

IV.

Image and Likeness.

“Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness.” —*Gen. i. 26.*

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Glorious is the divine utterance that introduces the origin and creation of man: “And God created man after His own image and after His own likeness; after the image of God created He him” (Dutch translation).

The significance of these important words was recently discussed by the well-known professor, Dr. Edward Böhl, of Vienna. According to him it should read: Man is created “*in*”, not “*after*” God’s image, *i.e.*, the image is not found in man’s *nature* or *being*, but outside of him in *God*. Man was merely *set* in the *radiance* of that image. Hence, remaining in its light, he would live in that image. But stepping out of it, he would fall and retain but his own nature, which before and after the fall is the same.¹

In the discussion of the corruption of the human nature we will consider this opinion of the highly esteemed professor of Vienna. Let us state here simply that we reject this opinion, in which we see a return to Rome’s errors. Dr. Böhl’s negative character of sin, which is the basis of this representation, we can not entertain. Moreover, it opposes the doctrine of the Incarnation, and of Sanctification as held by the Reformed Church. Hence we believe it to be safest, first to explain the confession of the fathers concerning this, and then to show that this representation is inconsistent with the Word.

Accepting the account of Creation as the Holy Spirit’s direct revelation, we acknowledge its absolute credibility in every part. They who do not so accept it, or who, like many Ethical theologians, deny the literal interpretation, can have no voice in the discussion. If in the exposition of the account we are in earnest, and do not trifle with words, we must be thoroughly convinced that God actually said: “Let Us make men after Our image and after Our likeness.” (*Gen. i. 26*) But denying this and holding that these words merely represent the form in which somebody, animated by the Holy Spirit, presented man’s creation to himself, we can deduce nothing from them. Then we have no security that they are divine; we know only that a pious man *attributed* these thoughts to God and laid them upon His lips while they were but his own account of man’s creation:

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Hence the infallibility of Sacred Scripture is our starting-point. We see in *Gen. i. 27* a direct testimony of the Holy Spirit; and with fullest assurance we believe that these are the

1 In the Dutch the preposition “in” has not the meaning of “conformably to,” as in the English, but denotes rest or motion within limits, whether of place, time, or circumstances. With nouns or adjectives the word governed by “in” indicates the sphere, the domain where a property manifests itself. Hence the Dutch expression, “Geschapen *in* het, beeld God’s” (created in the divine image), indicates the sphere in which Adam moved before he fell.—Trans.

words of the Almighty spoken before He created man. With this conviction, they have decisive authority; and bowing before it, we confess that man was created after God's likeness and after His image.

This statement, in connection with the whole account, shows that the Holy Spirit sharply distinguishes man's creation and that of all other creatures. They were all manifestations of God's glory, for He saw that they were good; an effect of His counsel, for they embodied a divine thought. But man's creation was special, more exalted, more glorious; for God said: "Let Us make men after Our image and after Our likeness."

Hence the general sense of these words is that man is totally different from all other beings; that his kind is nobler, richer, more glorious; and especially that this higher glory consists in the more *intimate bond* and *closer relation* to his Creator.

This appears from the words *image* and *likeness*. In all His other creative acts the Lord speaks, and it is done; He commanded, and it stood fast. There is a thought in His counsel, a will to execute it, and an omnipotent act to realize it, but no more; beings are created wholly *outside* and *apart* from Him. But man's creation is totally different. Of course, there is a divine thought proceeding from the eternal counsel, and by omnipotent power this thought is realized; but that new creature is connected with the image of God.

According to the universal significance of the word, a person's image is such a concentration of his essential features as to make it the very impress of his being. Whether it be in pencil, painting, or by photography, a symbol, an idea, or statue, it is always the concentration of the essential features of man or thing. An *idea* is an image which concentrates those features upon the field of the *mind*; a statue in marble or bronze, etc., but regardless of form or manner of expression, the essential image is such a concentration of the several features of the object that it represents the object to the mind. This fixed and definite significance of an image must not be lost sight of. The image maybe imperfect, yet as long as the object is recognized in it, even tho the memory must supply the possible lack, it remains an image.

And this leads to an important observation: The fact that we can recognize a person from a fragmentary picture proves the existence of a *soul-picture* of that person, *i.e.*, an image photographed through the eye upon the soul. This image, occupying the imagination, enables us mentally to see him even in his absence and without his picture.

How is such image obtained? We do not make it, but the person himself, who while we look at him draws it upon the retina, thus putting it into our soul. In photography it is not the artist, nor his apparatus, but the features of our own countenance which as by witchery draw our image upon the negative plate. In the same manner the person receiving our image is passive, while we putting it into his soul are active. Hence in deepest sense, each of us carries his own image in or upon his face, and puts it into the human soul or upon the artist's plate. This image consists of features which, *concentrated*, form that peculiar expression which shows one's individuality. A man forms his own shadow upon a wall after his own



image and likeness. As often as we cause the impress of our being to appear externally, we make it after our own image and likeness.

