

Subverting the Image of the Trinity

by Father Roger J Landry

On May 10, more than 100 Catholic parishes in Germany defied Church teaching and an explicit, recent Vatican declaration to stage quasi-liturgical ceremonies attempting to bless same-sex unions. On the same day the Biden administration announced that it would force surgeons with the technical skill to carry out so-called transgender reassignment surgeries, regardless of doctor's conscientious or religious objections. Each was just the latest instance in the transgressive attempt to convert same-sex sexual relationships from sinful to sacred and gender confusion from disordered to psychologically healthy and humanly foundational.

While there are multiple reasons why one can and should object to such maneuvers – as derisory and corrosive broadsides against biological sex, marriage, sacramentals, conscience, religious freedom and medicine – the deepest reason is because they undermine our understanding of God, ourselves, and the way we are called to relate to each other.

As we prepare to celebrate the solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity on May 30, it is key for us to ponder what it means to be made in the “image of God” – the image of the Trinity – and how transgender ideology and same sex unions objectively subvert that image, with inevitable consequences for theology, anthropology and ethics.

Let's go back to the beginning to see why. In his famous catechesis on *Human Love in the Divine Plan*, popularly referred to as the theology of the body, St. John Paul II wrote about how the image and likeness of God refers not principally to the fact that, like God (and unlike animals), we can reason and choose, but to the fact that we were created to exist in communion like the Trinity.

Genesis states, with profoundly important word shifts, “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (1:27). The image of God is the interpersonal communion between man and woman – what we see in the primordial marriage, the original one-flesh union, between Adam and Eve.

Reflecting on this passage, St. John Paul II said, “Man became the image and likeness of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons, which man and woman form right from the beginning. ... Man becomes the image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion. He is, in fact, right ‘from the beginning’ not only an image in which there is reflected the solitude of a person who rules the world, but also, and essentially, an image of an inscrutable divine communion of persons.” This constitutes, he concluded, “perhaps the deepest theological aspect of all that can be said about man.”

St. Augustine, in his writings on the Trinity tried to sketch out how “God is love” (1 John 4:8) by affirming that God the Father is eternally the lover, God the Son is the Beloved, and God the Holy Spirit is the eternal Love between the Father and the Son. While all analogies contain greater dissimilarities than similarities – even more so analogies of God – we can see the imperfect parallel to marriage: Husband and wife can love each other so much that in their one flesh union willed by God they can literally “make love” and pro-create together with God a child who is the image of God and of mother and father, who is both the fruit and instantiation of their love and a means by which it can continuously grow. This is the closest imitation of the loving relations within the Trinity that exists.

John Paul II's insight about the connection between the *imago Dei* and marriage was picked up by the catechism of the Catholic Church, which emphasized, “The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit” (2205).

It was also one of the core underpinnings for Pope Francis' 2016 exhortation on the family, *Amoris Laetitia*, where the Holy Father wrote: “The couple's fruitful relationship becomes an image for understanding and describing the mystery of God Himself, for in the Christian vision of the Trinity, God is contemplated as Father, Son and Spirit of love. The triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection” (11).

He reiterates elsewhere that the “family is the image of God, who is a communion of persons” (71) and says that it is called to become more and more “a communion of persons in the image of the union of the Father, the Son and

the Holy Spirit” (29). At the end of the exhortation, Pope Francis says that Jesus, by taking marriage back to the beginning, intentionally sets the understanding of marriage “in the context of the ultimate and definitive dimension of our human existence,” namely how we are created in the image of God and called to live in divine communion. “We urgently,” he stressed, “need to rediscover the richness of this teaching” (325).

This “ultimate and definitive dimension” of our human life, however, is precisely what is obscured by gender ideology and by the redefinition of marriage. In gender ideology there is no longer “male and female” created by God in communion, but rather 58, or 72 or conceivably many more “genders” or ways to be human, as sex is no longer a given oriented toward its natural complement but is dismissed in favor of a conceptual self-identity unmoored from creation and every cell in one’s body.

In same-sex bonds, we are no longer dealing with the complementary communion of a man and a woman open to life giving, one-flesh union in a child, but rather a manless, womanless and lifeless institution incapable of imaging God in the way marriage was created by God to reveal. Jesus gave witness to the importance of this “ultimate and definitive dimension” of human life when, in a dispute about the indissolubility of marriage, he described how God intended marriage (Matthew 19:4-7). “Have you not read,” Jesus asked, “that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female?” Those who believe in God believe that that choice was not random and that original differentiation is part of God’s plan.

“For this reason” he continued, “a man shall leave his father and mother,” not any two-or-more adults. “And be joined to his wife,” not to anyone to whom he might be sexually attracted. “And the two shall become one flesh.” This refers not principally to the ephemeral bodily contact involved in sexual activity but to the enduring one flesh union found in a child, possible only through the communion of man and woman (for reasons biology would eventually make quite clear).

“What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.” This points not only to marriage of a particular man and woman, but more generally to God’s joining in marriage man and woman – not two men or two women or any combination of a continuously expanding list of possible genders – as the most profound earthly expression of his divine image.

As we celebrate the solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, “the central mystery of the Christian faith and life” and the “source of all the other mysteries of faith” (Catechism, 234), it’s time anew, as Pope Francis says, to rediscover urgently the richness of this teaching, especially in its application to human identity and moral action.

To do so is not “homophobic” or “transphobic,” but a necessary manifestation of the love of God, the love of neighbor, and authentic self-love and a proclamation of one of the most fundamental truths given to set us free.

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