

## **The Way to Communicate the Message of Holiness to the Uchi-Soto Culture in the Japanese Context Using the Image of God in Genesis**

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When thinking about the sanctification and holiness of Christians, the restoration of the image of God is an important concept and should be pursued by believers. Yet, what exactly is the image of God that believers desire to restore? In this essay, I will provide an exegesis of the image of God in Genesis 1:26–28, 5:1–3, and 9:8. Then, I will discuss the message of holiness that can be read from the phrase “the image of God.” Furthermore, I will consider how to deliver the message of holiness to Japanese culture.

### **The Image of God in Genesis**

This section provides an exegesis of Genesis 1:26–28, 5:1–3, and 9:6, which deal with the image of God. Through this exegesis, I will identify how Genesis considers the concrete picture of the restoration of the image of God, which is the great goal of holiness.

Many scholars agree that these three passages should all be classified as coming from the Priestly source. Genesis uses the two words *šelem* (שְׁלֵמָה) and *ḏmût* (דְּמוּת) to describe how humans were created in the image and likeness of God. The *šelem* used in these passages is presumed to be derived from the Arabic verb *šalama*, which means to *cut* or to *curve*.<sup>1</sup> *šlm* (שָׁלַם), the root of *šelem*, is used twelve other times throughout the Old Testament beyond its use in Genesis and Daniel 2–3, which is written in Aramaic. Ten of these refer to materials and idols, such as the image of the mice and the tumors and the statue of Baal (Num 33:52; 1 Sam 6:5, 11; 2 Kgs 11:18; Ezek 7:20; 16:17; 23:14; Amos 5:26; 2 Chr 23:17). It is likely that these meanings

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<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Köhler and Walter Baumgartner, “צלם,” *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. M. E. J. Richardson, trans. M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 1028.

inherited the Arabic meaning from which the word was derived. The two remaining usages are in Psalm 39:7 and 73:20. *šlm* is used to indicate what is insubstantial in Psalm 39:7, which says, *ʾak-bʿšelem yîthallek-ʾiš* (אֶכְ-בְּשֵׁלֶם יִתְהַלֵּךְ-אִישׁ), *surely human walks like a shadow*. The above shows that *šlm* is a word used in the dual sense of concreteness and abstraction. Therefore, it is difficult to use this word alone to indicate the specific nature of the restoration of the image of God.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, *dʾmût* used in Genesis 1:26; 5:1, 3 is the noun derived from the verb *dāmâ* (דָּמָה), which means to *resemble*.<sup>3</sup> Although *dʾmût* can refer to image (2 Chr 4:3; Isa 40:18) or pattern (2 Kgs 16:10), one characteristic of the word is that it is mostly used in the book of Ezekiel to describe the glory of God and the visions that Ezekiel received (Ezek 1:5, 10, 13, 16, 22, 26, 28; 8:2; 10:1, 10, 21–22). That is, *dʾmût* is more often used abstractly than *šelem*, but it can be taken as a synonym for *šelem*, since it is used in the dual meanings of concreteness and abstraction, just like *šlm*.<sup>4</sup>

What message do the texts themselves convey by using *šelem* and *dʾmût* to speak of the image of God? The texts claim the following two things. First, the image of God connotes a strong insistence on the value of human beings. In the context of the Ancient Near East, the image of God was used only for kings.<sup>5</sup> However, Genesis 1:26 declares that *ʾādām* (אָדָם) is the image of God. Although *ʾādām* can refer to an individual name or the

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<sup>2</sup> Edward M. Curtis, “Image of God (OT),” *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 389; A. H. Konkel, “דָּמָה דָּמָה,” *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 951; W. Sibley Towner, “Clones of God: Genesis 1:26–28 and the Image of God in the Hebrew Bible,” *Interpretation* 59, no. 4 (October 2005): 345–46.

<sup>3</sup> Ludwig Köhler and Walter Baumgartner, “דָּמָה,” *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. M. E. J. Richardson, trans. M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 225.

<sup>4</sup> Towner, “Clones of God,” 346–347; Curtis, “Image of God (OT),” 389.

<sup>5</sup> D. J. A. Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968): 92.

whole of humanity, it clearly refers to all of humanity in 1:26–28.<sup>6</sup> In verse 27, the singularized *’ādām* is defined as *zākār ûn<sup>c</sup>qēbâ bārā’ ’ōtām* (זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם), *He created them as male and female* (cf. 5:2). That is, the text says that all humans were created by God in the image of God. Thus, Genesis finds and powerfully asserts that all people have special values, not just the exalted people called kings and not just the specific tribe called Israel. In 9:6, there is a command from God that no human being may take away any human life because of such human worth.

