

Man

Chapter 7 of *Elements of Faith*
(T&T Clark: Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 53-88.

a. Image

In the Tradition of the undivided Church and its historical continuity in Orthodoxy, we learn the truth about man by studying the revelation of the truth about God. Therefore, since a descriptive anthropology is not enough for us (one which the “human sciences”, as they are called today, can give us), we look rather for an interpretation of the fact of human existence, the illumination of those aspects of human being which remain inaccessible to objective explanation.

From the written tradition of the revelation of God, the Holy Scripture of the Church, God is affirmed as a personal Existence, and man is created *in the image* of God. Man is himself also a personal existence, even though he is a created nature. This initial relationship of man with God, which constitutes the very mode by which man exists, is pictured in the first pages of the Old Testament, in a poetic and symbolic narrative, from which Christian thought has always drawn the fundamental presuppositions of ecclesial anthropology.

We read, then, in the book of Genesis, that God fashioned the world in six days. God created everything that forms the world with just the command of his word. On the sixth day, the same day that he completed the creation by calling into existence the wild animals, the cattle, and the reptiles of the earth, when God saw the beauty of the whole creation, he proceeded to fashion man. With its figurative language the biblical narrative marks a distinct activity of God to create man. It is no longer the creative command, but the special

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expression of a decision of God— in which Christian hermeneutics (as we have seen in previous pages) has always distinguished the first revelation of God as Trinity: “Let us make man in our own image and likeness, and let them rule the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky and the cattle and all the earth and all the reptiles which creep on the earth” (Gen 1. 26).

It is not a question here any longer of one more of the creatures which make up the world, but of a creature which the will of God distinguishes from all the others in order for it to be an *image* of God within the world— which means an immediate revelation, appearance, or representation of God.¹ Therefore, man *rules* within creation, not in the sense of an endowed overseer or imposed master, but in the sense of the guide who directs the whole creation to its final *reason (logos)* or purpose.

The expression of this special will and decision of God to create man is accomplished in the biblical image by a separate act of God: “God formed man, dust from the earth, and he breathed in his face a breath of life, and man became a living soul” (Gen 2.7). God “fashioned” no other creature in the biblical narrative. The material to fashion man is nothing other than the dust of the earth— and this property of the earthly will even be the name of the first man: Adam (= of the earth). But earthly human nature is constructed by a separate divine activity, he is “fashioned” by God in order to receive in the sequel the inspiration of the breath of God and for man to be raised to be a “living soul”.

To breathe in the face of someone else was always for the Hebrews (and for the Semitic peoples generally) an act of the deepest symbolism: it means that you transmit to the other your breath, something very inwardly yours, your own selfconsciousness or your spirit. This is so since breathing is a presupposition of life, the element which constitutes you as an active being, and all the experiences— fear, anger, joy, pride— all influence breathing, they show a relationship of breathing with your deepest being, your own self. When, then, the

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Scripture says that God blew his own breath in the earthly face of man, this image is to demonstrate the communication to man of certain marks of the very existence of God. In biblical language the result of this communication is that man becomes a living soul.

b. Soul

The word soul is among the most difficult words in the Bible and in Christian literature. Moreover, confusion was added to the meaning of the word, since the Greeks used it with a different meaning. Today, most people, almost self-evidently, understand the word “soul” more with the ancient Greek (particularly Platonic) and less with its biblical meaning. They believe that, as there exists within the body of man blood, lymph, bone marrow, in the same way there exists an immaterial element, spiritual, essentially

¹ By the word *icon* (image), the Seventy translators of the OT translated into Greek the Hebrew term *tselem*, which means precisely, “appearance”, “representation”, “equivalence”, “substitute”.

different from our material composition and precisely this is the soul— something transparent and indefinite, which leaves us with the last breath when we die and goes “somewhere else”.

But this is not the biblical meaning of the word. The Seventy translators of the Old Testament carried over into Greek with the word *psyche* (“soul”) the Hebrew *nephesh*, a term with many meanings. Anything which has life is called a soul, every animal, but more commonly within the Scripture it pertains to man. It signifies the way in which life is manifested in man. It does not refer just to one department of human existence— the spiritual, in opposition to the material— but signifies the whole man, as a single living hypostasis. The soul does not merely dwell in the body, but is expressed by the body, which itself, like the *flesh* or *heart*, corresponds to our ego, to the way in which we realize life. A man is a soul, he is someone, since this constitutes the sign of life, as much an external manifestation as interiority and subjectivity. But if the soul is the sign of life, it does not signify that it is also the source or cause of life, as the Greeks believed. It is, rather, the bearer of life, and therefore it is often identified in the Old Testament only with the manifestation of life on earth (the soul dies, it is handed over to death, but it also is raised, when life returns to the dead

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body), while in the New Testament it appears also as a bearer of *eternal life*, and therefore the *salvation of the soul* is identified with the possibility of life which does not know corruption and death.

The Fathers of the Christian Church interpreting the Scripture respected absolutely the very important meaning of the word “soul” and did not try to define it with only one interpretation. They saw both in the soul and in the body of man two differentiated and often co-inhering modes by which the image of God in man is revealed. But they refused to schematize the content of the “image” in a particular definition; they sought to preserve the mystery of the mode of the divine Existence and its imprinting on human existence from the danger of intellectual schematization.

Much later, chiefly in the middle ages and afterwards and especially in the European West, when Christian theology began to succumb to the temptation of intellectual schematization, the “image” was interpreted with “objective” categories; it was identified with particular properties which characterize the “spiritual nature” of man. The most general understanding of man received in the West a strong influence from ancient Greek thought, with, though, exaggerated simplifications. The Greek definition of man as an “animal having reason” (*animal rationale* as it was put in the West) was interpreted in the form of a real, antithetical distinction of soul and body, matter and spirit. Man was

thought of as, in principal, a biological being endowed additionally with a soul or with a soul and Spirit.

Within the scheme of this opposition, the “image” was limited to one of these two “parts” of the nature of man, the spiritual “part”, that is, the soul– since the bodily, material “part” is by definition unable to represent the immaterial and spiritual God. The soul, then, of man– each one’s individual soul– was endowed with three properties which characterize God himself, and therefore impart His image to man: *rationality*, *free will*, and *dominion*.

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c. Rationality– free will– dominion

Not to torment the reader with extensive analyses, we will note only this: These three attributes were used as well by the Greek Fathers to interpret the “image”, but chiefly in the attempt to determine the mode of existence of the entire man, without fragmenting and division of his nature into “parts”. Rationality, free will, and dominion are not simply “mental” or “spiritual” qualities, but a concise recapitulation of the mode in which man exists as personal otherness– which is particularly an otherness as to nature: Even if the nature of man is created, he has been endowed with, the possibility of a mode of existence which is other than, different from, the mode of existence of the created. He is endowed with the possibility of the mode of divine existence, which is manifested especially in the gift of rationality, of free will, and of dominion. But these gifts reveal, without exhausting it, the image of God in man, and therefore the disturbance of their functions does not take away the mode of personal existence with which the nature of man has been endowed.

This formulation may seem theoretical, but the reader will grasp its significance if we adopt the contrasting version which western people have accepted: If we agree that rationality, free will, and dominion define and exhaust the image as given qualities of man’s soul or “spiritual nature”, then the consequences are literally inhuman. It will, then, be necessary in any situation of mental illness or of traumatic damage to the brain which entails an upset or loss of rationality, free will, and dominion to demote the man from the status of an image of God to the level of a simple animal. And when he is from birth burdened with such a loss, he is not to be considered a human existence.

