

On the Image of God

From: Joel Gibbons
Subject: The Image of God
Date: Saturday, August 22, 2009, 1:14 AM

SCSS:

In asserting that we were not fashioned in the image of god, I expressed the opinion that the father may not have an image at all in the sense that we normally understand that term. That is what Jesus seemed to imply. However, the father is the most real of all beings; he is the source of reality itself. I only ask whether, in light of the scriptures, he needs an image.

It is clear that in any case – and this was the essential point – we were not fashioned in his divine image. If we were, then whoever sees us – for we all agree what “our image” means – would see the father. But, “no one has seen the father except the son, and everyone to whom he has revealed him.” The world does not see the father in us or through us, because we do not bear his image.

Joel

From Emma Roxas
Sent: Saturday, August 22, 2009 12:24 PM
Subject: Re: The Image of God

Dear colleagues:

The very thought provoking arguments of Joel, have prompted me to make these comments. First, I think the more relevant question to ponder, considering his position, is to ask how man reflects the image of God, in the first place, because it has already been revealed to us in Scriptures (Gen.:1:26) that man was made into the image and likeness of the Creator. This is a given in our consideration. No argument can change this.

Second, it may true that this image is not immediately evident in every man nor is it immediately perceptible to every man, due to the failings of man himself, like his propensity to sin and his misuse of the freedom the Creator has given him. But even this condition does not negate the prior truth of divine revelation that man is made to the image and likeness of God.. The imperfection of man has given rise to the biblical prayer: “Let me decrease, Oh Lord, that You may increase in me.”

No man sees God but He is so visible in all His works. Operare sequitur esse. Even in my youth, I had no difficulty seeing Him, as I used to preface my prayers with “Oh God, whom I do not see, but whose works are so visible to me.” We always arrive at the nature of God “a posteriori” (this is St. Thomas). And having arrived at this knowledge, we must draw comfort with another truth of our being, that like God, we are meant for eternity. St. Catherine of

Sienna, arrived at this wonderful truth in her contemplation “In your nature O Godhead, I shall know my own nature.” It is in the nature of man to rise above his failings, to cleave to the Creator in his “downtroddenness,” to cooperate with the grace of the Creator. In this lies the authentic greatness of man. Man does not cease to be great even in his weakness. (P. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*), because man is the only creature on earth that God wants for Himself. (2nd Vatican Council)

In Christ, Emma R. Roxas

From: Joe Hebert
Subject: Re: The Image of God
Date: Saturday, August 22, 2009, 12:50 PM

Greetings,

I somehow missed the beginning of this interesting thread, so I'm not aware of all that's been said. I was able to find a few relevant texts:

Genesis 1.27: And God created man to his own image: to the image of God he created him.

Col. 1.15: [Jesus Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.

S.T. [*Saint Thomas Aquinas*], I.35.2: Reply to Objection 3. The image of a thing may be found in something in two ways. In one way it is found in something of the same specific nature; as the image of the king is found in his son. In another way it is found in something of a different nature, as the king's image on the coin. In the first sense the Son is the Image of the Father; in the second sense man is called the image of God; and therefore in order to express the imperfect character of the divine image in man, man is not simply called the image, but “to the image,” whereby is expressed a certain movement of tendency to perfection. But it cannot be said that the Son of God is "to the image," because He is the perfect Image of the Father.

In Christ,
Joe Hebert

From: Joel Gibbons
Sent: Saturday, August 22, 2009 10:09 PM
Subject: Re: The Image of God

Dear Joe,

I agree entirely. Please see my response to Emma's earnest query. There are few topics more worthy of our attention than this one. Jesus and the father are one; no issue of image or likeness arises in any conventional sense. The phrase of Colossians focuses on that ultimate intimacy. John emphasizes that we have not seen the divine image. But more to the point, we

are not gods. We are men and women. We will not somehow become gods. It is all that we can hope for to become true men and women. Jesus the man will be satisfied with that.

When we sin it is not because we are men and women, it is because we are yet fully men and women. It is because unlike the true man we are still creatures of this world. By our gift of humanity we were made capable of growing up in him, of becoming fully human you might say, and everything about us, body and soul, were fashioned to achieve that end. [I have no intention of dabbling in Manicheism.] But every man and woman has a body. In whose image was that body fashioned?

