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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

May you always be consciously aware of the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love and mercy of God the Father, and communion with the Life-Giving Holy Spirit dwelling within your heart!

Made in God's Image and After His Likeness

In that DELIGHTFUL modern fable entitled *Jonathan Living Seagull* (by Richard Bach), an instructing seagull explains to Jonathan Livingston, the small seagull: "You've got to understand that a seagull is an unlimited idea of freedom, an **image** of the Great Gull, and your whole body, from wingtip to wingtip, is nothing more than your thought itself." In another passage the instructing seagull explains what is needed to reach fulfillment as a seagull: "The hardest thing in the world is to convince a bird that he is free and that he can prove it for himself if he'd just spend a little time practicing. Why should that be so hard?"

You and I have been made by God-Trinity to be free, to share in the Trinity's freedom to love each other in complete self-giving to each other through the binding, self-emptying Holy Spirit. This makes us unique among all the other creatures, called by God to be lord and master, the faithful steward as a willing being, ordered toward God's love, as prophet and priest. Through Jesus we are capable of communing with our Maker and co-creating with God-Trinity in transfiguring the created elements of this cosmos into signs of our loving surrender to our Maker and Father through the Son of God in their mutual Holy Spirit.

Our uniqueness over all creation consists in our God-given power to be self-positing. We have been ordained by God's creation to a living, dynamic relationship in self-surrendering love to the triune community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are made, as both male and female, according to God's very own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). God is continually in the process of creating us in such a way that we are being constantly summoned to receive God's Word actively. We are called to listen, to understand, and to believe in God's intimate communicating with us through his Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, in and through their Spirit. Our unique being as an "I" is being from and in the divine Word through whom all things are made. "The Word was in the beginning, and that very Word was with God, and God was that Word. The same was in the beginning with God. Everything came to be by his hand; and without him not even one thing that was created came to be. The life was in him, and the life is the light of men" (John 1:1-4).

We are obligated in our freedom to answer God's call. We are beings created by God, in the words of Emil Brunner, "to stand 'over against' God, and reply to God. In our answer alone we can fulfill or destroy God's purpose in creating us."

A RETURN TO THE EARLY FATHERS OF THE CHURCH

There is a strong resistance of Christian mysticism developing throughout our modern world. This will also bring about a return to the basic insights of the early Fathers, especially of the Christian East, whose theology (arising from their experience in liturgical worship) was primarily fruit of their deep, mystical prayer-life. Holy Scripture, especially the writings of Saint John the Theologian, and Saint Paul, became for them the living Word of God and gave them a solid theological anthropology of human persons as seen from God's creative viewpoint.

Such charismatic giants, purified by years of monastic asceticism, spoke from their Spirit-filled experiences of divinization, which they called *theosis*. They had experienced in prayer a dynamic process of growth from a potential relationship to God through Jesus Christ to an ever-increasing consciousness through the infusion of the Holy Spirit's gifts of faith, hope, and love of being assimilated into the ocean of the Trinity's Allness.

The early Eastern patristic writers developed their whole doctrine of grace, of creation, their theological anthropology and human psychology, and therefore their whole understanding of the ascetical and mystical life around the Image and likeness doctrine. Among Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox scholars there is taking place a rebirth of patristic studies because of the innate conviction that these early Eastern Fathers grasped as in no other age the understanding of pristine Christianity, especially expounded in the writings of Saint John and Saint Paul.

The earliest Christians were mainly concerned with living the new-found faith in simple obedience to the message of the Gospel. Gradually, as they explained their faith to neighboring pagans and Jews or defended Christ's revelation from heretical teachings, there developed an articulated tradition that would be made up of reflective knowledge concerning the basic truths of the Christian faith.

The early Eastern Fathers built up a theology of divinization around two terms found in Genesis. "Then God said, Let **US** make man **IN OUR *image*, AFTER OUR *likeness***; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild beasts of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And **GOD BLESSED THEM...**" (Genesis 1: 26-28); (*eikon*, image, and *homoiosis*, likeness). We find in their speculation about these two concepts the meeting of an integrated theology of Christ and the Trinity, God's creation and his goal in creating all things in his Word, sin and the dynamic expression of salvation and redemption through divine grace.

