

## GOD’S LITTLEST IMAGE BEARERS:

### The Image of God and Preborn Children

#### (Genesis 1:26-28, Part 1)

**G**OD is the Ruler over all things. By His own divine nature, He has the divine right, power, and authority to reign over the heavens and the earth. He created all things, and, therefore, has dominion over all things. He governs the flight pattern of every sparrow in the air, and He plans the formalwear of every lily in the field.

This God, to whom we are to give an account at the end of the age, has unrivaled power and authority. No one can challenge Him to an arm wrestling match and win. Nothing can undermine or usurp His sovereign control over the universe. He is the unrivaled God.

And yet this God of Scripture, whose power to rule is incomparable, is unrivaled, also, in compassion and covenantal love. He describes Himself as *“the LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in covenantal love and faithfulness”* (Exodus 34:6).<sup>1</sup> He shows mercy to sinners. He goes out, Himself, in search of the lost sheep. As the Good Shepherd, He binds up the injured of the flock, protects them from the bullies of the fold, lifts the little lambs into His lap, and gently leads the nursing ones. He, the Good Shepherd, lays down His life for the sheep. As a Ruler, God exercises holy, protective love over His subjects.

This means that most human rulers are very unlike God. The human king, premier, prime minister, or president thinks that he has the divine right to rule—whether by way of succession, appointment, military takeover, democratic election, or some other means of rising to power. And yet, historically speaking, he typically rules with an unjust rule. He most often exalts his own word above the Word of God, and in doing so he oppresses and brutalizes his subjects.

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<sup>1</sup> The present author’s translation.

## DIVINE HEARTBEAT

The history of human rulership is, for the most part, a history of tyranny.<sup>2</sup> It begins with Cain, the son of Adam, who chose to crush his brother, Abel, in an act of murder. It includes Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who, in his rule over his Hebrew slaves, demanded the drowning of all Hebrew baby boys in the Nile River, and who introduced unreachable quotas for the slaves in their brick-making labors. It climaxes, in many ways, in the Old Testament with the wickedness of King Manasseh, who mandated pagan idols in the Temple and who sacrificed his own sons in the fire.<sup>3</sup>

Horrible things have been done throughout history in the name of human rulership. For example, sometime in the eighth century BC, the ruler of the people of Ammon thought that it was wise and expedient warfare to slaughter pregnant women as part of his conquest of portions of Israel; his men “*ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead, that they may enlarge their border*” (Amos 1:13). In the third century BC, China’s first emperor, Qin Shi Huang, whom Mao Zedong later came to admire, murdered over a thousand scholars, seeing them as a threat to his power, and over four hundred of them he buried alive. Much later in history, during the age of the Reformation, Thomas More (AD 1478-1535), Chancellor of England, developed an addiction to torturing and burning Evangelicals, and he oftentimes quoted the Bible in order to justify and feed this addiction.<sup>4</sup> And in post-World War I Germany, a charismatic man named Adolf Hitler rose to power, promising economic recovery and prosperity to his nation, but instead immersing it in mass brutality and bloodshed.

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<sup>2</sup> This cursory survey of the history of human tyranny is not meant to neglect the bright spots of rulership in world history. There have been great rulers in history; these great rulers practiced justice and righteousness for the glory of God and for the benefit of their people. King Josiah, for example, was a just king in Judah who served his subjects best by honoring God the most (see, for example, 2 Kings 23:1-3).

<sup>3</sup> And yet the grace of God is displayed all the more in the fact that Manasseh, at the end of his life, repented before God, and God accepted his repentance/faith and brought him, personally, into salvation (see 2 Chronicles 33:10-13).

<sup>4</sup> Despite the Roman Catholic historical apologetics that are exercised on More’s behalf, whose arguments are designed to downplay More’s bloodthirsty violence, there is overwhelming evidence of tyranny found in More’s own writings (especially his personal letters); this evidence is documented throughout Brian Moynahan’s *God’s Bestseller: William Tyndale, Thomas More, and the Writing of the English Bible—A Story of Martyrdom and Betrayal* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2002).

## GOD'S LITTLEST IMAGE BEARERS

Yet the greatest of all abuses of human rulership, the greatest of all tyrannical acts, happened in between ancient warfare and Enlightenment-age genocides. It happened when a Roman governor named Pilate threatened an impoverished Jew from Nazareth with the prospect of crucifixion, as an attempt to compel the Jew to cooperate with him: “*Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to release You, and have power to crucify You?*” (John 19:10). Of course, Pilate did not use his power to release Jesus of Nazareth; he released Barabbas, the murderer, instead. This act of Pilate was the epitome of tyranny.

What, then, of the horror of abortion, as it relates to human rulers? How should human rulers view abortion? How should the king of Saudi Arabia, the Parliament of the United Kingdom, the Standing Committee of China, and the Supreme Court of the United States understand the practice of abortion? This is *the greatest* ethical question of our time. It cries out for much more than scientific, philosophical, or political debate. It pleads for the Sovereign LORD to speak His own sovereign decree concerning it. For, the question of how human rulers ought to face the prevailing practice of abortion in our world is a question that will lead us into the heart of what it actually means to be human.

### **HUMAN BEING AND THE IMAGE OF GOD**

The Bible has a very specific definition of humanity. It is vastly different, even worlds apart, from the modern scientific and psychological definitions of human being. The modern definitions are, in essence, atheistic ones. They define humanity according to evolutionary processes, predictable social behaviors, and (merely physical) genetic heredity. The Bible, in stark contrast to these cold, anti-supernatural definitions of human being, says that to be human is to be created in the “image of God”:

*God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” God created man in His own image. In God’s image He created him; male and female He created them. (Genesis 1:26–27)*

## DIVINE HEARTBEAT

What does this mean? If we want to understand who we are—what it means for us to be human beings—we must seek out what God means when He says, “...*in Our image*.” What kind of marvelous language is this, that we, frail creatures of dust, should be said to be God’s image bearers?

