

# **The Spitting Image of Love**

In the Image of God: The Christian Vision for Love and Marriage

The Cranach Institute, Concordia Theological Seminary, LCMS World Relief and Human Care

Fort Wayne, Indiana, September 18–20, 2006

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## **Summary**

When a man and a woman marry each other, they form a spitting image of love. All too often the spitting turns ugly; but the teaching that God created man, male and female, in the image of God shows that the spitting image can be a beautiful reflection of a heavenly reality. The help that marriages need is built into the institution of marriage and into the love that gives it life.<sup>1</sup>

## **I. The Image of God**

### ***A. The Original Creation in the Image of God (Gen 1:26–28)***

The teaching that God created man in his image is found in the very first chapter of the Bible:

Then God said, “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.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” [Gen 1:26–28]

When God says, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness,” this is a Hebrew form of speech in which parallelism is used to clarify a phrase. “In our image” means the same thing as “in our likeness.” Therefore this text teaches that the image of God is equivalent to the likeness of God. In other words, to be created in the image of God means to be made like God.

The immediate context shows many ways in which man was made to be like God. He was created very good: “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen 1:31). He was created with dominion: “Rule over the fish of the sea...” (Gen 1:26, 28). He was created to participate in God’s creation by being fruitful: “Be fruitful and multiply...” (Gen 1:28). He was created to be in relationship as a unity with distinction: “So God created man ... male and female” (Gen 1:27).

The last-mentioned likeness is a rewarding one to explore when discussing questions about human relationships. Human relationships are not accidents of history, but part of the

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<sup>1</sup> For a more comprehensive discussion of the image of God as it relates to the relationship between male and female, see my article “Man as Male and Female: Created in the Image of God,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 68 (2004): 5–96. For an application of the image of God to the vocation of scientists, see my chapter “Scientists Called to Be Like God,” in *Reading God’s World: The Scientific Vocation*, ed. Angus J. L. Menuge (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia, 2004): 243–269.

created order. Notice how the nature of human relationships is set by the nature of God who created them. God's nature includes both unity and distinction—one God, yet three Persons. The distinction is taught by the plural words used of God: “Let *us* make man in *our* image, in *our* likeness” (Gen 1:26). Luther agrees that the plural words here refer to the distinct Persons of the Trinity rather than to God and the angels: “For we were not created in the likeness of the angels’ but they, together with us, are the likeness of God.”<sup>2</sup> The unity of God is taught by the singular words used of God: “So God *created* man in *his* image, in the image of God *he created* him, male and female *he created* them” (Gen 1:27). The pronouns are distinctively singular in both Hebrew and English while the italicized verbs are distinctively singular in Hebrew.

Corresponding to and derived from the nature of God is the unity and distinction of man. The unity is taught by the singular words used of man: “Let us make *man* in our image, in our likeness. So God created *man* in his image, in the image of God he created *him*” (Gen 1:26–27). The distinction is taught by the plurals: “*male and female* he created *them*” (Gen 1:27).

Because human relationships are part of God's created order, based on his own nature, they are sacred, that is, they are set apart by God for his holy purposes. The basic pattern of unity in distinction is found again and again in the basic human relationships. Husband and wife are distinct individuals, but in marriage “they will become one flesh” (Gen 2:24). Father and mother are distinct individuals, but children are to honor both equally in their united office as parent: “Honor your father and your mother” (Exod 20:12). Man and neighbor are distinct individuals, but love unites them in God's plan: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18). Members of church are distinct individuals, but they are to be perfectly united: “I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in minds and thought... Is Christ divided?” (1 Cor 1:10, 13).

The identity of God not only is the basis of our creation, but also is the basis of the law by which we live. God's law is not an arbitrary list of demands designed to put God's creatures through their paces in some divine dog show, with the purpose, depending on which denomination the judges come from, to show how the good dogs can be distinguished from the bad, or alternatively, to show how all the dogs are miserable mutts and deserve to be put down. No, God's law is simply his identity worked out in his creatures. God is love, and his law is to love. Right after Paul tells the Colossians that they “have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (Col 3:9–10), he tells them: “Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. *And above all these put on love*, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col 3:12–14). God has created us in his image, God has made us to be like God, and *therefore* we must love, since God is love.

