
THE TRADITION OF THE PATRISTIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONCEPT OF ‘IMAGE’

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Abstract

In the article are considered questions of the patristic understanding of the concept of ‘image’. The author of the article gives its definition and describes its multi-stage structure. The concept of the image of God, and patristic approaches to understanding problems, what is the image and likeness of God in a man, the image and personality are also considered.

Keywords: image, likeness, prototype, man, person

1. Introduction

Turning to the topic of the patristic understanding of the concept of ‘image’ is conditioned by processes, which in the XX-XXI centuries had affected many areas and directions of human activity. The main vector of this development is the globalization component. Processes of standardization and unification are evolving in the sphere of culture and they lead to the depersonalization of a man. The old social institutions that determined the identification process, especially religion, are destroyed, while earlier, religion sanctioned norms of moral behaviour and was an important factor for the integrity of the personality. Nowadays, as the American futurologist A. Toffler wrote: “Millions of individuals are looking desperately for own identity” [1].

In society there is always a need for extension and justification of certain values, which have the highest absolute value, including questions of morality, sense of personal improvement and understanding of human destiny. The need for absolute values is the anthropological reality. One of these values in Christianity is the understanding of the image of God in man, or his personality. Reflections on this subject, in our opinion, could play a positive role in the development of modern anthropological paradigm.

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2. Theology of image

Patristic theology of the image is very multifaceted. Saint Gregory the Theologian gives the following definition for the concept of ‘image’: “The very nature of the image is to be an imitation of the Prototype” [2]. Saint John of Damascus said about six areas of Theology of image in connection with its multi-stage structure.

The first direction is connected with the idea of God the Son as the image of the Eternal Father: “God himself gave birth to the first begotten Son, and His Word, His living image” [3]. All the patristic tradition shows about it.

The second direction develops the idea of the image as being located in the representation of God that has to be from Him, that is, His Eternal Council, and always remains the same. If for God anything is pre-determined, it is certainly in the future to happen. But before its being in Divine, thought it had already been endowed with signs and images.

The third way, according to Saint John of Damascus, is descended from God, man, who is endowed with His image and likeness.

The fourth way is that when Scripture creates verbal images and views, outlines invisible and incorporeal objects depicted in body, in order to give us some ideas as God and the Angels, because we are not in a position to contemplate the incorporeal without appropriate colours and shapes.

John names the fifth kind of image as the one that foretells the future, as, for example, the burning bush (Exodus 3.2), the fleece which was dry (Judges 6.40), and so on.

The sixth direction of the theology of the image is a reminder of the past for teaching virtues. This is either a verbal description or a material sign, as, for example: tablets, stamina, rod, or position in the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 34.28, 16.33-34, Hebrews 9.4-5).

The reasoning of Saint Augustine is very important and interesting, in what should be invested in the concept of the ‘image of God’. In the exact sense this concept “applies only to creation, for which between it and God there is no intermediate nature” [4]. Hence, in the true sense of the image of God, there are only incorporeal and mortal beings, i.e. angels and men. The same can be argued in relation to the Images of the Holy Trinity.

3. The concept of the image of God

Based on his mystical experience, the monk Simeon the New Theologian gives an absolutely amazing and unique testimony of the trinity of the Images: “The Son is the most precise image of God the Father. So, the image of the Father is the Son, and the Son is the Holy Ghost. He who has seen the Son has seen the Father, and he who has seen the Holy Spirit has seen the Son.” [5]

So, the Holy Spirit is the perfect image of the Son. This testimony, which was forgotten by theologians, seems to be the most important. The old debate between the East and the West on the issue of the ‘filioque’ could unlikely have

developed with such fury, if both parties had paid attention to such evidence. More than six hundred years before the monk Simeon, Saint Gregory the Theologian wrote: “the Son is not separate from the Father, and the Holy Spirit is not separate from the Son, just as thought is inseparable from the mind” [6].

