“In the Image and Likeness”: The Uniqueness of the Human Person

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There's only one of me¹

The son of one of our Orthodox parishioners in Oxford was watching a program on television about endangered species. At the end he remained unusually silent. Eventually, with a note of anxiety in his voice, he said to his mother, “I am important, aren’t I? Because, I too am an endangered species – there’s only one of me in all the world.”

He was expressing a vital truth about human personhood: “There’s only one of me.” Each human person is unique and irreplaceable. It is not enough to say that, among all the diverse kinds of living creatures, the human race occupies an exceptional and unique position; it has also to be affirmed that, within the human race itself, each specific person possesses an irreducible uniqueness. We are not interchangeable tokens or programs on a computer; within each of us there is a priceless treasure not to be found in anyone else. From before our birth – indeed, from all eternity – God the Creator foreknows each one of us in our particularity, and for each one He has a special love and a different plan. In each of us God discerns possibilities not to be realized by any other person in the universe. Each has the vocation of creating something beautiful in his or her own unrepeatable way.

To emphasize the uniqueness of each person, Scripture states that Jesus Christ will give a white stone to everyone who conquers, “and on the white stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives

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it" (Rev 2:17 NRSV). Throughout the "ages of ages" there continues to exist in each person a hidden mystery, a secret shared only between that person and God. Underlining the inexhaustible variety of humankind, Prince Vladimir Monomakh of Kiev (†1125) remarks "how various are the images in human faces"; even if we gathered together every single man and woman in the whole world, "there are none of the same image but everyone by God's wisdom has their own image."² Each particular human person is an endangered species, for each is distinctive and of each it may be said, "There's only one of me; in all the world there's no one else exactly like me."

From this uniqueness of every human person, it follows that each is of infinite value. That is why the sixth-century recluse Abba Zosimas of Palestine claims, "The salvation of one person made in the divine image is more precious to God than ten thousand worlds with all that they contain."³ Not in arrogance but with sober realism, let us renew our sense of wonder before this limitless mystery of our own personhood. "I will praise Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps 138 [139]:14 KJV).

Yet why are we in this way unique, unrepeatable, and irreplaceable? What makes us different from the other living beings in the world around us, and different from one another? Wherein does the special meaning and value of each human person reside? In seeking an answer to these questions, Orthodox Christians should listen to the many conflicting voices in our modern – and postmodern – world. We Orthodox need to explore, with a rigor and a humility that we have not so far displayed, the characteristic insights of contemporary medicine, psychology, and sociology. We should not, however, expect these disciplines to provide us with ready-made answers; theologians are often surprisingly naive and over-confident about the supposed "findings" of science. When we listen to others, moreover, our attitude should certainly be one of openness but must never become one of abdication. Let us keep in view what as Christians we are called distinctively to affirm. As heirs to the living tradition of the Fathers, we have our own agenda, and we are not to allow the secular environment to set the agenda for us.

What is it, then, that differentiates the Christian vision of personhood from the secular world view? The answer can be found in the words of Abba Zosimas: "the salvation of one person *made in the divine image*." As Christians,

2 Gueorgui Petrovitch Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind*, 2nd ed., vol. 1. Kievan Christianity: The Tenth to the Thirteenth Centuries (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 247.

3 *Sayings* 11, PG 78:1696C; cf. Paulos Evergetinos, *Synagoga*, ed. V. Matthaiou, vol. 3 (Athens: Monastery of the Transfiguration, 1964), 501, §47.

we begin from the presupposition that the human person is an icon of God, a finite expression of God's infinite self-expression: "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness'" (Gen 1:26 NRSV). Such is the foundation, the polestar, of all Orthodox Christian anthropology. We have God at the innermost center of our existence. Human beings cannot be understood apart from divine being, for the divine is the determining element in our humanity.

