



In His Image

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PREFACE



I first learned about Dr. Paul Brand in 1976 while writing my book *Where Is God When It Hurts?* As I was ensconced in libraries researching the problem of pain, my wife cleaned out the closet of a medical-supply house and in the process stumbled across an intriguing essay he had written on “The Gift of Pain.” The author had a unique point of view. Whereas I had interviewed scores of people who wanted desperately to escape pain, Brand told of spending several million dollars trying to *create* a pain system for his patients. “Thank God for pain!” he said. “I cannot think of a more valuable gift for my leprosy patients.”

An orthopedic surgeon, Dr. Brand had spent most of his medical career in India, where he made a dramatic discovery about leprosy, one of the oldest and most feared diseases. Careful research convinced him that the terrible manifestations of that cruel disease — missing toes and fingers, blindness, ulcers, facial deformities — all trace back to the single cause of painlessness. Leprosy silences nerve cells, and as a result its victims unwittingly destroy themselves, bit by bit, because they cannot feel pain. When he moved to a high-tech laboratory in the United States, he applied what he had learned about painlessness to other diseases, such as diabetes, thus helping to prevent tens of thousands of amputations each year.

Brand's ideas so captivated me that I called him out of the blue from Chicago and arranged an interview. We met on the grounds of the only leprosarium in the continental United States (later closed due to budget cuts). Louisiana authorities who founded the hospital in the nineteenth century situated it well away from population centers, and I drove along the Mississippi River for several hours from New Orleans to reach the tiny town of Carville. Laid out in sprawling, colonial style under massive live oak trees, the leprosarium resembled a movie set of a tropical plantation; it had, in fact, been built on the site of an antebellum plantation. Patients on crutches and in wheelchairs moved slowly along double-decker arched walkways that connected the major buildings.

I knew of Dr. Brand's stature in the world medical community in advance of my visit: offers to head up major medical centers in England and the U.S., distinguished lectureships all over the world, the hand-surgery procedures named in his honor, the prestigious Albert Lasker Award, his appointment as Commander of the Order of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth II, his selection as the only Westerner to serve on the Mahatma Gandhi Foundation, his service as an expert consultant to the World Health Organization. His face appeared in the most unlikely places: alongside an article extolling the virtues of bare feet in the consumer magazine *Seventeen*, as a guest of Johnny Carson on *The Tonight Show*.

A slight man of less-than-average height and stiff posture entered the room where we had agreed to meet. He had graying hair, bushy eyebrows, and a face that creased deeply when he smiled. In a British accent — a striking contrast to the bayou tones heard in hospital corridors — he apologized for the flecks of blood on his lab coat, explaining that he had just been dissecting armadillos, the only nonhuman species known to harbor leprosy bacilli. He wore outdated clothes, lived in a rented bungalow on the hos-

pital grounds, and drove an economical, run-down automobile. At heart, Paul Brand was still a missionary, unimpressed by and unaccustomed to relative prosperity and fame.

That first visit lasted a week. I accompanied Brand on his rounds, sitting beside him as he studied the ulcerated feet and hands of patients and visiting the labs that whirred with the sounds of early-generation VAX computers. At night in their wooden house on the hospital grounds, I would share a rice-and-curry meal with him and his wife, Margaret, a respected ophthalmologist. Then Paul would prop up his bare feet, and I would turn on the tape recorder for discussions that ranged from leprology and theology to world hunger and soil conservation. Every topic I brought up, he had already thought about in some depth. He quoted Shakespeare and discussed the derivation of Greek, Hebrew, and Latin words. During breaks he taught me such things as how to select a ripe fig (watch the ones butterflies light on several times, testing, before flitting on to their preferred overripe fruit) and how African weaver birds build their elaborate nests using only one foot and a beak.

The conversations that stand out sharpest to me now are those in which he recalled individual patients, “nobodies” on whom he had lavished medical attention. When he began his pioneering work, he was the only orthopedic surgeon in the world working among fifteen million victims of leprosy. He and Margaret performed several dozen surgical procedures on some of these patients, restoring rigid claws into usable hands through innovative tendon transfers, remaking feet, forestalling blindness, transplanting eyebrows, fashioning new noses.

