

Introduction

The doctrine of the image of God is foundational to a Christian view of ethics and mission. It does not merely relate to one or other aspect of ethics or mission; it is one of the major building blocks in the biblical foundation of both. The knowledge of what is logically precedes the knowledge of what ought to be. In this the Christian will be in profound disagreement with the existentialism of Jean Paul Sartre. For Sartre, existence (including moral choice) precedes essence. For the Christian, essence precedes existence and moral choice. We need to know what we are before we can decide how we ought to act. We need to know what others are before we know how we ought to treat them. If I and all humans are merely animals, or if I and all other living creatures are merely chemical machines, does moral choice or salvation have any real meaning? Put humorously, I need to know the difference between a hammer, a cat and a child - or I will try to drive in nails with my cat, I put my child out for the night and put my hammer to bed! Put more seriously, if a human being is an animal, the incurably sick can be put down, and if we are carbon-based computers, the old can be disposed of as casually as their silicon-based obsolete equivalents.

One of the most pressing questions as we enter the 21st century is the question of personal identity - 'Who or what am I? Has my existence any meaning, my life any purpose? As I see my intellectual work being taken over by computers and my manual work by robots, as I see science creating and disposing of human life in a Petri dish, as I see the dead body of an old person being referred to by a hospital manager as 'waste product', I am forced to confront the question, 'What is my life worth?' I am faced with a plethora of alternatives - am I an animal, a computerised machine, a reincarnated spirit, or a total mystery? The doctrine of the image of God catapults the Bible right into the **post-modern** 21st century. The Bible has a very clear answer to the question, 'Who am I?' I am a human being made in the image of God, and therefore my life has the greatest possible significance. This paper will be concerned with exploring that significance in the areas of ethics and mission.

But before we can even begin to look at the question of what the image of God means in these areas, we have to confront the exegetical problem of whether human beings remained in the image of God subsequent to the Fall and the resulting depravity of the human race. Let it be said, if the image of God in human beings was wholly lost at the Fall, this will be the shortest conference paper of all time! If the image of God was totally lost at the Fall, the doctrine would be of very little relevance to ethics and mission as we would be addressing people not made in the image of God. The position of this paper is that the image of God was not lost at the Fall. This is for the following reasons. First, the Bible never says that human beings have lost the image of God. Second, I do not think that the usual objection to the continuation of the image of God, namely, that the New Testament speaks of the image of God as being renewed (Ephesians 4:24, Colossians 3:10), is valid. The argument is that if the image of God is renewed in Christ, then it must have been lost in the Fall. This does not follow. These passages speak of being renewed in knowledge, righteousness and holiness. They are not primarily addressing the question of the original image of God, but of a new spiritual creation in Christ. This is connected with the great New Testament emphasis on Christ as the image of God, the new Adam (1 Corinthians 15:49, 2 Corinthians 4:4, Colossians 1:15). The implication is that the image of God in Christ is more complete than the image of God in Adam. The image of God in Adam did not have primary reference to holiness, righteousness **and** knowledge, whereas the image of God in Christ seems to have primary reference to his moral and spiritual perfections. Of course, Adam undoubtedly possessed holiness, righteousness and knowledge pre-Fall - he was 'very good' (Genesis 1:31), but that is not the focus of attention in Genesis 1:26ff as we shall see.

This is borne out by the fact that whereas clearly in Biblical terms the original holiness, righteousness and knowledge of the human race were fatally damaged (or even totally lost) in the **Fall**, we are still

described in our fallen condition as being in the image of God (Genesis 9:6, 1 Corinthians 11:7, James 3:9). There are, then, two apparently contradictory, but complementary truths which we must hold in tension - the continuing image of God in post-Fall humanity, and the total depravity of our human nature which requires renewing in the complete image of God in Christ. They are only apparently contradictory, not essentially so. We must adopt the same approach as we do with regard to divine sovereignty and human responsibility. We must hold them both because they are biblical, but we must not compromise either of them as we attempt to harmonise them in our thinking.

The meaning of the image of God (with particular relevance to ethics and mission)

While there is great diversity of opinion among scholars as to the exact meaning of 'the image of God', there are certain relatively straightforward points that we can make. Both words that are used in Genesis 1:26, 'image' and 'likeness', speak of resemblance, of one thing being like another. The image resembles that which it images. In the New Testament, 'image' (εἰκόν) is used of an image reflected in a mirror (2 Corinthians 3:18) or of a portrait on a coin (Luke 20:24). This is the same Greek word that is used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word for image in Genesis 1:26, and is also used of the image of God in man in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 11:7). The implication is that man resembles God. This is clearly not in every way. Even the immediate context shows that God is the Creator, man is the creature. And as the story unfolds throughout the Bible, it becomes very clear that God is unlike man in many ways. Indeed, we may say that one of the major emphases in the Old Testament is upon the difference between God and man - the utter transcendence of God and the smallness and weakness of man. And after the Fall there is the further difference and distance in holiness and righteousness. The question then remains: How can man be like God? The answer is that an image is not like that which it images in every respect. The image of a golden calf is like a calf in shape, but not in texture, sound or movement. The image of Caesar on the coin resembled Caesar in profile, not in skin colour, voice or mannerisms. We are therefore looking for some way (or ways) in which man resembles God - some way in which the Bible indicates we are like God.