Beyond this point, however, we need to advance with care. As St. Epiphanius of Salamis (†403) observes, "Tradition holds that every human being is in the image of God, but it does not define exactly in what this image consists."⁴ In this, as in many other questions of anthropology, there is no clear consensus among the Fathers. In the Church's dogmatic tradition – in the doctrinal decrees, that is to say, of the seven Ecumenical Councils, and also in the decrees of later local synods accepted by the Orthodox Church as a whole, such as the Palamite Councils held at Constantinople during 1341–1351 – there are virtually no explicit definitions about personhood. The Creed speaks of the resurrection of the dead on the last day, thereby safeguarding the essential unity of the human person, body and soul together; but that is all. As St. Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) remarks, tradition leaves it an open question how the soul is united to the body, whether the intellect (*nous*) resides in the head or the heart, what is the seat of the imagination or the memory;⁵ in the words of Fr. John Meyendorff, "There are no dogmas in physiology."⁶ By the same token, there are no dogmas defining the precise character of the divine image.

We Orthodox, then, must guard against the tendency to enlarge the scope of dogma beyond its proper limits, and must reject the temptation to make tradition more clear-cut and monolithic than is in fact the case. That we are in God's image is undisputed; but how we are in God's image, and in what that image consists, is far from immediately clear. Let us not oversimplify the patristic standpoint, for the Fathers do not actually offer us a single, systematic doctrine of the human person; they merely provide us with a diversity of approaches

4 *Panarion* 70,3,1; cf. *Ancoratus*, 55, 4–5. On the Patristic doctrine of the divine image, see John Edward Sullivan, *The Image of God. The Doctrine of St. Augustine and Its Influence* (Dubuque: Priory Press, 1963); Walter J. Burghardt, *The Image of God in Man According to Cyril of Alexandria* (Woodstock: Woodstock College Press, 1957); Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator. The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Lund/Copenhagen: C.W.K. Gleerup/Ejnar Munksgaard, 1965), 121–39. For a more general treatment, see David Cairns, *The Image of God in Man* (London: SCM Press, 1953).

5 Gregory Palamas, *Triads in Defense of the Holy Hesychasts*, I,ii,3; II,ii,30 ed. John Meyendorff (Louvain: Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense, 1959), 79 and 381.

6 *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 2nd ed. (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), 148.

to the continuing mystery of personhood. Within the deep unanimity of the Patristic heritage there is room for creative contrasts and complementarity.

With due caution, then, let us now take up our central question. What is signified by the "image of God"? How much does it embrace, and what does it exclude?

1 The Meaning of the Image: Relationship

The fact that human persons are created in the image of God signifies first and foremost an orientation, a direction, a relationship.

The orientation is primarily vertical – a relationship with God. If we are in God's image, this means that human personhood cannot be defined and understood simply in terms of itself, as a self-contained, autonomous entity; I do not contain the meaning of my selfhood exclusively within myself. Only when I see myself in relationship with God does my personhood acquire authentic meaning; without God I am unintelligible.

From this it follows that we cannot first work out a description of the human person on its own, and then proceed to consider its relationship with God in an appendix. On the contrary, the human person without God is not normal but abnormal, not human but subhuman. To be created in the image means that we are created for fellowship and communion with God, and if we repudiate that fellowship and communion, we are denying our own true self. When we affirm humanity, we also affirm God; and when we deny God, we also deny humanity. In this sense the theist is the only true humanist. I recall a meeting in Oxford many years ago, addressed by Fr. Sophrony (1896–1993), the disciple of St. Silouan the Athonite who now has been declared a saint. As the discussion drew to a close, the chairman invited one last question. A member of the audience asked, "Tell me, Father, what is God?" Fr. Sophrony replied, "Tell me, what is man?" Yes, indeed: the two questions are inseparable.

Such is the vertical dimension of our personhood. Our creation "in the image" signifies that to be human is to be God-related; I cannot understand myself apart from God. But this vertical, God-related orientation implies also, in the second place, a horizontal orientation: to be human is to be in relationship with our fellow humans. For the God in whose image we are made is God the Holy Trinity, and so the divine icon within each of us is a Trinitarian icon. The God who is essential to my personhood, without whom I cannot be genuinely human, is a God of mutual love: not a simple monad, not one person loving himself alone, but three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – loving one another in reciprocal relationship. As Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of

Pergamon has rightly insisted, "The being of God is a relational being: without the concept of communion it would not be possible to speak of the being of God."⁷

If all this is true of God, then it is true also of human persons formed in God's image. We humans are called to reproduce on earth the *perichoresis* (interchange of mutual love) that unites the three members of the Holy Trinity in heaven. The unity of the Trinity, needless to say, is a unique unity, and human persons can never be one with the same degree of closeness and reciprocal indwelling as prevails among the three divine persons. But, after full allowance has been made for the differentiation between the divine and the human, it can still be claimed that there is an analogy between the two levels: "Even as you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be one in us" (John 17:21). Fr. Vasileios insists with good reason that this Trinitarian "even as" is vital to our salvation, "the one thing which is needful."⁸

