

**"Original beauty: Patristic understanding and visual approach"**

Asst. Prof. Dr. Dr. Vasiliki Mavroska

**St. Andrew's Biblical Theological Institute**

International Conference "*Theology of Beauty*"

Bose, Italy, 19- 22 October 2011

The revelation of the Triune God is performed through the theophanies, starting from the creation of the world, the history of the prophets of the Old Testament, the incarnation of the fleshless Logos, the events of the New Testament, the Apostles, the saints and the whole ecclesiastical community. In other words *ex visu* and *ex auditu*, through the words and the visual approach<sup>1</sup>. In my announcement, I shall draw the aesthetical line between the patristic understanding, mostly from st. Gregory of Nyssa, on the notion of the original beauty of the human beings and its illustrative display in a number of indicative Christian artistic examples.



The most of the scholastic books on Dogmatics refer to the creation of the world out of nothing. Yet, if we examine the creation of the world as coming out of a zero, that means it happened suddenly through the divine power. And the question remains; is it possible something to have a zero origin? This logical difficulty is overcome by the fact that the phrase *Nihil ex nihilo fit* does not mean that *nothing comes from nothing*, but *out of the non-existing* (*ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος*). Apparently, the Church Fathers do not refer to creation as being created from nothing. That term (*ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος*) is used in order to stress the connection of the existing and the non-existing, the created and the un-created, the substance and the energies. That notion indicates the fact that the created reality has not been brought into existence having the same substance with God, but through the

---

<sup>1</sup>. N. A. Matsoukas, *Δογματική καί Συμβολική Θεολογία Γ- Ἀνακεφαλαίωση καί Ἀγαθοτοπία. Ἐκθεση τοῦ οἰκουμενικοῦ χαρακτήρα τῆς χριστιανικῆς διδασκαλίας* (ΦΘΒ 34), ed.: Π. Πουρναγῶ, Thessaloniki 1997, pp. 118- 9.

uncreated energies of God<sup>2</sup>. All these are based on the logos (reasons) for the existence of beings (*Λόγοι τῶν ὄντων*). Nothing exists between the uncreated (God) and the created, apart from God's wills to create. In the patristic literature the logos of beings are associated also to the *creative powers* or the *predestinations* or *examples*, but not the compulsory continuation of God's thoughts (as the Platonic ideas). Hence, the creation co- exists eternally in God through his volition. It is essential to notice that the logos of beings are not created archetypes, but what God would like for the world, in order it to be in a constant way of development<sup>3</sup>. In that frame the theory of Darwin (1809- 1882) for example could not cause the awkwardness that has caused in the West, since the evolutionary theory of the Eastern Fathers was a part of their writings and teachings. The

---

<sup>2</sup>. See in details the theology of the creation *ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος*, N. A. Matsoukas, *Δογματική καὶ Συμβολική Θεολογία Β, Ἐκθεση τῆς ὀρθόδοξης πίστεως σέ ἀντιπαράθεση μέ τή δυτική Χριστιανοσύνη* (ΦΘΒ 3), ed.: Π. Πουρναγῶ, Thessaloniki 1992, pp. 144- 52. The creation out of the non- existing is also found in the Orthodox liturgical texts, such as on the 30<sup>th</sup> January, the feast of the st. Basil, st. Gregory the theologian and st. John Chrysostom, *Matin, Theotokion of 3<sup>rd</sup> Ode*, "Ὁ πάντα ἐκ μὴ ὄντων ὄντα ποιήσας, καὶ φύσιν δούς ἐκάστῳ τῶν γενομένων", ("He who brought all things from non-being into being and gave each of them its nature..."). See about the distinction between the created and the uncreated in st. Gregory of Nyssa, N. P. Xionis, *Οὐσία καὶ ἐνέργειες τοῦ Θεοῦ κατὰ τόν Ἅγιο Γρηγόριο Νύσσης*, ed.: Γρηγόρη, Athens 1999, pp. 30- 55.

Cf. a western theological perspective II. Dello, O.S.F., "Is Creation eternal?", *Theological Studies* 66: 2 (June 2005), pp. 279- 303. For the Christian doctrine of creation on st. Augustine and its relationship with the Neoplatonic or Plotinian ideas see R. D. Crouse, "The meaning of Creation in Augustine and Eriugena", *Studia Patristica 22- Papers presented to the 10<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 1987* (1989), pp. 229- 34. Cf. R. J. O'Connell, SJ, *St. Augustine's early theory of man*, A. D. 386- 391, ed.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts 1968, esp. pp. 1- 17.

<sup>3</sup>. For example see the text of st. John of Damascus "Εἰσι δὲ καὶ ἐν τῷ Θεῷ εἰκόνες καὶ παραδείγματα τῶν ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ἐσομένων, τουτέστιν ἡ βουλή αὐτοῦ ἢ προαιώνιος καὶ αἰεὶ ὡσαύτως ἔχουσα... Ταῦτα τὰς εἰκόνας καὶ τὰ παραδείγματα προορισμοὺς φησὶν ὁ ἅγιος Διονύσιος... Ἐν γὰρ τῇ βουλῇ αὐτοῦ ἐχαρκτηρίζετο καὶ εἰκονίζετο πάντα τὰ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ προωρισμένα καὶ ἀπαραβάτως ἐσόμενα πρὶν γενέσεως αὐτῶν, ὥστε, εἴ τις βούλοιτο οἰκοδομῆσαι οἶκον, ἀνατυπὸν καὶ εἰκονίζει πρῶτον τὸ σχῆμα κατὰ διάνοιαν" in B. Kotter, "Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos III, Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tres", *Patristische Texte und Studien* 17, ed.: Walter de Gruyter, Berlin- New York 1975, p. 84, lines 1- 14 (PG 94, 1240D- 41A. In a modern Greek translation see I. *Κατὰ Μανιχαίων II. Πρὸς τοὺς διαβάλλοντας τὰς ἀγίας εἰκόνας Λόγοι τρεῖς, Κείμενο- Μετάφραση- Εἰσαγωγή- Σχόλια (text- translation- introduction- comments)* N. A. Matsoukas, ΦΘΒ 8, ed.: Π. Πουρναγῶ, Thessaloniki 1988, p. 182).

