

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWS

THE IMAGE OF GOD IN MAN

By Rev. Jos. Hamilton.

Genesis 1:27: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."

I do not think we have realized as we ought that we are made in the image of God. But it is a great fact. We have it here in the first chapter of Genesis. "God created man in his own image." Then it is repeated. "In the image of God created he him." What a wonderful heritage it is, to be made in the image of God. What a pity it is that we should ever lose that image, in whole or in part, by sin.

I suppose that one reason why the great fact of the divine image in man is not more pondered and appreciated is, that there is so much that is figurative in the account of creation we have in the Bible. There is certainly a great deal that is figurative; we really do not know how much; we cannot always distinguish between fact and figure.

A Sublime Reality.

I remember very well the day I first saw Mount Tacoma. I was not thinking of it at all. I was on the train. Suddenly my attention was arrested by a hard, white appearance in the clouds. It seemed almost too white and too hard to be a cloud. Otherwise, it seemed a cloud amongst other dark clouds. So I kept watching it, till at length it was disentangled from the surrounding clouds, and stood out a veritable mountain, the higher part covered with white, glistening snow. So it is, I think, with some parts of revelation, especially the history of creation, and the Apocalypse of St. John. We are not sure what is mountain and what is cloud. Perhaps we shall know some day. Meantime, I think it is wise, generally speaking, to take the record just as it stands. When we actually see, we shall not be disappointed. The fact may far surpass the description; but will be along the same line; we shall realize that the half has not been told.

But whatever of figure there may be in the history of creation, there is certainly no figure here. Man was created in the image of God. There is no room for figure in that statement. There may be something in it obscure; but certainly there is nothing figurative. What it really means is well worth pondering.

You will observe that man was created male and female; and this statement is brought into close connection with the one that asserts that man was created in the divine image. In fact, both statements are in the one sentence. I take it that the male and the female are united in containing the image of God. Some of the qualities of God preponderate more in the male; some more in the female; both together, they contain something of the divine image.

A Feeble Reflection.

I say, something of the divine image; for man at his best estate can never contain or reflect it all. Man can reflect a little of it; but it is a feeble reflection; yet the human can reflect the divine in some degree. The highest knowledge that man can attain in this world, or in any world, is the knowledge of God. And how is the knowledge of him to be obtained? One way is to look at man. He is created in God's image. Whatever of good, or the possibility of good, you find in yourself, or in anybody else, is from God. If you take all the possibilities of goodness in the world, and increase that

ten thousand times, you have some idea of what God is. In a small way the human reflects the divine.

In what way, then, is man like God? How has God impressed his image upon man? It has been thought that God impressed his own mental qualities on man, and the idea has been largely restricted to that view. One of our standards says that man was made like God in "knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness." You will observe that all these are mental or moral qualities.

But I have the idea that God impressed upon us his own bodily qualities as well. You will think that a bold assumption. You will, perhaps, question if God has any bodily qualities. I admit that in one sense he has none, but I think we shall see later on that he really has, and that he has impressed these qualities on man, no less than his mental and moral qualities.

The simplest idea of course is that we are made in the divine image in things mental and moral. I shall therefore, take this idea first. Afterwards, we shall try to develop the other thought—that God has impressed us also with his physical image. In the first place, then, we have to notice some of the mental and moral qualities of the divine constitution and character that are reflected in the human.

You will observe then that God has made us as nearly like himself as possible, in regard to immortality. I mean, of course, so far as we can contain immortality. Of Christ it is said that he "only hath immortality." That is, he is the fountain of it. It all proceeds from him. Now we cannot be like God in the immortality of having no beginning; but we can be like him in the immortality of having no end. In that respect we are immortal. Death does not end all; it really begins all. We are to have no end. In that respect we are like God. I do not say that we cannot die; I think all created spirits need in some way to be sustained. What God created he can destroy. But he has destined us for an endless life. In so far as we can have it, we have his own immortality.

In His Attributes.

I think, too, we have a species of God's omnipresence. In the 139th Psalm we have a wonderful picture of God's omnipresence. Indeed the thought is too high and wide for us that God is everywhere. But we have the same faculty in a small degree ourselves. Think of these minds of ours. We can, in a moment, soar beyond the sun and stars. If we are not actually present everywhere, we may say that our thoughts are. A man may appear to be "cribbed, confined, and confined," and so he is; but only in reference to the body; his thought soars into the infinite. In the wide universe there is no limit to his thought. He has actually a species of omnipresence; he has as much of that faculty as the human can contain.

In like manner, too, we have a kind of omnipresence. Think of the millions and millions of ideas the human mind can contain. There really seems to be no limit to the accumulation of our knowledge. It would almost seem that everything that has ever entered the mind stays there. Marvelous instances are on record of what the mind really contains. Some there have been who could read a whole column of a newspaper and repeat it without mistake. It was said of Lord Macaulay, that if Paradise Lost were lost to the world he could restore it, word for word, from memory. In this poor brain of ours we do seem to

have a reflection of the divine omnipresence.

There is another way, too, in which we have in ourselves a hint of the divine omnipresence. We actually think God's own thoughts. Every discovery we make in science is just a discovery of the divine thought ages and ages before worlds and men were born. Kepler felt this way when, on discovering the law of the planetary motions, he said: "I was thinking God's thoughts after him." It was a sublime and holy idea.

In Adaptation.

We, as a rule, think we have done some great thing when we discover a fact in science. But we have only discovered what was in God's thought from all eternity. He had this conception, and expressed it in matter long ago, which we now alight upon and discover. The thought should make us humble; at the same time it is a dim hint in ourselves of the divine omnipresence.

We have also a hint of the divine faculty of creation. I do not say that man can create anything in the divine sense. God created all worlds and all beings out of nothing—or out of himself. Man cannot do that of course. He can create neither matter nor force. But he can make wonderful things from matter already created. Just look at the world. Think of the wonderful things that man can make. Remember, that there was nothing in the world at first but the raw material. Then look at the world today. What marvels of genius it contains. It is true that man can create nothing; creation is too high for him; but he has the next best thing along that line; he has a marvelous faculty of making things. He comes as near creation as it is possible for the human to approach the divine.

Then there is the faculty of variety in God which we also find in man. It is very plain that the Creator delights in variety. He might have made all worlds alike in size and glory. He might have made all spirits alike in capacity and attainment. He might have made all animals alike. He might have made all insects alike. He might have made all trees, and all flowers, and all shrubs alike. But, as a matter of fact, he has made a difference in everything we know. The principle of variety he has introduced into everything that he has made. From angels to worms then is the law of difference. God seems to delight in variety, and so does man. We must make things in the best way we know, first of all; but after that, there is variety. The mind craves for variety; and we produce it. We have something of the divine preference for variety, when we cannot say that it is best; but we like it for its own sake.

These, then, are some of the qualities of God that are reflected in man. I have not named them all; and I have not elaborated any of them as they deserve. But I would ask you to think of them, and to remember that all possibility of goodness in you is from God alone, in whose image you are created.

In the next place, we would notice some of the divine bodily qualities that are reflected in the human.

You may say that God is a spirit, and has no body. I believe that is true. I conceive of him as a spirit. Our Lord said to the woman of Samaria, "God is a spirit." And a spirit may have a body as we have; but I believe God in his true essence has none. I believe that philosophers must find room in their thought for something between matter and spirit; something that is neither, but partaking