THE IMAGE OF GOD AS THE INTERPERSONAL CAPACITY

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Introduction

"Interpersonal capacity" includes three notable ideas about the image. (a) Interpersonal stresses the fact that the image of God has to do with characteristics of persons rather than that of things, forces, ideas, *etc*.

(b) Interpersonal relates the image to the social setting so that it involves more than the individual by addressing marriage, community, church, society, mankind as well as the purposes of God for us.

The third point lies in the word (c) capacity. Speaking of interpersonal "capacity" distinguishes potential from actual. As attitude is more basic than action, so capacity is more basic than function. The inner and the potential are the "heart" from which spring the issues of life. We are in God's image even when we are not actually relating to another person, even if our relating has some impersonal, even sinful, aspects to it. "Capacity" does not put the image at any particular "level." It is not identified with individual person, the "sub-individual" (rationality, "spirit"), or the corporate (marriage, society). The following observations lead to the conclusion that the image of God is the interpersonal capacity.

I. The Implication of Mankind's Interpersonal Purpose for the Image as Interpersonal Capacity

Out of the nature of God comes the purpose of God.
Out of the purpose of God comes the purpose of man.
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The interpersonal purpose of man implies interpersonal capacity in man. As the purpose of anything determines its nature and design, so the purpose of man determines the nature and design of man. The reason God made us establishes guidelines for the way God made us. He created us for fellowship and mission; consequently, he created us with capacities that enable us to relate and be responsible. He made us able to love and be loved; he made us capable of fulfilling mission mandates (dominion and proclamation).

The origin of anything determines its meaning and nature: "Your 'roots' define you." God created mankind God in God's image, and that makes all the difference. The situation with us is not so much that nature determines use or purpose, but *vice versa*. If something already exists, what it is like determines what it can do and what it can be for. In God's case, for example, his purpose(s) arise from his nature because he is eternal. He that alone is without beginning of days determines his own purpose on the basis of what he is. We were created by another; so we had a beginning that manifested the purpose of the creating Other. As Paul said in a different connection, *"By the grace of God 'I am what I am'"*; what we are comes from the "grace" of Another. But when God said, *"I am what I am,"* he spoke of himself as ultimate reality. Because we have a beginning through creation by him, our nature communicates his purposes, which make us interpersonal. From the beginning, interpersonal purposes have been associated with the

image of God in us; consequently, the purposes that imply interpersonal capacity cause us to identify that capacity with what it means to be created in God's image. We come from God by creation in the image of God: purpose, origin, nature.

The "Dominion Mandate": Responsible Being

Commission. In connection with the statement about creating us in God's image, we received a commission to take responsibility for the earth and everything in it. In the creation account, the responsibility implied by "dominion" is worded in direct association with God's image in us (Genesis **1**:26-28; cp. Psalm **8**). We were to till the ground (Genesis **2**:5) and dress and keep the Garden (**2**:15). In the Great Commission we are to call fellowmen back into fellowship with God (Matthew **28**:19-20, *etc*.).

Covenant. After God destroyed the human race, he made a covenant with the family of Noah and his descendants that he would never again destroy us with a universal flood. An agreement with promises and conditions takes place between persons and guides their interaction. Impersonal reality operates by built-in natural "law," but persons make covenants with one another. Personal behaviors like trust and love accompany such arrangements.

Interpersonal capacity participates in the covenants God has made with us. Covenant combines responsibility and fellowship. As far back as Genesis **2**, God's covenant name Yahveh appears in the account of establishing our relationship to the plant world (**2**:4-17), the animal world (**2**:19-20), and the human world (**2**:18, 21-25). Later came the rainbow covenant (**9**:1-17), the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant, and so forth. Fellowship with God shows up in the terminology for his people—sons of God, friends of God, *etc*.; in his communication with us, and in the goal of having the tabernacle of God with us (Revelation **21**:3).

For two reasons we understand the nature of mankind as the interpersonal capacity. We reason from our interpersonal purpose to our interpersonal nature. Since the thought pattern reasons from purpose to nature, it moves from demonstrating interpersonal purpose to inferring interpersonal nature. Elsewhere, we lay out arguments for summarizing under interpersonalism God's reasons for making us. As our distinctive nature, interpersonality ties to the meaning of the expression "image of God" because Genesis uses that expression to characterize our nature. So, the image of God is the interpersonal capacity.

Responsibility and accountability are interpersonal phenomena. Fellowship implies likeness to the "other," and responsibility assumes abilities that can fulfill purpose for the "other." Since the Genesis text associates them with the *imago dei* terminology, they argue for the image as interpersonal capacity.

God made us to have fellowship and to be stewards. The first is existential and the second is eschatological. The first has to do with our present situation; the second has to do with where we are going. Together they comprise the primary dimensions of interpersonal existence. They both require personhood and equally contribute to personal meaningfulness. We are to walk with God, in the first case, and to be stewards of his handiwork and grace, in the second case. Within that second case, we are stewards of the grace of God whether the common grace of creation or the proffered grace of redemption (1 Corinthians **4**:1-2; Titus **1**:7; 1 Peter **4**:10). Accordingly, we glorify him by fulfilling the management mandate and the mission mandate. When we do those things, we have fellowship with him, and he meets our needs (1 Corinthians **6**:6-11); so there is

an interplay between the main aspects of human experience. The image as interpersonal capacity harmonizes nicely with these basic aspects of human existence.

II. The Implication of the Creator's Interpersonal Nature for the Image as Interpersonal Capacity

Parallelism Between "Us" and "Them": Relational Being

> *"Let's make humankind in our image after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the cattle, all the earth, and everything that moves on the earth." And God created people in his own image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it."* (Genesis **1**:26-28a).

We reason from the interpersonal nature of God to the interpersonal nature of mankind that he created in his likeness. This second approach derives from scripture's most programmatic statement about human nature: created in the image of God. If God is interpersonal and people are interpersonal, we expect interpersonal capacity to be associated with our being created God's image. Our interest in the expression "image of God" serves the larger concern to show that our nature is interpersonal. We need not labor the point that God is personal being, but the materials below do highlight certain data in the creation account that belong to that understanding of him. It is obvious on all accounts that the God of the Bible has the characteristics and behaviors we associate with personhood. He has rationality, affection, volition, and self-transcendence. He cares (love), communicates, behaves ethically (holiness), *etc*. We know from experience that we also have those capacities and can do those same behaviors. So we know that we are like him in those respects. It remains only to associate that set of shared traits with the "image" expression; it is in the "image of God" that we are created.