Cf. N. A. Matsoukas, *Δογματική καὶ Συμβολική Θεολογία Γ- Ἀνακεφαλαίωση καὶ Ἀγαθοτοπία. Ἐκθεση τοῦ οἰκουμενικοῦ χαρακτήρα τῆς χριστιανικῆς διδασκαλίας* (ΦΘΒ 34), ed.: Π. Πουρναγῶ, Thessaloniki 1997, p. 162 (see also the differences to Platon and to Origen, pp. 163- 8).

logos of beings and then the history of the holy Oikonomia are focused on the level of the evolutionary path towards the likeness of God, in order all the after- original sins to be healed; that is why there is no diarchic situation among the nature and the super- nature, because all the created world, within the uncreated energies of God, is struggling to reach the zenith, meaning the recovering of the original beauty with the variety of charismata and events that derive from it<sup>4</sup>.

Within the logos of beings there was the concept of a catholic reality as the only true icon of God. Actually, the creation consists the *κατά χάριν* homogeneity of the world<sup>5</sup>, in a kinetic completeness to the *likeness* of God. The fundamental point of the creation is the loving relationship of the Holy Trinity. The creation of the human beings according to the image and likeness of God is, according to st. Gregory of Nyssa, as if someone is seeing through a very clean speculum<sup>6</sup>. That is the actual original beauty; the mirror of the three persons of the Holy Trinity<sup>7</sup> as well as the prefiguration of the incarnation of the fleshless Logos of God<sup>8</sup>.

The visual approach of the above analysis of the patristic texts can be detected on the two early- fourth- century examples one in the new Museum de l' Arles Antique (around 325) and the second in the Museum Pio Cristiano (Vatican, second quarter of the

---

<sup>4</sup>. N. A. Matsoukas, *Δογματική και Συμβολική Θεολογία Γ- Ανακεφαλαίωση και Άγαθοτοπία. Έκθεση του οίκουμενικού χαρακτήρα της χριστιανικής διδασκαλίας* (ΦΘΒ 34), ed.: Π. Πουρναρά, Thessaloniki 1997, pp. 343- 6.

<sup>5</sup>. Grégoire de Nysse, *La création de l' homme*, SC 6, εκδ.: J. Laplace, Paris- Lyon 1943, p. 158 (*De Hominis Orificio*, PG 44, 185BD). Cf. N. A. Matsoukas, *Δογματική και Συμβολική Θεολογία Γ- Ανακεφαλαίωση και Άγαθοτοπία. Έκθεση του οίκουμενικού χαρακτήρα της χριστιανικής διδασκαλίας* (ΦΘΒ 34), ed.: Π. Πουρναρά, Thessaloniki 1997, σσ. 351- 3.

<sup>6</sup>. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De eo quid sit ad imaginem Dei et ad similitudinem*, PG 44, 1328A, "Οί την έναντων άπλανώς του προσώπου θεόκτισον ώραιότητα κατανοείν βουλόμενοι ούκ άλλως πως την οικείαν είκόνα και του προσώπου τον χαρακτήρα ένοπρίζεται δύνανται, άλλ' η διά τινος καθαρωτάτου έσόπρου..."

<sup>7</sup>. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De eo quid sit ad imaginem Dei et ad similitudinem*, PG 44, 1328C, «Θεόν και λέγει τον Πατέρα και τον Υιόν και τὸ άγιον Πνεύμα».

<sup>8</sup>. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De eo quid sit ad imaginem Dei et ad similitudinem*, PG 44, 1329B, «... ώσπερ εν έσόπρω τινι και σκιαγραφία τυπική, ού φυσική, της τρισυποστάτου θεότητος τὸ μυστήριον, ού μόνον δέ, αλλά και την ένανθρώπησιν του ενός της άγίας Τριάδος Θεού Λόγου σαφώς προγράφων».

4<sup>th</sup> c.), the so- called "*Trinity sarcophagi*"<sup>9</sup>. Our interest is the left scene (of the middle row of the Arles sarcophagus and the upper row of the Vatican sarcophagus), where it was said that the Triune God is depicted. In both sarcophagi, there are three male figures, with the usual roman clothing. Only the central man is seated on a throne, in the pose of blessing or speaking<sup>10</sup>. In the Arles sarcophagus is the man on the right, who holds the small male figure from his shoulders, while in Vatican one is the man at the back, whose head is apparent<sup>11</sup>.

Scholars have interpreted as the creation of Eve by the Holy Trinity, since it is the transformation of st. Augustine's theology into a pictorial way<sup>12</sup> or the other three persons as the Holy Trinity<sup>13</sup>, that brings up the resemblance of the fourth figure with portraits of Apostle Paul of the 4<sup>th</sup> c<sup>14</sup> or Logos and two angels<sup>15</sup> or in general an assistant figure<sup>16</sup>.