The second argument the texts bring is that all human beings created in the image of God are invited to enter into relationships with God, other creatures, and the world. According to W. Sibley Towner, the relationships given to human beings can be classified into three categories. First, humans created in the image of God naturally have a relationship with God as Creator (cf. 1:26–28). The second is the relationship between human beings (cf. 1:27; 5:1–3; 9:6). Genesis 1:27 asserts that the image of God cannot be expressed by one person alone. The image of God is revealed in the plurality and cooperation involved. Also, considering that the image of God is used in the genealogy in chapter 5 and that the image of God has been inherited, it is possible to interpret the relationship between human beings expressed by the image of God as also taking into consideration the relationship between generations. Third, every human being has a relationship with the world that God created. *Rādâ* (רָדָה), translated to *rule* in 1:26, means rule by the king (1 Kgs 4:24; 5:16; 9:23; Isa 14:6; Ps 72:8; 110:2). Meanwhile, however, the word rejects domination by violence (Lev 25:43, 46, 53) and is also used in the sense of the shepherd’s act of guiding the flock (Ezek 34:4; Ps 49:15).<sup>7</sup> In short, the rule of kings who care like shepherds and rightly lead is required of humans in their relationship with God’s

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<sup>6</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), 32–33.

<sup>7</sup> H.-J. Zobel, “רָדָה רָדָה רָדָה,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 333.

creation.<sup>8</sup>

In summary, the Priestly writer in Genesis uses *šelem* and *d<sup>c</sup>mût* to describe the image of God, but these words are ambiguous terms with multiple meanings. Nevertheless, the Priestly source has firm claims that all human beings are created in the image of God. The text speaks of the value every human being has and the relationships they are expected to build.

### **The Message of Holiness Conveyed by the Image of God in Genesis**

Through the exegesis of the texts referring to the image of God, it was found that human nature is portrayed positively. So, what message of holiness can we speak of based on the exegesis of the image of God mentioned above? In my opinion, the restoration of the relationships is a major key.

According to the results of source criticism, the Priestly source that testifies to the image of God is combined with the non-priestly documents in primeval history (Gen 1–11). For these texts, the recovery of damaged relationships is the major issue. These documents described the sinful reality of humanity quite candidly in the primeval history of the stories of the garden of Eden (3:1–24), the murder of Abel by his brother Cain (4:1–16), Lamech’s curse (4:23–24), the flood (6:5–8; 7:1–5, 7, 10, 12, 16b–20, 22–23, 8:2b–3a, 6, 8–12, 13b, 20–22), Noah’s drunkenness (9:18–27), and the tower of Babel (11:1–9).<sup>9</sup> The non-priestly documents seem to testify that generations of humans have hurt each other, and they have continued to undermine their relationship not only with each other but with God and this world. One of the important messages of holiness spoken by the image of God is that such damaged and undermined relationships should be the goal of restoration.

Also, in such relationships, humans can easily distort the value of others. The image of God, used only for kings in the context of the Ancient

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<sup>8</sup> Towner, “Clones of God,” 349–50.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1997), 246–7.

Near East, is applied to all humans in Genesis, and the Priestly writer proclaimed that all people are beings of special value. It is easy for humans to make the mistake of diminishing or overemphasizing and deifying the value given to the individual. Through the stories of primeval history, the readers can recognize the need for the redemption and restoration of humanity—created in the image of God—from such distortions.

Furthermore, it is the God-given relationship of humans with the creation that they serve this world and manage it appropriately. Humans and this world are interdependent with each other (1:29). And God commanded that human beings, who were created in the image of God, should serve the land. The verb ‘*abad*’ (עָבַד) used in 2:15 is a word with the meaning to *serve* or to *worship*. But as a result of humans disobeying God in Eden, the earth was cursed (3:17; cf. 4:11–12). Therefore, the editors of Genesis invite their readers into a life of holiness to serve and manage this world, which has been damaged by human sins, in hopes of restoring their relationship with it.<sup>10</sup>

### **How can the Church Communicate the Message of Holiness to the *Uchi-Soto* Culture in the Japanese Context?**

How can the church communicate the message of holiness in the image of God to the Japanese context? And how can Christians living in the Japanese culture live such a life of holiness? In this section, I consider how to bring the message of holiness spoken by the image of God to the Japanese context, keeping in mind the collectivism characterized by the Japanese culture.

