

# THE MYSTERY OF PERSON AND HUMAN ADVENTURE

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Having the privilege to live in a multicultural and democratic country in which every citizen is, by definition, entitled to express freely the tradition of his or her origin, we deem it a moral postulate to share with our fellow Australians the most precious and characteristic cultural values that Greek antiquity and Orthodox Faith have minted as a legacy for all humanity.

If this is one of our basic duties in everyday life, we are more obliged to do so in the framework of a series of cultural festivities under the title "Greek Orthodox Cultural Forum", which we have organised this year in order to celebrate the 70th Anniversary of our Church in the Antipodes, originally established in 1924 as a Diocese under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and later, in 1959, promoted, again by the Mother Church, to an Archdiocese.

The additional fact that these celebrations coincide with the 20th Anniversary of the enthronement of my humble person as Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia, provides me a unique opportunity not only to be personally involved in such a significant symposium, but also to express, in the form of this inaugural festival lecture, my deepest convictions as to what could be the most distinguished *diakonia* that my blessed flock should render to a pioneer country and society like Australia. The responsibility of our Church and community towards our spiritual heritage which we feel the need to share in a brotherly way with all people of goodwill, makes it necessary to develop the Greek Orthodox Cultural Forum as an institution which should be convened regularly from now on, perhaps every three years.

It is understandable that the main theme of our Forum "Person in Ancient Greek Literature and Christian Tradition" which is included in the programme of the Australian Government for the major event called the Global Cultural Diversity Conference, becomes even more important by the mere fact that, while all other

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cultural conferences aim to present and evaluate the products of the human person in science, arts or institutions of any kind, our Forum has the ambition to draw attention to the nature and sacredness of the person in itself.

We strongly believe that the mutual respect and solidarity, which our government tries to foster through an official common celebration of the cultural diversity that the various ethnic groups represent in this country as equal citizens, will receive undoubtedly the most solid basis and the most lasting inspiration if we are all reminded of the sacredness of the human person created “in the image and likeness” of God. The integration of us all into a deeply reconciled and truly civilised modern society could not appeal to a higher or more binding authority than the word of God as revealed and interpreted in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In undertaking the highly responsible task of introducing to the Australian cultural scene at large the most characteristic values of the Greek Orthodox tradition and spirituality, we have to start by making the following basic observation: the scholarly field called “humanities” in academic language is, undoubtedly, the area *par excellence* in which ancient Greek thought and Christian dogma coincide in the most creative manner.

If other nations became famous because of their inventions and various achievements in science and technology, in law, government, arts and even philosophy, the ancient Greeks will remain forever the inspired teachers of human morality as the quintessence of an individual’s identity. Even by underlining “morality” as the heart of man’s spiritual physiognomy, we already tackle the vital nerve of our theme which we formulated above as “The Mystery of Person and Human Adventure”.<sup>1</sup>

The key terms “mystery” and “adventure” make it already clear that we are going to contemplate the deepest “essence” of the human person in relation to all kinds of human “energies”<sup>2</sup>, whether in an active or passive manner. These energies - being experiences in the form of abstract thoughts, wishes, feelings or concrete actions - must be called collectively “adventure” in the context of our search here, for two very substantial reasons: Firstly, because human experience has always been a struggle against manifold adversities either from blind physical forces or from malicious feelings and attitudes of ourselves or other human beings.

And, secondly, because the uncertain character of all goods and circumstances in this world can always surprise even a vigilant conscience with the most unexpected results. Out of these two concrete reasons, it is quite clear that, in characterising as “adventure” any kind of human experience (thought, feeling or activity) we simply seek to emphasise the responsible (i.e. the moral) character of every human endeavour.

As is known, it is precisely this notion of responsibility which distinguishes the human individual as “person” from all other members of the animal world. But, at the same time, we must remember that the notion of responsibility is deeply correlated with the notion of “freedom”. So, we can say that freedom and responsibility are the two sides of the same coin which we call “person”. Needless to say, the degree of the donated or achieved freedom defines also the degree of the relevant responsibility.

