

Catechetical Letter 2

Who is Man? Why was He created. What are the implications?

In our first letter, we addressed the fundamental fact of the universe - God. All life, all blessedness, all goodness, all knowledge comes from Him.

Now we will address the most important scripture about man in the Bible. Most of the Bible is directly related to man, since he is the crown of God's creation. The earliest reference to man is the most important, because it teaches us, if we look at it with spiritual eyes, when, how, and why we were created, and of critical importance, the implications of our creation by God -- that is, how should we live?

Everything in Christianity has as its goal the fulfillment of the implications of this first event in the history of humankind:

And God said, Let us make man according to our image and likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the flying creatures of heaven, and over the cattle and all the earth, and over all the reptiles that creep on the earth. (27) And God made man, according to the image of God he made him, male and female he made them. Genesis 1:26-27

Man was created on the 6th day of creation, as the last created being. The angels had already been created, and all the animals, from the fish to the reptiles and birds and mammals. Man was made last, because he is the crown of God's creation. He is the most important created being. It is important to understand why.

First, we ask the question: "Why did God create man"? There is a simple one word answer: love. God created man because of love. To understand this answer, we must understand love. We will never learn about it from popular songs and entertainment. We can only learn of love from God, that is, *from our experience of God*. This is very important to understand! *Everything we do* must be to increase our experience of God.

The scriptures state the "God is love". This means that love is an eternal attribute of God, since God is eternal. Furthermore, a basic property of love is that it always has an object. Love gives of itself to another. Another fundamental aspect of love is that it communicates with another. We experience this daily in our lives, even though the way we love and are loved is usually far from perfect (that is, it is not love, as God loves) . If love is eternal and has an object, Who does God "give Himself" to and communicate with?

God eternally, has always, and will always love Himself. The Father loves the Son and the Spirit. The Son loves the Father and the Spirit,. the Spirit loves the Father and the Son. The three persons of God, each fully God, equally love each other, with one perfect united will, purpose and intelligence.

Let us look carefully at the meaning of "image" and "likeness". It is critical to understand these words, because *the entire direction of our life must be based on our understanding of them*.

The scripture tells us a curious thing: It has God referring to Himself in the plural, when He says "**... Let us make man ...**". This is the second reference to God as a Trinity in the Scripture. (See the Bibliography for the first reference) This is a critical point, because immediately after referring to Himself as a Trinity of co-equal persons, He creates man by His word in His IMAGE and likeness.

In daily life, we understand "image" to be similarity. We admire a baby and say "he is the spitting image of his father!" And indeed, we are made in the image of our human parents. We share in their attributes - color of their eyes, intelligence, athletic or music ability, and many other things. We came from them, so we are similar to them. We were made in their image.

What does it mean to be made in the "image" of God? We do not share in color of God's eyes or any physical human attribute, since God is above all created things, and is wholly immaterial. However, we must be like God in some way, because anything made in another's image shares of some of its attributes.

The church understands that there three attributes of God which humans share. God has perfect **knowledge** of all things, perfect **desire** of only good things, and a perfect **will** to accomplish whatever he wants. These fundamental attributes are also imparted to man. In God, all these attributes are perfectly expressed, but in man they are present in a germinal form. We can understand this by thinking of a child. This child may have inherited the intelligence of his parents, but if he is never read to, or even spoken to, or given education and basic care, he will not express this intelligence to an ultimate degree. So it is with our God-given attributes.

We are given the capacity to have perfect **knowledge**. Since God is perfect, and all good things come from Him, the ultimate expression of this capacity is the perfect knowledge of God, that is knowing God, by sharing in His inner life.

We are given the capacity to **desire**. In ascetical writings, this is called the "incensive power" of the soul. We can desire good or evil things, but only desiring good things will fully develop this capacity to be in agreement with God, who only and always desires good.

We are given the capacity to accomplish the things we desire. This can also be called "**will**". Our will must be exercised in order to become strong. God's will is perfect. He can accomplish whatever He desires. Our will is weak, and must be perfected through effort, so that we can perfectly accomplish good always.

Bibliography of Scripture and Church about the creation of man, and the image and likeness of God.

In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth. (2) But the earth was unsightly and unfurnished, and darkness was over the deep, and the Spirit of God moved over the water. (3) And God said, Let there be light, and there was light. Genesis 1:1-3

This is the first reference to God as a Trinity of persons. 'God' refers to the Father. The reference to the Holy Spirit is obvious. the Son of God, who is called the "Word" in scripture, is referred to by the statement "God said".

God created man of the earth, and made him after his own image. (2) And he turned him into it again, and clothed him with strength according to himself. (3) He gave him the number of his days and time, and gave him power over all things that are upon the earth. (4) He put the fear of him upon all flesh, and he had dominion over beasts and fowls. (5) He created of him a helpmate like to himself, he gave them counsel, and a tongue, and eyes, and ears, and a heart to devise: and he filled them with the knowledge of understanding. (6) He created in them the science of the spirit, he fired their heart with wisdom, and shewed them both good and evil. (7) He set his eye upon their hearts to shew them the greatness of his works: (8) That they might praise the name which he hath sanctified: and glory in his wondrous act that they might declare the glorious things of his works. (9) Moreover he gave them instructions, and the law of life for an inheritance. (10) He made an everlasting covenant with them, and he shewed them his justice and judgments.

“I was born to love people. It doesn’t concern me if he is a Turk, black, or white. I see in the face of each person the image of God. And for this image of God I am willing to sacrifice everything.” – Elder Amphilochios Makris of Patmos

So, being made of dust from the earth, and having received a breath of life which the word calls an intelligent soul and the image of God, he was placed in the garden to work and given a commandment to keep. How so? So that, as long as he did keep it and work, he would remain immortal and compete everlastingly with the angels, and together with them would praise God unceasingly and receive His illumination and see God intelligibly, and hear His divine voice. But in that same hour that he should transgress the commandment given him and eat of the tree from which God had commanded him not to eat, he would be given over to death and be deprived of the eyes of his soul. He would be stripped of his robe of divine glory; his ears would be stopped up, and he would fall from his way of life with the angels and be chased out of paradise. This indeed did happen to the transgressor, and he fell from his eternal and immortal life. For once Adam had transgressed God’s commandment and lent his ear for the deceitful devil to whisper in, and was persuaded by him on hearing his cunning words against the Master Who had made him, he tasted of the tree and, perceiving with his senses, he both saw and beheld with passion the nakedness of his body. He was justly deprived of all those good things. He became deaf. With ears become profane he could no longer listen to divine words in a manner which was spiritual and adequate to God, as such words resound only in those who are worthy. Neither could he see the divine glory any longer, in that he had voluntarily turned his nous away from it and had looked upon the fruit of the tree with passion, and had believed the serpent who said: ‘In that now that you eat of it, you will be as gods, knowing good and evil’ (Gen 3:5).”

- St. Symeon the New Theologian

“The Holy Apostle said, ‘Children, love one another (1 Jn. 4:7), humble yourselves, humble yourselves. Because if you love someone (and you must love everyone because every person is an image of God, and it, i.e., the image of God, is in even a defiled person, he can be cleansed and again be pure), then you humble yourself before him. Where there is love, there is also humility; but where there is malice – there is pride. I ask and desire that there be love among you.” St. Nikon of Optina

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