Careful reading of the above text of the monk Simeon suggests that the trinity of Divine Images, coinciding with the Holy Hypostases, is combined by a common Image of the Triune Godhead. This is confirmed by the Biblical text: “And God said, let us make man in Our image and after Our likeness... And God created man in His own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1.26-27) It should be noted that the Image of the Triune God is conceived of as Individuals in tandem with the likeness to each other. *So, Triune deity is the Divine consubstantial with the Father in the Son and the Spirit, the Son in the Father and the Spirit, the Spirit in the Father and the Son.*

As has been said above, “the very nature of the image is to be an imitation of the Prototype” [2]. But, according to our opinion, there is one exception. The Eastern Church, like a great jewel, stores among the ancient Symbols of faith the unique mystery of the Symbol of Saint Gregory, Bishop of Neocaesarea. In the period of hard struggle of the Church with heresies he was taught the extraordinary mystical way. In this dogma is the unanimity of the Holy Trinity, while the Images within are brief and extremely concise.

In the Creed, the first Person of the Holy Trinity is called the Father, the Eternal, the Parent, the Only, and nowhere named the Image. This is understandable. In terms of the Orthodox doctrine of the monarchy of the Father, this is the only case when talking about the Image is impossible, because the Father Himself is the sole and Supreme Archetype.

So, the image of the Divine Trinity is eternal and full of self-existent life and strength. It is in the ‘manifestations’, as Saint Simeon the New Theologian says [7], – the images of the Image of the Divine Trinity, the creation – that the Creator is known by. Through the ‘manifestation’ of eternal existence reflects itself in existence unoriginally, relatively, which in itself is fluid and changeable.

4. The image of God in man

But what is the image of God in man in his essence? Perhaps Fulgenzi Raspiski came closest to the resolution of this question: “For saying the word image in the singular, He [God], is the unity of nature, in the image which created man; when He says: in Our image, in the plural, thus he shows that one and the same God, in Whose image man was created, is not the same Person. If in this same essence of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit were one and the same Person, the Scripture would not have said In Our image, but: ‘in My image’; and God would not have said: let us create, but: ‘I shall create’. And if these three persons ought to be understood or accepted on faith as three substances, it would not be said in Our image, but: ‘our images’, for three different natures can be a single image. But since man is said to be made in a

single image of the one God, the Holy Trinity consists of one divine essence.” [4, p. 41] It follows that the image of God in man is nothing else but the reflection of the image of the Divine Trinity.

For Latin fathers, as Fulgenzi, and Saint Augustine, the image of God in man is the reflection of the image of the entire Holy Trinity. For Augustine, “man is the image of the Trinity. He is not equal to the Trinity as the Son is equal to the Father, but as was said, moving closer to Him in virtue of some similarity.” [4, p. 39] Augustine insists on this idea: “... he was created in the image of the Trinity... for the Trinity is one God. And God created man in the image of God, that is, in His own image.” [4]

However, some fathers wanted to bring the image of God in man as a reflection of the incarnation of God the Word, Who is the Image of the Father. Thus, they wanted to establish a direct link between the creation of a man and the coming Incarnation of God the Word. For example, arguing in this direction, Clement of Alexandria and Mariy Victorine defined man as ‘the image of the image’, that is, Christ. According to Clement, Christ is the way, according to which man was created: “the Image of God is His Word... man is the image of His Word” [4, p. 39]. In addition, Clement was sure that the image of God in man is “the mind in man” [4, p. 39]. Mariy Victorine said the same: “...man is not created as the image of God but in the image of God, because only Jesus is the image of God, man is created in the image, i.e. it is the image of the image. But God said: ‘in Our image’. It means that the Father and the Son are one in the same.” [4, p. 39] In the last line of the quotation Mariy, as you can see, touches on the question of a single deity with the plurality of Persons in the divine nature.