Plurality in unity. One observation that highlights the interpersonal character of humankind is the parallelism between the pronouns us and them: *"Let us make mankind in our image . . . and let them have dominion . . . ."* As "us" shows plurality on the side of the creator, "them" shows plurality on the side of the created. "Us" creates "them." *"Let us make man in our image"* reflects the interpersonal character of God himself (cp. **3**:22; 11:7; Isaiah **6**:8). Even if Genesis had just said that God created us in his image, we could have inferred that "image of God" included interpersonal capacity because Christianity understands that God is interpersonal. But the creation account brings that point in more explicitly by describing the creator as "us" and "our." Accordingly, we take "us" as a reference to the three-person oneness of God commonly called "trinity. Except for the four "us" passages that hint at the triunity of God in the Old Testament, nothing very explicit about trinity is revealed until we get to the New Testament. From the New Testament we read trinity back into these relatively ambiguous texts in the Old (John **14**:16, *e.g.*). "Us" and "our" presumably refer to God and therefore to his triunity since no one else has appeared so far in Genesis and since "majestic plural" does not account for Genesis **3**:22 ("one of us"). The fact that we have interpersonal capacity derives from the interpersonal nature of God who made us in his own image. God's nature establishes ours.

Diversity in unity. Another observation that highlights our interpersonal character is the correlation between "us" and "male-female." Genesis **1**:26-27 parallels *"let us make humankind in our image"* and *"in the image of God he created them,"* on the one hand, with *"male and*

female he created them," on the other. The image evidently relates in some way—indirectly, formally, or analogously—to the male-female nature of humanness. The image harmonizes with bisexual interpersonalism. Since God is spirit (John **4**:24), physicality and sexuality *per se* are not the point We can say that the plurality-in-oneness of marriage is analogous to the plurality-in-oneness of trinity rather than the same as or included in it. "Same as" would degenerate the situation back to what ancient paganism portrayed in its male and female deities. "Included in" would picture deity as somehow a combination of male and female traits. God transcends the masculine-feminine variable. Marriage is comparable to trinity in that (a) marriage provides the most intense, permanent, all-inclusive interpersonal relationship that human experience affords. Marriage has the character it does primarily because in it we most distinctively demonstrate the intense, permanent, all-inclusive oneness of the godhead.

Analogy to marriage also lies in the fact that (b) male-female epitomizes interpersonalism across diversity. The image is not just unity-in-plurality; it is unity in diversity. Beyond transaction and interaction in a plurality of individuals, diversity leads to complementariness, interdependency, hierarchy, compenetration, overlapping capacities. Paul uses the body figure to illustrate characteristics like these in the church (Romans **12**:4-8; 1 Corinthians **12**:4-30; Ephesians **4**:4, 15-16; cp. **1**:22-23; Colossians **2**:19). Within both the human and divine, there are differences in and between the individuals that make up the categories—differences perhaps in talents, interests, statuses, and roles that combine to form the whole and unite to achieve the goal. The work of the Father, Son, and Spirit variously stresses the initiating, creating, sustaining, redeeming, sanctifying functions within their combined operation. Likewise, within their very constitutions, male and female are diversely gifted for fellowship, for multiplying and subduing the earth, for fulfilling the mission mandate. Diversity in inborn talents leads to diversity in developed skills and conceivably to diversity in supernatural gifts. What is true between male-female is true between persons in the same "mode" of the image.

Walking with God. Genesis **1-3** pictures God in direct relationship with our first parents. He walked with them in the Garden.

III. Specific Human Capacities That Combine to Produce the Image as Interpersonal Capacity

We reason from specifics in the creation account to the meaning of the *imago dei* expression used there to define us. We expect that human distinctives present in that account correlate with descriptions found there. These particulars naturally relate to the interpersonal capacity we previously inferred from God's reasons for creating us and from the nature of God in whose image he made us. Even as interpersonal character seems to account for the particulars in these other two topics, so it seems to account for the human distinctives observed in the creation account.

The thought moves from the particulars of one topic to the overall picture, back to the particulars of a related topic, to the same overall picture, and so forth. For our part, interpersonalism accounts for the reasons for creating people and for particulars in the nature of God. It fits with the parallelism between "us" and "them." Now we posit interpersonalism as what accounts for other particulars associated with the expression "image of God." Interpersonalism naturally accounts for an increasing number of topics associated with mankind. As that number increases, we gain confidence that the characteristics of personal relationship form the proper frame of reference for Christian anthropology and provide the ultimate frame of

reference for the Christian worldview. At the same time, we gain confidence that interpersonalism correctly accounts for each topic we previously associated with it along the way.

"God Said-Satan Said": Communicative Being

Revelation. One distinguishing feature between us and the rest of "this creation" is the ability to carry on word communication, which is based on symbolic thought. When God created man and woman, he communicated to them their role in relation to the rest of creation. Their operation was not genetically encoded into them but communicated to them. They received revelation to the effect that they were not to eat fruit from the tree of knowledge in the middle of the Garden.

Naming the animals. In preparing Adam to see that nothing in the animal kingdom corresponded with him, God had him name the animals. Adam was made with such capacity that he could fulfill that task. He could differentiate and categorize.

Influence. When Satan approached Eve, he illustrated in mankind the ability to be influenced by words. Influence contrasts with force as an interpersonal way to affect behavior. It appeals to the emotions, thoughts, and conscience to persuade people to use the will in the ways the influencer desires. People can be deceived by information, arguments, and projected possibilities.

What Satan did with Eve is essentially what Eve did with Adam. Scripture says that Adam was not deceived (1 Timothy **2**:14), but it appears that he illustrated mankind's ability to be moved by the preference and belief of someone loved. Even if we "know better," the power of another personality can suffice to override our better judgment. In short, people's ability to be tempted by beauty and pride relates to their interpersonal character. People have the capacity for communication.

