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Send out your light and your truth! Let them guide me. Psalm 43:3

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Uniqueness and the Image of God: A Theological and Philosophical Justification of the Value of Diversity

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Uniqueness and the Image of God:
A Theological and Philosophical Justification
of the Value of Diversity

The diversity of cultures is rooted in the uniqueness of individuals and their creative ways of being in the world. At least so I will assume. Of course, cultural diversity is not reducible to individual uniqueness. But it is reasonable to believe that diversity depends on individual uniqueness in some significant ways. This assumption being made my question is this: what theological justification is there for celebrating the individual uniqueness that underlies cultural diversity?

This essay has seven sections. Section I considers the uniqueness of human persons in comparison to our shared or common features. Section II presents and describes the first sort of image I will consider, what I call the dichotomous image. Section III reflects on the image of God as typically understood. That is, it discusses the image of God as a set of essential properties. This section introduces as well a Wittgenstein-inspired notion of essence that allows for both uniqueness and commonality among humans. Sections IV and V introduce and discuss two further sorts of image, the typifying, and the presentational in respective order. Section VI applies the differences among notions of image to the image-of-God language of the scriptures. Those observations provide a basis for showing how the image of God provides both for our commonalities and our uniqueness. Section VII concludes with some practical implications of the philosophical view proposed.

I

The Uniqueness of the Image of God
In Comparison to Shared Properties

Our commonality as humans contrasts with our uniqueness and diversity. It is standard to think of humans as made in the image of God, to think of that image as something common to all humans, and thus to undergird the value of our commonality. What sets humans apart, theologically, from the rest of the animal kingdom is the image of God into which we were first made. The image of God also grounds the Christian doctrine of shared or original sin and our shared salvation through one person, Jesus Christ. Salvation is (in part) possible through Christ *because* we have our common humanity with our brother Jesus. Thus is the importance of our commonality. What about our uniqueness, the fact that each of us is in important ways quite different from all others?

Uniqueness may threaten our notion of shared (original) sin as well as our sense of shared salvation. Typically we take the image of God to be something like a combination of rationality, emotional richness, volition, creativity and spirituality. When thinking along philosophical lines we propose that we all have the image of God because each of us instantiates the essence of humanness, some pre-existing (Platonic) form in the mind of God. Insofar as human uniqueness impinges on our shared features, however, universal sinfulness and the possibility of salvation through one person, Jesus, is threatened. In order to preserve those important theological traditions, it is easy to overlook or even reject uniqueness as rooted in the image of God. Our uniqueness, it appears, is theologically unnecessary. Why then celebrate it? There appears to be little theological reason. Yet we do celebrate diversity and uniqueness. Is that only because our culture tells us we ought to? If so, it ought not to be so. Christian views on diversity should be

firmly rooted in our theology. Furthermore, although in popular culture it is common to value humans because each of us is unique, rarely have philosophers or theologians defended the value of human persons because of uniqueness. So while there is a long history of Christian thought about our commonality, there's little theology about the root of our diversity and uniqueness. What does root our uniqueness?

The answer is not far to seek but is perhaps a little surprising. It is the image of God. I argue that human uniqueness across persons (in contrast to our difference from non-human animals and other created entities) is rooted in the image of God *just as much as* our commonality is rooted in the image of God. Our being *made* in the image of God does both because to be made in the image of God is to be made unique just as much as to be made in the image of God is to be made the same on the essential level.

II

Dichotomous Images

What does the term “image” mean? Many things, lexically. One dictionary lists seventeen entries, both nouns and verbs. I discuss only three, one not in that dictionary. One common understanding of image depends on a particular structure and relationship. Typically there is a (pre-existing) entity that something else copies, resembles or represents. I'll call this the “object/image dichotomy” and images that result from it “dichotomous images.” Dichotomous images are those that seem to fall into a separate level or sphere than the objects inspiring them. Often, this sort of imaging involves a physical image of another physical thing. Probably this sort of physical imaging and the object/image dichotomy it is rooted in gives us our most common understanding of what an image is.

Often we talk about such imaging in terms of something being real with an image of it being made. This pattern of talk has created much havoc in the way we think about images. Beginning with Plato's observation that the arts merely copy what is real, there is a long history of the idea that what art produces is less real than the original objects. The arts are, therefore, misleading. Art, suggests Plato, is simply not reality but a copy of it from which ensues the entire philosophy vs. poetry interaction. In response it is important to note that an image, although typically copying, resembling or representing another real thing, is still, itself, real. 20th century art and art theory picks up this theme (Danto 1983).