The language of “image” in the Bible is the language of family resemblance. When little boys burst into their father’s home office, interrupting his work with their joyful laughter and childhood play, the father delights in the scene primarily because he sees, in their little faces, the resemblances of their mother, and of himself. Similarly, when certain orphans, whose parents died when they were still infants, long to recapture, in their minds, the visages of their parents (but lack photographs or images to help them to remember them), they simply need to look at themselves in the mirror. When they see themselves, they see the “images” of their parents:

*Adam lived one hundred thirty years, and became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. (Genesis 5:3)*

To be human, then, is to be created “in” God’s image.<sup>5</sup> We are not God’s image, itself. Still, we are created “in” His image. We are created to resemble our Creator, just as a son resembles his father. And we are created to mimic God’s holiness, just as a son mimics his father’s character.

### **The Image of God versus the Image of Idolatry**

Here a grave danger emerges in the realm of human temptations. All is well when we accept our status as creatures made in the image of God. The Lord God created us as image bearers. Yet what if human beings decide to craft their own images? What if we turn the created (hierarchical) order upside-down? What happens when we

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<sup>5</sup> Notice that we are created in the image of God, not in the image of ape or monkey. This shows, from a theological perspective, the absurdity of Darwin’s view of human evolution. We are made in the “likeness” of God, not in the “likeness” of ape. Moses says that the “father-son resemblance” of the image of God is a God-human resemblance; modern pseudo-science, especially in the field of biology, exercises both hubris and foolishness in claiming that humanity’s “image” is, in essence, an ape-human resemblance. Jesus became incarnate as Man, not as ape.

## GOD'S LITTLEST IMAGE BEARERS

ignore God's right to create us in His own image, and decide, ourselves, to try to create "gods" in our own image?

Idolatry is the product of the human decision to create "gods" in our own image. This is why the Israelites were to destroy the Canaanite peoples. The Canaanites were masters at the skill of idol-craft:

*...then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their stone idols, destroy all their molten images, and demolish all their high places. (Numbers 33:52)*

Humans are created in God's image, but God will have no rivals. He will not allow the creation of other "gods" in His likeness:

*To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him? (Isaiah 40:18)*

Again, God creates human beings in His image, in His likeness. However, as human beings who have inherited a sinful nature from Adam, we are ever prone to seek to create our own "gods" in our own likeness. God made us for His own glory, but we make idols for our own glory:

*You also carried the tent of your king and the shrine of your images, the star of your god, which you made for yourselves. (Amos 5:26)*

Making idols in our image is tantamount to blasphemy. It defames the glory of God by reducing our very concept of God to the created realm. We pretend to be creators, ourselves, when we make our own "gods" out of the stuff of creation:

*[They] traded the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed animals, and creeping things. (Romans 1:23)*

Ultimately, this great sin of idolatry will result in the whole world being handed over to the deception of Antichrist. In the last days, says the Bible, a great "beast" will arise who will lead people into deception through the creation of an "image." Instead of "the image

## DIVINE HEARTBEAT

of God,” people will now commit themselves, wholeheartedly, to “the image of the beast”:

*He [the false prophet] deceives my own people who dwell on the earth because of the signs he was granted to do in front of the beast; saying to those who dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast who had the sword wound and lived. It was given to him to give breath to it, to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.*

(Revelation 13:14–15)

Idolatry, then, is insidious for the very reason that it twists and mangles our understanding of the image of God. We bear God’s image, having been created in His image, but idolatry is the destruction of that image. When we craft idols, pretending to be creators, ourselves, we actually mar and tear the portrait of the image of God that the Spirit of God has painted within us.<sup>6</sup> Our sin tempts us to believe that we, like Oscar Wilde’s character, Dorian Gray, whose portrait never aged, can have perpetual youth and beauty, all the while living in frivolity and licentiousness. In the end, if we do not repent of our wickedness and call upon the Lord for salvation, the portrait of our souls will become more and more like a hideous image of Satan, himself. The Father of Lies, the Devil, wants to replace the image of God in us with his own image.

### Jesus Christ is the Image of God

Why, then, is the voice of Genesis 1:26 a plural voice? God says, “Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness...” and thus He speaks in the plural voice. He does not say, in the singular voice, “Let Me make...in My image, according to My likeness.” Rather, He says, “Us...Our...Our...” Why does God speak here in the plural voice?

Modern scholars, in the name of “biblical scholarship,” have tried to avoid any reference to the Triune nature of God in this verse. These scholars have called for esoteric theories involving Hebrew

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<sup>6</sup> Athanasius (c. AD 298-373), the courageous bishop of Alexandria, says in his masterful book, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 14.1 (NPNF<sup>2</sup> 4:43), that the effects of idolatry and sin on the image of God in us are comparable to “when the likeness painted on a panel has been effaced by stains from without.”

## GOD'S LITTLEST IMAGE BEARERS

grammar<sup>7</sup> that try to avoid hearing the Father, Son, and Spirit speaking, in the plural, in Genesis 1:26. However, we do well here to listen, instead, to the wisdom of the early Church Fathers.