"Forbidden Fruit": Ethical Being

By setting up a situation in which Adam and Eve were supposed to do certain things and forbidden to do others, God put them in the "morality matrix." They were to exercise dominion over the animal kingdom (**1**:26-30) and the plant kingdom (**2**:5-9). They were not to eat from the "tree of knowledge." Morality and ethics address interpersonal circumstances because they have to do with values/ideas, which people are not externally compelled to do or internally programmed to do. They can choose to apply or not apply a principle of interaction with another person relative to some purpose.

The coming of a sense of nakedness accompanied the disobedience in the Garden. Being self-conscious is a phenomenon of conscience that relates to people's unique characteristic of blushing. The sense of guilt is largely an interpersonal phenomenon, which Adam and Eve reflected in hiding themselves from God (Genesis **3**:7-8) after they sinned. From the subjective side, they distanced themselves from God. From the objective side, God removed them from the Garden where they had previously walked with him (**3**:8; cp. **5**:21; **6**:9; **17**:1; **24**:40; **48**:15). Going out from his presence (**3**:8; cp. **4**:16) was a kind of separation, and separation is an interpersonal phenomenon that occurs because of inappropriate behavior.

Mankind has the capacity for morality, which is part and parcel of what it means to be a person. So moral requirement implies that the image consists of interpersonal capacity.

Primary Capacities

Reason. Over the centuries theologians have given extensive thought to the interpretation of Genesis **1**:26-27 and related texts: *"Let's make humankind in our image after our likeness."* Traditionally there have been four proposed aspects of the "image of God" together with their subunits and effects. Reason has headed the list because it relates to so many derivative capacities.

Will. The human will enables choice between alternatives. People are not limited to a stimulus-response existence where response answers the strongest stimulus in the environment. Will relates to choice and therefore purpose and implies something about motives and motivation.

Conscience. People can sense guilt, which Genesis **3** pictures as nakedness. Conscience references to persons and their values. The pangs of conscience often do not bother us unless someone faces us with our failure to honor shared standards. Conscience responds to the person who gave the commandment or the person with whom we share a breached behavioral value. Conscience responds to a face. Guilt indicated by a bothered conscience results from two relational factors: (1) the lack of correlation between behavior and a standard for behavior plus (2) the lack of correlation between one person's behavior and the expectations of other persons who share that standard.

Conscience is not itself an exact standard for performance but a sense of inconsistency between standard and performance, or more exactly, between expected standard and actual performance. Conscience operates relative to ingrained more than inborn values. Conscience is educated by experience in the context of persons. It does not function relative to items not known or agreed to. People can pass lie detector tests if their values differ from the item being tested. People's conscience can begin to bother them later about a past action they did not know or believe was bad when they did it. The ability to feel guilty retroactively is especially characteristic of persons. A person can even feel guilty about something in front of someone else he loves and respects even though he may not think doing it is wrong. These kinds of experiences show that conscience and a sense of guilt are not just in reference to abstract values, which in themselves are interpersonal; they are even more interpersonal than that.

Affection. Emotion distinguishes people from much of the created realm because they care, have feelings and emotions, and experience affection for other persons.

Spirit. People have a spirit, something that continues after their body dies. Traditionally they have been regarded as created in God's image because they have rational, volitional, ethical, emotional, and spiritual capacities. These irreducible, simple capacities combine variously to create the complex ones that appear below.

Derived Capacities

The great variability in people derives from reason, will, and power. Reason lies behind imagination to "create" what is not there yet. Satan appealed to that capacity when he tempted Eve with the prospects of being wise like God. Mind altered values in this case. Will enables a person to respond differently from the implications of personal influence or physical stimulus. Power refers to the ability to carry out choice. Mankind therefore is a much less determined creation than the inorganic, plant, and animal kingdoms.

Abstract thought relates to the capacity for language communication, creativity, self-transcendence, self-awareness, self-objectification, responsibility (dominion/ mission), and even humor. People can penetrate a situation in thought and imagination.

A human person is not a "dumb brute." Animals can do what might be called "communication," but they do not communicate through language systems. Their communication is genetically based and transmitted and operates in stimulus-response fashion. Human language, however, is rationally based and culturally transmitted. In fact, language is a function of a culture. It is specialized to the interests, needs, characteristics, and perceptions of a particular society.

Human language is hierarchically structured in that it has levels—sounds (phonemes) that grammar relates together (morphemes) to create words; groupings of words to make phrases, clauses, sentences, and the like (tagmemes). Language has "deep structure," which corresponds to the categories of formal analysis. Animal communication has one "level," and there is no grammar between parts; that is, its elements do not form a "system" of interdependent phonemes, morphemes, and tagmemes. Instead, there is a set group of separate sounds.

Human language is arbitrary since there is no inherent connection between the linguistic item and what it refers to, which is partially what is meant by saying that human language is "symbolic." By "dancing," bees tell the other bees where a source of nectar is located. The bees' flight movements are "iconic"; they indicate the direction and distance to the source of nectar. They form a map in the air.

Human language is imaginative in that it is not based on external reality itself but on the speaker's conceptualization of it. People can lie (contradictory to reality); talk about unicorns (contrary to reality); communicate things of the past, the future, the distant, the imperceivable—things that require "trust" for the hearer to come to know about and believe in (displaced reality). Either by place, time, or perception, there is separation between the speaker/hearer and the topic.

Human language is creative in the sense that it generates new words, sounds, and combinations; it evolves. In this way, whole new language systems emerge and thousands of such systems currently exist in flux, some seven thousand of them. Animal language is static rather than dynamic. All members of the same species use the same sounds for the same "meaning," and new systems do not emerge. The distinctiveness of human language is one of the most important indicators of human uniqueness over animals, which correlates with people's being in the image of God.

Self-Transcendence: Spiritual Being

The rational capacity enables self-transcendence, self-awareness, self-objectification, imagination, and the like, which take part in interpersonal existence. People's transcendent capacity relates to an ability to project their viewpoint over behind the eyes of others and consider what the situation looks like from there. Mead said that self emerges only when a person can take the role of the "generalized other" and look back on the self. Self-awareness comes from interaction with other selves. Only in the social circumstance can the self define itself as a self.

