



The Holy Spirit in the Creation of Man

by the Rev. Archimandrite Fr. Eusebius Stephanou, Th.D.

An amazing study may be seen through the centuries among many Church Fathers regarding the Divine mystery of the Holy Spirit in the Creation of Man-kind. There has been no official position of the Church decided through a Church Council regarding the subject at hand. Though a number of Church Fathers and Theologians from the East, such as St. Irenaeus, St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory Nazianzus and

St. Symeon the New Theologian teach of the tripartite nature of man, (comprised of Body, Soul and Spirit), the latter Western Fathers of Rome taught of the bipartite nature, (only comprising of the material body and immaterial soul or spirit). These studies are considered as theologoumenon, (or theological hypothesis), and not officially decided. However, it is important to note that as Greece and Eastern Europe had come out of the ashes of hundreds of years of Ottoman occupation, theological students had to learn at western universities in which their studies had been limited to the western ideals of the bipartite nature. The late Fr. Stephanou had suggested that the Church should explore and decide the issue. Sincerely, Joseph Abbate / President.

The story of the creation of Man is the story of divine love and divine sharing. We find it in 1 John 4:16: “God is love.” Infinite love makes it possible for God to be a trinity in unity. It is the bond that unifies the three persons of the triune God and makes a mystery of three in one and one in three real and believable. Such a boundless and perfect love became manifested in time outwardly, that is, in a direction outside the divine life, when God willed to bring into existence a creature that would closely resemble Himself, and this creature was man.

This sovereign will of God is solemnly declared in Genesis 1:26 “Let us

make man in our image and likeness.” Though God Himself is without beginning and is eternal. He willed, as it were, to make a godlike creature to coexist eternally with Himself. It is in this light that we can understand Psalm 82:1: “Ye are gods and sons of the Most High.”

Although it is true that God created man out of nothing (ex nihilo), we must not think that He created him only out of substance other than Himself or outside Himself. His love and wisdom are manifested in the fact that, in creating man, the crowning work of His creation. Man becomes created in God’s image by participating in the divine life, as well as in creaturely and finite nature. The apostle Peter states this truth explicitly in his second epistle, chapter 1, verse 3: “--- That you may become partakers of divine nature.” But the three persons of the Trinity comprise one, undivided Godhead by reason of their common nature and common will.

If man is to have Spirit and Logos, the nature of the Holy Spirit and the Logos could not be created out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), because they are proper and intrinsic to the uncreated life of God which was without a beginning. This means that the creation of man requires a self-communication of God. In the act of creation He reveals Himself as the self-communicated God and, as will be pointed out later in the course of this message. He is also

a self-communicating God in sustaining man in his proper nature and relationship to his creative source, that is, the Holy Spirit. It is in this self-giving that God possess infinite blessedness.

God does not impart something apart from himself or from the fringes of his life. He gives what is of his deepest life and inmost nature, that is, His own Spirit, or Breath, Spirit literally meaning breath from the Latin *Spiritus*. The Greek for “Spirit”, or *Pneuma*, also literally denotes “breath.” And, as I shall point out later, the Holy Spirit is not infused in a single, instantaneous act, but rather remains in man as a continuous self-giving relationship to man. The measure of the Spirit increases or decreases according to how much man is responsive and open to receiving. He grows into the image and likeness of God to the measure that his own will cooperates with God’s will.

There is such infinite wisdom and power manifested in the way God created man. God did not merely command man to be created nor did God command water or the ground to bring forth man, as we find that He did in the case of the creation of other organic creatures according to Genesis. We read in Gen. 1:3 “Let there be light and there was light.” God is depicted in the scriptural narrative as commanding the earth to “bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind... and it was so.” In Gen. 1:20 God commands the waters “to bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.” In Gen. 1:24 He instructs the earth “to bring forth the living creature after its kind, cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth after its kind.” And following each creative decree, scripture says, “and it was so.” It became an accomplished fact, a completed

and final fulfillment of God's will.

However, the account of the creation of man marks a striking contrast with the manner in which God created all other animate creatures. We are told in Gen. 1:26 "*God said, let us make man in our own image and likeness.*" It is, as if God paused and gave the creation of man special thought and concern – as if God decided on man's creation after deliberating over it with himself. The plural form of the verb "*let us make*" reveals the triune nature of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All three persons were in consultation over the question of the creation of man.

Adam was not created instantaneously as a finished product of God's creative power. God intended His creation to be a process of growth from potentiality into actuality. In fact, one of the early Church Fathers, St. Irenaeus, teaches that Adam was created as an infant. In other words, he was created in a physically, as well as spiritually, undeveloped state, destined to attain his end in the process of growth.

