

THE IMAGE OF GOD IN MAN

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I. The main and most explicit *Biblical Data* on the subject are the following passages. Genesis 1:26-27, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" etc. Genesis 5:1, "In the likeness of God made he him." Genesis 9:6, "In the image of God made he man." I Corinthians 11:7, "Man... is the image and glory of God." Colossians 3:10, "Renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." James 3:9, "Men which are made after the similitude of God."

In addition to these explicit references to the image of God in man, there are many passages, perhaps even some not yet recognized as such, that have some bearing on the subject. Hebrews 2:6-8, with its appeal to Psalm 8, and whatever analogy may be found elsewhere between Christ as the image of God (cf. Heb. 1:3) and the image in man would be such passages, useful in developing the doctrine. Acts 17:26-29 also has implications; for example, with the support of Romans 1:23 and other passages, it gives the reason for the divine prohibition of idolatry. When, too, empirical philosophers deny innate ideas, inherited corruption, a priori forms of the mind, and stress environment to the exclusion of heredity, Romans 2:15 and Psalm 51:5 sharpen the contrast. An analytic mind will discover a great number of verses from which pertinent implications can be drawn.

Paradoxically there are some verses that make no reference, either explicitly or implicitly, to the image of God, but which by their complete silence contribute to the doctrine nonetheless. Chiefly this material is in the first chapter of Genesis, concerning the creation of animals. These were not created in the image of God; man was. Hence the characteristic of humanity, as distinct from mere animality, is somehow to be found in the divine image. From all the Scriptural material, the doctrine must be derived.

II. The doctrine of the image of God has been studied throughout the history of theology. The Romanists eventually arrived at a position, to be discussed later, that originated in fanciful exegesis and finally wandered far from Scripture. G. C. Berkouwer in his *Man: The Image of God* (pp. 37ff. et passim) describes the brittle pedantry of some Dutch theologians; and any substantial history of the doctrine will report the complexities of the discussion. Now, it must be admitted, indeed it must be emphasized that this doctrine has to be consistent with the whole system of theology; and therefore, since it has implications for the doctrine of sin, atonement, sanctification, glorification, complications cannot be avoided. Nevertheless a substantial grasp of the matter is not too diffi-

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cult, and the basic elements are rather easy to understand. Therefore the doctrine will now be briefly stated with a minimum of historical and polemical defense.

God created man after his image and likeness. This image cannot be man's body for two reasons. First, God is spirit or mind and has no body. Hence a body would not be an image of him. Second, animals have bodies, yet they are not created in God's image. If anyone should suggest that man walks upright, so that his bodily position could be the image, the reply is not merely that birds also walk on two legs, but that Genesis distinguishes man from animals by the image and not by any physiological structure. In fact, man himself is the image, as I Corinthians 11:7 indicates, in spite of the antithesis between man and woman found there. So also the other references quoted at the beginning. The image therefore is not an extra gadget attached to man after he had been created—not a *domum superadditum*—nor a suit of clothes that he could take off. It is rather the unitary person. If the body is to be somehow included in the notion of image, it cannot be the body as such, for God has no body, but the body only as controlled by the spirit.

Man is not two images. To distinguish between image and likeness is fanciful exegesis. Nor can this single image be divided into parts, like our two arms or two legs. For example, "dominion over the fish of the sea . . . and over the earth" is not an extra ingredient mixed in with others. It is an extra, or, better, it is one of the functions of the single image. The point is important for the effect of sin on the image. One must not suppose that sin amputated one part and left a remnant untouched. Similarly, the Bible should not be interpreted as making morality and intelligence the two parts of the image; and an ontological division between the natural and permanent image versus the moral and accidental image, or any other supposedly scholarly but actually empty distinction, is confusion. Doubtless the image, i.e., the man, performs different functions, of which dominion over the birds of heaven and over every creeping thing is one. These functions, however, add up to more than two.

The reason theologians have asserted a duality of the image, rather than the unity of the image and the plurality of its activities, the reason also that Paul indicates some sort of duality by mentioning righteousness in Ephesians 4:24 and knowledge in Colossians 3:10 is the occurrence of sin. Since Adam remained Adam after the fall, it looks as if some "part" of the image survived; but since also Adam lost his original innocence and Cain committed murder, was not some "part" of the image lost? Man did not lose dominion over the animals; he also retained some other items; but in comparison with his changed relation to God, animals are of minor importance and the other items require little discussion. Sin, on the other hand, and its effects are of such great importance and require such frequent mention that a duality in the image, one half of which is lost, appears as a natural interpretation. Such an ontological separation of two parts has seemed to many theologians the best method

of maintaining both of two truths: that man after the fall is still man, and that sin is far from trivial or superficial.

