

Anthropology: The *Imago Dei* in Man

by George Gunn 8/9/2012

The single most defining characteristic of who man is, is what the Bible calls the Image of God, or, as theologians refer to it, the *Imago Dei*. At creation, the Bible declares, “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:27).¹ All Christian theologians agree that man was created in the image of God, but they cannot seem to agree on what constitutes the image of God. Is it conscience? Is it exercising dominion? Is it morality? Is it spirituality? All of these, and many more ideas, have been suggested as constituting the *Imago Dei* in man. While we may not be able to state definitively all that is comprehended in the *Imago Dei*, at the very least we can make the following two observations, based on the broad context of Genesis 1-2:

1. The *Imago Dei* in man is that which differentiates him from the animals, since only man, and not the animals, are said to have been created in God’s likeness and image.
2. The *Imago Dei* in man is that in which there can be seen a correspondence between the nature of God and the nature of man.

Beyond these two observations it is difficult to be more definitive. However, recognition of the *Imago Dei* in man is at least twice given in Scripture as the grounds for moral behavior. Specifically, both capital punishment for murder and civility in speech are grounded upon the notion that man is created in the image of God.

Genesis 9:6 “Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man.

James 3:8–10 But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; 10 from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.

Man is unique among all of God’s creation. Only of man is it said he is created in the image of God. Man, as originally created, was the apex of God’s creation. Even the angelic beings are of a lower order than man. In Psalms 8:5 and Hebrews 2:7 where man is described as “a little lower than the angels,” both the Hebrew word (טַדָּוּ *m’at*) and the Greek word (βραχύς *brachys*) should probably be understood temporally, “lower than the angels *for a little while*.” Prior to the fall, only man – not the animals, not the angels – are said to be in God’s image. It is through man that God designed to make Himself known to the rest of creation. Of course sin has entered into our existence and has severely marred the image (Eccl. 7:29). Only through redemption in Jesus Christ can man be restored to the unadulterated image of God (Col. 3:10; 2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:29).

In the following pages I would like to examine the practical implications of the *Imago Dei* in man. Society has suffered greatly due to man’s widespread abandoning of the doctrine of

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from the *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update*. LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995.

the *Imago Dei* in man. Modern so-called “scientific” views of man based on Darwinian evolutionary philosophy have convinced an entire generation that we are no better than the animals. It is therefore no wonder to find that society has become so degenerate and ungodly! Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer wrote:

In each age, the science of its time has imposed its ever-shifting notions relative to origin upon theology, and it has been the burden of theology in each age to rid itself of the ghosts of defunct philosophical and scientific opinions of a preceding age.... It is the conceit of man which contends that the divine account of the origin of things is true only so far as it conforms to the science of his own day. If the science of today runs true to the course set for it by earlier generations – and why should it fail to do so? – it will be discarded by the scientists themselves; yet the Word of God will abide unchanged.²

As noted above, the Bible twice appeals to the image of God in man as grounds for ethical conduct. In the remainder of this chapter, I would posit that there are at least five realms of human ethical conduct which are affected by our view of the *Imago Dei*: The Sanctity of Human Life, Civility, Human Government, Sexuality, and Worship.

THE IMAGO DEI AND THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

This first realm of human ethical conduct to be considered is suggested by the first reference to the *Imago Dei* after the fall. When God instituted His covenant with mankind through Noah He strictly forbade the shedding of human blood and gave as the grounds for this prohibition, “for in the image of God He made man” (Gen. 9:6). One might have suspected from the narrative of Genesis 3-8 that man had surrendered completely the image of God as a result of the fall. After all, man had become so corrupt that “the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually,” and that “the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence ... all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth” (Gen. 6:5,11–12). So it is with great surprise that we read God’s estimation of man in the ninth chapter that his life is to be valued highly because he was made in the image of God. Though significantly marred, God still deems the image of God as essentially present even in fallen man. Thus, *all* human life is to be held as sacred and valued highly in human society.

