



The Divine Likeness in Humanity and the Personal Identity of the Human Being

Bugiulescus Martins, Ph.D.

Scientific and Interdisciplinary, Research Centre, 'Valahia' University, Târgoviște,
Romania

Abstract

Human beings are, by their very nature, dynamic realities oriented toward the eternal. At the core of human existence lies the mystery of love, an inner force that draws persons toward communion. This movement reveals human life as personal and conscious, unfolding in time and space within an inseparable unity of body and soul a psychosomatic whole of profound interior depth. The human person is free, rational, self-governing, creative, capable of sanctifying the world, and endowed with knowledge. These qualities together express the true nature of humanity. The enduring value and uniqueness of each person arise from the harmonious unity of apparent opposites body and soul within a single being. Thus, the human person is not created by God as an isolated or abstract entity, detached from nature or existence. Rather, each person comes into being within a rich network of relationships, characterized by love and care both for oneself and for others. These others, though distinct, share the same human nature a nature within which the divine presence mysteriously abides.

Keywords: Persona; communion; spirituality; Christian theology analysis.

Introduction

In accordance with the teachings of the Apostle Paul, the Holy Fathers speak of the love of God, who created man in His own image (Genesis 1:26), thereby revealing the One who is Himself the Image namely, Christ. Humanity is not only fashioned in the image of God but is also called to become a dwelling place of the Holy Trinity by attaining the likeness of God; the soul thus becomes a house prepared by the Holy Spirit for divine indwelling. In this sense, the human soul may be understood as an icon of the Trinity. Through man, who bears the image of God, we come to know the Image of the Son, and through the Son, the Father Himself. Moreover, the human capacity for communion—both among persons and with God—reveals our likeness to Him and the possibility that the Trinity may dwell within us. Thus, we are called to be sons, though not as the Son; gods, though not as He is God; and like the Father, though not the Father Himself (Genesis 4,32).

The distinguished Romanian theologian, Father Dumitru Stăniloae, emphasizes that a God devoid of love or eternal relationality would not truly be God. The true God is one who gives Himself, communicates, and desires to share. The Holy Trinity, as the fullness of perfect love, constitutes both the model and ultimate goal of human existence. Without the eternal communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit this exchange of divine love there would be no basis for the creation of human persons destined to love God and be loved by Him as His children.

1. Christian Anthropology

Christian anthropology is grounded in two fundamental truths revealed in Holy Scripture: that man is created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1, 26). Being endowed with the divine image, the

human person possesses the capacity to grow freely and consciously toward the likeness of God. This growth entails both a horizontal dimension expressed in interpersonal and social relationships and a vertical ascent toward communion with God. According to Saint John the Apostle, God is love both in His inner life and in His relationship with creation. Thus, God created humanity out of love, in love, and for love. As the image of God, man continually strives toward his divine Archetype; his very existence is a response to God's call.

The biblical account of creation tells us that God formed man from the dust of the earth and breathed into him the breath of life, making him a living being (Genesis 2, 7). Through this divine breath, man receives not only biological life but also spiritual life the capacity for understanding and communion with God. Father Stăniloae identifies this moment as the point at which God bestows upon man a rational and free soul destined for eternity. From then on, God enters into communion with the human soul, establishing a living relationship between Creator and creature. Through the soul, man comes to know God, perceive His call, and respond to Him. The divine breath establishes within man a relational "you" addressed to God an image that can also say "I," but more profoundly can say "You" to God.

This breath is none other than the Spirit of God, who becomes the very principle of human existence. Man is truly human because he bears within himself the Spirit of God, and he is truly free only insofar as he is inspired by this Spirit. The Holy Spirit constitutes the foundation of the divine image in man, which is not static but dynamic, rooted in freedom as its essential attribute. As Scripture affirms, "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (II Corinthians 3, 17). Through this freedom, man may choose to live in Jesus Christ, thereby becoming a spiritual person, or to live apart from Him, becoming either dominated by biological impulses or limited to purely cultural or intellectual development without true spiritual growth. Freedom is the foundation and guarantee of love; therefore, each person must decide whether to live in alienation or as a child of God. The unique dignity of man as the "crown of creation" is expressed in Genesis (1, 26): "Let us make man in our image and likeness." These two dimensions—image and likeness are essential for participation in divine life.

Because man is the image of God by nature in an uncreated sense, he is called to become fully human by God's will in a created and participatory manner. God, who is by nature goodness and love, created man not out of necessity but out of His overflowing goodness. This goodness is manifested in bringing humanity from non-existence into being and endowing it with every good gift. In His essence, God remains beyond comprehension, naming, or containment; yet through His uncreated energies, He becomes knowable and experienced. A similar distinction applies to the human person: we know human beings through their actions and expressions, yet their inner essence remains ultimately inaccessible. These manifested energies arise from the depths of human being, which itself transcends them.

