

Making Our Way



A McMAHON / CHEYNE PODCAST

Season 2 - Episode 31

4/30/25

Imago Dei

Our Hosts

Janet Cheyne McMahon is a lover of family, dogs, nature, travel, books, and music. Born south of the Mason-Dixon line, she left after 9 months for parts north, landing eventually in Michigan, which will always be “where I’m from.”

Love of learning led Jan to a Bachelor of Arts (History, Political Science) at the University of Michigan-Dearborn (Go Blue), and a Master of Arts (Library and Information Science) at the University of South Florida. Amid all that, studied for a time with Rob at Colorado State University, a pivotal time in their lives.

Worked at the U of M-Dearborn Library, and then The Salvation Army Florida Divisional Headquarters, with the greatest reward being in serving as the Divisional Librarian. A librarian is who Jan is “in my soul.”

Jan and Rob have made our home in Florida since 1983, and live now in retirement with their dog, Skye, who makes it all the best adventure. They travel as much as possible, spending time in nature and in diverse places on this amazing planet. It has all been, and continues to be a fascinating journey, with hope of making a difference, in small ways, by being brave enough to speak and act on behalf of others.

Rob McMahon is a native Michigander, born in Saginaw and raised in the suburbs of Detroit. Rob attended Michigan State University, graduating in 1978 with a Bachelor of Science degree. He did graduate studies at the University of Michigan and the University of South Florida. Rob is retired, having spent 36 years in public education teaching both high school chemistry and biology and middle school science. He worked as a total quality management trainer for the Pinellas County School District and served four years as the president of the Pinellas Classroom Teachers Association. Rob cofounded a non-profit total quality management training center, The Learning Co-op, for Teacher Unions interested in applying the W. Edwards Deming continuous improvement principles to their day-to-day operations. He worked with teacher unions in Colorado, Maryland, New Mexico, North Dakota, Texas and Michigan. He also worked in a similar capacity with Jim Shipley & Associates. In retirement Rob has written a series of science related children’s books, and enjoys traveling with his wife, Jan, and their black Labrador Retriever, Skye.

Deanna Cheyne, born in St. John’s, Newfoundland, earned a Bachelor’s Degree in Vocal Performance from the University of Toronto (1996), studying with such luminaries as Elmer Eisler, Doreen Rao, Greta Kraus, Lois Marshall, and Rosemarie Landry.

Dee taught music at Mississauga Christian Academy, served as music director for Meadowvale Bible Baptist Church (Mississauga, Ontario), served as Assistant Divisional Music Director for The Salvation Army in Florida, is a former member of Tampa’s Master Chorale, and, for the past 18 years, has been a public school teacher.

Dee has visit 36 of the 50 U.S. states, and 12 countries. Her favorite destinations include France, Prague, New Orleans, National Parks, & Hawaii.

Dee & Jim live in Florida with Brigus (Golden Retriever) and Pip (Teacup Yorkie).

James Cheyne, born in Galesburg, Illinois, earned a Bachelor of Music degree (Theory and Composition) from Michigan State University (1978); and a Master of Music degree (Theory and Composition) from the University of Illinois Urbana/Champaign (1981), studying with David Liptak, Salvatore Martirano, and Ben Johnston.

Jim has served as music director for The Salvation Army in Central Illinois & Eastern Iowa, Orlando Area Command, and the Florida Division, served as a pastor with The Salvation Army, and was a public school teacher for 17 years.

In travel so far, Jim has visited 50 states and 27 countries. His favorite travel destinations include National Parks, New Orleans, Newfoundland, Argentina, Prague, & France.

Jim continues to write music and support Dee’s musical endeavors, and cooks whenever absolutely necessary. Jim & Dee live in Florida with their dogs Brigus & Pip.



L-R: Brigus, Jim, Deanna, Skye, Jan, Rob.
Inset: Pip

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Imago Dei

Season 2; Episode 31

4/30/2025

Host: Jim.

Jim wishes a happy 7002nd birthday to the universe, talks about Johannes Kepler, the Parthenon, Genesis 1, and the Imago Dei - the image of God.

