

MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE

God made human beings in his image, to be like him (Gn 1:26-27). God has no body, so the likeness to God does not simply have reference to physical life, or soul, though the breath of life in human beings came from God (Gn 2:7). It must refer to the spiritual nature of human beings. This likeness to God was what the Devil attacked when he suggested to Eve, 'You will be like God, knowing good and evil.' That was a lie, not because God knows good, but because he has no knowledge of evil (meaning experience of evil). Eve should have replied, 'We are like God. God made us like him, in his image.'

It is clear that the image of God was spoiled by the fall. As Paul points out, the two major calamities for human beings are sin and death (Rm 5:12-21). It is unthinkable that the likeness of God could include sin and death, or all the futility that came in consequence of them (Rm 8:22-26). Genesis 5:1 says, 'When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God.' Several verses later we are told that Adam had a son in his own likeness, in his own image (Gn 5:3). His son was like his parents, who were now sinful and subject to death.

Several verses in Paul's letters give us the best clue to what the image of God entails. Paul refers to the renewal that is brought about in baptism, the source of new life. He says, 'Put on the new man, which has been created according to God in true righteousness and holiness' (Eph 4:24), and 'You have put on the new man, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of him who created him' (Col 3:10). When Paul speaks of baptism he speaks of 'newness of life' (Rm 6:4). His word for 'life' is not the word for physical life, or soul, but the word for spiritual and eternal life, in which the new walk with God has begun. So essentially the image of God is being righteous and holy, and knowing God. That implies much more: having communion with God, and being blissful and happy. Obviously, this renewal has already partly begun in baptism, and much is still to be realised in the life to come. The renewed image of God is set in restored spiritual and eternal life.

When Paul talks about putting on the new 'man', the contrast between Adam and Jesus Christ is at the forefront. There is no new 'man' apart from Christ. So we cannot speak of the renewed image of God and likeness to God without taking up the important truth that the incarnate Jesus Christ is 'the exact representation of the Father's being' (Hb 1:3), and 'the image of the invisible God' (Col 1:15). We cannot speak of the restoration of God without that wonderful theme of 'recapitulation'. The human portrait was ruined almost beyond recognition in Adam, so Jesus Christ became the subject for the painting of true man to be re-done completely. He set things right that went wrong in Adam. He who was the firstborn in the first creation is the firstborn also of redemption (Col 1:15-18) through his victory over sin and death in the resurrection.

God's gracious purpose was that those whom he foreknew should be conformed to the image of his Son (R 8:29). We have already been joined to his death, burial, and resurrection, and we shall be linked to him also in his glorious ascension and session at the right hand of God. Our mortal bodies will be like his glorified body after his resurrection (Plp 3:21). In every area of nature sons of a father are like their father. Though there is much that lies beyond our wildest dreams about the life to come, we are to content ourselves for the present with the knowledge that we are already children of God. We have been born again, born of God. And when God's Son appears, we shall be like him (1 Jn 3:2).

One of the special roles that mankind had in God's first creation was dominion over the rest of the creation (Gn 1:26-27). Being like God entailed having control, under God, over the rest of God's creatures. This dominion was significantly lost in the fall, too (Hb 2:8). All kinds of forces buffet him in this hostile, sinful world. But Psalm 8, which speaks of everything put under man's feet, has been fulfilled in Jesus, the true Son of man. By experiencing death himself he brings many sons to glory. In Him man is on the throne with God (Hb 2:5-12). Believers who have died with Christ and endure with Him will live with Him and reign with Him (2 Tm 2:10-12).

Human beings were originally made in God's image. They were redeemed to recapitulate that likeness to God. These factors should determine our attitude to all human beings. If a piece of cloth has had the honour of being painted as our country's flag, we don't use that flag for demeaning purposes even when it is worn out. A drunken derelict demands our respect inasmuch as he is a member of the humanity that was made in the image and likeness of God. Physical human life is distinct from plant and animal life by virtue of its creation at the beginning in God's image and likeness. The worst criminal demands our respect also insofar as the Son of God's work of redemption has placed the restoration of God's image and newness of life within his reach, to be received through repentance, re-birth, and faith in God's Son. All that concerned Christians do in the area of life-issues in particular, in combating the awful evils of abortion and euthanasia, should be motivated by respect for God's original creation and God's purpose to make it conformable to him again through his Son, who, as God

and perfect man, is himself the image of God.