### ***B. The Subsequent Continuation of the Image of God (Gen 9:6)***

There is some debate in the Lutheran church whether or not it is proper or advantageous to speak of the image of God as continuing after the fall into sin. There is no dispute that original righteousness was completely lost, and that if one speaks of the image of God as righteousness, it is proper to say the image of God was lost in the fall. There is also no dispute that many of God's

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, 55 vols. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg/Fortress; St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-1986), 2:227 (hereafter cited as *LW*).

created gifts to man were severely corrupted by the fall but not completely lost, and that if one speaks of the image of God as these created gifts and abilities, it is proper to say that the image of God continues after the fall. The only debate is whether it is proper or advantageous to speak of the image of God in this second way.

For a church that confesses that doctrine is established by Scripture alone, *sola scriptura*, it is best to speak of the image of God in the way Scripture does. Two passages of Scripture are particularly instructive to show that it is proper and advantageous to speak of the image of God continuing after the fall. The first records God's words to Noah after the flood: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man" (Gen 9:6). This first explicitly stated prohibition of murder is stated in universal terms. It protects all people from murder. If, as some theologians teach, the image of God is *only* original righteousness, then this text would outlaw only the murder of believers who have regained the image of God through the righteousness of faith, leaving unbelievers with no protection against murder. In the attempt to make the text apply to all people, these theologians alternatively invoke the *memory* of God's past creation of Adam or the *hope* of God's future re-creation of unbelievers in the image of God through faith and final glorification in heaven. Neither of these solutions is demanded or even supported by the words of the text. Though the Hebrew word for "man" in the passage is ha'adam אָדָם, no reputable scholar translates the passage: "Whoever sheds the blood of Adam, by Adam shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God did he make Adam." Ha'adam in this passage refers to any "man" living during or after the time of Noah. This is the "man" who stands in danger of having his blood shed, *and this is the same "man" whom God has created in his image, and is therefore protected from murder.* Hebrew grammar teaches that this protection is based on the *previous* work of God having created that man in his image, since the verb is in the perfect aspect (past tense), rather than being based on the possibility that in the future God would re-create him in his image through faith and final glorification in heaven.

The second passage particularly helpful to show that it is proper and advantageous to speak of the image of God continuing after the fall is from the New Testament: "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness" (Jas 3:9). Once again, the men who are being cursed at the time of James are the same men who have been made in God's likeness. In these two passages, Scripture teaches that there must be some sense in which God continues to make all people, even after the fall, in his image. As Luther says, "*All human beings* and angels are also made in the image of God."<sup>3</sup> Human life and honor is protected by God because all human beings, Christian as well as non-Christian, are created in the image of God. We need to guard against a neo-orthodoxy that labels as un-Lutheran or "to be avoided" the teaching that also unbelievers are created in the image of God. Correlatively, we need to guard against blanket statements that the image of God is *only* original righteousness that was completely lost in the fall. Rather, what Scripture teaches must govern what we teach.

### ***C. Resolving Apparent Contradictions: Simul Similis et Dissimilis***

While we believe that everything the Bible teaches is true, we also realize that Scripture contains many *apparent* contradictions. The greatest apparent contradiction is that the law appears to contradict the gospel. The teaching that people are justified or sinless because Jesus

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<sup>3</sup> LW 34:221.

took away their sins cannot logically be reconciled with the teaching that people are sinners who deserve to be punished for their sins, yet both are taught in Scripture. It is a mystery of faith, tied to the life and death of Jesus Christ, and therefore must be accepted by faith rather than by reason. Rather than concluding that Scripture contradicts itself or that some passages should be preferred to others, Luther maintained that both teachings were true at the same time, that people are at the same time justified and sinners, *simul iustus et peccator*.

Scriptural teachings about the image of God are like the teachings on law and gospel. In different passages, the image of God is affirmed and denied to the same groups of people. Instead of concluding that Scripture contradicts itself or that some passages should be preferred to others, we should maintain that both teachings are true at the same time, that people are at the same time similar and dissimilar to God, *simul similis et dissimilis*. This resolution of apparent contradictions in Scripture is made possible only through understanding that to be created in the image of God means to be made to be like God in various ways.