In the first recorded covenant between God and men, God forbids the taking of human life, with one exception: the life of the murderer. “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed” (Gen. 9:6). In light of this requirement, Judeo-Christian culture has always, until recently, required the death penalty for murder. Beginning in the late twentieth century, however, practice has begun to be reversed under the influence of modern humanistic thinking. To date, fifteen states in the United States of America have outlawed the death penalty for murder. Opponents of the death penalty have argued that it does not in fact deter murder. One must exercise caution, however, when appealing to statistics. Both sides in the death penalty debate have appealed to statistics to support their arguments.³ But the problem with this argument by appeal to statistics is that it is based on pragmatic grounds, rather than on God’s Word.

² Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), II:129.

³ See, for example, on the anti-death penalty side the report from the Death Penalty Information Center, <http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/deterrence-states-without-death-penalty-have-had-consistently-lower-murder-rates>,

Regardless of how one views the statistics, the death penalty is morally right because God says it is. God says that the way to preserve the value of the *Imago Dei* in man is for human government to take the life of the murderer. In the pre-flood world the death penalty did not exist. In fact, God Himself forbade the carrying out of the death penalty on Cain, guaranteeing that He would carry out seven-fold revenge on anyone who attempted to impose such a penalty (Gen. 4:15)! Lamech misunderstood this gracious tolerance on God's part as a license to carry out murder under the presumption that God would certainly protect him as He had done for Cain (Gen. 4:23-24). Such a cavalier attitude toward the *Imago Dei* in man came to prevail in the absence of a death penalty and eventually led to the need for mass extermination of an exceedingly wicked world through the judgment of the deluge.

The death penalty as instituted in the Noahic Covenant was doubtless imposed on mankind as a deterrent upon the wicked intentions of man's heart. As noted above, the debate rages today among both proponents and opponents of the death penalty as to whether or not capital punishment actually does deter murder, but one of the most carefully written studies to date is, "Does Capital Punishment Have a Deterrent Effect? New Evidence from Post-moratorium Panel Data" by Hashem Dezhbakhsh and Paul H. Rubin of Emory University, and Joanna M. Shepherd of Clemson and Emory Universities (2001). This study is well written, carefully researched and takes into consideration significant variables attached to the populations studied. Their conclusion is that "capital punishment has a strong deterrent effect; each execution results, on average, in 18 fewer murders with a margin of error of plus or minus 10."⁴

The last two generations of American public school children have been thoroughly brain-washed in Darwinian evolutionary theory. Darwin's humanistic theory has completely replaced the Biblical doctrine of the *Imago Dei* and has had the effect of reducing the value of man to the status of an animal. As easily as one casts away an unwanted puppy, pregnant women discard an unwanted fetus. According to the Bible, human life begins at conception (Psa. 139:15,16; 51:5; Jer. 1:5; Lk. 1:41, 44); therefore, the fetus in the womb bears the stamp of the *Imago Dei*. The willful destruction of that life through abortion is a direct offense against God. We are understandably, and rightly, horrified at the six million Jews who were killed in the Nazi holocaust of World War II, but what of the nearly 50 million legal abortions that have occurred in the U.S. from 1973 through 2008? As the blood of Abel cried up to God from the ground that received it (Gen. 4:10), a mighty cry ascends to God from the violation of the *Imago Dei* through legalized abortion in America. God help us!

THE IMAGO DEI AND CIVILITY

In Massachusetts, Donald Graham, a 54-year-old bookkeeper, became embroiled in a heated, ongoing traffic dispute with Michael Blodgett, 42, on February 20, 1994. After the motorists antagonized each other for several miles on the Interstate, they both pulled over to an access road and got out of their vehicles. At that point Graham retrieved a powerful crossbow from his trunk and murdered Blodgett with a razor-sharp 29-inch arrow. In Seattle, Washington, Terrance Milton Hall, age 57, shot and killed Steven

and on the pro-death penalty side, Jay Johansen, "Does the Death Penalty Deter Crime: Comparing States," <http://www.johansens.us/sane/law/capstate.htm>.

⁴ Hashem Dezhbakhsh, Paul H. Rubin, Joanna M. Shepherd, "Does Capital Punishment Have a Deterrent Effect? New Evidence from Post-moratorium Panel Data" (Emory University, and, Clemson University, 2001), <http://www.cjlf.org/deathpenalty/DezRubShepDeterFinal.pdf>.