As far as the ‘location’ of the image of human nature is concerned, too, there was no consensus. Irenaeus of Lyons put it in the spiritual and the bodily structure of man. Other fathers, such as Origen, John Cassian and Ambrose saw the image of God in the soul and spirit of man. Origen wrote: “This person I said to be created in the image of God, we mean not physically <...> whoever is created in the image of God, is our inner being, invisible, incorporeal, incorruptible and immortal. That’s what is truly proposed as the image of God.” [4, p. 41]

According to Ambrose, “..... no flesh can be in the image of God, but our soul, which is free and in open-ended thoughts and advice rushes hither and thither, and, seeing, sees all <...> so, in the image of God remains what one perceives is not bodily, but by the power of the mind...” [4, p. 42] Epiphanius generally believed that one should not even try to determine the place where the image of God is in man.

Nevertheless, it may be noted that this issue was limited to reflections or about the true nature of man, or, as in Western theology, on the presence of grace in the soul, and then in the body. Theologians reasoned about the qualities of the person in which he is most godlike. These qualities must be cultivated in the first place. The majority of the Alexandrian fathers shared this point of view.

Since God is Spirit, then to the extent that a human being is involved in the Spirit, it is the image of God.

Irenaeus of Lyons, Saint Maximus the Confessor, and the Syrian exegetes believed that the image of God is all part of human nature. Many mystic writers, including Rufus, believed that the image of God is in the region of the soul, on which the Holy Spirit has the greatest effect and sanctifies and is connected to it. For Cyril of Alexandria, the very soul sanctified by the Spirit is the image of God. Other fathers saw the image of God in all virtues - freedom, impartiality, responsibility, charity and so on.

The possession of reason, freedom, justice, and the manifold virtues - all this, in the opinion of the fathers, is a manifestation of the image of God. On this subject there are many texts. "If God is the fullness of good, and that is His image, the image that has similarity to the Prototype, to be filled with all good", says Gregory of Nyssa [4, p. 44]. "Is it not that what is in the image of God, always God?" asks Ambrose of Milan [4, p. 43]. God dwells in goodness and truth.

The presence of the image of God in man makes him a Regal creature: "... to be made the way Nature reigns over all means nothing, as if the very creation immediately become the Regal nature... had in common with the Prototype, both the dignity and name. But not clothed in purple, not the scepter and the diadem showed his dignity (this has no Archetype), and instead of purple endowed with virtue." [4, p. 45]

Potami Lisbon saw the image of God in knowledge, which is given to the person of the Triune God: "He imprinted in the human face His image and said – In Our image. The knowledge of the Father and the Son given in the face of a man; and what the Father and the Son is the image of His face, captured in the first person, created out of the dust, that the people were astonished at God looking as the man." [4, p. 43]

Gregory Nazianzen brings together the concepts of life, soul, and image: "And created from substances the body having already been taken, and from myself investing life (that in the Word of God is known under the name of the soul and the image of God), performs as a second world, in the small greatness..., which occupies the middle ground between greatness and meanness..." [4, p. 44] According to Saint Augustine, the guarantee of the preservation of God's image in man and its disclosure is "to be the image and likeness of God, and this image is stored only in respect to those in whom it is imprinted..." [4, p. 119]

Gregory Nazianzen identified the image of God with the divine spirit of life: "the Word, taking the part of the newly created Earth, created my image by immortal hands and gave it its life, because He sent in His spirit, which is the spirit of the invisible deity" [4, p. 64].

Gregory of Nyssa proposed the 'inbreathing' of the image of God in man as a single act of creation of man: "... we assume one common beginning of his stock, so he's not older, not younger than himself and it is not first corporal, and then another" [4, p. 66].

The division of human nature by gender does not dissect the unity of the image of God in man as the image of God is superior to sexual differences. "For the wife and husband are in one way, one form and one likeness. So why is the man said to be the image of God, and the wife is not? Because he is called an image not by sight, but by the authority which only the husband has but not the wife... the woman is the glory of man, because she is subordinated to her husband," says John Chrysostom [4, p. 45-46].