For instance, all human beings are protected from murder because they are made in the image of God, while animals can be killed for food (Gen 9:3, 6). Yet various human beings are denied the image of God elsewhere in Scripture. Woman is distinguished from man in the family since “the head of the woman is man,” and with respect to authority “he is the image and glory of God” (1 Cor 11:3, 7). Non-Christians are distinguished from Christians because only Christians “have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” (Col 3:10). Saints on earth are distinguished from saints in heaven who already “bear the image of the man of heaven” (1 Cor 15:49). And finally all human beings are distinguished from Christ, who alone is the image of God with respect to being of the same nature as God: “Only the Son is like God, or only He is ‘the image of the invisible God,’ as we read in Col. 1:15, and the image of His divine essence, who ‘bears the very stamp of God’s nature,’ as Heb. 1:3 tells us.”<sup>4</sup> What these pairs of contrasts shows is that Scripture uses “image of God” in various ways to speak of various likenesses of God, and that it is therefore not contradictory to affirm the image of God in someone with respect to one likeness but to deny it with respect to another.

The idea that man can be like God in some ways and unlike him in others is also taught in classical literature. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, Odysseus says to Euryalos, the unfriendly Phaiakian who insulted him:

Friend, that was not well spoken; you seem like one who is reckless.  
So it is that the gods do not bestow graces in all ways  
on men, neither in stature nor yet in brains or eloquence;  
for there is a certain kind of man, less noted for beauty,  
but the god puts comeliness on his words, and they who look toward him  
are filled with joy at the sight, and he speaks to them without faltering  
in winning modesty, and shines among those who are gathered,  
and people look on him as on a god when he walks in the city.  
Another again in his appearance is like the immortals,  
but upon his words there is no grace distilled, as in your case  
the appearance is conspicuous, and not a god even  
would make it otherwise, and yet the mind there is worthless.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> LW 15:339.

<sup>5</sup> *The Odyssey*, 8. 166–177.

To summarize: to be created in the image of God simply means to be made to be like God. Since people are like God in some ways and unlike him in others, they are at the same time similar and dissimilar, *simul similis et dissimilis*. Therefore the Bible does not contradict itself when it affirms and denies the image of God in the same people in different ways.

If the Lutheran church has had some controversy about the image of God through the years, it has been primarily because of its emphasis on salvation by grace alone *sola gratia*, through faith alone *sola fide*, for the sake of Christ alone *solus Christus*. By speaking of the image of God only in terms of righteousness which was lost in the fall and regained in Christ, the church has guarded itself against falling into the false doctrines of some other denominations, such as the claim that a spark of divine good remains in people even after the fall, and that the God's work of salvation is more like polishing silver that has been tarnished rather than like reviving a dead body. On the other hand, speaking of the image of God only in terms of righteousness risks neglecting much of what Scripture teaches about the image of God. The image of God affects not only salvation, but also creation, sanctification, and vocation. In order to understand how the image of God pervades human life, we need to turn first to the source of the image.

## II. Unity and Distinction in God: The Trinity

The Triune God is one God in three Persons. The Persons are distinguished in “works to the inside,” *opera ad intra*. The Father eternally begets the Son, and the Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son. On the other hand, the unity of God is taught in “works to the outside,” *opera ad extra*. Though the Apostle's Creed ascribes creation to the Father, redemption to the Son, and sanctification to the Holy Spirit, these are not exclusionary ascriptions. When God created the world, the Son and the Spirit were not taking naps while the Father alone worked. When God redeemed the world, the Father and the Spirit were hard at work along with the Son. When God sanctifies the world, the Father and the Son are right there with the Spirit, making the world holy.

## III. Unity and Distinction in Man: Male and Female

Those made in the image of God, both male and female, are also a unity with distinctions. The unity is stressed between male and female in “works to the outside,” *opera ad extra*, so to speak. They appear as a unit before God in marriage: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become *one flesh*” (Gen 2:24). They appear as a unit before God as his children in Christ: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, *male nor female*; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). They appear as a unit before the rest of creation as rulers: “Let *them* rule ... over all the earth” (Gen 1:26). But in “works to the inside,” *opera ad intra*, so to speak, male and female are distinct: “The head of the woman is man.... A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. Man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man” (1 Cor 11:3, 7-9). Luther carefully preserved both the unity and distinction of male and female when he wrote:

When the man and the woman are joined together in physical marriage, one body is formed, the goods are in common, the children and everything are common property. The wife is just as much mistress over the goods of her husband as the husband himself, and in nothing is she differentiated from her husband, except that the husband is lord of the

wife. In other respects that do not pertain to the husband, the wife is mistress of everything, just as much as the man.<sup>6</sup>

In summary, God has created male and female to be like himself, a unity with distinction. In “works to the outside” *opera ad extra*, so to speak, male and female are one man, but in “works to the inside” *opera ad intra*, so to speak, male and female are distinguished from each other. This helps to teach that love and order are not mutually exclusive, even though love unites and order distinguishes. It also carries connotations of loving relationships based on respect for the worth of others, and the implication of being united in service to God.

