

## **The Trinity – The Ground of Our Being**

How did the word “person” come to theology?

The two main schools in Western scholarship have two different answers:

1. God Created man according to his image (Gen 1:26), and that our humanity possesses some divine features which allow humanity to know itself and God in one related undivided knowledge. (St. Athanasius of Alexandria and St Augustine)
2. In 1842 Ludwig Feuerbach published his onslaught on Christianity, *The Essence of Christianity*. Feuerbach developed what he calls the "true or anthropological essence of religion." Treating of God in his various aspects "as a being of the understanding," "as a moral being or law," "as love" and so on. Feuerbach talks of how man is equally a conscious being, more so than God because man has placed upon God the ability of understanding. Man contemplates many things and in doing so he becomes acquainted with himself. Feuerbach shows that in every aspect God corresponds to some feature or need of human nature. "If man is to find contentment in God," he claims, "he must find himself in God."

Thus God is nothing else than man: he is, so to speak, the outward projection of man's inward nature. This projection is dubbed as a chimera or daydream by Feuerbach. In one line God is no more than an anthropological projection.

Three mistakes led to the down fall of humanity as a result of the loss of the divine and the ruling human orientation to life:

1. The loss of the dimension of transcendence
2. Man became a prisoner of his own ego
3. Humanity is locked into the closed book of a nature without God where death is the end of all.

The loss of the dimension of the transcendence has inflicted on us humans deep wounds that are obvious in our history:

1. It became the womb of Fascism and other Totalitarian form of rules. Man replaced God and nothing can stop him from doing anything
2. Man lost his eternal values and so everything is an item that can be destroyed or eliminated.

Man became a prisoner of his own ego:

1. Human love is the work of hormones and physical needs.
2. When the ego is mobilized and becomes the only form of existence, the others are negated. The ego rules by itself without any realization of the “others”; man becomes less than an animal.

The closed book of human history is that book where heaven is no longer part of our awareness.

1. Death colors everything in life and mortality creates the opposite driving force which is seeking immortality even at the cost of the life of others.
2. Darwinism and other off-shoots made us the products of our history, biology, instincts.. Etc. It made us images of ourselves locked into our culture, natural history....and that led to the great damage of three human bio-spiritual forces of our life:
  - To love
  - To be loved
  - To be related or united.

We can see the image of God in us:

- Our constant desire for the infinite and our looking for the absolute.
- We are creative like our Creator, even when evil takes over, we are still creative.
- We have infinite desire for love.

The image of God has its place in our social life:

- We struggle to avoid loneliness
- We have a deep love for self-reflection and self-projection
- Our commitment to communication or community reveals that the old saying is true "no man is an Island"

## **The Person is Not Just the Individual**

Man as a person holds together communion and freedom. Both are the bed foundation of love. It is impossible to speak of love without freedom and communion. No one can live as human without being able to be part of the life of other humans. To speak of a person is to speak of plurality. In our time there is confusion between person and individual. A Person is a human who is related and integrated, and a human who is disengaged and isolated from all others is the individual.

Personhood came to us as a result of the Christian doctrine of God in Christ. The Incarnation was impossible for those who lived under the Hellenistic culture where humans, the gods and the universe were ruled by Laws. Three important articles of Christian faith developed Christian awareness of the personhood of God:

1. Creation out of nothing
2. The revelation of the Son in human flesh.
3. The resurrection of the body

Creation out of nothing was a new teaching unknown even in its full statement in the Bible itself. It means that God was free to create the world and that Creation was created for humanity.

## I. The Christian Doctrine of “Creation Ex Nihilo”

Our human being is bound to the being of God in whose image we were created. Humanity exists as God himself exists and that means in a relationship or in communion. The fact that there is more than one person in the human race means that there is more than one Person in God. Moreover, the fact that we cannot realize the meaning and fulfillment of our life as separate individuals, means that our existence and our being is meaningless without communion or fellowship with other human beings.