He told me of his patients’ family histories, the awful rejection they had experienced as the disease presented itself, the trial-and-error treatments of doctor and patient experimenting together. Almost always his eyes would moisten and he would wipe away

tears as he remembered their suffering. To him these, among the most neglected people on earth, were not nobodies, but people made in the image of God, and he devoted his life to try to honor that image.

(Later, as I began working with Brand and following him around the world, I met many other dedicated Christians who devote their lives to healing the wounds of humanity. In India, for example, where less than 3 percent of the population claims to be Christian, nearly a fifth of all medical work is performed by Christian doctors and nurses, many of them trained at Brand's old hospital in Vellore. If you say the word "Christian" to an Indian peasant — who may never have heard of Jesus Christ — the first image to pop into her mind may well be that of a hospital, or of a medical van that stops by her village once a month to provide free, personal care. And most of the medical advances in the treatment of leprosy came from Christian missionaries, not always the best-trained in the field, but often the only ones willing to work with people suffering from that feared disease.)

We made an odd couple, Dr. Brand and I. He was a silver-haired surgeon characterized by proper British reserve, and I an eager young journalist in my mid-twenties with bushy Art Garfunkel-style hair. I had interviewed many subjects: actors and musicians, politicians, successful business executives, Olympic athletes, Nobel laureates, and Pulitzer Prize winners. Something attracted me to Brand at a deeper level than I had felt with any other interview subject. My father died just after my first birthday, and in many ways Dr. Brand became a father-figure to me. Already an adult when I met him, I didn't have to go through teenage rebellion and the agony of individuation. I sat at his feet from the first day we met.

For perhaps the first time, I encountered genuine humility. The apostle Paul pointed to Jesus as an example of humility:

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” Meeting Dr. Brand, I realized that I had misconstrued humility as a negative self-image. Paul Brand obviously knew his gifts: he had finished first throughout his academic career and had attended many awards banquets honoring his accomplishments. Yet he recognized his gifts as just that, *gifts* from a loving Creator, and used them in a Christlike way of service.

When I first met him, Brand was still adjusting to life in the United States. Everyday luxuries made him nervous, and he longed for a simple life close to the soil. He knew presidents, kings, and celebrities, yet he rarely mentioned them. He talked openly about his failures and always tried to deflect credit for his successes to his associates. Most impressive to me, the wisest and most brilliant man I have ever met devoted much of his life to some of the lowest people on the planet: members of the Untouchable caste in India afflicted with leprosy.



After I had spent a few days at Carville and earned his trust, Dr. Brand admitted to me somewhat shyly that he had once attempted a book. Some years before, after he had delivered a series of talks to the Christian Medical College in Vellore, India, other faculty members encouraged him to write them down for publication. He made the effort, but the material filled only ninety pages, not enough for a book. Twenty years had passed, and he had not touched the manuscript since.

I persuaded him to dig through closets and bureau drawers until he located the badly smudged third carbon copy of those chapel talks, and that night I sat up long past midnight reading his remarkable meditations on the human body. I was staying in the hospital's vaulted antebellum guest room, and a ceiling fan periodically scattered the onionskin pages around the room. I kept gathering them up and resorting them, though, for I knew I had struck gold.

Brand wrote, "I have come to realize that every patient of mine, every newborn baby, in every cell of its body, has a basic knowledge of how to survive and how to heal, that exceeds anything that I shall ever know. That knowledge is the gift of God, who has made our bodies more perfectly than we could ever have devised." In ninety pages, he expressed that sense of wonder about the human body.

The next day I asked Brand if he would allow me to collaborate with him, expanding his medical and spiritual insights and adding more stories from his life. "It will be a very different book than this," I warned him. "But I sense something unique in these pages, and I would like to bring it to light." Eventually our collaboration led to two full-length books, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* and *In His Image*.*

As Brand saw it, studying the human body, a worthy endeavor in itself, yields an unexpected bonus. It sheds light on a metaphor used more than thirty times in the New Testament: the Body of Christ, in which the church is presented as a universal Body comprising individual members joined to Jesus Christ as Head. A likeness exists between the human body and spiritual Body, a likeness that derives from their common Source.