Consequently, Adam was to fulfill God's initial counsel only insofar as his own will was to collaborate with the divine will. If man chooses, he does not have to become in the image and likeness of God. Of course, God could very well have created him in some other way – after all – He is all powerful – nothing is impossible for God. But if He had done this, man would not have been a free moral agent. If he were to comply to God's will by mere instinct, he would have to claim to superiority over plants and animals. If he were to comply by necessity, he would be something of an automation or robot. But God wanted man to make free choices and to choose freely to conform to His law, unlike other creatures that were made to conform to God's natural law of the physical world by instinct and necessity.

Such freedom and intelligence to make responsible decisions shows man to be a co-creator of himself. He has a lot to say about whether or not he wants to become in the image and likeness of God. The option is opened to him to either obey God's will or to reject it.

But now let us take a closer look at the meaning of the creation of man in the image and likeness of God. It is important to remember that already the second person of the Trinity is the image of God but in a beginningless sense of the word – that is, the Son or Logos. We find this term in the first verses of the opening chapter of the Gospel of John: "*In the beginning was the Logos and the Logos was with God and the Logos was God.*" In this context the Son of God is designated as the Logos of God, "Logos in the Greek meaning Logic and Reason. The mistranslation of "Logos" into "Word" in all the existing English translations has been the source of countless evils in Western Christian thought. It began perhaps with the erroneous Latin rendering of **Logos** with the term **Verbum**.

The word of scripture reveals that man was created in the image of God's Son, it is almost like saying, in the image of the image of God. In Romans 8:29 we read: "*For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed into the image of His Son in order that He might be the first-born among many brethren.*" In 1 Corinthians 15:49 we read: "*Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.*" Now the man of heaven is none other than the Logos made flesh, the New Adam, Jesus Christ.

Usually in Christian thought the "*image of God*" has been regarded as different from the "*likeness of God.*" The first is thought of as constituting the natural, intellectual equipment shared in

common by all men irrespective of moral standing and individual inclination. It is not regarded as subject to change.

On the other hand, the expression "likeness of God" is considered as referring to the moral and spiritual stature that man acquires by rightly exercising the natural faculties of the "image" – free will and intellect. It is subject to progress and also to decrease and deterioration. It is regarded as a variable, while the image is regarded as fixed and stable. Unlike the "image," the "likeness" is acquired gradually in the process of growth and development by the act of the free will and not as a "birth right."

Although there is some truth and usefulness to this distinction, there is also a danger of pushing it to extremes. There is need to caution ourselves against thinking of the "likeness," as following the "image" in a necessary chronological sequence. Man really does not fully appropriate the "image" first and thereafter begin to take on the "likeness." He really begins to make moral choices prior to the stage at which he attains the "image of God" in all its fullness.

It would be more correct to say that the "image" and "likeness" are assumed almost simultaneously in the initial stages of growth. Spiritual stature subsequently advances, since intellectual growth stops upon reaching maturity. However, it would be correct to hold that even the "image" (intellectual equipment) increases and develops under the beneficent influence of the moral-spiritual growth involved in attaining the "likeness." In other words, spiritual growth reinforces the powers of freedom and intelligence (image), while, conversely, moral-spiritual decline weakens the "image", darkening mind and will. The growth of the "image" is dependent on the growth of the "likeness." Most important to remember

THE ORTHODOX EVANGELIST

2026 Vol. 60 No. 2

Published by the Orthodox Brotherhood of St Symeon the New Theologian, Inc. St. Symeon Office: 276 N. Holiday Road, Miramar Beach, Florida 32550 Phone: (850) 654-2771. Past issues available upon request.

Email: st-symeon-nt@cox.net

Web site: www.stsymeon.org.

is that both originate in the Holy Spirit.

In Second Corinthians 4:4 the apostle Paul speaks of *the "light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the likeness of God."* In Colossians 3:10 Paul refers to the Son of God as the "image of the creator." Now the "image of the creator" is none other than Jesus Christ. He is the image and son of God not only in the eternal and beginningless sense of the word as true God in His divine nature, but also in the temporal sense as true man in His human nature. Unlike the first Adam who fell, Jesus, the New Adam, became in the image of God as a result of His complete obedience to the Father, thus bringing to fulfillment God's initial will: *"Let us make man in our image and likeness."*

Man cannot become in the image of God, unless, like Jesus, he receives the fullness of the Holy Spirit by entering into a deep and intimate relationship with the eternal Image which is of the same essence and nature with the Father. The Son is the mediator that relates man to God in the Holy Spirit. Man's purpose, as ordained by his Creator, is to unite with the Son through the Holy Spirit, and in attaining the stature of the fullness of the Son, he becomes in the image of God.