From that same context comes our self-image, which depends largely on the feedback we get from other persons. Social existence and the ethical situation requires the ability to project consciousness over behind the eyes of other people to help determine how we ought to act

toward them. That mechanism operates in the Golden Rule and is made possible by the rational capacity together with other capacities to comprise the interpersonal capacity.

Beauty: Aesthetic Being

The primary capacities enable people to appreciate beauty, which consists of proportion, *etc*., recognizable by reason as well as perceived through the senses. Beauty is also a matter of social decision. What people consider beautiful changes within a culture, and different cultures do not consider the same things beautiful. Consequently, beauty is more than something pleasant to the senses, which are based in genetics.

IV. Confirmatory Observations on the Image as Interpersonal Capacity

(1) The image as interpersonal capacity provides for a holistic understanding of man. On the positive side, humankind is in the image of God. The text says that the man was created in the image of God; it does not say that the image of God is in man. The latter phraseology might suggest that the image applies to less than everything a person is. Furthermore, in saying that mankind was created in God's image, Genesis does not say people were created in God's image in a certain respect. The implication is that mankind is in the image of God, not that we have some trait like God's.

On the negative side, there are several disadvantages to identifying the image with the sub-individual level. The first is that **(a)** identifying the image with rationality or volition, *etc*., is not exegetical. Such identifications lack direct bases in the *imago dei* texts themselves. Interpreters are not drawing the meaning for image out of the text first and then correlating it with human experience or other scripture. They start with correlation between the biblical expression and human experience—in this case the experience of rationality in contrast to the observed lack or minimal presence of it in other physical creations. Whenever exegesis from the text can precede correlation with other texts or with experience, exegesis should take priority. It is not always possible to find something in the "near context" to explain a point of interest in a passage. In such cases, we look at the "distant context" in the rest of revelation and "the nature of the case" as inferred from experience to see what "fits with" the issue. Such cases involve a "correspondence" approach to interpretation: "this is that" (cp. Acts **2**:16). But this latter approach increases the likelihood of error or irrelevance.

Interpretation should follow a pattern of induction, deduction, and integration. We have tried to begin exegetically, then make inferences, and then generalize and integrate with other particulars to arrive at an understanding of the *imago dei* that fits in the Christian worldview. Thus, we have taken the image as people's interpersonal capacity in a worldview that organizes itself around interpersonalism.

An exegetical approach here produces a holistic and functional understanding of the image more than an analytical and static one. Traditional proposals about the image of God offer some significant insights into human nature, but Genesis **1**:26-27 suggests the larger and more basic truth we have correlated with interpersonalism. Reason, will, conscience, affection, and spirit do belong to the image, not because individually any one of them is the image, but because they help make the image possible; they make interpersonalism possible. They are capacities necessary for relating interpersonally; we may call them "aspects of the image," not the image.

Besides lacking contextual foundation in Genesis, another disadvantage to identifying the image with rationality or volition is that it is **(b)** reductionistic, which is contrary to the nature of the case. We are more than mind or will or conscience or emotion or spirit. We possess a combination of these and more—a gestalt. In the *imago dei* of Genesis **1**:26-27 we prefer to include all the creatable characteristics common to God and us. The limitation "creatable" applies because holiness, for example, derives from behavior, not being. Substance can be created, but action cannot—although by a figure of speech in deterministic settings we might speak of creating an action. We might say that someone created an action by creating something that had to act in a certain way. Since we have rationality and volition, there is not a one-for-one relationship between being and behavior; so behavioral qualities cannot be created indirectly in a kind of substance that would necessitate holiness.

Mankind's wholeness extends to more than the characteristics we share with God (physicality, sexuality, corruptibility, and the like), but there is no reason to exclude any shared likenesses at least and no harm in including the others. People are not one irreducible something from which everything else "unpacks." Philosophically that would be "foundationalism" in contrast to "combinationalism." In the latter case, the thinker starts with a basic unit and frame of reference that is comprised of more primary elements. Reason, affection, and the like are individual capacities that form a gestalt, that is, a whole that is more than the sum of such parts.

A third disadvantage to identifying the image with rationality, *etc*., is that it is (c) simplistic. It fosters a faculty psychology comparable to "bean-bag genetics," as if a human being were a series of parts that individually produced the conscience, the will, the affections, thoughts, and so forth. The complexity level is too low for what we need to describe.

A fourth disadvantage is that (d) it is analytical and static rather than synthetic and dynamic. Conceiving of the image as rationality plus volition plus conscience plus affection fragments the person. It loses the gestalt that a human person is. The whole of us is more than the sum of our parts even if all the parts are recognized and listed. In a real whole there are further considerations beyond sheer quantity; there are qualitative features like relationship, unity, interaction, hierarchy, and beauty. Identifying the image with interpersonal capacity avoids reducing persons to one essence or fragmenting them into a series of parts conceived of in static terms. It fosters functional wholeness.

Holism can exist without having to keep in the image forever everything mankind now is. Such is the case because the same effect can conceivably come from more than one "source." God and angels can be interpersonal as spirit beings (John **4**:24; Hebrews **1**:14; Luke **24**:39) and human beings can be interpersonal on physical bases. Brain may be able to produce mind epiphenomenally, but mind may not have to come from brain or "reside on" brain. Theologically the concern is practical effect more than ontic cause and analysis. Because we believe in an omnipotent God with ultimate authority, we can believe that he is free to will that mind exist on some other basis besides brain or on no basis at all. He can transform the physical into what is not physical and "re-connect" mind with a "new body," as in resurrection, translation, transubstantiation, re-creation, or some other form of miracle. How he has done or will do those connections we cannot know, and yet it is ours to know that we are in his image. The image of God that we have is something we can know in a functional sense and do not have to include unknowable factors.

We are concerned about wholeness because scripture presents mankind holistically. It speaks of the redemption of the whole person. Although a part of us dies, resurrection (or translation) remedies even that loss. People do not become less than people when they die.