The Christian West was led to such ultimately inescapable theories (we will see below the other inescapable confusion which the teaching of the West has invoked for the *absolute destiny* of man), since in its spiritual environment it has deemphasized and progressively ignored the truth of the person, which is a fundamental presupposition in order to approach Christian revelation. And the loss of the truth of the person is

not the result of accidental co-incidences, attitudes of mind, or currents and tendencies which have been cultivated in the West— such as intellectualism and the demand for “objective” certainties. All these are consequences, basically, of an *ethical* failure, of the inability of westerners, for some time past, to exist and to express themselves *ecclesially*, that is, to realize life and the expression of life as an event of communion. They have separated the Church from the triadic mode of existence, they have changed it into a “religion” which each one accepts individually and to whose dogmas, organization and rules he decides to submit himself as an individual. Thus life and truth are transformed from an event of relationship and communion into an anthropocentric subjectivism. The truth has become a knowledge subject to the conceptual demands of the subject and life, likewise, a subjective realization of utilitarian goals. God himself has been understood as an absolute Subject (with which understanding man has transformed him into an object, transcendent certainly, but subject to the rules of correct reasoning). God owes his existence to his given Essence, while the Persons of the triadic revelation function simply as modes (*modi*) of activity or as “internal relationships” of the Essence, seeing that a unique character is attributed— as is logically necessary— to this objectified Subject. And when both God and man are understood as subjects or individuals, as beings in themselves beyond any dynamic relationship or communion, then the one “images” the other with objectively given qualitative analogies. We refer to the absolute and we attribute to God the marks which characterize the human subject— and finally God is even created “in the image and likeness” of man, instead of the other way.

d. Person

We might dare to summarize the orthodox ecclesial interpretation of the “image” in the following formulation: Man has been endowed by God with the gift of being a person, with personhood, which is to exist in the same mode in which God exists. What constitutes the divinity of God is His personal Existence, the Trinity of Personal Hypostases which make up

the divine Being, the diving Nature or Essence, in a life of love, which is a life of freedom from any necessity.

God is God since he is a Person, that is since his Existence does not depend on anything, not even his Nature or Essence. As a Person— that is freely— he constitutes his Essence or Nature; it is not his Nature or Essence which makes his Existence obligatory.

He exists, since he freely *wills* to exist, and this willing is actualized as love, as a triadic communion. Therefore, God is love (1 Jn 4.16), his own Being is love.

And God has imprinted this same possibility of *personal* existence on human nature. Human nature is created, a given; it is not the personal freedom of man which constitutes his *being*, which makes up his essence or nature. But this created nature exists only as a *personal* hypostasis of life; each one is a *personal* existence which can hypostasize life as love, that is as freedom from the limitations of his created nature, as freedom from every necessity— just like the uncreated God.

Still more schematically: God is a Nature and three Persons; man is a nature and “innumerable” persons. God is consubstantial and in three hypostases, man is consubstantial and in innumerable hypostases. The difference of natures, the difference of uncreated and created, can be transcended at the level of the common mode of existence, the mode of personal existence— and this truth has been revealed to us by the incarnation of God, by the Person of Jesus Christ. For man to be an image of God means that each one can realize his existence as Christ realizes life as love, as freedom and not as natural necessity. Each can realize his existence as a person, like the Persons of the triadic Divinity. Consequently, man can realize his existence as eternity and incorruptibility, just as the divine life of triadic co-inherence and communion is eternal and incorruptible.

e. Scientific language

The reader who feels uncomfortable with this terminology of “nature”, “person”, “hypostasis”, might perhaps demand answers to more specific questions: If man is an image of God, how is this image revealed in his body and how in his soul or

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spirit? What becomes of the image of God in man when the body dies and decomposes in the earth? Is every trace of his soul or his spirit extinguished together with the last look or smile?

These are serious questions and, if they are not answered, everything remains up in the air and illusive. But the reader must understand that the language needed to answer such questions cannot be the language of physics and geometry, the language of mass, quantities, and measures of size. But another language is needed, one able to articulate experiences of qualitative differentiation, experiences or relationship, and sensitivities which reveal a knowledge which the senses do not assure. The Church talks about these subjects with such a language, which was largely borrowed from the dramatic, age-long struggle of Greek philosophy for the meaning of life and existence; only, the

ecclesial language did not remain intellectualistically philosophical, but became as well a song, a hymn, a worship, an action, that is, of communion and celebration. Here we retain only the philosophical shell of this language; but we emphasize that the reader will find the fulness of the “semantics” in the ecclesial act of worship, in the experience of communion of the ecclesial body.

The question is then: What happens to the image of God in man, when the body dies and every expression of the soul is lost? We must see if there are words especially to say what the body is, what the soul or spirit is, and which of the two constitutes what we call the existence of man, his personal identity, ego, or self-consciousness.

Contemporary rationalist man has the tendency to identify human existence– the ego, identity, the soul, self-consciousness, the spirit– with the concrete and tangible object which is the biological organism of man and its various functions. Everything depends on the function of the brain “centres”, and the manner of functioning of these centres is rigidly predetermined by their biochemical composition, or by the also biochemical genetic foundation of the individual, the chromosomes– DNA– which contain the “code” for the development of the personality. There is, then, no room left

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over for us to assume the existence of a soul nor, consequently, the possibility for “something” of man to survive after the death of his biological organism.

But unfortunately this so simplified version– even if it is very widely circulated today and so comfortably trusted– leaves huge gaps in the interpretation of man, at least as many as the “immortality of the soul” of popularized platonism. In principle, the science of biochemistry, and of every true science, is only able to discover and describe, even in its most concrete analytical determinations. It notes, for instance, that the possibilities for the development of the organism are contained in the “code” of the primitive chromosomes; it ascertains the organic unity within which the function of the cerebral centres, etc, operate. But it will go beyond its limits as a strict science, if it proceeds to formulate unproved metaphysical conclusions and claim that the biochemical composition of the chromosomes and the function of the particular organs or organic “centres” of man’s biological organism do not simply effect and reveal, but that they both ground and constitute the mode of hypostatic otherness of each human person.

But why should we exclude that what each man is as a unique, distinct and unrepeatable personal existence is owed exclusively and only to the differentiation of the biochemical composition of its chromosomes and by extension to the function of the various “centres” of its brain? Why do we restrict the role of biochemical composition and biological

functions solely to the *activity* and *manifestation* of the hypostatic otherness of each man, and do not extend it also to its foundation and composition?

For the simple reason that such an extension is excluded by the logic of scientific methodology itself today. If we agree that the biochemical composition of the chromosomes and the function of the cerebral “centres” do not simply effect and reveal, but are the cause of hypostatic otherness of each man, then we agree that his hypostatic otherness (or personality, or psychology, or identity, the ego) of man is determined with a strict regulation by the biological organism and its functions. We agree, that is, that the biological formations and functions which comprise and maintain the corporeality of man define

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and exhaust by themselves all the existential fact or hypostasis of the human subject and, consequently, no “psychogenic” factor may restrict or restrain the autonomy of these functions.