To be authentic human persons "in the image," therefore, we must reflect on earth what Christos Yannaras terms "the ethos of Trinitarian communion."⁹ If divine being is "a relational being," then human being is likewise relational; and if it is impossible to speak of the being of God "without the concept of communion," then this same concept of *koinonia* is equally essential to all our discourse concerning humankind. God is solidarity, exchange, mutual gift; so also is human personhood. Made as we are in the image of the Triune God, none of us can realize his or her personhood in isolation. Our faith in God as Trinity means that there can be no true person unless there are at least two persons – or, better still, at least three persons – communicating with each other. Because as an Orthodox Christian I believe in a God who is Trinity, therefore *I need you in order to be myself*. I cannot know myself as a person apart from my relationship with you; for I can be genuinely personal only if I love others after the likeness of the Trinitarian God, and if in turn I am loved by them. Personhood is always interpersonal, and there can be no "I" without a "Thou."¹⁰

7 *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 17. On Metropolitan John's theology of personhood, see Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henri de Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), esp. 138–43, 166–86. Perhaps Fr. McPartlan should have scrutinized the concept of "corporate personality," of which Metropolitan John makes much use, more critically.

8 Archimandrite Vasileios of Stavronikita [subsequently of Iviron], *Hymn of Entry. Liturgy and Life in the Orthodox Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 43.

9 *The Freedom of Morality* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 16.

10 See Kallistos Ware, "The Human Person as an Icon of the Trinity," *Sobornost. Incorporating Eastern Churches Review (Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius)* 8/2 (1986): 6–23.

Cogito, ergo sum, slated René Descartes: "I think, therefore I am." But this is to express only a small part of the truth. It is vital to affirm also *Amo, ergo sum*: "I love, therefore I am"; and also *Amor, ergo sum*: "I am loved, therefore I am." In the words of the great Romanian theologian Fr. Dumitru Staniloae (1903–1993), "Insofar as I am not loved, I am incomprehensible to myself."¹¹

Personhood, we may note in this connection, has much to do with the way we use our hands and our eyes. The clenched fist – closed, defiant, confrontational, excluding and threatening others – constitutes a denial of true personhood. But the hand extended to shake another hand, the hands and arms opened to embrace another person – the fingers of two persons stretched out to touch each other, as in the fresco by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican, depicting God creating Adam – these are all vindications of personhood. So also with the eyes: I become truly a person only when I look into your eyes and allow you to look into mine.

A number of modern thinkers, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox, have underlined the interpersonal character of our humanness by drawing a distinction between the individual and the person.¹² The difference is particularly clear in the Greek language. *Atomon*, the individual, denotes the human being as unit – turned inward, self-contained, isolated, a bare number recorded in a census. *Prosopon*, the person, denotes the human being as face – outward-looking, in relationship, involved with others. Whereas *atomon* signifies separation, *prosopon* signifies communion. The individual is the human being as competitor; the person is the human being as co-worker. The whole purpose of our life on earth is that we each develop from an individual into a person, and it is precisely communion after the likeness of the Trinity that distinguishes the second from the first.

The individual is the one who says "I," "me," "mine," whereas the person says "we," "us," "our," or "thou." In this sense the Lord's Prayer may be seen as a truly personal prayer. It says "we" once, "us" five times, "our" three times, "thy" or "thine" four times, but nowhere does it use "I," "me," or "mine." A story that has always haunted my imagination, ever since I heard it in childhood, is Dostoevsky's tale of the old woman and the onion, recounted in *The Brothers Karamazov*. You will remember how her guardian angel tried to pull the old woman out of the lake of fire with the help of an onion that she had once given to a beggar. When the other people in the lake crowded round her, hoping to

11 Marc-Antoine Costa de Beauregard, *Dumitru Staniloae, "Ose comprendre que je t'aime"* (Paris: Cerf, 1983), 24.

12 For example, Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London: James Clarke, 1957), 121–22; Yannaras, *The Freedom of Morality*, 22–23.

be pulled out as well, she exclaimed with indignation: "Let go, it's me who's being pulled out, not you. It's my onion, not yours!" No wonder the onion broke in two and she fell back into the fire; for in her unwillingness to share, in her refusal to say "It's our onion," she was repudiating her own personhood.