At this point in the exposition it is necessary to spell out the second truth by an appeal to Scripture. Concerning the extent and intensity of sin, Romans 3:10-18 collects a series of Old Testament statements, chiefly from the Psalms. "There is none righteous, no not one. . . there is none that seeketh after God. . . there is none that doeth good. . . there is no fear of God before their eyes." Really now! Isn't there anyone who does something good? "No, one one." Surely not Stalin; surely not the pharisees; but also not even the obscure common people who are neither so brutal as the one nor so hypocritical as the others. The Old Testament passages include everybody, and Romans 8:7 indicates the state of human nature in general by saying, "the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Men are "dead in sin" as the New Testament says several times. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." One might even allow that Sigmund Freud had a more nearly correct estimate of human evil, rationalization, and hypocrisy than the semi-pelagian Romanists have; though of course he did not view this evil as an offense against God.

Before the flood "God saw that. . . every imagination of the thoughts of his [man's] heart was only evil continually." After the flood he said, "I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." Possibly this means that there is no use to send a second flood because floods cannot cure the human race; but if this is not the correct explanation of the clause, it nonetheless asserts that man's heart is evil from his youth. In fact, "I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me."

Hence it is impossible for the natural or unregenerate man to please God. He is incapable of doing any spiritual good. Even the ploughing of the wicked is sin: not that turning over the soil is sin, but that the morality of an act cannot be judged apart from its motivation, and the motivation of the wicked is always wicked. Man then is totally depraved. Totally, not in the sense that every man commits every sin, nor that every man, or any man, is as wicked as possible, but in the sense that all his acts are evil and that no "part," function, act, or state escapes the corruption of sin. Yet if this is so, can man still be the image of God?

Yes, the image is still there. Paradoxical though it may seem, man could not be the sinner he is, if he were not still God's image. Sinning presupposes rationality and voluntary decision. Animals cannot sin. Sin therefore requires God's image because man is responsible for his sins. If there were no responsibility, there could be nothing properly called sin. Sin is an offense against God, and God calls us to account. If we were not answerable to God, repentance would be useless and even nonsense. Reprobation and hell would also be impossible.

But if we say all this, have we not tied ourselves in theological knots? If we acknowledge that we are dead in sin, must we not affirm either that the image has been lost altogether (and then we would no longer be able to sin), or that the image has parts and that most of its parts, or at least the most important parts have been lost (thus destroying the unity of the person), or finally should we retract the doctrine of total depravity and minimize sin?

The solution of this paradox is very easy and very clear. We note for one thing that Christ is the image of God (Heb. 1:3), and that he is the Logos and Wisdom of God. We note too that Adam was given dominion over nature. These two points, seemingly unrelated, suggest that the image of God is Logic or rationality. Adam was superior to the animals because he was a rational and not merely a sensory creation. The image of God therefore is reason.

The image must be reason because God is truth, and fellowship with him—a most important purpose in creation—requires thinking and understanding. Without reason man would doubtless glorify God as do the stars, stones, and animals, but he could not enjoy him forever. Even if in God's providence animals survive death and adorn the future world, they cannot have what the Scripture calls eternal life because eternal life is to know the only true God, and knowledge is an exercise of the mind or reason. Without reason there can be no morality or righteousness: these too require thought. Lacking these, animals are neither righteous nor sinful.

The identification of the image as reason explains or is supported by a puzzling remark in John 1:9, "It was the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world." How can Christ, in whom is the life that is the light of men, be the light of every man, when the Scriptures teach that some men are lost in eternal darkness? This puzzle arises from interpreting light in exclusively redemptive terms. If one think also in terms of creation, the Logos or Rationality of God, who just above was said to have created all things without a single exception, can be seen as having created man with the light of logic as his distinctive human characteristic.

For such reasons as these, the fall and its effects, which have so puzzled some theologians as they studied the doctrine of the image, are most easily understood by identifying the image with man's mind.

