

This article is based on a paper given at the John Owen Centre in April 2005 at a seminar entitled 'Style or Substance? 21st Century Holiness'.

Introduction

Samuel was impressed by the first of Jesse's sons (1 Sam. 16:1-7). Eliab's appearance made him a good candidate for the kingship. In fact, the implication is that he was rather similar to the young Saul who was also impressive looking, standing head and shoulders above other men. Maybe that resemblance influenced Samuel in some way. This is what kings look like. But as Samuel thought 'This is the one' the Lord spoke clearly to him and gave what is surely the definitive word on the relative merits of style and substance: 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart' (1 Sam.16:7).¹ 'Man looks on the outward appearance'. Not only in the 21st century but in 1050 B.C. Not only superficial worldlings or teenagers, but the godly elder-statesman of Israel. The punchline however is that the man God did choose was impressive looking; David was 'ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome'. Ugly people cannot claim the spiritual high-ground; the point is that appearance simply does not matter. Now what does this begin to say to us? The pursuit of holiness is always a struggle. Today we are part of a society greatly given to 'images' and to style, too often at the expense of substance. I want to look at the concept of the 'image of God' to help us distinguish what we are from what we appear to be. What is this image? What does its loss mean? How may it be recovered? How can people be led to reality and be less entranced by style. How, in other words, can 'the image' deliver us from images?

The Image of God

Genesis 1:26,27 states that God made man, male and female, 'in our image, after our likeness'. There is no sound basis for a clear distinction between 'image' (*tselem*) and 'likeness' (*demuth*) [see the use of 'likeness' alone in Gen 5:1, the use of both words again in 5:3, and 'image' alone in 9:6] but the overall meaning is that man (humanity) is made to *resemble* God and to *represent* God. God is saying 'Let us make man to be like us and to represent us'. The word 'image' is used of Nebuchadnezzar's statue in Daniel 3 – an image to represent the king, to remind the people to whom they owed allegiance. Two things become clear early in Genesis with regard to this image: (1) it is transferable through natural generation (5:3); Adam's son is in 'his' image which is presumably the image of God passed on – there is no clear suggestion that this is only his 'sinful' image. (2) The image is sacrosanct: (a) it is not to be murdered 'for God made man in his own image'(9:6) and (b) no other, competing image is to be made - the second commandment which, though it clearly has primary reference to protecting the spirituality of God in the eyes of the Israelites, also preserves the uniqueness of man as the only divinely authorised image of God (Deut 4:16; 27:15). Only man bears the Maker's trademark and it is not to be pirated. Man is in the image of God; it is not just something he has. He 'images' God. This is 'the heart of Christian anthropology';² it is what makes us human.

But what is the 'content' of this image? Various answers have been given. (1) Some look at what man does – a **functional** approach, in particular the restriction of the image to the exercise of dominion. But is this really 'the image' or is it 'a bestowment upon the image bearer'? Man's lordship is surely not identical with the image but an implication of it. (2) Others look at man's capacity for relationships - the **relational** view (eg Barth). We are analogous to God in our relationships but not in our being. A consequence of this is that nothing of the image is lost at the Fall because we are still capable of relationships. But this relational view seems too

restrictive. (3) A third approach is the **substantive** view - to see some particular quality of man – most commonly intellect or reason, or spirituality, as comprising the image. This was the approach of eg Irenaeus and Aquinas. No doubt something can be learned from each of these approaches though each is unsatisfactory in itself.

The Reformed approach has been to adopt what Raymond calls the ‘restoration hermeneutic’.³ This looks at that to which man is restored in Christ eg in Ephesians 4:23,24: the new man is created ‘after the likeness of God (according to God) in true righteousness and holiness’; and Colossians 3:10, where the new man is ‘being renewed in knowledge after the image (*kat’ eikwna*) of its creator’. Righteousness (moral rectitude, perfect conformity to God’s will), holiness (true piety towards God) and true knowledge of God are renewed in Christ. Is it not justified therefore to see in these what was given at creation? Indeed not just given at creation but also – since it needs to be renewed - lost at the Fall?