The problem perhaps originates with the notion of copying. In general terms, to copy X implies that X already exists (or at least did exist). There is a temporal ordering that typically attaches to copying. The original object comes first and the copied image second. There is an apple and the image of that apple. It was natural for Plato to suggest that the original object was real and the image less real or not real. Be that as it may, not all dichotomous images have that sort of structure. Y can resemble X without X having come first temporally. Y and X merely have to be alike in some feature or other. A rock formation can resemble Richard Nixon, for example. But the rock formation doesn't copy Richard Nixon and neither does Nixon copy the rock. Of course, the more alike two things are, the more likely the judgment will be made that the two things resemble one another, and certainly the better the copy, the more the copy resembles the original. A spherical rock can resemble a baseball but a spherical rock with stich-like markings resembles a baseball even more. And if the rock is made to copy a baseball by an artist, the more the shape, color, and so forth are like a real baseball, the better the copy is.

Representation need not imply resemblance or copying. Virtually anything could represent some other thing, given the right circumstances. A rock can represent, for example, the Queen of England, or the Queen of England can represent a country, or a country can represent freedom. So we really have three sorts of dichotomous images: copy, resemblance, and representational. The only common rule among the three seems to be that if X represents, resembles, or copies Y, then X and Y cannot be numerically identical. Otherwise the two would lose their dichotomous nature.

With a dichotomous image we are dealing with two real things whose relationship includes a more or less complex sort of logical dependency. Fundamentally, the relationship is not causal in the sense that when X copies, resembles or represents Y, Y brought X into being. (For example, a painting of a tree is not caused by the tree being painted although it is caused by the painter.) In the case of copies and resemblances, however, without Y's existence (now or in the past), X couldn't be a copy of or resemble Y. (So there would be not a painting of the tree without the tree existing first.) But we can say that insofar as X copies Y, Y is causally relevant for at least some of the features of X, viz., those features X and Y have in common. I'll say that if X copies Y, Y is "present to" a causal chain of events such that, without Y being present to the chain, X would not copy Y. This is not true with resemblances. X can resemble Y without Y being present to the causal chain that brings X about. The same is true in the opposite direction as well. That is, if Y resembles X, X need not be present to the causal chain that brings Y about. In other words, X and Y can resemble each other without the resemblance having anything to do with a mutual or overlapping history. Not so with copies. If X copies Y, there is a mutual or overlapping history. Finally, any and all copy relationships involve resemblance but not all resemblances involve copies.

When X represents Y, however, there is even less of a logical connection. X can represent Y just by my saying that it does, as when I pick up a rock, set it on the table, and say that it represents (or is) the Queen of England. Representations are rooted in social or cultural relationships rather than any historical presence of the object to the representation. Often things that represent do also copy or resemble the things being represented, but they need not do so. However, when X copies Y, X (the image) can standardly (although not necessarily, one supposes) be thought to represent (the object) Y.

Also, while typically X's copying Y does not include Y being the cause of X, it can. A picture of an apple is not caused by an apple. However, an artist can sketch herself, thereby copying herself and as such is both the causal source of the image as well as the object in the causal chain in which the shared features of the object and image are rooted. Here, so to speak, the picture of the apple *is* caused by the apple. In relation to this, cases of copying always involve intentionality. One must set out to copy something. Hence a thing's being a copy of another entity is not accidental or arbitrary. A piece of driftwood on the beach can resemble a person, but it doesn't copy a person. That is why an artist can copy herself and be the causal source of the copy. The history of a copy includes the intentional making of a copy whereas the history of a resembling image need not include intentional making at all.

Representation is similar to copying in this regard. It requires the intentional "making" of a representation. At some point, someone intends that X represents Y. While perhaps X might come to represent Y via a lost history (where no one can remember how one object came to represent another—say X marking the spot on a map where the treasure is: why not a T, for example?), there is still an intentional acceptance of X representing Y. Resemblance alone seems to be independent of our intending one thing to resemble another. A piece of driftwood can

resemble my car but the forces that led to this resemblance have nothing to do with the intention of the wind and water working on the driftwood.

Let's consider briefly how images are related to some other mental processes that generate them. For example, there are images that seem to "come out of one's head." Such images don't seem to copy another *actual* physical entity. Here we must be careful, for even images that do come "out of one's head" may still copy some other (physical) thing or at least something based on physical things. One's idea of an apple derives from having seen apples, and if an artist has never seen an apple, but merely had an apple described to her, her idea of an apple will ultimately be based on someone's having seen one. There are complications here that I need not attend to, but should be mentioned. One's idea of an apple might be a very "visual" idea. That is, some people are quite adept at conjuring up a (mental) image in their minds and then are able to draw what they see with their "mind's eye." Those mental images, one might say, create a "virtual" reality that is then copied in the physical image (drawing, painting, sculpture, etc.). Sometimes one hears artists say "that's what I was seeing, that's what I wanted to draw" only after the sketch is on the paper but where, in fact, they did not have a model (physically) in front of them.