Since moral judgments are a species of judgment, subsumed under general intellectual activity, one result of the fall is the occurrence of incorrect evaluations by means of erroneous thinking. Adam thought, incorrectly, that it would be better to join Eve in her sin than to obey God and be separated from her. So he ate the forbidden fruit. The external act followed upon the thought. "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts." Note that in the Bible the term *heart* usually designates the intellect, and only once in ten times the emotions: it is the heart that

thinks. Sin thus interferes with our thinking. It does not, however, prevent us from thinking. Sin does not eradicate or annihilate the image. It causes a malfunction, but man still remains man.

The Bible stresses the malfunctioning of the mind in obviously moral affairs because of their importance. But sin extends its depraving influence into affairs not usually regarded as matters of morality. Arithmetic, for example. One need not suppose that Adam and Eve understood calculus; but he surely counted to ten. Whatever arithmetic he did, he did correctly. But sin causes a failure in thinking, with the result that we now make mistakes in simple addition. Such mistakes are pedantically called the "noetic" effects of sin. But moral errors are equally noetic. When men became vain in their imaginations and their foolish hearts were darkened; when they professed to be wise, but became fools; when God gave them over to a reprobate mind—their sin was first of all a noetic, intellectual, mental malfunction.

Regeneration and the process of sanctification reverse the sinful direction of the malfunctioning: the person is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him. First the more obvious, the grosser sins are suppressed because the new man begins to think and evaluate in conformity with God's precepts. Second and third, the new man advances to restrain the more subtle, the more secret, the more pervasive sins that have made his heart deceitful above measure. Errors in arithmetic may seem trivial in comparison but these too are effects of sin, and salvation will improve a man's thinking in all matters.

The identification of the image as reason or intellect thus preserves the unity of man's person and saves theologians from splitting the image into schizophrenic parts. It also accords with all that the Scripture says about sin and salvation. Questions that remain will now be discussed under the heading of secular opposition and theological diversity.

III. Secular opposition to the image of God in man can be based only on a general non-theistic philosophy. Evolution views man as a natural development from the neutron and proton, through atoms, to plants, to the lower animals, until perhaps a number of human beings emerged in Africa, Asia, and the East Indies. Evolution can hardly assert the unity of the human race, for several individuals of sub-human species may have more or less simultaneously produced the same variation.

This non-theistic, naturalistic view is difficult to accept because it implies that the mind too, as well as the body, is an evolutionary product rather than a divine image. Instead of using eternal principles of logic, the mind operates with the practical results of biological adaptation. Concepts and propositions neither reach the truth nor even aim at it. Our equipment has evolved through a struggle to survive. Reason is simply the human method of handling things. It is a simplifying and therefore falsifying device. There is no evidence that our categories correspond to reality. Even if they did, a most unlikely accident, no one

could know it; for to know that the laws of logic are adequate to the existent real, it is requisite to observe the real prior to using the laws. But if this ever happened with sub-human organisms, it never happens with the present species man. If now the intellect is naturally produced, different types of intellect could equally well be produced by slightly different evolutionary processes. Maybe such minds have been produced, but are now extinct like the dinosaurs and dodos. This means, however, that the concepts or intuitions of space and time, the law of contradiction, the rules of inference are not fixed and universal criteria of truth, but that other races thought in other terms. Perhaps future races will also think in different terms. John Dewey insisted that logic has already changed and will continue to change. If now this be the case, our traditional logic is but a passing evolutionary moment, our theories, dependent on this logic, are temporary reactions, parochial social habits, and Freudian rationalizations; and therefore the evolutionary theory, produced by these biological urges, cannot be true.

The difference between naturalism and theism—between the latest “scientific” opinions on evolution and creation; between the Freudian animal and the image of God; between belief in God and atheism—is based on their two different epistemologies. Naturalism professes to learn by observation and analysis of experience; the theistic view depends on Biblical revelation. No amount of observation and analysis can prove the theistic position. Of course, no amount of observation and analysis can prove evolution or any other theory. The secular philosophies all result in total skepticism. In contrast, theism bases its knowledge on divinely revealed propositions. They may not give us all truth; they may even give us very little truth; but there is no truth at all otherwise. So much for the secular alternative.

IV. Theological diversity with respect to the image of God in man characterizes the history of the visible church. A few examples must suffice.

Eastern Orthodoxy stresses the rational nature of man and insists that man remains man after the fall. So far, so good. But the value of this sound position is vitiated by the Eastern churches’ failure to recognize the extent of the fall and therefore their inability to see the full need of grace. Some of their theologians toy with a verbally pleasing analogy: as God became man, so man will become God. This is similar to the Gnostic notion that salvation is deification. Partly because of this, some very conservative Protestants have reacted against the identification of the image as reason, believing that this identification implies a superficial view of sin. The implication, however, is fallacious and the reaction extreme.