John Chrysostom was one of the greatest pastors and preachers of early church history. In one of his sermons on Genesis 1:26, he says that God cannot be speaking to angels (which is another theory that seeks to avoid hearing the Triune nature of God in the verse). Chrysostom brings to our attention that when God says, “*Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness...*” He does not say, “Your [singular] and My image,” nor does He say, “Your [plural] and My image,” but rather He says, “*Our image.*”<sup>8</sup> This, says Chrysostom, shows the unity of the image. There are not two images (one of God and one of angels). Rather, there is only one image (God’s own image). So the “*Our image*” must refer to the one image of God, and thus belong to all “Persons” contained within the “Our.” This means that Genesis 1:26 is a record of God the Father speaking to God the Son, Jesus Christ, and to God the Holy Spirit.

Why does this matter? It matters a great deal because the source of “the image of God” in the Bible is not found in human beings themselves. Humans are created “in” God’s image, but they are not, themselves, the very image of God. Rather, in the Bible it is God’s only begotten Son<sup>9</sup> who, Himself, *is* the very Image of God:

*[He] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.*  
(Colossians 1:15)

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<sup>7</sup> For example, there is the “plural of majesty” theory, which says that God speaks in the plural in the same way that an ancient king might speak in the plural. The king does not say, “I decree that...” but rather “We decree that...” as a way of using grammar to assert his royal majesty. But this kind of speculation (which stems from a historical-critical bias against the traditional reading of the early Church Fathers) about Hebrew grammar ignores the theological connection that the Bible is making between the Triune nature of God and the image of God, itself. It also lacks biblical support.

<sup>8</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Eight Sermons on the Book of Genesis* (trans. Robert Charles Hill; Boston, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004), 47; for the Greek text of Chrysostom’s sermon, which alone is able to bring out the nuances of the second-person singular and second-person plural pronouns that he uses in his argument, see St. John Chrysostom, *Sermons sur la Genèse: sources chrétiennes no. 433* (trans. Laurence Brottier; Paris, France: *Les Éditions du Cerf*, 1998), 190.

<sup>9</sup> Here it is good to recall the concept of father-son resemblance in the “image.”

## DIVINE HEARTBEAT

The “image” belongs to God alone. It belongs to Jesus Christ alone. We have been made in His image, but we are not the image itself. Our Lord Jesus is the very image of God. He alone perfectly resembles the Father in Heaven. When we see the Son, we also see the Father, for the Son is the Father’s perfect image.

Therefore, committing sins against the image of God, in which we are created, is tantamount to belittling and assaulting Christ Himself. To curse the image of God, which is stamped upon our human identity, is to hurl curses at the Lord Jesus, who is *the Image* of God. Thus, when we speak of all humans as being created in the image of God, we must speak reverently and cautiously, with fear and trembling. For in so speaking, we are describing the handiwork and resemblance of Jesus Christ, Himself.

Gloriously, this path of thought turns out to be the one that leads us to the knowledge of true humanity. Jesus Christ is fully God, yes, but also fully *human*. At the incarnation, Jesus assumes a full human nature. He does not merely “seem” to be human, like a divine apparition, lacking physicality. Nor does He merely possess a human body, while lacking a human mind or will. Rather, everything that human nature possesses, He possesses. He is, as the Creed of Chalcedon (AD 451) states, “to be acknowledged in two natures [divine and human], inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably.” As fully God, He reveals God to us. As fully human, he reveals to us what it means to be truly human. Our sin nature has distorted our humanity. But Jesus’ humanity is perfect, and thus untainted by the distortions of sin.

What does it mean to be human? The only way to answer this foundational question of our existence is to know Jesus Christ. He, alone, is the embodiment of what a spiritually spotless and morally flawless human being ought to be. How does a true human speak? To know this, we must listen to how Jesus Christ speaks in the Scriptures. How does a true human pray? To answer this, we must study how our Lord prays in the Bible. In what ways does a true human honor and relate to his mother? To learn this, we must carefully follow the ways in which Jesus honors and relates to His mother, Mary, in the Gospels. He is true humanity.

Contemplation of Jesus’ true humanity leads inexorably to the beginning of His humanity: His conception. True humanity is revealed in Jesus Christ, and Jesus’ incarnation begins not outside of



## GOD'S LITTLEST IMAGE BEARERS

the womb, but *in the womb*. The very definition of humanity begins with the miracle of the virgin conception. That is, prior to the virgin birth, there is a supernatural conception. The Holy Spirit overshadows Mary, and Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled, "*Behold, the virgin will conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel*" (7:14). Jesus' first nine months of humanity are spent in the womb. He shows us true humanity by starting with His own true humanity in the womb, from the very moment of conception.

### The Image of God and Bloodshed

Abortion is bloodshed in the womb. For example, a typical "Dilation and Evacuation" (commonly known as a D & E) abortion involves "the crushing, slicing, and dismembering of the unborn."<sup>10</sup> During these abortions, which take place between 12 and 24 weeks of pregnancy, the baby feels physical pain.<sup>11</sup> And there is much bleeding during the little baby's murder. Or, in the case of a saline abortion, in which solutions of high salt concentrations are injected into the womb, the baby experiences immense pain. Medical doctors have documented that an "aborting mother can feel her baby thrashing in the uterus during the approximately two hours it usually takes for the saline solution to kill the [baby]."<sup>12</sup>

This is murder. It is the taking of the life and blood of a human being, who is created in the image of God. Remember, Jesus, in the womb, is fully human, right from the moment of conception. Jesus is *the Image of God* in Mary's womb. Therefore, according to God's Word, this means that to be a baby in the womb, at any stage of physical development, from conception onwards, is to be fully human, and already (conception is a past event) created in the image of God. Therefore, all abortions involve the shedding of the blood of fellow human beings, who are fellow image bearers.