Burgess, a 21-year-old college student, because Burgess was unable to disarm the loud anti-theft alarm on his jeep.⁵

Why is there such a lack of civility in modern society? Coarse language, obscene gestures, road rage and generally rude behavior seem to abound. Of course these have always been present to some degree in fallen society, but most people will readily admit that such incivility is becoming more commonplace and that it is coming under less and less public censure.

In order to quantify the extent of the road rage problem, the Automobile Association commissioned a survey of 526 motorists. The survey, carried out in January, 1995, found that almost 90 percent of motorists have experienced “road rage” incidents during the last 12 months. Sixty percent admitted to losing their tempers behind the wheel.

Aggressive tailgating (62 percent) was the most common form of “road rage,” followed by headlight flashing (59 percent), obscene gestures (48 percent), deliberately obstructing other vehicles (21 percent) and verbal abuse (16 percent). One percent of drivers claim to have been physically assaulted by other motorists.⁶

James 3:8-10 addresses the issue of abusive speech and relates it to the *Imago Dei*. He says, “But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.” James is oddly paradoxical at this point. In one and the same passage he speaks both of the utter and universal wickedness of man and also of the sublime and praiseworthy image of God in man. On the one hand, man is so utterly sinful that there is no hope of taming his tongue.

There is no ambiguity of description here. Like the double-minded person who cannot really trust in God and invariably falls into evil, the tongue, because it is uncontrollable, does the same. People do what they do because of what they are really saying. The connection between this evil within the individual and the unstable rivalry among believers mentioned later in the chapter should also be noted (v. 16). The statement that the tongue is an evil could not call for more caution. The ethicists look for sources of evil. The body is susceptible to evil influences. Deformed desire is evil. The tongue in its restless destructiveness is evil. It tends toward anger (1:20), self-deception (v. 26), offense (2:6), quarreling (4:2), boasting and bragging (v. 16), and swearing (5:12). Such is the tendency of the tongue to indulge in evil speaking. As such, the tongue, speech, is evil in humans.⁷

At the same time, James reproaches those who curse men, since all men are made in the likeness of God. In our efforts to oppose Pelagianism (rightly so) we too easily forget that man, as the apex of God’s creation, deserves a certain respect and dignity. James ties such uncivil use of language to an underestimation of the *Imago Dei* in man. That is not to say that man is worthy of

⁵ Louis Mizell, “Aggressive Driving,” (AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety), http://www.aaafoundation.org/resources/index.cfm?button=agdrtext#Aggressive_Driving

⁶ Matthew Joint, “Road Rage,” (The Automobile Association Group Public Policy Road Safety Unit), http://www.aaafoundation.org/resources/index.cfm?button=agdrtext#Road_Rage.

⁷ Kurt A. Richardson, *James, The New American Commentary*, vol. 36 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 155-56.

God's acceptance apart from redemption in Christ. But there is a sense in which man as God's masterpiece is to be respected and honored. To say that man is totally depraved is not the same as saying that man is as bad as he can possibly be. God has purposes for His creation besides salvation; among them is His purpose for human government. Of the ruling authorities Scripture states,

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. (Rom. 13:1–4)

Unbelieving human rulers are deemed God's servants and are considered as carrying out God's will when they reward those who do good and punish those who do evil (1 Pet. 2:13-14). Regardless of faith in Christ, some men, despite total depravity, do great things. Some have built great civilizations, others have produced brilliant inventions, and still others have explored dangerous wildernesses or conquered seemingly impossible obstacles. Such accomplishments are to be admired and are a reminder to us of the *Imago Dei* in man. As this chapter was being written men successfully landed a 1,000 pound robotic vehicle on Mars – a truly amazing accomplishment. The irony of this accomplishment is that those who undertook the task did so principally in the hope of finding evidence of life on Mars so as to buttress their evolutionary perspective on life. But in the very accomplishment of this feat, they demonstrate the insurmountable gap that exists between man and the animals, thus negating the very premise of Darwinian evolution. The great feat accomplished by the engineers of the NASA and the Jet Propulsion Lab could never have been accomplished apart from the *Imago Dei* in man.