[Music]

JIM: Imago Dei, Latin for the “image of God.” There’s much to say, and I’ll get to it, I promise. But first I would like to wish a very happy birthday to the universe. I’m recording this on Sunday, April 27th, 2025, which, by some calculations, is the universe’s seven thousand and second birthday. Let’s start there.

[Music]

JIM: Johannes Kepler was by most accounts a brilliant man. He developed his three laws of planetary motion. He provided the mathematical calculations that proved that Copernicus’s idea of the sun at the center of the solar system was right. And he provided the mathematical foundation for Newton’s law of gravity. Kepler did all of this in the early 17th century, which is the part to be admired, but is also part of the problem, because Kepler made one glaring mistake. He had calculated that the universe was created on April 27th, 4977 BC, exactly 7,002 years ago today. Given that the best estimates of the age of the universe give it at 13.7 billion years, how is it Kepler missed by so much?

Well, Kepler relied on biblical chronologies, that’s it. He calculated the generations needed by all the various biblical chronologies back to Adam, added the six days of Genesis one, and landed on April 27th, 4977 B.C., which was, yes, a Sunday.

Biblical chronologies are valuable in understanding certain cultural perspectives, but aren’t that good for determining the age of the cosmos. And before all the Answers in Genesis folks start in with their, “How do you know? You weren’t there,” script, I’ll give my take on Genesis one. It might seem irrelevant at first, but it actually relates to one of today’s hottest political divisions.

Regular listeners might remember an episode we did called “A Reasonable Faith,” where I outlined a non-chronological understanding of Genesis one. It was back in season one, episode 13, if you want to find it. But first, let’s travel back to the fifth century BC, to Athens, Greece.

The city of Athens built a temple to honor their goddess Athena. Athena was a virgin or “parthenos” in Greek, so they called the temple the Parthenon, and placed a large statue of Athena inside. By the time I visited in 1972, the Parthenon was in rough shape. Athena’s

statue was gone, the roof was gone, as were most of the walls. Most of the columns still stood, but not much was left inside. Lord Elgin had already stolen - excuse me, had relocated - several marble statues to England, where they can be seen today in the British Museum as the Elgin [EL-gen] Marbles, or worse, the Elgin [EL-jihn] Marbles. I prefer to call them the Parthenon marbles and wonder if they'll ever be returned. By the way, if you want to see what the Parthenon looked like in all its former glory, there's a full-scale replica complete with statue right where you'd expect to find it in Nashville, Tennessee.

Now, we begin with Genesis. Unlike Kepler, I read Genesis chapter one not as a chronology, but as a prologue to Israel's divine history, a setting of the stage for the vast drama to follow. You might ask, "If the six days of Genesis are not a chronology, what are they?" Well, in brief, I believe they describe a building, actually a temple.

Consider this.

In the first chapter of Genesis, days 1 through 3 are all about bringing order out of chaos, of sorting out different elements.

Day 1 is the creation of light, and then the separation of light from darkness, day from night.

Day 2 is the creation of a firmament, and the separation of the waters above from the waters below.

And day 3 is the separation of dry land from the waters and the creation of vegetation.

Days 1 through 3 then create the structure, and days 4 through 6 fill the structure with furnishings.

Day 1 matches day 1. Since day 1 was all about day and night, day 4 fills day and night with the lights of the sun, moon, and stars.

Day 5 matches day 2. Since day 2 was all about the firmament and the water, day 5 fills the firmament with birds and the waters with fish.

Finally, day 6 matches day 3. Since day 3 was all about the dry land, day 6 fills the dry land with terrestrial beings.

Now, God's temple is nearly complete. All that is needed is the statue. God, though, has this aversion to graven images. There'll be a commandment about that one day. Instead, God places not a statue, but a living being in the temple as his image. God places us there, all humanity, to be God's image on earth, or as the Latin has it, the *Imago Dei*.

Now, think for a moment about how the faithful, how the supplicants, would treat the image of their deity. Take the statue of Athena, for example. Would the Athenians honor the statue? Or neglect it? Would they preserve it? Or subject it to maltreatment? What would they do to someone caught vandalizing it? Banishment, stoning, and capital punishment are mentioned now and then.