Biblically, then, this raises the stakes on the abortion debate to a level that is exceedingly high. It is the "image of God" doctrine that

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<sup>10</sup> Francis J. Beckwith, *Politically Correct Death: Answering Arguments for Abortion Rights* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 48.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>12</sup> Vincent J. Collins, M.D., Steven R. Zielinski, M.D. and Thomas J. Marzen, Esq., "Fetal Pain and Abortion: The Medical Evidence," *Studies in Law and Medicine*, no. 18 (Chicago: Americans United for Life Legal Defense Fund, 1984), 8; qtd. in Beckwith, *Politically Correct Death*, 48.

## DIVINE HEARTBEAT

makes abortion the greatest wickedness of our time. Babies in the womb, who bear God's image, are to be protected by divine law:

*Whoever sheds man's blood, his blood will be shed by man, for God made man in His own image.* (Genesis 9:6)

Once we realize Jesus' own humanity in the womb, from conception onwards, as the embodiment of the image of God, and once we hear God's Word say to us that *all* babies in the womb, from conception onwards (no matter what sufferings brought about the conception),<sup>13</sup> are created in His image, then we realize the gravity of abortion. In abortion, human beings, bearing God's own image—and we dare not forget that He is a holy, holy, holy God—are slain. Their blood is spilled. And thus, with Abel's blood, their blood "*cries out to Me from the ground*" (Genesis 4:10).

In Judeo-Christian societies,<sup>14</sup> children are taught from a very early age the Sixth Commandment, "*You shall not murder*" (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17). Either the fear of God (for Christians) or the fear of judicial law (for unbelievers) warns us, from childhood onwards, not to murder. Whenever we are tempted, through hatred, selfishness, coveting, plotting, or feelings of rage, to strike someone so as to murder him, our fear of law (either divine or human) keeps us from doing so.

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<sup>13</sup> The sufferings of rape and incest, in particular, are not to be downplayed in the slightest. The Old Testament calls for the death penalty for the perpetrators of such crimes (for rape, see Deuteronomy 22:25-27; for incest, see Leviticus 18:6ff., 29) precisely because they are so evil and horrific. Nevertheless, a preborn child who is conceived as a result of these evils is not to be murdered, in the same way as it would be a crime to murder a three-year old child who was conceived as a result of rape or incest. There is no difference in the divine-legal protection rights of the preborn child, as compared with those of the three-year old child. Both are equally protected by Genesis 9:6 from the horror of murder.

<sup>14</sup> It must be noted that nations that have traditionally been seen as representing Judeo-Christian societies—nations such as the United Kingdom and the United States—are currently eroding, morally, at an alarming rate. The knowledge of the Sixth Commandment, for example, can no longer be taken for granted amongst the youth of England, or the youth of America. And a strong case may be made for the proposition that our legal-political acceptance of abortion (along with our intellectual embrace of Darwinian thought) has done more to undermine our Judeo-Christian ethics than any other cultural, political, or social development in the history of our nations. If this is true, time will bear it out.

## GOD'S LITTLEST IMAGE BEARERS

Still, what undergirds the Sixth Commandment (and our human laws that are based upon it) is the doctrine of the image of God. God says to Noah, “*Whoever sheds man’s blood, his blood will be shed by man, for God made man in His own image*” (Genesis 9:6). That is, the ultimate reason why a person ought to flee the thought of ever raising a knife to murder someone is that every “someone” is created in the image of God. Seeing the image of God in him, he must fear the thought of unjustly harming him. The infinitely bright light of the glory of God, reflected in finite ways through the image of God in us,<sup>15</sup> makes the very idea of murder a terrifying one. For, the wrath of God is poured out against those who would slay His image bearers.

But this same truth applies to *all* preborn babies. From conception onwards, all preborn children have been created in the image of God. Therefore, seeing God’s glory being reflected through these little image bearers, the thought of raising a suction tube, a curette, a knife, a needle, a bottle of saline solution, or a pair of forceps over a preborn baby ought to be a most terrifying one. We ought to shudder, with horror, at such a thought. In light of God’s holy wrath against the shedding of innocent blood, since “*God made man in His own image,*” abortion is a most hideous and most terrifying practice.

A word must be said here to the contemporary Evangelical Church in the Western world. The spiritual decline of the contemporary Evangelical Church in the Western world, which is taking place before our very eyes and is so obvious now that it cannot be ignored,<sup>16</sup> may well be a judgment from God (at least partially—for our spiritual idolatry is also an enormous factor) against our passivity and practical indifference towards the Abortion Holocaust.

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<sup>15</sup>Athanasius, in *Against the Heathen* 8.2 (NPNF<sup>2</sup> 4:8), describes the image of God as “the mirror which, as it were, is in [the human soul], by which alone [the human soul] ha[s] the power of seeing the Image of the Father.”

<sup>16</sup>To see this, one only needs to compare the popular sermons being preached by the average contemporary Evangelical preachers in the Western world—but there are, of course, bright and hopeful exceptions to this norm—with the sermons of our Puritan forefathers. The chasm between the two, in both doctrine and holiness, is so large as to call into question, with alarming bewilderment, our current methods of exposition and discipleship. Or, to see how alarming the spiritual decline really is, one only needs to point to the glaring moral laxity of the contemporary Evangelical Church in the Western world and its trajectory towards the apostasy of licentiousness, of which we are told, in the book of Jude, to beware.

## DIVINE HEARTBEAT

So obsessed with “missional contextualization” (the idea of adapting the Gospel to its host culture, in a missions-minded way) and issues of what it calls “reading the culture,” the Neo-Evangelical movement, which may have reached its zenith in the late twentieth century, has become a slave to its surrounding culture. It has sold itself into slavery under the cultural fads and trends of this present world.