According to James, man is made in the image of God, and as such, he is God's representative on the earth. One cannot praise God out of one side of his mouth and curse man, God's representative, out of the other side of his mouth with impunity. Civility of speech is called for because of the doctrine of the *Imago Dei* in man.

Civility is also seen in the way we regard the opinions and beliefs of others. The doctrine of Individual Soul Liberty is debated among some Christian scholars, but appears to be presumed in such passages as Romans 14:1–5,

Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.

One ought not to coerce another against the dictates of his conscience. Even if the other's conscience is "weak," and his opinions are ill informed or inadequately informed, Christian civility requires that respect be shown to the weaker brother. We may disagree, and, given the

opportunity, it is our responsibility to instruct and inform the weaker brother (Eph. 4:11-15; Heb. 5:12-14). Postmodernism's disavowal of cognitive, propositional truth has greatly impoverished much of evangelical Christianity;⁸ however, to violate the weaker brother's conscience by coercing him to violate his conscience is to demean the *Imago Dei* in that brother. "Why is my freedom judged by another's conscience?" (1 Cor. 10:29b).

As he struggled with the constant complaints of the Israelites, Moses desired to see the face of God.

Then Moses said, "I pray You, show me Your glory!"¹⁹ And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion."²⁰ But He said, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!" (Exodus 33:18–20)

This might be taken as a desire to understand God's image completely, and Moses is certainly to be commended for expressing such a desire. One might expect that God would have answered Moses' request with a display of His holiness. Instead, what God displayed to Moses was His compassion, grace and lovingkindness!

The LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD. Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations." (Exodus 34:5–7)

Even in the face of outrageous and demanding behavior on the part of the Israelites, God's display of His own character constitutes the quintessence of civility.

THE IMAGO DEI AND HUMAN GOVERNMENT

As noted above, the first post-fall reference to the *Imago Dei* is in reference to the Noahic Covenant (Gen. 9:6). This covenant was characteristic of what many have termed the "Dispensation of Human Government." Apart from the responsibility to meet out capital punishment for murder, what other implications of the *Imago Dei* might there be for human government? Governance of man in society requires a delicate balance between the rights of the individual and the power of the government. The value of the individual is bound up in the notion of the *Imago Dei* in man. How is it that the infinite God can be represented by finite man? Due to the infinite gap between God's immensity and man's finiteness, even before the fall, man was totally inadequate to represent God. The only way God's infinite multifacetedness could be represented by finite man is for there to be an infinite number of distinct individual men, each bearing a part of God's image. A Biblical view of human government will place a high value on the worth of the individual due to the *Imago Dei*.

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have seen the world's societies torn between two competing approaches to human government – free market capitalism and communism. Karl

⁸ See, for example, Rolland D. McCune, "A Review Article: The Younger Evangelicals," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal Volume 8* (Detroit: Detroit Baptist Seminary, 2003), 136-140.

Marx (1818-1883) introduced to the world a way of thinking about both economic and social theories that was strongly influenced by Hegelian philosophy.⁹ Though Marx and Engles are usually credited with being the “founders” of Marxism,¹⁰ other important contributors to this system include: E. Bernstein, K. Kautsky, A. Bebel, F. Mehring, and G. V. Plekhanov.¹¹

The plight of the underprivileged and oppressed can at times find a sympathetic ear from the Christian. As Ferguson and Packer note, “. . . class difference still divides capitalist societies, producing asymmetries of power and resources. And the capitalist system still depends upon this imbalance for its very existence. Christian concerns with justice and equity sit uneasily with capitalism, particularly in its more naked forms.”¹² However, the existence of “class difference” should not be considered particularly unchristian. Jesus Himself said, “The poor you have with you always” (Matt. 26:11; see also Deut. 15:11). Paul returned Onesimus to his master, Philemon, and he did not instruct Lydia to sell her house and give all the money to the poor. Instead, he took advantage of her gracious offer of hospitality. No doubt the early church in Philippi benefitted greatly from the property holdings of Lydia, the capitalist! In Christ, both slaves and free are united into one body and are equal before God, and yet, slaves remained as slaves, freemen remained as freemen, and apparently capitalist landowners remained as capitalist landowners (1 Cor. 7:20-22). Individual ownership of property will even be a characteristic of the Messianic Kingdom when “each of them will sit under his vine and under his fig tree, with no one to make them afraid, for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken (Mic. 4:4).

