

## VICTORINUS AND THE *IMAGO DEI*

THE doctrine of man as the *Imago Dei* has been brought out into the forefront of theological speculation in recent years, especially by Emil Brunner and Karl Barth<sup>1</sup>; and Catholic theologians fully admit that Christian tradition needs to be re-explored before an adequate theological statement can be made in the face of the existentialist writers. The great problem, of course, is how can the two apparently irreconcilable trends in Christian tradition be synthesised without prejudice to the truth which each enunciates. How, in short, can the classic theory of St. Augustine be reconciled with the far too little known *Imago Christi* stress of Tertullian and St. Irenaeus? The latter school taught that man was made to the image of God in the sense that he was made after the pattern of the Christ coming in the flesh to redeem mankind: this school therefore strongly stresses the corporal likeness as a basic element in the Image doctrine. St. Augustine on the other hand, basing himself on a subtle analysis of the nature of the '*mens*,' contends that man is made to the image of the Trinity itself, and carries in his soul a reflection of the divine life. This theory is then concerned to emphasise man's spiritual nature as the most important element in the *Imago* doctrine.

In this essay that vast subject is avoided, though it should be pointed out that St. Augustine was by no means unaware of the other opinion (cf. *De Trinitate*, iv.4, and vii.7). Here all that is attempted is to suggest that the *Imago Trinitatis* teaching did not spring from St. Augustine's head unheralded, but is the result of the impact of Neo-Platonic teaching regarding the soul on Christian dogma, which first explicitly emerges in the writings of Victorinus.

As a result of the absorption and transformation of his theories by St. Augustine the importance of C. Marius Victorinus Afer (c.300 to after 362) has been largely overlooked, even with regard to the considerable contributions which he made to the philosophic development of the *Verbum* doctrine.

The life and teaching of Victorinus have received competent treatment in accessible works (cf. Bibliographical Note at the end of this article), so it is possible to summarise the essential evidence in the short form of two quotations.

St. Jerome tells us, with a certain venom—perhaps owing to the fact that he had attended lectures by Victorinus<sup>2</sup>—that 'Vic-

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<sup>1</sup> G. Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, pp. 82 sq. and 490 sq. : and Barth, *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God*, pp. 41 sq.

<sup>2</sup> Com. in Gal. Praef: '*qui Romam me puero rhetoricam docuit.*'

torinus, an African by birth, taught rhetoric at Rome under the Emperor Constantius, and in extreme old age, yielding himself to faith in Christ wrote books against Arius written in dialectic style and very obscure language, books which can only be understood by the learned. He also wrote Commentaries on the Epistles' (*Lives of Illustrious Men*, c.1 Nicene and Post-Nicene Lib. vol. 3, p.381).

St. Augustine gives a longer and more vivid account: 'Unto Simplicianus therefore I went. I told him that I had read over certain books of the Platonists, which Victorinus, some time rhetoric professor at Rome (who died a Christian as I had heard) had translated into Latin; he much rejoiced over me, for that I had not fallen upon any other philosophers' writings. And the better to exhort me to Christ's humility he mentioned Victorinus himself, whom whilst he was at Rome he had familiarly known: and of him he told me this story, which I will not here conceal. For it affords matter of much praise of thy grace, which ought to be confessed unto thee, to hear how this most learned old man, most skilful in all the liberal sciences; one who had read, and weighed so many of the philosophers; one who had been the master to so many noble Senators, who also as a mark of high office nobly filled had both deserved and obtained a statue in the Roman forum; he remaining even till his old age a worshipper of idols' of whom 'this old Victorinus with his thundering eloquence, had so many years been the champion; how, I say, he blushed not to become the child of Christ, and an infant at thy font, submitting his neck to the yoke of humility' (*Confessions* viii, 2).

Those who are interested should read the rest of this chapter of the *Confessions* which tells how Victorinus gloried in his faith and made public profession of it; and somewhat later on, how under Julian 'when there was made a law whereby the Christians were forbidden to teach the liberal sciences or oratory, and how he obeying the law, chose rather to give over his wordy schools, than thy Word' (*id.*5).

This must suffice, but it is valuable to have such a glimpse of the attractive personality of Victorinus, which at times breaks through the excessively abstract trend of his writings in a hymn of praise.