Hell, which stands at the opposite extreme from the Holy Trinity, consists exactly in the radical loss of all personal communion. As T.S. Eliot has insisted in *The Cocktail Party*, rightly contradicting Sartre, hell is not other people, but it is oneself, cut off from others and isolated. The same point is made in one of the basic texts of Orthodox monasticism, the *Gerontikon* or *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. When St. Makarios the Egyptian asks the skull of a pagan priest what kind of torment the condemned are suffering in hell, the priest replies: "We cannot look at each other face to face, but we are each fixed back to back." Then he adds, "But when you pray for us, each of us can see the other's face a little."¹³

In today's dehumanized world, in which we anticipate hell by no longer looking in any profound sense at each other's faces, one of our most important tasks as Christians is to reaffirm the supreme value of direct personal communion. We must not allow the machines to take over, as happens in the anecdote about the psychiatrist and his new patient. "It's easier for me to concentrate," said the psychiatrist at their first meeting, "if I'm not actually looking at you. So I'll sit over there in the corner behind a curtain while you lie down on the couch and tell me your story." After a time the patient grew suspicious, for it was curiously quiet behind the curtain. So he tiptoed across the room, and his misgivings were confirmed. He saw behind the curtain a door, and near it a chair, but there was no psychiatrist on the chair – only a tape recorder. The man was not unduly perturbed, for he had related his story many times to different psychiatrists, and he had it all down on tape. He took a tape recorder out of his briefcase, laid it on the couch, and turned it on. Then he went downstairs and across the road to a coffee-shop. Inside he found the psychiatrist, drinking coffee; the man ordered his own cup of coffee and sat down at the same table. "Look here," the psychiatrist protested, "you're not supposed to be here. You should be upstairs on the couch telling your story." "Don't worry," the man replied. "My tape recorder's talking to your tape recorder."

As Christians we are here to insist on the vital need for unmediated personal encounter: not machine to machine, but face to face, person to person, *proson* to *proson*, according to the model of God the Trinity.

13 Makarios the Egyptian, in Benedicta Ward, trans., *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers. The Alphabetical Collection*, 2nd ed. (London: Mowbray, 1981), 136–37 (§38).

2 The Meaning of the Image: Growth

Such, then, is the basic and primary meaning of personhood according to the image and likeness of the Holy Trinity: it denotes a relationship at once vertical and horizontal, with God and with each other. But this is not all. At the same time it also signifies movement, advance, a continuing exploration, an uncompleted journey. To be a human person is not only to share but also to grow. There is an illuminating point of contact here between Patristic theology and contemporary psychology, for psychology likewise sees personhood not as fixed and static but as developing and open-ended.

In Orthodox theology this dynamic character of personhood is often expressed by drawing a distinction between the image of God and the likeness of God. When these two terms are first used in Gen 1:26, "in our image, according to our likeness" (NRSV), it is unlikely that any contrast was intended in the original Hebrew; the double phrase is simply an example of the parallelism frequent in the Old Testament. The Greek Septuagint, however, inserts the word "and" between the two terms: "according to our image [*eikon*] and according to [our] likeness [*homoiosis*]." Does this perhaps suggest a contrast between the two? Significantly, it is only in this passage, referring to humankind prior to the Fall, that the term *homoiosis* is employed; later passages dealing with the human condition after the Fall speak only of the image (Gen 5:1; 9:6). A possible inference from this is that the image is something retained by humankind even in its fallen state, whereas the likeness denotes the divine idea of human personhood, our original glory and our ultimate hope. But it remains doubtful whether this was the conscious intention of the Septuagint translators.

Among the Greek Fathers, St. Irenaeus of Lyons († ca. 200) is the first to distinguish clearly between image and likeness. The "perfect" human being, he maintains, is according to both the image and the likeness of God, whereas the "imperfect" human being has only the image but not the likeness.¹⁴ St. Clement of Alexandria († ca. 215) takes up the distinction. He sees the likeness as belonging to the future rather than to the past: "Some of our writers have understood that humans received what is 'according to the image' straight away at their creation, but what is 'according to the likeness' they look forward to receiving in the future at their perfection."¹⁵ For Origen († ca. 254) it is likewise part of our eschatological hope: "Humans received the honor of the image at their first creation, but the full perfection of God's likeness will be conferred upon

14 *Against the Heresies*, V,vi,1; V,xvi,2.