Others don't, apparently, think in pictures but rather think in words or concepts. Such a person might think "I'll draw an apple" and not, in fact, conjure up a virtual mental image of an apple but just have what might be thought of (in philosopher's jargon) as a "mental representation" of an apple. That last phrase, "mental representation," is a loaded one philosophically. I'm going to by-pass it as a distraction from my main point. Let's just say that in any (physical) image making, the image is always mediated by the mind or its ideas or thoughts. Typically there is a physical object (or some idea based on physical objects) that falls on the "object" side of the object/image dichotomy and even though that is mediated through ideas or thoughts, the resulting (physical) image is an image of another physical object or thoughts derived from experiencing physical objects. That is true even where one "makes up" a physical object of which one then makes an image. The last thought allows for fictional objects to be imaged as dichotomous images. For example, one could dichotomously image a fruit from the planet Zorb, something no human has ever seen before. Nevertheless, it would be "constructed" out of what other physical things look like—shapes, sizes, colors, etc. As Descartes notes, even the (physical) things I dream about borrow from (physical) things I've experienced.

The last two paragraphs are related to copies but less clearly to resemblances. One can discover resemblances in nature without there being any corresponding creatively derivative work in the mind's eye. (Here I'm setting aside the creative mental work that may go on in recognizing resemblances. One can't cover everything in a short work.)

It remains, of course, that the mind is doing some work in noting the resemblances. The same is true where X represents Y. No mental imaging of the sort required in copying is needed, yet there is clearly mental work going on that links X with Y. In noting resemblances, one mentally compares the two objects. In representations, however, one must recognize a cultural "announcement" (or make one) of X representing Y. Of course, it may make it easier for us to recognize that X represents Y if, in fact, X resembles Y in some way but X need not resemble Y to represent. In chess, for example, it helps if the king and queen resemble real kings and queens but they need not do so. One could use a cube and an ovoid just as well.

It is also worth noting that lots of things besides images are related in similar ways to ideas as are copies. Cars, computers and apple pies are examples. Although we sometimes refer to such things as images, as when, for example, we say the 1959 Cadillac is the image of post-

war, American self-congratulation, typically we don't call cars "images." The process of making a car involves images, of course—sketches of proto-types, for example. However, that is art and often it is only art that draws out the term "image" for us. Of course, art covers a lot of territory.

Most times when we use the term "image" we have something like dichotomous images in mind. The limiting factor in the discussion thus far is the emphasis on the physical. While many images are physical, not all are. That some images are not physical is most certainly true in representations where both physical and non-physical entities can represent either physical or non-physical things. The flag can represent courage, courage can represent the best in humanity, my thought about my mother can represent my mother, and finally, a stone, the Queen. What of copies or resemblances? We say things like "his thought pattern resembles (copies) Einstein's, with this difference." Do such dichotomous images follow the same patterns as those with physical objects? It appears so. Copying involves the necessity of the object being present to the causal chain that leads to the image whereas resemblance need not. Representational imaging is a sort of social construct not rooted in copies or resemblance, and so forth. Of course, we discover such non-physical dichotomous images through physical objects, but that is nothing unique to images.

III

A Wittgenstein-Inspired Notion of the Image of God as Essential Properties

To take up topic of the image of God in humans, we need to reflect on what sort of image humans are. It is too quick and easy to simply replace the image language of the scriptures with the philosophical language of essences. Further, I believe that is a mistake. Since the early days of theologians commenting of the biblical witness, they have said humans have an essence—let's say (the capacity for) thought, emotional richness, will, and creativity—and they have said that is what the image of God is. Rationality is often the main term used to explain the image of God in us. Here we confront some of the prejudices against images and for philosophical abstractions that rest in Plato's lap. Images mislead, he told us, whereas philosophy tells the truth. While I don't deny human essences (and in fact they are important for a variety of theological reasons) I do want to think more seriously about the image. To say that we are made in the image of God is not the same as saying that certain universals are instantiated in us. To be *made* in the image of God is a making not an instantiating from abstract universals to the concrete instances of those universals even if the former involves the latter. Adam is made from dirt and God's breath into the image of God. It is too easy and quick, again, to treat the image language as mere metaphor and replace it with philosophical theory. What if we treat the language of image as literal, or at least as literally as we can?

(I don't mean to imply that I think God literally made Adam out of the dust of the ground. But to say that God literally created an image of the divine self does not imply that every scriptural reference should be taken literally. God could very well have used (and I think probably did) use an evolutionary scheme to make humans in the divine image. That can be literal without treating the text of scripture as scientific description.)

First, we have to acknowledge that our being made in God's image involves no physical object (God is not physical) even though the resulting humans are themselves physical. In discussions of the image of God it is common to note that the image is *not* physical. What is typically meant is that our bodies do not have anything to do with the image of God that is in us.

It is our spiritual or non-physical attributes that image God. But in walking that route we don't take the image language very seriously. We make physical images of non-physical things with fair regularity. The flag is a physical image of freedom, for example. That is a representational image however, and it seems that what's going on with the image of God in humans is not merely representational (hence merely socially created) but closer to resemblance or copying.

