



## THE IMAGE OF GOD IN THE HUMAN BEING OR THE IDENTITY OF MAN AS A PERSON

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### ABSTRACT

*Man by his being is par excellence a dynamic organism, towards the eternal. Man is fundamentally penetrated by the mystery of love that pushes people from the inside towards a natural communion, which reveals the personal and conscious existence in time and space, incorporated in an indissociable psychosomatic unit, with immeasurable psychic depth; free, master, rational, creator of holiness (man sanctifies the place), knower, etc. These are the attributes that eloquently reveal the true constitution of man. The eternal value of the human person, the uniqueness of his being realized through the unity of contrasts that man represents as body and soul, shows that the person is not brought into the world by God in isolation, as a uniform abstract achievement, separated from nature, from being. The person presents himself in the complex context of the bonds of love and care manifested towards himself and towards other persons different from him, but who share the same common nature in which the divine presence mysteriously dwells.*

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

### INTRODUCTION

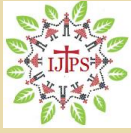
Following the teachings of the Apostle Paul, the Holy Fathers tell us about the love of God, Who makes man in His own image (Genesis 1:26), thus revealing the One who is His Image, that is, Christ himself.

Man is not only in the image of God, but he can become the abode of the Holy Trinity, acquiring the likeness; the house of our soul being prepared by the Holy Spirit for Her coming. The human soul is the icon of the Trinity. Through man, who is the image of God, we know the image of the Son (or the Son) and through the Image, the Father Himself, but also through the fact that people can live in communication, with each other and between them and God, we can deduce our likeness to God and the possibility of the indwelling of the Trinity in us. Let us be sons, but not like the Son, gods but not like Himself, let us be like the Father, but not Father (Genesis 4,32).

The renowned Romanian professor of Theology, Father Dumitru Stăniloae shows that a God without love, without eternal attention towards someone, is not God. Our God is a God who pours out, who communicates, who wants to "share"<sup>1</sup>.

The Holy Trinity, as the existence of supreme love, is the model and target of man. If there had not been a Son of God, communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, communication of love, there would not have been the desire to give birth to other people, who would love the Father, and He would love them as his own sons.

<sup>1</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Sfânta Treime sau la început a fost iubirea*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2002, p. 47.



## 1. CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

Christian anthropology rests on the two basic coordinates revealed in Holy Scripture: Man is in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1, 26). The man having the image of God is able to develop freely and consciously towards the likeness of God, by this development is understood as a progressive communication horizontally, that is, within social relations and a rise towards God vertically.

Saint John the Apostle says that our God is love, it is communication of love in Himself, but also with man, with His entire creation. Thus, God created man out of love, in love and for love. Man, as the image of God, constantly strives towards His Image, his existence is a response to the divine call.

In the biblical description of creation, God took dust from the earth, made man and breathed into him the breath of life, and man became a living being (Genesis 2, 7). Through His breath, God planted in man the biological life, but also the spiritual life, of understanding and communication with the divinity.

Father Stăniloae marks this moment, as the one in which God puts in man, the understanding and free soul forever. From this moment, God enters into communion with the soul implanted in man, emerging the communion of man with his Creator. Through the soul, man gets to know God, feels His call and can respond to Him. Surrendering to God's breath of life gives birth to a "you" of God in man, who is "His image", because this "you" can also say "I" but above all it can say to God "You".<sup>2</sup>

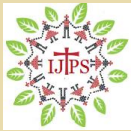
The breath of God is His own Spirit, which at the same time becomes the principle of our existence. Man is truly man, because he has the breath of God's Spirit in him, and he is not truly free unless this Spirit inspires him. The Holy Spirit makes man the image of God. The image of God in man is a dynamic essence, since the fundamental attribute of man is freedom. God is Spirit and where God's spirit is, there is freedom (II Corinthians 3, 17).

Based on his freedom, man can live in Jesus Christ and then he is a spiritual human being or he can live apart from Him and then he is either a carnal man subject to biological experiences or a spiritual man who progresses only in the spiritual, cultural, but not in the spiritual. The freedom with which the human person is endowed is the secret of love, its guarantee, therefore, man must choose for himself what he wants to be: a man alienated from life or a son of God. The state of distinction of the man created by God as the "crown of creation" is indicated by the biblical account of Genesis (1, 26) "And God said: let us make man in our image and likeness. . . ." The image and likeness of God in man become existential requirements for participation in the divine life.