The best place to start looking is in the immediate context of Genesis 1 and then in the wider context of the whole book of Genesis and the rest of the Bible. The immediate context indicates two aspects of the image of God: the difference between man and animals indicated by man's rule over the animals; and the unity in diversity of the human race in existing as male and female.

It is striking that God says, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' (Genesis 1:26) Being made in the image of God is linked with rule over the rest of the creation. There are two aspects to this. First, there is the difference between man and animals implied in man's capacity to rule, and secondly there is man's Godlikeness in having the capacity to rule. The former is clearly recognised in the Bible. Throughout the Old Testament the radical difference between man and animals is emphasised, for instance in Psalm 32:9: 'Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.' The implied incongruity of human beings behaving like animals only makes sense if human beings are of a different order of being from animals. This is confirmed by Jesus when he says to his disciples, 'Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows' (Luke 12:7) and when he says of a handicapped man, 'How much more valuable is a man than a sheep!' (Matthew 12:12) All this confirms that there is some connection between the image of God and the difference between humans and animals.

Secondly, the human capacity to rule is linked to the image of God. Man is made in the image of God and as a consequence he rules over the rest of creation. God rules the whole universe, but because he has made humans in his own image, they too rule. They rule under him and are

responsible to him, but they rule; and in ruling they express their distinction from the animals and from the inanimate, they express their Godlikeness.

The other area in Genesis 1 that is linked to the image of God is the unity in community of the human race existing as male and female. It is striking that God does not say 'Let me make man in my image and let him rule.' Instead plural pronouns are used: 'Let us make man in our image and let them rule.' The unity in community in God is linked to the unity in community of the human race. And the diversity of the human race is specifically spelt out in maleness and femaleness. The image of God in humans involves persons existing in community and particularly in the community of marriage (2:24). This involves the capacity to love and to be loved.

In Genesis 2 we see other aspects of the distinctiveness of human beings which show their Godlikeness. We see God working (v.2); and we see man working (v. 15). God is the Creator; and man also is creative. God speaks (vs.16-18); and man also speaks (v.23). Yes, the serpent too speaks (3: 1), but there is something incongruous, unnatural about this. He was more crafty (cunning) than the animals. He was no ordinary animal. And the fact that he spoke was a clear indication of this. So creativity and communication in words are also aspects of the image of God which distinguishes humans from animals.

In connection with the ability to communicate in words, there are some additional points worthy of note. When God speaks to man, he addresses him as a moral creature, capable of making moral decisions: he commands him not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. No similar command is addressed to the animals. Part of man's being created in the image of God is the capacity to relate to the concepts of good and evil. Included in this is rationality. Man is a creature clearly able to understand the concept of moral action and the consequences of moral action and to reason in a way similar to God.

Furthermore, when man speaks (2:23), he speaks in poetry, not prose. The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman', for she was taken out of man.' (Genesis 2:23) Again here we see creativity, this time with words not plants, and an aesthetic sense of the beautiful.

In Genesis 5:1-3 we have another use of the term 'image of God'. The context here is that of family relationship. As Adam's genealogy is being given, we are reminded that Adam was made in the likeness of God, and then we are told that when Adam had a son, he was 'in his own likeness, in his own image'. This usage seems to stress relationship. As Seth bears the relation of son to Adam, so Adam bears the relation of son to God. This understanding is backed up by Luke's genealogy of Jesus, where Adam is called 'the son of God' (Luke 3:38) and by Paul in Athens where he accepts as correct the pagan understanding of the image of God as man being 'God's offspring' (Acts 17:28,29). It is this aspect of the image of God that emphasises most the dignity of human beings - a factor that receives full treatment in Psalm 8:4-6: 'what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet'. Human beings have this dignity because they are made in God's image, they are created as his children, they are spiritual, personal beings.

In Genesis 9:5-6, it is the sanctity of human life that is stressed in connection with the image of God: 'And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.' Human life is sacrosanct and protected by the divine sanction: the man who murders deserves to die. The reason given is that human life is made in the image of God. Murder is so heinous because as an assault on the image of God, it is an assault on God himself, even as the

destruction of a statue of the Queen would be an insult to the Queen, or the destruction of a painting would be an insult to the artist.

Consequences for ethics

The very first consequence of the doctrine of the image of God for ethics is that it gives a real basis for ethics. Why is man a being that has ethical concepts, a moral sense, an appreciation of right and wrong • a sense that there are actions that are right or wrong irrespective of personal advantage? What is the explanation for this astonishing difference from other living things? The Biblical doctrine of the image of God gives us a real and satisfying explanation of this moral sense. God created us in his own image. We are creatures on a different order of being from animals. As God is rational and moral, so we were created rational and moral, capable of understanding and relating to moral commands. This remains true after the Fall. Indeed, it is after the Fall that God says that man is 'one of us, knowing good and evil'. The implication seems to be that before the test of obedience and love involving the tree of the knowledge of good and evil man already had a moral sense, but after the test he would have a deeper understanding of good and evil from experience, whether from the viewpoint of good, or as happened, **from** the viewpoint of evil. (There is perhaps here a hint that a Fall has already taken place in the heavenly realm, for there is already the knowledge of good and evil there.)