But there are plenty of examples of physical images that copy, not merely represent, non-physical things. Consider the 1959 Cadillac. It as an image of American post-war self-congratulation and prowess, especially since Harley Earl (the designer) had American greatness in mind as he designed the largest tail fins for a car in history, right down to the bullet-shaped tail lights! One might note in this regard that many car designers of the 1950s used fighter planes from WW2 as models for their work, which adds to the complexity of how physical and nonphysical symbols interact but which also links the post-war self-congratulatory attitude to very physical images. One can begin with a non-physical notion (self-congratulation or prowess) and end up with a physical image of it.

Another sort of example of physical images that copy a non-physical entity is a trademark for a corporation. In thinking of what a corporation is like (a corporation being not the people, the business a corporation engages it, etc. but the non-physical, legal entity that is the corporation and perhaps its social features, etc.) graphic artists try to capture in a physical image the "essence" of the corporation. We might think of Ronald MacDonald, for one specific, or the Nike "swoosh." One finds something similar in book-cover images where a physical image captures the non-physical topic of a book. Imagine a book called "Repairing Eden" whose book cover has a leaf torn into pieces but resembled with the pieces all laying together in the proper pattern. Would that cover copy the book's content? Presumably.

In like manner, humans in their very physical bodies may copy God's very non-physical being. Of course, there is lots of overlap between non-physical characteristics of the human person (thought, emotion, will, etc.) and the non-physical God. But in fact for the most part our experience with the divine is embodied in people we know, the nature we experience, and, of course, the Jesus we love and worship. Nevertheless, the plausibility of the very physical bodies we have copying the non-physical God is not that difficult to grasp, so long as we avoid a very positivistic approach to reality. Our bodies act, think, create, and so on. The separation of these features of humans from the body is perhaps driven by the desire to turn the image language of scripture into decorative metaphor.

But we need to say more, for the image of God into which we are made is arguably not a copy of God's properties—intellect, emotion, creativity, moral capacity, spirit and so forth—but a copy of God. God of course has certain properties or capacities (God thinks, emotes, creates, is spirit, etc.). But God is not making images of the abstract entities but making images of the divine self. The properties God has are, of course, instantiated in the individual humans (as arguably they are in the divine persons), but that they are so instantiated is not the image itself. The image is the individual human person.

God's making us in the divine image seems to follow the same sort of pattern as we find in dichotomous imaging. First there is something real and then a copy is made of it; object then image. But the image of God, as it is typically understood in theology, is a "shared" image. This is the place where it is tempting to ignore the actual language of scripture, replacing the notion of image with the notion of essential properties which are shared by all humans *qua* human. But that is not what an image is.

Let's say two things accidentally resemble a third. Under those circumstances, we have resemblance but not copying. But in the making of X in the image of Y, one is not merely making a resemblance (although one is also doing that) but one is copying. In the case of the accidental resemblance, there is no copy. Copied images seem to be singular, with each image an image of the object itself. The resemblance it has, let's say, to other copies is of course not totally accidental because each copy is a copy of the original, but neither is the resemblance among copies planned, or at least it need not be. Two copies of one object resemble each other not as copies of one another but as *copies of the original object*. A copied image is not an image simply because it instantiates the same properties of the object. There is a causal history that is vital to its being a copy. The image is a concrete, non-universal entity, a particular and historical uniqueness in the world.

A fear may arise here. If we start with the image as a real entity and have that as the primary sort of thing each of us is (with each individual copy of God standing on its own, so to speak) and then understand the shared properties as secondary (with our commonality not being the main feature of humans), don't we end up with the image of God as shaky ground for sin and salvation? That conclusion, I will argue, is too hasty. That we are unique copies God individually does not entail that there is nothing in common to us. It only places the commonalities in the right perspective.

What I've suggested does not deny that insofar as each of us is made in God's image each of us resembles one another or even that we do, in fact, instantiate essential properties. But it is the copying that makes us in the image of God and not the resembling or instantiating *per se*. Consider an analogy between physical dichotomous imaging and non-physical/physical dichotomous imaging. All images, say, of Mt. Denali, share some set of properties in common in virtue of which they are resemblance images of Denali, just as all images of God share something in common in virtue of which they are resemblance images of God. Now it is primarily because they are copies of Denali that they are resemblance images of Denali; they are not copy images of Denali just because they resemble one another. No resemblance the images have to one another is enough to make them copies of Denali. They could resemble one another and be copies one of another without being copies of Denali. So it is with humans. We could all resemble one another, or we could all be instantiations of certain properties *without being copy images of God*.

Be that as it may, if we want to emphasize the uniqueness of the image of God that we are—that is, if we want to emphasize the fact that we are *made* images of God—we'll need to say more of how the instantiation of a property makes it the unique instantiation. The notion of essences and instantiation is a large and complicated topic. There are a variety of ways in which the term "essence" is used. I want to pick out what is sometimes called "kind-essences." When we think of kind-essences, we typically think of necessary properties. To be a member of a kind (here I'm talking about natural kinds rather than artifactual kinds—horses, for example, rather than tables, the latter of which are made by humans) is to have certain properties without which one wouldn't be in the kind. Granting that there are a set of properties that make humans human, we all have them. For the most part essences or necessary properties are thought of along realist lines. By "realist" I mean that for the vast majority of things in the world, they are what they are independent of human noetic contributions. So cows have bovine essential properties independent of what any human person wishes about, believes about or otherwise thinks about cows. Kinds (natural ones, at any rate) are found or discovered not made by humans.