The Son and Logos is the Image of God because, as the epistle to the Hebrews states, He is the *"brightness of God's glory and the express image of his person."* Paul in Colossians 1:15 calls Jesus *the "Image of the invisible God."* The Son is the Image of God, because He is the Truth or Presentation of the Being or of He Who Is. He is of the same essence of God, because He is the exact and perfect Image of the perfect God, and consequently, equal in nature and alike in all His attributes.

But now let us return to the actual description of how God created Adam in Genesis 2:7 – *"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils (the Greek Septuagint says "prosopon", that is, person or personality) the breath of life and man became a living soul."* Here we see the two-fold origin of man: the dust of the ground and the "breath of life," that is, God's Spirit. It will be necessary to consider how these two – earth

and Holy Spirit – become related to one another in the creative process.

First, we need to bear in mind that the "man" spoken of as *"formed of the dust of the earth"* represents not only body, but both body and soul, since "man" cannot be conceived of as body alone. This means that the soul, as well as the body, originated from the ground, that is, the earth. In this way we can explain God's later condemnatory pronouncement on fallen Adam and Eve: *"Dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return."*

The soul returns to the earth, in the sense that it is consigned to hades, a subterranean area and abode of the departed souls prior to the coming of Jesus into the world. Paul refers to hades when he says in Philippians 2:10: *"At the name of Jesus, every knee should bow of things in heaven and things in the earth and things under the earth."*

If we examine the text more closely we will see that the two constitutes "body" and "soul" had already been created before the infusion of the Holy Spirit. The soul was already in existence at the moment of the infusion. It must be remembered that the Spirit was infused into man (soul and body) which already had been created out of the dust of the earth.

The Greek Septuagint rendering clarifies this fact because it reads as follows: *"And He breathed into his prosopon (person) the breath of life."* Obviously where there is person or personality there must naturally be a "soul" (*psyche*). Certainly the "breath of life" or Spirit could not possibly have been infused into the body, since the body is the proper abode of the soul, while the soul in turn is the proper abode of the Holy Spirit. That the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit is to be understood in terms of the Spirit's indwelling in the soul which relates the body to the Spirit, absolute matter to absolute Spirit, since it possesses the nature of both.

Besides, if we were to hold that the Spirit is infused into the body, it would be saying that the soul was infused and not created. It would make the soul totally of a divine nature and a particle of divin-

ity. Such a pantheistic view is wholly untenable and unacceptable scripturally and logically, because it would make man devoid of moral responsibility and accountability for his deeds. To clearly distinguish between "soul" and "Spirit" is of utmost importance.

"Soul" in the Hebrew text is *"nephesh,"* in Greek *"Psyche."* It occurs more than 700 times in the Old Testament. It is translated "soul" 428 times, "life" 119 times, "person" 30 times. In all of its uses it refers to the individual with active life. In Genesis it is used to refer to every "living creature." Animals were regarded as "living souls." "Nephesh" is different from "ruach," the Hebrew for "breath, wind, Spirit," in the Greek "Pneuma".

The Bible does not tell us that "man became a soul," but rather a "living soul." This indicates that the soul had been created at an earlier stage in a seed or seminal form. It pre-existed in a potential form in the created world. It is the consensus of many Church Fathers of the early church that all animate things were created instantaneously and collectively on the first day of creation in a certain seed form. This is born out from the verse in which the Holy Spirit is mentioned for the first time in the creation narrative: *"And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters"* (Gen. 1:2). The role and operation of the third person of the Trinity is that entifying matter first and then vivifying, that is, quickening or giving life to things originating from matter. The Holy Spirit is the executor of the plan of God the Father. His function is three-fold: that of entifying, vivifying, sanctifying and perfecting.

St. John Chrysostom teaches in his commentary on Genesis that *"the Spirit of God was carried above the waters... This shows that there was in the waters a certain vital activity and that it was not simply stable and immobile water, but rather in movement and possessing a certain vital power"* (Migne 53, 34).

St. Gregory of Nyssa states in his commentary on Genesis that in the very beginning the "sources" (*aphormai*), "causes" (*aitiai*), and "virtualities" (*dynamis*) of all things were "collectively"

created (*en akarei*) which means “in an instant” and “in the first impulse of the divine will all things existed *adiakritos* (without differentiation). All things were *dynamei* (potential) in the first divine impulse for creation, existing, as it were, is a kind of spermatic potency” (Apologia Hexaemeron, V).

As we have already pointed out, the “living creatures” that the earth and the water brought forth are also called in Genesis “living souls.” Since the Holy Spirit is the only source of life, be it organic or intelligent, the rest of animate creatures could not have come into being without receiving some sort of Holy Spirit infusion. This is more understandable when we take into account that the infusion of God’s Spirit is a continuous process, indeed a permanent relationship of a self-communicating Spirit with His created world. The infusion is not a single, one-time event. It is God’s sustaining relationship with His en-Spirited creation. In one sense, the infusion begins on the first day when He “hovered over the waters.” It is mentioned explicitly on the sixth day to demonstrate the distinction and excellence that man has on the earth, as the crowning work of God’s creation. Because man is the only animate creature who possesses not only a “living soul,” but a *psyche logice* – a “rational soul.” The Spirit communicates to him not only life, but ratio, that is, *logos* and intelligence.