15 *Stromata*, II,22,131,5.

them only at the consummation of all things.”¹⁶ The distinction continues to be employed by a series of later authors, most notably St. Diadochos of Photiki in the fifth century, St. Maximos the Confessor in the seventh, and St. John of Damascus in the eighth. There are, however, other Fathers who make little or no use of the distinction, such as St. Athanasios of Alexandria, St. Gregory of Nazianzos, Theodoret of Cyrus, and St. Symeon the New Theologian; and there are even some – such as St. Cyril of Alexandria in the East and St. Augustine in the West – who explicitly deny that there is any essential difference between the two terms. Here, as elsewhere, allowance should be made for the wide variety in the Patristic understanding of personhood.

St. Maximos the Confessor succinctly sums up the teaching of those Fathers who differentiate between image and likeness: “Every intelligent nature is in the image of God, but only the good and the wise are in His likeness.”¹⁷ The image, that is to say, indicates our essential humanity, the endowment conferred on every one of us simply by virtue of the fact that we are human beings; and even though it is obscured by sin, it is never entirely lost. The likeness, on the other hand, is attained only by the saints who have reached the fullness of *theosis* (deification). Image is to likeness as starting point is to end point, or as potentiality is to realization.

Interpreted in these terms, the “image” doctrine entails an intensely dynamic view of what it means to be a person. Each human being is a pilgrim on a continuing journey from the image to the likeness. *Homo viator*: to be human is to be a traveller, always on the move. Personhood implies constant discovery, ever-new beginnings, unceasing self-transcendence.¹⁸ St. Irenaeus underlines this dynamic character of personhood by suggesting that humans at their first creation, prior to the Fall, did not possess a realized perfection but existed only in a state of simplicity and innocence. Adam, he says, “was but small, for he was a child; and it was necessary that he should grow, and so come to his perfection.”¹⁹ Similar ideas are expressed by St. Theophilus of Antioch (late 2nd century): Adam was a “child,” “simple and innocent”; he was originally created “in an intermediate state, neither entirely mortal nor entirely immortal, but capable of either state,” and he was in this way given by God “an opportunity for progress, so that by growing and becoming mature, and

16 *On First Principles*, III,iv,1.

17 *On Love*, iii,25; PG 90:1024C.

18 Compare Kallistos Ware, “The Unity of the Human Person According to the Greek Fathers,” in *Persons and Personality. A Contemporary Inquiry*, ed. Arthur Robert Peacocke and Grant Gillett (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 197–206.

19 *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 12.

moreover having been made god, he might thereby ascend to heaven."²⁰ In this perspective the Fall is to be viewed not as a willful lapse from an unimaginable height of wisdom and glory but in more compassionate terms, as a failure to grow in the right way.

For St. Irenaeus, St. Gregory of Nyssa († ca. 395), and St. Maximos the Confessor, there are no limits to this spiritual journey that humankind is called to undertake. It is unending, for it extends beyond this present life into eternity. Even in the age to come we never cease to grow. "Forgetting what lies behind, I reach forward to what lies ahead," says St. Paul (Phil 3:13). This "reaching forward" (*epektasis*), according to St. Gregory of Nyssa, continues even in heaven. In a fine paradox, he maintains in *The Life of Moses* that the very essence of perfection consists in the fact that we never become totally perfect but advance endlessly "from glory to glory" (2 Cor 3:18), without ever arriving at an ultimate stopping place. Each boundary, in his view, implies a beyond; each limit presupposes its own self-transcendence.²¹ In the words of Jean Daniélou, "Every ending is but a beginning, and every arrival but a new departure."²² History, it has been said, is not a closed circle but an upward-sloping line. Something similar is to be affirmed of eternity: it is not a closed circle but an ascending spiral, and to this ascending spiral there is no final limit. God is inexhaustible, and so the potentialities of our human personhood according to the divine image are likewise inexhaustible.