“Person” and “personalism”, however, signify a level in anthropology which, as we shall see further on, is entirely unthinkable before or without the Christian dogma of the Holy Trinity in the global history of civilisation. In antiquity there was an entirely different concept of the individuality of the human being.<sup>3</sup>

By stating this, we declare the Trinitarian dogma of the Church as being the only solid basis on which, by way of analogy, we shall be able to formulate in our days an elementary form of Christian Personalism. This means, in other words, that all major concepts of Trinitarian theology having been expressed through key terms such as “mystery”, “person”, “essence”, “energy”, “communion”, “interpenetration” and so on, will have to be implemented in our task to describe the sacredness and uniqueness of each human person as the visible image of God. Under the above basic presuppositions, we shall try now to elaborate on our theme in the following paragraphs: (a) the Holy Trinity as the source and model for the structure and function of the human person; (b) the “human condition” as “mixture of grandeur and misery”; (c) moral consequences of observations made in (a) and (b) for human relations.

### **The Holy Trinity as the source and model for the structure and function of the human person.**

Although all religious traditions accept the main truths of the Old Testament’s revelation should be able to share with Christians the foundations of anthropology

deriving from the basic faith that man was created in God's image and likeness, it seems that neither Judaism nor other monotheistic religions are in a position to do so. The main reason for this is the mere fact that the Trinitarian dogma, while sufficiently rooted in the Old Testament, still remains the specific difference between Christendom and all other religions or philosophical systems.

Thus, the Trinitarian God as confessed and proclaimed by the Christian Church is a scandal not only for philosophers but also for people of faith. Christian anthropology might appear equally scandalous for those who are not ready to accept God as the mystery of "all-consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29), but simply as a harmless principle of a neutral creation or even as an abstract concept. This is a clear indication that any misunderstanding of the Church doctrine concerning the Trinitarian God will necessarily have fatal consequences also for our understanding of man as the image of God. However, this is not the place to present, even in the form of a summary, the Trinitarian doctrine. Rather, we should remember the most characteristic elements of it which, at the same time, define the vulnerable area in which the major Trinitarian heresies have already arisen in the past and could arise again at any time.

The elementary truth expressed by the Trinitarian dogma is that God is one in essence but three in Persons. Such a Trinity is not a multitude of beings in the sense of polytheism. Rather it expresses three entirely different ways of God's undivided and identical life by which the fullness of God's love is manifested. In such an understanding of the "nature" and "life" of God, there is no place for subordination between the three divine Persons yet this does not lead to three parallel and independent lives because the source of this communion remains always only one - the Father.

Even from such a short presentation of the Trinitarian mystery, it becomes apparent that variety and identity no longer signify a "contra-diction" as is the case in logical thought. Variety and identity or, in other words, plurality and unity, when understood not as abstract ideas but as conditions full of life and energy, can be reconciled on a deeper level and this is precisely the mystery of love and communion which characterises the beatitude of life that the Persons of the Holy Trinity share with each other eternally.

In the Trinitarian mystery, life, love, and communion presuppose freedom as a limitless dynamism of each of the three divine Persons towards the other two,

so that instead of a separation, an eternal interpenetration renews ceaselessly the common divine beatitude. This is why life as “communion in love” is a mystery which cannot be described or explained in logical categories, but rather approached only by experience.

Given this mystery of love, it is no wonder that St John the Evangelist did not use another term such as “omnipotence”, or “omniscience” or “holiness” to adequately express in a single word God’s inaccessible essence, but merely “love” (1 John 4:8). Though we know how much this term “love” has been abused and misunderstood in human relations, particularly in modern times, we have to admit that this is the key notion by which we should approach the mystery of the divine beatitude.