Sanctity

The sanctity or value of human life is one of the most controversial ethical issues today. The medical areas of abortion, some infertility treatments, some forms of contraception, embryo research, treatment of newborn children with birth defects, of brain injury victims and of the terminally ill, all raise serious questions concerning the sanctity of human life. So too do violence, murder, the death penalty and war.

Has human life any special value or sanctity? The answer depends on one's philosophy or explanation of the universe. And there are only two serious contenders at the beginning of the 21st century. Either the universe is explicable in personal terms (it was created and is being sustained by God) or it may be explained in impersonal terms by some naturalistic, mechanistic or evolutionary theory. It is strange that there is no generally recognised term to describe this latter position, as it forms the intellectual furniture of our generation. For lack of a better name, I call it impersonalism.

Impersonalism holds that human life is only the product of millions of years of the chance development of matter. All existence is an uninterrupted continuum from the hydrogen atom to the human brain. All life is an uninterrupted continuum from the amoeba to man. There was, and is, no Intelligence outside the universe to create it and sustain it. The astronomer Fred Hoyle put it like this: 'Only the biological processes of mutation and natural selection are needed to produce living creatures as we know them. Such creatures are no more than ingenious machines that have evolved as strange by-products in an odd comer of the Universe Most people object to this argument for the not very good reason that they do not like to think of themselves as machines.' Psychologist B.F. Skinner agreed: 'Man is a machine in the sense that he is a complex system behaving in lawful ways.' But not only is man merely a machine, according to this view, he is also a machine produced merely by chance. Jacques Monod, the molecular biologist, expressed it in popular terms: 'The universe was not pregnant with life nor the biosphere with man. Our number came up in a Monte Carlo game.'

However, impersonalism involves two insuperable **difficulties**. The first concerns its reliability, the second its consequences. The first **difficulty** is what C.S. Lewis called 'the cardinal **difficulty** of naturalism'. He quotes Professor **Haldane**: 'If my mental processes are determined wholly by the

motions of atoms in my brain, I have no reason to suppose that my beliefs are true . . . and hence I have no reason for supposing my brain to be composed of atoms.'

C.S. Lewis himself describes this **difficulty** of naturalism in these terms: 'It offers what professes to be a **full** account of our mental behaviour; but this account, on inspection, leaves no room for the acts of knowing or insight on which the whole value of our thinking, as a means to truth, depends.' In other words, there is no basis for the validity of human reasoning in impersonalism.

The second difficulty is that if impersonalism is true, then it is impossible to introduce any notion of the inherent value of any part of the universe over other parts. Particularly, if the evolutionary process has resulted in the emergence of a being with greed and cruelty enough to destroy the whole of his and other species' environments, how can it reasonably be argued that he is higher than other species and not lower?

There can be no basis in any form of impersonalism for the belief that human life has an intrinsic value greater than that of a blue whale, a rabbit, or even a fly. Any sentimental feelings for the value of human life must be purely irrational. Indeed the compassion that desires to protect and save even the weakest human individual may, in evolutionary terms, be deemed counter-productive, as one of the foundations of evolutionary theory is the principle of natural selection (the survival of the fittest).

It is no coincidence, **after** some form of impersonalism being taught in our schools, universities and medical colleges throughout the 20th century, that we now have many members of the medical profession who give strong support to abortion, euthanasia and experimentation on human embryos. Nor was it any coincidence that it was in Nazi Germany (shaped by an amalgam of Hegelian philosophy and Darwinian theory) that, in addition to the Holocaust of Jews, there was a lesser known holocaust in which the medical profession co-operated in the mass extermination of the chronically sick and of those considered socially disturbing or racially and ideologically unwanted.

We live in a strangely inconsistent world - a world that doesn't seem to be bothered by its glaring inconsistency. On the one hand, Oscars were heaped on the film Schindler's List which is a devastating expose of the arbitrary reclassification by the Nazis of Jews and others as non-human, not having the rights of human beings. But on the other hand we are just as willing to toy with the same kind of thinking today with regard to the unborn, the newborn and the chronically ill. We forget it was not only Jews and Slavs that were marked for extermination and medical experimentation, but the chronically ill and handicapped also.

Leo Alexander, an American psychiatrist involved in the Nuremberg Trials, wrote a remarkable paper entitled 'Medical Science Under Dictatorship' (1949). In it he points out that before Hitler came to power 'a propaganda barrage was directed against the traditional, compassionate, nineteenth century attitudes towards the chronically ill and for the adoption of a utilitarian Hegelian point of view.' He shows that the medical profession co-operated with the Nazis and he states that 'It started with the acceptance of the attitude basic in the euthanasia movement, that there is such a thing as life not worthy to be lived.' Particularly of relevance in the present climate, Alexander also indicates that a major factor in the acceptability of these arguments was the propaganda for economic benefit. Just think what you could do with all the money wasted on treating such useless people!