In specific, the current Evangelicals of the early twenty-first century have discovered a zeal for what is broadly termed by the secular world as “social justice.” Awakening to the teachings of Carl Henry (1913-2003),<sup>17</sup> who helped launch the Neo-Evangelical movement in the late 1940’s, young Evangelicals are now following rock-and-roll stars, such as Paul David Hewson (commonly known as “Bono,” the lead singer of the rock group U2), and even their own worship-music pop stars, in a quest for meaning in life through social action. Much of this is biblical (e.g. Amos 5:24). Adopting orphans, caring for the poor and the needy (especially widows), developing prison ministries, fighting against global sex trafficking, coming to the aid of earthquake victims, and working towards ethnic reconciliation<sup>18</sup> in the Church, are all things of monumental significance, and things that God lovingly demands of His people (for the divine “demand” of biblical social action, see, among many other New Testament passages, Matthew 25:32-46).

However, there is something very amiss in all of this. The fact is that social justice is trendy and modish, both in the Evangelical Church *and in the non-Christian world*. This is not a bad thing, per se,<sup>19</sup> and a genuine, sacrificial (as opposed to Marxist) concern for the needy should be welcomed by all as a great development in the realm of social concern. Nonetheless, it is telling that while Evangelicals wax bold on the very issues that are in harmony with their

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<sup>17</sup> In many ways, the work of Carl F.H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), marks the beginning of the Neo-Evangelical Movement in America.

<sup>18</sup> The present author has purposefully avoided using the phrase “racial reconciliation,” as there is, in the Bible, only one true “race,” which is the human one. Also, there are not different “colors” of people in the Bible. There are, however, *ethnic* groups, all of whom God loves. He is indebted to the preaching of Ken Ham, president of Answers in Genesis, for this insight.

<sup>19</sup> However, let us who treasure passages such as Isaiah 1:16-17 not forget that the “Social Gospel” of the early twentieth century was, indeed, heretical, and ultimately led many professing Christians (who were not regenerate believers) to Hell.

## GOD'S LITTLEST IMAGE BEARERS

unbelieving peers, they are culpably silent on matters that would draw the hatred of their unbelieving peers.<sup>20</sup>

For example, contemporary Evangelicals may give lip service to a traditional view on sexuality and marriage, but they are too quick to claim (erroneously) that homosexuality is no greater sin than heterosexual fornication (while, in reality, both are horrible sins, but homosexuality is, biblically speaking, the greater sin).<sup>21</sup> They are forever speaking against any kind of “fire and brimstone” type of evangelism (while Ezekiel, for example, preaches, evangelistically, both “*fire*” and “*brimstone*”; see Ezekiel 38:22), preferring, instead, to proclaim a very placid, non-threatening version of “Jesus.” In response, it must be said that while we are to preach “judgment” in a charitable and humble way, there is no avoiding the biblical evidence that the proclamation of “*the judgment to come*” (Acts 24:25; note that Felix, the unbeliever, becomes “afraid” of Paul’s evangelism) is a big part of the preaching of the Gospel, itself.<sup>22</sup>

There are degrees of sin. All sins are worthy of everlasting condemnation in Hell.<sup>23</sup> But some sins are much worse than others.<sup>24</sup> Lust is Satanic, and just as condemning as adultery (so out the window goes Pharisaical righteousness), but lust is not as evil as the actual act of adultery, which is unconscionable. Hatred condemns a

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<sup>20</sup> This is not to imply that it would be a bad thing for the non-Christian world to embrace the idea of the abolition of abortion, or that Christians should not welcome the global (non-Christian) popularity of things that are in line with biblical justice. Nor is this to say that if the abolition of abortion were to gain the approval of many unbelievers that we should, therefore, cease to be as passionate about it as we were when it was a minority view. This is simply to say that contemporary Evangelicals tend to gravitate towards social causes that cost them little in the way of persecution, whereas they tend to shy away from social causes that draw persecution.

<sup>21</sup> Why is it, for example, that many Evangelicals seem to be ashamed of the intensity of the word “abomination,” which was chosen by God for a specific purpose in Leviticus 18:22 (KJV, NKJV, ESV, NASB)? Is this not reflective of how both the lies of “genetics/psychology,” on the one hand, and the pressures of the surrounding culture, on the other, have blunted their view on what is, in truth, the shocking and abhorrent nature of homosexuality?

<sup>22</sup> See especially: John 16:8; Acts 17:31; Hebrews 6:2; 10:27; Revelation 14:9-11.

<sup>23</sup> Thus James 2:10 is rightly understood as speaking about the ability of all sins, including a single sin, to bring condemnation. It is not, however, teaching that “all sins are equal,” in the sense of having equal degrees to them.

<sup>24</sup> Consider the following: Exodus 21:14-19; Leviticus 10:2, 19-20; Matthew 26:24; Mark 9:42; Luke 12:47-48; John 19:11.

## DIVINE HEARTBEAT

soul to Hell, but murder is much worse. Hoarding wealth and multiplying vacation homes in a world of starving people is wicked—even deserving of a Sodom-like judgment (see Ezekiel 16:49). But abortion is even worse. It is the worst of all of the social sins because it is the slaughter of the weakest of the weak. It attacks and murders *the most vulnerable of image bearers in all of God's creation*. It brings bloodshed into the sanctuary of the womb.