Regards, Joel

From: Joe Hebert
Subject: RE: The Image of God
Date: Monday, August 24, 2009, 7:19 AM

Dear Joel,

Human nature is a fascinating subject, and I look forward to reading your book on it. There seems to be a paradox concerning our nature, if I have understood this correctly: by nature we are made to enjoy an eternal beatitude which is beyond our nature; by nature we are called to a supernatural life. This is closely related to the concept of “image,” since beatitude is the vision of God, whom we cannot naturally see; the sight which makes us happy and fulfills our nature can only take place through the supernatural impression upon our minds of this divine image. This would suggest a precise meaning to our being created “to the image” of God—we are created so as to long to receive this image. The practice of virtues—natural and supernatural—draws us closer to God’s image, but the fullest union with this image is in heaven alone. I believe this is the way St. Thomas describes it. Does this sound right?

In Christ,
Joe Hebert

From: Joel Gibbons
To: Joe Hebert ; Dennis Bonnette
Sent: Monday, August 24, 2009 9:40 AM
Subject: RE: The Image of God

Dear Joe,

I would put it a little differently, but I wouldn’t say anything to shake what you say. Every coin has two sides, but it is the coin itself that has value, and not the sides. So let me explore a bit.

What we are called to be is not paradoxical. Far from it, it is the fulfillment of our nature. John says that in Paradise we will become like Jesus because we will see him as he is: a vision that John had already experienced at the Transfiguration, though he was at pains to say that there was even more that he had not yet seen.

Now, to say that John had seen god is logically correct, just as it is logically correct to say that Mary is the mother of god. John saw him who is god, just as Mary carried him who is god. But what John saw and what Mary carried were the humanity of Jesus. Not a worldly humanity like ours, but a perfect humanity. This is the humanity that our gift of humanity is called to. This is our destiny: to become fully human as he is human, the Most human of all beings. It is no lowly estate to be human.

To be human is fully compatible with god himself, because Jesus is both god and man. God wills to be human. Adam and Eve were tempted by the serpent to will to be god, and so they died. If instead we will to really be human however, we will live. In the Eucharist he comes to be with us, and we assert that it is Jesus god who comes to us, but listen to what he says of it: it is his flesh and blood that comes to us; it is his humanity that was given for us and that comes to us, So that we may become human as he is human.

We too have a dual nature, because we are both man and animal. Aquinas says that, though he does not speak of a dual nature in this context. Our animal nature is that of a very clever animal, the cleverest of all the animals. Even as animals we can live well and live long. Genghis Khan and Al Capone were little more than animals, and they achieved lasting fame. As long as we live, our humanity cannot be extinguished. I do not assert that in this world they surrendered their humanity entirely. Though still men, it is for their animal achievements that they are famous.

So we must choose what it will be. Will we be men and women, or will we be like the animals? When they die, the animals fall to the ground and live no more. In the scriptures, the authors often allude to our animal nature as "the flesh." The Manichees accordingly came to see the flesh as evil, but of course it is not. The flesh that we partake of in the Eucharist is life, not death. The flesh that we will regain at the end of time is again eternal life, not death. There is no man or woman without a body. In Heaven at this time, the saints have not a physical body, but a spiritual body as Paul writes. This spiritual body is the form and plan of our physical bodies, and it is enough for us. But at the end of time we will become physical creatures too, because even the body can be perfected if we are fully human. We believe in the resurrection of the body, as the Nicene Creed assures us.

The social sciences are about us, as human and animal creatures. The Holy Father juggles this duality in his writings, always struggling as we all struggle with the two sides of that coin. Is economics a plan for our humanity or is it an excuse for our animality? Tough call. I made the case in a recent note that I attached to a post that economics applies to our human nature, that some of the Commandments which define the workings of our human nature also define quite explicitly our response to, our implementation of, the laws of economics. Animals are economists, but Jesus is a better economist.

In Paradise we are united with god. Like John (I guess), I don't really understand what that means, but I do know that it does not mean that we will become god. There is only one god and we aren't him. (I know I'm not god, and I deduce that if you were god you wouldn't have to buy my book.) We aren't him here certainly, and we won't be him there either, because we will retain our individuality. Heaven is not Nirvana. Or more accurately, Nirvana is no Heaven. All he wants of us is to be his people, his human people.

Regards,
Joel

Re: The Image of God Monday, August 24, 2009 9:16 AM
From: Dr. Dennis Bonnette
To: Joel Gibbons, Joe Hebert

If I may interject just a little side note as a Thomist, the phrase, "image of God," primarily is understood to refer to the spiritual side of man, his possession of a spiritual soul having intellect and will. God alone is the sole Spirit in Whom intellect and will and their proper acts are substantially identical with the divine essence itself; in angels and man, intellect and will are distinct operative potencies, proper accidents of our substances, but not identical with our substance. As in most Christian mysteries, there are many analogical levels at which the same truth expresses itself – and you, we ... , are free to explore and develop these other levels, some of which you express below.

Dennis

[Note: Professor Bonnette is a retired professor of philosophy at Canisius College.]