

Why does Genesis 1:26 refer to God in the plural?

I am confused by Genesis 1:26. Then God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Why is it written in the plural form?

This is a wonderful, profound passage to contemplate!

God's use of the plural in reference to Himself appears a few times in Genesis (see 3:22 and 11:7 for additional examples). Great theologians have long debated the reason for this. Some scholars say that this is just a holdover from the primitive worship of many gods. Others say this is a "royal we" as used by a king or other leader. Even the Pope in his encyclicals will say "we."

Yet other scholars, including Scott Hahn, stress the point that God is a Trinity. He is a communion of persons, a "family." This point will be revealed in the Gospel (see Matthew 28:19) and further sorted out under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the early centuries of the Church. This verse could be interpreted as pointing to this profound truth.

Note also the verse also refers to "man" in the plural: "Let *them* have dominion . . ."

Further clarification is given in verse 27, where we read, "God created man in his image; in the divine image he created *him*; male and female he created *them*."

In this passage we see the original complementarity of men and women. Even on a natural level, we are created for communion, for family, as man is truly a social being. We were not created as isolated individuals, nor are we saved as isolated individuals. The human family is reflective of the very life of God (see Ephesians 3:14-15), as God is not an isolated, solitary being, but rather a dynamic communion of persons.

Through Jesus Christ, we are truly "adopted" into God's family (Galatians 4:4-7; 1 John 3:1), and truly become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).

This Trinitarian explanation was not likely on the mind of the human author of Genesis, but it clearly is reflective of sound theology as God's revelation of Himself has unfolded over the course of salvation history.