

Man – icon of divine beauty

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ABSTRACT

The concept of beauty has theological grounds, because man himself is considered image of God's Son. The Orthodoxy practiced since the beginnings to the contemporary times an all-inclusive spirituality: the spiritual beauty of the spiritualized person can be seen in the way of living, manifesting itself fully from physical beauty to the beauty of the inter-human relations, of the relation man-creation and of the relation man-Divinity.

Keywords: God; creation; beauty; relation; world; perfection;

Introduction

Taking an attentive look around us, we can make a painful remark: modern civilization has shipwrecked in ugliness; the architectonic over-dimensioning of the great metropolitan cities suggests the Babylon and the infernal, favour a way of living marked by violence, immorality, excessive consumption and pleasure, eroticism and sodomy represent specific elements of the secularized contemporary society. And when this post-modern civilization cultivates “**beauty**”, this beauty is the fruit of a pseudo-beauty, because *this civilization has moved man's focus from God and faith to the autonomous reason and science*, and so beauty has become an ordinary merchandise of the consumption society.

Far from God, man got to ignore the ineffable value and the authentic sense of the world, trying to impose on it, via the technique, an artificial and crooked rationality that corresponds to his evident intention of building, by his own powers, an earthly paradise. In this sense, as Christos Yannaras observes: “*what we call “progress” and “development” has proven to be a violation and a destruction of nature, constituting a permanent threat of death for man as well*”[1]. The ecological crisis caused by the irrational human behavior can find no solution except by the transfiguration of this perspective by the divine Revelation, which reveals the rationality and the internal value of the world, its divine sense.

The Orthodox Theology, relying on the Holy Scripture and the Holy Fathers, shows the special meaning that the creation, the world, possesses intrinsically, because it does not reduce in a dualistic manner grace and matter, on the contrary, in the matter pulses grace, inviting spiritual beings to a meeting: God and man. Nature, the creation is envisioned as the gift of God for man so that, by seeing it, man may lift his thoughts to its Creator and endeavor to commune with Him. The world is the gift of God for the man whom He loved since the beginning and to whom He freely entrusted the earthly paradise, as an expression and model of the love of God.

The world, in its deep and simple meaning, has another sense, which man loses simultaneously to his individualization because of his selfishness and because of the

consequences of the lack of communion vertically and implicitly horizontally. The visible world, whose protector is man, carries a message that God transmits to man, namely that God has made Himself a man for us so that we may be deified. In the world is present God Himself, looking for man, giving man the opportunity to meet Him so that nature may partake of eternity.

1. Man – icon of divine beauty

Thus, the conception of beauty has a theological fundament, because man himself is considered image of God's Son. The Orthodoxy practiced since the beginnings up to the contemporary times a holistic spirituality: the spiritual beauty of the pneumatized person is visible in the respective person's way of living manifesting itself fully, from physical beauty up to the beauty of the inter-human relations, the beauty of the relation man-creation, and the beauty of the relation man-Divinity.

Man has always been preoccupied to give a sense to his inner tendency towards beauty; for this reason, since times out of mind, the search for beauty was at the same time a matter of religious faith and philosophic reflection. Beauty has been since the beginnings part and parcel of man's life. Everything around man bears the mark of beauty: man himself, his existence, the cosmos, and, consequently, logically, God as well.

In the patristic teaching, it has been affirmed that man sums up or reproduces in himself the whole universe, thus his name of microcosm. Leaving aside any controversy on this topic and limiting ourselves only to the object of the present research, we can say that while God's beauty is reflected in the world's beauty, this is valid for man as well, because man is beautiful just as his Creator, both spiritually and physically. For this reason, doubtlessly, Saint Athanasius speaks about "*God's artistic work in men*" [2].

The idea that man is "*priest of the creation*" is understood by some in the frames of reason. Man's duty is "*to interpret the book of nature, to understand the universe in its wonderful structure and harmony and give it a rational articulation. Theology and physics need to pursue, each of them in turn, its objective aim, yet their work, nevertheless, comes in touch, because both of them function via the rational structures of space and time*" [3].