#### IV. Marriage and the Image of God

Now that we have examined the Scriptural teaching of the image of God and have seen that basic human relationships image God’s Trinitarian nature, it is time to turn to the specific topic of marriage. Marriage and the family relationships that derive from it are windows of heavenly realities lived out on the earth. God reveals himself as Bridegroom, and as Father and Son. These heavenly realities we understand dimly through earthly marriages and families. Yet when the heavenly realities collide with the sin and disease of the world, it can create cosmic disturbances. How many marriages, how many families, look more like hell than like heaven? Whether marriages turn out good or bad, they are always a trial:

Marriage is at all times—in every culture and under the widest variety of circumstances—one of the supreme tests of human character. The relation between men and women before and after marriage, the relation of parents and children—these create crises and tensions, conflicts between love and duty, between reason and the passions, from which no individual can entirely escape.... Sometimes the resolution is tragic, sometimes the outcome seems to be happy, almost blessed; but whether a human life is built on this foundation or broken against these rocks, it is violently shaken in the process and forever shaped.<sup>7</sup>

The reason why marriage is such a trial is that it is where love is greatly exercised, and love is an expression of the image of God. When the image we inherit from God collides with the sin we inherit from Adam, there are bound to be earthquakes. Jesus teaches that expressing love is a trial for post-fall man, and that it becomes possible only through divine power: “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). John directly links the earthly expressions of love to heavenly realities when he says, “No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us” (1 John 4:12). John also teaches that the loving we do is derived from God’s own nature, that we love because we are born of God and know him: “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 4:7–8). In other words, love is an expression of the image of God.

Marriage thus becomes a trial of the image of God, an arena for godly love to be exercised in a sinful world. In this trial, husbands and wives might well ask, How can this turn out well? How can we be happy with each other?

<sup>6</sup> LW 12:260.

<sup>7</sup> *Great Books of the Western World* ed. Mortimer J. Adler, vol. 1, *The Syntopicon: An Index to the Great Ideas, Volume 1*, ed. Mortimer J. Adler (London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990), 393.

Some husbands and wives figure that in order to be happy with each other, they need to identify their wants and satisfy them. Although it sounds reasonable, happiness cannot be defined as satisfying wants. In classical literature, Socrates' dialogue with Callicles taught the inadequacy of this definition of happiness. Callicles had listed the requirements of a happy person: "He is to have all his desires about him, and to be able to live happily in the gratification of them," to which Socrates replied, "Capital, excellent: go on as you have begun, and have no shame; I, too, must disencumber myself of shame: and first, will you tell me whether you include itching and scratching, provided you have enough of them and pass your life in scratching, in your notion of happiness?"<sup>8</sup> Callicles realized that his definition of happiness must be flawed if it leads to the conclusion that the happiest man on earth is the one who itches and scratches most intensely all day long.

The other possibility for figuring out how to be happy in the trial of marriage is to identify the nature of self and spouse, and then to live in harmony with that identification. Do you know to whom you are married? Do you recognize your spouse's ID?

### ***A. Being Married to a Commodity***

Evolutionists say that man is an animal, and that the primal urge of all animals is to pass on their genes to a new generation. Because of that primal urge, sexual cravings are hardwired into animals so that they will do whatever they have to do to mate and pass on their genes.

My wife tells me of one of her college professors who was nearly at this animal level. No, he did not tell the class that the only reason he was married was to satisfy his sexual cravings or to leave his spawn, but he told the class that he would make a check list of his wife every year. He would list the positives and the negatives, and if the positives were greater than the negatives, he would remain married—if not, he would get a divorce. At twenty-five years of age, he was on his third wife, having divorced his second when she was seven months pregnant.

This is a radically selfish way to try to achieve happiness in marriage. The selfish animal says, "My back itches; I need you to scratch it so that I can be happy." Such selfishness is one way sin corrupts God's good creation. According to the psychoanalyst Leavy:

The desire to possess, to gain control over other human beings, is so primitive as to appear innate. We may well ask whether this desire has its beginnings in the original unity of mother and child, and we may likewise wonder whether it is not the counterpart of what we think of as the fall of man.... Our need to possess can be thought of as a need to repossess something that we lost in being born.... To accomplish our desires, we need to love and be loved.<sup>9</sup>

What Leavy ascribes to the original unity of mother and child may better be ascribed to the original unity of husband and wife, created by God. This original innate unity is disrupted by the fall into sin. As sinful man attempts to regain the unity, his sinful selfishness pushes him to possess or control others, and this leads to many of our deepest sorrows today.