Individual statements of scripture consider the flesh as part of us, as Paul implies in Romans **7**:18: *"I know that nothing good resides in me, that is, in my flesh."* In the context Paul bemoans the conflict that goes on in his members. He is both part of them (**7**:18) and above them (**7**:20); so, the mind/spirit/transcendent nature should predominate, but it includes that over which it predominates instead of being parallel to it. The biblical picture of mankind does not suggest dualism in the normal sense of that term because the higher and lower natures are not in contrast or parallel, but in hierarchy.

Holism can put too much in the image while honoring God's image can work against holism. The image as interpersonal capacity avoids these extremes by establishing a context that can incorporate everything in us and our relationships at least indirectly. That interpersonal context qualifies every aspect of our being and behavior and relationship which manifest that capacity. Flesh becomes interpersonal flesh; sexuality becomes interpersonal sexuality; marriage becomes interpersonal intimacy. Although such factors may not be inherently necessary to the image, they are included in it for now.

(2) The image as interpersonal capacity establishes our attitude toward the physical body. God created us in his own image in the physical state (Genesis **1**:26-27), blessed us (**1**:28), and pronounced us very good in that state (**1**:31); the physical body was part of that. In the biblical view, the material realm relates to the spiritual realm as positive to positive (**1**:10, 12, 18, 21, 25; cp. **1**:22, 28; **9**:1; cp. Psalm **104**:28; **119**: 68), not as negative to positive. The human body relates to the human spirit positively. The lower nature does not relate to the higher as negative to positive. Since the material realm derived by creation from the spiritual realm that preceded it, matter is not parallel to spirit or opposed to it, but positively secondary to it and functionally incorporated under it. The material manifests the spiritual (Psalm **19**:1) and serves as an instrument for accomplishing spiritual purposes. Likewise, the human body is not parallel to the human spirit or opposed to it, but positively secondary to it. The body manifests the spirit and serves to accomplish its purposes. As a result, the image as interpersonal capacity sets our attitude toward ourselves in the physical state as persons in fellowship, not as animals in herds or chemicals in clusters.

Characteristics of the relationship between spiritual and material realms establish guidelines for understanding the spiritual and material aspects of us. There have been three approaches to the body relative to the spirit. (a) The body is evil and the spirit is good (Stoicism, Epicureanism, Gnosticism). The body is "the prison house of the soul," a negative-to-positive view. (b) The body is amoral, and the spirit does not exist (materialism). The physical realm is all there is. (c) The spirit is predominant, and the body subordinate (Christian). Scripture implies this last viewpoint since a good God created matter including the human body and made it an aspect of the mankind he commissioned to take care of the other matter God created. The doctrine of creation and the fact of commission establish the positive character of the material universe and all its parts. In our physical humanness we can have fellowship with a holy God and can participate in the responsibilities such a God gives us. A positive attitude toward the physical body fits with the positive attitude toward physicality in general. The biblical religion does not teach that matter is evil, so the material body is not evil either.

Positive attitude toward the body relates to an ethic that uses the physical body for spiritual ends. The behavioral implication is that we not satiate the body as in Epicureanism (cp. Philippians **3**:19), that we not depreciate it as in asceticism (cp. Colossians **3**:23), that we not glorify it as in humanism, but that we transcend it. We keep the body in secondary position (1 Corinthians **9**:27; Romans **8**:13; **12**:1-2), using it as an instrument for good guided by

transcendent values of spirit and mind and directed toward divine purposes and fellowship. The body can be viewed as a temple of the Spirit (1 Corinthians **6**:13-19; cp. Mark **14**:58), as a vessel for spiritual treasures (1 Thessalonians **4**:4; cp. Acts **9**:15; 2 Corinthians **4**:7; 2 Timothy **2**:20; 1 Peter **3**:7), as a temple and tabernacle of the soul/spirit (2 Corinthians **5**:1, 4; 2 Peter **1**:13-14), as an instrument of righteousness for glorifying God (Romans **6**:7; 1 Corinthians **6**:13; Colossians **2**:17).

Positive attitude toward the physical body relates to several other biblical doctrines and phenomena that presuppose it. Incarnation, divine indwelling, theophanies, anthropomorphisms, and creation in the image of God do not degrade deity; they dignify humanity. The doctrine of creation itself correlates with the idea that the creation is in some sense good—or at least not evil (Genesis **1**:31, *etc*.). There is no contradiction between prohibiting idolatry and relating the image to the body if spirit directs body.

Physical humanness in the image allows for incarnation without incarceration or dualism. For first-century Jewish religious leaders, the offense in Jesus' claim to deity lay not only in their fear of polytheism, but in their abhorrence of making God too imminent. They stressed his transcendence of God and the ineffableness of his name to the point that they did not even pronounce Yahveh. Even today in the reading of the Hebrew scriptures, Jewish people read *Adonai* ("my Lord") or occasionally *Elohim* ("God") in place of the tetragrammaton. New Testament writers did not challenge this hyper-sensitivity; they regularly use *kyrios* (κύριος, "Lord") for referring to him. For Jews incarnation made God too imminent. But if interpersonal capacity capsulizes the shared nature of God and man, then Jesus was not an artificial combination of deity and humanity and the flesh did not imprison the deity in him during the incarnation.

Later Judaism had difficulty with anthropomorphisms, expressions that assign human characteristics to what is not human. Old Testament scripture, however, is replete with phraseology about God's hands, right hand, fingers, eyes. It freely speaks of him as "getting up early." Semitic idiom used body parts symbolically for psychological, abstract, and intangible realities; and in scripture it did so with God.

Physical humanness in the image allows for indwelling. It pictures the body as a temple for the spirit rather than a prison for the soul. Indwelling means that the transforming influence of God fully permeates to the inner character of the human self, from which springs the issues of life. Whether the indwelling is locational or just pictured as locational, the implication remains that God's being with us and in us (John **14**:17) does not grate on spiritual sensitivities.

Physical humanness in the image allows for physical death without losing the higher nature and for physical life without tainting it. Scripture never says we lose the image when we die, and we have it while we live. The image does not require any circumstance of its manifestation. The body manifests the human person in much the same way as the incarnation manifested the second person of the trinity.

