

When Image Is Everything

‘While waiting for my first appointment in the reception room of a new dentist, I noticed his certificate, which bore his full name. Suddenly, I remembered that a tall, handsome boy with the same name had been in my high-school class some forty years ago. Upon seeing him, however, I quickly discarded any such thought. This balding, grey-haired man with the deeply lined face was too old to have been my classmate. After he had examined my teeth, I asked him if he had attended the local high school. “Yes”, he replied. “When did you graduate?” I asked. He answered, “In 19[77]”. “Why, you were in my class!” I exclaimed. He looked at me closely and then asked, “What did you teach?”’

W—what? I guess this mature lady had a self-image that was, just a bit out of date!! Of course, none of us here could ever be guilty of a similar mistaken understanding of our own appearance. Not at all! But whether we’re old or young, plain or pretty, handsome or ho-hum, rich or poor, actually makes no real difference at all. Because if we’re a human being, then every single one of us, bear one and the same image, in almost infinite variations—the image of God. Which is foundational and profound. That fact alone makes all the difference in the world!

For here, just after the flood was over, God gives one of His

His most ancient commands. Recall God's very first command given to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1 was to "be fruitful and multiply". The second was to "fill the earth and govern it". The third was to "reign over" all the living things on the earth. They were then told to eat as food "every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees". They were vegetarians. Vegans actually. All plants. Quite a variety of delectable fruits and greens. All waiting and available. Except for the one single tree in the midst of the Garden of Eden called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The fruit of that one they were commanded not to eat for doing so would result in immediate death. And it wasn't too long before the devil, speaking through a probably four-legged serpent, had sold Eve a bill of goods and she ate the forbidden fruit, and gave some to her husband Adam, and he ate it too. And immediately, they died spiritually. And because they had broken God's command, and listened to and obeyed the word of the devil, they, in effect, handed over their God-given authority over the whole earth to the devil. Oh, how happy he must have been.

The tragic consequences of their rash act now began to manifest. They suddenly had to wear clothes. They were banished from Eden, never to return. Their easy, carefree lives now abruptly required hard work and pain. And not long after, the worst sin of all first entered the world, the ugly fruit called murder. Cain, in a fit of hate and jealous rage, struck his younger brother Abel, and killed him. And the Lord God punished Cain by with-

drawing the Divine Presence from him, and making Cain a wanderer on the earth, whose livelihood was even harder than all others. Yet still he lived and produced many descendants.

But Cain's sin spread. By Noah's time, the entire human race was violent, and been infiltrated by sinful, fallen angels. Human-angel hybrids called nephilim were born and roamed the earth. It was a total mess. The earth required a "great reset". So God cleansed the earth with a great flood, sparing only righteous Noah and his family, and the young creatures God sent to safety in Noah's ark. After they had resettled themselves on the newly cleansed earth, God issued a new, revised set of commands. "Be fruitful and multiply". "Fill the earth". But now, because the human race had already lost their God-delegated authority over the earth, and could no longer exercise dominion over the animals, birds and fish, God now put a fear of mankind into all wildlife. Before, mankind and animals lived in perfect harmony. All ate only plants for food. But now, in order to protect humankind from the violence of the animal kingdom, God caused all wildlife to dread mankind, and so they avoided him. Where there had been kind and friendly relationships between humans and all animals, now there was separation and fear. And because they feared mankind, humanity could still, sort of, rule over them. And, eat them! All had been vegans before. Now, humans and animals alike became carnivores. Quite a change. With one important caveat—they "must never eat any meat that still has the lifeblood

in it". For the life of a creature, man included, is in the blood.

Though only Noah and his three sons and their wives had survived, God knew that the sin of Cain lived on within them, and would sooner rather than later raise its ugly head again. So this time, God issued another command. For whoever or whatever would kill a human being, the murderer, whether man or beast, would forfeit its life as punishment. For the life is in the blood, and if blood is shed to death, then the killer must also lose his or her blood to death as well. It was now humanity's responsibility to shed the murderer's blood. Even if a person was killed by an animal, the animal must also die, too. Why? Because "God made human beings in His Own image". Animals could be killed without consequence. No law against that. But killing a human was a direct affront and rebellion against God Himself, because each and every human being bears the very image of God Himself. And therefore, anyone or anything that takes the life of a human, must lose their own life for they have in effect attacked God Himself.

Note that this new command predates by around a thousand years the Ten Commandments, whose sixth commandment specifically forbids murder. Think about this. Murdering, killing any human being, except as punishment for murder, was anathema to God. And among the ancient pagan nations, human sacrifice was rampant. In our own day, just in America alone, since 1973, upwards of 60 million babies have been stabbed, ripped, torn apart, crushed, injected with lethal poisons, and harvested for

body parts. Every single one bearing the very image of God. Our national sin just in this one matter is monstrous, gross and gigantic beyond imagining. But, as we know, this is hardly our only sin against Holy Father God.

After Noah and family disembarked from the ark, time passed, and Noah began a new “career”. Farming. He liked grapes and built a winery. Unsurprisingly, one day he drank too much and got drunk. Getting drunk by itself is a sin. But at the very least, he was alone in his tent, and fell down naked in a drunken stupor. While unconscious, his youngest son Ham happened to pass by and saw his father’s nakedness. Ham was around 100 years old at this time, for he already had four sons of his own, the youngest being Canaan. Ham must not have been on really good terms with his father Noah, because Ham did not avert his eyes when he saw his father’s nakedness. Instead he gazed upon Noah’s shame, and then went and reported this to his two older brothers, so that they, too, could see their father’s shame, and have a good laugh about it. Never mind that doing so gravely disrespected and dishonored their father. But Shem and Japheth did not take Ham’s bait. Instead, they took hold of Noah’s fallen robe, and holding it on their shoulders, walked backward, laying it over their father, so as they would not see their father’s nakedness. And so they honored their father. In stark contrast to Ham’s mischievous and salacious attitude.

When Noah awoke, and heard what had happened, he

cursed his grandson Canaan, Ham's youngest son, because Ham was Noah's youngest son. Perhaps because years before, Noah had already pronounced blessings on Ham that he could not now "counteract" those blessings, so instead he turned his righteous wrath on Ham's youngest and cursed Canaan instead, prophetically pronouncing that Canaan and his descendants would become the lowest of servants, serving the descendants of the other two brothers, Shem and Japheth. And because Shem and Japheth had honored Noah, he prayed down new blessings upon them, blessing God that Shem would be prosperous and Japheth gain great territory, while Canaan would serve both of them.

We must here refute some lingering evil theories that Ham represents the black race and Noah's curse upon Ham results in the black races being inferior to white races. Nothing could be further from the truth. Recall that Canaan became the forefather of the pagan peoples who inhabited the coasts of what became the Holy Land, who were so wicked and vile that God used the Israelites under Joshua to invade and cleanse the land of the blood of the thousands of human sacrifices the Canaanites had shed to their primary idol-god baal over the intervening centuries.

For us today, who've taken hold of Christ Jesus Who shed His Own blood in our place, we now receive His unblemished image and eternal life anew when we share His body and His blood in the elements of Holy Communion. And we are made alive in God's blessed and joyful presence forevermore! Don't forget it!

