

CHAPTER I

The Genesis of Sainthood

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”¹

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being... Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature that was its name.²

“Let There Be ..., and There Was... Good”

This visible world is in constant movement, a continuity of actions and interactions. How can it be otherwise? Is it not the manifestation of the work of God the Creator?

The Triune God in his stillness is in unceasing “agapetical” movement, and therefore, God created the world in order for it to grow and produce, in a manner, to be useful. The visible creation holds in its three levels- the vegetative, irrational and rational- the cell of life that the Word infused into the creation by his powerful action that is in accordance with His Father’s demand “*Let there be light...firmament... etc., and there was.*”³ It is the action of love and goodness that were projected out to the “nothing,”⁴ to the “not yet created”, which does not have existence by itself outside of God. God’s self “agapetical” outpouring is to make the mystery of Good visible, but God remains hidden in His super-luminous darkness, through His projected goodness and love.

¹ Genesis 1: 26.

² Genesis 2:7, 19.

³ Genesis 1: 3-31.

⁴ Nothing is unknown before the beginning of time. It is not the negation of thing, because the thing was not created yet. And it is never to be understood as the opposite of The Thing, the Creator of all things. Man names it nothing because he has known the thing. So, it became the negation of the created thing.

The power of the Word is the power that transformed the “nothing” into a “thing”. It is this power that obliterated unconstructiveness and eliminated it. It is this power that changed “nothing” into a wonder and a beauty by revealing the mysterious emanations of God’s secret glory. It is the power of creativity and of evil’s destruction, for evil is *“the state of not-being [that does not] possess neither goodness nor creativity nor the power to create goodness.”*⁵ As Dionysius the Areopagite states: *“Evil is not a being; for if it were, it would not be totally evil...by contrast, evil is not among the things that have being nor is it among what is not in being.”*⁶

Good and Zero

So we see that the overflowing of grace, love and goodness have another indirect effect. They have obliterated all possibilities for evil to exist. Although evil has received a presence after the fall, it has remained lifeless, with no power and no capacity, for *“evil is not something negative; it is simply zero.”*⁷ The origin of everything is the Good One, the Holy One, and evil, being a “not-being”, has no existence. Evil is neither created nor uncreated because there is only one Uncreated God and one Cause of everything. Although man can speak about it, he cannot have any relationship with it, for it is a not-being. Dionysius the Areopagite explains evil as such: *“Evil has no being nor does it inhere in the things that have being. There is no place for evil as such and its origin is due to a defect rather than to a capacity. And as for the demons, the Good is their source and the fact of their existence is itself good. They are evil insofar as they have fallen away from the virtues proper to them.”*⁸ Therefore creation was made to render a service of love and to be a witness of goodness. It was permitted out of love, through love to become love. The levels of creation were created to minister to each other in harmony and synergy. Therefore, man (female & male) was not made to

⁵ Robert Payne, *The Holy Fire, The Story of the Early Centuries of the Christian Church in the Near East* (Crestwood, N.Y: SVS Press, 1980) p.245, on his commentary on Dionysius the Areopagite.

⁶ The Classics of Western Spirituality, *Pseudo-Dionysius, the Complete Works, Divine Names* (New York, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987) p. 85.

⁷ Robert Payne, *The Holy Fire, The Story of the Early Centuries of the Christian Church in the Near East* (Crestwood, N.Y: SVS Press, 1980) p.245, on his commentary on Dionysius the Areopagite.

⁸ The Classics of Western Spirituality, *Pseudo-Dionysius, The Complete Works* (New York, Wahwah: Paulist Press, 1987) p. 95. This thought is in the same wave of thoughts of St. Gregory of Nyssa in his discourse *“On The Making of Man.”*

become an island, but rather to be developed into a manifestation of love and goodness, a manifestation of Holiness, and to be projected back onto the Creator, the One who gave him existence and purpose.

Man in the Image and unto the Likeness of the Holy Trinity

In man, God has completed His creative work for He has made him in His image and unto His likeness. He has imparted onto man His language and His logic in order to subdue (control) the universe so that it will stay in constant communion with Him. Thereafter, God rested right after He had finished His work. He left the work to be continued by His icon that would take care of the beauty He had created. In the genesis of man, the creation became very good.⁹

As God's icon, man had a special role to fulfill. First, he had to explore and discover the splendor of this creation. He had to ponder the mystery and the secrets of its beauty by means of its marvelous jewels. Second, he had to minister God's mystery, through it and unto it. His sanctity, communion with God, was to maintain the creation in its original function and progressive process and invoke unto it the wisdom of God. Man's role became that of a prophet, a king and a priest. As a prophet *"he stands on behalf of God before people; he speaks God's word, leading, challenging and contending,"*¹⁰ as a king, he was consecrated to have dominion and subdue the creation; and as a priest, *"he stands on behalf of the people [creation] before God; he offers life to God".*¹¹

Consequently, man became holy, an icon of the Holy One, the Holy Trinity, and a living saint (unfortunately the meaning of the word saint is often related to a dead person, but we will look into this in the following chapters). The Holy One has manifested His holiness by way of man and hence man became the sole witness of wholeness, for he was made whole at his genesis.¹² For this reason, God had made man differently from the whole creation by saying *"Let us make"*¹³ instead of *"Let there be"*. The Holy Trinity was in dialogue and counsel preceding this making. The three hypostases were

⁹ Genesis 1:31.

