

The Mystery of Man

“Lord, what is man, that You take knowledge of him? Or the son of man, that You are mindful of him? Man is like a breath; His days are alike a passing shadow”. (Psalm 144:3-4)

The mystery and wonder of man is exclaimed thrice in scripture (Job. 7:17, Ps. 8:4, Heb. 2:6), each with the question “What is this?”. These questions do not arise over meditations on the excellency of this creation of God, as in Ps. 139:14. Rather, why God bothered to make him and to convey upon him such favor, power and dominion. Indeed, when compared with the greater glories and powers of all creation, their size, number, power, excellence and permanence, man, in his fleeting temporal existence, seems a surprising steward under whom to put the whole of the created universe.

Man is the most helpless of all born creatures. He is born stupid, ignorant, naked, toothless, unable to find his food, to protect himself from the elements, or to do the least thing necessary for his care. Everything must be brought to him and done for him. Whereas most other new-born creatures can immediately undertake survival action, an infant left to himself would surely perish. A week-old baby calf can outrun a man in his prime. Man is dwarfed by a tree, a fish is more consistent, a hummingbird more skilful. A goose is a better traveler. Unencumbered with luggage and provision, he can precisely navigate thousands of miles to his destination, finding food, water, lodging and shelter along the route. A pig is a better provider, a house cat a better hunter, a spider a better engineer, a worm more efficient, and the clucking of a hen to her chicks more effective than the most impassioned preaching. Ten square feet of good earth is more productive than a Thomas Edison. Inventors and industrialists only discover things, die and are no more; the good earth actually coaxes to life and nourishes, over and over, continually renewing itself generation after generation.

Man’s single excellence over all other creatures, the size of his brain, is his greatest liability. It is what gets him into all his trouble. Devoid of practical sense, he has to be *taught* everything he knows, and so is vulnerable to every lie in the universe. He has the distinction of being “the fool” of all God’s creation.

Why has God set this impotent, helpless, stupid, feckless, temporal creature over all His creation, indeed made him to bear the image of the Almighty? Psalm 8:2 tells us that He has ordained power and strength “out of the mouths of babes”, the helpless and impotent, in order to silence the enemy and avenger. It is all for the excellence of God’s name. Satan, lifted up with pride over his beauty, excellence and station, led a rebellion in the heavenlies, and sought to overthrow the Almighty. God deliberately chooses to crush this Serpent’s head under the heel of one born a helpless babe. It is to His glory, and the humiliation of His enemies to make the weak and inferior to rule the mighty and the excellent. (I Cor. 1:27:31) God has effectually robbed the great and mighty of any grounds of boasting and exaltation, deliberately put the weightiest of responsibilities in the hands of weak, foolish and ignorant men, so that all that is done may accrue, not to created flesh, but the Almighty hand of the Creator himself. If man is to glory it can be in nothing but the knowledge and favor of God (Jer. 9:23-24).

-C.M.