What is needed, then, within the contemporary Evangelical Church, is a deep, somber, heart-tearing repentance over the issue of priorities. For example, most American Evangelicals are at least nominally pro-life. But many American Evangelicals recently voted, at least once and some of them twice, for the most aggressively pro-abortion president in the history of America. These Evangelicals failed to uphold *the top priority of the defense of preborn life* on God's scales of justice. They elevated what they called “economic justice”<sup>25</sup> above the Abortion Holocaust.

We must see justice as God sees it. Genesis 9:6 elevates the murdering of preborn children, who are created in the image of God, decisively above other issues of justice in our world.<sup>26</sup> The sheer numbers of preborn children slaughtered in the Abortion Holocaust should cause us to rethink our priorities. The numbers are beyond staggering. Since the *Roe v. Wade* decision in America, which took place on January 22, 1973, there have been considerably more than 50,000,000 abortions perpetrated on American soil.<sup>27</sup> Also, since the implementation of the one-child policy in China, there have been

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<sup>25</sup> “Economic justice” is a matter that, itself, must be worked out biblically, and not Socialistically, but this debate is beyond the scope of this book.

<sup>26</sup> This is not to say that other issues, such as the horror of human sex trafficking, are not important. They are immensely important, and ought to receive enormous amounts of attention from Christians. It is to say, however, that abortion is the greatest issue of our day, and that no one claiming to love God's justice can do so truthfully without making the abolition of abortion their *highest* priority in the realm of societal justice.

<sup>27</sup> The usual statistics on the number of children murdered by abortion in America since 1973 do not take into account all of the children who have been slaughtered via: (i) the murderous discarding of embryos during the in vitro fertilization (IVF) process; (ii) the widespread use of the birth control pill, which sometimes causes abortions (see, especially, Randy Alcorn, *Does the Birth Control Pill Cause Abortions?* [10<sup>th</sup> ed., rev.; Sandy, OR: Eternal Perspective Ministries, 2011], 52); (iii) the rise in popularity of “the morning after pill”; and (iv) other “contraceptive” means that cause abortions.

## GOD'S LITTLEST IMAGE BEARERS

upwards of 336,000,000 recorded abortions in China,<sup>28</sup> not counting those abortions that have been caused by the mass employment of intrauterine devices (commonly called IUD's, which produce abortions)<sup>29</sup> in China.

The numbers are vastly appalling, but there is more. The high-resolution ultrasound machines that have come to us through modern technology are lifesavers (literally), and they have given pregnant mothers a window into the grandeur of God's artistic design of babies in the womb. The ultrasound images, too, summon us to action. Any compassionate consideration of the sheer beauty and vulnerability of these little image bearers, who suck their thumbs, adorably, and who love the rhythms of their mothers' heartbeats echoing in the womb, should compel us to rethink our rhetoric about abortion. Therefore, instead of always speaking in the language of "a positive alternative to expectant mothers," and couching our arguments in blunted fashion, as a way of cowering before the criticisms of the advocates of abortion, we need to start speaking much more firmly, openly, and boldly about what abortion actually is in the eyes of God. We need to speak of bloodshed as bloodshed. Such radiant image bearers deserve our courageous and unwavering (though still full of grace, seasoned with salt) speech in their defense.

Preborn children, all of them, from conception onwards, are little image bearers. They are precious to God because in their tiny and marvelous beauty, they are children who are vulnerable, weak, dependent, trusting, and very much attached to their mothers' love. Abortion, in all cases, is the act of spilling the blood of these image bearers. It is a most murderous practice. And we, who claim to worship the God of Scripture, and by worshipping Him also claim to "practice justice" (Micah 6:8, the present author's translation), ought to be in tears for the preborn. We should find ourselves weeping and sobbing for them. We must tear our clothes, rend our hearts, and wail

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<sup>28</sup> Malcolm Moore, "336 Million Abortions Under China's One Child Policy," *The [London] Telegraph*, March 15, 2013. Cited 18 March 18, 2013. Online: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/9933468/336-million-abortions-under-Chinas-one-child-policy.html>.

<sup>29</sup> After surveying the detailed medical evidence that IUDs can prevent implantation, J. Collins and P.G. Crosignani et al., "Intrauterine Devices and Intrauterine Systems," *Human Reproductive Update* [an Oxford Journal] Volume 14, Issue 3 (2008), 197-208, conclude that "both clinical and experimental evidence suggests that IUDs can prevent and disrupt implantation."

## DIVINE HEARTBEAT

over our sins of omission in not doing more to protect them. And, afterwards, we must commit ourselves to place the defense of the preborn, which includes the total abolition of abortion, *at the very top* of our list of objectives when it comes to praying for, and fighting for God's justice in the world.

### THE IMAGE OF GOD AND HUMAN RULERSHIP

To be human is to be created in the image of God. How, then, should human rulers view the practice of abortion? The two concepts of “the image of God” and of “rulership” are intimately connected. Part of God's image in us involves the capacity to rule.

*God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness: and let them have [rulership] over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” God created man in His own image. In God's image He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them. God said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Have [rulership] over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (Genesis 1:26-28)*

What does it mean to be created in God's image? Part of the answer to this question involves human rulership “*over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth*” (v. 28). God made us to organize and govern His creation, as His under-rulers. He is the Ruler over all. In His likeness, we are made to be sub-rulers, rulers under His sovereign rule, and we are to imitate Him in ruling our little domains with holiness, justice, mercy, and love.<sup>30</sup>

Of course, the history of human rulership is not an upright one. Adam forfeited his rule over the Garden through his sin. Ever since then, all humans—save Christ Himself—have been conceived with a sin nature, and are naturally bent towards a sinful or tyrannical form

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<sup>30</sup> Tertullian (c. 145-220), in *Against Marcion* 2.8 (ANF 3.304), speaks of the image of God in the language of human rulership: “[Man] being the image and likeness of God, was stronger than any angel...[God] would not have made all things subject to man, if he had been too weak for the dominion, and inferior to the angels, to whom He assigned no such subjects....”