But such a claim is upset by just one very small example from the field of another “positive” science, today’s clinical psychology. An anorexic child drives itself to death, proving that its “soul” is determinative of its existence or hypostasis incomparably more than the rhythmical mechanism of its biological functions. And in its more positivistic versions, the contemporary science of psychology and psychoanalysis prove in short order— with a mass of revealing examples like the anorexic child— that what we call subjectivity or ego precedes and determines the function of the biological corporeality. If, in spite of all this, we want to insist that even the psychogenic anorexia of the child has its cause in biochemical reactions, then we ought to demonstrate the reasons by which the biological factor is able in this case to kill itself— for the biological factor to oppose the biological factor. And it is not possible for an internally consistent scientific logic to adopt reasons which account for such a contradiction.

f. Ecclesial language

Biblical and ecclesial anthropology are not opposed to the discoveries or language which contemporary biology uses, nor is it undermined by it. It is just that it troubles the partisans of that popularized platonism which has often been dressed in Christian garb (especially in the West) and which has sought to supplant the Church’s truth concerning man.

In fact, if we agree that the human body is an entity in itself and the human soul another entity in itself, that only the latter (the soul) constitutes man, and that by itself it comprises the personality, the ego, the identity of the subject— while the body is just a

shell or the instrument of the soul which only indirectly influences the soul— then certainly contemporary biology would hold many objections to our interpretation and its language would be incompatible with ours.

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But such a platonizing interpretation does not find support in the biblical and patristic tradition. We will answer the question, “What is the body and what is the soul of man?” with the criteria of the ecclesial tradition: Both the body and the soul are energies of human nature, that is the modes by which the event of the hypostasis (or personality, the ego, the identity of the subject) is given effect. What each specific man *is*, his real existence or his hypostasis, this inmost I which constitutes him as an existential event, is identified neither with the body nor with the soul. The soul and the body only reveal and disclose what man is; they form energies, manifestation, expressions, functions to reveal the hypostasis of man.

Let us recall here what we have said about the energies in the last chapter. They are common properties of the nature of man which nevertheless effect and express the unique, distinct and unrepeatable character of each specific human hypostasis. All of us have the same functions, bodily and mental: breathing, digestion, metabolism, understanding, judgement, imagination— but these common functions differentiate definitively every human subject. Its bodily and mental functions differentiate it, as much its purely bodily or spiritual characteristics (such as its finger prints or its feelings of inferiority), as their co-inherence (the look, reason, physiognomy, gestures)— all those ways of subjective expression which make it difficult for us to distinguish the boundaries between the soul and the body.

What man *is*, then, his hypostasis, cannot be identified either with his body or with his soul. It is only *given effect*, expressed and revealed by its bodily or spiritual functions. Therefore, no bodily infirmity, injury or deformity and no mental illness, loss of the power of speech or dementia can touch the truth of any man, the inmost I which constitutes him as an existential event.

Furthermore, even for our direct experience what we call body is not a determinate given, an unchangeable being, but a dynamically effected event, a complex of unceasingly effected functions (and in the discovery and description of biochemical unions, mechanisms, developments which constitute these functions, we could adopt with no difficulty the

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results of contemporary biology or their eventual improvements and changes in the future). And what we call soul is also a dynamically effected event, a complex of

ceaselessly effected functions which reveal and express the living existence of man. We give different names to these functions: we speak of reason, imagination, judgement, creativity, ability to love, etc. just as we speak of conscious, subconscious, unconscious. In the ascertainment and description of these functions, we can adopt with no difficulty the results and language of contemporary psychology and psychoanalysis or their eventual future improvements— always assuming respect for the boundaries of science and recognizing its investigative and descriptive character. And so, with whatever language we express it, we could formulate the conclusion that the biological-bodily as much as the psychological individuality of man *is* not, but *is being* completed dynamically. It is completed with progressive development and, after weakening and debility, with death, the final “effacing” of the psychosomatic energies. But, what man *is* remains untouched by this process of development, maturity, old age, and death.

For the Church and her truth, what man is as a personal existence “before” God, that is what constitutes the image of God in man, cannot be immobilized in some temporal moment or period. The infant who “does not understand” and the mature man at the peak of his psychosomatic powers and the one sunk in the incapacity of old age or even senility are the same person before God. Since what constitutes man as an hypostasis, what gives him an ego and identity is not psychosomatic functions, but his relationship with God, the fact that God loves him with an erotic singularity that calls into existence what does not exist (Rm 4.17), establishing and founding the personal otherness of man. Man is a person, an image of God, since he exists as a possibility of responding to the erotic call of God. With his psychosomatic functions, man “administers” this possibility; he answers positively or negatively to the call of God guiding his existence either to life, which is the relationship with, or to death, which is the separation from God.

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The call of God, which establishes the personal hypostasis of man, is not altered or changed according to the integrity of the psychosomatic functions. Nor is it influenced by the scientific interpretations of the progress or evolution of this integrity. The intervention of God’s call constitutes man and therefore the Church is not upset nor is her truth under attack, if science accepts the “evolution of the species” and it is proved that man is descended biologically from the ape. Man’s difference from the ape is not founded on quantitative differentiation of the completeness of the psychosomatic functions, but in the qualitative differentiation, in the fact that man “administers” with his psychosomatic functions— whether he admits it or not— his existential response to the invitation to life which God directs to him. The biblical image of the formation of man by God and the breathing of the divine breath into the human person shows, however, not the biological creation, but certainly the beginning of personal self-consciousness and

identity and freedom and self-control. If this beginning is joined to the biological appearance of the human species or if it is interjected in some link of consecutive evolution of the species, the truth of the biblical and ecclesial anthropology will not change.

g. Life after death

From all this, perhaps the Church's faith in the immortality of an is illuminated, the faith in "life after death". Many religions and philosophies proclaim the "immortality of the soul,,," but the Church is differentiated from all these, because she understands immortality, not as an uninterpreted form of "survival" after death, but as a transcendence of death by means of the relationship with God. Death is, for the Church, separation from God, the denial of the relationship with Him, the refusal of life as love and erotic communion. How is man by himself, with his own existential capacities which are created (they contain neither their cause nor their goal), able to survive eternally? When all the psychosomatic functions are extinguished with the last breath, the created nature of man has exhausted at last its own possibilities for survival.

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The Church's faith in the eternity of man is not the conviction that there is somehow a future "condition" where "something" from man survives, his "soul" or his "spirit". But it is the certainty that my nature and its existential possibilities do not secure the hypostasis of my life; my relationship with God, his erotic love for me, secure it and constitute it. Faith in eternity is the trust that this love will not stop but will always constitute my life whether my psychosomatic capacities function or do not function.

Faith in *eternal life* is not an ideological certainty; it is not defended with arguments. It is a motion of trust, a deposit of our hopes and our thirst for life in the love of God. He who gives us here and now such a wealth of life, in spite of our own psychosomatic resistances to the realization of life (of real life which is a loving self-transcendence and communion), he has promised us also fulness of life, direct adoption, a face to face relationship with Him, when the last resistances of our rebellion are put out in the earth.

How this new relationship with Him will operate, by means of what functions, I do not know. I merely rely on it. What I do know from such revelation of truth as he has given us is that the relationship will always be personal, that before him, I will be me, as God knows me and loves me, I will be with my name and with the possibility of dialogue with Him, like Moses or Elijah on Mt Tabor. That is enough; perhaps it is more than enough.

h. The distinction between the sexes

In the biblical narrative of man's creation, the truth of the image of God which is imprinted in man is followed or fulfilled with the distinction of the sexes, the differentiation of man and woman. "And God made man; in the image of God he made him; male and female he made them" (Gen 1. 27). In this phrase, ecclesial hermeneutics saw the joining of the "image" with the "power of love" of man, the power which drives him to realize life as communion with the other sex, while at the same time this same force is also constitutive of life; it is the way for human life to be constituted in new

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personal hypostases and so for man to be increased and multiplied, to fill the earth and to have dominion over it (Gen 1.28).