Marx’s formal training was in law, rather than in philosophy, and it may be legitimately questioned whether the title “philosopher” is even properly attributed to Karl Marx. Nevertheless, he liked to “dabble” in philosophy and was particularly drawn to the philosophies of Georg Hegel and Auguste Comte. Both Hegel and Comte contributed significant features to Marx’s system of communism, but it was Comte in particular whose philosophical ideas proved singularly destructive to the Biblical view of the individual’s worth.

Comte (1798-1857), French philosopher and founder of the discipline of sociology, contributed to Marxism the notions of “community” and “altruism.” Though the term “community” preceded Comte in the English language,¹³ it was Comte’s unique use of this term in a sociological context that came to be an important concept in Marxism. “Altruism,” on the other hand, is a term that was coined by Comte himself, and becomes an indispensable feature in his notion of the community. As for Comte himself, he was a deeply troubled man. Biographer Boris Sokoloff refers to him as “The ‘Mad’ Philosopher.”¹⁴ “During his lifetime, Comte exhibited violent rages, manic grandiosity, homicidal and suicidal tendencies, delusions of God-like omnipotence, paranoia, and a genuinely sick compulsion to control others.”¹⁵ Comte called for the reconstruction of humanity in which individuals would give up their rights for the sake of

⁹ See this author’s more complete critique of Marxism at <http://www.shasta.edu/admin/userfiles/resourceDocuments/Marxism.pdf>.

¹⁰ C. Stephen Evans, *Pocket Dictionary of Apologetics & Philosophy of Religion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 74.

¹¹ Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley, vol. 3, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Leiden, Netherlands: Wm. B. Eerdmans; Brill, 1999-2003), 425.

¹² Sinclair B. Ferguson and J.I. Packer, *New Dictionary of Theology*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 414.

¹³ “Community” entered the English language in the 14th century.

¹⁴ Boris Sokoloff, *The "Mad" Philosopher, Auguste Comte* (Vantage Press, 1961).

¹⁵ Geri Ball, *The Turning of the Tide – In a Nutshell* (Chico, CA: The Patriot, 2011), 17.

the good of the community. This giving up of individual rights he termed “altruism” (selflessness), from the French *autrui*, “of others.” Though the terms “selflessness” and “altruism” are frequently used in a Christian context, Comte (and Marx) meant something different by the term. In a Christian context the term “selflessness” generally connotes the idea of a willingness to give up one’s comfort and/or possessions for the sake of benefitting someone else from the motive of love. Comte’s idea was that one should surrender his self-identity and rights as an individual for the sake of the good of the community. Comte’s idea flies in the face of the whole notion of man as created in the image of God and “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.” In Marxism, the individual loses his identity as a “self” and is called upon to give altruistically for the good of the community. When Christianity adopts the notion of altruism, it runs the risk of destroying principled Christian individualism. Ball summarizes:

Comte held that individualism and individual rights must be abolished. He asserted that our egoism [individualism] is “the main source of human misfortune.” (Comte, *The Catechism of Positive Religion*, p. 216.) Comte declared, “All human rights ... are as absurd as they are immoral.” (Comte, *The Catechism of Positive Religion*, p. 230.) Men have no individual rights and there “will be the substitution of Duties for Rights...” Each individual “has duties, duties towards all; but rights ... can be claimed by none.” It is necessary to direct man’s activities in the service of Humanity. (Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, pp. 400, 402.)

The mad philosopher Auguste Comte coined the term “‘altruism’” (Andreski, *The Essential Comte*, p. 9.) In Comte’s view, we must “dedicate ourselves to a life of Altruism.” “... that the thought of self is conquered or transcended, – is essential to altruism.” (Caird, *The Social Philosophy and Religion of Comte*, pp. 53, 202.) Comte called for a new morality that “would be based on ... altruism....” (Standley, *Auguste Comte*, p. 87.)