However, one need not be a strict realist about essential properties in order for kinds to be rooted in a reality independent of human noetic work. In fact, taking a more relaxed approach to essences allows for more diversity among the individual (copied) images as I described them above. When talking about the essence of being human (the supposed image of God) it is common to take that essence realistically so that the image of God in you is the same as the image of God in me. Rationality, emotional richness, freedom, etc. are properties we all have as realist essential properties. But perhaps the set of properties shared among humans need not be instantiations of the same abstract essence, except in a fairly limited way. Perhaps, instead, we each receive what I'll call a "Wittgensteinian family resemblance" set of properties.

The standard Wittgensteinian picture (as many seem to conceive of it), claims that if A, B, C, D, and E resemble one another, A is like B, B like C, and so forth but A may not resemble E. That is, A may share no (resembling) properties with E. Hence one game is like another and that one like another and so forth but the last game may not share anything in common with the first game, except being called a game. I propose a different view. By "Wittgensteinian family resemblances" I will mean the following. Although A and E may be quite dissimilar, A and E still resemble each other because they have the same *thin essence*. Giving a definition of a thin essence is difficult but one can get the basic idea by example. A thin essence is what, in a very general description, all philosophers would agree that they are thinking about when thinking about a particular problem. For example, being rational is the property of assessing claims for truth and acting on those claims. Now two philosophers could thicken up that property in quite different ways via alternative conceptual schemes (or alternative noetic frameworks). Looking at the philosophical literature on rationality, one could have one's pick about how to thicken up the property. Any two of those ways of thickening up the thin notion of rationality may be contradictory to one another. Typically that is a good reason to reject at least one of them. However, if a claim is true only *within a conceptual scheme, noetic framework or historical circumstance*, then what is true is relative to conceptual schemes, noetic frameworks or historical circumstances. On that account, the claims are not contradictory unless removed, *per impossible*, from their situations (see McLeod-Harrison, 2009 for further details). Two people living their lives according to rationality might be living in two substantially different ways. One's thick rationality might not agree with another's at all but their thin rationality would. This way of considering essences allows for necessary properties at the thin level but not at the thicker level. What is true at a thick level within a situation depends not on the "real" way the world is but on a variety of features deriving from the conceptual scheme, noetic framework or historical circumstance. But still, at the thin level, it will turn out true in every situation that humans have certain essential properties.

Thus while each person shares the same thin properties, how those properties are thickened up depends on historically rooted conceptual-schematic features. Thus, what being rational looks like for one person may be quite different from what it looks like for another. So instead of Wittgensteinian resemblances varying so much between A and E because A and E fail to have any properties in common, A and E *appear* to have nothing in common because the thickened up versions of the properties are so disparate. All of this is consistent with the idea that God makes us in the divine image as copies of God. God is the object and each of us, in our historical, conceptually nuanced context, develops into the instantiation of the thin properties but they are always thickened up by the historical circumstance and its related (set of) conceptual schemes and noetic frameworks.

The result of all this is that humans copy God, and hence resemble God, via historically conditioned properties that are copied from God in rather unique ways. Humans also resemble (but do not copy) each other at the thin level. (Of course, there is a sort of copying going on with our genetically related children. However, even there the copying seems to lack the intentional control over what the children are like.) Copying involves God being present to the causal chain of each human's development whereas resemblance does not. Some of the differences in resemblance (even radical ones) can be explained via the Wittgensteinian resemblance properties being different from one another in quite significant ways at the thick level and yet similar enough at the thin level to count individuals as members of the same resemblance set.

IV Typifying Images

I turn now to a second sort of image. Although not as common as the one described in section II, there is a use of "image" that, if you will, carries its object with it. In this sense to be an image is to be an example of, the epitome of or to typify. For instance, we might say that Joe is the image of the football player or Mary is the image of a CEO. What this sense of image picks out depends a good deal on the tone of voice with which judgments about it are expressed. Both these examples can suggest a caricature of the sort of object under consideration. "Mary is the image of a CEO" could be pejorative, suggesting a negative picture not only of Mary but of CEOs in general. Similarly "Joe is the image of a football player" could suggest a negative picture of football players and Joe as well. Or both could be positive. Mary or Joe could image the best of being a CEO or a football player where being a CEO or a ball player are considered good things in their own right. In both the positive and the negative versions, however, what is meant depends further on the distinctions among examples, epitomes, and typifications.