The unity of God's image in man and woman is explained by the monk Ephrem by the fact that the wife was in her husband at the time of creation of the latter: "... Eve was in Adam, including the rib that was taken from Adam. Though Eve was not in the mind, but in body, but not in body only, but the soul and spirit; because God added nothing to what was taken from Adam's rib, besides the beauty and the external image" [4, p. 46].

5. Image and likeness

Most fathers teach the distinction between *image* and *likeness*. Man, created in the image of God, should achieve godliness with the right personal choice. It is achieved by translational motion through a renewal in faith and righteous living. Thomas Shpidlik, professor at the Pontifical Oriental Institute, writes: "Origen, as part and later the Eastern tradition, uses the dynamic nature of the image: there is nothing like the rudiment of deification, the aim of which is to imitate God as much as possible. This ascent 'from image to likeness' will end in glory of the resurrected bodies (see: 1 John 3.2), as it is expressed in Jesus' prayer for unity." [8]

Origen saw all the makings for a man to achieve likeness in the very image of God, given to him at creation. "Although the possibility of perfection is originally given to him in the dignity of the image, he himself, with his deeds should in the end achieve a perfect likeness." [4, p. 40] According to Origen, the image resembles the seed which was sown in man from God Who is the Word. From this beginning, the soul carries the fruit of the Christian virtues.

The same opinion was shared by, for example, Gregory of Nyssa, Diadoch Policiski, John Damascene and other fathers. Persian theologian Sakhadona (Martyr) wrote that the man "keeping control of his feelings..., all becomes still as a statue, likeness and image of his God" [4, p. 43].

In the fall man lost the original state of godliness, given together with the image of God, as mentioned by Origen. Irenaeus of Lyons explains this as follows: "... for there was still an invisible Word, in Whose image man was created. That's why he easily lost the likeness..." [4, p. 41] This is hardly a reflection of Irenaeus one can accept unconditionally. The fall is here not the evil inclination of man himself, and not dependent on a kind of 'hiding' from him by God the Word, in Whose image he was created.

Some fathers like Gregory of Nyssa, believed that the fall resulted in a complete loss of the image of God in man. However, closer to the truth is the idea that sin has only overshadowed him. Since the fall, two images have begun

to exist in man, one of God and one of the demonic. The lot of the sinner became a deep inner duality. Further, the process of spiritual recreation of man can only go by displacing the demonic presence. "What communion hath light with darkness? asks the Apostle Paul - And what concord hath Christ with Belial?" (2 Corinthians 6.14-15).

Restoration of the image and likeness of God in man is possible only through the incarnation of God. Irenaeus of Lyon says that God the Word "Himself made that was His way, and has restored the image, making the man through the visible Word in resemblance to the invisible Father" [4, p. 41].

6. Image and personality.

In our opinion, the important question is a theological consideration of the relationship of the person (hypostasis) and image. Leading Orthodox theologians of the 20th-21st centuries (N.R. Lossky, Archimandrite Sophronios (Sugars), H. Yannaras and others) tend to believe that the image of God is firstly expressed in the personality of a man.

Orthodox dogmatist S.A. Chursanov writes: "People as individuals are called to ask human nature the image of existence determined by the absolute installation for the fullness of relationship with the Divine Persons and human persons" [9]. Hence the understanding of the image of God in man is a person. It is possible to think only that personality is inseparable from the notion of the image. But the notion of image is often broader than the concept of personality. For example, you can talk about Persons (hypostases) in the Holy Trinity, about the image of each divine Person, you can talk about the Image of the Holy Trinity, but it is impossible to talk about some common person of the Holy Trinity.