The Septuagint, or Greek Old Testament, does not say that we human beings are the "image and likeness" of God. We are made only according to the image and likeness of God. Saint Paul tells us that only Jesus Christ is the icon, or image, of God: "He is the image of the invisible God, and the first-born of every creature; And through him were created all things that are in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible; whether imperial thrones or lordships or angelic orders or dominions, all things were in his hand and were created by him; And he is before all things, and by him all things are sustained. And he is the head of the body, the Church; for he is the beginning, the first-fruits of the resurrection from the dead, that in all things he might be the first; For it pleased God to complete all things in him. And by his hand, to reconcile everything to himself...(Colossians 1:15-20).

Thus we see that Eastern Christian spirituality is deeply rooted in the central faith of the Holy Trinity. God, the source of all existence, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, created human beings according to the *image and likeness* that is Jesus Christ, both perfect God (uncreated) and perfect man (created)...with both natures united in the flesh of the Ever-Blessed Virgin Mary, the Theotokos. The process of moving into a more conscious, loving relationship to God the Father, which means an ontological life of Christ living within us, is effected through the sanctifying activity of the Holy Spirit.

Saint Cyril of Alexandria shows, however, that these actions and operations of bringing us human beings into the fullness of God's divine life are effected by the whole Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. "All things come from the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit." Nothing of divine operation in the created order is attributed solely to any individual person of the Trinity, that such actions responds to the intertrinitarian relations.

ALL CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED TO BE HOLY

The process of moving from image to likeness in divinization is the end, therefore, of every human being in God's eternal plan. The Fathers did not hold a distinction between precepts of obligation, binding all Christians, and evangelical counsels which are followed only by Monastics embracing the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Saint Basil, Saint John Chrysostom, and others insisted that all Christians are to be *monotropoi*, i.e., monks, from the word *monachos*, which fundamentally means an integrated, whole person according to God's potentiality locked into each human being. All Christians are to live by one and the same desire for the same goal. Saint Gregory of Nyssa says that "there is only one vocation given to all those who believe in him...that is to be called Christians."

Thus in the matter of perfection there is no distinction between men, women and children, healthy and sick, whether physically or psychically, rich or poor. Saint John Chrysostom is clear on this point: "The Holy Scriptures do not know such a distinction. They enjoin that all lead the life of the monk, even if they are married men who have children as Paul says (and when I say Paul, I say also Christ). He demands from them the same rigorous observance as that demanded from monks."

Our whole fullness and perfection resides in an assimilation to the likeness of Christ. But it is not just Christ as a moral example outside of us, but Christ, the risen Lord, dynamically living in us and working in us through this grace of the indwelling Trinity. Grace for them is no longer a created entity. It is primarily an encounter with the living Trinity whose life is indwelling us and acting at all times to divinize us.

This relationship through Christ given to all human beings is called the "imageness" within it. This relationship was meant by God to become by the divining power of the Holy Spirit an experiential knowledge of being in union with the Lord Jesus and freely surrendering to obey his Word, his Logos, which he is speaking at all times. This potential union in Christ is locked in the potential imageness of each human person. Sin has distorted this call to be free in God's love, yet it can never be destroyed. This image resides in all human beings insofar as we possess an intellect and a will in our very nature. It can never be taken away. No matter how much a person may sin, this potential of being "toward" an intimate union with Christ, this imageness will always remain.

In the second century Saint Irenaeus wrote, and Athanasius and all other Eastern Fathers repeated him, that God became man in order that all human beings would become God. This was meant in a very real way, not that we ever become God by nature, but, as Saint Peter says in his second epistle, we are called to be "participators in the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). This is the great truth that the early Christians seized, and this is what made them so optimistic and so joyful in regard to God's created universe. In a pagan world where there was so much pessimism and fatalism, the non-Christian did not have a clear understanding of why they were living. But Christ truly came to give us this tremendous revelation: that God so loved us as to give us the possibility of becoming truly daughters and sons of God.