To say X is typical of the set of Ys is often to say that X's properties are the properties commonly found attached to Ys. To say X is an example of the set of Ys is often to say the same sort of thing—X's properties are what are commonly found among Ys. In contrast, to be typical implies a stricter account, for what is typical of a set would not normally be capable of being a poor example of the set, whereas a mere (nontypical) example could be a poor example. Finally, for X to epitomize the set of Ys seems somewhat stronger than either being an example or being typical. To epitomize often picks out what is distinctive of the set or what is a superlative example of the set. Of course, there are no hard and fast rules here. Sometimes we do use "typical" and "epitome" interchangeably, or we add a "best" to "example" with a similar meaning in mind. What's important to notice, however, is that to be the best example or the most typical or the epitome of a set can itself be ambiguous between depicting what members of the set are generally like ("general typifying") and having in mind not what is generally true but rather making a value judgment about what the ideal member would look like and picking the closest example of that ("ideal typifying"). Which we use depends on our purposes.

For all their ambiguities, let's call these "typifying images." The typifying image at a minimal level resembles the other members of the set. To have a typifying image of a set, we must have a set made of members that resemble one another in some significant way. Some sets have members that do not resemble one another much, if at all, beyond the trivial feature of being members of the same set. One could put typewriters, ghosts, moon shots and cows into the same set and one would be hard pressed to say how they resemble one another, whereas iguanas, cows, tigers and dogs would be easier to describe in terms of their resemblances. To have a

typifying image, the set must be constructed of significantly resembling members. The more the members of the set resemble one another, the easier it is to say why these things belong to the set and the easier it is to find a typifying image. However, the resemblances need not be exactly the same in each member of the set. They could, in short, have Wittgensteinian resemblances. Two members of the set at opposite ends of the resemblance continuum that captures the set would still have to have enough in common so that one could recognize them as members of the same set. One of the reasons for limiting Wittgensteinian resemblances the way I do is that if A and E (on opposite ends of the continuum) don't resemble each other at all, then it's hard to see how one could have a typifying member of the set, whether general or ideal.

There is obviously an overlap between dichotomous images and typifying images. As noted, sets can be made up of all sorts of wildly dissimilar things, so not all sets will have typifying imaging members. But typifying images do not merely represent the set. As we've seen, representation can be done with no resemblance at all (except perhaps the most general sorts of features—perhaps being things, for example). To typify or epitomize, one has to resemble. In fact, one has to resemble *in the right way*. What is the right way? To some degree, that depends on the purposes one has. Consider “Joe is the image of a good football player.” (Notice the addition of “good” into the earlier example). Is our purpose to pick out some set of general features of all football players? What would those be? It's not “big and burly” or “can run fast.” Nor is it “good throwing arm” or “good on the catch.” Wide receivers have different features than quarterbacks, and quarterbacks than centers. And all of them have different features than the defensive players. To typify a good football player *in general* may have little directly to do with the particular game of football: team player, ability to concentrate, etc. Perhaps better to say “Joe is the image of a good quarter back” or whatever one more specifically wants to pick out.

Consider the other example: “Mary is the image of a good CEO.” (Again, note the addition of “good.”) The category of “CEO” is in some ways narrower than that of football player, so perhaps it is tempting to respond that it is easier to say what would make a typifying member. Yet the problem doesn't go away. We could ask: “do you mean good CEO in terms of bringing in a huge profit, leading people well, knowing when to hire, when to fire, or speaks well to the board?” Without the “good,” typifying the CEO might be easier (as it would be with football player). Any CEO would do, perhaps, so long as the CEO ran a corporation. Here the ambiguity between the ideal and the general comes to the fore. To be clear about a typifying image, we have to ask some detailed questions about what it is we want to capture; that is, what is our purpose in trying to typify or epitomize a set of entities?

In the theological context, we might ask for a typifying example of humanity. Our first inclination might be to say that anyone of us might be as good as any other to typify humanity. Let's say that what it is to be human is to be made in the image of God. Each and every human is made in this way. If we want to talk about thin properties that are essential to humans, we might say that to be human is to be capable (in principle) of rationality, emotions, creativity, free choices, or spirituality. Once again, any one of us would fit the bill as typical.

(Here it is important to note that all humans, even those who are extremely mentally challenged and have lived, let's say, in a permanent vegetative state since birth are made in the image of God. Hence the importance when putting the image of God into philosophical terms to speak of “capacities in principle.” It is also theologically (and morally) important to consider that Jesus holds up children as models of spirituality. “Let the children come to me, for to such belong the kingdom of heaven.” He also indicates that the least will be the greatest and it is not

difficult to infer that the most mentally challenged human will be, in fact, the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. As such, we may be honoring saints in serving those among us who are the least capable now of serving anyone.)