Here we need to make the important distinction between the image in the ‘broad’ sense and in the ‘narrow’ sense. The Bible is clear that even after the Fall man is in the image of God: Gen 9:6; James 3:9. Theologians have used various terms to describe what was retained and what was lost (respectively broad/narrow [Berkhof, Bavinck]; formal/material [Brunner]; structural/ functional [Hoekema]). These are not two images, but one image with two aspects. What theologians are trying to grapple with is the fact that man lost something at the Fall but is still thereafter in God’s image. The Reformed ‘restoration hermeneutic’ takes the passages in Ephesians and Colossians and says ‘this is what is renewed, therefore this is what was lost.’ The image of God truly so called, ‘the strict and proper acceptation of the phrase’ in Thornwell’s words,⁴ is ‘holiness’, original righteousness or what Edwards calls ‘moral excellency’.⁵ This was lost at the Fall but man is still in God’s image in a broader sense.

What is this ‘broader’ sense? It is the ‘entire endowment of gifts and capacities that enable man to function as he should in his various relationships and callings’ (Hoekema).⁶ These include his spiritual capacity, moral

nature, rational powers, conscience, the ability to choose, creativity, the ability to rule, the capacity for relationships, emotions, communication, love. The exercise of dominion may rightly be said to be foremost among these capacities as it is specifically mentioned in Genesis 1 and expounded in Psalm 8. This ‘broader’ image remains, though scarred, shattered and terribly deformed by the Fall. But the narrow image has been lost altogether. Now how are we to understand this? Was holiness a ‘faculty’ that was lost? As a man might lose a kidney or the power of reason? No; at the Fall, no faculty of man was lost. That is the weakness of the Roman Catholic position – original righteousness as a ‘super-added gift’ which enables man to keep his unstable nature in check, but which was lost at the Fall. The narrow image – holiness - is in fact not so much a faculty or capacity but the way in which man in perfection related to God. According to Jonathan Edwards, not only did man possess those *faculties* of understanding and will wherein he resembles the Godhead (the *natural* [broad] image) but his exercise of those faculties in humble love and obedience was a mirror of the divine glory (the *spiritual* [narrow] image)⁷. Man can only be what God intends him to be if he is holy, that is, if he is exercising all the capacities that God has given him in perfect conformity to the will of God. The narrow image, which Hoekema calls ‘functional’, as it consists in the *use* that is made of the faculties of man in the broader image, is therefore lost when man disobeys. The narrow image is therefore ‘dynamic’ as it is not a faculty but the maintaining of a relationship through perfect obedience, exercising that perfect propensity for perfect obedience that Adam enjoyed – his original righteousness. Adapting Hoekema’s language, the image of God is both structural (what man is, the broader image) and functional (man living obediently in relation to God, the narrow image). As a bird was meant to fly, even if the wings are in perfect condition, without flight the bird is not fulfilling its purpose. The narrow image is not just the capacity for a right relationship with God – sinners retain that – but the maintaining and enjoyment of that right relationship. This dynamic nature of the image has not perhaps been

emphasized enough though it is by no means a new idea. Man must live a life of perfect love to God, not just have all his faculties.

Thornwell and Calvin alike assert the *universality* of the image in human life. Thornwell says of Adam: ‘The law was the bent of his being...with reason enlightened in the spiritual knowledge of God...with a will prone to obey the dictates of reason thus enlightened and therefore in accordance with the spirit of divine law. He knew his relations to God, his relations to his wife...and his relations to the world; and knew them with that spiritual apprehension which converted his knowledge into one continued act of religion’.⁸ Calvin writes: ‘the likeness of God extends to the whole excellence by which man’s nature towers over all the kinds of living creatures. Accordingly, the integrity with which Adam was endowed is expressed by this word [likeness/image], when he had full possession of right understanding, when he had his affections kept within the bounds of reason, all his senses tempered in right order, and he truly referred his excellence to the exceptional gifts bestowed upon him by his maker’.⁹ (Calvin often spoke as if the image in totality was lost at the Fall but he also makes it clear elsewhere that he regarded the image as continuing).