In the New Testament, starting with the theology of the Apostle Paul, we can distinguish two categories of texts. Some of them offer Christ as the image of God and other offer Christians as Christ's image (2 Corinthians 4.4, Colossians 1.15, 1 Corinthians 15.49, 2 Corinthians 3.18, Romans 8.29, Colossians 3.10). The Holy Fathers, based on these texts, especially on the text about the creation of man in the image of God (Genesis 1.26-27), developed Theology with elements of Greek philosophy, which is the basis of patristic anthropology.

Due to the importance of the question of the relationship between image and identity, it is necessary to formulate a definition of the human person in the structure of the methodological paradigm of Orthodox anthropology and Humanities research. S.A. Chursanov defines personality as follows: "a Person is not reducible to nature free, open, creative, unique, irreducible in the sense of an indivisible and indestructible identity, unknowable analytical objective methods ontological basis of the person that determines the way of life of its individualized nature and actualizing itself in personal relationships" [10].

Clarifying the Orthodox understanding of personality, S.A. Chursanov writes: “unlike any of the qualities of nature, the image of God, understood as a personality, is inseparable from man. He, in particular, cannot be destroyed by sin...” [9, p. 337]. From here is made the correct conclusion that no flaws of human nature can destroy a person’s personality in the image of God, to which an unethical and inhumane attitude is unacceptable.

A strictly rational definition of the theological concepts of personality is virtually impossible. Attempts to characterize the otherness of the individual in relation to nature lead to negative characteristics and only “in order to build private personal anthropological models, based on a theological understanding of the human person and focused on solving urgent humanitarian problems, it is useful to present all of these personal characteristics of the image in the form of definitions” [9, p. 337]. Hence we can conclude that there may be not only one private theological definition of personality.

It is easy to see that the above definition of personality is largely descriptive, revealing its outward manifestation. I would like to draw more attention to internal personality characteristics. Moreover, reasoning about the Person (Persons) in the divine nature is left behind the frames of definition. After all, the human personality, as the person of the angel, contains only the reflection of the image of the Triune God. However, starting in a certain sense from the above formulation, we offer as an option the following definition of personality in the conditions of its existence in the uncreated divine and the created Angelo-human nature.

Personality is logical, self-conscious freedom, the meaningful and semantic ontological core of absolute centrality in its individualized nature. It is a reflection and presence of the Divine spirit of life. By virtue of its divine origin, essence, and way of life the person is not reducible to nature and the unknowable by analytical objective methods.

In this definition we have tried to underline our attention on the Central position of an individual in its individualized nature. It is that ontological centre, which holds and defines all correlated with it.

The second point, without which, in our opinion, at least some acceptable identification cannot take place, is a reference to the person as in the presence in her life. In the Divine Personalities this is a Life of itself. In the person of an angel, and man is its reflection and movement, as in the Genesis of all things. By the Personal God “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17.28). This is evidenced by the Gospel: “... in Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1.4).

So, we can conclude that the concept of ‘image’ in the patristic understanding goes beyond the theology of the person (hypostasis), itself covering almost the entire anthropocosmic plan that, for example, we have seen in the arguments of John of Damascus. The personality is inseparable from the image only in terms of its individualized nature.

7. Conclusion

As already mentioned, the total civilizational crisis of modern humanity at the end of 20th and beginning of the 21st century penetrated to the level of anthropological ideas. In modern culture the image of man varies. Traditional views about the humanism of man, which was based on the traditions of Christian anthropology, clearly weakened. Even in the Christian theology of the twentieth century the concept of man as a 'naked project' was put forward. There is an obvious trend towards weakening not only Christian, but also universal moral values.

According to Patriarch Kirill, the fundamental challenge of the new era lies "in the need for humanity to develop such a civilizational model of its existence in the twenty-first century, which would require full harmonization of dramatically divergent imperatives of neo-liberalism and traditionalism. Before the West and the East stands a difficult, but not hopeless task..." [11] For this reason, the appeal to traditional themes of Patristic theology dealing with Anthropology appears to us to be modern and relevant.

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