The history of the first five hundred years of the church has supplied us with a great deal of information about the struggle of the church with one important question: 'How does God exist?' We know that the contemporary question: 'Does God exist' was not raised in ancient times, but what was questioned was how did God exist. We will appreciate this question if we remember that the Fathers were struggling with the pagan or Greek ontology. This Greek ontology was fundamentally monistic, i.e. it stated that the being of God and the being of the world formed one unity that could not be broken. The Judaeo-Christian attitude was different because it believed that God was free from the world. He is the Creator of the world and did not create the world out of any necessity or under any duress.

<b>Hellenism</b>	<b>Christianity</b>
The cosmos is eternal	God created everything out of nothing
God and the cosmos are eternal law	God is free and the cosmos is sustained by grace
Humans are part of the cosmos, no freedom	Humans are the image of God; they have been given freedom, and the cosmos was created for them
Humans are part of a nature; they are individuals but not persons	Humans have a nature, but this nature can only be in persons. It is the person who shows human nature
Humans and gods are locked into their natures	Humans are related to God and to each other as persons, not as natures
The body is temporary; it dies and it has no value	The body is created by God, and it will rise in Christ. It is the visible part of the human person

### Creation and Redemption

Athanasius of Alexandria started his book “On the Incarnation,” which aims at explaining the Incarnation by defining the Christian teaching on creation, with: 'Plato claims that God made the world from pre-existent and uncreated matter. God would not have been able to make anything unless matter already existed, just as a carpenter must have wood first in order to be able to fashion it' (2:2, p.139). Athanasius answered by saying that this Platonic idea says clearly that God is weak and thus can't be the Creator. Moreover Athanasius remarks 'how then could He be called Maker and Creator if his creative ability had come from something else. I mean from matter? And in this case, according

to them God would be merely a craftsman and not the creator of their existence' (Ibid 2:2 p.139).

This Platonic ontology is dealt with by Athanasius at the very beginning of his book because nothing can be said about Christianity if the starting point, i.e., the doctrine of creation, is not taken into account. In the same chapter Athanasius attacks the Gnostic ontology: 'others among the heretics devise for themselves another Creator or the Universe apart from the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ....' (Ibid). The Gnostic view created a 'gulf' between God and creation and believed in two gods, one evil god who created matter and the second a good god who created the spiritual beings.

In fact the idea of creation ex nihilo was a striking Christian innovation for the philosophy of that time. It was a new idea, altogether alien and even unintelligible to the Greek philosophical mind, as we shall explain later on. The Greek mind was firmly and immovably convinced that the world was eternal, permanent and immutable in its composition or essence. The world was not created by God, it simply existed and its existence was necessary. Some of the Greek philosophers might speak of the 'wheel of origin and decay', but the substance of the world was unchangeable. The structure of the world was governed by eternal laws which allowed movements and even changes, but all was subjected to an unfailing eternal structure and as a whole was an eternal being that did not need God as a Creator, but only as a fashioner or "demiurge". Thus the world had a perennial existence without beginning or end (J Baudry, *Le Probleme de l'origine et l'eternite du monde dans la philosophie Grecque*, page 23, 1931).

Here the Greek philosophical mind was challenged by Christian teaching, which at that time created a new Christian ontology with which we all have become familiar, and perhaps too familiar, to the extent that we forget that it was the greatest philosophical achievement of the early church. In fact the categories of Greek philosophy were inadequate for the use of any Christian who was faithful to creation ex nihilo. The Greek and Christian views could not have been reconciled. Christians saw in the creation of the world from nothingness a free gift and a free act of God, while the Greeks believed that even God, like the universe, was subjected to the eternal law.

The problem for Christians was that the world could not have existed eternally. God could not just be a Maker who cannot create, but only fashion. This would mean he existed for the world. Prof. Gilson puts this problem in a very fine phrase: 'it is quite true that a Creator is an eminently Christian God, but a god whose very existence is to be a maker is not a Christian god at all' (God and Philosophy, 35). Early Christians who thought that they could keep philosophy and the Gospel together, such as Justin Martyr, Clement and Origen of Alexandria, were not aware that they were putting the new wine into in old skins, because the old skins of Greek philosophy were still regarded as good. These early Fathers were not aware of the ontological trap of Greek philosophy and, as we shall see later, most of the questions which were raised concerning the nature of God were philosophical rather than theological. These questions were raised by able men such as Arius, who were more Greek than Christian in their thinking.