Such are among the implications of the distinction between image and likeness, if we choose to make such a differentiation. To all eternity personhood continues to be a sign of possibilities as yet unrealized. The divine image that makes us authentically human is not closed and confined within fixed frontiers; rather it signifies openness to an unknown future, a call that is constantly renewed, a vocation still to be explored.

3 The Meaning of the Image: Self-Awareness

The human animal, says Heidegger, is an animal that thinks. Although this is not the whole truth about personhood, it is certainly a vital aspect of it. For the Greek Patristic tradition, the divine image within us signifies, among other

²⁰ *To Autolykos*, ii, 24–25.

²¹ Compare Gregory of Nyssa, "Commentary on the Song of Songs, xii" in *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*, ed. Werner Jaeger and Hermann Langerbeck, vol. 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 352–54.

²² Jean Daniélou, ed., *From Glory to Glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa's Mystical Writings*, trans. Herbert Musurillo (London: John Murray, 1961), 69.

things, our conscious self-awareness; our powers of reason, introspection, and intuitive insight; our conscience; and our sense of good and evil. Christ the Creator is *Logos* and *Sophia*, the principle of coherence, order, and meaning within the universe. The image of God within us therefore means that we humans are likewise *logos* and *sophia*, that we, too, are capable of thinking, speaking, and acting with coherence and meaning. As humans in the divine image, we do not merely live in the world, following our instincts; we reflect, and by virtue of this capacity for reflection we reshape and refashion the world, endowing it with new meaning, giving the creation a voice and rendering it articulate in praise of God. "Thine own from Thine own we offer Thee, in all and for all": consciously and by deliberate choice we are capable of offering the world back to God in thanksgiving, and in this thanksgiving we become ourselves. All this the animals can do only by instinct, spontaneously, and without full self-awareness.

The self-awareness in this way conferred upon us through the divine image enables each of us to be an offerer, a priest of the creation, a cosmic liturgist. The human animal, as an animal that thinks, is fundamentally a eucharistic animal. Without an attitude of joyful offering, without gratitude and thanksgiving, I am not truly personal. Earlier I suggested that the emblem of genuine personhood is not the clenched fist but the open hand. Let us extend the analogy. In the apse of Orthodox churches there is often the figure of the Mother of God, *Platytera*, with her open hands raised, palms upward, toward heaven. This icon of the Theotokos is precisely an expression of our basic humanity. Only when we open our hands and raise them to heaven in thanksgiving do we become real persons according to God's image.

This emphasis upon self-awareness, however, should not be interpreted in an unduly narrow or negative manner. First, it should not be concluded that the divine image embraces only the conscious mind and excludes the unconscious. On the contrary, as persons in the divine image we relate to God not only through the feelings and emotions of which we are fully aware but also through the deeper levels of our inner self that elude the scrutiny of the conscious, thinking mind. God speaks to us more particularly through our dreams, as Scripture frequently indicates; there is in the Patristic tradition, especially in the writings of Evagrius of Pontos (†399), an elaborate discussion of dream interpretation that contemporary Orthodox psychologists might profitably explore. The unconscious, then, should certainly be seen as falling within the scope of the divine image.

Second, in stressing self-awareness through the conscious mind we should not assume that the divine image has nothing to do with the body. It is true that many Christian thinkers – Greek, Latin, and Syriac – have stated that the

divine image is located in the soul and not in the body; Origen is a notable example.²³ For this there are various reasons. In some cases the writers in question have been heavily influenced by a Platonic separatist view of the human person, which fails to allow sufficiently for the interdependence of body and soul. Also, the Fathers needed to guard against a crudely anthropomorphic view of the deity; if it were said in an unqualified way that the human body is in the divine image, simpler believers might have taken this to mean that God has a physical body like our own and is literally an old man up in the sky.