---

<sup>9</sup>. The second sarcophagus is also called "*the dogmatic sarcophagus*", because of its scenes relating with the salvation. R. M. Jensen, *Face to face- Portraits of the Divine in Early Christianity*, ed.: Fortress Press, Minneapolis 2005, pp. 529- 30, D. Markow, "Some born- again Christians of the fourth century", *The Art Bulletin* 63: 1 (March 1981), pp. 650- 5, pp. 650- 55.

<sup>10</sup>. Detailed discription of the motif see H. Kaiser- Minn, *Die Eschaffung des Menschen auf den spätantiken Monumenten des 3. und 4. Jahrhunderts*, ed.: Heidelberg University Press, Heidelberg 1976, pp. 10- 11.

<sup>11</sup>. In general the facial characteristics of the three persons of the Triune God and their differentiations or similarities could be depended on the exact date of the illustrations, meaning before or after the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea; the pre- Nicaea pictures present Logos and the Holy Spirit as younger than the Father, while the after- Nicaea models demonstrate them as identical. Also about the special characteristics in the *Trinity sarcophagi* see Jensen Margaret Robin, *Face to face- Portraits of the Divine in Early Christianity*, ed.: Fortress Press, Minneapolis 2005, pp. 125- 7, J. M. Jensen, "The Economy of the Trinity at the Creation of Adam and Eve", *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7: 4 (1999), pp. 531- 2. Also see the discussion in Büchsel, 1991, p. 62, J. Engemann, "Zu den Dreifaltigkeitsdarstellungen der frühchristlichen Kunst: Gab es im 4. Jahrhundert anthropomorphe Trinitätsbilder?", *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 19 (1976), p. 161, pp. 165- 7.

<sup>12</sup>. A. Heimann, "Trinitas Creator Mundi", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* II (1938), pp. 43- 4.

<sup>13</sup>. J. M. Jensen, "The Economy of the Trinity at the Creation of Adam and Eve", *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7: 4 (1999), pp. 535- 6.

<sup>14</sup>. J. M. Jensen, "The Economy of the Trinity at the Creation of Adam and Eve", *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7: 4 (1999), p. 531. That aspect was first supported by Christe (the information is taken

However, the assistance in the *Genesis* story can only be an angel and since it is more than possible the seated person to be the Father, then it is likely to be accompanied by his Logos and two angels<sup>17</sup> or according to Kaiser- Minn they are two royal assistants<sup>18</sup>. The prospect of being a royal assistant is rather vague, since it cannot be documented by the *Genesis* text or the patristic literature. Also, it is usual in the art Logos or an angel to be depicted, an element that comes from the fact that in the Old Testament Logos is revealed through his theophanies and often, as for instance in the Abraham's hospitality, has the appearance of an angel.

Should we agree with the aspect, according to which the scenes in both sarcophagi represent the raising from the dead then a potential interpretation of the fourth person would be the humankind in its entirety. This assumption can be based on the humankind's creation according to the *image* and *likeness* of God and that is why there is an iconographical resemblance of the four persons. Furthermore, it can be, that in the scene man is already created and he is dressed, according to God's promise for

---

from Kaiser- Minn, 1976, pp. 23- 4), who said that the two men around the seated Godfather are the Apostels Peter and Paul.

<sup>15</sup>. J. Engemann, *Deutung und Bedeutung frühchristlicher Bildwerke*, ed.: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1997, pp. 65- 9. In the later bibliography it is supported by Koch, Bovini and Brandenburg that the figure may stand for an angel, a statement, which is pointed out already from all of the above- mentioned researchers as another possibility. Cf. *Repertorium der christlich- antiken Sarkophage III- Frankreich, Algerien, Tunesien*, Brigitte Christern- Briesenick (editor), ed.: Philipp von Zabern, Mainz am Rhein 2003, p. 23, Koch Guntram, *Frühchristliche Sarkophage*, ed.: C. H. Beck, München 2000, p. 134.

<sup>16</sup>. M. Büchsel, "Die Schöpfungs mosaiken von Saint Marco- Die Ikonographie der Erschaffung des Menschen in der frühchristlichen Kunst", *Städel- Jahrbuch, Neue Folge* 13 (München 1991), p. 62. J. Engemann, "Zu den Dreifaltigkeitsdarstellungen der frühchristlichen Kunst: Gab es im 4. Jahrhundert anthropomorphe Trinitätsbilder?", *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 19 (1976), pp. 168- 9, pointed out that on the sarcophagi of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> c. there are a number of indefinable figures, which can be considered as assistants or attendants (p. 169).

<sup>17</sup>. J. Engemann, "Zu den Dreifaltigkeitsdarstellungen der frühchristlichen Kunst: Gab es im 4. Jahrhundert anthropomorphe Trinitätsbilder?", *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 19 (1976), p. 170.

<sup>18</sup>. H. Kaiser- Minn, *Die Erschaffung des Menschen auf den spätantiken Monumenten des 3. und 4. Jahrhunderts*, ed.: Heidelberg University Press, Heidelberg 1976, pp. 20.

redemption, while in the lower part of the scene the resurrected man and woman are blessed by God<sup>19</sup>.