Positive attitude toward the body allows for the resurrection of the body (both Christ's and ours), not just immortality of the soul. Resurrection was foolishness to Gentiles (Acts **17**:31-32, 18; cp. 1 Corinthians **1**:23) because they typically believed in a dualism that depreciated matter or made it evil. Resurrection of the body as distinguished from immortality of the soul affirms the dignity of physical humanness and the fundamental meaningfulness of life in our present condition. Even though we do not know exactly what resurrection is, it must be more than immortality of the soul. In resurrection, there is at least re-identification with the material realm and the kind of physical body we have now. Resurrection is more than the resuscitation of a dead

corpse because metamorphosis, transformation, transfiguration occurs even for those alive at Christ's coming (1 Corinthians **15**:50-54). That transformation involves the change to asexual being since there is no marriage in the resurrection (Matthew **22**:30). But resurrection and transformation both involve continuity between the earthly, physical body and the spiritual, heavenly one (1 Corinthians **15**:42-54).

(3) The image as interpersonal capacity provides the theological foundation for interpreting sexuality. It implies a positive view of sexuality, affirms the equal worth of both sexes (Galatians **3**:28), and defines the proper relationship between them (1 Corinthians **6**:13-20). Sexuality represents a variable within the image since both sexes have interpersonal capacity and equally so. This variance is subsumed under the larger truth of the divine image common to both and expressed in the union of the two (Genesis **2**:24). Sexuality along with its physicality is a non-essential part of human wholeness. What is variable is not essential, and we have concluded that the essence of image is interpersonal capacity. That is a little different from defining what is the essence of humanness since interpersonal capacity applies to a range of created and uncreated kinds. Since in the resurrection marriage does not take place, we infer that sexuality does not continue; yet in the resurrection humans do not cease to be human nor to be in the image of God. So, on this side of death-resurrection, sexuality does not represent a variable of sufficient degree or kind as to constitute a basis for variously valuing the one mode of the image over the other.

Physicality, sexuality, procreation are evidently at least related to, analogous to, governed by, or exhibitive of, the *imago dei* since scripture makes the same connection terminologically between Adam and Seth as between God and Adam. *"In the day that God created man, he made him in the likeness of God; he created them male and female. . . . Adam lived a hundred and thirty years and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image"* (Genesis **5**:1-3; cp. **1**:26-27); Luke's genealogy of Jesus concludes with *". . . Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God"* (**3**:37). Paul calls man the *"*[God's] *offspring* [γένος, *genos*]*"* (Acts **17**:28-29).

Procreation takes place in all organisms, which reproduce after their kind; so we might be inclined to separate procreation from image considerations entirely. But the image consists of more than the peculiarities of man *vs.* animal. More importantly, the interpersonal image transforms the character of everything in its context, including reproduction. God intended human sexuality to be interpersonal rather than purely biological as reflected in the fact that man is unique in being able to reproduce face to face and in the fact that sex has more than a reproductive purpose. It involves commitment to common identity, values, and purposes; so compenetration of personalities precedes compenetration of physical natures. In light of this point, we note that the Jewish idiom for sexual intercourse is "knowing," which uses personal terminology. Relating sexuality to deity through the image in man does not mean God has sexuality but that man's sexuality operates in an interpersonal context as an expression of interpersonal capacity, reaffirms interpersonal identity, and has to do with commitment to values and purposes more than drives. The image precedes sexuality; so human and animal reproduction differ in character.

(4) The image as interpersonal capacity establishes the nature of marriage. The doctrine of the one flesh defines marriage, which leads to multiplying and filling the earth through the offspring of that union. The one flesh of marriage manifests in humanity a plurality-in-oneness that is analogous to the plurality-in-oneness in deity. Sexual unity between male-female is an intended physical analogy to the person-to-person relationship between man and God and more especially between the "us" of God. Arguing against temple prostitution, Paul says that being

sexually joined to a harlot makes the two one "body," which he considers incompatible with being analogously joined to the Lord as one "spirit" (1 Corinthians **6**:16-17). Sexual union is intimate physical and psychological identification even as spiritual union is interpersonal identification. Husband-wife sexual relationship is ultimate intimacy in the physical realm even as Father-Son-Spirit spiritual relationship is ultimate intimacy in the interpersonal realm (note John **17**:20-22).

God intended male-female physical unity to stay within the interpersonal context rather than be separate. When it becomes something by itself, it is reduced to temporary physical pleasure rather than contributing to ongoing psychological identification. Intimacy is missing, and the possibility of achieving it is often destroyed. Sexual relations were intended to be a union in the larger context of commitment to values and purposes (ethics) and to each other (identity). Intercourse is not for the one or for the other partner, and so Paul teaches that neither husband nor wife has final authority over his or her own body (1 Corinthians **7**:2-5). Interpersonal identity leads to physical intimacy, which establishes and reinforces interpersonal intimacy. For this reason, the New Testament teaches that fornication, adultery, and divorce are sinful: they destroy identity and the sense of identity, and they are unique in the degree of doing so (1 Corinthians **6**:18). Sexual relations have the guidelines they do because of God's purpose in establishing the marriage mode of intimacy as one reflection of the divine image. That interpersonal purpose of God to have mankind in his own image is reflected in the historical manner of his bringing man and woman into existence (making one from the other and making one for one other) and in the manner of having them reach their full number (procreation). It is reflected in their complementariness (one flesh) and interdependency (man from the woman plus man by the woman). All New Testament teaching on men-women relationships stems from the nature of man and woman as implied by their manner of origin. That is the reason New Testament teaching refers to Genesis **1-3** on every issue associated with sexuality and men-women relationship in the home, the church, and society. Those issues include fornication, adultery, divorce, and complementary roles (Matthew **19**:3-12; Mark **10**:2-12; 1 Corinthians **6**:12-20; **11**:2-16; Ephesians **5**:22-33; 1 Timothy **2**:11-15).