At the moment the 'right to die' lobby may plead only for voluntary euthanasia, but research in Holland has shown that voluntary euthanasia can easily become involuntary euthanasia. And the British Medical Journal found that just under half of all doctors questioned in this country would consider taking active steps to hasten a patient's death if it became legal to do so. The researchers say, 'The taboo nature of the subject and the legal and religious prohibitions prevent adequate education about euthanasia during medical training. It is important that euthanasia should be discussed more openly and effectively.'

The plain fact is that there is no basis for the value, dignity and sanctity of human life in any form of **impersonalism**. If there is no basis there, is there a basis anywhere? Biblical Christianity **provides** the only **firm** basis for belief in the value of human life: in particular, the doctrines of God and man - the existence of the unlimited but personal God who has created the world and revealed himself in the Scriptures, and the creation of man in the image of God.

Once we know that the ultimate reality of the universe is not impersonal, not the matter or energy of which it is made, but the personal Creator who made it, then we immediately have a basis for the worth of man and the sanctity of his life. Man is not the end product of the purely blind and random combination of atoms. He has been created by God as the only personal creature that inhabits the material universe.

Our Lord Jesus also taught that the worth of man is linked to his superiority over animals. He said, 'How much more valuable is a man than a sheep!' (Matthew 12:12) However, it must be said that, although a man may lose some or all of the abilities which distinguish him from the animal, he does not cease to be a man nor does he become an animal. The very man of whom Jesus was speaking was a handicapped person. He had a withered hand. Even in his severe handicap he still differed from the sheep. Whereas the sheep could never have the creative potential of a hand, the man could, if it was restored. It is precisely in this way that we must view the **difficult** cases. No matter how poor, weak, handicapped or demented a human being becomes, he never descends to the status of an animal or lower, because, unlike the animal, he can be restored, if not by the power of man, then by the power of God; if not in this life, then in the life to come.

It is this doctrine of the image of God that is made the basis for God's protection of human life. Murder is seen as such a heinous crime precisely because it strikes at what is most God-like in this world - a human being (see Genesis 9:6). It is this passage too that gives us the distinction between lawful and unlawful killing. The only lawful taking of human life is the retributive execution of one guilty of murder (and, by extension, the waging of a just war). The taking of innocent human life is always condemned in the Scriptures.

However, it is not only the deliberate taking of human life that is condemned, but also the deliberate neglect to save life. This is one of the main points of the story of the Good Samaritan. The question at issue was the law's requirement to love one's neighbour (the second great commandment, which sums up our duty to our fellow man). The priest and the Levite clearly broke the law of God by leaving the man to die. The particular aspect they were neglecting was the positive duty involved in the sixth commandment. Jesus was teaching that to allow a person to die, when one has **the** means to restore him to life, is as reprehensible as murder.

Various questions in terms of medical ethics, penal theory and war lie outside the scope of this paper. In medical ethics, the question 'Which life is human life?' must still be answered, and I think **can** be answered in terms of sanctity of life from conception to death. In penal theory and war, a clear Biblical case can be made out for a distinction between justified and unjustified killing. However, the question as to whether human life has any special value is answered affirmatively by the Christian. Human life is created in the image of God and all innocent human life is protected by divine sanction.

Ecology

There appears to be a quite general consensus of opinion within the Green movement that orthodox Christianity is to blame for the ecological crisis. Max Nicholson, for many years Director-General of the Nature Conservancy, put it in popular terms: 'The first step must be plainly to reject and to scrub

out the complacent image of Man the Conqueror of Nature, and of Man Licensed by God to conduct himself as the earth's worst pest.'

The same argument had been put in a more scholarly way in a seminal article by Lynn White in 1967. Lynn White was professor of history at the University of California. The article, published in Science Magazine was the text of a lecture delivered in 1966 and is entitled The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis. It is worth quoting at length:

'Christianity inherited from Judaism not only a concept of time as non-repetitive and linear but also a striking story of creation.... God planned all this explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes.... Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen.... Man shares in great measure God's transcendence of nature. Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends.... Since both science and technology are blessed words in our contemporary vocabulary, some may be happy at the notions, **first**, that viewed historically, modern science is an extrapolation of natural theology and, second, that modern technology is at least partly to be explained as an Occidental, voluntarist realisation of the Christian dogma of man's transcendence of, and rightful mastery over, nature. But, as we now recognise, somewhat over a century ago science and technology - hitherto quite separate activities - joined to give mankind powers which, to judge by many of the ecologic effects, are out of control. If so, Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt.'