Comte’s aim was to replace love of God with love of the Supreme Being – “Humanity” – and to substitute pure self-sacrifice for self-actualization through Christ. Comte wrote, “It [the sweetness of the incorporation into the Supreme Being – Humanity] is unknown to those who being still involved in theological belief ... have never experienced the feeling of pure self-sacrifice.” (Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, p. 444.)¹⁶

Though free-market capitalism is not without its problems, in a well governed society, where a limited government exercises reasonable restraint against man’s sinful behavior, the individual retains his ability to express the *Imago Dei* through creativity, imagination, and labor. Such a system has been described as “Principled Christian Individualism,”¹⁷ and is well expressed in the opening lines of the U.S. Declaration of Independence, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.”

THE IMAGO DEI AND SEXUALITY

The record of God’s creation of man contains a significant grammatical interplay between singulars and plurals. Note the following arrangement of Genesis 1:26-27,

¹⁶ Ball, 17-18.

¹⁷ Cincinnatus, *Armageddon: The Final, Decisive Conflict Between Liberty and Slavery* (Cincinnatus, 2012), 29-32.

- 26 Then God (pl. אֱלֹהִים) said let us (pl.) make man (sing. אָדָם) in Our (pl.) image,
according to our (pl.) likeness;
and let them (pl.) rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky
and over the cattle and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps
on the earth.
- 27 Then God (pl.) created man (sing.) in His (sing.) own image
In the image of God (pl.) He created (sing.) him (sing.)
male and female He (sing.) created them (pl.)

Both God and man are referred to in the singular and plural. The plural noun “God” (אֱלֹהִים) takes a singular verb (“created”), and the singular noun “man” (אָדָם) takes a plural verb (“let them rule”). Theologians and Biblical interpreters have pondered deeply the significance of the plural in reference to God. Traditional Christian interpretation attributes its significance to the plurality within the triune Godhead; although, at least six different interpretations of its meaning have been put forward.¹⁸ Though this mixture of singular (“he created”) and plural (אֱלֹהִים) is seen in the preceding account of the creation of heaven, earth and the animals (vv. 1-25), it is the change from the impersonal jussives (e.g., “let it bring forth”) to the personal cohortative (“let us make”) that focuses attention on the plurality of God in this present text. It may be that many of the efforts to explain the plural references to God have largely missed the point. It is likely that the singular/plural references to God are intended to prepare the way for the singular/plural references to man. The *Imago Dei* is not borne exclusively by either the male (זָכָר *zachar*) or the female (נְקֵבָה *neqēvah*) but in both male and female when brought together in companionship. It cannot be said that God is either male or female, but it takes a companionship of both male and female in mankind (אָדָם *'adam*, a collective singular) to express the plurality within the Godhead. Thus, the distinctions between “maleness” and “femaleness” are important to maintain if the *Imago Dei* in man (אָדָם) is to be rightly represented. Modern feminist attempts to diminish or eliminate such distinctions are a direct affront to the purpose of God and can only result in damage to the concept of the *Imago Dei*.

An assault is being made today on the traditional view of marriage from both the feminist and homosexual camps. The traditional view – one man and one woman joined together by God for life – is rooted in the Biblical text and founded upon the concept of the *Imago Dei*. The traditional Biblical view of marriage is based on the notion of two purposes for marriage, as seen in the two accounts of its institution – Genesis 1:26-28 and Genesis 2:18-25. In the former passage, the purpose of *procreation* is the focus (“be fruitful and multiply”); whereas, in the latter passage the focus is on *companionship*. Verduin elaborates:

¹⁸ See, for example, the list given in K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, in *The New American Commentary* vol. 1A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 161: (1) a remnant of polytheistic myth; (2) God’s address to creation, “heavens and earth”; (3) a plural indicating divine honor and majesty; (4) self-deliberation; (5) divine address to a heavenly court of angels; and (6) divine dialogue within the Godhead.

In the former account the sexual differentiation, the occurrence of male and female, is introduced as a device for the propagation of the species. Do we not read: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them; and God said unto them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion’ . . .”? Here sex is described as a device serving the cause of reproduction. Small wonder that in *this* account mankind is pictured as male and female right from the start.

