

The Image of God in Man

Readings: Genesis 1:26–27, 2:1–8, 2 Corinthians 5:17–21, John 14:15–26

Introduction

I'm going to mention a variety of trends in western society — see if you can find the common thread.

- Do you remember when the news was full of stories about sexual harrassment, sparking the MeToo movement?¹ How is it that actresses were bought and sold as cattle on the market of directors' couches?
- Iceland has virtually wiped out occurances of Down Syndrome, not because of some medical secret, but because of a nearly 100% abortion rate. The termination rate in the US is as high as 85%.² Even CBS was bothered by these facts, stating, "Many people born with Down syndrome can live full, healthy lives ..."³
- In the Netherlands, euthanasia is available upon request from 12 years old!⁴ Nearly 6% of all deaths in the Netherlands are due to euthanasia,⁵ including such cases as when a patient had tinnitus and another was an acute alcoholic.⁶
- Lest you think that to be a foreign problem, there are presently 14 US states

¹ metoomvmt.org.

² pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22418958.

³ www.cbsnews.com/news/down-syndrome-iceland.

⁴ www.government.nl/topics/euthanasia/is-euthanasia-allowed.

⁵ From AI: "In 2024, euthanasia accounted for approximately 5.8% of all deaths in the Netherlands, with 9,958 reported cases, marking an increase from 5.4% (9,068 cases) in 2023."

⁶ www.dutchnews.nl/news/archives/2017/04/number-of-official-cases-of-euthanasia-rise-10-in-the-netherlands and thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/02/22/dutch-puzzled-by-santorums-false-claim-they-practise-forced-euthanasia.

that permit what they call “death with dignity”. 13 more, including PA, are considering similar laws.⁷

- I recognize that there are nuances about allowing a person to die a natural death. There exist incredibly complex and difficult cases. I have witnessed some of them. But those who think that there is no slippery slope about which we should be concerned, there is present legislation being considered in the Netherlands called the “Completed Life Bill” which proposes to legalize suicide for adults over 75 years of age for any reason.⁸ A politician said, “It’s my personal opinion that in our civilization dying is an individual consideration. You didn’t ask to be brought into the world.”⁹
- Consider the horrendous and massive crimes against humans committed by the Japanese, or German medical “experimentation” during WW II. Think about the US imprisonment of ethnically Japanese people during that same war, or the “killing fields” of Cambodia, or the animalistic cruelties and murders based on race in the American south ... one could go on and on.
- Of course, I must mentioned the fact that roughly 1,038,000 abortions were performed in 2024. According to the pro-abortion Guttmacher Institute, “these numbers represent an undercount of the total number of abortions occurring in the United States”.¹⁰ Note that this is after the Dobbs decision of 2022!

These are all examples of the unpersoning of human beings, seeing them as objects and not beings with a clear design from the sovereign who made them.

How can these things happen? What is going on?

There are many key themes in the Bible that run throughout it.

- Blood
- The tree of life from Genesis 2 to Revelation 22

⁷ See <https://deathwithdignity.org/states>.

⁸ thefederalist.com/2017/06/30/netherlands-considers-euthanasia-healthy, see also www.ncbcenter.org/public-policy/cms/january-16-2024.

⁹ See also wfrtds.org.

¹⁰ www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/induced-abortion-united-states.

- The lamb
- The covenant

Today is being honored as Life Affirming Sunday and the primary theme is that of the image of God in man as male and female, as we heard read about in Genesis 1 this morning.

Image of God Defined

I know that the doctrine of the image of God may sound abstract or like high theology. But we'll soon see that this doctrine is immensely practical.

Nevertheless, we need to start with a definition.

Why It's Necessary

- God is not like us. We are not like he is. He is wholly other. "No one has seen God at any time."¹¹
 - No one can see God's face and live.¹²
 - In Isaiah 6, where Isaiah saw "saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up", there is much about the surroundings, but nothing about God's own appearance.¹³
 - In Revelation 4-5, there is quite an extended passage about God's appearance. While Jesus appears as a lion and a lamb, the Father is not described at all, only his surroundings, much like the Isaiah 6 passage.

In all of these cases, the effect of God's presence is described, but not God the Father himself.

The point is that, strictly speaking, God is unknowable. He cannot be seen or described. He cannot be experientially understood. And yet, we can know him. How?

¹¹ John 1:18.

¹² Exodus 33:20.

¹³ Isaiah 6:1-5.

What The *Imago Dei* Is

God valued his human creation so much that he built into humanity aspects of himself so that we can understand Him. We could call them analogies.

- “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”¹⁴
- Analogies are needed to understand God. “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, *being understood through what has been made ...*”¹⁵
 - Omnipresence: we understand immensity, largeness
 - Omniscience: we “have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him”.¹⁶
 - Omnipotence: we understand power and strength
 - Righteousness: conformity to a standard, God never ceases being what and who he is.
 - Faithfulness and truth: he always keeps his word.
 - Eternity: a long time.
 - Mercy and justice¹⁷
 - Anger: yet without arbitrariness.
 - Pleasure: God’s response after the 6th day of creation, that it was very good!
 - Even sexuality, gender, and marriage are types of the unity and diversity of the Trinity, indivisible and yet distinct persons, in the image of God, *male and female he created us*.
 - Unity of the church with Christ: see Eph 5 regarding marriage.
 - Unity within the Trinity: “I and father are one”,¹⁸ and: “I am in

¹⁴ Genesis 1:27.