Love in the life of the divine Trinity is not simply a kind of feeling or quality. It is rather the manifestation of the fullness and truth of the divine essence. More concretely, it is the unpredictable, that is, the limitless moral power which not only expresses but even constitutes the divine essence. By stating this, we have to realise that, in God, essence is not the presupposition of certain qualities but, on the contrary, essence is the result and realisation of an absolutely free and divine will.

The leading Byzantine theologian of the 14th century, St Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonika, stated quite precisely that, in God, it is not the person which results from essence but essence which comes from person. Such an “existential” statement which no doubt would surprise or even provoke every philosophical mind constitutes, so to say, the “Copernican revolution” in all theology of East and West. If we are not prepared to accept this inaugural premise of Byzantine theological thought, we would never be able to understand the differences between Orthodoxy and heretical deviations on the Trinitarian doctrine.

From all the above, it is clearly indicated that love substantiates the divine being as free sharing in beatitude. Sharing in “beatitude” does not mean participating to a certain degree in a static common good, because this would undoubtedly lead to a concept of subordination or static “classification” of the three divine Persons into different levels of being. The proper understanding of the communion in love in which all three Persons enjoy the fullness of the divine essence consists in the fact that each divine Person is equally fully and truly God and not only a part or an individual aspect of God’s life.

The true reason for the uniqueness and absolute unity of the divine life

which holds together all three Persons is not the common essence, but very significantly the common love which has only one source - the Father. Perhaps this is the deeper reason for which the incarnate Son of God asked all physical sons and daughters who would receive Him not to call anyone "father" on earth, since we have only one Father in heaven (Mt. 23:9). Though the Father is the only root and the absolute source of the divine life, the Son and the Spirit do not present in Trinitarian theology different expressions or qualities of the Father, but rather they constitute true Persons manifesting the variety of relations within the one divine essence.

In such an interpenetration which proves all three divine Persons as being equal in honour and sacredness, one should not forget the individual features that each one of the three divine Persons holds as the "existential" condition of an individual difference in the sense of integrity as full Person. For example, the unique feature of the Father to beget the Son and to send the Spirit constitutes at the same time the unique features for the Son to be the only begotten of the Father and of the Spirit to be the only one who proceeds only from the Father. In this understanding of communion, the difference between the three Persons does not signify an alienation of the three Persons from each other but rather the richness and variety of love in various relations within the one undivided essence. Because the fullness and "integrity" of each divine Person is established in personal sharing of the common essence in absolute degree, precisely for this reason such a communion means true love and real beatitude.

However, one should always keep in mind that the uniqueness and "seniority" of the Father, which has nothing to do with the categories of time or value, but rather expresses the personal being of the Father as the causal source of the other two Persons, creates within the Holy Trinity, the principle of free obedience to the one divine will which keeps the harmony and unity of the one divine essence.

In order to clarify this admittedly anthropomorphic relation between the Persons of the Holy Trinity, we should underline particularly the fact that free obedience in the inner life of the Holy Trinity does not in any way mean that the one who obeys is degraded in comparison to the one to whom obedience is rendered. For, freely adjusting or subduing one's will to the will of another does not necessarily mean lower standing of the one to the other. On the contrary, such an expression of unreserved confidence shows that love in the divine essence is an

expression of fullness and power and not of need or weakness.

Thus, the overwhelming beauty and the utmost satisfaction in interpersonal relations, as pre-established in the communion of the Holy Trinity, is reached by giving and not by receiving. This is the reason why obedience is the source and manifestation of fullness, and by no means an indication of need or poverty. This entirely “new order” which expresses the selfless and “ecstatic” character of divine love as revealed in the life of the Holy Trinity was proclaimed also in the teaching of the incarnate Son of God as He stated that “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

Only in such a deeply doxological interpenetration within the inner life of the Holy Trinity are we enabled to see the entire process of the divine revelation as a continuous enlightenment and education of the human being to experience in existential life the gifts that God had provided by creating man in His image and likeness. Therefore, the central question which must now be clarified is how we should understand the human nature as created in the “image and likeness of God”. If God cannot be understood as a, so to say, “monolithic” entity but as Holy Trinity in the sense we tried to explain above, then it has to be asked to what extent and in what manner the mystery of identity and communion is reflected in human nature and life.