Such a theory on the distinction specific of man and on his role in the creation in the frames of reason, contributed very much to the creation of the ecological problem, because reason can be used in both directions: to constitute a means of referring the creation to the Creator in a doxological disposition (this is the intention of the idea of "priest of the creation"), but also as argument for the submission of nature to man, a fact that is the source of the ecological problem.

Concerning the distinct identity of man in relation to the creation, innumerable affirmations have existed in the world outside theology as well. Thus, among the philosophers of our epoch, a common opinion emerged, namely that the human being is fundamentally different from the animals, especially by the following fact: while the animal, faced with the world it lives in, develops all its "rational" possibilities to adapt to it, the human being wishes to create his own world. The animal discovers the laws of nature sometimes much more successfully than the human beings. An animal may even invent ways of meeting the problem the environment faces it with, surprising us, in this sense, by its cunningness.

All these can be done by man as well, even to a high extent, as it has been confirmed by modern technology, yet only the human being can create a world of his own by civilization, history. "*Man, for example, can reproduce a tree, by the art of painting, as his own creation. He can create events, institutions not just as means of survival and welfare,*

as birds build their nest and bees their beehive, but as milestones, as points of reference for his identity. When someone says, for instance, "I am English", he does not have in view only the simple fact that he is living in a certain geographic region, but understands much more than this. He understands something that has to do with his identity and creativity, with the development of some identity features different from those given by the environment. It is possible for all these to be researchable by reason." [4]

Man, by his very high degree of reason possessed by comparison to animals, creates civilization, history, art. Yet against this thesis one can say many things, because the creation of civilization imposes a much more radical difference between man and animal, not just the difference of degree of reason.

Pursuing to create his world, or just to impose his will, he is bothered by the already existing world. This is a thing that all the artists lived. Michelangelo used to exclaim: when will I get to finish with this marble, to be able to start my work? And Picasso comes to say similar things about figures, shapes and colours. Actually, the creator of the world in Plato's *Timaios*, according to the model of the artist, suffers because he has to create out of pre-existing space and matter, which impose their limitations on him. [5]

No creator is ever content with what he has been given. If he submits himself to the "given" he feels uneasy and awkward, which happens with all the creators of all the times. If he does not submit himself to this given he will have to destroy it to create out of nothing. Yet because the creation out of nothing is a privilege of the uncreated Creator, all the attempts of man to create his world in art, in history, or in any other zone of civilization, has led him to disappointment and impasse. Certainly, in history there have been forms of human "creativity" that have been copies of the world itself. Yet, such things could hardly be called art. Man is like the animals in any fact incumbent his submission to what has been given to him. Everything that is free from such submission is a sign of man's presence. This can lead very far away, up to the destruction by man of what has been given to him. "No animal could resist the rationality inherent to his nature. Man can do this, and by doing it he shows that his distinctive feature is not rationality, but something else: freedom." [6]

"Man is creation by definition. This means that the world has been given to him. The fact that in the biblical narrative of the creation man appears at the end of the creation makes man twice limited: man is given not just the world, but also God the Creator. He can choose what he likes, yet he cannot ignore the reality of 'the given'." [7]

Even since its early times, the Christian anthropology insisted on the fact that man was created "*in God's image and likeness*". This expression has been present since the first moment in the Old Testament, in *Genesis*, in the narrative on the creation. The Christian Fathers and the Christian theology continued it in history. This expression has been given many interpretations; one of them identifies God's image in man with man's **logos** or **reason**. But when we speak about "*God's image and likeness*" we need to refer inevitably to something that characterizes God exclusively. If "*the image of God*" is something that is outside God, then this could not be the image of God. We are speaking, therefore, about a particularity that refers to God and not to the creation. This obliges us to look for "*the image of God*" in freedom. Even since the 4th century, Gregory of Nyssa defines this idea as "*dominion over oneself*" (man's freedom to be master over the world and over himself). If we take this freedom in the sense in which it exists in God, then we are speaking about absolute freedom, in the sense that in front of us there is nothing that has been given to us. [8] It is precisely here that another notion, referring exclusively to man's definition, emerges: that of tragedy, of the tragic. Tragedy is the impasse created by a freedom tending

to accomplishment, but finding it impossible to attain accomplishment. The tragic concerns only the human state; it concerns neither God, nor the rest of the creation.