Saint Irenaeus is the first great Father of the Church to develop this doctrine of the image and likeness in us human beings. As we have said, all human persons possess the imageness insofar as they possess a body and an intellectual soul. This Irenaeus calls *imago in plasmate*, or the "frame" of a human person. Yet guided by Paul's teaching that the human being is to progress in perfection in Jesus Christ, "safe and blameless, spirit, soul and body" (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Irenaeus insists that a human being is not fully developed until the potential in the imageness of body and soul evolves through the Holy Spirit into the human spirit. We do not have a body and a soul and a spirit, as separable compartments. We are

meant by God, as Jesus in his humanity evolved, to live fully on these various levels of body, soul and spirit relationships. You can see that not all human beings live and die on this earth in the attainment of being in the likeness of Christ, or live on the spiritual plane. The spirit is not present when a person is born. Yet for Saint Paul and the Early Fathers, the spirit was considered as a gift of God's love bringing about our divinizing into Spirit-filled children of God. Some Christians enter into this spiritual relationship with the indwelling Christ, but they lose this relationship to God's Spirit by sin.

This is a concept that is quite different from that found in Western Philosophy. It is not considered in Western thinking that human nature is incomplete without the whole person being guided by the indwelling Holy Spirit. the Holy Spirit is God's gift who brings about the perfecting of human nature. Irenaeus writes: "There are three things out of which, as I have shown, the complete person is composed—flesh (body), soul, and spirit."

WHERE DO WE FIND THE IMAGE AND THE LIKENESS?

If we have been made by God-Trinity according to Christ's image and likeness, where, therefore, do we find this image and likeness in us? Is the image of God in us different from likeness?

It is at this point that we might lose patience as we read the writings of the early Fathers. One writer may interpret "image" as the total, ontological, created human person in process of becoming ever more one's true self in a greater, conscious union with the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, while he might see "likeness" as what we would call grace. It is in this openness of ourselves to the guidance of the Spirit of the risen Christ that we find the likeness that can increase as we respond in loving obedience to the Word incarnate or this relationship can decrease if we harden our hearts and turn away from such an intimate union with Christ.

In the fourth century, Saint Epiphanius, a very outspoken person, said impatiently: "Where the image is and in what it consists, God alone knows, but we should admit the image [*kat' eikona*] in man lest we appear to reject God's gift and refuse to believe him." But when we begin to examine the individual writings of these Fathers, especially of the Christian East, we find a seeming confusion. On one page they may write about the image as distinct from likeness; on another page they write about image becoming always brighter and brighter, or they may state that it was lost to sin or covered over by sin.

Actually there is no contradiction. The teaching on the image and likeness admits of very fluid concepts, and only from the context can one understand what the individual writer is trying to say. But by and large, there is among the Fathers the basic conviction of the spiritual life as a progressive development of the image and likeness from the very moment that we are born to the moment we die, with this process of growing into greater oneness with the Trinity in and through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit continuing unendingly into the life to come.

One great richness coming out of this patristic teaching on image and likeness is the holistic emphasis on human nature. The total human person is created to progress in union with God-Trinity by living fully. We are not persons who have a body or who possess a soul or have a spirit. rather we are persons who are "embodied beings" and "ensouled beings" and "enspirited beings" in vital interpersonal relationships on the various integrated levels of human existence with the indwelling Trinity. The early Fathers conceived "nature" as the total being, created as body and soul with the potential to respond through the Holy Spirit to become a spirited being in living consciously in the likeness of Christ. All this is embraced by the one general word *physis* (nature). *Physis* is the broader term than our term "nature." It embraces not only the nature of a human person as he or she comes from the hand of God, but it also

looks toward its completion and is defined according to its fulfillment rather than the beginning stage. Therefore the concept of “remembering the future” will have a deep impact on our lives.