Man was therefore made to resemble and to represent God in every area of life; to love and worship God in all of life, in all of his being, body, mind, emotions, will. This can be summarised as living in conformity with the will of God in a threefold relation: to God, neighbour and the created order. When he fell, all of his being and all of life was affected. ‘Depravity’ was ‘total’. What is to be restored must be in each relation.

What happened at the Fall?

(1) The Nature of the Fall

Man disobeyed God. His continued blessedness and role in creation was made dependent on obedience to a command. He had all the capacities required to obey. Why he did not is beyond us to fathom. What he lost was ‘righteousness’. As a result we are a race dead in sin. But what was at the heart of losing the heart of the image

of God? Genesis 3 points to the sowing of mistrust in God; the idea that he could not be trusted, that he was not loving. Or that love was the ‘appearance’ God was projecting, but not his reality. The conviction of God’s love is the essential precondition to maintaining the image. Once that is lost, trust is lost and disobedience follows almost automatically. Faith is the presupposition of obedience.

It is to the ensuing disobedience itself, however, that the Bible traces sin. The very heart of our identity is obedience to our Creator. We are essentially moral beings. What do we mean by ‘moral’? That God is a ‘moral’ being – he is holy and requires above all else from his creatures conformity with his character; as Creator he justifiably issues commands; we are to obey; there is absolute right and absolute wrong; disobedience is sin; we are accountable; faith entails obedience; love for God will be shown by obedience; persistent and habitual disobedience is evidence of a heart still in fundamental rebellion; there is a judgement to come; God is our judge. This is what it is to live as moral beings.

David Wells¹⁰ and Dick Keyes¹¹ make the point that we have lost public discourse in terms of morals and replaced it with discourse framed in psychological and emotional terms. ‘...the older quest for spiritual authenticity, for godliness, has often been replaced by newer quests for psychological wholeness’ says Wells. This has permeated the church. Feeling good has become more important than meeting God. Creating a relaxed and amusing atmosphere is more important than the serious business of self-examination in the light of God’s Word.

The tragedy is, that without a moral discourse, we lose the context in which to find our humanity. As Wells points out, there are consequences:

(a) character takes second place to personality. Words such as honour, reputation, morals, integrity, manly, good are (unless they’re interpreted psychologically) replaced by words like stunning, creative, charisma, forceful, fascinating, magnetic, to describe desirable qualities. These are non-moral. So attention turns from being something in relation to timeless values or virtues to

being appealing to others. What we actually are is less important than our performance before a public that mostly (we hope) judges the exterior – or, at least, the image we project.

(b) guilt is replaced, if at all, by something like shame, not an objective reality but a feeling, not a reflex of our relationship with God but of our relationship with others – social, not moral.

(c) virtues have been replaced by personal values which are little more than preferences.

The overall picture is of a society identifying itself by images because what we are seen to be by people is everything. Like Saul we fear the people, unlike David, we do not fear God.

2. Consequences of the Fall

Man is a ruined temple, broken down and decayed, but sufficient remains to hint at the splendour that once was. The effects of the Fall are that man now uses all his capacities (the broader image) in sinful and disobedient ways. All he has and does is against his Creator. What is the significance of the image of God now?

(a) **Idolatry.** The heart of man, as Calvin describes it, is a veritable idol factory. Cut off from God we desperately search for something else to worship. We cannot escape what we are, even in our sinful state; we are worshippers. But neither, Scripture would suggest, can we escape being in the image of our god. ‘Their idols are silver and gold, the work of man’s hands....Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them’. (Psalm 115:4,8). What we worship, that will we come to resemble; the worshipper of money, success or power suffers a diminished humanity. We may add that what we worship we also represent to the world. We become the ambassadors of our gods. The great god is self as the hero of Camus’ novel *The Fall* discovers: ‘I am not hard-hearted; far from it – full of pity on the contrary and with a ready tear to boot. Only, my emotional impulses always turn toward me, my feelings of pity concern me. It is not true after all, that I have never loved. I conceived at least one great love in my life, of which I was always the object’.¹² What was meant to be the image has become

god. And so we make god in our image and remake ourselves in the image of our god. Who can deliver us from this circle?