The first Christian to construct a Theology with the aid of Neo-Platonic principles, he was naturally led to stress the divine transcendence of the God 'who is above all things that are and all things that are not' (*De Generatione Verbi Divini*, P.L.8, 1021-2); yet he is no Arian. At least in intent, for Dr. Gore has detected subordinationist lapses, and goes so far as to assert that there is an unintentional duality of that which is and that which proceeds (*Dict. Christian Biography*, iv.1134, Victorinus). Be that as it may, he certainly

does teach that there is in the Godhead 'a *motus* that is not a *mutatio*,' this is the eternal utterance of the divine will, the *logos* or the Son, who is the eternal object of the Spirit as a *regressus* and a *progressus* (*Adv. Arium*, i 58, P.L. 8, 1085-6), and is thus the 'First theologian to speak of the Spirit as the principle of unity in the Godhead' (*Gore op. cit.*, 4: *Adv. Arium*, i 60). It can therefore be seen that Victorinus had arrived at a sufficiently explicit theological vision of the doctrine of the Trinity to be able to discuss man as the image of God in terms of it.

What then was his doctrine regarding man? Man is a mixed being—his soul (*anima*) not yet spirit (*nous*) is intermediate between spirit and matter (cf. *Adv. Arium*, v.11, P.L.1121), and therefore the force and power of his soul are not yet that of spirit, but are such that man can receive spirit (*In Ep. ad Ephesios*, P.L. 1239). Not spirit since the soul is chained to matter and man contains earthy elements (cf. *De Generatione Verbi*, P.L.1086, 1023). In the soul itself he distinguishes the *Intellectualia* or *nous* by which the soul is related to the *Logos* and is said really to be, from the earthy elements which *non vere sunt* (*De Generatione Verbi*, 1023). The question then with which this essay is concerned is how Victorinus thought this being was made to the Image of God.

'All which is from the divine, is to it as if part of it, but as image so that it is in others, . . . in the truly divine things the *Logos* is the image of God, so the soul of the *Logos*. . . but in sensual natures there are not images, but rather something like an image' (*Adv. Arium* iii, P.L.8, 1098). The soul, then, is the image by reason of its likeness to the *Logos*. Material things and the material element in man cannot be in the image of God, and this latter denial is occasioned by Victorinus's horror of matter. It is also important to note as Monceaux does (*L'Afrique Chretienne*, iii, 415), that the soul does not directly reflect the transcendent God, but only the manifested *Logos*, who is the image of the hidden divinity; a clear instance of the strong negative trend in Victorinus's thought.

It is in the *Adversus Arium*, written about 359, that he develops this doctrine. First he tried to discover what an image is; and here, rather interestingly, he gives a Neo-Platonic twist to an idea found in Tertullian (*Adv. Praxeam*, 5). 'And why is the *Logos* the Image of God? Since (what is in) God in a hidden (mode) as in potency, the *Logos* indeed manifests as action; which action having all that is in potency, produces life and knowledge according to motion and manifests all; on account of which of all those things that are in potency (it is) the image and action' (*Adv. Arium*, i 19). There follows a long and complicated argument which may be summarised

in this way. The Logos is, as it were, the manifestative species and determination of the divine esse, which latter is only known to us as cause or source. The Logos is the *actio* of all that is potential and is the perfect image in the sense that as all *esse* has as inseparable species defining it, so the Logos is the defining element, one in substance with that which it defines. Esse is the cause of the species that is in it; esse can thus be identified with the Father, the Son with the species or Logos, which is the Image of that which is in the Father.

We can reduce his concept of Image to his own terse phrase *quod autem alterum ab altero, imaginale et imago* (*op.cit.*, i 21), and without further elaboration it can be asserted that the perfect Image, the Logos, is the full expression of that which is imaged, being at the same time, as Image, in some way dependant on and inseparable from its exemplar.

How can this idea be applied to man? In his Commentary on Genesis Victorinus wrote 'God said these words, Let us make. . .; he said them to a co-operator, by necessity Christ; and said, according to the image; therefore man is not the image of God but according to the image: for only Jesus is the Image of God, man is according to the image. But he said according to our image. Therefore of the Father and the Son there is one image' (*op. cit.* i 20). This is not the place for a criticism of Victorinus's exegesis, but only for a statement of his theory, that man on account of his imperfection is not the Image of God, but only according to the image of God. On account of the authority of Genesis he asserts that man is the image of both the Father and the Son. This conclusion is, however, only the logical deduction of considering the Logos as the Image and man's soul as being an image of the Logos.