Is this fair? Has belief in the image of God and man's dominion over the creatures led to the ecological crisis? What exactly is the biblical teaching on the relation of man to nature? The **first** thing we must face is that this is not merely a two-way relationship - man and nature. It is a **three-way** relationship - God, man and nature. From the Biblical emphasis on God's sovereignty in creation and providence, it is clear that there can be no such thing as a relationship between any of his creatures **that** does not involve him. This is where it becomes obvious that the idea of man's dominion over **nature** giving him an autonomous power is a deistic or humanist idea, not a Christian one. Whatever this dominion is, it is defined and regulated by God, not by man. Man's dominion must be seen in the context of all that the Bible has to say concerning this three-way relationship.

There is the fact that man is both the fellow-creature of other creatures and their ruler. Francis Schaeffer expressed this memorably with reference to God's as 'the infinite, personal God'. The God who reveals himself in the Bible is unique in that he is infinite-personal. By contrast, **the** pagan gods are personal, but limited; and **the** god of pantheism is unlimited, but impersonal. The Christian concept of God, which we have learned from the Bible, is absolutely unique. He is both **infinite** and personal. This has important implications for our understanding of man's relationship to nature. This is how Schaeffer expressed it: 'On the side of His infinity there is the great chasm. He creates all things and He alone is Creator. Everything else is created. Only He is Infinite and only He is the Creator; everything else is the creature and finite. Only He is independent; everything else is dependent. So man, the animal, the flower and the machine, in the biblical viewpoint, are equally separated from God, in that He created them all. On **the** side of infinity man is as separated from God as is the machine.... But **there** is another side - the Personal. Here the animal, the flower and the machine are below the chasm. On the side of God's Infinity everything else is finite and equally separated from God; but on the side of his Personality God has created man in His own image.'

This is the biblical balance which we must constantly bear in mind as we consider a Christian view of ecology. On the one hand humans share creaturehood and limitedness with all other creatures, but on the **other** hand, humans are unique - God created us in his own image.

The emphasis that we share creaturehood and limitedness with **all** other creatures is a necessary corrective to man's pride - the tendency to man-centeredness. We **cannot** have a man-centred view if we have a biblical view. God has created us, yes, but he is also the Creator and Sustainer of every other creature. He has purposes and plans for **all** his creatures, some of which may be revealed to us and which may involve us, but some of which may not. After he had created the whole universe, but before he created man, 'God saw that it was good.' The Hebrew word 'good' means both good and beautiful. Nature is good and beautiful in the eyes of God quite apart from man. So we must treat all creatures with respect for they are ultimately God's, not ours. 'The earth is the LORD's and everything in it.' (Psalm 24:1) 'The glory of the LORD fills the whole earth.' (Numbers 14:21) God owns the earth, and the earth is full of his glory. Therefore we must treat all of his creatures with care. We must seek to ensure that we treat them according to his directions not according to our own whims.

Although it is thus clear that human beings share creaturehood and limitedness with all other creatures, the Bible also teaches that our primary relationship is not with other creatures but with God. We are uniquely created in the image of God. Of particular note in the present context is the fact that, as we have seen, our being in God's image is linked closely with our dominion over creation.

Because we are made in God's image, we have been given authority over the other creatures. We are kings of creation. But nowhere is there any indication that man has a 'licence to conduct himself as the earth's worst pest'. Rather the reverse. God placed clear limitations on man's rule. For instance, man was not allowed to eat anything he liked. His diet was to be limited to plants and fruit. It is true that this limitation was later lifted after the Flood, but the point is that it was God's decision to limit or not to limit, not man's. Similarly God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden not to do as he pleased, but 'to work it and take care of it' (Genesis 2: 15) and even in it there was one tree, the fruit of which he was not allowed to eat. The point is that although God has given the earth to man (Psalm 115: 16), it is not an absolute and unconditional **gift**. The earth still remains the **LORD's**. The environment in which man moves in the Bible constantly implies that man is answerable to God. Man is God's gardener, shepherd and steward. One day we will have to give an account of how we have discharged our stewardship.

The fact remains that man's authority over nature, though a delegated authority, is an authority nonetheless. The Christian should not be embarrassed or defensive about that. After all, everyone concerned for the well-being of the earth recognises the crucial role that the human race must play. Every Green pressure group exhorts us to change our personal, social, agricultural and industrial practices for the good of the whole planet. They present programmes, strategies and policies towards that end. They take for granted man's right to do these things, to take this lead. The vital question is: What gives us this right? If we are merely one species among many, why should we arrogate to ourselves the role of being the earth's policeman? If, as some believe, dolphins and whales are better than us, should we not wait for them to do something about the ecological crisis, and meanwhile carry on doing what comes naturally to us? Or if Gaia is in ultimate control, maybe we should leave it up to her and not interfere! Of course, no rational person suggests any such thing. It is an obvious fact that man does exercise dominion over the earth. The Bible alone gives the explanation for that fact: man is created in the image of God. God has given him this right. The only question is: **How** are we exercising that right - for good or evil?