Thus *physis* is everything that God puts into a human being, whether it is in the beginning stage or the final one, and it also includes that which comes to a person after he or she is baptized and begins to lead a virtuous life. The Fathers consider, therefore, everything in nature or that comes to nature after baptism as being “according to nature” (*kata physin*). All is within the structure of true human nature. There is nothing superimposed from the outside upon nature. The patristic doctrine emphasizes the idea of a dynamic drawing out of the potencies present in the first creation. The expression “supernature,” to indicate what God creates and puts on top of nature like one story of a building built upon another, as in the scholastic phrase “grace builds on nature,” is NEVER used by the Fathers!

Sin according to the early Fathers is anything that is against human nature, which God creates as always very good (Genesis 1:31). Anything that is “against nature” (*para physin*) has to come from outside. Everything in us that is given to us in our creation or that comes after is a drawing out of God’s initial creation of human nature as good and always potentially being driven by God toward greater union with the triadic life.

We can lose created grace by breaking away from God’s gift of sharing in his eternal life. Even if we do sin, our human nature can never be evil or corrupt, but remains always in the goodness of God’s continued call to us to return to live fully unto God’s glory. We may succumb to sin and commit moral evil, but such evil is not able to touch or destroy or corrupt our nature. We can lose grace, the divine likeness, but the human nature given to us by God is good and can never be destroyed.

The will, therefore, is the great determining factor. There are two parts in the human will. The first is self-possession, or the autonomy to determine our destiny (*autoxousion*). This autonomy of free will can never be taken from us. We are always intrinsically called by God to be master of our own destiny. No outside agent coming in and touching us can ever force us against our will. We must determine freely in the face of all temptations to succumb or not.

There is another part of our human free will that the Fathers call *eleutheria*. It is that quality which we would perhaps call “integrated nature.” You, as a total person, react according to your total nature for your total fulfillment as God has eternally wished you to respond to his freely given call to share his community of love. Possessing this type of true freedom, your whole being harmoniously reacts according to the powers which God has given you. In the first sin Adam and Eve, human beings lost this true freedom, this harmony among all their powers, so that all the bodily appetites and senses along with the internal faculties of memory, emotions, understanding, imagination, and will tend toward their own proper end and unity, and intimate friendship with God is lost.

Irenaeus is the first of the early Fathers to give us an authentic Christology. He speaks of the incarnation as the necessary means to bring about the salvation that we human beings could never have attained by our own power. The Word of God became human in order that we might become God through God’s graceful divine life. Christ desired to become all things to us except sin. He comes as the perfect image of God in us, in our entire human being.

It is not merely our soul that becomes the temple of God, but our whole being must be refashioned “according to Christ.” In the depths of our being, on body, soul, and spirit levels, we must become conscious sharers of his divine and human natures. In this teaching, Irenaeus and those writers who followed his holistic spirituality, nicely unite the mysticism of Saint John the Beloved and Saint Paul. He identifies the flesh of Christ with ours and states that the promise of eternal life is given us because Christ is the Prince of Life.

GOD IS EVER CALLING US

In a very summary fashion we have tried to present here the main lines of the patristic anthropology of our human nature, built around the image and likeness concept from Sacred Scripture. Hopefully we have seen that this doctrine flows directly from Scripture. In a very true sense, as God conceives us, we are truly human persons only when we emerge from ourselves (false self) and rediscover by God's grace our true selves. This means to turn to him, Jesus Christ, who is the perfect image of his Father.

We must believe we can find in our daily modern life many applications of this doctrine of the image and likeness. It will certainly recover for us a more existential view of the life of God-Trinity personally working in all areas of our human nature, made up of body, soul, and spirit levels of relationships to God, to neighbor, and to the entire created world around us. We can also discover a more personalistic and dynamic view of grace as primarily God-Trinity, as uncreated energies of divine love in self-giving as Father, Son, and Spirit to us in each moment of our existence.