If now we turn to the latter account, we find the *raison d’être* of the sexual differentiation set in a different, let us say, a complementary, light. Here sex is relational, for fellowship, for the ultimate in human companionship – with not a word said about procreation. This time the divine soliloquy is: “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” Then follows the story of the “sleep” or trance, in which out of a rib of the man is fashioned the contemplated companion. Here the *raison d’être* of sex is relational, a device for companionship, companionship expressing itself as the man and his life-partner (we say *life-partner* because the writer of this account plainly has in mind the founding of a new home, similar to the one a man leaves by the espousal of such a partner) coalesce, become “one flesh.” Small wonder that in this account mankind is first a solitary male and only after that male and female.¹⁹

Feminists and homosexuals focus entirely on the companionship aspect of “marriage” to the complete neglect of the procreation aspect of marriage. While it is true that some married partners are unable to have children, couples should not enter into marriage while not planning to have children. Only through procreation can finite mankind expand the expression of the *Imago Dei*, thus fulfilling God’s original intention for man to represent the infinite God. This is one reason why homosexuality is seen as such a grievous sin in Scripture. It is a direct affront to God’s expressed purpose for mankind.

Espousing a “new hermeneutic,” professed evangelicals Jack Rogers (Professor Emeritus at San Francisco Theological Seminary and former Professor of Philosophical Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary) and Mel White, embrace homosexuality as a legitimate way to express love between two people in a marriage relationship, even to the point of admonishing the church to welcome those who are LBG (Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay and Transsexual) as full and equal members.²⁰ Such assaults on the Biblical view of sexuality and marriage must surely merit the judgment of God on a sinful generation!

THE IMAGO DEI AND WORSHIP

“You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.” (Exodus 20:4)

The prohibition against the use of idols in the worship of God is likely tied to the *Imago Dei* in man. Man is not to create a “likeness” (הַמִּזְמָנָה *t’munah*) of God, because God has already created His “likeness” (תְּצַלֵּם *tselem*, Gen. 1:26) in man.²¹ Anything created by man would be

¹⁹ Leonard Verduin, *Somewhat Less Than God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 44-45.

²⁰ David R. Nicholas, *The Strategic Importance of Shasta Bible College & Graduate School*, (Redding, CA: SBC Books, 2012), 4.

²¹ Though תְּצַלֵּם and הַמִּזְמָנָה are different words, they are synonyms. Note תְּצַלֵּם used as an “idol” in Num. 33:52; 2 Kings 11:18; Ezek. 7:20; Amos 5:26; 2 Chron. 23:17.

inferior to man himself, and thus inadequate to serve as an image of God. Berkouwer was wrong to reject entirely the idea that this prohibition was based on a “a background of a ... contrast between material and non-material, and of Jahwe as ‘spirit.’”²² While focusing on Exodus 20 and on the anthropomorphisms of Scripture, he neglected to take seriously the expansion of Exodus 20:4 found in Deuteronomy 4:15–19,

So watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any form on the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire, so that you do not act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the sky, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water below the earth. And beware not to lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven.

Clearly, God places the idols not only in the classification of things created by man, but also in the classification of things corporeal (“heaven,” “sun,” “moon,” “stars,” etc.) as opposed to things non-corporeal. Nevertheless, I believe Berkouwer was right to identify the core problem with idolatry as being “the arbitrariness with which man tries to have God at his beck and call, [and] tries high-handedly to control God’s presence in the visible world.”²³ This attempt to control God results in a two-fold alienation for man: “...an act of unmistakable alienation from God. And ... simultaneously, an act of extreme self-alienation, since man thereby seeks to construct an ‘image of God,’ although he himself, in communion with God, should *be* that image in all of his being.”²⁴

Physical props as an aid to worship may be appropriate, as evidenced by the tabernacle, priesthood and offerings. However, they can also constitute a distraction from the true nature of worship. As Jesus said, “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24).²⁵ His rejection of both Mt. Gerizim and Jerusalem and His approval of both “spirit” and “truth” provide a basic framework for understanding a proper concept of worship in the present age. The Samaritans, who claim to be descended from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh that remained in the land after the Assyrians had deported most of the Israelites, derive their name “Samaritan” (*Shomronit*) not from the city or region of “Samaria,” but from the Hebrew *shamar* (שמר) “to guard.” They consider themselves the “guardians” of the sacred, holy place appointed by God in Deuteronomy 12:5-7. Their belief is that David, the son of Jesse, was wrong in selecting Mt. Moriah as the site for the Jewish temple. The Samaritans had, in fact, built a temple to Yahweh on Mt. Gerizim²⁶, though it had been destroyed by John Hyrcanus in about 128 BC. They were firmly attached to Mt. Gerizim, the site of their own temple. The Jews, on the other hand, were equally convinced that Jerusalem was the only place where Yahweh could be rightly worshipped. The claim made by Jesus here was most remarkable: “Neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.” He could not have been referring to

²² G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 79.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 82.