Equality

There are two aspects of the creation of man in the image of God which are important for human equality: the unity of the human race in being descended from one human pair, and the equality of individuals. One of the great instincts of the secular world of today is **the** essential equality of human

beings, regardless of colour, class, sex or religion. But what is the origin of this belief? Does it originate merely in political will? That society or the state just grants it? If that is the case, society or the state may take it away. Certain classes or kinds of humans may be classed as non-equal, or sub-human. In George Orwell's satire *Animal Farm*, all animals were equal, but some were more equal than others. Neither is there a basis for confidence in the essential equality of human beings in current scientific theory of the origins of the human race. Although genetics may point to a common descent, there is no intrinsic reason in evolutionary theory why the human race should have developed from one family line. It may have developed from several different (though similar) primate sources. There might be not one human race, but several.

In contrast to all this uncertainty, the Bible gives us a firm foundation for human equality. As Paul said to the council of the Areopagus in Athens, 'From one man he made every nation of men' (Acts 17:26). This statement was deliberately directed against the racism of the Athenians who believed they were different from (and superior to) other men in that they alone derived from the native soil of **Attica**. By contrast, we can be sure we all share the same humanity because we are all descended from Adam who was created in the image of God. There is one human race.

In addition the Bible assures us of the essential equality of human beings. By equality, I do not mean equality of gifts or abilities, physical or intellectual, which obviously vary, but equality of humanity, of worth as those made in the image of God. The insight of Robert Burns is strictly Biblical: "The rank is but the guinea stamp; The man's the gowd for a' that." In similar vein, Thomas Chalmers, the great nineteenth century preacher, philanthropist, and church leader, on laying the foundation stone of New College, gave the assurance that 'there is one equality between man and man which will be strenuously taught - the essential equality of human souls; and that in the high count and reckoning of eternity, the soul of the poorest of nature's children, the raggedest boy that runs along the pavement, is of like estimation in the eyes of heaven with that of the greatest and the noblest of our land'. These sentiments are based on passages of Scripture like James 2: 1-4, which condemn discrimination on the basis of wealth or poverty.

But this belief in equality in spite of differences in circumstances goes back to something even deeper. There is a division of the human race that is even more basic than that caused by differences of circumstance, ability or even race. There is the fundamental differentiation of the human race into male and female. Apart from the obvious differences between male and female (**Vive** la difference!), there may be differences of role and function as envisaged in the New Testament in marriage and in the church. Does any of this mean that women are inferior to men, or in some way not equal to men in their essential humanity? Absolutely not! And the reason is the image of God. The point at which humanity first existed fully as the image of God was not at the creation of the man, but on completion of the creation of the woman from the man. In other words, the creation of the single man was not the perfect expression of Godlikeness - 'It is not good for the man to be alone' (Genesis 2: 18). It was only when humanity was differentiated into male and female that the image of God was fully expressed: 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.' (Genesis 1:27)

As we noticed earlier, the unity in diversity in God ('Let us make') is reflected in the unity in diversity in the human race (male and female). This becomes even more apparent in light of the full Scriptural data that forms the basis of the doctrine of the Trinity. God exists as three persons - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - each equal in deity, though differentiated in person and relationship (the Son is eternally begotten by the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son). Similarly, the human race exists in two types of person - male and female - each equal in humanity though differentiated in person and relationship. Thus in the image of God we have a basis for both the essential humanity and equality of every human being and the validity and value of our own individual personalities. Each human being is a unique person, even as each divine Person is unique.

Each human being has their own unique contribution to make with their own unique combination of gifts.

Community

While encouraging belief in human equality and individuality, the doctrine of the image of God also directs us to the importance of community: the community of marriage in particular, but community in general as well. Being made in the image of God means that we are made for fellowship.

Although God exists as three distinct and equal Persons, those Persons exist in eternal fellowship. This is expressed most memorably in John 1: 1 - 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' The Son's being with God, being towards God, being face to face with God, speaks of this eternal community, communion or fellowship of God, and because humans are made in the image of God it means they have a need for community,

Physicists speak of an asymmetry in the origin of the universe. If there had been no asymmetry between matter and anti-matter at a crucial point following the big bang there would be no universe. If this is true, it ought not to surprise the Christian, because according to the Bible God did not create a uniform symmetrical universe. Instead it is full of unbelievable complexities and asymmetries, yet existing in harmony. This reflects the very being of God himself who exists in the ultimately mysterious complexity and asymmetry of three persons in community. And in love. God is love. And this love is not self-love. Nor is it love of the same. It is love of the other. The Father loving the Son and so on.

The image of God in humans particularly reflects this asymmetry. It is the male-female pair that most perfectly expresses the image of God. It was not good for the man to be alone. He could never express the love of God. Nor was the perfect expression a man existing face to face with another male. That would never express love for the other. The perfect expression of the image of God was the asymmetric human pair, male and female, sharing a common humanity, but not identical, each loving the other. 'We're one, but we're not the same.' (UZ) This has profound implications for sexual ethics. Creation expresses the mind of God. And the pattern of love he has laid down is not **self-**love, homosexual love or promiscuous love, but faithful heterosexual love • marriage.

