

# Made in God's Image

## Two New Hymns on Healing Sexual Identity

**ROBERT BAYLEY**

*Paul Ryan's article "Addressing Sexuality in Worship" (RW 85, Sept. 2007) challenges worship leaders to honestly name the sexual struggles all Christians have in the midst of a sex-saturated culture. In this article Robert Bayley continues that call to speak openly and honestly about those struggles and even to sing of them. He has written two hymn texts to help us do that. —JB*

### O God, Who Made Us in Your Image

*The sexual images around us  
are filled with broken truth and lies.  
Pornography now steals your likeness,  
and sex our culture deifies.  
Desire for you has turned to lust,  
and bound'ries moved we cannot trust.  
In this terrain we've lost our way.*

Those who first sang the hymn above "O God, Who Made Us in Your Image" were jolted by the unanticipated singing of the word "pornography." That was intentional.

Why this text, and why aim to provoke such a response?

The hymn text had its genesis in a series on healing. I was able to find appropriate selections for each service until I came to the Sunday where the topic was "The Healing of Sexual Identity." I was unable to find a single hymn text addressing this issue. I was able to locate only three hymn texts that even remotely referred to the image of God:

- Albert Bayly's 1950 hymn "O Lord of Every Shining Constellation," which includes the words "You, Lord, have stamped your image on your creatures, and though they mar that image, love them still."
- While focusing on race, Shirley Murray's 1987 hymn "O God, We Bear the Imprint of Your Face" includes the words "O God, we bear the imprint of your face: the colors of our skin are your design, and what we have of beauty in our race, as man or woman, you alone define."
- Graham Kendrick's 1988 hymn "The Lord Is a Mighty King" includes the lines "The Lord is a mighty King, the Maker of everything. The Lord, he made the earth, he spoke and it came at once to birth. He said, 'Let us make mankind,' the crown of his design, 'in our likeness,' his image in every human face."

However, none of these texts addressed in a specific way our sexual identity and our need of healing in this regard. So I wrote the hymn for that Sunday. What are its components, its purposes?

#### Intentional

It is an *intentional* hymn text, heading straight into the foundational Christian premise that God made us in his image as male and female. Genesis 1:27 shouts for centrality in our thinking, but no core concept is more neglected in sermon and song than this: human sexuality, being male and female, is what encompasses our being made in God's image.

The purpose here is to enable people to move away from the sexual identity reductionism that marks all cultures, an example of which is found on forms and applications: Male or Female. In reality human sexuality exists on a continuum that stretches from exclusively homosexual to exclusively heterosexual. Everyone is somewhere on it, and no one's perception of their sexual identity is whole. Even the plainsong nature of the tune lends itself to this dynamic.

From sexual feelings and attractions within to sexual images and values bombarding us from every angle, sex and sexuality are ever before us. And so we write and sing and pray with intentionality.

#### Petitional

This hymn is *petitional*, as opposed to being instructional or informative. Those singing this hymn already know that every word they are singing is true. What they don't know is how to talk about it—in church, and to God.

In his book *God Songs: How to Write and Select Songs for Worship*, Paul Baloché encourages us to "Sing your prayers. This is because most of our prayers tend to come from a sincere, authentic place in our heart, the very kinds of expressions we're trying to write in our songs."

These words are prayers—petitions set to music. And so we sing and pray.

#### Confessional

The text is *confessional* in that those singing it are acknowledging before God what God already knows to be true, which is the whole basis of confession. It is one confession every human being can make without exception, for this sexual confusion afflicts us all in varied ways that are sometimes subtle, sometimes not so subtle.

"God's image is the perfect excellence of human nature which shone in Adam before his defection, but was subsequently so vitiated and almost blotted out that nothing remains after the ruin except what is confused," observed Calvin (*Institutes* I:XV:4). This hymn seeks to address this fluid, nebulous nature of human sexuality with which all can identify and, therefore, all can sing. Put bluntly, no

one's perception of their sexuality is whole and complete in the way God intended. We are all confused. And so we confess.