We have seen that the soul and the Spirit are two distinct constituents of man. The soul cannot be the same as the Spirit and the Spirit the same as the soul, since the soul is creaturely. It is a created entity and has a beginning at a point in time, while the Spirit, as the third person of the triune godhead, is uncreated, eternal and beginningless.

Indeed the soul, being created *ex nihilo*, must by necessity be partly material in character. Only God is an absolute Spirit, that is, spiritual by nature and devoid of any materiality. Spiritual nature is not created. It is instead communicated by the one perfect Spirit of God. Even angels who are usually thought of as incorporeal and spiritual beings and powers, are not intrinsically and absolutely spiritual. St. John Damascene, a Church Father of the ninth century,

teaches that “*they are bodiless in contrast to us humans, but all things compared to God are found to be material and crude. Only the divine is truly incorporeal and immaterial*” (On the Orthodox Faith II, 3).

Let us look more analytically at the soul in order to determine which part of the soul is totally spiritual and which part is totally creaturely, taken from the dust of the ground. Being in the image of God, man’s soul consists of two distinguishable parts: the *hypostasis* of the soul and the *physis* (nature or essence) of the soul. The *hypostasis*, on the one hand, is the creaturely substratum of the soul, its underlying, individuating principle which accounts for one soul being entirely distinct from the other and one personality distinguishable from another.

The nature or essence of the soul is divine. It is of the very nature of God’s Spirit, because it is communicated by the infused Spirit. The soul’s nature consists of life, consciousness, intelligence, cognition, rationality, and free will. It is divine life which man’s soul shares in a direct relationship with God’s Holy Spirit.

Sometimes the very nature or essence of the soul is called “spirit.” Usually spelled with a small “s.” Rationality is a quality essentially proper to God’s nature and cannot be conceived of as a detached attribute. It is not an *ex nihilo* creation, but a self-giving of divinity. But that which is given remains part of the divine life and not a detached gift. The creation of the soul is not like turning out a manufactured article. It cannot survive on its own power. It is never self-contained. It always subsists in an organic and constitutional relationship to God’s Holy Spirit. I want to quote from a fourth century Church Father, St. Basil in this respect: “*God did not make, but He poured out the Holy Spirit. He did not fashion it, but bestowed it. He did not create Him, but gave Him*” (Against Eunomius V). Thus the Spirit transmits the powers of reason and cognition to the soul by being continuously infused into the soul and always indwelling the soul. Where God’s Spirit is, there is necessarily God’s *Logos*, the second person of the Trinity. The role of the Spirit is to reveal the *Logos*.

Jesus Christ, the incarnate *Logos*, said: “*He (the Holy Spirit) will take what is mine and declare it to you*” (John 16:14).

Just as each of the three persons in the triune godhead has both an *hypostasis*, sometimes called “substance,” and *physis* or nature, sometimes called *ousia* or essence, so does each individual human soul have both an *hypostasis* and a *nature*. While the *hypostasis* of each person is distinct from that of the other, as the principle of individuality, each of the three persons share a common nature or essence. Now it is in this two-fold division of soul into *hypostasis* and *nature* that man is manifestly in the “*Image of God*.”

In summing up, let me affirm again that the soul and Spirit are not related in any external manner. Their relationship is inward and organic. The Spirit indwells the soul as the gift of God. Creation is the expression of divine love and love is self-giving. The soul is the habitation and abode of the Spirit, while the body is properly the abode of the en-Spirited soul. It is true that the soul of man is sometimes called “spirit” in the Bible. In this case it is the soul that is spiritualized by the indwelling Spirit. But it should never be concluded from this that soul and spirit are one and the same.

In the Christian understanding of man, however, there is interaction between the Spirit and the body, made possible by the existence of the soul. It is this relationship that enables the body to become sanctified. It is the reality of the indwelling Spirit that makes redemption and man’s *Theosis* possible. The Spirit is not given for the first time at the stage of man’s salvation in Jesus Christ, as God’s free gift. It is then rather the renewal and full restoration of the Spirit which God had freely bestowed upon man as a gift at the time of creation. The Holy Spirit is not an adjunct superimposed upon the soul, but not essentially necessary to man’s nature. God did not intend “*to be far from each one of us*,” as the Apostle Paul teaches in Acts 17:28, for “*in Him we live and move and have our being... for we are indeed His offspring*,” and this is possible only because the Holy Spirit is an integral and component part of man.