¹⁰ Joseph J. Allen, *The Ministry of the Church, Image of Pastoral Care* (Crestwood, N.Y: SVS Press, 1986) p. 27.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹² Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, quoted in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. V*, T&T Clark Eerdmans, p. 407: "For He Who brought all things into being and fashioned Man as a whole by His own will to the Divine image."

¹³ Genesis 1: 26.

involved, and thus man turned out to be an image of wholeness. This counsel made man as the only creature made in an archetypal beauty who could experience the sanctity of God and commune with the Creator. Man was molded in holiness, and sainthood therefore became an original ingredient of his created nature. He was “set apart” from the beginning as the pinnacle of the entire visible creation and was commanded to minister in holiness. This is his role since his genesis. He fulfills this role by maintaining constant communion with God. His double function as standing on behalf of God in front of creation, and as standing on behalf of creation in front of the Creator, has made him a receiver and a distributor of holiness. He is an active worker, a saint, and a person who, through his actions, sanctifies the world.

Man an Icon of the Holy Who Was “Set Apart” from the Beginning

Man was “set apart” as a holy worker in the two stories of genesis according to the Book of Moses. Despite differing in whether man was formed at the beginning or the end of creation, both stories established his important role. The commandment is clear and the origin of holiness is the same - God. He was likened to the uncreated God by his image and likeness and through the breath of life.

Gregory of Nyssa stresses that the life of the original human person is “a life similar to the divine nature.”¹⁴ Therefore, this man was formed to be a saint, a living icon of the Holy, and he will remain a saint as long as he is in communion with the Holy One. He is in His presence and he is receiving His grace through the intimate relationship of love. He is obedient (*akoui*, listening in Greek) to the Word of God and acquires His *logismoi*. If communion is terminated, the flow of holiness will stop, the image of God will be distorted and the likeness will be corrupted. Thus the living creature will be dead even though he is still alive existing and functioning, for he was made to live.

In this way, *“The Fall, in that it signified the abolition of the original genuineness, was understood in the theology of the Church as destruction, deprivation of sanctity, that is*

¹⁴ Copied from http://theolcom.ru/doc/sacradoc/1_10_Skouteris_en.pdf, Vth International Theological Conference of the Russian Orthodox Church, *ORTHODOX TEACHING ON THE SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH, Moscow, 13–16 November 2007*, Prof. Konstantinos Skouteris, University of Athens, Baptism and Original Sin. p. 2 (footprint # 5, *Idem*. In *Ecclesiasten Homiliae* / Ed. P. Alexander. P. 284, 19–20; PG. 44 Col. 624B).

the loss of communion with God, and consequently as death."¹⁵ The falling of man has detached the saint from direct communion with his Origin. The sanctifying action of man was ceased, and thus evil was permitted to have existence, and therefore to act. Man has chosen freely to taste the mixed fruit¹⁶ in order to acquire the knowledge of good and evil,¹⁷ and consequently, to rely on his own knowledge rather than the *logismoi* of God.

But man did not lose his potentiality to attain once again the connection with his Origin, for the "Breath of Life" and the "image and the likeness of God" have molded his nature. They are the true particles of his human nature because "*nothing could exist without some share in the being and source of everything,*"¹⁸ and therefore, man did not lose his ability to be regenerated as a saint once again. But he has to chose freely the Good after he has tasted from the mixed tree. He has to put an end to evil; to return evil back to its original non-being, non-existence.

¹⁵ Copied from: http://theolcom.ru/doc/sacradoc/1_10_Skouteris_en.pdf Vth International Theological Conference of the Russian Orthodox Church, *ORTHODOX TEACHING ON THE SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH, Moscow, 13–16 November 2007*, Prof. Konstantinos Skouteris, University of Athens, Baptism and Original Sin, p.2.

¹⁶ In context, Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, quoted from *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. V, T&T Clark Eerdmans, p. 407.

¹⁷ Genesis 2:9.

¹⁸ The Classics of Western Spirituality, *Pseudo Dionysious, the Complete Works* (New York, Wahwah: Paulist Press), p.162.