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<sup>8</sup> *Gorgias* 494 c–e, in *Great Books of the Western World* ed. Mortimer J. Adler, vol. 6, *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990), 277.

<sup>9</sup> Stanley A. Leavy, *In the Image of God: A Psychoanalyst's View* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988), 19–20.

### ***B. Being Married to a Partner***

The humanist identifies man as a higher, social animal. Rather than being hard-wired for strictly selfish gratifications, human beings are able to empathize with others and form communities that care for each other. In simple terms, the humanist says: “My back itches; I bet your back does too. If you scratch my back, I will scratch yours, and then we can both be happy.”

At first sight this seems like a reasonable perspective that would be a very social thing to do. The problem is that it is based on the principle “separate but equal.” You and I are separate beings, both equal, so the key to happiness is that we treat everybody fairly and share equally in the gratification of desires.

Couples with this idea are in a much better position than those with the previous idea. To be one’s partner is much better than to be one’s commodity. But it does not go far enough. When the United States was struggling with conflict between the races, many thought that the reasonable solution was the principle “separate but equal.” In fact, when that principle was applied to schools in different communities, the situation quickly turned caustic. “Perhaps the ‘great leap forward’ of American life in our time was the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* to outlaw the principle of ‘separate but equal’ because enforced separation of the races is not equality.”<sup>10</sup> Marriages, like schools, can become caustic if the “separate but equal” philosophy is applied.

### ***C. Being Married to a God***

According to Scripture, all human beings share an ID that is the *Imago Dei*, the image of God. Have you considered what it means to be married to the image of God? Should not the husband say to his wife, and wife to her husband, “You are the most precious thing in the world to me?”

There is a danger in making such an ID. Romantic love elevates the beloved so highly that there is the danger that the beloved can take the place of God. We need to ask, Is romantic love compatible with Christian love? Does “the adoration accorded a beloved human being ... amount to deification?...”<sup>11</sup>

Some romantic love clearly crosses the line. I can vividly remember the revulsion I felt when I first heard the lyrics to one of the love songs on the radio:

I will sell my soul for something pure and true; for someone like you....  
 I will burn for you.  
 Feel pain for you.  
 I will twist the knife and bleed my aching heart; and tear it apart.  
 I will lie for you.  
 Beg and steal for you.  
 I will crawl on hands and knees until you see, you're just like me.  
 I will die for you.  
 I will kill for you.  
 I will steal for you.  
 I did time for you.

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<sup>10</sup> Leavy, *In the Image of God*, 16.

<sup>11</sup> *The Syntopicon*, 819.

I will await for you.  
 I'd make room for you.  
 I'd sail ships for you.  
 To get close to you.  
 To be a part of you.  
 As I believe in you.  
 I believe in you.<sup>12</sup>

What a horrifying spectacle of a woman who has made her lover into her god in place of the one true God! Not only would she sacrifice her life to him, but also whatever makes her human, even whatever is good.

Yet the biblical teaching on having gods is not uniformly negative. Some modern texts give the impression that it is never right to have other gods. The synodical catechism cites the First Commandment as: “You shall have no other gods.”<sup>13</sup> But the Bible says more: “You shall have no other gods *before me*” (Exod 20:3). That it is proper to speak of certain people as gods is taught by Jesus himself: “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I have said you are gods’? [Ps 82:6]... [H]e called them ‘gods,’ to whom the word of God came—and the Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:34–35). As Luther says, “He who is in authority is an incarnate god, so to speak.”<sup>14</sup>

Returning to the question of how spouses should identify each other, they should begin by seeing their ID, their *Imago Dei*. To make use of Luther’s words above, one’s spouse is “an incarnate god.” The best image of God’s love, faithfulness, forgiveness, etc., that a husband will ever see might be his wife. As long as one’s gods are not illegitimate rivals to the one true God, it is not wrong to have other gods; it is only wrong to have other gods *before God*.