It is in this context too that the submission of the wife to her husband emphasised by Paul in Ephesians 5:24 ought to be seen. The pattern given in that passage is the submission of the church to Christ. But in 1 Corinthians 11 it is the submission of Christ to the Father that is the pattern: 'the head of every man is Christ, the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God'. The eternal Son, though co-equal with the Father, willingly submitted himself to his Father's will in his role as Redeemer. It is impossible to conceive of a higher model of loving submission.

Although marriage is the highest expression of the communal aspect of the image of God, it is by no means the only one. As image-bearers of God we are by nature communal, social creatures, and we repress and sublimate that instinct at our peril. We have emphasised the unique place of marriage. However, some of us will never marry through **gift** or necessity. Does that mean that we are somehow less than human, or being disobedient? It is clear from the teaching of Paul that this is not so. Even more decisive on the question is the example of Jesus. He never married, yet he is the perfect expression of the image of God in an individual. And we see the communal aspect of the image in his taking a full part in family life, in his surrounding himself with people • men, women and children, in his choosing the Twelve to be with him and in his having close friends in Martha, Mary, Lazarus, Peter, James and John. The perfect expression of humanity is not the 'independent' modern person, nor the reclusive religious person, but the Christ who loved fellowship and friendship with people.

Consequences for mission

The Lord Jesus commissioned us to preach the gospel to the whole world, to make disciples of all nations, to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. We may know the gospel which we are called to communicate, but do we know those to whom we are told to communicate it? And does it matter? The traditional evangelical position is that it is sinners we have to evangelise, and that is true. But it is not all that can be said about them and must be said about them. If we emphasise only the truth of sin, we are being unbalanced in Scriptural terms. We are also in danger, at a practical level, of seriously damaging the evangelistic enterprise. Those with whom Christians are seeking to communicate may feel that they **cannot** relate to the Christian message, and Christians who are attempting to communicate may feel that they have nothing in common with non-Christians - their outlook and their attitude to sin and to God are totally different. We may even begin to feel that we are living in two wholly different worlds and there is no point of contact. According to the Bible this is not so. With its emphasis on creation, general revelation and the image of God in particular, the Bible stresses we live in the same world, we have numerous points of contact. Here we must concentrate on the image of God, but man being in the image of God is in itself a revelation. This is what is meant in Romans 1: 19-20: 'what may be known about God is plain to (lit. in) them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.' Truth about God is revealed in man as well as to man. He is the handiwork of the Creator. He shows the power, wisdom and intelligence of God as a painting shows the greatness of the artist. But more than that - as the image of God, he reflects God as a self-portrait reflects the artist - he is like God.

This has several implications for the concept of a point of contact, for the whole area of communicating the gospel, and for ministry in general. First, the Christian is given confidence as he speaks to the non-Christian. He is not speaking to an alien from an alien universe (although that's what it often seems like!) He is speaking to a fellow human being who shares a human nature that reflects God's nature. What does this mean in practice? It means that as we communicate in words - the words of Scripture, or the words we use to explain Scripture - we are speaking to a being who has been given the gift of communication in words. God is the great Communicator and he has made man a communicator too - communicating rational thought in words. We know that through the ministry of the Holy Spirit there can be a real communication and a real understanding of what we say.

Second, there are real points of contact. Because the man we are addressing is the image of God, we have bridges to him in spite of the great chasms that may exist between us because of his world view or his lifestyle. He has unsatisfied longings. This was one of the points of contact that Jesus had with the Samaritan Woman (John 4). Jesus speaks of 'living water', and says that 'whoever drinks the water I will give him will never thirst.' (John 4: 14) In different ways we're all longing, like Abraham, for a better country. There's a restless, dissatisfied desire at the core of everyone of us - a longing for something we can't quite put our finger on. It may be expressed in all sorts of ways. We may think we're longing for beauty, material things, love, knowledge, power and so on, but when we get these things, we find they don't satisfy. And yet still there is the desire, the longing for something intangible, inexpressible. Sometimes the very longing itself is a stab **of joy** - maybe the momentary glimpse of something tantalisingly out of reach. Why? The explanation is that we are made in the image of God. We are made for fellowship **with** God. We are made to long for beauty and light and love. In **the** memorable words of Augustine, 'You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you', or as Aquinas put it 'The end of our desires is God'.

Another bridge is morality itself. Jesus arouses the Samaritan woman's moral sense or conscience by mentioning her husband. She has been married five times and is now living with another man. It is obvious from the terse way she responds and the way she quickly changes the subject that he has

touched a sensitive area. She has a guilty conscience. But we know that every person we address has a conscience, and they have a conscience because they are made in God's image. They have a sense of right and wrong. It will not be accurate. It will need adjustment. But it is the fact that they have it that shows they are made in God's image.