But there exists as well a second description of the creation of man, which the second chapter of the book of Genesis (vv. 4-25) preserves for us and which the philologists consider to be more ancient as a written formulation . There, the formation of man is not bound from the beginning with the differentiation of the sexes. God creates the first human, who has a masculine name, "Adam". But the name shows the quality of earthliness, not his sex. On this first and general human, God breathes his breath and establishes him as a "living soul". The differentiation of sex follows, only in order to serve the need for communion: "It is not good for man to be alone; let us make a helper for him who is like him" (2.18). And the distinction of the sexes is accomplished with the intervention of a special creative activity of God, a second formation: God imposes an "ecstasy" on Adam and takes one of his ribs and constructs the woman (2.21-22).

In this second description, the consciousness of sex is also the first expression of man's self-knowledge: Facing the existence which has come forth from his side, Adam gives himself a name, a name which arises from his relation to his partner. He is not longer simply "Adam", he becomes *ish* and she becomes *ishah*— he becomes a *man* since she is a *woman* (2.23). With the criteria of ecclesial hermeneutics, we must see in the image of the first and general human the undivided unity of human nature. But the natural similarity of flesh and bones (Gen 2.23) is not enough to ensure that unity of nature which would establish man as an image of the divine triadic unity. The triadic prototype of life is unity as a communion of love, a communion of separate and free hypostases, not a naturally given unity. So we return again to the necessity of the distinction of the sexes if the image or manifestation of the life of the uncreated is to be realized within the bounds of the created.

Facing the woman, Adam prophesies: “Because of this, man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife and the two shall be as one flesh” (Gen 2.24). The communion

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of man and woman is intended to be an event of freedom which is completed in a natural unity. The naturally given bond with the parents is broken so that a new bond can be created of free choice and devotion, which results not only in living together, friendship, an ethical and spiritual relationship, but in a physical unity, which means a unity of life, literally a co-existence, an existence-with. This is the way in which the triadic prototype of life is realized within the limits of created nature.

Consequently, in the biblical perspective the distinction of the sexes, while it has its foundation in the nature of man— it is a manifestation or demonstration of his nature— does not have the needs and expediencies of nature in view, but that unity of nature which is a fruit of freedom from nature, a fruit of personal love. In other words, the distinction of the sexes does not function in man as it functions in the animals where it is exclusively subordinate to the natural necessity of propagation. In Adam’s prophecy which interprets the reason or goal of the distinction of the sexes, the physical expediency of propagation does not appear at all— the natural unity “as one flesh” is determined as a unique goal, a unity which is the result of the free “joining” to the person of the other sex. But also in the description of the creation of man which the first chapter of Genesis (vv. 26-29) gives us, the perspective of increase and propagation of people appears as a result of a special *blessing* of God (v. 28), that is of a special gift which is offered to man, and not as a given physical necessity as in animals. Only sin, the failure of man to realize life in accordance with its triadic prototype, will upset this order and displace the object of the distinction of the sexes from being the “image” of God to the relentless necessity of physical perpetuation.

i. The power of love

The distinction of the sexes has its foundation in the nature, but it is not identical with the nature, just as it is not to be identified even with the hypostasis of man. It is one of the energies of the nature about which we have spoken above, one of the ways in which the existential reality of the nature

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operates, the unique, distinct and unrepeatable character of every specific human hypostasis. The science of psychology today assures us that the erotic urge does not appear in man simply at the age when it is needed to serve the propagation of the

species. But from the first moment of his birth, the erotic impulse toward the mother constitutes the first possibility of a vital relationship— a possibility which makes up the personality itself of man and the beginning of his entry into the world of people, into the area of life as communion.

Without the distinction of the sexes and the erotic impulse which accompanies it, the fact of relationship, of communion, of love, of eros, would perhaps be defined at the level of behaviour, of communication, of a simple psychological bond. Thanks to the distinction of the sexes, eros is an impulse and presupposition of life, the fundamental presupposition for the realization and manifestation of the personal hypostasis of life. The personal hypostasis of man, even in its biological origin, is a fruit of the eros of two other people. But the composition itself and manifestation of the personhood of the subject is a result of the possibility of relationship, of communion, of erotic reference. The relationship of the infant with its mother is erotic, not of course because it intends the perpetuation of the species, but because it is a relationship constitutive of life. The mother transmits life to the baby, not metaphorically and symbolically, but literally and really: She gives it the nourishment which is a presupposition of life, and with it the caress, the affection, the first words which are addressed to it; that is, she gives it the first possibility of relationship, the feeling of a personal presence without which the baby can never enter the world of people, the world of language and of symbols, of existential identity and names.

The connection of sexual distinction with the creation of man “in the image of God” is not, then, by chance or simply metaphorical or by analogy. Man is the image of God since he is a person, a personal existence. But the person differs from the biological individual, precisely since his existence itself is not naturally given, but is realized as an event of erotic relationship and communion. The distinction of the sexes permits man to give a physical hypostasis (an hypostasis of

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nature) to his personal existence— permits the personal reference to be effected as an event constitutive of the hypostasis and unifying for the nature of man.

Therefore it is not chance either that God’s relationship with man (the principal relationship constitutive of life as a personal hypostasis) is always portrayed by the erotic relationship of a man and woman. When Israel is unfaithful to God and worships idols, the prophets charge that he is committing adultery (Jer 13.27), dishonoring the uniqueness of the relationship by which God had elevated him to the place of the “beloved” (Hos 2.23; Rm 9.25). The relationship of God with his people, with each member of his people, is a nuptial secret, erotic, and this is the only reason, for the

ecclesial interpretation at least, that a clearly erotic song, the Song of Songs, takes a place among the books of the Old Testament.

But the erotic relationship of God with Israel is only an image and copy of the union which God has realized with humanity in the Person of Christ and by means of his body which is the Church. This is the “great mystery” which the Apostle Paul describes in his Letter to the Ephesians (5.23-33) and which the parables of the Gospels portray with scenes taken from wedding dinners and banquets. In the New Testament, Christ is the bridegroom of the Church and the bridegroom of the soul of each one of us— God is passionately in love with the person of each human. And especially in the Gospel of John, eternal life which Christ comes to give us is defined by the verb “to know”, which always renders the Hebrew word which means, in biblical language, the erotic relationship of a man and a woman: “Eternal life is this, to know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (Jn 17.3).

In the patristic tradition, God himself in his internal triadic life will be defined as “the whole of eros”, the fullness of continuous erotic unity: “This eros is love, and it is written, that God is love”.² And this eros is *ecstatic*, “stimulating the erotic inclination of God” I which founds and constitutes the

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beings “outside him”: “He, the cause of the universe... through the superabundance of his erotic goodness... is outside of himself... and it is as if he feels fascinated by... love and eros; and he descends from the condition of preeminence before the universe and of separation from the universe.”³ The only way for man to describe the experience of receiving this eros and his response to it is again the relationship of man and woman: “Love for you has come upon me as the love of women.”⁴ In the ascetical literature, the copy of the love of God for man and of man for God likewise is to be sought in the forms of human eros and especially of bodily love, not of the idealistic forms of platonic nostalgia: “Let bodily love be an example for you of the desire for God”.⁵ “The most passionate lover of his own beloved does not desire, as God desires the soul he desires

² Maximus Confessor, *Scholia on the “On the Divine Names” of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 4, 17, P.G. 4, 268-269.

³ Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names*, 4.13, P.G. 3, 712AB. Cf. ET *The Divine Names and Mystical Theology* tr John D. Jones (Marquette UP, Milwaukee, 1980), p. 145.

⁴ Ibid. 709C. Page 144 in Jones’ translation. Cf. 2 Sam 1.26.

⁵ John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 26 §31. Cf. ET by Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell (Paulist Press, New York, 1982), P. 236.

to repent.⁶ “Blessed is the one who has acquired such desire for God, as that which the passionate lover has for his beloved.”⁷

If love as we usually know it expresses more a blind and instinctive impulse for selfish pleasure and not the liberation of the person from the necessities and demands of nature (given that life is supposed to be accomplished as a loving coinherence of two persons), this is because we know love in its fallen condition, we know it as sin, that is, as an existential failure and loss of its purpose and goal. But even in the condition of the fall and of sin, love makes possible the natural union of two different hypostases and the formation of new personal hypostases, because something is preserved from the power to love which has been imprinted on our nature as an image of God. It is the power of love which makes possible the union not only of different hypostases, but also of different natures, and shows man to be “a participant in the divine

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nature, the whole man to be “co-inhering totally with the whole God and becoming all that God is, except for the identity of essence”.⁸ The writer of the Areopagitic texts sees an “obscure echo” of this power to love even in the dissolute who “desires the worst life in accord with an unreasonable lust”.⁹ And St Maximus Confessor recognizes even in the erotic attraction of animals without reason, as in the attractive power which forms the “common alleluia” of the whole creation, a single erotic impulse and movement turning back to the single form of divine life.¹⁰

All this means that for ecclesial anthropology, the distinction of the sexes neither serves simply the physical expedient of perpetuation of the species, nor only an extension of social roles an extension which permits the creation of the “cell” of social life which is the family. Before anything else, the distinction of the sexes in man and the erotic attraction of heterosexual existences leads the general erotic impulse placed in the nature to its “natural” end and purpose: It serves the imaging in nature of the triadic mode of life— the personal coinherence of life within the limits of created nature. It intends finally the deifying union of man with God.

⁶ Nilus the Ascetic, *Epistles*, P.G. 79, 464.

⁷ John Climacus, Step 30 §5. Cf. ET by Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell, p. 287.

⁸ Maximus Confessor, *To Thalassios: On Various Questions relating to Holy Scripture*, P.G. 91, 1308AB. Cf. *The Philokalia*, vol.2, tr. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware (Faber and Faber, London, 1981), “Various Texts on Theology, the Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice”, 3.30, p. 216.

⁹ *On the Divine Names*, IV, P.G. 3. 720BC. Cf. Jones’ translation, p. 151.

¹⁰ *Scholia on “On the Divine Names”*, P.G. 4, 268CD-269A.

If man refuses this goal and purpose, love is perverted into an eneluctable *suffering* of the nature: The nature *suffers* love, endures it as a tormenting and always unfulfilled desire for existential completion and a relentless expedient for perpetuation of the species. Sin is precisely the failure of love to realize the goal which it has in view, which is the union of man with God. Love is transformed into an everlasting repetition of the tragedy of the Danaids, into an insatiable impulse for the satisfaction of nature, hedonism and pleasure of individual senses. It is no longer an event of communion and loving relationship, but a subordination of the other to subjective demand and the need for sensual pleasure.

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Only when the love which is directed to the person of the other sex leads to the loving transcendence of physical individuality (which means: for man to go beyond his individuality, his private desires, needs and demands, to cease to aim at individual survival and to begin to live for Joy of the other, from love for the other), only then is the way freed for man's response to the erotic call of God and for love to become a way of life and a gift of life. Therefore the love of Christ for the Church, to the point of the cross (Eph 5.23-33), is also an example of conjugal eros, the willing mortification of physical individuality if life is to be realized only as love and self-offering. First Christ incarnates the example of "real love" and makes possible our own erotic reference to his Person: "He first loved us," says Photius the Great, "while we were enemies and hostile. And he not only loved, but he was also dishonoured on our behalf and was smitten and crucified and counted among the dead; and through all these things he presented his love for us".¹¹

Within the Church, which is the place of the Kingdom of God— the place where the triadic way of "real life" is realized— "there is neither male nor female" (Gal 3.28).

Within the Church we exist in the manner in which we will exist even after the death of our physical individuality: Not with the powers and abilities of our nature, its psychosomatic energies, but thanks to the love of God "who calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Rom 4.17)— thanks to his own erotic call which constitutes our existence as an event of communion with Him.

This does not mean that our nature is taken away within the space of the Kingdom. It means that the way by which our nature is hypostasized (becomes an hypostasis) is transformed. Nature does not become any longer an hypostasis (a particular living

¹¹ Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople, d. 895. The quotation is from the *Admonitory Enchiridion* of St. Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain, p. 183, n. 1.

existence) thanks to its own functions and energies, but thanks to the call of God's love. Therefore we no longer have any need to pass by way of the natural possibility of the

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distinction of the sexes in order to realize our natural existence as an hypostasis of life, that is, of love and communion.

The gospel word wishes to mark this reality when it affirms that in the area of "real life" sexuality is abolished, the distinction of the sexes is abolished: "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are accounted worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage; for they cannot die any more, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection" (Lk 20.34-36, RSV).

The resurrection which abolishes the marital relationship, as it also abolishes death, is a resurrection "from the dead". It presupposes the death of the autonomous physical mode for the composition of our hypostasis, the willing or unwilling death of the individual who draws his existence from the strengths and energies of his nature. It is necessary that a death interpose in order that "what is mortal may be swallowed up by life" (2 Cor 5.4, RSV). The *monastics* of the Church willingly brave this death. They refuse marriage, the natural way for the erotic self-transcendence of individuality and attempt the leap to hypostasize eros and the body in the mod, of the Kingdom, to exist only by obedience and spiritual exercise, only by self-renunciation from nature, to draw existence and life only from the call of love which God addresses to man.

Accordingly, the monastics of the Church are the pioneers and the first-fruits of the Kingdom— the Kingdom which is being brought to birth secretly within the bosom of the Church. We others, the majority, have need of a "helper" (Gen 2.18) of the other sex in order to arrive, with the example of Christ's cross, at the death and resurrection which the monastics attain with a leap. And both roads— both the monastic and the married— are equally revered and considered worthy within the Church, since the goal of them both is the same: Life free from space, time, corruption and death.

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j. The fall

The consciousness of a *fall* which has brought man down to a level of existence different from that for which he feels he was formed is not exclusively a part of the judaeo-christian tradition. All peoples have this consciousness which is expressed in myths and symbols in almost every religion. This consciousness has inspired serious speculative turns in many philosophical systems.

But nevertheless for the Christian tradition the reference to the fall of man is not simply a particular twist to its anthropological theorizing, but the axis or “key” to understanding man, the world and history. On the one side the truth of the fall and on the other the truth of the *deification* of man define the fact of the Church itself and give meaning to its existence and its historical mission.

The Church’s teaching on the theme of the fall is drawn chiefly from the interpretation of the texts of the Old Testament. The narrative of the creation of man in the first pages of the book of Genesis is completed by reference to the event of the fall, with an imagery astonishing in its wealth of meaning and with unrepeatable archetypal symbolism.