²⁵ For this author’s full treatment of true spiritual worship from John 4, see <http://www.shasta.edu/admin/userfiles/resourceDocuments/DispensationalViewWorship.pdf>.

²⁶ There is archaeological evidence of a temple on Mt. Gerizim as early as about 500 BC.

the coming kingdom, since in the kingdom Jerusalem will be the undisputed capital of the world and the location of Yahweh's temple (Ezekiel 40ff.; Zechariah 8:22; Isaiah 2:2-3; 25:7; Matthew 23:37-39; Romans 11:26). Thus, Jesus' reference to a coming hour in which Yahweh would be worshipped neither in Gerizim nor in Moriah must be a reference to worship in the church age. This corresponds well with other New Testament claims of the uniqueness of the church age dispensation as one in which all distinction between Jew and Gentile is eliminated (Eph 2:14-18; Romans 3:22; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Colossians 3:11) and the only "temple" is a spiritual one (Ephesians 2:21-22; 3:6; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

In contrast to the notion of worship being tied to a physical location – be it Gerizim or Jerusalem – Jesus stated that worship in the coming age was to be "in spirit and in truth." The expression "in spirit" is not directly a reference to the Holy Spirit, but to the human spirit,²⁷ and this comports well with the context. Worship in the church age is not dependent upon physical location or liturgical props. As clear New Testament teaching would later reveal, church-age worship is to be focused within the human spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) and is to incorporate the notion of "spiritual sacrifices" (1 Peter 2:5; Hebrews 13:15-16; Philippians 3:3). It is inconceivable to the current writer that the Lord Jesus or His apostles would have contemplated the possibility of worshiping the Father by means of such liturgical props as incense, icons, labyrinths, prayer stations or church buildings with altars. Though it may be possible to incorporate such props and still worship God "in spirit," it is no more likely that such props would be beneficial to worship than those associated with either the Gerizim or Jerusalem temples. Jesus' words, "neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem," suggest in the strongest possible way, that one should take a skeptical view of the use of physical props in the worship of the Father.

Jesus directed attention to the true essence of worship – that which is spiritual, internal and a matter of the submission of man's will to the will of God. An examination of Jesus' discourse with the Samaritan woman yields three significant principles that must shape an understanding of worship from a Dispensationalist's perspective: (1) Worship is in spirit, neither tied to a physical locality nor dependent upon the use of physical props; (2) Worship is in truth, that is, it must correspond with what is revealed in the Word of God, even if contrary to human reasoning; and (3) Worship consists essentially of man's submitting his will to the revealed will of God.

CONCLUSION

What is man, that thou art mindful of him?
 And the son of man, that thou visitest him?
 For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels,
 And hast crowned him with glory and honour.
 Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands;
 Thou hast put all *things* under his feet:
 Psalm 8:4-6 (KJV)

Man, sinful as he may be, is truly a remarkable creature, "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14), created in the *Imago Dei*. Modern society has suffered much from trading the

²⁷ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 270; Kenneth O. Gangel *John* in "Holman New Testament Commentary" (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 77; Calvin.

Scriptural view of man for a Darwinian, evolutionary view that casts off the *Imago Dei* in exchange for man who is nothing more than a glorified animal. This failure to appreciate the man as the image of God has resulted in an increased murder rate through insufficient penalties for murderers and the legalization of abortion; a drastic decline of civility in human society seen both in outrageous conduct and in crass, foul speech; widespread subjugation of individual freedoms through socialist, Marxist governments; perversions of human sexuality, and idolatrous worship systems that “have the appearance of godliness, but deny the power thereof” (2 Tim. 3:5).