

We move rapidly, now, from imaging a child to imaging an adult; from the claim that an infant face makes on us, to the claim that any human face is a claim on us. Stephen is closely imaging Christ here, though he may never have seen him, and speaks eloquently for Christ against those Jews who still placed their hope in the Temple and the Law of Moses. And as the Spirit takes hold of him so does he seal his fate:

You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the Law as delivered by angels and did not keep it. (Acts 7:51-53)

This is Stephen standing firm to the end, inspired by the Spirit promised by Christ and handed on as one generation of witnesses supplants another. Imaging Christ is costly. How else can it be when Christ himself has given his life for us – for the sea of faces that assailed him in their need? This is the face of Christ handed down now for us all to see in one another, and given to us unconsciously as we imitate our parent in faith:

and gazing at him, all who sat in the Council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

An idealised portrait, perhaps, but just occasionally the veil is lifted and we see this glory in one another. We are always on holy ground in the presence of another. Sometimes we see it – mostly we don't. But every face has a claim on us and calls us to sometimes speak harshly and sometimes not.

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