## II. The Revelation of the Son in Human Flesh

Athanasius of Alexandria and other Fathers were aware of the difficulties of the Greek ontology. Their experience was basically pastoral and their understanding of the Christian teaching biblical. God, as Creator of all things, freely created all in order to bring all to communion with Him. God's being in itself is the cause and the model for every communion. This new ontology was developed as a result of faithfulness to the biblical teaching. Christian theology needed new words and new concepts or, in the words of Gregory of Nazianzus, 'to coin new names'.

The first item on the agenda was not only the doctrine of creation as a free gift, but also the belief that the human soul is mortal, i.e., it has a contingent nature. If the human soul does not die, it is because God gives humanity life and maintains our being. 'Man is by nature mortal in that he was created from nothing' (On the Incarnation 4, p.145). The whole picture of God, man and the world was to alter as a result of the Christian Gospel.

1. God has created the world for the human race. The Platonic idea was in opposition to this, because it stated that human beings were created for the world or the cosmos (Plato, Laws X: 903 c-d).
2. Man is mortal by nature, but can overcome his mortality by the grace of participation in the life of God.
3. God created the whole world for the sake of communion. This also means that we do not talk or contemplate the being of God, nor are we able to know anything about God except in a relationship and communion.

What is more important for now is that God was not One and then became a trinity, but rather he is One and Trinity. We cannot know anything about the oneness of God except in the communion of the Three, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. J D Zizioulas states 'The substance of God has no ontological content, no true being apart from communion' (Being as Communion, p 17). What is important for us is to know that God's being was released from the cosmological setting. He is no longer the fashioner, but the Creator.

4. All things came to existence for the sake of communion and to share in the divine goodness. Athanasius put this very clearly, 'God did not only create us from nothing, but He also granted us the grace of the word to live a divine life' (On the Incarnation 5, 145). This divine grace or life was the 'grace of the participation of the Word'. which is the rational power or the faculty of understanding (On the Incarnation . 5, p.145 and 6, p. 149). Communion is the reason for the existence of the world: 'God is good or rather the source of goodness and the good has no envy for anything. Thus because he envies nothing its existence, he made everything from nothing through his own Word our Lord Jesus Christ ... (On the Incarnation 3, p.142).

But communion is also what makes God, God, for God does not exist and then create in order to have something to communicate with. God's being is communion, and because of that he created the world to share in his goodness. The reference to creating through his Word or Logos, our Lord Jesus Christ, means that since the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the Divine communion, all that was created came into existence in order to receive a share of the unique relationship of the Divine Trinity.

## **The Incarnation and the Personhood of God**

Christian ontology was a great change from a god who is under the eternal laws that governed the world, to God the Father of Jesus Christ. The ancient world was unable to accept that God is the Creator and that his relationship with us will not advance beyond the relation of the Fashioner and the fashioned. The Gospel message came to say that God is not only the Fashioner - Creator but also is the Father: 'Before God creates at all He is the Father, and He creates through His Son' (Athanasius, Against the Arians, 1:3). The eternal Fatherhood of God was a central subject of the Orthodox - Arian debate in the fourth century. The Gospel message of love and forgiveness cannot stand simply on the assertion that God is our Fashioner - Creator and no more. The Fathers of the church during the debate with the Arians saw that, although the world was created by the will of God, there is more than a will in God and that is the eternal Son who is superior to the will of God (ibid). The Son who was made man for our salvation has been with God from eternity. If our creation needed the will of God, our salvation needed more than the will of God, and because of that the Son came down and was made man.

We needed to be established as a new creation in an eternal salvation in order that what happened at the fall might not be repeated. The matter was more than an assurance of eternal salvation, because this time it is the gift of adoption. But how is it possible for us to be God's own children if He has no Son? In other words, if the Son is not the eternal Son of the Father, none of us can become the child of God.

Arianism suggested and continues to suggest under the banner of Jehovah Witnesses a different way of salvation, for those who like to keep the law and to progress to salvation through it. In this scheme the message of grace given in the Son does not appear an attractive idea. This is not the place to deal with Arianism, but the following points must be noted:

1. Arianism came to revive a mixture of the old Greek ontology and pagan ethics by refusing to accept that the Son came to give us more than ethical teaching. The pagan idea was that the Son is a god but not God. Greek ontology held that God has no direct relation with the world except through intermediary beings. This was the old Gnostic ontology.
2. Arianism says: If we remain good and keep the law of God we remain forever with God but without participation in his life.