Two Japanese words can be used to describe Japanese collectivism: *uchi to soto* (内と外) and *wa* (和). *Uchi to soto*, which translates as *in-groups and out-groups*, is a term used to describe the Japanese people’s clear distinctions as to whether someone else belongs within or outside the same group of which they are a part.<sup>11</sup> *Wa*, translated as *harmony*, means to

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<sup>10</sup> J. Gordon McConville, *Being Human in God’s World: An Old Testament Theology of Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 25.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Norbury, *Japan: The Essential Guide to Customs & Culture*, Revised and

maintain a harmonious integration within a community, namely, *uchi*, in-groups.<sup>12</sup> This cultural value can be found in the *Seventeen-Article Constitution*, written by Prince Shōtoku (聖徳太子) in 604 CE, and in *Nihon Shoki* (日本書紀), written in 720 CE. In Article I, it is stated that harmony must be the most important thing and not fighting with each other.<sup>13</sup> In this way, it can be said that Japan is a relationship-oriented culture.

For the above reasons, it can be said that when communicating holiness to Japanese culture, it is effective to use the image of God to discuss the restoration of relationships. Of course, the Bible uses other terms to describe relationships, such as *oikeioi tou theou* (οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ), members of *God's household* (Eph 2:19). However, the emphasis on being members of God's household is not considered appropriate in Japanese culture because for Japanese people under the *uchi-soto* culture, the term *uchi*, in-groups, refers to their own home or the organization they belong to, such as a company or school.<sup>14</sup> Although at first glance it seems to be a good key to conveying the perspective of holiness to Japanese people, it is likely to be swallowed up by Japanese cultural values. The emphasis on being a family strengthens the Japanese sense of family, as it can easily lead to an emphasis on being male-centered, building boundaries that cannot be crossed between those who identify with *soto*, outsider, and placing a greater value

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updated ed., *Culture Smart!* (London: Kuperard, 2017), ch. 2; Boye Lafayette De Mente and Geoff Botting, *Japan: A Guide to Traditions, Customs and Etiquette*, Revised ed. (Tokyo: Tuttle, 2017), ch. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Chie Nakane, *Japanese Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 49.

<sup>13</sup> “十七条憲法 全文 [The full text of the Seventeen-article constitution],” *十七条憲法 (原文・現代語訳・解説・英訳) [the Seventeen-article constitution: Original text, modern translation, commentary, and English translation]*, accessed May 6, 2020, [http://www10.plala.or.jp/elf/\\_kenpou/2-1.html](http://www10.plala.or.jp/elf/_kenpou/2-1.html); Katja Triplett, “The Discourse on Wa or Harmony in Contemporary Japanese Religions and Society,” in *Religious Harmony Problems, Practice, and Education* (Presented at the regional conference of the International Association for the History of Religions, Yogyakarta and Semarang, 2004), 179–180.

<sup>14</sup> Nakane, *Japanese Society*, 3.

on the collective than on the individual.<sup>15</sup> *Uchi* is the opposite of the image of God's message, which places great value on the existence of all people. Thus, an illustration that allows the collective consciousness to swallow up individual rights and human rights is unlikely to convey the message of holiness that leads to the restoration of relationships. That kind of illustration would only encourage the bad aspects of Japanese culture.

While avoiding the danger of reinforcing the aforementioned Japanese view of the family that oppresses the individual, it is still possible to use the message of the image of God to communicate holiness-based relationships to Japanese culture. For, as the exegesis makes clear, the image of God has a message that values every human being and cares for the individual. Simultaneously, the editor of Genesis invites us to the restoration of damaged relationships through speaking about the image of God. Therefore, it can be said that in the Japanese context, believers are required to live a holy life by finding the relationships that are damaged in Japanese society and often vulnerable in Japanese culture and working to restore those relationships.