God has created all human beings with a basic drive toward union with him. All human beings are desperately searching for happiness, but many do not know who it is who alone can ever satisfy this yearning. If we suppress this basic image and these drives given us by God for becoming sharers in his own divine Trinitarian life, then our hearts will always remain restless until we are free from all anxiety or stress in God himself.

With our emphasis in this month's *Inscape*, on more individual personalism, we are now more open to move away from a perfect but immutable, static God who is far away from us to discover from Scripture and in the writings of the great Christian mystics of both the East and the West the humility of the pursuing Trinity that wishes to give themselves to us in every event of our human existence. Every moment is a constant "vocation" in which God is calling us to respond to his invitation to become more like his Son according to whose image and likeness we are being created as we cooperate in this process of divinization, of fructifying the seeds of the Trinitarian life implanted within us in our creation and baptism.

We do not wait until heaven to aspire to this intimate union with the Trinity. We enjoy this divine life even now as we go through our daily lives as we seek to put on the mind of Jesus by an inner revolution and strive to live according to his virtuous life. Our union with Christ can never be taken from us by any event, trial, cross, or person, not even by death itself (Romans 8:35). This union as we live in the likeness of Christ spills outward into loving action. Contemplation and action blend together to that we really create, as Teilhard de Chardin has said, a divine milieu. Wherever we are, the whole universe is truly a temple of God, and we find God everywhere and in all things dynamically working to bring us and the whole universe to Christ. We are not alone, we are part of this total cosmos. We find our completion precisely in our activities in this world done in and for and through Jesus Christ. We go to God together with this whole wonderful, awe-inspiring, world of ours. The world must never become a hindrance, but rather an instrument through which we can respond to God, and, in listening to his call and accepting it, we can thus move ever more from being made according to God's image to become actuated in the very likeness of Christ.

"My days have vanished like a dream on waking. I have buried Thy **Image** and broke Thy commandments. O my soul; return, repent, and uncover what was hidden. Accept me O Lord; repenting in fear and crying in love."

"I am the coin with the **Royal Image** which was lost of old; But light the lamp—Thy Forerunner—O Word. Seek and find Thy **Image!**" (Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete)

“No one could describe the Word of the Father, but when He took flesh from you, O Birth-Giver of God, He accepted to be described and restored the fallen **Image** to its former state by uniting it to divine beauty. We confess and proclaim our salvation in words and Icons.” (*Kondak on the First Sunday of the Great Fast and the Triumph of Orthodoxy*)

“When You created man by taking dust from the earth, and honored him with Your own **Image** O God, You did set him in a paradise of delight, promising him eternal life; and the enjoyment of everlasting blessings in the observance of Your commandments.” (*Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great*)

The following patristic reflections are from *Pilgrimage of the Heart: A Treasury of Eastern Christian Spirituality*; edited by Reverend George A Maloney.

MADE LITTLE LESS THAN A GOD

“For Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast clothed him with glory and honor” (Psalms 8:5).

“Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; ... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them... And God blessed them...” Genesis 1: 26-28).

“Now the soul and the spirit are certainly a part of the man but certainly not the man; for the perfect man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the spirit of the Father and the admixture of that fleshly nature, which was molded after the image of God... But when the spirit here blended with the soul is united to God’s handiwork (*plasma*) the man, is rendered spiritual and perfect because of the outpouring of the Spirit, and this is he who was made in the image and likeness of God. But if the Spirit be wanting to the soul, he who is such is indeed of an animal nature, and, being left carnal, shall be an imperfect being, possessing indeed the image of God in his formation (*in plasmato*), but not receiving the similitude through the Spirit, and thus is this being imperfect... Neither is the soul itself, considered apart by itself, the man; but it is the soul of a man, and part of a man. Neither is the spirit a man, for it is called the spirit, and not a man, but the commingling and union of all these constitutes the perfect man... For this cause he (Paul) declares that those are “the perfect” who present unto the Lord the three component parts without offense. Those then are the perfect who have had the Spirit of God remaining in them, and have preserved their souls and bodies blameless, holding fast the faith of God, that is that faith which is directed toward God and maintaining righteous dealings with respect to their neighbors” (*Saint Irenaeus*).