There are, however, a number of patristic authors – a minority, perhaps, but as significant minority – who adopt a more holistic approach to personhood, insisting that the divine image embraces the total human being, body, soul, and spirit together. In particular this is the view of St. Irenaeus, who writes: "By the hands of the Father, that is, by the Son and the Spirit, the human person was created in the likeness of God. The person was so created, not just as a part of the person. Now soul and spirit are certainly a part of the person, but they are not the person as such. For the complete person consists in the commingling and union of the soul that receives the spirit [or breath] of the Father, together with the flesh [or physical nature] that is fashioned according to God's image."²⁴ Here St. Irenaeus remains faithful to the Hebraic and biblical view of the human being as a unified whole. His approach is not far from that of Carl Jung when he wrote, "Spirit is the living body seen from within, and the body the outer manifestation of the living spirit – the two being really one."²⁵

In the later Byzantine period, Michael Choniates (†1222) makes exactly the same point as St. Irenaeus: "The term human being is applied not to the soul alone or to the body alone, but to both of them together; and so it is with reference to both together that God is said to have created the human person in His image."²⁶ Following out the implications of this holistic standpoint, St. Gregory Palamas maintains that it is the total person – body, soul, and spirit together – that participates in the vision of the Divine Light; the divine energies transfigure not only our inner self but also our physicality.

If the divine image is given this inclusive sense, are we to conclude that it also embraces within its scope the human passions, including our human *eros*? In what sense, moreover, is the distinction between male and female relevant to the image (cf. Gen 1:27)? These are complex questions on which Greek Christian writers do not entirely agree. Although many of them, such

23 See, e.g., *Against Celsus*, VI,63.

24 *Against the Heresies*, V,vi,1.

25 *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (London: Routledge-Ark Paperbacks, 1984), 253.

26 *Prosopopeiai*, PG 150:1361C (often attributed to Gregory Palamas).

as Clement of Alexandria and Evagrius of Pontos, adopt a negative, Stoic view of the passions, condemning them as a sinful distortion of true personhood, there are others who adopt a more neutral Aristotelian standpoint: the passions are impulses implanted in our nature by God that are open to misuse but are also capable of being employed to God's glory. A monastic author such as Abba Isaias († ca. 491) holds that anger, for example, can be employed in a positive way against the demons; jealousy can be transformed into zeal for righteousness; even pride can be put to good use if it leads us to affirm our meaning and value in God's eyes when assailed by self-hatred and despair.²⁷ For St. John Klimakos (7th century), physical *eros* is a true "paradigm" of our love for God.²⁸ St. Maximos refers to "the blessed passion of holy love,"²⁹ and St. Gregory Palamas speaks of "divine and blessed passions" and maintains that our aim should be not the "mortification" of the passions but their redirection or "transposition."³⁰

Whatever our specific theology of the divine image, one thing is surely evident. The body is integral to our personhood and central to our life in Christ. It is a "temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 6:19) through which we "glorify God" (1 Cor 6:20) and which we offer to Him as a "living sacrifice" (Rom 12:1). All the sacraments of the Church involve the body's participation. Furthermore, unity of soul and body continues into eternity, for at the resurrection of the dead on the last day, we shall be reunited to our bodies. In this present life, then, we need to listen to the body – to its rhythms, its dreams, its modes of understanding – for the body does not lie. Our human physicality bears God's imprint and God's seal, and can be used as a means of communion with God. Is it not wiser, then, to give to the divine image a maximalist rather than a minimalist sense?

4 The Meaning of the Image: Freedom

Because the divine image is closely connected with self-awareness, although not limited to this, the image is to be seen reflected particularly in our

27 *Logos*, ii,1–2, ed. Monk Avgoustinos (Jerusalem: Press of the Holy Sepulchre, 1911), 5. See Kallistos Ware, "The Meaning of 'Pathos' in Abba Isaias and Theodoret of Cyrus," in *Studia Patristica* 20, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Leuven: Peeters, 1989), 315–22.

28 *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 26, PG 88:1024B. Compare Kallistos Ware, "Introduction," in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Colm Luibhéid and Norman Russell (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 31–33.

29 *On love*, iii,71; PG 90:1037C.

30 *Triads in Defense of the Holy Hesychasts*, II,ii,22; III,iii,15 ed. John Meyendorff.

possession of free choice. Through our power of conscious reflection, we freely and deliberately make moral decisions, discerning with God's help between good and evil. God is free; and so, as human persons made in God's image, we also are free. God's freedom is of course absolute and unconditioned, whereas our human freedom is conditioned in a fallen world by heredity, environment, our own past sins, and the influence of our unconscious motives. Yet despite every limitation, our human liberty continues to be a genuine reflection of the divine Trinitarian liberty.