Reverting to the patristic discourse on the original beauty, it is significant to continue on the rumination of st. Gregory of Nyssa: Adam was created without having a man- father, Eve was created through her emanation from Adam and their son with a natural birth, meaning that they are the icon of the persons of the Holy Trinity<sup>20</sup>. Evidently, in order we to understand our creation according to the *image* and *likeness* of God, we have to find out the hidden Triune God inside us; that is the most trustworthy manifestation of the mystery of the Holy Trinity<sup>21</sup>. Indeed that is the only reason for God having created the human nature, having the beauty of the Holy Trinity, in order the uninterpretable mystery to be demonstrated<sup>22</sup>. "*In order you, who was created according to the image and likeness of God, to have inside you the image, the model, the types and the examples of the Holy Trinity and to understand God by seeing in your mental construction*"<sup>23</sup>.

Accordingly the iconographic preferences of depicting Adam and Logos are extremely interesting. Primarily, we quote the frontispiece of the Carolingian Bibles, where an individual with young physical characteristics, almost alike with Adam,

---

<sup>19</sup>. V. Mavroska, *Adam and Eve in the Western and Byzantine Art of the Middle Ages*, Ph.D. Thesis, J. W. Goethe Universität, Fachbereich Sprach- und Kulturwissenschaft, Frankfurt am Main 2009 (<http://publikationen.uni-frankfurt.de/volltexte/2010/8111/>), pp. 72- 4.

<sup>20</sup>. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De eo quid sit ad imaginem Dei et ad similitudinem*, PG 44, 1329CD, «Ἀλλὰ τὸν μὲν Ἀδὰμ ἀναιτίως καὶ ἀγεννήτως ὑπέστησε, τὸν δὲ δεύτερον αὐτοῦ ἄνθρωπον τὸν υἱὸν γεννητόν, τὴν δὲ Εὐάν οὐ γεννητῶς οὐδὲ πάλιν ἀναιτίως, ἀλλὰ ληπτῶς, ἥτοι ἐκπορευτῶς ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ ἀναιτίου Ἀδὰμ ἐξελθούσα ἀρρήτως οὐσιώσης. Καὶ μήπως ἄρα τρεῖς αὐτῶν πρωτογόνων κεφαλαὶ πάσης τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος ὁμοούσιοι ὑποστάσεις κατ' εἰκόνα τινά, ὡς Μεθοδίῳ δοκεῖ, τυπικῶς γεγονάσι τῆς ἁγίας καὶ ὁμοουσίου Τριάδος;».

<sup>21</sup>. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De eo quid sit ad imaginem Dei et ad similitudinem*, PG 44, 1340BC, «εἰ φιλοσοφεῖν περὶ τοῦ κατ' εἰκόνα καὶ ὁμοίωσιν Θεοῦ βούλει, οὕτω φιλοσόφησον, οὐκ ἐκ τῶν ἐκτός, ἀλλ' ἐκ τῶν ἐντός σου τὸν κρυπτὸν Θεὸν γνώρισον ἐκ τῆς ἐν σοὶ τριάδος, τὴν Τριάδα ἐπίγνωθι δι' ἐνυποστάτων πραγμάτων».

<sup>22</sup>. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De eo quid sit ad imaginem Dei et ad similitudinem*, PG 44, 1340C, «Διὰ γὰρ ταύτην καὶ μόνην τὴν αἰτίαν τοιοῦτον ζῶον ὁ Θεὸς κατεσκευάσεν, ἐπειδὴ ἔμελλεν ἐν κόσμῳ κηρυχθῆναι τὸ τῆς ἁγίας Τριάδος μυστήριον ὡς δυσσεμνέντον τε καὶ ἀκατάληπτον».

<sup>23</sup>. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De eo quid sit ad imaginem Dei et ad similitudinem*, PG 44, 1340CD.

represents Logos. That is actual a heritage of the early Christian sarcophagi<sup>24</sup>, something that can reinforce our suggestion about the fourth person beside the Holy Trinity on the *Trinity* sarcophagus, as the human being on his entirety, as a person that on his nature carries the godlike resemblance. Moreover, there is almost a striking resemblance of the male figures (Adam and Logos) to Eve, as far as their main facial features are concerned. The mirror- like- effect can be partially noticed on the figures of the Millstatt Genesis, the Arsenal Bible, the Salerno Antependium, the Souvigny Bible and of the Morgan Old Testament M 638. More specific, on a lid- scene of the middle- Byzantine ivory of the Cleveland Museum (CMA 1924. 747, 11<sup>th</sup>- 12<sup>th</sup> c.)<sup>25</sup> and on the first scene of the ivory plaque (Musée des Beaux- Arts de Lyon, D 312, 11<sup>th</sup> c.)<sup>26</sup>, the image imitation on Adam's creation between the two figures had already been formed. Their facial features as well as the clothes and the gesture of the Creator in Capella Palatina follow the ivory prototype, while his standing stance goes after the Creator of the Salerno antependium<sup>27</sup>. Thus, on the cycles of Capella Palatina and of Monreale there is a striking resemblance between Logos<sup>28</sup> and Adam. Their face, beards, haircut and even the plasticity of their hands and

---

<sup>24</sup>. G. B. Ladner, *Ad Imaginem Dei- The image of Man in Mediaeval Art*, ed.: The Archabbey Press, Latrobe, Pennsylvania 1962, pp. 26- 7.