Returning, after these preliminary remarks, to [Gen. i. 27](#), we notice the difference between (1) the divine image after which we are created, and (2) the image which consequently became visible in us. The image *after which* God made man is one, and that *fixed in us* quite another. The first is God's image after which we are created, the other the image created in us. To prevent confusion, the two must be kept distinct. The former existed before the latter, else how could God have created man after it?

It is not strange that many have thought that this image and likeness referred to Christ, who is said to be "the Image of the invisible God," ([Col. i. 15](#)) and "the express Image of His Substance." ([Heb. i. 3](#)) Not a few have accepted this as settled. Yet, with our best ministers and teachers, we believe this incorrect. It conflicts with the words, "Let Us make men after Our image and after Our likeness," ([Gen. i. 26](#)) which must mean that the Father thus addressed the Son and the Holy Spirit. Some say that these words are addressed to the angels, but this can not be so, since man is not created after the image of angels. Others maintain that God addressed Himself, arousing Himself to execute His design, using "We" as a plural of majesty. But this does not agree with the immediately following singular: "And God created man after His image." ([Gen. i. 27](#)) Hence we maintain the tried explanation of the Church's wisest and godliest ministers, that by these words the Father addressed the Son and the Holy Spirit. And then the unity of the Three Persons expresses itself in the words: "And God created man after *His* image." Hence this image can not be the Son. How could the Father say to the Son and to the Holy Spirit: "Let Us make men after the image of the Son"?

That image must be, therefore, a concentration of the features of God's Being, by which He expresses Himself. And since God alone can represent His own Being to Himself, it follows that by the image of God we must understand the representation of His Being as it eternally exists in the divine consciousness.

"Image" and "likeness" we take to be synonyms; not because a difference could not be invented; but because in [ver. 27](#) the word "likeness" is not even mentioned. Hence we oppose the explanation that image refers to the soul, and likeness to the body. Allowing that by the indissoluble union of body and soul the features of the divine image must have an after-effect in the latter, which is His temple, yet there is no reason nor suggestion why we should support such a precarious distinction between image and likeness. Hence the image after which we are created is the expression of God's Being as it exists in His own consciousness.

The next question is: What was or is there in man that caused him to be created after that image?



V.

Original Righteousness.

“For in Him we live and move, and have our being: as certain also of your own poets have said. For we are also His offspring.” — *Acts xvii. 28.*



It is the peculiar characteristic of the Reformed Confession that more than any other it humbles the *sinner* and exalts the *sinless* man.

To disparage man is unscriptural. Being a sinner, fallen and no longer a real man, he must be humbled, rebuked, and inwardly broken. But the divinely created man, realizing the divine purpose or restored by omnipotent grace in the elect, is worthy of all praise, for God has made him after His own image.

Because he stood so high, he fell so low. He was such an excellent being, hence he became such a detestable sinner. The excellency of the former is the source of the damnableness of the latter.

It is said that while the present age properly appreciates and exalts man, our doctrine only disparages him; but with all its eulogy and praise this present age has never conceived a more exalted testimony than that of Scripture, saying: “God created man in His own image.” (*Gen. i. 27*) We protest against the cry of the age, not because it makes of man *too much*, but *too little*, asserting that he is glorious even now in his *fallen state*.

What would you think of the man who, walking through your flower-garden, laid waste by a violent thunder-storm, called the stem broken and mud-covered flowers, lying upon their disordered beds, *magnificent*? And this the present age is doing. Walking through the garden of this world, withered and disordered by sin’s thunderstorms, it cries in proud ecstasy: “What glorious beings these men! How fair and excellent!” And as the botanist would say regarding his disordered garden: “Do you call this beautiful? You should have seen it before the storm destroyed it”; so say we to this age: “Do you call this fallen man glorious? Compared to what he ought to be he is utterly worthless. But he was glorious before sin ruined him, shining in all the beauty of the divine image.”



Hence our doctrine exalts him to highest glory. Next to the glory of being *created after the image of God* comes the glory of *being God Himself*. As soon as man presumes to this he thrusts at once all his glory from him; it is his detestable sin that he aspires to be like God. If it be said that even in Paradise the law prevailed that God alone is great, and the creature nothing before Him; we answer, that he that is created after the divine image has no higher ambition than to be a *reflection* of God; excluding the idea of being above or against God. Hence it is certain that the original man was most glorious and excellent; wherefore fallen man is most despicable and miserable.

Has fallen man then lost the image of God?