3. The whole pagan ethic of success and achievement was revived to undermine the teaching that the sinners and the weak can enter the kingdom of God freely. Thus even Jesus earned his salvation by the way he lived and the way he fulfilled the will of the Father. The church was able to resist this because it is all centered round the Person of the Son. If the Son is God's eternal Son, then his incarnation brought to us more than the teaching of the Gospel, and that is life eternal. We receive the life of the Son in the Spirit and thus we are brought for the first time since creation into a unique relationship with God. Here, more than before the doctrine of God was challenged and the struggle concerned whether the Trinity is about the Being of God or whether we have no more than a continuation of the OT revelation. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are not mere divine attributes; they are real and subsisting modes in the being of God. When we speak of will, power, wisdom and so on, we speak of the activities of God, but when we speak of Father, Son and Holy Spirit we speak of God as He is, i.e., of His Being.

So we have to be very careful that one set of names and attributes refer to the acts or deeds of God, while the other set of names, which are only three - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - refer to the being of God. The two sets must remain constantly distinguished. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three names of what God is, while power, wisdom and creator are not what God is in Himself, but the names we use to describe the divine relationship with creation.

God's Fatherhood must then precede his Creatorship, not because creation came to exist in time and from nothingness, but because creation is not related to the Father in the same way as the Son or the Holy Spirit. The Son and the Holy Spirit share the will of the Father. Therefore they are not the will of the Father. To make this clearer, let us quote the words of Athanasius, who wanted to defend the Christian faith against the Arian heresy. 'God is described in the scripture as the fountain of wisdom and life. The Son is his wisdom. Now if one admits with the Arians that there was a time when the Son was not, this would imply that once the fountain was dry, or rather, that it was not a fountain at all' (ibid 1:19).

Athanasius sees the eternal generation of the Son from the Father as an eternal unique relation in the being of God. 'If the Word was not the genuine Son of God, God himself would no longer be a Father, but only a shaper of creatures. The fecundity of the divine nature would have been quenched. The nature of God would be sterile and not fertile. It would be a barren thing, a light without shining, a dry font' (ibid 2:2). The eternal existence of the Son is what makes God not a dry font or sterile, but fertile. These words describing the generation of the Son are of great importance and significance because the Fatherhood is not a mere metaphor, but a reality. The word 'father' itself is taken from our human language and experience.

Arianism rejected the eternal Fatherhood of God on linguistic and philosophical grounds. The name 'Father' suggested for the Arians a division and separation if applied to the essence or 'ousia' of the Godhead. Why? Because a father brings birth and birth demands a separation between a father and a child. The striking Arian argument was not

only based on words, but also on one basic idea, which is that, if the Son is born of the Father, then not only is time involved, but also God becomes, like creation, involved in birth. The Arian insistence on the similarity between the generation of the Son and the creation of the world goes even further, because the word 'father' means or just implies ungenerate, (The Greek word ungenerate means in fact uncreated, while generate means born and created).

The consequence of this teaching was immediately felt and seen in the Christian teaching on eternal salvation. God alone can save and alone can recreate and bring creation from death to life eternal. The Savior must be God himself and not a creature and since it is the Son incarnate that fulfilled this role, he must have been God and remain God.

Athanasius' sharply-pointed central argument runs as follows:

1. We must discriminate between being and acting in God. Being is what God is by nature or substance, while acting is what God may or may not manifest. The being of God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit; the acting of God is his will and power.
2. God was always the Father from eternity. He was called Creator when the world was created. A human being is called maker as an artist, but a human being can only be called father when a child is born to him (Against the Arians 1:20). So, if God is the eternal Father, he is so only if he has an eternal Son.
3. Athanasius, like all the Fathers, wanted to avoid the Greek ontology, which demanded that the world be eternal. If God were eternally Creator, matter and creation must also be eternal. As we have already observed, the Christian doctrine of creation ex nihilo was not accepted by Greek philosophy. Athanasius, like all the Fathers, insisted that creation 'has no affinity or similarity with the Creator. Creation is outside God. It has received its existence by the grace and the work of the Word. It can again cease to exist (ibid). What does this mean? It means that only God's being is eternal and he is not subject to any law or necessity. He can create because he has the ability to do so, but it is an act of grace and of free will.