“For the image of God is His Word, the genuine Son of Mind, the divine Word, the archetypal light of light; and the image of the Word is the true man, the mind which is in man, who is therefore said to have been made “in the image and likeness of God,” assimilated to the Divine Word in the affections of the soul and therefore rational” (*Clement of Alexandria*).

“And God said, ‘Let us make man in our own image and after our likeness,’ and then He added the words: ‘So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them and He blessed them.’ Now the expression, “in the image of God created He him,” without any mention of the Word likeness,” conveys no other meaning than this, that man received the dignity of God’s image at his first creation; but that the perfection of his likeness has been reserved for the consummation, namely, that he might acquire it for himself by the exercise of his own diligence in the imitation of God, the possibility of attaining to perfection being granted him at the beginning through the dignity of the divine image, and the perfect realization of the divine likeness being reached in the end by the fulfillment of the (necessary) works” (*Origen of Alexandria, Egypt*).

“Being God, God gives them (men) a share in His own Image, our Lord Jesus Christ, and makes them after His own image and after His likeness; so that by such grace perceiving the Image, that is, the Word of the Father, they may be able through Him to get an idea of the Father, and knowing their Maker, live the happy and truly blessed life” (Saint Athanasius).

“For, as when the likeness painted on a panel has been effaced by stains from without, he whose likeness it is must needs come once more to enable the portrait to be renewed on the same wood; for, for the sake to his picture, even the mere wood on which it is painted is not thrown away, but the outline is renewed upon it; in the same way also the most Holy Son of the Father, being the image of the Father, came to our region to renew man once made in His likeness and find him as one lost” (Saint Athanasius).

“Man is a great thing, and pitiful man is something honorable,” (Proverbs 20:6) who has his honor in his natural constitution. For, what other things on earth have been made according to the image of the Creator? To which of the animals that live on the land, or in the water, or in the air, has the rule and power over all things been given? He has fallen a little below the dignity of the angels because of his union with the earthly body....But still, the power of understanding and recognizing their own Creator and Maker also belongs to men. ‘And he breathed into his nostrils’ (Genesis 2:7), that is to say, He placed in man some share of His own grace, in order that he might recognize likeness through likeness. Nevertheless, being in such great honor because he was created in the image of the Creator, he is honored above the heavens, above the sun, above the choirs of stars. For, which of the heavenly bodies was said to be an image of the most high God? What sort of an image of his Creator does the sun preserve? They possess only inanimate and material bodies that are clearly discernable, but in which nowhere is there a mind, no voluntary motions, no free will” (Saint Basil the Great of Caesarea).

“What is this mystery that is around me? I had a share in the image; I did not keep it. He (Christ) partakes of my flesh that he may both save the image and make the flesh immortal. He communicates a second union far more marvelous than the first, inasmuch as then He imparted the better nature, whereas now He Himself partakes of the worse. This is more godlike than the former action, this is loftier in the eyes of all men of understanding” (Saint Gregory of Nazianzus).

“The Godhead is mind and word, for ‘in the beginning was the Word’ (John 1:1) and the followers of Paul ‘have the mind of Christ’ which ‘speaks in them’ (1 Corinthians 2:16; 2 Corinthians 13:3); but humanity too is not far removed from these; you see in yourself word and understanding (*logos, nous*), an imitation of the very Mind and Word. Again, God is love and the font of love; for this the great John declares that ‘love is of God,’ and ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:7-8); the Fashioner of our nature has made this to be our feature too; for ‘hereby,’ He says, ‘shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.’ Thus, if this be absent, the whole stamp of the likeness is transformed. The Deity beholds and hears all things and searches all things out; you too have the power of apprehension of things by means of sight and hearing and the understanding that inquires into things and searches them out” (Saint Gregory of Nyssa).

May we some how and in some way, by the grace of God, recognize the Image of God dwelling within everyone that becomes *present* to us.

Father John Michael Zboyovski