As the image of the Triune God, man is a personal being, called into continual dialogue with a personal God. This God revealed Himself in the Old Testament through prophets, the pillar of fire, and the burning bush, and in the New Testament through the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ the divine-human Person. This dialogue is meant to be ongoing and meaningful. The "image" grants man the capacity for conscious and free communion with God, while the "likeness" signifies the process of becoming like God deification realized through the synergy of divine grace and human freedom, through obedience and love freely offered. Thus, the image is the foundation of this relationship, while the likeness represents its fulfillment in continuous ontological growth. God, who created man in His image, is a personal God the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob one in essence and three in Persons. Man, as a person, reflects this divine Archetype, and personhood itself constitutes the most profound expression of the image of God in humanity.

2. Person, Communion and Spirituality

The person has spirituality as a fundamental characteristic, but it is realized only in communication. Man must be understood as a personal subject, capable of asking questions and giving answers only in the personal communion in which he finds his true identity.

This personal relationship is inscribed in man from creation by the fact that God, his Creator is a triune God in persons. Creation itself is the act of the interpersonal relationship between God the Father and the Holy Spirit. So, man is created precisely to reflect these personal relationships, to manifest himself in personal relationships with his peers. Likeness is precisely the realization of the image through man's personal relationships with God and his fellow men. The human being is realized in and through people, through dialogue, exchange of words, in understanding and love for each other. Due to the fact that they are special, they complement each other. Thus, that "maintaining and updating the unity of being and the variety of people is done through communication that moves towards more and more free communion between people. Man, as a created being, but the highest among created existences, can say "I am" only in relation to "you are", "he is", framed in "we are". This fact does not show that when we approach each other through communication and love, we resemble the Holy Trinity, as our prototype. The communion of persons with each other is the condition of the encounter with God. Through communion we discover more and more God in ourselves and in each other. The more people are united in God, the more they communicate with each other through love and the more they are united with each other, the more they resemble the Holy Trinity. Significant for the community character of the image, of the person, is the fact that in the book of Creation, it speaks of "image" in relation to the creation of man as a pair. "And God made man in His own image; in the image of God, he made him male and female. "Genesis 1, 27. The creation of the first human person by the Person of God, as well as the second one, but from the first person, reveals to us the dyadic dimension of man's constitutive love. God gave man the power to love and an ability to make him worthy of being loved, through the uniqueness of each one. Father Stăniloae said: "I can love if I want to endlessly another person, because through my union with God and through the power given to me by Him, I can extend and renew my love."

God's love for us is a call and a help to deepen his image in us, to make us like him, and love can only be answered with love. Our response to love is a joy for God, but not a necessary love but a joy springing from love, because "the heavens were not created in the image of God, nor the moon, nor the sun, nor the beauty of the stars, nothing that we see in creation, but only man, image and likeness of beauty, imprint of the true divinity, vessel of the happy life, seal of the true light, towards which, having your eyes fixed, you become what she is and you will imitate by the brilliance of your own purity, on The one that is already reflected in you."

The image of the human person, as an ontological structure sealed by love, tends towards communion, and similarity is the activation of this structure. God did not create a world forced to love him, but creates it with the risk that it will not respond to His love, that is, through an act of humility, which can be considered a sacrifice in relation to His omnipotence. In time and space, man discovered that the first and last argument for the existence of God and his existence, as the image of God, is the love that the Holy Apostle Paul says never dies.

3. Sin- The Failure of Man Broken from Communion with God

Man as a person, created by the divine person in His image, is endowed with freedom. According to the classic definition, freedom is related to the faculty of choice. Saint Maximus the Confessor, however, states the opposite: the need to choose is a precursor to true freedom. True freedom is a total drive

directed towards God, towards good, without knowing any sign of question or hesitation. Man united with God, follows the good spontaneously, choice no longer conditions his freedom. "In its highest form, freedom is an activity that produces its own reasons and supports them. Similarly, the act of a Saint surpasses any preference".⁷

Thus, freedom as a sign of spiritual power and holiness is not only a gift, but also a result of one's own effort. Giving man this gift, God wanted it to grow in its freedom, to strengthen it through effort and its own will.

The commandment given to the first man, itself called for his freedom, God thereby asking him to remain free and grow in freedom. "In this way, creation is a help given to man to live in relational harmony, in which he himself was created. The moment man, as a created hypostasis, decides to stop listening to what God told him, he removes God from the first place, thus attacking the hierarchy of relational truth. The consequence is that all relationships immediately break down. Suddenly the created no longer reminds man of God, but will be presented to him as food for his self-oriented appetite.