* In this edition, we have updated the relevant statistics and made slight revisions. We have, however, retained the present-tense voice of Dr. Brand in such phrases as "Now I have my own laboratory" and "Today when I visit India," as expressed in the original.

Dr. Brand described his writing journey this way: “In a sense we doctors are like employees at the complaint desk of a large department store. We tend to get a biased view of the quality of the product when we hear about its aches and pains all day. In this little manuscript, which I set aside long ago, I tried instead to pause and wonder at what God made, the human body. Then I lifted an analogy from the New Testament and updated it with the expanded knowledge we’ve gained from modern science. Curiously, every medical discovery seems to make the body analogy fit even better; not one has weakened the original meanings the apostle Paul set forth.”

The idea of a book based on analogy attracted me because I too appreciate the harmony between the natural and spiritual worlds. Christians have largely abandoned the natural world to physics, geology, biology, and chemistry. In contrast, Brand strove to bring the two worlds, natural and spiritual, back together.

As I worked on this material, I had the sense of wrestling with several different books at once. I wanted to capture the essence of Dr. Brand’s remarkable life practicing medicine on three different continents. In addition, I hoped to convey an appreciation for the human body by rendering medical facts in an appealing style. And, of course, the real core of the book lay in its spiritual application, drawn from analogy, that sometimes expressed reverence, sometimes praise, and sometimes prophetic challenge.

In every chapter, on almost every page, I strained to keep these three disparate kinds of material in balance. I often felt as if one or another of the three books was taking over, and I struggled to shape a unified book out of the three approaches. I persevered because I recognized that Dr. Brand offered a unique blend of gifts. Even after fifty years of medical practice, he retained a boyish enthusiasm for the grandeur of the human body. In two decades

of missionary service in India he had gained fresh and profound insights into Christian truth. And, along the way, he experienced adventures and personal encounters with patients that were as dramatic and poignant as any I had come across.

The book got off to a rough start. The first publisher we approached turned it down. Then I accidentally left the first and only draft in a motel room (a substantial reward helped the motel staff remember that the sheaf of papers had not been thrown away after all). When *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* finally went to press in 1980, Dr. Brand and I, as well as our publisher, awaited results with some trepidation. It was a difficult book to describe and present. Few books of analogies exist, and we could not predict how the public would respond.

More than two decades have passed, and some 700,000 readers have bought copies of *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* or its sequel *In His Image*. We have heard from many of them: pregnant women thanking us for helping them appreciate the miracle of life and birth, medical students crediting these books for helping push them toward a career in medicine, high school and college biology teachers who use excerpts in their classes, and many other readers simply grateful for an opportunity to pause and reflect on the multiple wonders of the human body.

Sometime later Dr. Brand and I worked on a third volume, *The Gift of Pain*, a more biographical treatment, which focuses on his theories of pain. In all I have spent almost ten years following the threads of Dr. Brand's life. The more I questioned him, the more I seemed to be unraveling a giant skein. I would tug at one thread, and out would come a story from India I had not heard before, which would lead to a digression on why blue jeans feel cool to the touch while flannel feels warm. Somehow that conver-

sation would lead to a spiritual point, perhaps a dissertation on Job or one of Jesus' parables.

My own writing took a different tack after these three books with Dr. Brand, turning more personal and meditative. Now I look back with nostalgia on the decade we spent working together. I had grand subjects to work with: the entire world of creation and specifically the magnificent human body; the exotic life of a surgeon who brought healing to people who knew no physical pain and therefore much suffering; and the mystery of Christ's Body, surely the most precarious venture ever made by God, entrusting the divine reputation to the likes of us his fickle followers.

Paul Brand was both a good and a great man, and I am forever grateful for the time we spent together. My faith grew as I observed with a journalist's critical eye a person enhanced in every way by his relationship with God.