Of special importance regarding marriage is the fact that its interpersonal character precedes its physical distinctive. Not until there is compenetration of personhood can there naturally be compenetration of physical natures; otherwise, there is loss of self-esteem. The loss of self-esteem is both by the "user" and the "used." The woman ends up being the one most often "used" in fornication and adultery. The "used" loses self-esteem because she senses in the other's behavior a lack of "respect," which is another way of saying impersonal behavior. The "used" is not treated as an equal but as something lower. The way others treat us is a prime basis for the way we view ourselves. It is no wonder that "love 'em and leave 'em" makes them feel like they are living a "dog's life." Even the "user" is not fulfilled because he does not receive interpersonal response back from the other, and "emptiness" results. Paul has such thoughts in mind when he says that fornication is unique among sins in being a sin against the "body." More than any other it is a sin that strikes at the sense of who we are, our identity, our "body" (1 Corinthians **6**:18). Marriage is mutual commitment and common identity before it is pleasure and procreation.

We place the relevance of image to male-female, not directly in the physical domain, but contextually in the interpersonal framework where the physical body and human sexuality function. Physical relationship occurs in interpersonal relationship, and physical relationship bonds interpersonal identity uniquely between husband and wife. As a result, analogy to the

trinity teaches us about the divine intent in marriage as an interpersonal experience, and the interpersonal intimacy of the marriage experience helps us comprehend something about the divine trinity in whose image men and women are created. In other words, the image of God in each individual person manifests itself in ideal marriage as well as in ideal society. The socio-physical unit we call marriage bears analogy to the socio-spiritual unit we call trinity (cp. 1 Corinthians **6**:17). As such, marriage participates in the less specialized interpersonalism that all persons have capacity for: they can be one as Father and Son are one (John **17**:22), and they can be one with the Father and the Son in the same way the Father and Son are one with each other (**17:**21).

The dignity of marriage nevertheless harmonizes with the validity and wholeness of persons not married, because the interpersonal capacity accentuated in marriage also finds expression in all other personal relations. The interpersonal oneness of marriage simply adds the dimension of physical intimacy (Genesis **2**:24; Ephesians **5**:23-33). The total, permanent, exclusive identity of husband-wife reflects the Father-Son-Spirit. In his own image God created them male and female.

(5) The image as interpersonal capacity clarifies the man-animal distinction. Harmony describes the image of God in connection with the God-man parallels. Contrast describes the image in connection with the man-animal distinctives since no animal is said to be created in God's image. The man-animal distinction relates to other observations. No mate for man was found in the animal kingdom (Genesis **2**:18-20). Animals could be killed but not man (Genesis **9**:6). Cohabitation between man and animal was punishable by death under Mosaic legislation (Exodus **22**:19; Leviticus **18**:23; **20**:15-16; Deuteronomy **27**:21). God gave mankind dominion over the animal kingdom (Genesis **1**:26, 28; **2**:18-20). Revelation does not classify mankind among animals, even though the two groups share a significant set of characteristics.

If the image is the interpersonal capacity, to be distinguished from animals, we do not have to be different in every respect nor absolutely unique in any one respect. Rather, the degree to which we possess these abilities is sufficiently greater that in combination they produce our uniqueness as a total being—interpersonal capacity. Our uniqueness from animals is not jeopardized by rudimentary intelligence seen in tool making (*vs*. tool using) or in elementary language learning and usage—which science has not demonstrated despite occasional claims to that effect. The image is not just our distinctives from animals any more than it is only the commonalities between us and God. Rather, our specific peculiarities usually reflect the image because they are appropriate to, instead of necessary for, our purpose as summed up in interpersonal existence. The image as interpersonal capacity establishes the man-animal distinction at the level of the whole, not at the level of some particular trait.

Interpersonal capacity can resist the constant temptation toward reductionism and fragmentation. So much thinking about the *imago dei*—and many other subjects as well—comes from approaches that focus attention on specific distinctives rather than on integrated wholes. Evolutionary philosophy offers one example. Evolution arranges "kinds" in a sequence based on relative complexity amidst similarity and then correlates this "logical sequence" with chronological sequence. The next item up the evolutionary "tree" is contemplated relative to the one that precedes it. It adds new features and subtracts or alters old ones. It is a process of complexification through time. When theistic evolutionists plug us into this schema and integrate their format with biblical considerations, the image ends up being something added onto animal nature. The "add-on" is the image, which roughly correlates with "higher nature" *vs*. "lower (animal) nature." That reductionist scenario works against wholeness.

Not only is the resulting view reductionistic and fragmenting, it is also simplistic. Even the distinctions between animals are more complex than that, much more the distinctions between us and any one of them. The lack of adequate complexity comes from confusing homologous with same and from not appreciating the complexity that comes from the interdependency of parts within a functioning whole. You cannot seriate the origin or reciprocating parts; that is, you cannot put in a time sequence the beginning of parts that depend on each other reciprocally. The whole has to be there from the beginning. Nascent and vestigial organs would be dysfunctional within the previous whole and would tend away from the viability of the organism rather than enhance its survival as evolution theory requires. The only way to have a whole from the beginning is through creating the whole at the beginning by external means. The result cannot come about by stages from within.

This critique of materialistic evolution applies likewise to reincarnation and chain of being. The complexity coefficient in these formats is too low to fit the actuality or provide for the whole that we particularly are. In discussing the *imago dei*, we want to avoid that same fault of making us too much like animals or overdoing the differences between us and them. Interpersonal capacity seems to meet this requirement by keeping physicality and sexuality within the image while allowing for animals to have characteristics that are not individually of sufficient degree to produce in the aggregate what we are calling interpersonal capacity.

(6) The image of God as interpersonal capacity provides for a natural understanding of incarnation. It accounts for incarnation without incarceration. Though the Logos was in a more limited condition during the time of incarnation, it was not an evil condition inasmuch it was a self-limitation in humility and obedience to the Father to accomplish a positive purpose. He expressed humility to the point of death, violent death, yes, violent of an extreme sort (Philippians **2**:1-8). Whatever evil there was lay in the behavior of those who rejected him and did with him as they would. Incarnation does not require the discarding of deity or imply the prostitution of humanness because we share the essential characteristic.