This may be why the language of love often borders on “god-talk.” The intense language of love in the Song of Solomon could be used between a lover and his beloved, or between God and his people, and interpreters continue to struggle to decide which is intended. The great chapter on marital love, Ephesians Five, constantly mixes “god-talk” with the language of love: “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord... Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph 5:22, 25). The rite of marriage in the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* includes the intriguing words, “With this ring I thee wed: *with my body I thee worship*: and with all my worldly goods I thee endow.” Luther advises husbands, “As a creature of God, a woman is to be looked upon *with reverence*.”<sup>15</sup> Perhaps some love songs that proclaim in various ways, “You are my god,” are not so bad after all:

You are my sunshine, my only sunshine  
 You make me happy when skies are gray  
 You'll never know dear, how much I love you  
 Please don't take my sunshine away<sup>16</sup>

You are everything

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<sup>12</sup> Garbage, “Crush.”

<sup>13</sup> “An Explanation of the Small Catechism,” *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1991), 55.

<sup>14</sup> *LW* 5:124.

<sup>15</sup> *LW* 15:130.

<sup>16</sup> Johnny Cash, “You Are My Sunshine.”

And everything is you  
 Oh, you are everything  
 And everything is you  
 Oh you are everything  
 And everything is you  
 Everything is you<sup>17</sup>

Once again, classical literature supplies a wonderful example of a man who valued his wife so highly that he preferred his wife even to a goddess. The goddess Kalypso, with all her charm, could not prevent Odysseus from pining for his wife Penelope, as the following dialogue poignantly illustrates:

But after they had taken their pleasure in eating and drinking, the talking was begun by the shining goddess Kalypso:  
 “Son of Laertes and seed of Zeus, resourceful Odysseus, are you still all so eager to go on back to your own house and the land of your fathers? I wish you well, however you do it, but if you only knew in your own heart how many hardships you were fated to undergo before getting back to your country, you would stay here with me and be the lord of this household and be an immortal, for all your longing once more to look on that wife for whom you are pining all your days here. And yet I think that I can claim that I am not her inferior either in build or stature, since it is not likely that mortal women can challenge the goddesses for build and beauty.”

Then resourceful Odysseus spoke in turn and answered her:  
 “Goddess and queen, do not be angry with me. I myself know that all you say is true and that circumspect Penelope can never match the impression you make for beauty and stature. She is mortal after all, and you are immortal and ageless. But even so, what I want and all my days I pine for is to go back to my house and see my day of homecoming.”<sup>18</sup>

## V. The “Spitting Image”

Being married to a god does not mean unending days of continual happiness. While on the earth, we interact with God in two very different ways, with love and hate. This is where the phrase “spitting image” can be helpful, since it conjures up two radically different images. One includes expelling foul liquid from the mouth, usually with the intent to express contempt. The other is taught by William and Mary Morris in their *Dictionary of Word and Phrase Origins*. In their discussion of the phrase, they write: “Harold Wentworth ... notes that the phrase ‘He’s the very spit of his father’ is widely heard in the South and suggests that ‘spit’ in this sense is probably derived from ‘spirit.’ Noting that the letter *r* is often indistinct in Southern speech, he

<sup>17</sup> Stylistics, “You Are Everything.”

<sup>18</sup> *The Odyssey*, 5. 201–220.

suggests that the phrase may actually have started as ‘He’s the very spirit and image of his father.’”<sup>19</sup>

### ***A. Marriage as the Spitting Image of Love***

When a man and a woman marry each other, they form a spitting image of love. All too often the spitting turns ugly; but the teaching that God created man, male and female, in the image of God shows that the spitting image can be the very spirit and image of a heavenly reality.

This dual understanding of “the spitting image,” mirrors the dual capacity of man to love and hate: “For me, loving and hating are the most revealing of all human capacities to resemble God as he has been revealed to us, and to depart from that resemblance. God, we say, hates nothing that he has made and so loved the world that he entered as a human into human fate and history. He also showed his love in our capacity for love, including sexual love, as John Milton wrote. Our minds and bodies are at one in the possibility of attachment, caring, protection, giving. Human fulfillment is never adequate when it is only fulfillment of the self: the other who cares, or the others who care, are the guarantors of our personal fulfillment. Humans need to love and be loved....”<sup>20</sup> It is in marriage that this need to love and be loved, this capacity to love and hate, is often most starkly revealed.