There is no doubt that human nature in its entirety constitutes the common basis on which an endless variety of human persons develops the various forms of communion. Sharing with each other all goods of the entire creation and commonly enjoying all possible achievements of human civilisation and culture we realise that we are consciously or subconsciously related to each other in biological, social, cultural, or even sacramental ways. Thus we could say that roughly both aspects of the divine life of the Holy Trinity, that is the unity of essence and the plurality of Persons is undoubtedly given in the structure and function of human nature. On the other hand, bearing in mind the clarification of St Gregory Palamas that, in God, it is not the essence which defines the person but rather the opposite, that is the free will of person which forms the essence, we have now to face the most critical question how this relation could be identified also in human nature and life, even as a remote analogy. We might approach this indeed most crucial question of Christian anthropology in a more or less promising way if we consider exactly on this point

the importance of the factor of freedom for the personal identity of each human being.

If moral freedom and responsibility is, in the final analysis, what distinguishes the human being from all other species in the animal kingdom, then it is clear that also in the created nature of man the above mentioned principle of Palamas remains valid in so far as the responsible life and behaviour defines categorically the true entity of the human being.

A further question which has to be asked in this context is how the individual human person relates to the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. Can we say that, since man is created in the image and likeness of God, all three divine Persons influence equally the formation and life of the human being?

According to the faith of the Church the answer to this should be that, although all energies of the Holy Trinity towards the entire creation are undivided, there is a distinction between the so-called “economies” of each of the divine Persons of the Holy Trinity. This distinction makes it possible for human beings, in the various stages of their development to enjoy basically the gifts and blessings of all three Persons of the Holy Trinity, but at the same time to have a more distinct relation to the Son, since only the Son became man in order to give the example of the truly human according to the will of God. However, the distinct and specific relation of the human being to the Son, cannot be seen in its deeply soteriological consequences if one ignores the event of Christ as the unique case of a theandric union.

The experience of the theandric being, which may sound like a “mythical monster” to philosophical ears, is for those faithful to divine revelation the most convincing witness of God’s love towards His image, i.e. the human being. The presence and action of the God-man, who became a historical reality through the incarnation of the Divine Logos, was always the example which God had provided in order to communicate with His created image. The pre-existing Logos, as Son of the living God, presents, before all creation, the characteristic model for the final stage of the human being which is no less than *theosis*, that is, deification by grace.

Though this providential perspective of the human being has been misunderstood almost until to the present day by the great majority of the non-Orthodox Christians, it always remains the most characteristic feature of the Orthodox faith which also, on this point, preserves the pure doctrine and belief of undivided



Christendom of the first millenium. It is not only St. Athanasius the Great, but also all great theologians of the formative period of Christian theology who clearly interpreted the deification of humanity as the real purpose and reason for the divine incarnation. And yet this interpretation was not a theological innovation of the Patristic era. It was rather the most passionate doctrine of St. Paul who declares in his letters, especially in the letter to the Ephesians, that the final dimensions of the human being created in the "image and likeness of God" are given in Christ Himself, even before all creation.

Here is not the place of course to present in detail the Biblical material which substantiates this Pauline anthropology, but we can say, without any hesitation, that this view concerning the nature and destiny of the human being is a major truth of divine revelation in all particular writings of the Old and New Testament. But, at the same time, it must be said that in order to recognise the continuity of such a doctrine throughout all books of divine revelation, one should read them not as an isolated individual scholar, but in the sense of what was called *consensus patrum* in the traditional language of the Church or in the sense of true "contextualisation" which is the most modern postulate of theology in our times. After all this, let us now see in a brief epitome how the human being faces in history the providential challenge of which we have already spoken.