This God-given freedom of each human person is a master theme in Patristic anthropology. In the words of St. Cyril of Alexandria (†444), "Human beings were created in the beginning with control over their own decisions, and were free to direct their will as they chose. For they were formed in God's image, and God is free."³¹ "If the human person," says St. Maximos, "is created in the image of the blessed and supraessential Godhead, then – since the Godhead is free by nature – this signifies that as God's image the human person also is free by nature."³² "Heaven, sun, moon and earth have no free will," state the *Homilies* of St. Makarios (†391). "But you are in the image and likeness of God; and this means that, just as God is His own master and can do what He wishes and, if He wishes, He can send the righteous to hell and sinners to the Kingdom, but He does not choose to do this [...], so, in like manner, you also are your own master and, if you choose, you can destroy yourself."³³ As Kierkegaard rightly claims, "The most tremendous thing granted to humans is choice, freedom."³⁴ We are never to lose sight of this royal liberty that is our birthright as persons in God's image. One of the questions asked by the Jewish rabbis was this: "What is the worst thing that the Evil Urge (*yetzer ha-ra'*) can achieve?" The answer is "To make someone forget that he is the child of a king."³⁵

It is in this human freedom according to God's image that we find the explanation for the uniqueness of each human being. Each person is different from every other person – as Vladimir Monomakh puts it, "Everyone by God's wisdom has their own image" – precisely because each is free, and therefore through personal decisions each expresses the divine image in his or her characteristic and distinctive way. Our power of voluntary choice, exercised in co-operation with God's grace, confers on us an inexhaustible variety. Our

31 *Glaphyra on Genesis*, I,4; PG 69:24C.

32 *Dispute with Pyrrhus*, PG 91:304C.

33 *Homilies*, xv, 23.

34 *Journals*, trans. Alexander Dru (London/New York/Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1938), 372.

35 Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*, vol. 1. The Early Masters (New York: Schocken, 1961), 282.

vocation, as persons made in God's image, is not to become copies of each other, repetitive and unoriginal, but through the use of our freedom to become each authentically our own unique self. In the words of the Hasidic master Rabbi Zusya, "In the coming world, they will not ask me: 'Why were you not Moses?' They will ask me: 'Why were you not Zusya?'"³⁶

5 The Two Pockets

Let me in conclusion quote a third Jewish text that exactly sums up our human condition as persons in the divine image. "Rabbi Bunam said to his disciples: Everyone must have two pockets, so that he can reach into the one or the other, according to his needs. In his right pocket are to be the words: 'For my sake was the world created,' and in his left: 'I am earth and ashes.'"³⁷ Such is indeed the human paradox. As persons we are a strange mixture of glory and frailty, of infinite possibilities and actual failure: in the words of St. Gregory of Nazianzos († ca. 389), we are "earthly, yet heavenly [...], midway between majesty and lowliness [...], both spirit and flesh."³⁸

"I am earth and ashes." In ourselves and in society around us, we are everywhere confronted by the tragic evidence of human corruption and failure. We see conflicts and hatred, loneliness, fear, depression, alcoholism and drug addiction, suicide. Hypersensitive, delicately balanced, the human mechanism all too easily goes wrong. And yet there is more to the human person than this, incomparably more. Never for a single moment are we to forget the other pocket: "For my sake was the world created." The human person is the crown and fulfilment of the divine creation – microcosm and mediator, priest of the cosmos, God's royal image. By virtue of the divine icon placed in our hearts, we are capable of mutual love, open to unending growth, endowed with self-awareness, entrusted with free will, and each of us distinctive and unique.

"At the beginning in Paradise," says St. Theodore the Studite (†826), "God made us beautiful through the high dignity of being in His image and likeness."³⁹ Whereas the Bible states simply that "God made us in His image and likeness," St. Theodore draws out the meaning of Scripture by affirming that "God made

36 Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*, 1961, 1. The Early Masters:251.

37 Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*, vol. 2. The Later Masters (New York: Schocken, 1968), 249–50.

38 *Oration*, 38,11.

39 *Short Catechesis* 100, Giuseppe Cozza-Luzi, ed., *Nova patrum bibliotheca* 9 (Rome: Typis Sacri Consilii Propagando Christiano Nomini, 1888), 232.

us beautiful." This divine beauty is reflected in and through all the various things that the Creator has formed, but it shines out pre-eminently from God's living icon, the human person.

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