Dr. Brand and I used to joke about the collaborative process. He said he felt guilty because he merely answered my questions and a few years later a book would emerge. I responded that all I did was ask questions, research, and write up the answers, whereas he had spent a lifetime serving leprosy patients in desolate places.

There was another exchange at work too, I now see — a trade with eternal significance. Wounded by the church, plagued by doubts, I had neither the maturity nor the ability to express much of my own fledgling faith. Yet I could write with utter integrity about Dr. Brand's faith, and through that process his words and thoughts became mine too. I now view the ten years I spent working with him as an important chrysalis stage. As a journalist, I gave words to his faith. In exchange, he gave faith to my words.



True friends get their measure, over time, in their effect on you. As I compare the person I was on our first meeting and the person I am now, I realize that large changes have occurred within me, with Paul Brand responsible for many of them.

I have written honestly about my early struggles, due in large part to lengthy exposure to toxic churches. I can imagine God taking great delight in steering me to Dr. Brand (through my wife's serendipitous discovery of his essay in a closet, of course) at a critical time in my spiritual journey. *Okay, Philip, you've seen some of the worst the church has to offer. Now I'll show you one of the best.*

In the movie *Manhattan*, Woody Allen turns to a woman he's courting and says, "You're God's answer to Job." He explains that when Job whines about how awful the world is, God could at least point and say, "but I can still make one of these." Similarly, as I grappled with the injustices of this world, the problem of pain, and other imponderables of theology, I could look to Paul Brand as a shining example of what God had in mind with the human experiment.

As much as anyone, he has helped set my course in outlook, spirit, and ideals. I look at the natural world, and environmental issues, largely through his eyes. From him I also have gained assurance that the Christian life I had heard in theory can actually work out in practice. It is indeed possible to live in modern society, achieve success without forfeiting humility, serve others sacrificially, and yet emerge with joy and contentment. To this day, whenever I doubt that, I look back on my time with Paul Brand.

As the years passed, our roles inevitably reversed. He started calling me for advice on such matters as which word processing software to use, how to organize research notes, and how to deal with publishers. After retiring from medical practice, the Brands moved to a small cottage overlooking Puget Sound in Seattle, the only home they ever owned. Paul served a few terms as president

of the International Christian Medical and Dental Society, consulted with the World Health Organization, and into his eighties continued to lecture throughout the world. In 2001 he announced with pride that he and Margaret had become U.S. citizens.

Inevitably, health problems set in with age. Brand suffered a stroke on a trip to Turkey and a mild heart attack in London. For a time his speech slurred noticeably and his ability to recall names and events faded. Our conversation moved to issues of aging and mortality.

I got a call in June 2003 informing me that Dr. Brand had fallen while carrying a box of books to the second-floor office in his cottage. He had hit his head on the banister, and was now lying in a coma in a Seattle hospital. My wife and I were due to leave in a few days for a trip to New Zealand, and after some persistent calls United Airlines allowed us to reroute the trip through Seattle.

We spent five hours in an intensive-care room with the Brands' immediate family. Their five daughters and one son had gathered from scattered homes in England, Hawaii, Minnesota, and Washington. Paul was receiving expert medical attention (one daughter is a doctor, two are nurses, and two of their husbands are doctors), but it was clear to everyone that he would not recover. Dr. Brand had always insisted on no extraordinary measures should he ever reach a brain-damaged state, and an emotional family council had honored his wishes. He was receiving hydration, but no ventilator assistance with his breathing.

The fall itself had not caused the main damage. Only later that day, after he had complained of headaches, had his wife driven him to the emergency room. After the fall, a blood clot developed in the brain, and subsequent surgery, combined with blood-thinning medication that he took for strokes, led to further bleeding that destroyed most of his higher brain functions. First he became

uncharacteristically combative, then lost speech, then slipped into the coma from which he never awoke.

Now he lay curled almost in a fetal position, his breathing heavy and raspy, his body moving restlessly from side to side. A long S-shaped scar creased his shaved head, blotched here and there with purple bruises, a mark of the surgery. Monitors flashed digital readouts of his pulse, blood pressure, and respiration, and a tube drained excess brain fluid into a plastic container. The hospital room overlooked beautiful Seattle and the mountain ranges that Dr. Brand so loved, but his eyes were vacant, uncomprehending.