(b) **Identity.** ‘Made in God’s image’ is the Bible’s answer to the question ‘Who am I?’ Having lost the image we have lost the knowledge of who we are. Is not this why ‘style’ is so important? We are radically lost, our true ‘substance’ lost or obscured. David Wells writes: ‘A century ago, the answer to the question, “Who are we?” would have been one thing, but today it is something entirely different. “I am my genes” some say, as they surrender themselves to biological fate. “I am my past”, “I am my self-image”, “I am my gender”, I am what I have”, “I am what I do”, “I am whom I know”, “I am my sexual orientation”, say others who think that there are other kinds of fate or that identity is either something we do or something we can construct. And what we once would have said – “I am one who is made in the image of God” – does not translate into the language of modernity’.¹³

People need to know who they are but without God there is no adequate sense of identity that can do justice to what they are. Identity is therefore located in something we have, wear or do; something we want to be seen to be; some projection - be it ‘bad’ or ‘good’ in conventional moral terms matters not provided it gives me an answer to the question ‘who am I?’ Moreover it is important that *other people* see me in this way. I must project an image; what others think of me is all important. ‘People’ rather than God are the audience for my life’s performance. Appearance – style - becomes everything – because after all, man looks on the outward appearance. So what if God looks on the heart? He does not exist; even if he does, what has he got to do with me? Image is everything. But that I am an image means nothing.

What’s more – don’t you dare attack my sexual orientation, or my preferences, or my culture or what I do or the way I dress. Attack these and you attack what and who I am. I can no longer be distinguished from my constituent parts, my components, my faculties, gifts, capacities and accoutrements. For, lacking as I do a real

sense of identity apart from or deeper than these, these are me. Tolerance of me while criticising my behaviour, choices and morals is, to me, incomprehensible. I am those things. Reject my image and you reject me. I really am that frail. The outward appearance is who I am and if you cannot accept this, you do not accept me. But at the same time I long— and demand – to be accepted for what I am - warts and all.

(c). **Ignorance.** We do not know ourselves. With apologies to John Calvin in the opening paragraph of his *Institutes*, ‘Nearly all the folly we possess, that is to say, true and sound folly, consist of two parts: the ignorance of God, and of ourselves. But, while joined by many bonds, which one precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to discern’. We are ignorant of ourselves; thinking we are wise, we become fools. We have exchanged the Truth for a lie (Psalm 106:20; Rom 1:25). True knowledge is part of the renewed image. But the knowledge of God is also the way to the renewing of the image.

(d) **Implications in the New Testament.** Explicit references to creation in the image of God are not common in the New Testament but are significant.

- James 3:9 – it is wrong to curse people who are made in God’s likeness [*kath homoiousin theou*] because to bless God and curse what he has made is the height of inconsistency because the creature evidently bears some of the glory of the Creator. The clear implication is that even fallen man bears something of the glory of God because he is in God’s image and is therefore to be treated with profound respect. Listen again to Calvin.¹⁴ ‘We are not to consider what men merit of themselves but to look upon the image of God in all men, to which we owe all honour and love. Therefore whatever man you meet who needs your aid, you have no reason to refuse to help him...Say “he is contemptible and worthless” but the Lord shows him to be one to whom he has deigned to give the beauty of his image...”’.

- In his discussion of head-coverings in 1 Cor 11:7 Paul calls man the image [*eikwn*] and glory of God, and woman the glory of man. The implication appears to be that man reflects God in his lordship and in this way is the ‘glory’ of God in a way that the woman is not. Both

are equally in God’s image but man is God’s glory in the sense that he reflects God’s dominion and authority in a way that the woman does not. She meanwhile is the glory of man (that is, reflecting him by her existence and role in creation). Again, the ‘image’ has implications for Christians in that it upholds the order of creation.