We read in the book of Genesis that God, when he had created man, planted a garden for his pleasure, a most beautiful garden in Eden, and settled him there. The image of the garden in all middle eastern religions functions as a symbol of ideal happiness—perhaps in contrast with the aridity and the bareness of the deserts which abound in these regions. Certainly, the drought of the desert is a symbol of death, while the rivers which irrigate the garden of Eden and the wealth of vegetation which adorn it give the picture of fulness of life.

Within this “garden of luxury”, as the Scripture characterizes it, God places the first formed man “to work it and keep it” (Gen 2.15). Work in this first phase of human life is not “labour”— a slavery to the need for physical survival— but the organic continuation and extension of the creative work of God, the flowering of the creativity which characterizes man as an image of God, as a person.

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At the same time, all the fruit of the plants in paradise are offered to man by God “for food” (Gen 1.29). Man’s life of paradise does not represent a “spiritualized” condition or idealistic exaltation, as the moralists often imagine. Man’s life, from the first moment, is realized by taking nourishment, the immediate use of the stuff of the world. Man lives and exists only in a direct and organic relationship with the world, with the stuff of the world. It is not an intellectual and theoretical relationship; man is not simply a spectator and observer or the interpreter of the world, but he is the one who employs the world directly as nourishment, takes it into himself and makes it his body. Only thus, only with this organic communion with the world is human life realized.

The extraordinary thing in man’s state of paradise is that this taking of nourishment, which assures man his life, constitutes not only a practical relationship and communion with the world, but also a practical and vital relationship with God. God is the one who provides man his nourishment, the presupposition of life. He offers him every fruit and seed “as food”. Every taking of food is a gift of God, a “blessing” of God, a realization of

relationship with Him— a realization of life as relationship. Man's relationship with God in paradise is not an ethical or religious relationship, which means that it is not realized indirectly by the keeping of some law or by offering of prayers and sacrifices. It is man's life itself which is realized as a relationship and communion with God, the direct realization of life by the taking of nourishment, food and drink.

We find this same truth of the first pages of Genesis in the ecclesial action of the Eucharist, where the relationship of man with God— as it has been restored as a relationship of life “in the flesh” of Christ— is realized again universally within an event of eating and drinking: Man again takes his nourishment— the basic forms of nourishment which are bread and wine— as an event of communion of a now hypostatically divinehuman communion: Body and Blood of Christ. The Holy Communion, the communion of man with God, is again a relationship of life by means of nourishment. Man does not draw his life from nourishment by itself, but from nourishment as a relationship and communion with God. He takes his

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nourishment as a gift of life which God offers to him; he draws life and existence from the event of communion with Him and not from the ability of his nature to survive fleetingly by means of nutrition. But this change of the mode of existence surpasses, however, the physical act of eating and drinking. Participation in the way of the Kingdom is not a passage to some “other” life, but making this life itself incorruptible, this life which is realized as a communion of nourishment. Therefore the image of the Kingdom of God in the New Testament is often a picture of a dinner where people “eat and drink at the table” which God has set for them (Lk 22.30).

God offered to the first formed people the possibility of life, of “real life”, of incorruptibility and immortality, giving them the world, nourishment, as an event of communion with Him. But the realization of life as communion and relationship is nevertheless a fruit of freedom— there is no necessary or compulsory communion or relationship of love. This means that the life of paradise of those first-formed people included even the possibility of a different use of freedom: the possibility for human existence to be realized, not as an event of communion and relationship with God, but to be realized by itself alone, drawing existential strength from itself, from its created nature alone.

This possibility is expressively portrayed in the biblical narrative by using the symbol of the tree “of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen 2.9,17). This too is a tree of paradise, but it is not included in the “blessing” which God offered to man— the eating of its fruit does not constitute fellowship and relationship with God. It represents precisely the possibility for man to take his nourishment— to realize his life— not as communion with God, but unrelated to and independent of God, to feed himself only for his own

preservation, for the survival of his physical individuality, for man to exist not as a person, drawing an hypostasis of life from the communion of love, but to exist as a physical *individual*, as an existential unit which draws the survival of its hypostasis from its own powers, its created energies and functions.

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God asks the first formed people not to eat of fruit from the tree “of the knowledge of good and evil”. Can it be that he wishes to exclude them from the knowledge of ethical dilemmas, to keep them morally “unidimensional”? We must discern here that the terms “good” and “evil” do not have the conventional content of good and bad as we understand them today.. They are not categories of conduct; they do not express the legal conception of socially useful and socially harmful. Here, as throughout the Holy Scripture, the terms “good” and “evil” show the possibility of life and the alienation from life which is the possibility of death. God makes this clear to these first formed people and warns them: “the day in which you eat from it, you will surely die” (Gen 2.17).

In these words of God, we do not have a threat of punishment, but a forecast and warning. If these first people eat from this tree, they do not simply make a mistake, they do not transgress some command which must be kept because it is given “from above”. Eating the fruit of this tree will remove the presuppositions of life and lead them to death. They will have tried to realize life, not in the way which constitutes life (the triadic way of love and communion), but completely the opposite: by seeking to draw life from the created and therefore ephemeral capacities of their natural individuality, to exist as if each physical individual has its cause and its end in itself “Good” and “evil” do not constitute here a simply conceptual antithesis– “evil” is not the open refutation of “good”, but its counterfeit and perversion. There is a “good” and an “evil” way to realize life: this is the dilemma which is posed for the first formed people. The “evil” way advances the possibility of living from oneself, the possibility for the created thing to contain both its cause and its goal, to attain by itself, that is, equality with God and to divinize itself But this is a lie, a false pursuit, which accepts as life the denial of life and leads undeterred to death. In the biblical picture, God wishes to dissuade man from precisely this knowledge of death– because death is a definitive knowledge and, once it is attained, it is too late to hold back its tragic consequences.

But the first people chose finally the way of “evil”, the way of death. The warning which God directed to them underlines

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in the biblical narrative that their choice is made with full awareness of its consequences. However, there intervened a certain extenuating circumstance: In their

decision they were influenced by the snake, the archetypical symbol of evil. In ecclesial hermeneutics, the snake here is an expression of the intervention of the *devil* or Satan, who constitutes a personal existence, spiritual, similar to the angels of God, the ministering spirits that God created before the world. The devil, though, is an existence in revolt, excluded from life, selfcondemned to perpetuate the death which he first of all freely chose.

The snake directs his challenge firstly to the— woman. And here the symbolism is not accidental. In the language of archetypes of life which the Scripture uses (the language of archetypical images which “signify” much more than concepts), the woman is the image of *nature*, in contradistinction to the man who is the symbol of the *essential principle (logos)*. This contrast of nature and essential principle, feminine and masculine, does not represent an evaluative distinction, but portrays the experience which man has of the way in which physical life is realized: Nature has a “feminine” readiness to incarnate the event of life, but it needs the seed of the essential principle in order that this incarnation be realized. Without the pairing of masculine and feminine, life cannot exist. Without the intervention of the constitutive principle, nature is only a potential, not an existential event. And without its incarnation in nature, the existential principle is just an abstract concept, without substance.

