

## IX.

**The Image of God in Man.**

“As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.”—*1 Cor. xv. 49.*

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One more point remains to be discussed, viz., whether the divine image refers to the image of Christ.

This singular opinion has found many warm defenders in the Church from the beginning. It originated with Origen, who with his brilliant, fascinating, and seducing heresies has unsettled many things in the Church; and his heresy in this respect has found many defenders both East and West. Even Tertullian and Ambrose supported it, as well as Basil and Chrysostom; and it took no less a person than Augustine to uproot it.

Our Reformed theologians, closely following Augustine, have strongly opposed it. Junius, Zanchius and Calvin, Voetius and Coccejus condemned it as error. We can safely say that in our Reformed inheritance this error never had a place. .

But in the last century it has crept again into the Church. The pantheistic philosophy occasioned it; and its after-effects have tempted our German and Dutch mediation theologians to return to this ancient error.

The great philosophers who enthralled the minds of men at the beginning of this century fell in love with the idea that God became man. They taught not that the Word became flesh, but God became man; and that in the fatal sense that God is ever *becoming*, and that He becomes a better and a purer God as He becomes more purely man. This pernicious system, which subverts the foundations of the Christian faith, and under a Christian form annihilates essential Christianity, has led to the doctrine that in Christ Jesus this incarnation had become a fact; and from it was deduced that God would have become man even if man had *not* sinned.

We have often spoken of the danger of teaching this doctrine. The Scripture repudiates it, teaching that Christ is a Redeemer from and an atonement for sin. But a mere passing contradiction will not stop this evil; this poisonous thread, running through the warp and woof of the Ethical theology, will not be pulled from the preaching until the conviction prevails that it is philosophic and pantheistic, leading away from the simplicity of Scripture.

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But for the present nothing can be done. Almost all the German manuals now used by our rising ministers feed this error; hence the widespread prevalence of the idea that the image in which man was created was *the Christ*.

And this is natural. So long as it is maintained that, even without sin, man was destined for Christ and Christ for man, it must follow that the original man was calculated for Christ, and hence was created after the image of Christ.

For evidence that this deviates from the truth, we refer theologians to the writings of Augustine, Calvin, and Voetius on this point, and to our lay-readers we offer a short explanation why we and all Reformed churches reject this interpretation.

We begin with referring to the many passages in Scripture, teaching that the redeemed sinner must be renewed and transformed after the image of Christ.

In [2 Cor. iii. 18](#) we read: “We all are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord”; and in [Rom. viii. 29](#): “That we are predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son”; and in [I Cor. xv. 49](#): “As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.” To this category belong all such passages in which the Holy Spirit admonishes us to conform ourselves to the example of Jesus, which may not be understood as mere imitation, but which decidedly means a transformation into His image. And lastly, here belong those passages that teach that we must increase to a perfect man, “to the stature of the fulness of Christ”; and that “we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

Hence believers are called to transform themselves after Christ’s image, which is the final aim of their redemption. But this image is *not* the Eternal Word, the Second Person in the Trinity, but the Messiah, the *Incarnate* Word. [1 Cor. xv. 44](#) furnishes the undeniable proof. St. Paul declares there that the first man Adam was of the earth earthy; *i.e.*, not only after the fall, but by creation. Then he says that as believers have borne the image of the earthy, so they will also bear the image of the heavenly, *i.e.*, Christ. This shows clearly that in his original state man did not possess the image of Christ, but that afterward he will possess it. What Adam received in creation is clearly distinguished from what a redeemed sinner possesses in Christ; distinguished in this particular, that it was not according to his nature to be formed after Christ’s image, which image he could receive only by grace after the fall.

This is evident also from what St. Paul teaches in—[1 Cor. xi](#) In the [third verse](#), speaking of the various degrees of ascending glory, he says that the man is the head of the woman, and the head of every man is Christ, and the head of Christ is God. And yet, having spoken of these four, woman, man, Christ, God, he says emphatically, in [ver. 7](#), not as might be expected, “The woman is the glory of the man, the man the glory of Christ,” but, omitting the link Christ, he writes: “For the man is the glory of God, and the woman the glory of the man.” If this theory under consideration were correct, he should have said: “The man is the image of Christ.”

Hence it is plain that according to Scripture the image after which we are to be *renewed* is not that after which we are *created*; the two must be distinguished. The latter is that of the Triune God whose image penetrated into the being of the *race*. The former is that of the holy and perfect Man Christ Jesus, our federal Head, and as such the Example [*Dutch, Voorbeeld*; literally, an image placed before one.—Trans.], after which every child of God is to be renewed, and which at last he shall resemble.

Hence Scripture offers two different representations: first, the Son who is the image of the Father as the Second Person in the Trinity; second, the Mediator our Example [*Voorbeeld*, image put before one], hence our image after which we are to be renewed; and between the two there is almost no connection. The Scripture teaching that the Son of God is the express image of His Person and the image of the Invisible, refers to the relation between the Father and the Son in the hidden mystery of the Divine Being. But speaking of our calling to be renewed after the image of Christ, it refers to the Incarnate Word, our Savior, tempted like as we are in all things, yet without sin.