Yet another bridge is the fact that people 'hold the truth in unrighteousness' (AV), as Paul puts it in Romans 1: 18. This is translated in the NIV as 'suppress the truth by their wickedness' and that is part of what Paul is saying too. But there is also here a nuance of knowing the truth (albeit held down or suppressed) because Paul goes on to say 'since what may be known about God is plain to them'. This means that human beings everywhere, in all cultures and all conditions will show evidence of knowing the truth. We see a striking example of this, and of Paul's use of it, in his address to the Council of the Areopagus in Athens in Acts 17. He knows his Greek literature and he is observant. He highlights their altar to the unknown God - an admission of their consciousness of the failure of their own religious beliefs and of their agnosticism or ignorance of the true God. Even more obvious is his quotation from the Greek poets Epimenides and **Aratus**: "'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'" (Acts 17:28) Now, these words in their original contexts refer to Zeus as the supreme being of Greek philosophy, and Paul by quoting them is not endorsing the world view from which they come. But he is demonstrating that they knew the truth, or at least some aspects of the truth and he is using this as a point of contact. In the same way we may find truth in the literature, music, art and philosophy of our day, which will provide us with a point of contact with people.

A third way in which the reality of the image of God gives us a point of contact is that it is evidence of God. Paul stresses this both in his letter to the Romans and in Athens. In Romans 1, after saying that what may be known about God is shown in humans, he states that God's invisible qualities are understood **from** what he made. Now, part of what he made was man, and man in particular reflects God because he is made in God's image, so man by his very existence is evidence of God's existence and his nature. In Athens he applies this thinking in the evangelistic context of addressing his pagan audience. He says, 'Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone - an image made by man's design and skill.' (Acts 17:29) If we are like God and he is our Creator, then he must be personal like us, only greater by far. This is why the Biblical writers always emphasise the foolishness of idolatry: the idolater is worshipping what is less than himself (whether the idols themselves or the natural forces thought to be behind them), while he himself in his own being bears evidence of his Creator, Someone incomparably greater. Nothing rises higher than its source, and human beings are obviously higher than the material or animal worlds. We are observing and manipulating and cataloguing the universe, and not vice versa. In our creativity, our communication, our moral conscience, our love and our longings we point to Someone greater than ourselves. In the final analysis we either came from a bang (the Big Bang after all is just a bang!) or from God. As we have already seen, a naturalistic Bang leaves no room for the validity of human reasoning, nor does it give any satisfying explanation of human personality. By contrast the existence of the unlimited personal God who created us in his own image does.

A fourth implication of the image of God is the worth and dignity of the individual human being. This is something that is relevant to every area of our mission and ministry. We must never forget that those to whom we are ministering and those to whom we are sent with the message of God's grace are made in the image of God. No matter how way-out or depraved or disabled or down and out people may be, they still have a worth and a dignity as those who are the image of God. Jesus' story of the lost coin in Luke 15 illustrates this. The coin was really lost. It may have been covered in grime and dust. It may have been scratched and chipped. But it still retained its intrinsic value. It was no use to the woman it belonged to as long as it was lost, but it still did not cease to be a coin. All this is true with regard to the lost sheep and the prodigal son also, but it is most obvious in the case of the lost coin. This truth is illustrated in a remarkable way in an old poem I've come across called *The Old Violin*:

'Twas battered and scarred and the auctioneer
 thought it scarcely worth his while
 To waste much time on the old violin
 as he held it up with a smile.

“What am I bidden, good folks?” he cried;
 “Who’ll start the bidding for me?
 A dollar? A dollar? Who’ll make it two?
 Two dollars! Who’ll make it three?”

Three dollars once! Three dollars twice!
 And going? And gone? But no!
 From the room far back came a grey-haired man,
 and he picked it up with the bow.

And wiping the dust from the old violin
 and tightening up all the strings
 He played a melody pure and sweet ▪
 as sweet as an angel sings.

The music ceased and the auctioneer
 in a voice that was quiet and low
 Said, “What am I bid for the old violin?”
 as he held it up with the bow.

“A thousand dollars? Who’ll make it two?
 Two thousand! Who’ll make it three?
 Three thousand once! Three thousand twice!
 And going, and gone!” said he.

And the people cheered, but some of them said,
 “We do not quite understand
 What changed its worth.” **Swift** came the reply,
 “It was the touch of the master’s hand.”

And there’s many a man with his life out of tune,
 that’s battered and tom with sin
 Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd,
 much like the old violin.

A mess of pottage, a glass of wine,
 a game and he travels on;
 He’s going once, he’s going twice,
 he’s going and almost gone.

But the Master comes, and **the** foolish crowd
 never can quite understand
 The worth of a soul or the change that is wrought
 by the touch of the Master’s hand.

In all our mission and ministry we must have the intrinsic worth of those we are serving always before our minds. We see this characteristic in the Apostle Paul. In Philippi, he and Silas were

beaten and imprisoned, but an earthquake liberated them. However, the prison warder thought they had escaped and was going to commit suicide. Paul was not indifferent to the plight of a man who had cruelly treated them. Nor did he launch right into an exhortation to faith in Christ. The first words of grace this man heard were, 'Don't harm **yourself!**' And they are the **first** words so many people need to hear today. We need to say to them, 'You may feel worthless and your life is not worth living, but you are precious to God and he has a message for you. Don't harm yourself!' This too is the outworking of the doctrine of the image of God and perhaps sums up better than anything else the relevance of the image of God to ethics and mission.

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