But what of the other sense of typifying image—the ideal typifying image? Here we run into some substantial difficulties, for if we are in the set “human” because we resemble one another, we resemble one another in Wittgensteinian resemblances rooted in thin essential properties, at least according to my account. That is, we run into the problem that humans are so varied and indeed, unique that it is hard to point to any singular set of features by which one human can be used as an ideal. Since the ideal typifying image requires us to make certain value judgments, the vast differences among us might incline us to narrow the field. We might want to ask which aspects of humanity we desire to typify. Is it courage, creativity, rationality with emotional sensitivity or something else? We might propose, for example, the heroic among us, or the great inventors, leaders, or other “important” figures. But if we try to pick out the ideal *human*, we are probably going to run into challenges of all sorts. There is a theological answer, however. Jesus might be the only human who fits the ideal account for not only has he all the properties at the thin level that go into making up the human person but he also lacks a property that keeps the rest of from being ideal, namely, sin. Whereas many other superlative human persons are superlative in having some of the thin properties thickened up in interesting and powerful ways, no one but Jesus can claim to be superlative in being without sin (by nature). (Here one might suggest the Roman Catholic version of Mary. She however, is sinless by grace, not nature. In fact, we can all become sinless by grace.)

V

Presentational Images

I turn now to a third and narrower but related sense of image. It is, perhaps, a philosopher’s sense of image. Consider single-membered sets, sets consisting of a unique member. Take that member as an image of the members of the set. In that case, the singular set member images itself. Unlike with typifying images, where one thing epitomizes or typifies the other things in the set by resembling them, in this case, the thing that is the image just is (fully and completely) the thing in the set. Looked at in one way, such an image also epitomizes the members of the set but in a narrowed down or even trivial sense of epitomize. In another sense, however, such an image truly epitomizes the members of set because it simply is all the members of the set. It’s not that one thing represents or resembles or copies the others in the set; the thing doing the imaging is the only thing in the set. “Resemblance,” “copy,” and “representation” are the wrong terms. “Presentation” is closer. The image presents itself or, one could just as well say, that the object presents itself. In short, the image just is the object and the object the image. In this case, the image brings its object with it. I’ll call this the “presentational image.”

The presentational image appears to be the sort of image that Christ is of God. Since he is God, he doesn’t copy God, at least in the sense that we find him described in Colossians 1:15ff. So the image that Jesus is of God is a presentational image. Equally truly, I am the presentational image of myself. Since I am a member of the single-membered set made up solely of myself, I presentationally image myself, as do you yourself, and your neighbor herself, and so on.

One final point about images. The typifying image appears to bridge dichotomous and presentational images. On the one hand, the typifying image resembles the other members of the set. On the other hand, the typifying image is a member of the set itself and thus presents at least

one member of the set. Although not identical to the set, it is at least identical to one member of the set. It could be said to be a presentational image of the subset made up of the singular member that typifies the larger set.

VI Images of God, Jesus and Scripture

Jesus is the presentational image of God, the unique member of the set “divine-human persons.” That makes him unique not only among humans, but among all the things in the universe. It would be a mistake, however, to think that that is all there is to Jesus’ uniqueness, viz., that he has a divine history. He also has a human history that is unique. He was born of Mary, taught carpentry by Joseph, walked along the road between Jerusalem and Bethany on a certain day in the year 27 and so forth. We “regular” humans are unique in that same way. We are born of the particular parents we are, raised in the neighborhoods we are, etc. In that way, each of us is the presentational image of ourselves.

Jesus’ unique history as a divine person, however, includes becoming human and staying human. That is, the second person of the Trinity is forever the divine-human. When the New Testament speaks of Jesus as the image of God (see Colossians 1:15ff, 2 Corinthians 4:4 and the related John 14:9, Hebrews 1: 1-4, Ephesians 4: 17-24, Romans 8:3 and Philippians 2: 7,8), it speaks of us seeing God (in the divine self) when we see Jesus the human. The two are not separated, as Chalcedon recognizes when it says Jesus has two natures and two wills but is one person. To see Jesus the human is the see Jesus the divine creator of the universe.

What have these claims to do with our being made in the image of God? Just this: if Jesus is truly human, then he too is made in God’s image. That is, Jesus is a much the dichotomous image of God as a human as we are. That explains, if my earlier description is right, why Jesus is unique as a human. He is the unique copy of God. But then so is each of us a unique copy of God. Yet there is something else about Jesus that is unique. When a “regular” human is made, she is made from scratch as a copy of God. But Jesus pre-exists his human incarnation and thus, in a sense, *he copies humans* when he is made the incarnate God. Whereas we all resemble one another because we copy God, Jesus resembles us because he copies us.

But Jesus copies us without sin. Sin, of course, is not necessary to humans. It is not a necessary property. When God incarnates as a human, he does not copy us in that respect. To put it as the Orthodox would, the image of God is separate from the likeness of God in the creation of humanity. The image of God is our reason, will, emotional richness and creativity. But the likeness of God is our capacity for virtue, our capacity to be fully like God *in the human way*. Jesus becomes like God *in the human way* in his incarnation. We see God in Jesus because he has grown into the sort of reliance on God that is needful for true sanctification (true deification, as the Orthodox would say). He has by nature what we can have by grace. By nature, he never was sinful. He chose, in his earthly life, to shape his earthly being after God’s will not his own human will. That makes him the full image of God as a human. So not only is he God by nature, but he is the ideal typifying image of God as well. He is a human without sin, totally reliant on the will of God. His human will is amalgamated to God’s will and he thus lives out the life of God on earth.