<sup>25</sup>. M. Büchsel, *Die Skulptur des Querhauses der Kathedrale von Chartres*, ed.: Gebr. Mann, Berlin 1995, p. 149, fig. 363, A. Eastmond, "Narratives of the Fall: Structure and Meaning in the Genesis Frieze at Hagia Sophia, Trebizond," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 53 (1999), p. 224, fig. 9, A. Goldschmidt, K. Weitzmann, *Die byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen des X- XIII. Jahrhunderts, I*, ed.: Deutscher Verl. für Kunstwissenschaft, Berlin 1930, Nr. 67.

<sup>26</sup>. See the description of J. Durand in *Byzance, L' art byzantin dans les collections publiques françaises*, Catalogue of exhibition *Musée du Louvre (3 Novembre 1992- 1 février 1993)*, ed.: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, Paris 1992, pp. 261- 2, no 170. Also see A. Eastmond, "Narratives of the Fall: Structure and Meaning in the Genesis Frieze at Hagia Sophia, Trebizond," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 53 (1999), pp. 224- 5, fig. 12, A. Goldschmidt, K. Weitzmann, *Die byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen des X- XIII. Jahrhunderts, I*, ed.: Deutscher Verl. für Kunstwissenschaft, Berlin 1930, Nr. 70.

<sup>27</sup>. The facial features of Adam are repeating in all of the scenes of the ivory. See the ratiocination in M. Büchsel, *Die Skulptur des Querhauses der Kathedrale von Chartres*, ed.: Gebr. Mann, Berlin 1995, pp. 148- 9, p. 416, fig. 363- 364 respectively. Also about the appearance of Logos in the Salerno antependium see K. Weitzmann, *Byzantine Book Illumination and Ivories*, ed.: Princeton University Press, London 1980, pp. 122- 3.

<sup>28</sup>. Logos of the Genesis cycle is the actual *Pantocrator*, a motif frequently met in Monreale. For the pictorial presence of Christ as *rex* and *imperator*, as well as his connection with the current political situation of the 12<sup>th</sup> c. and the policy of the Latin Church see Th. Dittelbach, *Rex Imago Christi- Der Dom*

feet have a remarkable pictorial correspondence, which probably acts as the part of the adamic typology and as a visual interpretation of the coming of the second Adam, as the Redeemer.

Man is the *ἔσοπρον*, the mirror of the Triune God and of the incarnated Logos, though not in a physical way, since the only truth is God and he is inexpressible by his substance, but accessible through his uncreated energies<sup>29</sup>. In the biblical world there is God on the one hand and the creation on the other. There is nothing between them and all the creatures are living and moving within the surrounding air of the holy glory<sup>30</sup>. Yet, the inaccessible God reveals himself through his holy light and finally his relation with his creation is totally ontological. The only truth is God and his icon (the creation) is not a plain diagram of the history and the future, but the dynamic fulfilment of the truth (his likeness). The original beauty of the creation is actually the beauty of God. According to st. Gregory of Nyssa, God is the actual realization of the goodness and since man was created according to God's image, he has the perfect resemblance to his archetype<sup>31</sup>. That

---

von *Monreale Bildsprachen und Zeremoniell in Mosaikkunst und Architektur (Spätantike- Frühes Christendom- Byzanz. Kunst im Ersten Jahrtausend 12)*, ed.: Reichert, Wiesbaden 2003, pp. 295ff. We cite a speculation on the foundation of Christ's worship on the adamic worship, in D. Steenburg, "The worship of Adam and Christ as the image of God", *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 39: 1 (June 1990), pp. 95- 109.

<sup>29</sup>. John of Damascus, I. *Κατὰ Μανιχαίων II. Πρὸς τοὺς διαβάλλοντας τὰς ἀγίας εἰκόνας Λόγοι τρεῖς, Κείμενο- Μετάφραση- Εἰσαγωγή- Σχόλια (text- translation- introduction- comments)* N. A. Matsoukas, ΦΘΒ 8, ed.: Π. Πουρναρά, Thessaloniki 1988, pp. 24- 7. See about the creation in connection with the incarnation of Logos in Chr. S. Voulgaris, "The Holy Trinity in Creation and Incarnation", *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 42: 3- 4 (1997), pp. 245- 58.

<sup>30</sup>. N. A. Matsoukas, *Δογματική καὶ Συμβολική Θεολογία Γ- Ἀνακεφαλαίωση καὶ Ἀγαθοτοπία. Ἐκθεση τοῦ οἰκουμενικοῦ χαρακτήρα τῆς χριστιανικῆς διδασκαλίας (ΦΘΒ 34)*, ed.: Π. Πουρναρά, Thessaloniki 1997, pp. 104- 5.

<sup>31</sup>. Grégoire de Nysse, *La création de l' homme*, SC 6, εκδ.: J. Laplace, Paris- Lyon 1943, p. 157 (*De Hominis Opificio*, PG 44, 184B), "Εἰ γὰρ πλήρωμα μὲν ἀγαθῶν τὸ θεῖον, ἐκείνου δὲ τοῦτο εἰκῶν, ἄρ' ἐν τῷ πλήρει εἶναι παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ, πρὸς τὸ ἀρχέτυπον ἢ εἰκῶν ἔχει τὴν ὁμοιότητα".

See the analysis in I. D. Giannakopoulou, *Το δόγμα της δημιουργίας κατά τον άγ. Γρηγόριο Νύσσης*, Master's thesis, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Faculty of Theology, Thessaloniki 2010, pp. 93- 5.



resemblance cannot be identified in any external characteristics, but by being given by God the power of governing and the tendency of reaching the holy beauty<sup>32</sup>.