¹⁵ Romans 1:20.

¹⁶ Colossians 3:10.

¹⁷ Though not necessarily both together simultaneously!

¹⁸ John 10:30, regarding Jesus.

My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.”¹⁹

- Differentiation in the body of Christ: “eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’ “. ²⁰
- We are, ourselves, images of God. Peter wrote that in Christ, we “become partakers of the divine nature”.²¹ We are not little gods. We are not pantheists; this is not Star Wars, with the force. We are not Mormons, who teach that as God once was, so now we are, and as God now is, so we shall be. Creature-creator distinction.

Therefore:

- The Father cannot be comprehended entirely as he is — and yet he builds into us analogies of himself.
- And who is the preeminent analogy of the Father, the perfect representation of his character and nature? The Son is the image of the Father, “the image of the invisible God.”²²
- Believers in Christ are images of the Son: “For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son.”²³ God has built into us the capacity to look like Christ, who looks like the Father — using “looks like” in a very loose sense.

Image Of God Applied

We are in the image of the Father, most especially when we reflect the character of the Son.

What does this mean practically? Without an understanding of the image of God in man as male and female, we are rejecting the essential personhood of

¹⁹ John 14:20.

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 12:21 ff.

²¹ 2 Peter 1:3–4. It could be argued that 2 Peter 1:5–7 is a list of God’s attributes which we are to cultivate in ourselves.

²² Colossians 1:15, also Hebrews 1:1–3.

²³ Romans 8:29.

humans.

Evolutionary theory has had this very effect, turning us into nothing more than sophisticated termites.

In This Life: Respect for Life

Here are some examples of application of the doctrine of the image of God in man.

- Racism: those who are “other” are image bearers as we are. I’m reminded of Dred-Scott decision determining that a black person doesn’t have the value of a white person. The Justice who penned the Court’s opinion reminded his readers that black men have always been considered “beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race ... and so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect”.²⁴ This sounds horrendous in our ears today — and should!
- Gender politics: if the design of male and female are God-ordained, then the confusion of that design is an offense against God and humanity. This has created an atmosphere of confusion that is almost impossible to navigate; with terms like “gender fluid”, “cisgender”, “non-binary”, and over a dozen new pronouns.²⁵ And let’s be clear, these ideas aren’t even related to the idea of gender orientation, so we are told.²⁶ I acknowledge that there are subtleties here which Christians need to take into account: the “intersex” phenomena for instance, in which a child is born without a clear presenting gender.
- Sexual sin, including pornography or prostitution: If men/women were to see women/men as image bearers, would we be able to objectify / dehumanize the other as means to our own pleasures and power?
- What about plain old good manners? “For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind,

²⁴ Dred Scott v. Sandford, 60 U.S. (19 How.) 393 (1857). See the opinion of the court: en.wikisource.org/wiki/Dred_Scott_v._Sandford/Opinion_of_the_Court.

²⁵ See lgbtqia.ucdavis.edu/educated/pronouns.html.

²⁶ www.genderspectrum.org/quick-links/understanding-gender.

but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.”²⁷

- Being image bearers drives our love for and care about others: foster care, adoption, single moms or dads, and justice (CLCP). Every human relationship!
- Obviously, murder is included in this discussion.
- And clearly, this has to do with what we call pro-life issues, from conception to natural death.
 - euthanasia and abortion “unperson” the being. God has bestowed an intrinsic value on human life, new and old.
 - No doctor who does abortions questions the humanness of an unborn child. The question is whether they are persons. How can we dare risk unpersoning a child at whatever stage?
 - Same with euthanasia: strange to me that many who strongly support what is called “pro-choice” policies that kill children, are against capital punishment!
- Identity: children of God, contentment in the Lord, our identity as “the body of Christ”²⁸

“Unpersoning” someone, whether via racism, sexual harassment, abortion, euthanasia, murder is the usurpation of God’s prerogatives as sovereign. We arrogate to ourselves God’s prerogatives in deciding which life is valuable, which race, and at what time.

I’m saddened that we have a culture that cannot help those who are confused!

In The Life To Come

There’s another aspect of life in view here: eternal life.

I’ve been giving a lot of thought to death lately. Christians of previous generations are no less grieved, frightened, challenged by death; but they do seem less surprised by it. The fall necessitates that which is *not* natural: the

²⁷ James 3:7–9.

²⁸ Romans 12:5

cessation of our lives.

Every human intuitively appreciates the preciousness of their own lives. I mean no disrespect, but go to the funeral of the child of a materialist or evolutionist and express the idea that it's only right that the unfit shouldn't survive and see how that goes! It's often the materialist who likes to opine that whomever it is that just died is in a better place. What does that even mean?

If *this* life is meaningful, precious in God's sight, then how much more eternal life?