If man wants to become god, he has to face the “given” of his own existence. Since he comes face to face with his reality of created being – which means that the existence has been given to him - one cannot say that he is free in an absolute sense. If the beauty of the Holy Trinity is reflected, although relatively, both in the visible and in the invisible world, it is all the more mirrored in the human being created in God’s image and likeness, following the counsel of the Holy Trinity (Genesis 1: 26-28), as partner of the relational dialogue with Him and with his fellows, the people.

According to the Orthodox teaching, based on the Holy Scripture and the Holy Tradition, man has been brought to life by a special creative act (Genesis 2: 7) of the Holy Trinity. By this act, God put his imprint on the human being and life more than on those of any other created being, which means that the human being has beauty as his ontological given and by his special mission in this world man must preach beauty ceaselessly and realize it in the earthly existence, in relation with the Creator, with his fellows, the people, and with the world, being solidary with the whole creation and responsible, in a way, for the creation, in front of God. In this aware and voluntary relation of our being with God, due to the soul related with God, lies the image of God in man. Man is in God’s image because, having a soul akin with God, tends to God, or is in a living relation with God. And by this relation he maintains the relation with God unflinching. Even a biological image maintains its kinship with its model only if a continual power comes to it from the model, or if between him and the model there is continual communion. [9]

2. Man - image of the infinite God

Man maintains himself as un-weakened image of God only if, based on a kinship, a living relation, a continual communion is maintained between him and God, in which it is not just God that is active, but also man. Thus, our being shows and maintains itself as image of God by this living relation, and this relation is possible because God made man since the beginning akin with Himself and therefore capable of the relation with Him. Better said, God put man since the beginning in an aware and free relation with Himself, even by inbreathing a living soul in him.

The Holy Fathers say that by this breath God planted in man not just the understanding soul akin with God but also His grace, as manifestation of His relationship with man, which triggers in man his answer to God’s relation-founding act. Saint Gregory Palamas says: “*Then the angels’ eyes saw the human soul, united with senses and with a body, as another god, not made on earth, (as) mind and body out of the divine goodness, but (made) out of the divine overabundant goodness, and configured according to God’s grace for the body, mind and spirit to be one and for the soul to be according to the divine image and likeness, as a fully unitary being made up of mind, reason and spirit (pneuma)*” [10].

Although in the image is hidden the virtuality of the likeness, this virtuality cannot become actual automatically, but only under the flame of the divine work or love. [11]

Vadimir Lossky says, taking into account the above-mentioned words of Palamas: “*The divine breath indicates a manner of creation, by virtue of which the human spirit is intimately related to grace*”. One could understand this even as an indissoluble relation between our soul and the power of God, Who gives the soul the possibility to subsist in his image, and, in this sense, the image continues to exist even in the fallen man, by an uncreated energy, rather like a relation and an ontological dialogue than as a relation and a

dialogue of knowledge and intuition in relation to God. It is in this sense, as the new interpretation given by Lossky to God's breath, that one can also understand the expression of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, namely that we are "*little parts of God*" [12]. "*This means that the uncreated grace is involved in the creative act itself and that the soul receives at the same time life and grace because grace is God's breath, the ray of divinity, the life-giving presence of the Holy Spirit. If man comes alive, when God breathes life in him, this is because the grace of the Holy Spirit is the true principle of our existence*" [13].

Our being is akin to God by the spirit (pneuma) received, yet our being receives the spirit because it is capable of the spirit, namely because it is capable of the aware relation with God.