Imagine the Creator as a painter, who conveys his thoughts (logos of beings) into the realisation of the human beings (creation) with a precise manner, using the most appropriate colours<sup>33</sup> to demonstrate the virtues of clearness, calmness, bliss and beatitude<sup>34</sup>.

Visually speaking, man was created in an upright stance, in order to look straight at the sky. That position signalises the royalty of his origin<sup>35</sup> and his superiority towards the other creatures of the earth<sup>36</sup>. Yet, his sin and disobedience caused shame towards God as well as humbleness and fear, emotions that are declared in the scenes of the *Hiding from God* and the *Denial of guilt*<sup>37</sup>. In the *Denial of guilt*, the protoplasts have a slight inclination on their bodies, an element referring to their shame, which is more intense on the next episode, where the protoplasts with shyness accept their punishments.

---

<sup>32</sup>. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *In verba, Faciamus Hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram, orat. I*, PG 44, 261C, "Πῶς οὖν ἡ Γραφή εἶπεν ἡμᾶς κατ' εἰκόνα Θεοῦ γεγενῆσθαι: Τὰ περὶ Θεοῦ διδαχθῶμεν, τὰ περὶ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν νοήσωμεν, ὅτι οὐκ ἔχομεν τὸ κατ' εἰκόνα ἐν μορφῇ σώματος· φθειρομένον γὰρ τοῦ σώματος ἡ μορφή ἀπόλλυται. Οὐκ ἐν φθαρτῷ δὲ τὸ ἀφθαρτον σχηματίζεται, οὐ φθαρτὸν ἐστὶ τοῦ ἀφθάρτου εἰκῶν".

<sup>33</sup>. Grégoire de Nysse, *La création de l' homme*, SC 6, εκδ.: J. Laplace, Paris- Lyon 1943, p. 96 (*De Hominis Opificio*, PG 44, 137A), "Τὸ δὲ θεῖον κάλλος οὐ σχηματίζει τι, καὶ μορφῆς εὐμοιρία, διὰ τινος εὐχροίας ἀγλαΐζεται, ἀλλ' ἐν ἀφράστῳ μακαριότητι κατ' ἀρετὴν θεωρεῖται. Ὡσπερ τοίνυν τὰς ἀνθρωπίνας μορφὰς διὰ χρωμάτων τινῶν ἐπὶ τοὺς πίνακας οἱ γραφεῖς μεταφέρουσι, τὰς οἰκείας τε καὶ καταλλήλους βαφὰς ἀπαλείφοντες τῷ μιμήματι, ὡς ἂν δι' ἀκριβείας τὸ ἀρχέτυπον κάλλος μετενεχθεῖν πρὸς τὸ ὁμοίωμα· οὕτω μοι νόει καὶ τὸν ἡμέτερον πλάστην, οἷόν τισι βαφαῖς τῇ τῶν ἀρετῶν ἐπιβολῇ πρὸς τὸ ἴδιον κάλλος τὴν εἰκόνα περιανθίσαντα, ἐν ἡμῖν δεῖξαι τὴν ἰδίαν ἀρχήν".

<sup>34</sup>. Grégoire de Nysse, *La création de l' homme*, SC 6, εκδ.: J. Laplace, Paris- Lyon 1943, pp. 96-7 (*De Hominis Opificio*, PG 44, 137B), "... ἀλλ' ἀντὶ τούτων καθαρότης, ἀπάθεια, μακαριότης, κακοῦ παντὸς ἀλλοτριώσις, καὶ ὅσα τοῦ τοιούτου γένους ἐστὶ, δι' ὧν μορφοῦται τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἡ πρὸς τὸ θεῖον ὁμοίωσις".

<sup>35</sup>. Grégoire de Nysse, *La création de l' homme*, SC 6, εκδ.: J. Laplace, Paris- Lyon 1943, p. 106 (*De Hominis Opificio*, PG 44, 144AB), "Ὁρθιον δὲ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ τὸ σχῆμα, καὶ πρὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀνατείνεται, καὶ ἄνω βλέπει. Ἀρχικὰ καὶ ταῦτα, καὶ τὴν βασιλικὴν ἀξίαν ἐπισημαίνονται...".

<sup>36</sup>. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *In verba, Faciamus Hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram, orat. II*, PG 44, 293C "Ἐπλασεν ὁ Θεὸς ὀρθόν· ἐξαίρετον ταύτην σοὶ τὴν διάπλασιν παρὰ τὰ λοιπὰ ζῶα ἔδωκε. Διὰ τί; ἐπειδὴ ἐξαίρετόν σοι καὶ τὴν ἐνέργειαν ἀποδιδόναι ἔμελλε".

<sup>37</sup>. St. John Chrysostomus, *In cap III genes, Hom. XVII*, PG 53, 132- 135.

On the contrary, on the episode of the *Clothing*, as performed in San Marco, the protoplasts acquire their upright position, due to God's promise. Adam is already dressed and depicted static and frontal, whereas Eve maintains in profile and Logos on the middle assists her to be clothed in the tunic<sup>38</sup>. In the first instance, that act, in conflation with her portrait in profile, might echo her major level of guiltiness that requires superior, personal treatment from Logos himself. The tunics according to some of the Greek Fathers represent God's promise for providence for all the humanity and the perspective for rehabilitation of the humans into paradise<sup>39</sup>.