### **The "human condition" as "mixture of grandeur and misery"**

"Human condition" as a technical term, was created, as known, in French literature of our century, in order to describe the limits within which the individual is placed not only in advance by nature but also, and perhaps primarily, by the complications of psychological, social and other similar conditions. This is, however, the view of a secular analysis which remains in a more or less one-sided, if not superficial, evaluation of the problem. Needless to say, such an evaluation interprets the human limitations as being fatal and, for this reason, invincible.

Our theological approach, on the contrary, which is dictated by what we have said up to now, must proceed deeper in so far as we have to study the problem mainly from its strictly ontological point of view. In so doing, we must of course keep in mind that Christian ontology in general has a radically different foundation from that of the philosophical one, and such a difference is quite eloquently spelt

out in the Judeo-Christian doctrine about the creation of the entire universe “out of nothing”.

For the human being, the privilege of having been created in “the image and likeness of God” is not only a blessing. At the same time, this providentially ontological condition is immensely obliging and, precisely for this reason, it becomes a real trial. The ancient Greek postulate “become what you are” (Pindar), though indicating perhaps a similar moral sensitivity towards expectations deriving from the very nature of the human being, remains still a far less demanding moral obligation. As is obvious the moral task in the ancient Greek tradition is a merely anthropocentric struggle without a concrete example for orientation, while the theandric person of our Lord provides an absolutely theocentric ideal for Christian ethics.

In such a comparison, it becomes more evident that the obligation of the Christian faithful to act always according to the inspiration and the limitless potential given to the human person as “image of God” while still being under the pressure of the two normative components of space and time, undoubtedly signifies the most unheard of “contradiction” in the moral task of the person. In other words, for humans it is a contradiction in itself to have been created in the image of the uncreated and limitless God and, at the same time, to realise that time and space would never allow them to turn fully the donated image into a responsibly experienced likeness. Even “the man on the street” - and not only philosophers and moralists - has always recognised the permanent distance from his/her own ideals when they admit in all modesty that “nobody is perfect”.

There is no doubt that the deficiency expressed by such a popular saying describes generally the individual situation of everyone without referring to one’s relations with other human beings. If the interpersonal relations are taken also into consideration, then it is quite clear that the admitted individual deficiency appears to be of an even more serious and complex character.

It is not a secret that human beings, in communicating with each other, usually discover the nucleus of the original sin - another elementary truth of the divine revelation - in basically two forms of egocentricity. Firstly as jealousy and, secondly, as active rivalry and antagonism.

People of today do not really need any proof that all these observations are valid in every section of modern life. Even in the noble field of the arts,

for example, audacity, aggression and violence express qualities which are quite often confused with originality. More tragic seems to be the situation in the sacred field of religion in general where bigotry and all other forms of fanaticism betray again the inefficiency of human nature to follow adequately the spiritual dimensions of the divine.

In this relation, one could perhaps say that even the classical definition of the religious experience in general given by the German scholar Rudolf Otto from a certain point of view does not seem to do justice to the experience of the Trinitarian mystery. In defining the divine as *mysterium tremendum* and at the same time as *mysterium fascinosum*, Rudolf Otto obviously avoids the ineffable character of the Trinitarian mystery, being the absolute communion in love. "Fear" and "fascination" can easily lead the faithful to admiration and even to adoration but by no means to communion.

If the Holy Trinity remains always for the human person the utmost target of moral life as the eternal example of communion in love, then we should admit that the main difficulty in responding to such a model is given primarily not so much in the weakness and fragility of our created common nature, but rather in the constantly ambivalent use of personal freedom. For this reason, "prayer" has such a central place in Christian life. When praying, we do not ask for another nature, but rather for a pure mind in order to be able to direct all our steps according to the will of God. When St. Paul speaks of "prayer without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:17) he is not giving just an admonition among many others. He is rather characterising the deepest need of the entire Christian life as a permanent invocation (*epiklesis*) of the Holy Spirit.