Created "*in the image*" of the infinite God, man is called to go beyond his own limits and also beyond the limited margins of the creation and to become infinite. In the image is involved essentially man's tension towards deification. It is in this that man's greatness consists, in the tension-commandment to become deified and not in the beauty of the supreme biological existence, of rational animal. Man's greatness resides therefore in his destiny, that of deification shown by the image of God, which "*supposes the indestructible presence of grace in the human nature, implied in the very act of faith*" [14].

In the Greek Antiquity, man's beauty was interpreted as theophany: the settling of the god in the body of a mortal. With the Holy Fathers, man's beauty does not just preserve its sacred character, but it is considered a reflection, a symbol of the divine beauty. In the *Book of Genesis*, God's beauty is reflected first of all in the beauty of the world, in the macrocosm, and at the end of the sixth day, God's beauty is reflected in man as microcosm. Thus, man is the crown of the creation and its brightest adornment. "*And God said: «Let Us make mankind in Our image, in Our likeness » ... And God made man in His own image*" (*Genesis* 1: 26, 27). Thus, man is the icon of the eternal image of God, is the living icon of God's Son. Ad just as the divine Logos bears in Himself the uncreated reasons of the whole creation, similarly man bears in himself the created images of the divine reasons. Father Dumitru Stăniloae wrote: "*Just as the divine Logos, the Creator of the images of His uncreated reasons made Himself, by the embodiment, beside the Subject of His uncreated reasons, also the Subject of the created images of these reasons, similarly, the human subject is meant to become, beside the bearer of the created images of the divine reasons, also the bearer of the uncreated reasons of the Logos together with Him*" [15]. Therefore, in man are concentrated the elements of the macrocosm and for this reason, all the Holy Fathers call him a *microcosm*.

Man's calling is to master the world and adore God together with the angels compared to whom he is just "*a little lower*" and this only for a short while, as the Psalmist says: "*what is man that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man that thou dost care for him?*" (Psalm 8: 4, 5)

Man is created beautiful just as his Creator, both as soul and body. All the Holy Fathers clearly affirm that God's image in man refers to the unity body-soul, therefore the divine Beauty is reflected in the beauty of the body and of the soul.

This is how Saint Gregory of Nyssa explains the beauty of the body: God "*gave (man) the exterior beauty because he was made in the image of the very Archetype of beauty*" [16]. The Christians have always had admiration for the physical beauty which they saw as an echo of the transcendent Beauty, and when they wanted to represent virtue artistically they turned to the image of a beautiful being.

The human body appears, therefore, as rationality under an artistic form, which expresses the Divine. The Patriarch Photios of Constantinople wrote that artistic beauty is the beauty affirming that it expresses the Divine. The beauty of the human body is manifested in the harmony of its constitutive parts and ascends towards the spiritual sphere. Saint Basil the Great also saw physical beauty in the harmony of the members but added that the presence of the divine grace is decisive: beauty *“is the harmony that flourishes in the way the members are made up and has grace in it.”* [17] On the divine origin of the human beauty Saint Ambrosius wrote, as well: *“When God created the first man, made him with a pleasant exterior, with the harmonious makeup of his members, and gave him the most beautiful figure.”* [18] Saint Athanasius the Great praises human beauty as God’s work of art in men.

The spiritual value of beauty completes the human body, which was chosen by God as place of worship adequate to bear His Son. The Lord’s Embodiment does not just restore the image of God in man to his edenic dignity of the paradise, but lifts man up to perfection, to the full likeness with God.

Man’s situation in heaven represents the starting point of any theology but can be at the same time a stumbling stone, if the state of the first people in heaven is not well understood, in the complexity of its aspects: man referred to God, to himself and to the nature surrounding him. The Orthodox theology presents this reality with the help of the Holy Scripture, explained by the Holy Fathers. In this warm atmosphere, one can observe, on the one hand, the love that moved the Absolute Being to create and, related to this, man’s wonderful situation and condition of *image of God*.