Mere similarity of sound should not lead us to make this mistake. Every effort to translate [Gen. i. 26](#), “Let Us make man in or after the image of the Son,” is confusing. Then “Let Us” must refer to the Father speaking to the Holy Spirit; and this can not be. Scripture never places the Father and the Holy Spirit in such relation. Moreover, it would put the Son outside the greatest act of creation, viz., the creation of man. And Scripture says: “Without Him was not anything made that was made” ([John i. 3](#)); and again: “Through Him are created all things in heaven and on earth.”

Hence this “Let Us” must be taken either as a plural of majesty, of which the Hebrew has not a single instance in the first person; or as spoken by the Triune God, the Three Persons mutually addressing each other; or the Father addressing the two other Persons. A third is impossible.

Supposing that the Three Persons address each other; the image can not refer to the Son, because, speaking of His own, He can not say, “Our image,” without including the other Persons. Or suppose that the Father speaks to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; even then it can not refer to the image of the Son, since He is the Father’s image and not that of the Holy Spirit. In whatever sense it be taken, this view is untenable, outside the analogy of Scripture, and inconsistent with the correct interpretation of [Gen. i. 26](#).

To put it comprehensively: If the divine image refers to the Christ, it must be that of the Eternal Son, or of the Mediator, or of Christ in the flesh. These three are equally impossible. First, the Son is Himself engaged in the creative work. Second, without sin there is no need of a Mediator. Third, Scripture teaches that the Son became flesh after our image, but never that in the creation we became flesh after His image.

The notion that the divine image refers to Christ’s righteousness and holiness, implying that Adam was created in *extraneous* righteousness, confounds the righteousness of Christ which *we embrace by faith* and which did not exist when Adam was created, and the *original, eternal* righteousness of God the Son. It is true that David embraced the imputed righteousness, altho it existed *not* in his day, but David was a *sinner* and Adam before the fall was *not*. He was created without sin; hence the divine image can not refer to the righteousness of Christ, revealed only in relation to *sin*.



In our present sad condition, we confess unconditionally that even now we lie in the midst of death, and have our life outside of ourselves in Christ alone. But we add: Blessed be God, it shall not always be so. With our last *breath* we die wholly to sin, and in the resurrection morning *we shall be like Him*; hence in the eternal felicity our life shall be no more *without* us, but *in* us.

Wherefore, to put the separation which was caused only by sin, and which in the saint continues only on account of sin, in Adam before the fall, is nothing else than to carry something sinful into Creation itself, and to annihilate the divine statement *that man was created good*.

Wherefore we admonish preachers of the truth to return to the old, tried paths in this respect, and teach in recitation-hall, pulpit, and catechetical class that man was created *after the image of the Triune God*.



X.

**Adam Not Innocent, but Holy.**

“Created in righteousness and true holiness.”—*Ephes. iv. 24.*

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It remains, therefore, as of old, that “God created man good and after His own image, that is, in true righteousness and holiness, that he might rightly know God his Creator, heartily love Him, and live with Him in eternal happiness, and glorify and praise Him.” Or, as the Confession of Faith has it: “We believe that God created man, out of the dust of the earth, and made him and formed him after His own image and likeness, good and righteous and wholly capable in all things to will, agreeably to the will of God.”

Every representation which depreciates in the least this original righteousness must be opposed.

Adam’s righteousness lacked nothing. The idea that he was holy inasmuch as he had not sinned, and by constant development could increase his holiness, so that if he had not fallen he would have attained a still holier state, is incorrect, and betrays ignorance in this respect.

The difference between man in his original state and in the state of sin is similar to that between a healthy child and a sick man. Both must increase in strength. If the child remains what he is, he is not healthy. Health includes growth and increase of strength and development until maturity be attained. The same is true of the sick man; he can not remain the same. He must recover or grow worse. If he is to recover, he must gain in strength. So far both are the same.

But here the similarity ceases. Increase the strength of the sick at once, and he will be well, and what he should be. But add the full strength of the man to the child, and he will be *unnatural* and *abnormal*. For the present the child needs no more than he has. He lacks nothing at *any given moment*. To be a normal child in perfect health, he must be just what he is. But the sick person needs a great deal. In order to be healthy and normal he must *not* be what he is. The child, so far as health and strength are concerned, is *perfect*; but the sick person is very *imperfect* as regards health and strength. The condition of the child is *good*; that of the sick man is *not* good. And the former’s healthy growth is something entirely different from the latter’s improvement in health and strength.

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This shows how wrong it is to apply sanctification to Adam before the fall. Sanctification is inconceivable with reference to sinless man; foreign to the conception of a creature whom God calls *good*.

“Excellent,” says one; hence Adam was born in childlike innocence gradually to attain a higher moral development without sin; hence sanctification after all!