In the beginning man talked with God and to God, then after accepting the temptation, he talks to the snake about God, thinking about Him, but without God. Man, created as a relational, dialogic reality, cannot do without dialogue, it is very important who is his interlocutor because man becomes what he loves, desires, contemplates and if his interlocutor is replaced by an object, or by himself, man will become more and more like him. "Man's temptation is to do, like God, as the serpent tells him, and as he wants: you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3, 5).

Father Dumitru Stăniloae identifies disobedience as the formal cause of man's fall from God: "sin is disobedience, leaving the connection with God who has life in Him and clinging to created things, which cannot give true life".

Through this act, man internally breaks away from God, interrupts the dialogue of love. He no longer answers to God, believing that by this he affirms his freedom. But this act was the beginning of selfish closure in itself, man becoming his own slave. Man is truly free, only if he is also free to himself.

The ontological structure of the image of God in man bears the seal of love. Sin is an act within love, a wound of it that produces suffering.

Making himself a transgressor of obedience, man turns away from the love of God, towards himself and towards material things. Separated from the love of God, he separates his knowledge of love, of good, for the purpose of his affirmation. Being in communion with God, man knows good and evil. "In love there is a tendency to know through the love of the other and with his love".

The alienation from communion with God, of the human person, darkens his "image", but cannot cancel it. Man keeps the image of his Creator, but he can no longer step on the path of likeness. St. Gregory Palamas, declares that, the image remained, but the man lost his stability, which is one with the likeness. Paradoxical is the fact that, although it is an image, it cannot manifest itself steadily as an image, clearly, but is permeated by a certain ambiguity, duplicity.

In other words, Saint Gregory of Nyssa affirms the same fact: "through sin, man does not lose his image as an ontological fact of his being, but the possibility to make functional the gifts with which God has endowed him and to receive the beauty of the prototype because of evil which covered the image like mud. The image remains whole, but, it remains ineffective, because of the destruction of the ability to resemble God, although existing, the image is silenced."¹⁰

This silence and duplicity of the image of man, which mirrored the image of God before the fall, is the consequence of alienation from the life-giving breath of God's Spirit. The Spirit of God, which merged with man's freedom without canceling it, but leading it towards God, is removed by man precisely in the

name of freedom. Man affirms his autonomy, autonomy through which he wants to be free and master of himself, of those around him and of God. Spirit is the true freedom, but man tries to be free, losing his freedom and enslaving himself to his passions.

Man's passions and passions will support his claim to be an autonomous person, distancing him from God and closing him in himself. The body overshadows the soul through its selfish desires, reducing the sensitivity of the conscience and therefore the transparency for God and for fellow humans.

But, even if the voice of conscience is suppressed, man does not lose his quality as a responsible being, towards God and towards his fellow men.

"Adam cried out in lamentation: Woe is me! He who was once the king of all God's creatures, now I have become a slave, by a lawless counsel. Christian teaching claims that through the fall of God's love, creation, from the transparent curtain of love between us and God, became an opaque wall, to some extent, no longer being a reason for union, but for separation between us. People have distorted and covered each other's image with unlove and malice. The earth was also defiled by the disobedience of the first man and his descendants, sometimes to the point of being stained with the blood of crimes, of wars generated by their selfishness, envy and greed. The exclusively desired world covered the brother and the God of conscience."

No longer recognizing God as the Father, man no longer recognizes his fellow man as a brother. Oriented towards himself and towards the earth, man forgets to look up and around, or to say "you", "we" without interest or envy.

Far from the source of life, man feels "empty", vulnerable. The fear of death, unknown before, takes over man's life. With God, near Him, man felt that he was sharing Life, which he is still looking for, but in the material things that cannot be given to him. This state of man, contrary to his nature, in which he seeks and desires life, but moving in a wrong direction, is the starting point of the Holy Fathers in the teaching of "clothes of leather". So that man could survive, God clothed him through His mercy, "in clothes of skin" according to the biblical story. (Genesis 3, 21). These were added to man after the fall, and do not represent a constitutive element of his original nature. Because, "proper and conforming to nature is for humans the life similar to the divine nature". "Leather clothes", according to the Holy Fathers, express biological mortality, considered by them, a second nature of man after breaking the commandment. But it is not about death, but about mortality, about a life in death. Saint Gregory of Nyssa explains this fact to us in Interpretation of the Singing of Songs: "mortality entered the succession of the born. That is why a dead life was handed down to us, life itself killing us in a way."