The heaven that God created is the gift of His love for man, something highlighted in these words: *“Behold the honour God has given to man! He created man outside heaven; yet immediately He introduced him in heaven, to feel benefaction by what was made, and know by (God’s) actions the honour given to him, when He brought him in heaven. ‘And He put there the man He had made’. The word ‘He put’ must be understood, again, as said instead of the word ‘He ordered (man) to live there’, for the vision of heaven and the enjoyment there to give him a lot of pleasure and to exhort him to thank God and be grateful, thinking how much good he received without having done anything to deserve it yet”* [19]. And the Saint continues: *“Behold one more type of benefaction in the honour of the one who was created! God wanted man to live in heaven; for this reason, he ordered that various trees may sprout from the earth, being, at the same time delightful by their aspect and good to eat. ‘Every tree, says the Scripture, pleasant to behold, namely as aspect’, and ‘good to eat’ namely able to delight by their sight and to give much joy by eating their fruit and to give joy by the multitude and abundance of the trees to the one who would want to make use of them. When the Scripture said: ‘every tree’, it meant that the earth yielded all the kinds of trees that you could name. Have you seen what a living, devoid of want and troubles? Have you seen what a wonderful life? Man was living as an angel on earth; he was dressed with a body, yet he was not subjected to the physical needs. As an emperor adorned with purple and diadem, dressed in purple, this is how man enjoyed himself in heaven, easily having everything abundantly”* [20].

Saint John focuses on a word highlighting the state of man which he had in heaven, which God had prepared for him five days earlier. The Saint says: *“‘God put man in the heaven of delight’. He did not put it simply: ‘In heaven’ but added: ‘of delight’ to show to us the overwhelming pleasure that man was to enjoy due to his dwelling place. And after having said: ‘God put him in the heaven of delight’ he added ‘to work it and guard it*

‘. And this is a sign of great providence. But because living in heaven filled Adam with all the delight, because he was delighted by all he could see and by the joy given to him by this delight, for this reason, for man not to slide and fall due to the overwhelming enjoyment and delight – ‘For laziness leads to sin’ (Syrah 33: 32) – God ordered man to labour and guard heaven” [21].

Father Dumitru Stăniloae affirmed: *“man’s primordial state cannot be a state of deployment of the image in the virtues in which it manifests this communion, because this requires time. But the primordial state could not have been a lack of the image as ontological structure tending to this communion either, because such a specifically human structure is not won in time.” [22]*

In the edenic state, man was clean from all evil impetus and tending to the good of the communion with God and with his fellows, yet not reinforced in this cleanliness and in this good. He was aware and free, and in his conscience and freedom he had the tendency towards good. Man was not a sinner, yet he was not adorned with acquired virtues and consolidated clean thoughts, either. He had the innocence of one who had not tasted sin, but not the one acquired by the rejection of temptation. The body of the edenic man was not enslaved by the automatic law of sin, yet it did not have the force strengthened by habit to remain immune to such a state (of sin). The world did not impose on his body and spirit its processes like inescapable chains, yet it had not been brought under the dominion of the spirit imposing its power on it, either. In this sense, Father Dumitru Stăniloae said: *“The world had for man the transparency it has for an innocent child, who shall, nevertheless, have the possibility of experiencing its opaqueness if he begins to do evil, yet it did not have that transparency that it has for a saint, who really defeated its opaqueness. The good sense of reason, in understanding things and choosing actions, had a clarity that has not been preserved in the man drawn towards all sides by all kinds of pieces of knowledge and opinions; yet he had not been put to the test and reinforced in an unshaken firmness by a critical experience won by persisting in good and rejecting evil.” [23]*

Although God’s beauty reflected by His image in man is reflected at the same time on the body and on the soul, man’s beauty is realized fully only on the spiritual level. Because the beauty of the soul is *pneumatophoric* (bearer of the Holy Spirit) and goes beyond any physical likeness by far, the actual exterior beauty, true exterior beauty is nothing else except the pneumatophoric beauty overflowed on the “vessel” bearing it. And this inner beauty is something that does not decrease, but increases ceaselessly, the believer who thirsts for the divine Beauty growing in beauty as he collaborates with the divine grace.