Image of God as interpersonal capacity accounts for incarnation without dualism. The doctrine of the "two natures" does not come across as an artificial combination of divine and human in Jesus. It does not represent a kind of "consubstantiation" or "impanation" that mixes divine and human substances or amalgamates them into a third substance that is neither truly human or verily divine. The "two natures" may be regarded not so much as two different kinds as they are different levels of the same kind: interpersonal being. At least the interpersonal capacity forms the distinctive cluster of shared capacities between man and God. Incarnation remains something of a mystery since we do not know very fully the nature of deity that incarnated and do not know whether deity has any distinctive hypostasis/substance. But we can say that (a) deity does not become something else in becoming humanity, because the interpersonal image of God that mankind has covers directly their creatable shared characteristics. (b) Incarnation then adds compatible, human distinctives interpersonalized by their *image dei* context. That addition does not bring in a set of foreign characteristics; it simply defines a more limited arena in which the common capacity operates or is temporarily suspended.

Finally, (c) incarnation need not lessen the degree of shared characteristics or eradicate the unshared ones. It only requires voluntarily limiting the active expression of interpersonal capacities or temporarily not using the unshared ones to the fullest. But self-limitation is not loss. Consequently, we can understand "emptying" (*kenosis*) in Philippians **2**:7 as voluntarily giving

up the free exercise of divine prerogatives rather than a giving up of deity *per se*. It was a matter of Christ's humbling himself and being obedient (**2**:8).

(7) The image as interpersonal capacity connects the natural and the ethical usages of the expression "image of God." One characteristic of biblical content is its concern for wholeness, the big picture, the synthetic emphasis in contrast to a dichotomistic, analytical, reductionist emphasis. That concern carries over into the usage of words. The penchant for integration accounts for the rather facile shifting back and forth between natural, behavioral, and relational usages of words like image, life, sin, flesh, create, knowledge, wisdom, and other terms associated with the creation narrative. It accounts for places where such expressions may combine these rather different concepts when the presentation deals with subjects in broad scope.

"Image" in the sense of nature appears in Genesis **1**:26; **5**:1; **9**:6; 1 Corinthians **11**:7; and James **3**:9. Paul uses "image" in an ethical sense in Romans **8**:29; 2 Corinthians **3**:18; Colossians **3**:10. Not only were we created in the image of God as to nature; we are commanded to be like him as to behavior. Ethics and morality apply only to interpersonal circumstances. The natural image amounts to the interpersonal capacity; the ethical image amounts to proper interpersonal behavior via the natural. The extended use of *image* for ethical character confirms our understanding of image as interpersonal capacity.

(8) The image as interpersonal capacity sets the framework for ethical theory. How something "ought" to operate derives from its nature relative to its purpose. The primary ethical guideline derived from interpersonalism is that behavior should conform to what fits personhood. Manipulation and force by one person against another fail to allow the "other" to be what a "self" is. Ethics is no longer accomplished by people individually conforming their behavior to a standard of behavior. It calls for a righteousness that *"exceeds the righteousness of scribes and Pharisees"* (Matthew **5**:20).

(9) Finally, the image as interpersonal capacity makes a natural connection with Christ as the ethical image and likeness of God for us. Whereas the natural image is retained when people fall, the ethical image is lost by sin and restored through grace in Christ, who is the image of God (2 Corinthians **4**:4; cp. Colossians **1**:15). Paul especially sprinkles creation terminology through his presentations on salvation and sanctification: creation, image, likeness, knowledge, wisdom. Because none of us have behaved completely in keeping with the way God expresses his interpersonal capacity, Christ came to redeem us from being sinners in order to *"put on the new man that is being renewed to 'knowledge' after the 'image' of the creator"* (Colossians **3**:10). Paul says that we are *"created in Christ Jesus for good works"* (Ephesians **2**:10). From Jews and Gentiles Christ *"created in himself"* a new united mankind (**2**:15). We are to *"put on the new man that has been created according to God [= likeness?] in righteousness and holiness of the truth"* (**4**:24; cp. Colossians **2**:10).

V. Practical Values of the Image as Interpersonal Capacity

(1) The image as interpersonal capacity establishes objective human worth. There are three related bases for human value. As to being, humans are significant because they are created in the image of God. As to relationship, they are significant because they can relate the kind of God their creator is. As to purpose, they are meaningful because they have objective purposes God established for them—responsibility for the creation and proclamation.

(2) The image as interpersonal capacity establishes objective bases for a human sense of worth. Humans' self-image has very much to do with the quality of their life and sense of fulfillment in it. Self-image has very much to do with the way they carry themselves in relationship to each other. Being created in God's image is the fundamental reality that underlies objective and subjective human worth, as well as a whole host of other things that relate to their nature in relationship to other persons.

Summary

Since God created us in his own image, identifying the image consists of comparing the biblical teaching about God and about us and integrating it with confirmatory evidence from human experience. Purpose determines nature.

As to the meaning of the image terms, we have differentiated between natural and ethical usages within the scripture, ethical usages appearing only in the New Testament. Within the natural usage, we have identified the image of God with the interpersonal capacity and distinguished the image itself from manifestations, modes, and aspects of it. The capacity for interpersonal operation leads to the manifestations, uses, consequences, and extensions of it in fellowship with God, in responsibilities like dominion and mission, in marriage especially, and in society generally. Male and female are modes of the image. Reason, will, affection, conscience, spirit, and the like are aspects of the image, that is, simple individual capacities that combine to produce the complex interpersonal capacity with its modes and manifestations.

The natural image consists of the (a) creatable, (b) shared characteristics between God and mankind. It does not directly include every characteristic of people or God, nor does it include them in the same degree. It is not limited to the peculiarities of humankind over animals. The image does not have to be grounded in the same thing that it is for God or angels; hence, it can indirectly include even the physical body, human sexuality, and marriage by involving them as the ground of the image, the medium for expressing it, or the means of transferring it across generations.

Identifying the image of God with the interpersonal capacity has several advantages because the concept is so basic and yet so comprehensive and complex. Because of the inherent complexity of persons in relationship, interpersonal capacity can incorporate anything scripturally relevant to the *imago dei* and everything scholars have historically associated with it. It fosters holism and avoids reductionism, establishes a theology of sexuality, affirms the completeness of single persons of either sex without projecting sexuality onto deity, legitimizes diversity and its potentialities. Interpersonal capacity can account for an extensive and diverse range of items without making people too much like God or *vice versa*, which confirms the correctness of identifying the image with the interpersonal capacity.