## GOD'S LITTLEST IMAGE BEARERS

of rulership. This sinful rulership is not just something that exists in the pagan nations that surround Israel. Even the Israelites, those who are called by God's own name, participate in a very sinful kind of rulership over their own people:

*An astonishing and horrible thing has happened in the land. The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own authority; and My people love to have it so. What will you do in the end of it? (Jeremiah 5:30–31)*

God is the Good Shepherd. He rules His people with perfect righteousness and unblemished justice. However, in Ezekiel 34, the Good Shepherd is quite angry. He is angry because His under-shepherds, the rulers of Israel, are abusing their power and oppressing their subjects:

*You have not strengthened the diseased, neither have you healed that which was sick, neither have you bound up that which was broken, neither have you brought back that which was driven away, neither have you sought that which was lost; but with force and with rigor you have ruled over them. (Ezekiel 34:4)*

There is, then, the cry in Israel for a Messianic King, who will rule Israel with perfect righteousness and complete justice. Only the Messiah will rule with a sinless rule:

*God, give the king Your justice; Your righteousness to the royal son. He will judge Your people with righteousness, and Your poor with justice. . . . He shall have [rulership] also from sea to sea, from the River to the ends of the earth. (Psalm 72:1-2, 8)*

Jesus is the Messiah. King of kings and Lord of lords, He has inaugurated His Kingdom on earth through His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. His rule shall be, in the future, first a

## DIVINE HEARTBEAT

millennial rule (see Revelation 20:1-6),<sup>31</sup> and then an everlasting rule. Still, in the time between His first and second comings, He has delegated His rulership to His bondservants. And, in the parable of Matthew 24:45-51, Jesus makes it clear that those church rulers who abuse their rulership in the interval between His first and second advents will be judged severely. Rulership in the Church is always a delegated rulership. It is to be handled with fear and trembling before Christ, the King.

Much of biblical rulership, to be sure, is sacrificial in nature. A true ruler becomes the slave of all. He washes the feet of his subjects. He exercises mercy and compassion in abundance. He learns from Christ Jesus to serve others, not for selfish agendas or for gaining influence over others, but simply out of sacrificial love. He governs with the rod and staff of the under-shepherd, and he lays down his life for the sheep.

Still, rulership in the Bible also involves the act of subduing. Image bearers are those who, in Genesis 1:28, “*fill the earth and subdue it.*” They exercise rulership by bringing the whole of creation into submission to Christ’s holy government. To be truly human is to be someone who desires to subdue the earth under the Lordship of Christ Jesus.

In our fallen world, this involves the conquest of evil, for the increase of Christ’s dominion on earth:

*The whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled themselves together at Shiloh, and set up the Tent of Meeting there. The land was subdued before them. (Joshua 18:1)*

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<sup>31</sup> The Millennial Kingdom of Christ is the perfect fulfillment of the image of God as it entails human rulership. Christ, the Image of God, shall be the perfect Ruler on earth during His thousand-year reign that precedes the second resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment. Amillennialists, who deny a literal and future thousand-year reign, ought not too quickly dismiss the weight of Justin Martyr’s words in his *Dialogue with Trypho* 81, 82 (ANF 1:239, 240), on this doctrine, “But I and others, who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged, [as] the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare...And further, there was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a revelation that was made to him, that those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem; and that thereafter the general, and, in short, the eternal resurrection and judgment of all men would likewise take place.”

## GOD'S LITTLEST IMAGE BEARERS

In Scripture, King David is a warrior. He exercises his status as God's image bearer and sub-ruler by subduing lands and peoples under the reign of the Kingdom of Israel:

*David also commanded all the princes of Israel to help Solomon his son, saying, "Is not the LORD your God with you? Has He not given you rest on every side? For He has delivered the inhabitants of the land into my hand; and the land is subdued before the LORD, and before His people."*  
(1 Chronicles 22:17–18)

Jesus, however, is greater than David. He is a greater warrior than David. Not with sword and spear, but rather with His own suffering and weakness on the Cross, Jesus conquers vast territories for God, His Father. He subdues our sin and wins our souls through His blood:

*He will again have compassion on us. He will [subdue] our iniquities under foot; and You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. (Micah 7:19)*

Yes, but Jesus still has a war to fight. He came to earth, the first time, gentle and humble, peaceful and riding on a donkey. But He shall come, a second time, in war. He will subdue the earth with a warrior's shout and a soldier's sword. And we, His people, shall fight with Him to subdue the earth beneath His righteous authority:

*The LORD will be seen over them; and His arrow will [go forth] like lightning; and the Lord GOD will blow the trumpet, and will go with whirlwinds of the south. The LORD of Hosts will defend them; and they will destroy and [subdue] with sling stones; and they will drink, and roar as through wine; and they will be filled like bowls, like the corners of the altar. (Zechariah 9:14–15)*

The cry of every truly Christian prayer, then, is a cry for the increase of the rulership and dominion of Christ on earth: "*Let Your Kingdom come. Let Your will be done, as in heaven, so on earth*" (Matthew 6:10). We are God's image bearers. We are, therefore, charged with rulership over the earth. Yes, but this rulership is an under-rulership. Like Christ, we subdue the earth, in this present age, not with Christian violence, but by way of our own sufferings and

## DIVINE HEARTBEAT

persecutions. And like Christ's rulership, our own under-rulership must be executed with protective love for the weak, the downtrodden, the injured, and the vulnerable. It must subdue the forces of evil that war against God's holy name, so that all lands and all peoples may be brought into submission to the Lordship of Christ Jesus.<sup>32</sup>

Human rulers, therefore, must exercise power and authority only as under the rule of Christ.<sup>33</sup> They are not permitted to write laws which are contrary to God's law. They do not have the right to use their own political philosophies or national self-interests in order to exalt themselves above God. Most importantly, they are not allowed to oppress, injure, and murder the weak in the name of "the common good" or "women's rights" or "national prosperity." They are, rather, charged by God with the promotion of holiness and mercy in the world. And they shall answer to God for how they have exercised their power, whether for good or for evil.