There are two specific relationships that have been damaged in Japanese society as an *uchi-soto* culture and are in need of recovery. First, there are many dishonest companies in Japan, and the existence of such companies and their working environment has become a social problem in recent years. Dishonest companies are those that excessively require employees to work overtime and do not give them an increase in pay in exchange for it or proper holidays. Such companies encourage workers to serve the economy instead of the earth and people, destroying their humanity and sometimes even taking their lives.<sup>16</sup> The message of holiness that the church should convey to Japanese society is to serve the world rather than the econ-

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<sup>15</sup> Roger Davies and Osamu Ikeno, eds., "Uchi to Soto: Dual Meanings in Japanese Human Relations," in *The Japanese Mind: Understanding Contemporary Japanese Culture* (Tokyo: Tuttle, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Jake Adelstein, "Working Harder to End Death by Overwork," Japan Times, December 3, 2016.

omy and to recognize human beings as valuable beings rather than as personnel expenses or workforces.

Second, the relationship between foreigners living in Japan and Japanese people can be considered. Thinking about the relationship through the *uchi-soto* culture, even if a person has lived in Japan for many years, acquired Japanese nationality, and speaks Japanese fluently, it is likely that he or she will be perceived as belonging to *soto* if his or her appearance and customs are different.<sup>17</sup> Even among the same Japanese themselves, the distinction between *uchi* and *soto* is strongly emphasized. As a result, those who are perceived as *soto*, namely outsiders, in the community are ignored and disadvantaged. In such a culture, the church's continued efforts to build relationships with people who are often perceived as outsiders will lead to holiness for believers. In short, redefining the people who were recognized as *soto* and *uchi* and building a relationship with them will lead to the restoration of the image of God.

What specifically can the Japanese church do to communicate such a holiness message to the Japanese society that needs to experience holiness? I have two suggestions for Japanese churches and believers. First, the church in Japan, which tends to keep certain people too busy with activities for the sake of the church, needs to change its structure and culture in order to take care of the people who gather in the church. Unfortunately, there seems to be a scheme in which busy people within the church are seen to be faithful. But when the church promotes this misunderstanding to believers, it hurts their image of God in two ways. Even if no one feels that way, the church has actually treated those considered to be in the workforce and working in society during the weekdays as resources for church operations in the same busy way. The church may also be hurting the relationships of these people with their families and friends by continuing to let them stay at the church in the name of faith after they have finished their worship services. Japanese pastors are both the aggressors and the victims of this problem because, while they lead the church, many of them are not given

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<sup>17</sup> Davies and Ikeno, "Uchi to Soto: Dual Meanings in Japanese Human Relations."



the proper amount of rest. This is an issue that needs to be given more consideration, especially by the church in Japan, where Christianity is an overwhelming minority. I strongly believe that the message of holiness will be embodied in Japanese society if the church lives in holiness, that is, if the church seriously understands each person as a precious being created in the image of God and takes an attitude of reforming itself rather than extremely trying to fit in with the trends and culture of society.<sup>18</sup>

The second suggestion is for Japanese Christians to get to know foreigners living in the same area, become their friends, and open churches to them. Many churches in Japan hold their services only in Japanese. This may not be a serious problem since many foreigners living in Japan need to learn Japanese. However, many Japanese churches unconsciously assume that their mission is to serve only Japanese and Japanese speakers. They have no connection to the foreigners in the area or are not familiar with their culture and language. We need to learn from foreigners and understand them. As the number of foreigners living in Japan increases, we can be assured that there will be more cultural clashes and bullying of foreigners in the country. But by taking the lead in building a community in the church, learning about each other's culture, and harmoniously living together, the church will be proclaiming the message of holiness to Japanese society.

### Conclusion

The book of Genesis testifies that the image of God is used to describe the value of all human beings and the three relationships that humans are expected to build: the relationship with God, the relationship between human beings, and the relationship with the world. The editors of Genesis combined the Priestly source, which speaks of the image of God, with the non-priestly documents, which testify candidly to human sins, to speak of the need for the restoration of these relationships given to humanity. This is

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<sup>18</sup> 吉岡恵生 [Yasutaka Yoshioka], “論壇2.0: 牧師は「24時間」戦えない [Critical Circles 2.0: Pastors Cannot Fight for 24 Hours],” *キリスト新聞* [*The Christ Newspaper*] (Tokyo, 1 August 2019).

the holiness that Genesis addresses through the image of God.

In the Japanese context that emphasizes relationships, churches can sufficiently use the message in the image of God to convey the message of holiness to communities with damaged relationships. Specifically, I strongly believe that such a message of holiness is necessary for Japanese society, which has labor problems and will have to invite many foreigners to work in the near future due to the aging society, and that it will have a great impact on that society if the churches and believers are able to properly communicate this message.

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