In an email I had read on the plane, his daughter Pauline had recalled a scene from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*: “It’s when the two girls find Aslan’s body shaved and bound up, and see that although such things had been done in order to strip the lion of his dignity they have only succeeded in emphasizing it. That’s how it is with Dad’s poor half-shaved head, and the ugly semi-circle of staples from the surgery, and the multitude of tubes taped to his face, neck and chest. Within it all, there is his grand old face....”

By his bedside, suddenly I was overcome with emotion and could not speak. For nearly thirty years Paul Brand had been the towering giant in my life, the one to whom I turned for guidance, wisdom, inspiration, and faith. Now only a shell was left, the physical body we had written about. I bent over and kissed the smooth, baby-like skin on his shaven head.

His left hand grasped out for something to hold, and I put my hand in his. Incredibly, almost eerily, he began examining it with his fingers, running his own fingers up and down mine, squeezing, testing, analyzing. As I stood there, he did the same thing with his own right hand, which lay useless at his side. The instincts of fifty years of hand surgery had so imprinted on the synapses of

his brain that even with much of it destroyed, this remained. Often he had told me that he could remember his patients' hands better than their faces. Now he could not speak, probably could not think, could barely breath, but still he reached out with the hands that had brought healing to so many.

A few days later, from an email received halfway around the world, I learned he had taken his last breath on July 8, a week before his eighty-ninth birthday. All that week, at unexpected times — waking up, in the shower, while praying — I would find myself sobbing. “What’s wrong?” my wife asked the first few times. “I miss Dr. Brand,” was my only answer. A phrase kept going through my mind: *I am not ready to walk alone.*

We returned to Seattle a month later for a public memorial service on the campus of CRISTA, a Christian relief organization, which both of the Brands served as board members. “A celebration of the life of Paul Brand,” the service was billed, and indeed it was. Representatives from the hand-surgery society and leprosy missions, a delegate from the hospital in Vellore, India, as well as medical residents and ordinary citizens of Seattle and elsewhere who had been touched by his life gathered to pay tribute.

When it came my turn to speak, first I removed my shoes and socks and stood barefoot. It seemed somehow appropriate to honor in this small way a man who slipped off his own shoes at any opportunity, who lobbied against “No shoes, no shirt, no service” policies, and who had spent thousands of hours investigating how best to protect the insensitive feet of his leprosy patients, for whom tight shoes or rough sandals represented danger.

I also borrowed an object lesson from Dr. Brand himself, one I had seen him give in the stately chapel of Wheaton College in Illinois. In the middle of his address, he had reached in his pocket and pulled out a cluster of grapes. He stopped talking, took a

plump, juicy grape, chewed it, then spat out the seeds on the plush carpet. After the audience laughter died down, he went on to make a serious point. He was speaking on the fruit of the Spirit described by Paul in Galatians 5: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

“These qualities are good for you in every way,” he went on to explain. “They are qualities of God, and God’s Spirit wants to grow them inside you. Yet as someone who has grown fruit trees, I also know that from the fruit’s perspective, the ultimate goal is reproduction. The fruit is attractive and beautiful so that a bird or perhaps a person will find that grape, or apple, or blackberry, pick it, and do just what I have done: spit out the seed on the ground. If we were meeting outside, rather than in this beautiful chapel, I could come back in ten years or so and find a grape vine growing as a result of my sermon illustration this morning.”

Later, in private conversation, I got a fuller version. Brand described how an apple or pear is weighted so that when it falls to the ground, it makes a slight indentation in the soil, and contains just enough meat to nourish the seeds inside. He observed, somewhat presciently, “My active life is mostly behind me. But I pray that my life and the principles that God has helped me to live by will continue to influence young lives. When we die we not only leave seed, but we also leave an effect on the soil in which future children grow and future spiritual seed will be nourished.”