Even the slightest movement or gesture in Christian life has to be of an epikletic character in order to be safe. The Orthodox monks of Mt. Athos do not dare to drink even a single glass of water without invoking the Holy Spirit while making the sign of the cross. All of this of course sounds for the people of today quite unreal, if not naive, but for those who accept revealed truth as God's creative word there is no place for any secular alternative. Precisely for this reason, the Church has correctly been characterised as an entirely new creation of the word of God: *creatura verbi*.

However, living in a pluralistic modern society, we have to record the main features of its structure and try to formulate accordingly the Christian message.

For this reason, the first and foremost observation we have to make is that the ideals and principles according to which human morality is developed as individual experience, do not always express the same set of values even within the same religious, cultural or ideological tradition. Today more than ever we are enabled to realise that the elements which dictate the unique individuality of every human being in history are of such a limitless variety that they really prove the human being to be at every moment, strictly speaking, “unpredictable”.

We always try of course, to explain the concrete differences in moral behaviour as being the results of a variety of factors, such as gender, biological heredity, as well as social, national, cultural and even geographical conditioning but, in the final analysis, we have to accept that the human person, in the most critical moments of a moral decision, can always transcend these influences and reach the unexpected. Precisely on this point we recognise the miraculous strength and the true moral physiognomy of person.

Yet the mentioned unpredictability can by no means be understood as absolute freedom. All human freedom is always bound by the two basic conditions of the created being, that is space and time as we already said. Ontologically related to these conditions, human freedom is then by definition relative.

Given all the above components of human life which render it to be, in every single moment, a pure ambivalence insofar as it jeopardises the sacredness of God’s image due to conscious or subconscious reasons, a believer like Blaise Pascal would not hesitate to characterise the human being as indeed a “mixture of grandeur and misery” as he did. The Apostle Paul describes the fragility of the human nature and condition in a more concrete and also in a more spiritual way when he presents the moral dilemma with the following words:

For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. (Rom 7: 14-19)

As we see from this Biblical passage, the Apostle Paul, in contrast to

Pascal, expresses perhaps a deeper respect towards the mystery of the human person. For, while Pascal gives a general definition embracing all humanity in a more or less abstract and theoretical way, the Apostle confesses unreservedly the same tragic situation as he experienced it in his own flesh. We certainly do not need to make any other comments in order to characterise the moral uncertainty and ambivalence of human nature. It is enough to remember that its perspectives and limitations are ontologically the same for all of us - real equal opportunities - and it is precisely this common lot which dictates some basic moral obligations we have towards each other.

### **Moral consequences of the above observations for human relations**

Bearing in mind that the "image of God" we carry in our deepest nature is a limitless charisma which neither we nor our fellow human beings will ever be able to develop entirely into concrete experience since we are placed within all possible limitations of space and time, we have to acknowledge, as our first moral obligation to each other, a profound and sincere sympathy. But the Greek word "sympathy" does not mean just a vague social benevolence or, even worse, tolerance. Sympathy literally means a co-suffering, that is a deep existential solidarity before the common destiny.

The relativity of all our feelings, thoughts and actions betrays on the one hand how closely related we are to each other by definition. On the other hand, it makes it clear that by all our thoughts, feelings and actions, we never express exhaustively the image of God with which our nature has been endowed. For this reason, we can never introduce ourselves to each other as an integral whole. We never know each other entirely. Even in the case of a husband and wife, in which the two become one flesh, the personal distance from each other will always remain a painful experience which no love would be able to overcome.

Regardless of whatever endeavours we may have recorded in all possible fields with our most ambitious plans during a whole lifetime, the experience of an always open deficit will be our common lot. Thus we realise that, for the human being, not only the absolute is inaccessible, but also the fullness of what we may have wished.