The creation according to the image of God is identified in the human nous (mind), though it penetrates the whole human nature<sup>40</sup>. When the nous is willing of accepting the holy grace, then the whole man remains in the holy beatitude; but when the nous is moving away from the truth, God, then the whole man loses his original beauty. Evidently, the nous is the speculum of the divine. When the nous succeeds the *likeness* of God, then it is the mirror of the image, meaning the blessing and the participation in the holy goodness of the human body and the soul. It is, according to st. Gregory of Nyssa, the speculum of the specula<sup>41</sup>. That union is not considering as an individual beauty, but a

---

<sup>38</sup>. A. Niero, "Die Genesiskuppel- ein Biespiel ikonographischer Lesart", *San Marco- Geschichte, Kunst und Kultur*, ed.: Hirmer, München 2001, p. 266.

<sup>39</sup>. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De Anima et Resurrectione*, PG 46, 148A- 149A, st. John Chrysostomus, *In Genesim*, 18, 1- 2, PG 53, 148- 150. Clothing also in the Jewish tradition acts as the bond between the past and the future. It is not accidental that in the Midrashic Aggadah it is mentioned that the garments of the coming Christ would be identical to Adams'. See the analysis in N. Rubin and A. Kosman, "The clothing the Primordial Adam as a symbol of Apocalyptic time in the Midrashic Sources", *The Harvard Theological Review* 90: 2 (April 1997), pp. 155- 74.

<sup>40</sup>. Cf. S. Wessel, "The Reception of Greek Science in Gregory of Nyssa's *De hominis opificio*", *Vigilae Christianae* 63 (2009), pp. 30- 46.

<sup>41</sup>. Grégoire de Nysse, *La création de l' homme*, SC 6, εκδ.: J. Laplace, Paris- Lyon 1943, p. 131 (*De Hominis Opificio*, PG 44, 161C), "Ὡσπερ δὲ ἔφαμεν τῇ ὁμοιώσει τοῦ πρωτοτύπου κάλλους κατακοσμεῖσθαι τὸν νοῦν, οἷόν τι κάτοπτρον τῷ χαρακτήρι τοῦ ἐμφαινόμενου μορφούμενον· κατὰ τὴν αὐτὴν ἀναλογίαν, καὶ τὴν οἰκονομουμένην ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ φύσιν ἔχεσθαι τοῦ νοῦ λογιζόμεθα, καὶ τῷ παρακειμένῳ κάλλει καὶ αὐτὴν κοσμεῖσθαι, οἷόν τι κατόπτρον κάτοπτρον γινομένην· κρατεῖσθαι δὲ ὑπὸ ταύτης καὶ συνέχεσθαι τὸ ὑλικὸν τῆς ὑποστάσεως, περὶ ἣν θεωρεῖται ἡ φύσις".

Cf. I. D. Giannakopoulou, *Το δόγμα της δημιουργίας κατά τον άγ. Γρηγόριο Νύσσης*, Master's thesis, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Faculty of Theology, Thessaloniki 2010, pp. 152- 3,

plurality, which derives straight from the unity of the Triune God and ontologically speaking leads the ecclesiastical community through its multiplicity to the eschatological aim of the *likeness* of God<sup>42</sup>.

Any kind of denial of the truth, it is definitely a rejection of the holy beatitude and the communion with the Creator, namely the original sin did not drive them away from the image of God, but to the abstraction of the original beauty of this image. For st. Gregory of Nyssa, even though man is anyway the speculum of God, he is not always God's image. Image means that he is willing of following God's wish<sup>43</sup>. St. Cyril of Alexandria mentions that the protoplasts went from the brightness of paradise to the ugliness of the fall<sup>44</sup>. Man, with his mind, is able of participating in the holy beatitude and when he decides to abominate it, he simultaneously loses his original beauty<sup>45</sup>. Consequently, this ontological connection with God indicates that the loss of the original beauty does not have any ethical extensions, but it is the detachment from the justice and beneficence of God. The prelapsarian life in paradise was a totally blessed situation,

---

K. V. Skouteris, *Συνέπειαι τῆς πώσεως καὶ λουτρὸν παλιγγενεσίας (ἐκ τῆς ἀνθρωπολογίας τοῦ ἁγίου Γρηγορίου Νύσσης)*, Athens 1972, pp. 53- 5.

<sup>42</sup>. G. Skaltsa, "Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὡς ἀτοπτρὸν τῶν ἐσχάτων κατὰ τὸν ἅγιο Γρηγόριο Νύσσης", *Σύναξη* 59 (Ιούλιος- Σεπτέμβριος 1996), pp. 52- 4.

<sup>43</sup>. Grégoire de Nysse, *La création de l' homme*, SC 6, εκδ.: J. Laplace, Paris- Lyon 1943, pp. 152- 3 (*De Hominis Opificio*, PG PG 44, 180BC), "Τίς οὖν ὁ τῆς εἰκόνης λόγος; ἴσως ἐρεῖς· πῶς ὁμοίωται τῷ σώματι τὸ ἀσώματον;... Ἡ γὰρ εἰκὼν, εἰ μὲν ἔχει τὴν πρὸς τὸ πρωτότυπον ὁμοιότητα, κυρίως τοῦτο κατονομάζεται. Εἰ δὲ παρενεχθείη τοῦ προκειμένου ἢ μίμησις, ἄλλο τι, καὶ οὐκ εἰκὼν ἐκείνου τὸ τοιοῦτόν ἐστι...".