The Holy Fathers affirm, unanimously, the superiority of the pneumatophoric beauty compared to the exterior one; it is about the primacy of the spirit over the body. Clement of Alexandria observes that truly beautiful is the soul that received the gifts of the Holy Spirit. *“The most wonderful beauty is the beauty of the soul; the soul is beautiful when adorned with the Holy Spirit, when adorned by the adornments given by the Holy Spirit.” [24]*

“Only the virtuous man is truly beautiful and good: and only moral beauty is considered good (...) therefore, beautiful is the just man, the sensible man, in one word, the good man.” [25] Moreover, Saint Basil the Great draws the attention on the need to purify the soul from sinful passions, to be able to ascend to the contemplation of the divine Beauty: *“to give birth in the soul both to beauty but also to power to accomplish what is necessary to be done, one needs divine grace (...). Beautiful is any soul, viewed in the symmetry of his own power, yet true beauty, namely the divine and happy nature, can be seen, can be contemplated by the one whose mind has been purified. The one who focuses*

his eyes on God's lights and graces receives something from Him, as from a colour these people colour their own image with flourishing brightness. [26]

Therefore, God's beauty overflows in man's clean soul, making it beautiful, a truth that will be amply experienced and expressed by Saint Symeon the New Theologian. He describes in details the fruits of the clean prayer of the mind, when, under the action of the uncreated divine energies, the Christian becomes beautiful in the soul and in the body. Grace gives human beauty a unique brilliance, makes man bright, makes him stronger, more dignified and, by this, man beautifies the surrounding world as well. Human beauty communicates, in this way, fully with the Archetypal Eternal Beauty, Which it reflects, for Which it becomes a place of theophany, at the same time bearer of divine Light, Love, Beauty and Goodness. [27]

The cleanliness of the heart of the spiritually beautiful man is also apparent in the fact that he looks at the world of God' creation "*with the eyes of the Holy Spirit*", namely seeing everywhere, in the world's and man's beauty, icons of the divine Beauty. This living of the human beauty, as symbol of the absolute Beauty lived by the man purified from sinful passions is described by Saint John Climacus in *The Ladder of Heaven*: "*Someone, seeing a wonderfully beautiful woman, found the occasion of adoring her and of glorifying by his praises the sovereign Beauty whose creation this woman is. Seeing her, he was filled with love for God and a flood of tears sprang from his eyes.* If we do not relate it to its spiritual character, man's beauty has no sense and cannot be understood. The spiritualization of beauty will be, however, made perfect only in the Kingdom of Heaven, as Father Dumitru Popescu states: "*Spirituality tends to transfigure not just the soul, but also the body, a transfiguration that begins in the world down here and will be made perfect in the world to come.* [28]

Since his creation, man has a dichotomic constitution: body and soul, which begin to exist at the same time, in full union, and consequently have the same value in the eyes of the Creator. By the dignity of *image of God* the human being has a soul akin to God and is in a special relation with Him, tending to realize the religious-moral values in this life. For this reason, the body, which supports our life, must not be left a pray to the inferior impulses, namely to the sinful passions that grow roots in it immediately after the fall, because its final destination is for the human spirit to work by means of the body on the beautification and transfiguration of the whole cosmos, of the whole nature. The body must be beautified in its senses, for us to transfigure the world by it, as well, on our way to the final target. This example and power is given to us by our Saviour Christ, [29] the Being of all virtues, Who humbled Himself down to the image of the slave and manifested the virtues to the people by acts and word, behaving with special beauty and great delicacy to all, [30] therefore, by the humility of His kenosis giving to all of us, of all the times and places, the possibility to be deified, therefore to participate to the life of God.