How then, should human rulers, whether the Parliament of the United Kingdom or the Standing Committee of China, view abortion? What laws should they establish in relation to abortion? The answer should now be obvious. If human rulership is viewed through the lens of the doctrine of human beings as created in the image of God, then all human rulership is to be practiced *as under God's sovereign Rulership*. It is God, and not man, who must decide the matter. It is man's job to enforce the rule of God on earth in a way that pleases God: by loving Him, first, and then by loving one's neighbor as one's very self. When it comes to abortion, then, the total and complete abolition of abortion, in all nations and at all times, is the responsibility of all human rulers. To bear God's image is to

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<sup>32</sup> The Bible, however, makes it clear that Christians, this side of Christ's Second Coming, will not be victorious in bringing all nations into submission to the Lordship of Christ Jesus. It is true that throughout history, Christians will be the harbingers of salvation to people from every tribe, every tongue, and every nation. Nevertheless, Revelation 11:10 and 13:7 seem to indicate that there will be a mass persecution and slaughtering of Christians just prior to the return of Christ, and that Christian influence in the world will wane in the final days before His return.

<sup>33</sup> To be sure, unbelievers who rule over nations do not recognize the rule of Christ, and, therefore, they wickedly deny their limited status as sub-rulers who, themselves, are subject to the rule of Christ. However, the rule of Christ remains the unchanging truth, even for them. It remains the standard of rulership and justice, even for them. And at the resurrection of the just and the unjust, they shall be judged by Christ, Himself, on how they responded to this standard of rulership.

## GOD'S LITTLEST IMAGE BEARERS

subdue the evil of abortion by ruling in such a way that will protect and treasure all human life in the womb, under all circumstances.

William Wilberforce was not the king of England, but he was, by God's gracious providence, one of the most powerful rulers in England in his day. His sharp wit and selfless love for others made him powerful as a Member of Parliament (MP). Yet it was, more fundamentally, his strong commitment to the fear of God and Lordship of Christ Jesus that made him powerful. He was unwavering in his moral convictions. He would not vote along party lines when his conscience was being pricked. He exercised his status as God's image bearer by ruling with justice, compassion, and Christian piety.<sup>34</sup>

It was not so for all MP's in Wilberforce's day. There was a time, for example, when Wilberforce's voice in Parliament was so strong that the abolition of the slave trade looked imminent, even as early as the year 1796. However, on March 15 of that year, when Wilberforce's Abolition Bill came up for vote on a Third Reading, the cause was lost by four votes (70 in favor, 74 opposed). This was a crushing defeat for Wilberforce, especially because he had personal knowledge that at least five or six MP's who would have otherwise voted on his side had, instead of attending the vote, decided to go to the Opera House to hear the new Italian opera that had come to town.<sup>35</sup> It would be another 11 years (the decisive vote in Parliament took place on February 23, 1807) before the abolition of the slave trade. In those 11 years, many Africans, who were equally created in God's image, lost their families, their freedom, and their lives.

Most Christians are not political rulers. In America, for example, most Christians lack the money and influence to become United States congressmen or senators. Still, all Christians are created in the image of God. That means that God has given to us, each and all, a certain amount of rulership. Pastors have a certain amount of

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<sup>34</sup> Many admirers of Wilberforce who nevertheless do not know the details of his life's story might be surprised to learn just how vocal he was about his faith in the God of Scripture, and how much he quoted the Bible in public. He was, first and foremost, committed to Christian piety, which one of his best friends, Hannah More, described as "a religion of the heart." But for both Wilberforce and More, this religion of the heart is dead if it lacks feeling for the weakest and most vulnerable members of society.

<sup>35</sup> For the details of this historical event, see John Pollock, *William Wilberforce* (Sandy Lane West, Oxford: Lion Publishing 1977), 143.

## DIVINE HEARTBEAT

dominion in their churches. Doctors have a certain degree of authority in their hospitals and clinics. Fathers and mothers have a large amount of dominion in their homes. Every web blog, every Christmas letter, and every financial gift to a Christian ministry, is an expression of the image of God through the exercise of sub-rulership in the world. God has given us talents to use in order to rule over His created order—in the fear of Him—and in order to subdue the earth under His Lordship.

Therefore, beloved Reader, when it comes to the Abortion Holocaust, the legalized slaughtering of the weakest of the weak, you have an obligation to act, courageously, in their defense. Jesus Christ, your Creator and your Lord, demands it of you. How, then, are you exercising your domains of sub-rulership on their behalf? Are you willing to speak up for them, who are unable to speak up for themselves? Are you willing to be persecuted for them, or to die for them? Will you commit yourself to the work of the abolition of abortion, in a holy and distinctly Christian manner, no matter what it may cost you? Should not the evil of abortion be subdued in our world, against all odds, so that the goodness and glory of God may be on display for all the world to see? Dear and precious Reader, exercise your realms of rulership for the sake of the preborn. Do not let the Sovereign Lord find you at the Opera House on the Day of Decision.