uses in 5 contexts could be understood as not referring to three dimensional objects, and this is further reduced since דמות in Ezek. 23:14 refers to a drawing or representation, and Gen. 5:3 speaks of physical likeness. Gen.1:26ff and 9:6 are problematic. Hence only in Pss. 39:7 and 73:20 could the word possibly refer to something non-physical, and these two occurrences are the hardest to analyse. Koehler has suggested that in these two passages we have a different root meaning “be dark”, but this seems unnecessary.

RSV renders Ps. 73:20 as “They are like a dream when one awakes, on awaking you despise their phantoms” (דומם, דמות). Whilst is here the image in a dream, it is still the shape or form of something. C.A. Briggs calls it an “image of the imagination”.

Ps. 39:7 (6) is more difficult; RSV renders “Surely man goes about as a shadow!” (בלילה, דומם) probably uses bethe essentiala here). Given the parallelism of with בחול in 39:7, Clines suggests that we translate verse 7 as “Surely man goes around as a dream image”,—“as an

---

