

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.*

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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.”

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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?

This vital question controls our view of man in every respect, and hence requires closest examination; especially since the opinions of believers concerning this are diametrically opposed. Some maintain that after the fall man retained a few remains of it, and others that he has entirely lost it.

To avoid all misunderstanding, we must first decide whether to be created after the image of God (1) refers *only* to the *original righteousness*, or (2) included also man's *nature* which was clothed with this original righteousness. If the divine image consisted only in the original righteousness, then, of course, it was *completely and absolutely lost*; for by his fall man lost this original righteousness once for all. But if it was also impressed upon his *being*, his *nature*, and upon his *human existence*, then it can not disappear entirely; for, however deeply sunk, fallen man remains *man*.

By this we do not imply that something spiritually good was left in man; among the finally lost even the deepest fallen will retain some evidence that he was created after the divine image. We do not even hesitate to subscribe to the opinion of the fathers that if the angels, Satan included, were originally created after God's image (which Scripture does not teach positively), then even the devil in his deep fiendishness must show some features of that image.

We do not mean that after the fall man had any willingness, knowledge, or anything good; and they who in pulpit or writing infer this from "the few remains" of article xiv. of the Confession of Faith pervert its plain teaching. Altho it acknowledges that a few remains are retained, yet it follows that "*all* the light which is in us is changed into *darkness*"; and it says before that "man is become wicked, perverse, and corrupt in all his ways," and "that he has corrupted his *whole* nature." Hence these "few remains" may never be understood to imply that there remained in man any strength, willingness, or desire for good. No, a sinner in his fallen nature is altogether condemnable. And there is, as the same article confesses, "no will nor understanding conformable to the divine will and understanding, but what Christ has wrought in man, which He teacheth us when He said, "Without Me ye can do nothing."

And thus we disarm any suspicion that we look for something good in the sinner.

With Scripture we confess: "There is *none* righteous, no not *one*. There is *none* that understandeth, there is *none* that seeketh after God. They are *all* gone out of the way, they are *together* become unprofitable; there is *none* that doeth good, no, not one."

But how is this to be reconciled? How can these two go together? On the one hand the sinner has nothing, absolutely nothing good or praiseworthy; and on the other, this same sinner always retains features of the image of God!

Let us illustrate. Two horses become mad; the one is a common truck horse, the other a noble Arabian stallion. Which is the more dangerous? The latter, of course. His noble blood will break loose into more uncontrollable rage and violence. Or two clerks work in

an office; the one a mere drudge of slow understanding, the other a youth with brains and piercing eye. Which could do his master the greater injury? The latter, of course, and all his schemes would show his superiority working in the wrong direction. This is always the case. There is no more dangerous enemy of the truth than an unbeliever religiously instructed. In all his impious rage he shows his superior training and knowledge. Satan is so mighty because before his fall he was so exceedingly glorious. Hence in his fall man did not put off the original nature, but he retained it. Only its action was reversed, corrupted, and turned against God.

When the captain of a man-of-war in a naval engagement betrays his king and raises the enemy's flag, he does not first damage or sink his ship, but he keeps it as efficient for service as possible, and with all its armament intact he does the very reverse of what he ought to do. "Optimi corruptio pessima!" says the proverb of the wise—*i.e.*, the greater the excellency of a thing, the more dangerous its defection. If the admiral of the fleet were to choose which of his ships should betray him, he would say: "Let it be the weakest, for defection of the strongest is the most dangerous." It is true in every sphere of life that the excellent qualities of a thing or being do not disappear in reversed action, but become most *excellently bad*.

In this way we understand man's fall. Before it he possessed the most exquisite organism which by holy impulse was directed toward the most exalted aim. Tho reversed by the fall, this precious human instrument remained, but, directed by unholy impulse, it aims at a deeply unholy object.