And so the temptation to pervert the realization of life, precisely because it constitutes not only a theoretical challenge but a physical possibility, is accepted initially by the woman. The words which the snake addresses to her are frankly the “logical” imitation of the “good”— unfeignedly a principle which wants to deceive nature, to falsify the possibilities of life: “What is this that God has said to you? Not to eat from any tree of paradise?” The woman reacts, “We can eat from the fruit of the trees of paradise, but from the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden God has said not to eat, lest we die.” The snake does not persist in rough reproaches, he

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gives up immediately and takes another approach: “You will not die, “ he says, “because God knows that the day that you eat from this tree, your eyes will open and you will become like gods knowing good from evil.” The biblical picture does not proceed further. The woman yields to this second temptation to equality with God and self-deification— nature agrees to attempt to have its life from itself The first people taste the fruit of autonomy and existential self-sufficiency.

k. Consequences of the fall: nakedness

And so the fall of man is complete. We speak of a fall in order to show not a simply evaluative degradation, but a change in the mode of existence, a decline from life. The

biblical narrative portrays this existential change, the consequences of the fall in unrepeatable symbols.

The sense of nakedness is the first consequence: “the eyes of the two of them were opened and they knew that they were naked and they sewed fig leaves and made aprons for themselves” (Gen 3.7). Until the time of the fall “the two were naked, both Adam and his wife, and they were not ashamed” (Gen 2.25). What, then, is the feeling of nakedness, the shame of nakedness which accompanies the fall? It is the awareness that the look of the other which falls on me is not the look of the beloved, of the one who loves me, whom I trust. It is the look of a stranger; he does not look at me with love, but sees me just as an object only of his desire and pleasure. The other’s look objectifies me, transforms me into a neutral individual. I feel him taking away my subjectivity, my deepest and unique identity. To feel naked is, the rupture of relationship, the revocation of love, the need to protect myself from the threat which the other now constitutes for me. And I defend myself with shame. I dress myself in order to save my subjectivity, to protect myself from the look of the other, not to be transformed into an object at the service of the other’s individual pleasure and self-sufficiency.

Before the fall the body was wholly an expression and manifestation of personal uniqueness, a dynamic call for communion of life, for self-transcendence and self-offering

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through love. The feeling of nakedness and the shame for nakedness begin from the moment when life ceases to have love in view, and aims only for the self-sufficiency of the individual— for individual need, for individual pleasure. Therefore after the fall, nakedness ceases to be shame and is made a movement of ultimate trust and self-offering only in human eros. “In true eros, the soul veils the body,” said Nietzsche, whose obstinate atheism did not always render useless the faculty within him to perceive the truth. And from the other side, a saint, Isaac the Syrian, completes his word: “Love does not know shame... Love is naturally unabashed and oblivious to her measure.”¹²

The feeling of nakedness and the shame of nakedness are the clearest manifestation of the change which human nature undergoes in the fall: The image of God imprinted on the nature of man is made obscene and perverted (but without it being destroyed)— the image of God which is the personal mode of existence, the mode of the Trinity, of the love of persons, of the love which alone can unify the life and will and activity of nature.

¹² *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, tr. Holy Transfiguration Monastery (Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, MA, 1984), Sermon 51, p. 245.

Personal freedom is subordinated (though never totally) to the individual need for physical self-existence, is made an instinct, an impulse, a relentless passion. And so nature is fragmented, parcelled out in individuals who live each one for himself alone, individuals treacherous to each other and opposed to the claim of life.

I. Consequences of the fall: guilt

A second expressive image for the consequences of the fall in the biblical narrative is the appearance of guilt and the attempt at individual justification. The first people hear the steps of God who is walking in the garden in the early evening and fear overcomes them, so much fear that they hasten to hide “from the face of the Lord God” among the trees of the garden. Then God calls Adam, asks him why he is afraid, and Adam

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attributes the cause of fear to his nakedness. Even before God, Adam now feels naked; he even feels the look of God as stripping him, feels it as an attack on his individuality. God is no longer his intimate, his beloved. The relationship with Him is not a bond of love and a source of life. Even God is an “other”, a second existence whose mere presence threatens to eliminate the autonomy of the individual.

“You have eaten, then, from the fruit of the tree of which I instructed you not to eat,” says God. And Adam hastens to shift the responsibility: “The woman whom you gave me, “ he answers, “she offered me the fruit and I ate.” And when God asks the woman, “why did you do it?” her own response is an evasion: “The snake deceived me and I ate” (Gen 3.8-13). The fall which has been accomplished, appears now with the individual’s self-defence, the transfer of responsibility, the effort for individual justification.

If the feeling of nakedness and shame is a manifestation of the loss of the personal character of existence, the feeling of guilt, fear, the attempt to transfer responsibility and to justify oneself individually are manifestations of anxiety over the loss of life, of true life which does not die. It is anxiety in the face of death. We have not reached such a conclusion arbitrarily, but with the standards of the ecclesial method of interpretation of the biblical images. Let us ask ourselves particularly: What does Adam in fact fear when he hides from God? From what does he wish to protect himself when he transfers the responsibility to his wife? Perhaps he is afraid of some external threat? Perhaps he senses some objective danger? But, he has no previous experience of threat and danger. Normally he should be as fearless as the infant who stretches his hand out to grab the fire.

The easy answer of the moralists is usually that Adam is afraid because he has violated the command of God and now expects punishment. But the concept of transgression

and of punishment is itself an image taken from subsequent experiences of the world after the fall. If we absolutize and see only a single interpretation of Adam's fear, we will leave gaps and create unanswerable questions: How is it possible for Adam to fear God whom he knows only as "a passionate lover" of man

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and a giver of life? If, even after the fall, the love of someone truly in love is ready to forgive and forget every fault of the beloved person, will the love of God fail to attain even these human standards? Is the love of God less than the human love of the true lover, of the affectionate father, of the patient mother? Does God not manage even what he asks from us, that we "forgive those who sin against us" as many times as they wrong us, "up to seventy seven times"?

But God is just, the moralists answer, and he must grant justice and punish transgression. But from what do they derive this "must" to which they subordinate even God? Does there exist, then, some necessity which limits the love of God, limits his freedom? If there is, then God is not God or at least he is not the God that the Church knows. A "just" God, a heavenly police constable who oversees the keeping of the laws of an obligatory— even for him— justice is just a figment of the imagination of fallen humanity, a projection of its need for a supernatural individual security within the reciprocal treachery of collective co-existence. Whatever tricks of sophistry the moralists may contrive in order to accommodate the love of God to justice, the edifices of their reasoning remain unsound. "As a grain of sand cannot counterbalance a great quantity of gold, so in comparison God's use of justice cannot counterbalance his mercy," says St Isaac the Syrian. The God of the biblical revelation and of ecclesial experience is not just: "Do not call God just, for his justice is not manifest in the things concerning you.... Where, then, is God's justice?... 'He is good,' (Christ) says, 'to the evil and to the impious.'"¹³

m. Consequences of the fall: the tragedy of creation

To this fundamental truth, which is the experience and certainty of the Church, many oppose a host of examples from the Scripture of punishments which God imposes or promises: The flood which drowned every living existence on the earth except for the ark of Noah; the fire and brimstone which destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah; the plagues of

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¹³ Ibid., Sermon 51, p. 244 and p. 250-1.

Pharaoh; David who is punished for his sin by the death of Absalom; and in the New Testament the paramount image of the future judgement and retribution, the division of the Just and unjust, the threat of hell where there will be “wailing and gnashing of teeth”. To these biblical examples, people have added every evil in nature, seeing them as the “scourge of God”, punishments revealing the wrath of God, earthquakes, floods, epidemics, etc.