The morning of the memorial service, despite visits to several Seattle supermarkets, my wife and I could find only seedless grapes. I resorted to cherries, liberally spraying the seeds around the carpeted platform as I explained the object lesson. I then switched analogies, for in the hospital room where Dr. Brand lay dying I had remembered a trip we took to the Quinalt rain forest on the Olympic peninsula. In that moss-covered forest, which supports the

greatest biomass of vegetation on earth, he pointed out to me a feature known as a “colonnade.”

When one of the giant evergreen trees falls to the ground, seeds from the cones sprout and send out roots in search of soil. They find instead the dead bark and meat of the mother tree, which becomes a “nurse log” providing the nutrients needed for growth. After many years pass, you can return to the site of the fallen tree, which has now disintegrated, and see its very shape from the long colonnade of young trees whose roots form a series of arches over where the mother tree once lay.

I still am not ready to walk alone. But that I walk at all on this perilous journey of faith depends in large part on the strength I received from a giant of faith against whom I leaned for thirty years as one leans against a towering tree of the forest. As we heard in that memorial service, the colonnade left by Paul Brand stretches long and far, spanning continents, affecting not just fellow surgeons, but nurses, leprosy patients, neighbors, and ordinary people whose lives he touched.

I know no one who better illustrates Jesus’ most-quoted statement, that “whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” From the perspective of a success-obsessed culture, an orthopedic surgeon spending his professional life among some of the poorest and most oppressed people on the planet is an example of “losing his life.” Yet Dr. Brand lived as full and rich a life as anyone I know, combining humility, gratitude, and a grand sense of adventure.

Simone Weil once said, “Imaginary evil [such as that portrayed in books and movies] is romantic and varied; real evil is gloomy, monotonous, barren, boring. Imaginary good is boring; real good is always new, marvelous, intoxicating.” I saw real goodness in Paul Brand, and found it new, marvelous, and intoxicating. I feel privileged, as his coauthor, to have had some role in shining a light

on his life. You need only meet one saint to believe, to silence the noisy arguments of the world, and I had the inestimable privilege of spending leisurely hours getting to know a distinguished and faithful follower of Jesus. For that, Paul Brand, I thank you.

Philip Yancey

LIKENESS

What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god!

William Shakespeare



Curtains screened my group of ten interns and medical students from the rest of the forty-bed ward. Externally, the Christian Medical College Hospital in Vellore resembled a modern Western facility, but inside it was all Indian. Activity throbbed just beyond our curtain: patients' families bringing in home-cooked food and nurses chasing away the scavengers that followed — crows and an occasional monkey.

Those of us inside the curtains, however, were giving full attention to our young colleague as he made his diagnosis. He was half-kneeling, in the posture I had taught him, with his warm hand slipped under the sheet and resting on the patient's bare abdomen. While his fingers probed gently for telltale signs of distress, he continued a line of questioning that showed he was weighing the possibility of appendicitis against an ovarian infection.

Suddenly something caught my eye — a slight twitch of movement on the intern's face. Was it the eyebrow arching upward? A vague memory stirred in my mind, but one I could not fully recall. His questions were leading into a delicate area, especially for demure Hindu society. Had the woman ever been exposed to a venereal infection? The intern's facial muscles contracted into an expression combining sympathy, inquisitiveness, and disarming warmth as he looked straight in the patient's face and asked the questions. His very countenance coaxed the woman to relax, put aside the awkwardness, and tell us the truth.

At that moment my memory snapped into place. Of course! The left eyebrow cocked up with the right one trailing down, the wry, enticing smile, the head tilted to one side, the twinkling eyes — these were unmistakably the features of my old chief surgeon in London, Professor Robin Pilcher. I sucked in my breath sharply and exclaimed. The students looked up, startled by my reaction. I could not help it; it seemed as if the intern had studied Professor Pilcher's face for an acting audition and was now drawing from his repertoire to impress me.

Answering their questioning looks, I explained myself. "That is the face of my old chief! What a coincidence — you have *exactly* the same expression, yet you've never been to England and Pilcher certainly has never visited India."