Comparing man to a steamship, his fall did not remove the engine. But as before the fall he moved in righteousness, so he moves now in unrighteousness. In fact, as fast as he steamed then toward felicity, so fast he steams now toward perdition, *i.e.*, away from God. Hence the retaining of the engine made his fall all the more terrible and his destruction more certain. And thus we reconcile the two: that man retained his former features of excellency, and that his destruction is sure except he be born again.

But in the divine image we must carefully distinguish:

First, the wonderful and artistic organism called *human nature*.

Second, the *direction* in which it moved, *i.e.*, toward the holiest end, in that God created man in original righteousness.

That God created man good and after His own image does not mean that Adam was in a state of *innocence*, in that he had not sinned; nor that he was perfectly equipped to *become holy*, gradually to ascend to greater development; but that he was created in *true righteousness and holiness*, indicating not the degree of his development, but his *status*. This was his *original righteousness*. Hence all the inclinations and outgoings of his heart were perfect. He lacked nothing. Only in one respect his blessedness differed from that of God's children, *viz.*, his good was *losable* and theirs not.

Of these two parts constituting the divine image—first, the inward, artistic organism of man’s being, and, second, the original righteousness in which the organism moved naturally—the *latter* is completely lost, and the *former* is reversed; but the *being* of the instrument, tho terribly marred, remained the same, to work in the wrong direction, *i.e.*, in unrighteousness. Hence the features or after-effects of the divine image are not found in the few good things that remain in the sinner, ”but in *all that he does.*” Man could not sin so terribly *if God had not created him after His own image.*

Scripture teaches, therefore, that they are all gone aside, that they are altogether become filthy, and that all come short of the glory of God; while it also declares that even this fallen man is created after God’s image—[Gen. ix. 6](#), and after His likeness—[James iii. 9](#).



VI.

Rome, Socinus, Arminius, Calvin.

“And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”—*Ephes.* iv. 24.

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It is not surprising that believers entertain different views concerning the significance of the image of God. It is a starting-point determining the direction of four different roads. The slightest deviation at starting must lead to a totally different representation of the truth. Hence every thinking believer must deliberately choose which road he will follow:

First, the path of Rome, represented by Bellarminus.

Second, that of Arminius and Socinus, walking arm-in-arm.

Third, that of the majority of the Lutherans, led by Melancthon.

Lastly, the direction mapped out by Calvin, *i.e.*, that of the Reformed.

Rome teaches that the original righteousness does *not* belong to the divine image, but to the human nature as a superadded grace. Quoting Bellarminus, *first*, man is created consisting of two parts, flesh and spirit; *second*, the divine image is stamped partly on the flesh, but chiefly on the human spirit, the seat of the moral and rational consciousness; *third*, there, is a conflict between flesh and spirit, the flesh lusting against the spirit; *fourth*, hence man has a natural inclination and desire for sin, which as desire alone is no sin as long as it is not yielded to; *fifth*, in His grace and compassion God gave man, independently of his nature, the original righteousness for a defense and safety-valve to control the flesh; *sixth*, by his fall man has willingly thrust this superadded righteousness from him: hence as sinner he stands again in his naked nature (*in puris naturalibus*) which, as a matter of course, is inclined to sin, inasmuch as his desires are sinful.

We believe that the Romish theologians will allow that this is the current view among them. According to Catechismus Romanus, question 38: “God gave to man from the dust of the earth a body, in such a way that he was partaker of immortality not by virtue of his nature, but by a superadded grace. As to his soul, God formed him in His image and after His likeness, and gave him a free will; *moreover* [*præterea*, besides, hence not belonging to his nature], He so tempered his desires that they continually obey the dictates of reason. Besides this He has poured into him the original righteousness, and gave him dominion over all other creatures.”

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The view of Socinus, and of Arminius who followed him closely, is totally different. It is a well-known fact that the Socinians denied the Godhead of Christ, who, as they taught, was born a mere man. But (and by this they misled the Poles and Hungarians) they acknowledged that He had *become* God. Hence after His Resurrection He could be worshiped as God. But in what sense? That the divine nature was given Him? Not at all. In Scripture, magistrates, being clothed with the divine majesty which enabled them to exercise authority,