**Image of God**

**FBC Albemarle**

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Throughout history, faith and science have often clashed. One of the most argued points of contention has been between creationism and evolution. People who approach the Bible with a literal perspective believe the Earth is just over 6,000 years old (young earth theory) while those who would side with evolution believe the Earth is over 4.5 billion years old (old earth theory). Growing up in the ‘80s, I heard a lot of pros and cons for both ends of the spectrum.

Over the last several decades as science has evolved, there isn’t the same kind of fervor in arguments between creationists and evolutionists. Another perspective has emerged to the forefront for many Christians who hold the Bible as authoritative but understands the validity of science. This perspective is known as intelligent design. Those who favor this perspective believe that the Earth and the universe have existed for billions of years but were created by God, the Great Architect of the cosmos.

A couple of years ago, while speaking at Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Pope Francis supported the idea of Intelligent Design. “The beginning of the world is not the work of chaos that owes its origin to something else, but it derives directly from a supreme principle that creates out of love. The Big Bang, that today is considered to be the origin of the world, does not contradict the creative intervention of God; on the contrary it requires it. Evolution in nature is not in contrast with the notion of divine creation because evolution requires the creation of the beings that evolve.” Pope Francis understands that creation is the handiwork of God not chaos. Intelligent Design supporters would argue that there is too much evidence in the world of order and creativity for it to have been born into existence out of chaos of the Big Bang Theory.

Certainly, David understood that all of creation was the handiwork of God. I imagine David might have written this psalm while he was a shepherd in the fields. He was alone in the darkness of night on the hillside looking up into the sky pierced by the brilliant light of stars billions of light years away. As he gazes into the night, David senses that he was not alone in that moment. He understood that God was present because he could see the evidence of God’s intelligent design. The beauty of the night and the brilliance of the stars were just the beginning of God’s power and glory. In Psalm 139, David understood that he was also God’s work of intelligent design: “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body.” (v. 13-16)

Genesis 1:26-27 states: “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our image; 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 wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Interestingly, “Humankind” (vv. 26 and 27) is ’*adam* in Hebrew; the word (unless it’s used as the name “Adam” in the Genesis 2–5 story) is usually a collective noun that means *not* a male individual (other Hebrew words are used for “a man”), but rather mankind, human beings or people. We were all created in God’s image but what does that mean? What does it mean to be made in the image of God?

Before we can answer that question, we need to place God in the proper perspective. Notice in Genesis 1:26 that scripture says, “Let us make humankind in our image.” The writer uses the plural pronouns when referencing God. “Let US make humankind in OUR image.” This is the first evidence of the Holy Trinity: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The concept of the Trinity is really confusing and difficult to explain. There is no simile or metaphor that can fully describe the Trinity. Simply put, God is indescribable!

That is what David was trying to convey. If God’s glory has been set above the heavens (v. 1), then imagine God’s astonishing glory given how almost incomprehensively vast the universe is (v. 3).

Back in 2005, Louie Giglio, leader of the Christian college movement called Passion, and singer Chris Tomlin crisscrossed the country with their Indescribable Tour. It was a night of worship through music and message focused on the greatness of God. In Giglio’s message, he tried to paint a picture of how vast our universe really is. Here are some of the statistics he shared during his message:

* A beam of light takes eight minutes to cross the 93 million miles between Earth and the sun. (speed of light is 670,616,629 mph)
* Our solar system — sun and nine planets — is the relative size of a quarter, making our galaxy the size of North America.
* The Milky Way galaxy contains billions of stars, but our galaxy is only one of at least 200 billion galaxies in the Universe.
* If you were to count the stars in our galaxy, one per second, it would take you 2,500 years to count them all.

But in contrast to how big God is, *this vast universe is simply tiny*. After all, God’s fingers (v. 3) push the stars into their places. God’s massive hands are billions of light years wide, holding the heavens in his palms (Isaiah 40:12). God numbers the billions of stars, speaking each of their names as he counts (Psalm 147:4).

While we can’t really comprehend how big our universe really is and how our God could hold all of it in his hands, how does it then make sense that he would love you and me? The paradox of this is incomprehensible! David said, “What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?” If God is so big that he is indescribable, then how is it that he could know everything about you and me? He knows our name; he knows how many hairs we have on our heads; God knows our desires; God knows our hearts; God knows our failures, yet through it all, God loves us!

David affirms the idea of Intelligent Design in versus 5-8. “Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. 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 seas.” Through all of creation, God has revealed himself mostly through humankind. We were crowned with the glory and honor of having dominion over God’s creation. That is how much God loves humanity.

Now that we have set God in the proper perspective, let’s go back and answer the question, ‘What does it mean to be created in God’s image?’ Humankind was created in God’s image because we were created to love.

Though I can’t fully understand the Trinity, I do understand how the Trinity exemplifies perfect love. Within the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, there is no sense of jealousy or hierarchy. There is no sense of competition or power struggle. The Trinity lovingly submits to one another, serving each other with perfect love.

In the same way, God created us to love God, love one another and love his creation. In the Garden of Eden, humanity enjoyed this perfect love. Adam and Eve communed with God daily. They mutually loved and served each other. They also cared for the garden and had dominion over all that was in it. That is the picture of God’s kingdom. Yet, when sin entered into the world, that perfect love was broken between us and God, between us and one another, and between us and creation. That is why God had to make a way through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

We need to emulate what we know of God through the Trinity. We can build God’s kingdom as it was meant to be by lovingly submitting to God, mutually submitting to one another out of love and by caring for God’s creation. We should set aside any sense of jealousy or competition. We should eliminate any power struggle that might exist in our lives. We were created in God’s image. We were created to love perfectly just as God loves perfectly. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Matt. 22:37-39) (Amen) May it be so!