The crucial thing to emerge from the trouble of the first 400 years was a Christian ontology based on the Christian vision of the Personhood of God.

1. God is not subject to any of his powers and is not under the necessity of his nature. He is free to act or not to act.
2. God is not subjected or constrained by his substance as we are, and therefore God do not respond to the need and the laws of his substance.
3. God is the Father whose substance is his Fatherhood. God is not possessed by a substance or nature which cannot but eternally create. He is 'the free Father, who shares his Fatherhood with the Son and the Holy Spirit and is free to create or not to create.

4. God does not exist for the sake of creation. God is the Father whose existence is a personal existence and that is the person of the Father. These last words sum up the whole debate, because they mean that God is not a substance, but his existence as a Person equates with his Fatherhood. This also means that God is not contained in a substance or constrained by nature. All that is in God is owed to the Person of the Father, who is also the cause of the Son and the Spirit. In short, the Person comes before the nature and it is the Person who reveals the being rather than the substance that defines and constrains the Person.
5. So it is wrong to say that God cannot but love or cannot but exist. This is no more than a repetition of Greek ontology dressed up in Christian vocabulary. God loves because he is the Father and his love is shown to us in the sending of the Son. God's love is not blind nature - love coming from a substance, but a free personal love of a person. The Christian teaching was at that time and continues to be that God's existence is a personal one, the Person of the Father, not a blind, naked and abstract substance.

## **The Personhood of Man**

We touched briefly on the personhood of God as a new discovery in the ancient world which saw God as part of the universe and, subjected to the eternal laws of his substance and of the universe. It is important to repeat what we said before because when we deal with the rise of the personhood of humanity it will become clear that the two, God and humanity, in the tradition of the fathers were interwoven and that we cannot understand one without the other.

Athanasius stressed this point when he was dealing with creation. 'God the Creator of the universe and the king of all, who is beyond all being and human thought, since he is good and bountiful, has made mankind in his own image, through his own word our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and he also made man perceptive and understanding of reality through his similarity to him, giving him also a conception and knowledge of his own eternity, so that as long as he kept this likeness he might never abandon his concept of God' (Against the Heathen 2, p 7).

This similarity is ontological and the words 'image and likeness' must not be taken to mean something unreal. It is a created reality, i.e., a reality that does not exist by itself, but through the mercy and grace of the Creator. Humanity was able to see God and was able to converse with him, and was even, in the words of Athanasius, 'renewed by his desire for God' (ibid).

The relationship was not external and remained internal even after the fall. 'So perverted, and forgetting that it was made in the image of the good God, the soul no longer perceived through its own power God the Word in whose form it had been created: but turning outside itself, it regarded and pictured non-existent things. For in the complexity of fleshly desire, it obscured the mirror it had as it were within itself, in which it was able to see the image of the Father' (ibid 8, p 21).

The ancient Christian tradition took seriously the biblical notion that humanity is made in the image of God. Thus if the human being is in the image of God, then it becomes obvious that our knowledge of God is not what we receive from outside, but what we possess as an integral part of our own being.

## **Personhood and the Trinity**

In his last publication Prof. E C Mascall remarks that the doctrine of God as tri-personal is the first known source of the development of the human being as a person. Prof. Mascall quotes the late Russian theologian V. Lossky, who in turn remarked some years ago that 'our ideas of human personality, of that personal quality which makes every human being unique, to be expressed only in terms of itself: this idea of 'person' comes to us from Christian theology. The philosophy of antiquity knew only human individuals. (E C Mascall, *The Triune God*, p 27, V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology*, p 53).

This great achievement of the Fathers of the church has been forgotten. This is due to philosophical, political and social changes since the 18th century. The human being as person has become a concept detached from Christian tradition. Secular humanist ideas have taken over the concept of the human person and made it an autonomous being, whose autonomy is such that all social and human ties with society are based on it. It is obvious to us now that, while Christian theology is responsible for creating the historical concept of the human being as a person, the concept became detached from theology and was secularized. What is lost is not only the understanding that God and humanity together reflect what a person is, but also the reasons for the development of this understanding.