Because man is the image of God by nature and in an uncreated way, he must be man by the good will of God, in a created way. God by nature is love, kindness. He does not create man for any other reason than because He is good. The perfection of His goodness is shown in the fact that He brings man from non-existence to existence and overwhelms him with all goods. God made humanity partaker of all goods.

In His being, God is uncontained, unnamed, unknown, but through His uncreated energies He is felt, known and named. The same thing happens with man, we know the human being only in its manifestations, but what man is in his being, we cannot know. All these energies manifested by the human being come from the depths of our being, but the being is more than these energies, since we cannot know it in its essence.

<sup>2</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol I, Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1991, p. 47.



As the image of the Triune God in persons, man is a personal being, permanently in dialogue with a personal God, who revealed himself in the Old Testament through the prophets, through the pillar of fire, through the burning stake that was not consumed and in The New Testament through His Son Incarnated in the Person of Jesus Christ, so through a divine-human person.

This dialogue is meant to last continuously, He gives man a meaning. The "image" of man gives him the power of conscious and free communication with God, and the "likeness" means becoming the image, deification, actualized through the interpenetration of grace and freedom, through obedience and free love. Thus, the image is the starting point of this dialogue, and "resemblance" offers man the possibility of continuous ontological fulfillment.<sup>3</sup>

God who created us in His image is a personal God, He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He is God One in Being and triune in Person. Man is a person because he reflects his archetype, his model. The fact of being a person is the most essential quality of the image of God in man.

## 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.

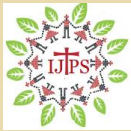
This personal relationship is inscribed in man from creation by the fact that God, his Creator is a triune God in persons. Creation itself is the act of the interpersonal relationship between God the Father and the Holy Spirit. So man is created precisely to reflect these personal relationships, to manifest 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"<sup>4</sup>. 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

<sup>3</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, p. 292.

<sup>4</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu*, p. 403



another person, because through my union with God and through the power given to me by Him, I can extend and renew my love."<sup>5</sup>

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."<sup>6</sup>

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".<sup>7</sup>

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).

<sup>5</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Studii de Teologie Dogmatică*, p. 226..

<sup>6</sup> Pr. Vasile Răducă, *Antropologia Sfântului Grigorie de Nyssa*, IBMOR, București, 1996, p. 110.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Evdochimov, *Innoirea spiritului*, Editura Pandora, București, 1997 p. 23.



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".<sup>8</sup>

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".<sup>9</sup>

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."<sup>10</sup>

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

<sup>8</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică*, vol I, p. 468.

<sup>9</sup> Marko Rupnik, *Cuvinte despre Om. Persoana-ființă a Paștelui*, p. 164.

<sup>10</sup> Pr. Vasile Răducă, *Antropologia Sfântului Grigorie de Nyssa*, p. 223.



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."<sup>11</sup>

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".<sup>12</sup> "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."<sup>13</sup>

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."<sup>14</sup> 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

<sup>11</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică*, vol I, p 484.

<sup>12</sup> Panayotis Nellas, *Omul-animal îndumnezeit*, trad și studiu introductiv diacon Ioan Ică jr., Ed. Deisis, Sibiu 1999, p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> Pr. Vasile Răducă, *Antropologia Sfântului Grigorie de Nyssa*, p. 251.

<sup>14</sup> Panayotis Nellas, *Omul-animal îndumnezeit*, p. 29.



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".<sup>15</sup> 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".<sup>16</sup>

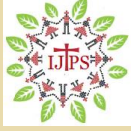
The human person as the image of God is a great mystery, it is the mystery of the divine seal on the earthly human nature, which is revealed only after a purification and cleansing of passions that illuminates and establishes the mind in the above, having as its target and daily virtue the virtue, in 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.

<sup>15</sup> Panayotis Nellas, *Omni-animal îndumnezeit*, p. 58.

<sup>16</sup> Pr. Vasile Răducă, *Antropologia Sfântului Grigorie de Nyssa*, p. 228.



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