#### **1. Negative sense**

First we need to acknowledge the negative spit that often accompanies marriage. Why does it accompany marriage? Because that is where disappointment in love is so keenly felt, and “one might say without too much exaggeration that all human sorrow, as well as intolerance and often violence, come from disappointment in love.”<sup>21</sup>

It is precisely because God has created marriage as a primary place to exercise love and unity that the effects of sin are felt so strongly there, in the hatred and disunity that accompany sinners wherever they go: “The evident point of this picture is that our lives are locked in struggle and in conflict of feelings from the outset; our first loves are also our first hates. Although it is unquestionably desirable for love to predominate, it is inevitable for it to be countered by its opposite in some important respects. That is why it is hopelessly artificial to try to deal with these emotions separately.”<sup>22</sup>

#### **2. Positive sense**

Yet marriage is also the spirit and image of heavenly realities. It remains a good gift of God, created as a blessing. God works through spouses to convey the forgiveness of sins, to provide a deep well of love, to form an intimate unity. Psychoanalysts work hard to provide their patients freedom from inhibition and guilt in order to lead their patients to health. In psychoanalysis, “Feelings of guilt are relieved by telling the causes to a noncondemning ear, and the patient, like the penitent, feels at least temporarily restored to harmony with the community from which he or she had felt alienated.”<sup>23</sup> Husbands and wives can provide each other a

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<sup>19</sup> William and Mary Morris, *Morris Dictionary of Word and Phrase Origins*, 2d ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), 544.

<sup>20</sup> Leavy, *In the Image of God*, 38.

<sup>21</sup> Leavy, *In the Image of God*, 30.

<sup>22</sup> Leavy, *In the Image of God*, 29.

<sup>23</sup> Leavy, *In the Image of God*, 5.

noncondemning ear, they can help relieve feelings of guilt by conveying the forgiveness of sins, and they are uniquely qualified to restore harmony in their “one flesh” union. In these ways they make full use of marriage as the spirit and image of heavenly realities.

### ***B. Joy in the Image of Love***

When people make use of marriage as God intended, it brings tremendous joy. Once again, classical literature provides good illustrations of the joys of marriage. When Odysseus entreats the Phaiakian princess Nausikaa to give him clothing and shelter after he is washed ashore, he adds a prayer of blessing:

and then may the gods give you everything that your heart longs for;  
may they grant you a husband and a house and sweet agreement  
in all things, *for nothing is better than this*, more steadfast  
than when two people, a man and his wife, keep a harmonious  
household; a thing that brings much distress to the people who hate them  
and pleasure to their well-wishers, and for them the best reputation.<sup>24</sup>

The ancient Odysseus says that nothing is better than a harmonious household. The modern psychoanalyst Leavy explains how the selfless love that is cultivated and nourished especially in marriage and the family is more important than one would guess:

Selfless love not only exists but is essential to our being human. It needs examination, too. It isn't “selfless” at all, if by that we mean a kind of devotion to another that is unaccompanied by any feeling of pleasure, satisfaction, approval, or just care, all of which are rewarding in themselves. The deep identity of oneself with another, deriving from the early identity of mother and child, here delivers a powerful ethical potential: I cannot do good to anyone else without having a sense of inner good, as well. This is “at heart” not self-praise or pride in my own virtue, but a sense of being that other person myself. In a quite literal sense, when we love our neighbor we also love ourselves.<sup>25</sup>

Rather than deriving this deep-seated need to for selfless love from “the early identity of mother and child,” it may be better to derive it from man being created in the image of God as a unity with distinction.

### **Conclusion**

For the final, concluding sentence of his influential book, *The Office of Woman in the Church*, Fritz Zerbst writes, “Of decisive importance is, that clear conceptions of woman's position in the church of Christ be achieved, and that also in this matter the triunity of God be taught, lived, and affirmed in church practice.”<sup>26</sup> The same could be said of our current topic on the image of God as it relates to love and marriage. Among all who have been created by God in his image, it is of decisive importance in the family, in the relationship between husband and wife, that “the triunity of God be taught, lived, and affirmed.” When husband and wife are taught

<sup>24</sup> *The Odyssey*, 6. 180–185. Emphasis added.

<sup>25</sup> Leavy, *In the Image of God*, 30.

<sup>26</sup> Fritz Zerbst, *The Office of Woman in the Church: A Study in Practical Theology*, trans. Albert Merckens (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia, 1955), 124.

that they are created in the image of God and that their marriage is an image of God's love, and when they begin to live in harmony with that identity, then they affirm the triunity of God in their own lives according to the creative design of God, by the grace of Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

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