So Jesus is the presentational image of God (God in the divine self), the ideal typifying image of a human (in his sinless humanity) and the dichotomous image of God in his being made the unique human he is, a copy of God. Salvation is provided by God in Jesus because of way

these three images work together. Because Jesus is a copy of God as we are, his presence among us is related to us via both his uniqueness from us and his commonality with us. He is, via the thin properties that we all share, and in virtue of which we resemble each other, the savior for all humanity. But he copies us as well in his uniqueness, his historicity, his being thickened up according to a conceptual scheme or noetic structure that places him very much among the finite and contingent. His uniqueness is, in short, just as much a part of the image of God as is the fact that he shares the properties necessary for his being a human. But it is because he is the unique, particular example of the ideal human that we can learn to become like God as well (on the Orthodox view). He chose to be like God and hence imaged God in the full way a human ought and not merely in his rationality, emotional richness or creativity. He lived the life of sinlessness and thereby is the example of how it can be done.

VII

Conclusion and Practical Implications

Thus we have the image of God, as much unique as shared. The implications of our uniqueness is not limited to the development of our individual ways of being in the world, but to the development of the wide variety of cultures and expressions of the celebration of the life God gives us. But it also influences how we should understand the nature of (original) sin and the nature of our salvation. We come to God both corporately and individually. When the rich young man asks Jesus what he must do to be saved, Jesus asks him if he'd followed the law. He had! Then Jesus says he lacks one more thing. He is to sell all his possessions and to follow Jesus. That is a very different approach to the particulars of salvation than he tells Nicodemus, the woman at the well and Martha. Each of us comes to salvation in unique circumstances with our unique personalities but also with the knowledge that we are all related to Jesus our brother and it is that relatedness that means Jesus singular life, death and resurrection can save us.

The image of God, when taken seriously, leads us to see at least three things. First, it leads us to see the possibility that humans are unique. Second, it opens our eyes to the fact that uniqueness is one of the fundamental aspects of being human. Third, it helps us see that our value as humans truly is in our uniqueness and not merely in our commonalities. While our commonalities ground two of our great doctrines, sin and salvation, as well as our moral obligations and universal virtues, our uniqueness is our own—inspired by the creative God of the universe. If, then, the diversity of cultures and peoples is rooted in our uniqueness as individuals, we have a powerful theological reason to continue to nurture cultural diversity in our schools and universities.

What are some practical implications for educators that follow from this philosophical and theological account of uniqueness and its rooting of cultural diversity? I shall be brief. First, we educators must pay even more attention to the personal histories of our students. Part of what makes a person made in God's image his particular historical experiences. Getting to know a student on a personal level may involve things such as getting to know the parents and having the student write or talk about important events in her family life, the family's history and ancestry. Second, we must pay attention to the cultural influences on those personal histories as well as to connect changes in the student's experience of home-life as young children to the influence of the school setting. What happens to one's unique background when exposed to a more dominant culture? How do we help students understand the changes? Third, it will be important to celebrate as many cultures as are represented in one's class but also to introduce

cultural points of view that are not represented in one's class. Of course, many of us are doing these kinds of things already. I propose, however, that we think of culture more thoroughly not simply in terms of how the culture at large impinges on our own culture but how the culture shapes the student's own experience. We'll need a good deal more research on the mingling of cultures to do this well. This will lead to seeing the student not merely as a member of a certain culture but to see the student as the unique person she is. For example, one of my students is African, raised by a Roman Catholic mother and a Muslim grandmother in Africa but now attending an evangelical university in the U.S. When speaking with him about his experience, he said he simply passed between the two African religious cultures as was necessary to get by. His spiritual formation, thus, was rooted in two different and competing traditions religiously. Now finding himself in the U.S. among largely evangelical peers, he was beginning to take on a third religious culture. In class, he typically acted like many of the evangelical kids, reporting what his local pastor had taught him. But upon spending more personal time with him, it became clear that his own culturally religious views had not become rooted in his own person. To celebrate his rich background requires helping him not only finding and understanding his roots but reflecting carefully on what it means to be the unique person he is.

On another practical issue, however, it seems that we need to be able to explain why Christians celebrate diversity. Have we not largely picked up the diversity piece in Christian education because our American culture now recognizes its importance and we are the last ones on the bandwagon? We need, it seems, to teach why cultural diversity is important *theologically*. It won't do simply to say that the kingdom of heaven is made up of every tribe and nation. That is a description of what we hope will be but it does not give a theological justification for it nor a theological motivation to help bring about a multicultural kingdom. The position proposed here gives us theological reasoning for defending and explaining why individual and cultural uniqueness is important. It was God's plan all along. We Christian educators no longer need to simply go along with the cultural demands without our own deeper theological reflections. In short, we need to teach them.

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