

## Column

When I was in the ninth grade, the English literature book used in our school included the text of Psalm 8. This passage, as rendered in the Authorised King James Version, was held up as an example of the English language at its most exalted. The text begins with a grand statement of praise: “O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!”

I suppose that this selection could not be used in a textbook today, in case some small-minded person might be offended and complain that ‘religion’ was being taught. Even so, I believe the editors of the textbook were right to include it. Listening to noble prose and poetry excites the mind and heart in a way not unlike that of standing before a painting by one of the great masters.

Of course, the psalm has a religious dimension. It speaks of the Creator God and of man’s place in the divine order. I am particularly attracted to the line that says: “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man that thou visitest him?” There is much in these parallel lines to unpack.

From all outward appearances, humans are members of the animal kingdom who live for a few years and die. Yet, in our bones of bones we feel we have an identity and a purpose beyond this naturalistic view. Wordsworth, for example, speaks of humans having “intimations of immortality.” Tennyson, meanwhile, says: “He [man] thinks he was not made to die.”

What answer does the psalmist give to the question, What is man? Like Wordsworth and Tennyson, he sees man made for something more. He says: “Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet.”

These words, along with others in the Bible, represent a high view of man. A quick summary may go something like this:

Man was made in the image of God (Genesis 1), yet this image was marred by human sinfulness and rebellion (Genesis 3). Rescue was needed, a rescue which God provided in Jesus. He is the Second Adam’ . . . the second head of the human race. In Him the defaced image is restored and humans can once again begin to fulfil the calling God gave them ‘in the beginning.’

The exalted man spoken of Psalm 8 – “Thou hast . . . crowed him with glory and honour” -- is first fully realised in Christ, and now in all those who are ‘in Christ’. The Son of God came not only to save us from our sins but to show us how to be truly human.

In response, let us shout with the Psalmist: “O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth” . . . and get busy shining!

*Almighty and everlasting God, who didst will to restore all things in thy well-beloved Son, the King of kings, and Lord of lords: Mercifully grant that all the kindreds of the earth, set free from the captivity of sin, may be brought under his most gracious dominion, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit ever, one God world without end. Amen.*

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