- In Acts 17:28f the word ‘image’ is not used but the idea of affinity to God is clear; we are offspring of the one God. The implication of verse 29 is that if we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the God who ‘fathered’ us can be represented by inanimate objects, ‘an image formed [*xaragmati*] by the art and imagination of man’. The concept of being God’s offspring is used in an evangelistic context to remind people of their inherent relationship to God as creatures, and as a rebuke for worshipping idols. In context, its main purpose for Paul is as a rebuke. What we were (and are) stands over us as a rebuke to what we have become: idolaters. We should be able to infer something about God from what we are, but instead we make images of him from metal and stone.

Restoring the Image

Most important in the NT usage of ‘image’ is the theme of renewal of the image. The ‘restoration hermeneutic’ relies on the renewal of the image to infer the content and meaning of the original image. This tacitly assumes that we can only see what humanity should be in Christ. The image is renewed in Christ. He is the ‘image [*eikwn*] of the invisible God’(Col. 1:15; also 2 Cor 4:4). According to Hebrews 11:1-3 he is the ‘radiance’ of God’s glory, the ‘express image’ or ‘exact representation’ [*xarakteer* – stamp, impress, as of coin or seal] of his nature, his very being [*hupostasews*]. The ‘exact impress’ is that which corresponds to the original so that thereby the person is known. ‘As Image, Christ is the visible representation and manifestation of the invisible God, the objective expression of the divine nature, the face of God turned as it were toward the world, the exact likeness of the Father in all things except being the Father. Thus we receive “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”.’¹⁵

'What God essentially is, Christ makes manifest'.¹⁶

Christ is eternally the image of God; he can never be not the image. He is the image of God in his pre-incarnate state (Heb 1:3) also in the incarnation (Col 1:15; 2 Cor 4:4).

He is the image inherently; we, derivatively. He *is* the Image of God; we are created in that image. In the incarnation we see striking evidence of man being made in God's image, for how could God have revealed himself fully in his Son if there were not correspondence between our nature and God's? He is the 'facsimile' of God and also the 'prototype' of humanity within the Godhead.¹⁷

In Christ being fully man and fully God we have the answer to Calvin's conundrum: does the knowledge of God or of ourselves come first? In Christ we find both the knowledge of God and of ourselves, true God and true humanity.

Christ was God and fully obeyed God. There was never any possibility of his sinning and no possibility therefore of there being any breach between the narrow and broad image. His work is called, in Romans 5:18, his 'one act of righteousness' (*benos dikaiumatos*). He maintained throughout his life but especially and characteristically at the cross his love for and obedience to God and did so from the heart (John 4:34; 8:29; 17:4; Heb 10:7). Thus a perfect image of God was maintained and a perfect righteousness wrought to be 'reckoned' through faith to those who believe. The righteousness of God as man, that is the righteousness of Christ, should perhaps be seen not as a substance or a faculty or even a quality but as an act, the act of obedience which Adam failed to offer God, an act that was human but of infinite value because also divine. It is perfect love which is not static but dynamic, active, the expression of authentic faith or trust. By that act all who believe are constituted righteous, by imputation, by federal relation to Christ – made what they are not by nature.

In Christ's being the image of God we see also the goal of regeneration: to be conformed to his likeness (Rom 8:29) and to be like him - 'just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven' (1 Cor 15:49; cf 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 John 3:2). In

Christ we are renewed in righteousness, holiness and knowledge. The image of God in this sense is dynamic not static. To 'image' God is to live a life of love, imitating God. The goal of redemption is to be like God.

What then should the church do?