Out of such an understanding of the human condition, we come naturally to a contradictory feeling: on the one hand, we feel a silent humiliation for not being

able to give full expression to all the powers we implicitly carry in our deepest nature as God's image and, on the other hand, we draw a kind of consolation that our fellow human beings must feel the same way.

The basic moral and most obvious consequence of all the above for our personal relations is that we can never make a definite judgement concerning any person, be it ourselves or our fellow human beings. Whatever our experience may be of anyone's moral behaviour - including our own - up until the present, we should always be ready to be surprised even at the very next moment. A saint could at any moment become a sinner, and a sinner can always become a saint. "To be Orthodox means to always walk on a tightrope".

Precisely this unpredictable character of the human condition calls us to ceaseless vigilance and this is the message of the Apostle Paul when he states "He who believes he stands should be careful that he does not fall" (1 Cor 10:12). However, the above observations should by no means be interpreted in the spirit of agnosticism or even in the sense of moral indifference. On the contrary, in the final analysis, such an evaluation of the human condition, which always keeps open all possible developments in human life, is an extremely optimistic view, a truly genuine affirmation, of the moral liberty of every person, appreciated as a God-given privilege and right.

If we want to speak more concretely, we must say that all human words, thoughts and deeds can be judged, one by one, as good or bad, but they are never sufficient to give the full image of the human person. For example, if a man is caught lying, we shall call his action a lie but we never have the right to call him a liar. For, regardless of how often this person has lied, he has not exhausted his life only in lies. We can go so far as to say that, even if this was the case, no one can exclude the possibility that from the very next moment onwards, he could start saying the truth.

In appreciation of the liberty of the human person as the image of God, one should feel solidarity with all other human beings as communion. The more we experience our solidarity as a communion in love, the more we approach the Trinitarian mystery by turning the image into likeness. And yet this likeness to which we are called by definition will never reach the quality or identity of the communion between the Persons of the Holy Trinity, not only because we are not of divine nature, but also because the sinful use of our freedom does not lead us to a

common beatitude and essence, but it separates us from one another and, at the same time, from God. Despite the tragic gap in us between “image” and “likeness”, the word of God is, at least for Christians, quite clear and imperative: “Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

This solidarity, which involves not only the relations between human persons but also the inter-relationship of all of God’s creation, is expressed so movingly in the following often-quoted passage of St Isaak the Syrian:

What is a charitable heart? It is a heart which is burning with charity for the whole creation, for men, for the birds, for the beasts, for the demons - for all creatures. He who has such a heart cannot see or call to mind a creature without his eyes becoming filled with tears by reason of the immense compassion which seizes his heart; a heart which is softened and can no longer bear to see or learn from others of any suffering, even the smallest pain, being inflicted upon a creature. This is why such a man never ceases to pray also for the animals, for the enemies of Truth, and for those who do him evil, that they may be preserved and purified. He will pray even for the reptiles, moved by the infinite pity which reigns in the hearts of those who are becoming united to God.<sup>4</sup>

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#### NOTES:

1. From the relevant theological bibliography of Greek Orthodox writers, I would think that the works of Prof. Christos Yannaras and Prof. John Zizioulas (now Metropolitan of Pergamon) are the ones which present personalism beyond the strictly theological framework and, as such, are closer to the way we try to study “mystery” and “adventure” of the human person.
2. It is quite clear that we apply here the basic distinction that Christian theology had made between essence and energy already in the text of the New Testament, then by the Cappadocian Fathers and, in an even more systematic way, by St Gregory Palamas.
3. This entirely different concept of human individuality in pre-Christian literature and thought has been underlined in a very convincing way by the lecture given by Dr Vrasidas Karalis, under the title “The Ocean of Human Glance in Ancient Greek Literature” in the framework of our first Greek Orthodox Cultural Forum.
4. In Lossky, V., *The Mystical theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church*, New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1976, p.111