At first the students stared at me in confused silence. Finally two or three of them grinned. "We don't know any Professor Pilcher," one said. "But Dr. Brand, that was *your* expression he was wearing."

Later that evening, alone in my office, I thought back to my days under Pilcher. I had thought I was learning from him techniques of surgery and diagnostic procedures. But he had also imprinted his instincts, his expression, his very smile so that they

too would be passed down from generation to generation in an unbroken human chain. It was a kindly smile, perfect for cutting through the fog of embarrassment to encourage a patient's honesty. What textbook or computer program could have charted out the facial expression needed at that exact moment within the curtain?

Now I, Pilcher's student, had become a link in the chain, a carrier of his wisdom to students some nine thousand miles away. The Indian doctor, young and brown-skinned, speaking in Tamil, shared few obvious resemblances with either Pilcher or me. Yet somehow he had conveyed the likeness of my old chief so accurately that it had transported me back to university days with a start. The thought gave me a crystalline insight into the concept of image.



The word *image* is familiar to us today, but the meaning of the word has leaked away so that now it connotes virtually the opposite of its former meaning of “likeness.” Today, a politician hires an image-maker, a job applicant dresses for image, a corporation seeks the right image. In all these usages, image has come to mean the illusion of what something is presented to be, rather than the essence of what it really is.

In this book entitled *In His Image* I want to reinforce the original meaning of image as an exact likeness, not a deceptive illusion. We must return to the concept of likeness to understand the “image of God” we are intended to carry. Glimpses into that former meaning still endure. For instance, when I gaze at a nerve cell through a scanning electron microscope, I study the neuron's image. I am looking not at the neuron itself — its small size precludes that — but at a reassembled image that faithfully reproduces

it for my eye. In this case the image enhances, rather than distorts, the essence of the cell.

Similarly, photographers use the word *image* to describe their finished product. The image of a sequoia redwood grove flattened onto a small black-and-white rectangle surely does not express the totality of the original, but when developed by a master like Ansel Adams it may convey the original essence with great force.

Or, think of a ten-pound bundle of protoplasm squirming fitfully in a blanket. The baby's father weighs fifteen times as much and has a vastly larger range of ability and personality. Yet the mother announces proudly that the baby is the "spitting image" of his father. A visitor peers closely. Yes, a resemblance does exist, evident now in a dimple, slightly flared nostrils, a peculiar earlobe. Before long, mannerisms of speech and posture and a thousand other mimetic traits will bring the father unmistakably to mind.

These usages of image, applied to the microscope and photograph and offspring, carry a meaning similar to the "image" of Professor Pilcher that I unwittingly passed along to scores of Indian students. All are true images, a likeness of one subject expressed visibly through another. And all shed light on the grand and mysterious phrase from the Bible: the image of God. That phrase appears in the very first chapter of Genesis, and its author seems to stutter with excitement, twice affirming a concept just mentioned in the preceding verse: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him" (1:27). The image of God — the first man on earth received it, and in some refracted way each one of us possesses this quality wondrous strange.

How can visible human beings express the image of God? We certainly cannot look like God, sharing characteristic features of eyebrow or earlobe, for God is invisible spirit. Philosophers and theologians have long speculated on all that could be contained

within the mystery of that single phrase. Predictably, they tend to project onto their definitions the principal concerns of their own era. The Enlightenment age assures us the image of God is the ability to reason, Pietists identify it as the spiritual faculty, Victorians claim it as the capacity to make moral judgments, and Renaissance thinkers locate the image of God in artistic creativity. As for our own psychology-dominated age? What else could that image be, we are now advised, than our capacity for relationships with other people and with God.

Because even professional theologians have failed to reach a consensus over the centuries, I will not attempt a comprehensive definition saying the image of God is *this* and not *that*. But since it stands for all that is unique about humanity among God's creations, the phrase deserves a few moments' reflection.

In the Genesis narrative, the concept "image of God" appears at the consummation of all creation. At each stage of progress, Genesis notes punctiliously, God looks back on creation and pronounces it good. But creation still lacks a creature to contain God's own image. Only after all that preparation does God announce the culmination of life on earth: "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground" (1:26).