Victorinus next applied himself to the problem of what this exegesis implies. "Let us make man. . ." what is the "according to the image" and the "Our"? Then what is this "and according to the likeness"? For so it is said signifying a difference both of image and likeness. Since there is much questioning of what "Let us make" is said. . . it is to be conceded now that it is of the soul of man . . . and nothing except the soul: for it alone is according to the image of God and according to the likeness. We can say Christ, the very Logos, is the Image of God. We say the soul is according to the image of God, calling it rational' (*op. et loc. cit.*)

A discussion on the difference between the image and the likeness follows which gives further relevant information.

The soul which is to the image is a substance, since it is self-moving. Therefore the image is something substantial. The rational

soul is the image by reason of its rationality. As the Logos is considered to be substance, we can say that the soul as both rational and as substance is to the image of the Logos. On the other hand the likeness (*similitudo*) denotes a perfecting of the soul and is something qualitative. How, therefore, he asks, 'can the soul be rational and perfectly rational according to the likeness of the perfection that is in God?' (*op. et loc. cit.*)

The answer is that there is an equivocation in the use of the word perfect. 'We call the soul perfect according to the image now and in this world; according to the likeness, however, afterwards by faith in God and in Jesus Christ in the future.' Obscure though the argumentation is there can be no doubt that for Victorinus the image consists in man's rationality, which reflects the supreme rationality of the Logos. We must, however, leave aside the question as to what precisely he means by substance.

The field is now clear for the final question. What does the *ad nostrum* mean? And although his answer is confused and confusing, the doctrine of the *Imago Trinitatis* can be seen taking shape in it.

Man is dual, composed of body and soul, with also a double *nous* and a double soul. There is his animal soul and his heavenly soul or *nous* which flows from the divine soul. Thus there is 'the divine soul in an earthy or matter bound spirit, the earthy spirit in an earthy or animal soul, and the earthy soul in the body' and all these must be purged before the divine light can flow in.

All these elements are in one man, so that in each man we can distinguish a heavenly element and an earthy element. The heavenly element consisting of the spirit and the divine soul, the rest constituting the earthy man. It is the higher of these that is to the image of God and of Jesus Christ (*Adv. Arium*, i 62-63). What does this imply? 'Christ is the life (i.e. Life since *actio*) and the Logos, the Image of God, in which image is seen God the Father' and 'that which is *esse* is the Father. 'Again,' that which is *intelligere*, i.e. the Holy Spirit, et *Tria ista sunt omnia: et in unoquoque tria et unum tria, et omnino ὁμοῦσία . . .*'

But man's soul, as soul, is and lives and understands, '*tria ergo superioris Triadis anima est, ut imago est, ut imago imaginalis*' (*op. cit.* 63).

There is little to add for Victorinus carried the argument no further. But he had discovered three attributes of the soul which can be used to express the Three Persons of the Divine Trinity. Whether his formulation of this reflection of the Trinity in the soul is adequate is

quite another question—to which the answer is given in the *De Trinitate* of St. Augustine.

Even such a superficial treatment of Victorinus as is given in this essay makes it quite clear that St. Augustine used many notions which had been discovered by Victorinus, who thus made a great and lasting contribution to the classical doctrine of the *Imago Dei*.

*Miserere, Domine, miserere Christe; animam, Deus, dedisti mihi, anima autem imago vitae est, quia vivat anima in aeternum, vivat et anima mea.*

*Miserere, Domine, miserere Christe: sed ad similitudinem tuam, Deus pater, et ad imaginem Filii homo, factus sum, vitam creatus saeculis, quia me cognovit Filius' (Second Hymn to the Trinity P.L.8, 1142-3).*

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#### BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE.

(i) Life and Works of Victorinus:—Dr. Gore's Article in the Dictionary of Christian Biography; P. Monceaux, *L'Afrique Chretienne*. Paris, 1905. T.3, 373-422; Migne, *Patrologia Latina*. Vol. 8.

(ii) His Neo-Platonic Background:—Armstrong, *The Intelligible Universe in Plotinus*. Cambridge, 1940; F. H. Brabant's Essay on Augustine and Plotinus in *Essays on the Trinity and the Incarnation*, edited by A. E. J. Rawlinson. London, 1928. 301 seq.

(iii) Relation of Augustine to Victorinus:—Rev. Paul Henry, *Augustine and Plotinus*. J.T.S., Jan. 1907; P. Alfarc, *L'Evolution Intellectuelle de St. Augustin*. Paris, 1918. 232, 374-75, 384-85, 516-7.

(iv) St. Augustine's Image Doctrine is usefully summarised in E. Gilson's *Introduction à l'Etude de St. Augustin*. Paris, 1929. Part 3, Chapter 3.