We appropriate this example by the unceasing and sincere practice of the virtues, in the continual fight against all sin and sinful passion, in the realization of which the important role goes to the human soul, being endowed by God with attributes akin to those of the Creator: conscience, cognitive reason, liberty. [31] The human soul, due to his conscience, has a special calling to establish a free dialogue with God by knowledge and action and, at the same time, by using the body and the world in a free and aware manner, as gifts of the Creator, to answer by them the endless love of the Holy Trinity and to extend by this the dialogue of love to all the people of all the times and places.

Virtue, specific of the beautiful soul, according to the Orthodox teaching, is always in harmony with God's will and is accomplished by man's powers and with the help of the divine grace, without which the human being could not overcome his limited condition and could not realize the communion with the absolute religious-moral value, the Triune God - infinite Truth, supreme Good and absolute Beauty.

By comparison with different ethical systems, the Christian Orthodox morals accentuate the fact that virtue cannot be conceived except as a harmonious labour of the divine grace and of the powers of the human nature for the realization of the Christian's ultimate aim: his salvation and deification, therefore perfection in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit in the Church, by knowing Him. For this reason, the process of deification or participation of the believer to the absolute beauty of the Holy Trinity, yet without being confused with the Holy Trinity, has as its first step the realization of a life full of spiritual beauty, therefore virtuous, both in relation with God, and with our fellows, in harmony with our Saviour's teaching, and then with the advice or experiences of the Holy Fathers of the *Paterikon*, *Philokalia* or other ascetic works, kept as normative by the Church.

In relation to God, beauty as value, in close relation to good, is materialized in the theological virtues: faith, hope and love, and, in the relations with our fellows, it is realized by the cardinal moral virtues: wisdom, justice, courage and moderation, mentioned as well in the Old-Testament tradition, yet having an inestimable sense and value in the Orthodox Christian morals. These virtues make the soul of the faithful man irradiate beauty, which, in fact, implies them and by the virtues, man is continually moving towards his Creator, having this impulse towards a continual movement meant to attain the beauty of perfection in Christ. In this sense, Saint Basil the Great affirms: *"in the happy contemplation of the image, you will see the beauty of the Archetype. By the Spirit, the hearts are exalted, the powerless are led by the hand, and those on the way of virtue are made perfect. Lighting those who have cleansed themselves of any spot, (the Spirit) shows them spiritual (bearers of the Holy Spirit), due to the communion with Him. And just as (it happens) with the bright and transparent bodies, that when a ray falls on them they become brighter and a new brightness emerges from them, it is the same with the souls illumined by the Spirit, they themselves become spiritual and radiate grace."* [32] Because the beautiful soul does not manifest itself only in what it already is but also in what it tends to be. [33] This is an essential feature of the Orthodox Christian morals: what matters is not just what the Christian is, but also what he must be. Our Saviour Christ is the One Who must be lived by those who believe in Him, according to His Will, in full love and joy. [34]

The beautiful soul exerts a great power over the body, because, by it, virtues are no longer purely individual, but acquire a social character and efficiency. By this, God Himself, the being and the source of all virtue, works by all, for all. Living in virtue is a deiform living, imitation and pursuit of God. By some people's virtue, God works on others by a living dialogue of love. [35] Every effort of ours is meant to increase the beauty of both our nature and our fellows' nature with the virtues of patience, asceticism, love for our fellows, and faith in God, to illuminate us regarding the wise commandments put by our Creator in everything. [36]

Man's life, as a whole, also has a universal communitarian aspect in love which is not full and is not realized except in the theandric community of the Church, having its source in the Holy Trinity Whose love and spiritual beauty descend in those who truly believe by the intercession of God's Son embodied in history, [37] the Head of the Church (1 Col. 1: 24 and 18). The Church, in her turn, is His Body (Romans 12: 4-8; 1 Cor. 6: 15; Eph. 1: 22-

23), completed, nourished in his growth and harmonization by the beauty springing from the communion of life of the Holy Trinity. By Christ, her Head, to those who believe in Him, as actually to the whole creation, the horizon of God's spiritual beauty is opened, and, at the same time, they receive power of life, of unifying love and of well-pleasing beauty from the infinity of the Holy Trinity, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Who is our model, guiding and infilling and marking those incorporated in Himself, who are made more and more in His likeness. [38] In the Church there is, therefore, new life in Christ, full of beauty, ceaselessly springing powerfully from her Head. For this reason, the value of beauty is realized fully and lived to the full only in the community of the Church, in communion with Christ and with our fellows, because it is meant to comprise all that exists: God and the creation.