1. Remember that (a) some appearance/image is inevitable as the genuine expression of reality; not artificially projected but the outshining of our being and behaviour. If I appear competent/wise/loving/generous it should be because I really am, not because I am 'putting it on', but (b) 'image' is wrong when created consciously to obscure reality or project an alternative or even contrary and therefore deceptive 'persona'. This is the essence of hypocrisy.
2. Image and reality will never wholly coincide in this life; perfect integrity is possible only in heaven.
3. Christians should be able to 'dare to be sinners' with each other, acknowledging what we are though not glorying in it, and not feeling the need to project perfectionist images. We fear God not man. Our attitude should be 'I do not fear your condemnation because although I am not perfect I am right with God.' We do not glory in our sins but we know that what counts is that the blood of Jesus has cleansed us from them all.
4. Be careful to try not to project or impose any images in preaching and church life. Looking at your life or church, and listening to your sermons, what would people think 'justifies'? Even if we preach the gospel of justification through faith by grace alone, what are people hearing and seeing? Are we pressurising people to conform on inessentials? Dr. Lloyd-Jones tells a story of a man who was converted. He had a big 'handlebar' moustache. One day the Doctor was indignant to see that this man's moustache had gone. He thought some busy-body Christian had been telling him that 'Christians do not have moustaches like that'. That was not the way of sanctification. Francis Schaeffer used to say, 'You cannot be the Holy Spirit for someone else'. What unrealistic images do we project and what unbiblical standards do we impose? Preachers in particular may do so unwittingly – by their style more than by their 'substance'.

5. Preach God. The only way for the image to be restored is by the knowledge of God in Christ.

(a) Be convinced and convince the people of the seriousness of preaching and listening.

(b) Present God as the 'audience' for our lives. Inculcate a true fear of God, a reverent awe of God as the one who knows all, sees all and will judge all; the one who sees the heart. 'Fear him, ye saints, and you will then / Have nothing else to fear'. Integrity begins with finding our identity before God.

(c) Preach the love of God. A God to whom people are attracted. Love is the perfect expression of the image and it is God's love that calls it forth.

(d) Preach the moral God, the God of absolute standards, of holiness, law and justice. The gospel can only be understood in the moral context of human existence. Remember Paul in Athens – Acts 17:30,31 – preaching to pagans, he concludes with a call to repentance based on the coming judgement.

(e) Preach Christ and not yourselves, 2 Cor. 4:4,5.

(f) Remember that in all preaching and leading of worship, style as well as substance is important. We need what someone called both a 'divine reverence' and a 'human freshness'. We do not encourage reverence by being inhumanly sombre; nor a godly joy by being jocular and light-hearted.

6. In sharing God's image with all humanity we have the best possible 'point of contact' with unbelievers. In Acts 17:22-3, 27-9 Paul makes use of 'points of contact' in creation and Fall (man's religious nature, practices and ignorance and our being made in God's image) as he confronts the Athenians with the (redemptive) truth of God. Surely no cultural differences can be as great as the similarities between human beings who share all that is contained in the divine image and the plight we share as sinners ignorant of the living God?

Some questions for discussion.

1. In what ways is 'projecting an image' inevitable? Would you draw any distinctions between style, appearance and image?

2. What are some of the consequences of the prevalence of images over reality in our relationships with other people?

3. Do Christians project images of the Christian life which are not realistic? How? In what ways may these be damaging?

4. How does 'the fear of the Lord' in everyday life eliminate hypocrisy and bring about integrity?

5. How may we promote the recovery of a moral framework for thought and life?

References

1. Bible quotations are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.
2. A.A.Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, (Eerdmans 1986) p 66.
3. Robert Reymond in *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nelson, 1998), p 428.
4. J.H.Thornwell, *Collected Writings*, (Banner of Truth 1974) Vol 1, p236.
5. Jonathan Edwards, *On the Freedom of the Will*, Pt I, SecV.
6. Hoekema, p 70-71.
7. Edwards, Part. I, Sect IV,V.
8. Thornwell, p 237-38.
9. Institutes I.xiv.3. (Ford Lewis Battles translation).
10. *Losing our Virtue*, (IVP, Leicester 1998) p 16.
11. Two essays on 'Image and Reality in Society' in *What in the World is Real?* (Communication Institute, 1982).
12. Quoted from *Worship by the Book* ed. D.A.Carson, (Zondervan, 2002), p 240.
13. Wells, p 13.
14. Insts. III.vii.6.
15. International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia on *Image of God*.
16. F.F.Bruce, cited in the ISBE.
17. But to say with Barth that humanity finds its original nature only in Christ and not in Adam is to go too far because Adam is called the first man, Christ the Second man; Christ takes on human nature in the incarnation (Phil 2:7; Heb 2:14,17).