God valued life so much that the eternal and immortal — one who cannot die, even Christ our lord — died in order to give life those who will follow him. It is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma.²⁹

In Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian ran from the City of Destruction, stopping his ears against all who decried his strange obsession with eternity, crying, "Life, life, eternal life!" If we care about the physical well-being of ourselves, friends, children, parents, etc.; how much more the eternal well-being? Physical death is certain. That penalty was set. It's eternal death that isn't necessary!

Therefore, the *imago dei* necessitates the preaching of the gospel.

Conclusion

CS Lewis wrote.

"There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. ... it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours. ... [We must take] each other seriously—no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption. And our charity must be a real and costly love, with deep feeling for the sins in spite of which we love the sinner—no mere tolerance or indulgence which parodies love ... Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses. If he is your Christian neighbour he is holy in almost the same way, for in him also

²⁹ To abuse Churchill's comment about Russia.

Christ “really lies hidden”³⁰ —the glorifier and the glorified, Glory Himself, is truly hidden.”³¹

Glory — the goal and end of the Christian.

We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.³²

Addendum: It’s About People! ***A Speech Given to Abington Hospital’s Board: April 2009***

Ladies and gentlemen, I would venture to say that the topic at hand is as emotional as any that has affected our national conscience. Perhaps only slavery can compare, a piece of national shame memorialized in the infamous Dred Scott decision.

That Supreme Court decision found that “a free negro of the African race ... is not a ‘citizen’ within the meaning of the Constitution of the United States”.³³

That statement appears to be about citizenship, but at its root, it is a statement about personhood. The Justice who penned the Court’s opinion reminded his readers that black men have always been considered “beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race ... and so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect”.³⁴ Today, these are shocking words in our ears—at least, I hope that they are.

³⁰ Lewis used the Latin “vere latitat”.

³¹ C.S. Lewis, “Weight of Glory”.

³² 2 Corinthians 3:18.

³³ Section 1, Para 4. of Supreme Court of the United States, 60 U.S. 393 (How.), DRED SCOTT, PLAINTIFF IN ERROR, v. JOHN F. A. SANDFORD. Argued: February 11–14, 1856, February 15–18, 1856 — Decided: March 6, 1857). Note that the Constitution, Art IV, Section 2 reads: “No Person held to Service or Labour in one State, under the Laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in Consequence of any Law or Regulation therein, be discharged from such Service or Labour, But shall be delivered up on Claim of the Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due.” Superseded by the 13th amendment. Source: en.wikisource.org/wiki/Dred_Scott_v._Sandford.

³⁴ http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Dred_Scott_v._Sandford/Opinion_of_the_Court,

An objective observer may argue that the finding of the court was good law in the context of that day. But who would argue that it was good ethics?

The courts of our day have explicitly stated “the word ‘person’ ... does not include the unborn”.³⁵ Borrowing words from Dred Scott, pre-born children have been declared “beings of an inferior order ... and so far inferior that they *have* no rights which the *adult* is bound to respect”.

I don’t know if this was good law. But in the analogy of Dred Scott, Roe v. Wade is bad ethics. Contrary to the courts of this land, I hold that these people—unseen by us, without a voice, nevertheless people—have been “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights”, among which the Constitution includes “life”.

For us, this is a gut level, in-your-face matter of life and death. It’s not simply about statistics concerning psychological or physiological damage, nor a slippery slope leading to euthanasia, nor about unwanted children, nor about adoption—as important as these things are!

For us, it is about a human being in her mother’s womb, struggling to avoid the curette and suction tube of the doctor, as has clearly been revealed in ultrasound filmography. It’s about a person’s fight to survive against all odds—and mostly loosing that fight.

This hospital saved the life of my son last October after a serious car accident. Your excellent science and staff not only kept him alive, but also helped him to regain his full faculties in a very short time. Your same science and staff have increased the viability of a fetus to about 23 weeks. How can a hospital that is so committed to and skilled at preserving life have a hand in purposely destroying it?

If all the stuff of human-ness and personality are present at conception, then for me, it’s about a human being, a living person, a body and a soul, a mind, a future, and a purpose. Statistical or legal nuance just don’t seem to weigh quite

³⁵ ROE v. WADE, 410 U.S. 113 (1973), Section IX, Subsection A, Para 3.

as much as the issue of life itself, don't you agree?³⁶

Let me ask you a question: if your heart reacted negatively to the 1857 finding of the Supreme Court stating that black men and women are of an inferior order, then I'm curious to know what your heart is telling you about unborn children?

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark E. Rudolph

Rector, St. John's Anglican Church, Southampton, PA

³⁶ Consider an analogy. Two friends are walking down the street and they hear blood-curdling screams from a nearby home. At that point, the two friends could debate the issue of trespassing on private property, the right of personal privacy in this circumstance, or the propriety of interfering in the actions of another and imposing one's personal moral judgment on another person. All of those topics pertain to the situation. But as the screams continue and the situation sounds increasingly dire, one consideration overrules all others: a person is being harmed or killed! Save a life now and discuss law later! Protect the weaker against the stronger! Concern about the legal, philosophical, perhaps even physical consequences for us personally—that comes later! In most contexts, we would call that bravery and heroism.