Romanism exhibits another aberration. With the help of a fanciful exegesis, no doubt inspired by theological traditions, the Romanists distinguish between *image* and *likeness*. Scripture does not intend such a

distinction, for not only is nothing made of it in the New Testament, but also Genesis 1:27 uses the word *image* alone and Genesis 5:1 uses *likeness* alone, though in each case the whole image is intended. The theological motivation has soteriological overtones. The image itself is rationality, created because, when, and as man is created. But then God gave man an "extra gift" (*donum superadditum*), viz., original righteousness. When man fell, he lost the extra gift and fell back to the level of his first created state, which therefore remains untouched by sin. The result is that while Christ's sacrifice is necessary to salvation, it is not sufficient. Man by the exercise of his freewill must add to Christ's merits some of his own; and if a particular man does not engage in enough good works, he can buy some merits from the treasury of the church, which the saints have amassed by doing more than was required of them.

The Lutherans violently opposed the sale of indulgences, emphasized *The Bondage of the Will*, and proclaimed the all sufficiency of grace. So far, so good. But in their stress on the moral aspect of the image, they virtually deny the rational aspect. Only that is to be included in the image which was lost in the fall. This again is an over-reaction, but in the opposite direction. Some of Luther's unguarded language could almost be interpreted to mean that man no longer remained man. A calm theologian must reject this on the basis of the Scriptural passages discussed above, but Luther's opposition to human merit and Rome's superficial view of sin was sorely needed.

Karl Barth originally denied that God created man in his own image. God was "totally Other." There is no similarity whatever between God and man. But if God's knowledge and our "knowledge" do not coincide at least in one proposition, we can know nothing about God at all. For this reason revelation cannot be a communication of truth, and although Barth is tremendously interested in theology, it is hard to find any rational motivation for it in dialectical theology.

Barth's later publications acknowledge a divine image in man. However, he continues strenuously to deny that the image is rationality. Therefore theology as knowledge of God remains impossible. Emil Brunner puts it perhaps even more pointedly: not merely words but their conceptual content itself has only instrumental significance; God and the medium of conceptuality are mutually exclusive; in fact God can speak his word to man even through false doctrine. Strictly, Neo-orthodoxy makes all doctrine false.

Barth's image turns out to be, most remarkably, the sexual distinction between man and woman. Since this distinction occurs in animals also, one wonders how it can be the image that sets man apart from the lower creation. And since there are no sexual distinctions in the Godhead, one wonders how this can be an image of God at all.

G. C. Berkouwer, as indicated above, has written a valuable book on *Man: The Image of God*. In opposing a tendency to define the image

in "ontic" or "ontological" terms—and presumably the statement that man himself, the rational creature, is the image, is an ontic or ontological definition—Berkouwer says, "This man, this sinful man, is not referred to in Scripture in terms of his ontological qualities, but in terms of his loss and his guilt" (pp. 63-64). This statement, however, is not accurate. Of course, Scripture emphasizes man's sin and guilt. But Scripture also refers to man's understanding and reason. One immediately thinks of Psalm 32:9, "Be not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding." Probably the reference to conscience in Romans 2:15 is also appropriate. But the massive evidence is all the functioning of men's minds described from Genesis to Revelation. Without an "ontological" mind, simply without a mind man could not do all the things recorded of him.

Nor does stress on the "wider" image lead to Pelagianism, as Berkouwer hints in the following paragraph. He suggests, or at least he reports (for it is difficult to be sure how much of the argument Berkouwer accepts for himself) that an admission of even remnants remaining after the fall is a case of man's excusing his sin and depravity. Then he queerly connects this with "idealism," as if a realist could not equally well excuse himself too.

But the argument is poor. How, for example, could a man excuse himself of sin on the ground that he was a rational creature? It would be easier to excuse sin if the agent were not rational. The term *remnants* that Berkouwer uses may deface the basically orthodox doctrine through materialistic expression; but if there were no "remnants," if the image had been obliterated, there could be no present responsibility.

In conclusion therefore one may say that the Biblical material is correctly summarized by identifying the distinctive characteristic of man as reason. Sin has caused its malfunction. Redemption will renew men in knowledge (righteousness and holiness) after the image of him that created him. Then in heaven we will not make mistakes even in arithmetic.