Cf. G. Skaltsa, "Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὡς ἀτοπτρὸν τῶν ἐσχάτων κατὰ τὸν ἅγιο Γρηγόριο Νύσσης", *Σύναξη* 59 (Ιούλιος- Σεπτέμβριος 1996), pp. 50- 1.

<sup>44</sup>. St. Cyril of Alexandria, *De Adoratione et cultu in spiritu et veritate* 9, PG 68, 149A, "Ἀπεμπολήσασα δὴ οὖν τὴν παρὰ Θεοῦ χάριν καὶ γυμνωθεῖσα ἤδη τῶν ἐν ἀρχαῖς ἀγαθῶν, ἐξεπέμπετο μὲν τοῦ παραδείσου τῆς τρυφῆς, μετεπλάττετο δὲ πρὸς τὸ ἀκαλλῆς εὐθύς ἢ ἀνθρώπου φύσις, φθορᾶς δὲ εἴσω πεσοῦσα λοιπὸν ἀνεδείκνυτο". Cf. C. Stamoulis, *Κάλλος τὸ ἅγιον. Προλεγόμενα στῆ φιλόκαλη αισθητικῆ τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας*, ed.: Ακρίτας, Athens 2004, pp. 160- 3.

<sup>45</sup>. Grégoire de Nysse, *La création de l' homme*, SC 6, εκδ.: J. Laplace, Paris- Lyon 1943, p. 131 (*De Hominis Opificio*, PG 44, 161C), "Ἐπειδὴ γὰρ τὸ κάλλιστον πάντων καὶ ἐξοχώτατον ἀγαθὸν αὐτὸ τὸ θεῖόν ἐστι, πρὸς ὃ πάντα νένυκεν, ὅσα τοῦ καλοῦ τὴν ἔφειν ἔχει, διὰ τοῦτο φαμεν καὶ τὸν νοῦν, ἅτε κατ' εἰκόνα τοῦ καλλίστου γενόμενον, ἕως ἂν μετέχη τῆς πρὸς τὸ ἀρχέτυπον ὁμοιότητος, καθόσον ἐνδέχεται, καὶ αὐτὸν ἐν τῷ καλῷ διαμένειν, εἰ δὲ πῶς ἕξω γένοιτο τούτου, γυμνοῦσθαι τοῦ κάλλους ἐν ᾧ ἦν".

where the protoplasts were in communion with their Creator. Their life within the garden of Eden was identified with the life in the eschatological time<sup>46</sup>. The condition of the bodies after the resurrection would be totally alike to the prelapsarian situation. Certainly, st. Gregory of Nyssa does not support that the human body will be replaced, but that the original beauty will be restored<sup>47</sup>.

Of paramount importance is the patristic concept of the Church and its bond with the creation. The Church cannot be defined as a foundation or just a community. It is the actual life, which can be described with its events already from its beginning. The beginning of the Church is the beginning of the history of the holy Oikonomia, meaning the Church is the whole creation, which was created according to the model of the loving communion of the persons of the Holy Trinity. The Church is the communion between the visual and the mental world, the icon of the Triune God, the direct comprehension of the divine energies. Man is the main body of the creation, namely the Church and he was created according to the image of God, moving to the likeness, yet not alone, but within the creation, the Church. That is the sound evidence of the fact that the Church was created according to the image and likeness of God, having by that way an unbreakable relation with the fulfilment of the divine perfection, namely the original beauty. The Church is the icon of God, of the whole universe, of man, of the nous and in its spermatic logos of being there is the original divine beauty<sup>48</sup>.

Our demarcation of the reflections on the original beauty is based on a more nuanced reading of the texts of st. Gregory of Nyssa. The original beauty of man and of the whole ecclesiastical community is not a lost element, but it is a part of the evolutionary

---

<sup>46</sup>. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio catechetica magna*, PG 45, 29B, "Ἐπειδὴ γὰρ διὰ τῆς θείας εὐλογίας δυναμωθεὶς ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ὑψηλὸς μὲν ἦν τῷ ἀξιώματι· βασιλεύειν γὰρ ἐτάχθη τῆς γῆς τε καὶ τῶν ἐπὶ αὐτῆς πάντων· καλὸς δὲ τὸ εἶδος, ἀπέικασμα γὰρ τοῦ ἀρχετύπου ἐγεγόνει κάλλους· ἀπαθῆς δὲ τὴν φύσιν, τοῦ γὰρ ἀπαθοῦς μίμημα ἦν· ἀνάπλεως δὲ παρόρησίας, αὐτῆς κατὰ πρόσωπον τῆς θείας ἐμφανείας κατατροφῶν...".

<sup>47</sup>. St. Gregory of Nyssa does not mention the particular subject in a separate discussion, but his explanation is the conclusion of the scholars having combined a variety of thoughts in his texts. I. D. Giannakopoulou, *Το δόγμα της δημιουργίας κατά τον άγ. Γρηγόριο Νύσσης*, Master's thesis, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Faculty of Theology, Thessaloniki 2010, pp. 147- 9.

<sup>48</sup>. N. A. Matsoukas, *Δογματική και Συμβολική Θεολογία Β, Ἐκθεση τῆς ὀρθόδοξης πίστεως σέ ἀντιπαράθεση μέ τή δυτική Χριστιανοσύνη* (ΦΘΒ 3), ed.: Π. Πουρναρά, Thessaloniki 1992, pp. 351- 66.

dynamism to the eschatological perspective. The route to the likeness of God and the holy grace is the path of the creation, since man cannot be sanctified alone, but with the whole spiritual dimension of the world.