But the Church separates the images of exemplary punishments from the truth which these images reveal. The fall of man is truth, and the fall does not have merely a legal content, but as we have tried to say here, it is a distortion of life in which the freedom of man brings down the whole creation— since human freedom is the unique possibility for every created thing to realize or not to realize the purpose of its existence. A distortion of life means an alienation and corruption of the laws or ways by which life functions. In all these biblical examples of man’s punishment and in all the “divine scourges”, the Church sees the consequences of the alienated function of the laws and ways of life, the consequences of the distancing of creation from “real life”, the chasm which the rebellion of man has dug between the created and the uncreated. The paedagogical language of Scripture, especially of the Old Testament which is directed to a stubborn people, interprets these consequences by the principle image comprehensible to fallen humanity: the image of the wrathful God who punishes transgression.

But God is not vengeful; it is just that he respects absolutely the freedom of man and the consequences of this freedom. He does not intervene to remove the most bitter fruits of man’s free choice, because then he would remove the truth itself of the human person and the astounding, in fact cosmic, dimensions of this truth. The love of God intervenes only to transform the free self-punishment of man into a salvific education. The culmination of this intervention is the incarnation of God himself, his acceptance in the divine-human flesh of Christ of all the consequences of man’s rebellion “to death on a cross” and the transformation of these consequences into

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a relationship and communion with the Father, that is with eternal life.

Thereafter, without the consequences of the fall being eliminated in a way subversive to human freedom, the possibility present in paradise of a choice between He and death is restored to man again, the possibility of converting death into life after the pattern of the second Adam, of Christ, or of persisting in death, in hell which is “the evidence of not loving”.

For the Church the fall of Adam, in its cosmic and age long dimensions which are shocking to the human mind, is a great tragedy revealing the infinite bounds of personal

freedom, the universal dimensions of the truth of the person— finally, revealing the “glory” of God, the unceasing majesty of His image, which he has imprinted on human nature. This revelation the Church discerns within the tragedy of the fall, a revelation which gives meaning to the whole creation. “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail until now” (Rom 8.19, 22 RSV). The universal adventure which begins in the garden of Eden is not a failure of God’s work. This world of natural catastrophes, of wars, of plagues, of injustice, of crimes, the world full of the groaning of innocent victims, the cries of battered children, literally drunk with blood and tears, this world is nevertheless not a triumph of justice, but it is in the eyes of the faithful a triumph of freedom which wins inch by inch and step by step the journey to deification led by the hand by the love of God. “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed among us... because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom 8.18,21 RSV). A deification of man and of the world which would not be an event of freedom, this is what the failure of God’s work would be. An unfree deification is something as contradictory as a concept of an unfree God, a paradox, life without reason or sense.

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n. Consequences of the fall: anxiety before death

Let us return again now to the fear which made Adam hide from God after the fall. We can say that this fear is not the child of a legal guilt. It is not an expectation of punishment. It is the loss of that “openness to God” of which the Scripture speaks (1 Jn. 3.21), the rupture of the relationship with him, the awareness of responsibility for realizing life separated from God, the first experience of existential loneliness which is a first taste of mortality. Adam’s fear is agony before death.

By very different roads, contemporary psychoanalytic experience is forming the view that the first experience of guilt and anxiety is born in man with the event of his birth, being cut off from the maternal body. If this view is confirmed, then it will not be very far from the biblical image of that first fear of Adam: The first feeling of “existing as an individual”, even if unconscious, is also the first feeling of mortality, a first experience of a very profound loneliness, that is, the individual’s inability to draw life from somewhere other than himself. Within man’s nature itself it appears that there exists an instinctive distinction between the way of life and the way of death— a distinction between “real life”, which is communicated and shared, and the mortal individualization of existence. If this is true, then the primitive fear of Adam is not only an image and symbol but an actuality

which marks man in the depths of his soul from the first moment of his coming into the world.

The dialogue of God with the first people in Eden ends with the announcement and prophetic description by God of the remaining consequences of the fall. Let us enumerate them:

An unbridgeable hostility is fixed between the woman and the snake, between human nature and the devil. The hostility will reach a climax in the person of some descendant of the woman who will crush the serpent's head, the power of the devil, while the snake will hardly succeed in bruising his "heel". This descendant of Eve is, for the Church, Christ and this first prediction of his victory over the devil is the Scripture's proto-gospel, the first joyful message of man's salvation.

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The sorrows and the groaning of woman are multiplied; she becomes a sensitive vessel and easily given to suffering. She does not cease to be the bearer of life, but life now is the perpetuation of nature, not of the person. The woman gives birth to her children, then, with much pain because each birth is also a further fragmentation of her body, a fragmentation of nature, an addition of autonomous mortal individuals. Her relationship with her husband, the eros which reveals the triadic Original of life, is transformed into a rupture with her husband— "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Gen 3.16 RSV).

But the approach of the man to life, his relationship with the earth, with nature, with his nourishment and life will be a ground of pain and ceaseless affliction. The relationship of man with material nature of the world cannot be a personal relationship, a relationship with the principle of God's love which constitutes the world. The world becomes a neutral object which resists man's effort to subordinate it to the need and desire for his individual survival. The earth "brings forth thorns and thistles" and man earns his bread "by the sweat of his brow", until he himself returns to the impersonal neutrality of the objectified earth for his body to be dissolved in the ground, because "you are dust, and to the dust you shall return" (Gen 3.19 RSV).

o. Consequences of the fall: the "coats of skin"

The narrative of the fall of man in the Holy Scripture ends with his dismissal from the garden of pleasure, his exclusion from the "tree of life", from the possibility of immortality. This tragic result is crowned with an image which reveals the love of God, of the love which succeeds in eliminating the decisive character of the fall, to limit the evil which has been invoked, to relativize the irremediable. It is the image of the "coats of skin" which

has especially drawn the attention of Christian interpreters: “And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them” (Gen 3.21).

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For ecclesial hermeneutics, the coats of skins with which God clothes the first people, symbolize the biological hypostasis which seals the personal otherness of man. Before the fall, every energy of the biological-earthly nature of man exists (is realized and manifested) only as a revelation of the divine image: it constitutes personal otherness, life as loving communion and relationship. After the fall, the hypostasis of the human subject is biological, and the energies of nature (the psychosomatic energies) at the service of life as simply individual survival. Man does not cease to be a person, an image of God; it is only that this image is clothed now with the “coat of skin” of absurdity, corruption and mortality.

But this clothing with corruption and death proves to be a very great philanthropy of God and providence of His love. By dressing the human person with a biological hypostasis, God tolerates the consequence of the fall: The physical (psychosomatic) energies do not hypostasize the personal otherness of life as love, but the mortal individuality and its ephemeral life. By permitting even death as a consequence of this clothing, God limits man precisely to his biological individuality, placing a limit and end to sin, the failure of life and corruption, “lest evil become immortal”.

And so death removes not man himself but the corruption which surround him. It does not touch the human person whom God called into being: it removes and abolishes the false hypostasis of life, the biological individuality which man has put on with the fall. Death, a result of sin, is turned against the phenomenological triumph of sin—autonomous biological individuality— and abolishes it. Death annuls the covering of corruption, freeing the existential possibilities of the human person.

The road, then, remains open after the fall for the person of man to become once more an hypostasis of life, no longer of a biological life, corruptible and temporary, but of an incorruptible and immortal life. This new existential possibility God inaugurates himself with his incarnation, becoming the beginning of salvation and renewal of the human race.