Among all God's creatures, only humanity receives the image of God, and that quality separates us from all else. We possess what no other animal does; we are linked in our essence to God. (Later, as God discusses with Noah the extent of human dominion over the animals, this quality of the image of God looms up again, as a decisive and awesome demarcation between man and other creatures. Killing an animal means one thing; killing a fellow human is an entirely different matter, "for in the image of God has God made man" [9:6].)



One of the supreme artists of history rendered the Creation sequence on the vaulted stone ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. Michelangelo chose as the centerpiece of his great work the precise moment when God awakened man into his image.

I have visited the Sistine Chapel, in its contemporary ambiance far different from what Michelangelo probably had in mind as a setting for his art. Tourists are admitted in groups running to several hundred, many of them clasping white plastic headphones to their ears like painful growths. They are listening to a recording that guides them through the chapel. Instead of looking up when they walk into that splendid room, they look down, following the trail of red tape that marks off an area where the recording is being transmitted.

Nothing can quite prepare the visitors for what they see when, on cue, they raise their heads. Magnificent works of art cover every inch of the large room: the division of light and darkness, the creation of the sun and planets, the days of Noah, the last judgment. And in the focal center, the calm eye in the swirl of frescoes, Michelangelo has painted the creation of man.

Adam's muscular body reclines on the ground in the classical pose of the ancients' river gods. Slumberous, he is lifting up his hand, stretching it out toward heaven from where God reaches down. The hands of God and Adam do not actually touch. A gap separates their fingers, like a synapse across which the energy of God is flowing.

In some respects, Michelangelo captured man's creation as no artist ever has. The very word Adam in Hebrew refers to ground or dust, and Adam is set on the physical earth. Yet Michelangelo also

expressed Adam's dual nature by portraying the instant when God reached across the void to convey spiritual life. The second account of man's creation, in Genesis 2, adds more detail: "And the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being" (v. 7).

When I heard that verse as a child, I imagined Adam lying on the ground, perfectly formed but not yet alive, with God leaning over him and performing a sort of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Now I picture that scene differently. I assume that Adam was already biologically alive — the other animals needed no special puff of oxygen, nitrogen, and carbon dioxide to start them breathing, so why should man? The breath of God now symbolizes for me a spiritual reality. I see Adam as alive, but possessing only an animal vitality. Then God breathes into him a new spirit, and infills him with God's own image. Adam becomes a living soul, not just a living body. God's image is not an arrangement of skin cells or a physical shape, but rather an in-breathed spirit.

This single act of special creation, God breathing into man "the breath of life," distinguished humanity from all other creatures. We share with the animals a biological shell composed, in our case, of bone, organs, muscle, fat, and skin. In truth, we fall short in direct comparison to the strictly biological features of some animals. Who would compete in beauty with a splashy macaw or even a lowly luna moth? A horse easily outruns us, a hawk sees far better, a dog detects odors and sounds imperceptible to us. The total sum of our sheer physical qualities is no more godlike than a cat's.

And yet, *we* are made in the image of God. For us, the shell of skin and muscle and bones serves as a vessel, a repository for God's image. We can comprehend and even convey something of the Creator. Our cellular constructions of proteins arranged by DNA

can become temples of the Holy Spirit. We are not “mere mortals.” We are, all of us, immortals.



I began with the image of Professor Robin Pilcher, my old surgical chief from London. As a young student I absorbed something from his image that I carried nine thousand miles to India and in turn transferred to scores of Indians. Today, those former students work in hospitals all over the world. An exact copy of Pilcher’s expression may appear at critical moments in Borneo, in the Philippines, in Africa. Pilcher died years ago, but that one aspect of him — a small pattern of facial muscles appropriate for a particular medical situation — remains alive and visible on my face and the faces of my students.

What God has in mind for us is similar, but far greater. God is asking us to be the chief bearers of his likeness in the world. As spirit, God remains invisible on this planet, relying instead on us to give flesh to that spirit, to bear the image of God.