Mortality is characteristic of the irrational nature, and man dressing with it, puts on this alien nature, living from now on its life and attributes. This life imposed by his new state is dead or irrational, because it is material. It refers to the entire psychosomatic organism of man, by no means exclusively to the body, nor is it identified with it. Psychic functions also became, together with bodily functions, "corporeal", forming, according to Saint Gregory of Nyssa, alongside the body. "the covering of the heart. . . the fleshly garment of the old man."¹⁴ Panayotis Nellas, identifies as the content of the "leather clothes": the cultivation of the land, the professions, the sciences, the fine arts, politics, all the activities and functions through which man lives in this world. "Leather clothes" have a bi-form character, being on the one hand, a consequence of sin, as a degradation of the "image of God" in man; and on the other hand, they are effects of God's wise and loving economy, being a new garment thanks to which man survives in the new improper conditions, generated by his fall. Breaking communion with God, man moves away from true life, becoming familiar with death, which is equivalent to breaking primordial communion and alienation from good. Two paths are now open to man, unknown before: "Behold, life

and death are before men, and whatever they like will be given to them.” (Meaning of Is Sir. ^{15, 17}). Man's disobedience produces a fundamental deviation, which Saint Irenaeus of Lyon considers necessary to make man aware of his limits and his great calling.

The new state, contrary to human nature, is not a punishment of God's justice. Adam's slavery is the natural consequence of his defeat. The laws of creation continue to function, but in a disorderly manner, the Greek theologian Nellas tells us, and involves man in this overturned functionality, tormenting him. "The punishment that the subjugated justice of creation brings upon man would be eternal, if the justice and goodness of God had not intervened to correct the justice of creation, transforming with love for people, internally, the "punishment" into a "cure". Thus, healing the wound and destroying "the disgrace that is sin". Suffering and death come against sin, and God allowed them not as a punishment, but rather as a cure for someone who got sick, St Nicholas Cabasilas tells us.

St. Gregory of Nyssa sees biological death as following the first one stemming from the breaking of communion with God and understands it as a "cleansing of evil. "If the first one is created by man, the second one is imposed like a cure for the first one: "so that the sin that has become us in a certain co-natural way, does not become eternal, the present vessel falls apart in death through better care; so that after the evil will be corrected, human nature will be reconstituted in the life restored from the beginning, without being mixed with evil".

The human person as the image of God is a great mystery, it is the mystery of the divine seal on the earthly human nature, which is revealed only after a purification and cleansing of passions that illuminates and establishes the mind in the above, having as its target and daily virtue the virtue, in order to acquire salvation by appropriating the reconciliation made by Christ's sacrifice, which restores the harmony lost through sin, harmony supported by the unifying atmosphere of grace achieved in connection with God. Through the power of knowledge and the freedom to choose, man tends towards God, but he can only know Him in the harmonic relationship, and by knowing Him, he cannot surpass Him, because this knowledge is absolute and divine. Man knows the truth through cooperation with God, through the working power of grace given by Christ, but he does not use this power only as a tool that works alone and forces it to work. He freely performs everything that leads him to salvation, salvation being the very will of God who deifies, being realized in the relational connection both with God and with fellow men, which makes humanity to be likened to the existence first given by the breath of the Spirit Saint. The fulfillment of creation according to the image and its likeness to the Creator can only be done in a direct relationship with Christ, who becomes like us so that we can become like Him, a relationship revealed through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

Man, a psycho-physical being, created in the image of God, has in his reason both the divine origin and the goal towards which he must go, receiving as a crowning glory, full existence. Man is the image of the Son of God, as the Son is the image of the Father, who by naming him, he becomes enlightened according to the image of the Son, and simultaneously according to the Image of the Holy Trinity. The creation of man in the image implies the natural implementation in his nature of all the necessary means by which to become like God. The image is so constitutive of man, that "creation after the image" actually means participation in the Archetype. Man, and creation are theological existences, which participate through uncreated divine energies, which cross the deified humanity of Christ and through Him the whole man, to God. Man is an iconic being. A living icon full of divine beauty, which constantly leads its existence in dependence on its own nature, in which the Spirit of God dwells as in a temple,

which encourages interpersonal communion, dependence that is achieved in a dialogical and loving relationship.

References

- [1] Marko Rupnik,) Cuvinte despre Om. Persoana-ființă a Paștelui, (Words on Man. Person, being of Easter), Satu-Mare, Galaxia Gutenberg.
- [2] Dumitru Stăniloae, Sfânta Treime sau la început a fost iubirea (The Holy Trinity or in the beginning there was love), Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2002.
- [3] Dumitru Stăniloae, Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology), vol I, Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1991.
- [4] Dumitru Stăniloae, Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu (The Immortal Image of God), Cristal București, 1995.
- [5] Vasile Răducă, Antropologia Sfântului Grigorie de Nyssa (The Anthropology of St. Gregory of Nyssa), IBMOR, București, 1996.
- [6] Dumitru Stăniloae, Studii de Teologie Dogmatică (Studies in Dogmatic Theology), Mitropolia Olteniei, Craiova 1991.
- [7] Paul Evdochimov, Înnoirea spiritului (Renewal of the spirit), Pandora, Târgoviște, 1997.
- [8] Panayotis Nellas, Omul-animat îndumnezeit (Man - Deified animal), translation and introductory study by Ioan Ică jr., Deisis, Sibiu, 1999.