### Communal

The text is *communal*, enabling people to say and sing with others what would be most difficult to say or even sing alone, what we all, in some way or another, feel and experience, and to do so in a way that does not engender guilt. As Bonhoeffer reflects in *Life Together*, "It is the voice of the Church that is heard in singing together. It is not you that sings, it is the Church that is singing, and you, as a member of the Church, may share in its song." This subtle but helpful shift makes it possible to sing hymns such as these. We "share in its song" together rather than singing it alone as a confessional solo. And so we gather together.

I once interviewed two single sisters, up there in years, never married, who were planning on joining our downtown First Presbyterian Church. They were coming to us from the First United Methodist Church two blocks away. When I asked them why they were leaving a church in which they had been baptized as infants and to which they had belonged their entire lives, they shuffled their feet nervously. One of them whispered, "The pastor said s-e-x from the pulpit."

In some churches, speaking of s-e-x has become, if still uncomfortable, acceptable within certain bounds. In other churches you can preach against homosexuality and prostitution, and sometimes adultery, but not about the healing of the sexual perceptions of the people in the pews, a number of whom are hooked on Internet pornography.

This hymn fills a need for such individuals in particular to be able

## O God, Who Made Us in Your Image

1. O God, who made us in your im - age, as male and  
 2. The sex - ual im - a - ges a - round us, are filled with  
 3. O Lord, 'twas in your in - car - na - tion that sex - u -

fe - male formed our frame, and in us placed a sex - ual  
 bro - ken truths and lies. Por - no - gra - phy now steals your  
 al - i - ty you bore; and climb - ing Cal - vary's cross re -

like - ness, that we should glo - ri - fy your name. That im - age  
 like - ness, and sex our cul - ture de - i - fies. De - sire for  
 deemed it, in us your im - age to re - store. Now male and

long you has bro - ken to been, con - fu - sion  
 fe - male turned help us lust, bound - ries  
 your sex - ual

reigns through A - dam's sin, as we de - fine i - den - ti - ty.  
 moved we can - not trust, in this ter - rain we've lost our way.  
 like - ness healed and free, that we might glo - ri - fy your name.

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Music: Johann B. König, 1738, alt. P.D.

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### Fan into Flame

Fan into flame, Lord, creation's sixth day,  
your likeness we would in fullness display;  
to all our brokenness wholeness convey:  
our lives created in the image of God.

Fan into flame, Lord, our spirit made low,  
since Eden's banishment nowhere to go;  
we would be nurtured with faith that can grow:  
changed to your likeness, the image of God.

Fan into flame, Lord, your features within,  
female and male, once clear, now blurred by sin;  
our sexuality captive, now win:  
gender reflecting the image of God.

Fan into flame, Lord, the gifts you have placed,  
creative powers your likeness to trace;  
all things inventive, artistic, of grace:  
your hand revealing the image of God.

Fan into flame, Lord, creation's design  
all that your image is, in us refine;  
glory to Father, and glory to Son,  
glory to Spirit, to Three and to One.

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to bring the subject up in church and do it vicariously, allowing a hymn to have them say things they would not be able to say on their own, which is what hymns do for us anyway.

### Fan into Flame

This hymn deals with sexuality in the larger context of all of God's gifts of grace, of creativity, of inventiveness and the artistic. It, too, is petitional, enabling a congregation to sing as a church.

Perhaps one of the reasons there are so few committed Christians in the professional world of art, music, dance, and theatre is precisely because the church has severed the arts from the fullness of the image of God, including sexuality. We are called in this twenty-first century to recognize that creativity, sexuality, and spirituality are inextricably bound together. We need to say this and to sing this, and this hymn seeks to enable congregations to do that.

In the end, we are called to address that which is most like God in us, even if marred by the fall—our sexuality—and that which, therefore, becomes the least like God when

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severed from him. Indeed, this has to do not only with who we are but with who God is. As Calvin observes, "the end of regeneration is that Christ should reform us to God's image" (*Institutes* I:XV:4).

Wesley came as close to the subject as anyone could in a petitional hymn that has us praying, "Finish, then, thy new creation; pure and spotless let us be; let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee; changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place, till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise."

Until that great day, let's write more songs that help us express to God what we need to say about his image in us as male and female, about the pervasive sexual confusion in the world—and the church—and provide ways for people to sing what they struggle to say in the safety of congregational life and worship. ■



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