Conclusion

The spiritual beauty of the Holy Trinity is extended by Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the universal body made up of all those who believe and tend to the ideal of perfection. Beauty becomes a gift of the Holy Spirit forever reinforced by other gifts: the Holy Mysteries corresponding to the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The authentic Christian life has for its supreme target perfection, salvation and deification in Christ, namely the eternal life possessed only by our Saviour (John 6: 47) and which cannot be obtained by closing ourselves, by selfishness, by sinful passions, but by opening ourselves to God and to our fellow, by doing good deeds and by practicing virtue, therefore by a life full of moral and spiritual beauty (Matthew 25: 31-46). The Christian life, as a whole, lived in a communitarian spirit, must realize the moral values, therefore the spiritual beauty as well, which is a component of salvation. [39]

The unique and complete value and beauty of the human life in the body was clearly shown by God's Son, Who took on a human body in history, assuming the human body and resurrecting it for eternity. Thus, the whole creation is lifted to the level of the culminating participation to the beauty of His spirituality. Our Saviour Christ was resurrected to put before our eyes the perspective and the hope of resurrection and at the same time to make Himself the source of the power of transfiguration of the present cosmos.

Man's earthly life passes, in our Saviour Christ, towards the divine life, in an infinite progress, because He, by His Embodiment in history, reveals to us the eternal value of each human person, destroying the wall of contempt and hate that used to separate people, opening to them the true, good and beautiful way to God - the source of life and of the existence and the way towards one another in Him. The human person tends to the Absolute - the Triune God - man's characteristic feature being the infinite thirst for spiritual progress and spiritual beauty. Man is able, by his soul, to overcome his limits and go towards higher knowledge by virtue, finding himself in this way in the dynamics of a ceaseless ascension (*epektasis*), as Saint Gregory of Nyssa says, in an endless progress of virtue towards the contemplation of God and the union with God - the absolute spiritual Beauty that cannot be reached except by knowing It in the concrete circumstances of life. Because our Saviour Christ Himself said: "*And this is eternal life: to know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom You have sent*" (John 17: 3). And to this eternal life we are called, all of us who believe in Christ, in full love, because we are characterized by an expectation and a hope of the full manifestation of our Saviour and of the glory of His truth, good, beauty and love in the world, on a special level different than the one of its present image.

Beauty, as the Christian morals see it, exists everywhere in the world. By the fall into sin, everything becomes opaque, and the image of God in man grows dark. It remains up to us to discover, each of us in his way, the true essence of the value of beauty and to materialize it, each in our own way, in the Christian life, to attain perfection. Thus, we can say that between man and nature there is an ontological relation, this relation of interdependence having its origin in the divine act of the creation of the first man “*from the dust*” (Genesis 2:7) as a crowning of the whole material world that Adam’s body was formed of.

But because man wanted to rule over God’s creatures without God and against His Will, he handed over, by his way of behaving, “*the whole nature as a pray to death*”. Thus, the forefathers’ sin introduced in the creation disorder ruined the beauty and harmony that the surrounding nature had before sin, when everything that God had made “*was exceedingly good*” (Gen. 1:31). By the forefathers’ fall “*nature became the devil’s domain and tool*” in the power of the evil one (Eph. 2: 2), this is why “*all things are wearisome, more than one can say*” (Eccl. 1: 8).

In his quality of servant in the middle of nature and “*co-worker with God*” (1 Cor. 3: 9), man is supposed to re-establish or heal and make perfect the material world, because: “*since the creation the entire nature has been predestined for the supernatural, which is meant to transfigure it and make it really symbol and temple of the Creator.*” [40]

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