Now, consider the *Imago Dei*, God's image, in his temple of Genesis one. If my reading of the chapter is correct, then it would follow that any mistreatment of humanity, in whole or in part, constitutes a desecration of the image of God, and there is a lot to unpack.

First, we are the image of God. God is not the image of us. He does not resemble us

physically. Despite what we might admire about the Sistine ceiling, God is not an old, bearded, white guy. But if the image of God is not a physical one, what is it? Some would offer these candidate attributes. God is love, mercy, morality, goodness, trustworthiness, faithfulness, and that is the image that we bear. But is not God also a God of vengeance, wrath, jealousy? Some of the Bible's more threatening passages seem to say so. And it's at this point I'd probably grab Milton's *Paradise Lost* and start talking about justifying the ways of God to men.

If we are indeed the image of God, how should that image be treated? That is, how do we treat ourselves, and how do we treat each other? For this part, I'm gonna do what Lord Elgin did, and I'm gonna steal something. I'm gonna steal someone else's idea. And the one I'm stealing from is Magrey deVega. Magrey deVega is an author, and he's also the senior pastor for Hyde Park United Methodist Church in Tampa, Florida, and he's the one that noted in *Imago Dei*, the God part - the Dei part - is spelled D-E-I. You see where he's going with this? The humanity that represents God on earth is meant to represent God in the fullness of God's being in all of its diversity, equity, and inclusion. To slander any portion of humanity is to scar the *Imago Dei*, the image of God that God intended. To marginalize any portion of humanity is to disfigure God's image. To disregard any part of humanity is to disregard God in whole. And yes, this is a bit of playing with words, but the point is clear. What does it mean to dismiss people, whether individuals, groups, or nations, if it does not mean to dismiss that part of God's image, we just don't like. In secular terms, we can speak of the maltreatment of others in terms such as prejudice and racism and bigotry, but in this context, we're now having to deal with sacrilege and blasphemy. And failure to notice this violation subjects us to charges of replacing God's image with our own.

Think about this. If you walked into a church and there was a Bible on the floor, wouldn't you pick it up? I think I would. Or if there was a candlestick toppled over, wouldn't you want to put it right? Of course you would. Or what if we saw a crucifix disfigured with graffiti? Would we not lend the hand to clean it, to restore it? Then what of the one so disfigured by life? Are we not compelled to come to their aid as the image of God, to clean and bind their wound? Idols might be blind and deaf to the maltreatment of their graven images, but not so the living God.

Part of the issue is our power of perception. Are we capable of viewing another person as the image of God? A newborn child? Sure. An elderly person devoting all of their time, energy and resources to the care of an ailing, failing spouse? Yes, I think that very clearly is the image of God. The young woman, both enhanced and yet hidden by piercings and ink, does she not also bear the image of God? Are we in a position to claim certain people are the image of God, but others are not?

Do we see the image of God in a man carrying a sign warning us the end is near? Or in a woman carrying a sign demanding social justice? Or a man holding a piece of cardboard that says, "please help"? Are not all of these the image of God?

You know, I might implore you to see the image of God in the faces of emaciated prisoners in death camps, but would I do so for prisoners serving sentences for crimes they really did commit? Aren't they too the image of God? And must I not also reverence them? And what of the uniformed soldier overlooking Bergen-Belsen? Is he too the image of God?

If we truly believe that humanity is made in the image of God, then the maltreatment, the

marginalization of any person, group, class, or nation must be impossible for us.

There's a passage that we know that gets to the heart of the matter and carries the full implication of what it means to be the image of God, and it goes like this:

[A]nd one of them, an expert in the law, asked him a question to test him. Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest? And he said to them, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments, hang all the law and the prophets."

Yeah, he said it better than I did.

[Music]

JIM: This podcast will come as a surprise to Jan and Rob and Dee, because we met yesterday. We talked about animals, talked about our pets, talked about ethics, talked about most of the world's problems and came up with decent solutions. But it's gonna take me a while to sort that all out and put it out into some nice bite-size episodes. So before I do all of that work, I thought I would drop this one in about the Imago Dei. It seems to be timely. It seems to be something that I need to listen to again, especially that last part.

So thank you for your company today and until next time.

[Music ends]