## **The Greek philosophical heritage**

Greek philosophy as we have said earlier was dominated by the ideas of permanence and recurrence. The cosmos was eternal and everything which was worthy of existence had to have existed in the most perfect manner before all time. Nothing could be added to that complete existence. The cosmos was perfect so that any change in it could only be a spoiling of its harmony. It was perfect and complete to the extent that nothing could be added or developed. Aristotle in one remark sums up all that we can say: 'What is of necessity coincides with what is always since that which must be cannot possibly be.' Hence everything is eternal because it has an eternal being and thus every being is necessary as part of that eternal necessity of existence. This was also described as a circular movement of the cosmos, mankind and all that has being. We may see this circular movement as follows:

1. Everything that really exists has an eternal and immutable substance.
2. Everything that is eternal existed as such from eternity.
3. No change can touch or alter the eternal immutable substance.
4. No change then is permanent and thus change belongs not to the substance, but to the accidents.

5. Then being is necessary and every movement, whatever it may be, keeps the eternal substance and makes all movements a return to the eternal substance.

We can imagine a gold coin. The coin is made of the eternal substance, which is the gold. The coin will be used and be melted to become a bracelet. The bracelet as well as the coin is a change in the form, or in the accident. All that can happen to the coin or the bracelet will not change the eternal substance of gold. This is what we mean by a circular movement.

### **III. The Resurrection of the Body**

Greek thought can be regarded as 'non-personal'. It depended on one important method of classification - the substance and the accident. What mattered to both Plato and Aristotle was whether an item or a thing has a substance or not. This abstract idea of substance means that human beings are no more than individuals who belong to a substance called humanity. According to Plato, human souls were all created alike. None is different. The difference comes about only when these souls acquire bodies. (Timaeus 41D). This implies that the body is what brings distinction. The body has nothing to do with our eternal existence, because it is transient. When souls are reincarnated they may acquire bodies of animals (Phaedo 249B, Repub. 618A, Tim. 42B,C). Thus there is nothing, not even the body since it is not permanent, that can create or reveal any distinction between souls.

Greek thought did not have the biblical psycho-somatic concept (Unity of body and soul) and in fact was in opposition to it because the body was seen as a catastrophe added to the soul to reduce its perfection. Aristotelian philosophy was not able to provide any room for the concept of the human being as a person, partly because of this soul-body dualism and partly because every individual is an individual related to the substance of humanity, which in turn is higher and more perfect than any individual. A human being does not live forever; but lives as a human being as long as the dualism of soul and body lasts. When the state of dualism ends at death, the individual does not live any more and what survives death is the human species (De Anima 2:4 - 415A).

This very closed circle made new things unreal; the true reality always lies beyond, i.e., in the eternal substance. The cosmos has no end and humanity, who is part of this eternal circle like the cosmos, is only self-reproducing. Humanity will survive as a species forever. New things cannot be contemplated as they violate the eternal structure and eternal laws. How could Greek thought accept and evaluate the differences between individuals if the cosmos and the human race are all subject to the eternal reality of their substances? God cannot change anything because the "cosmos" means "just and orderly behavior". God and the cosmos are locked in the laws of their nature (Plato, Timaeus 48A, 50-51B).

## The Place of humanity in Greek philosophy

**First, the mask:** It is important to notice that if everything in the cosmos is eternal, humanity's place in nature is to be in harmony. The beautiful and divine cosmos of the Greeks denied first of all human freedom and the Arts reflected the human dilemma, for it is known that the Greek word "*prosopon*", which later became person, was used in the theatre. It meant the part of the face below the cranium. The mask itself shows us to what extent the concept of the human being as a person was absent. The actor puts on his or her mask in order to act and to become first of all different, and secondly able to do what he or she cannot do in real life. Once the play ends, the mask is put away and the actor returns to the eternal reality of the substance from which he or she escaped for a while. On the stage the eternal harmony of the cosmos is set aside and the desire for a rational expression for freedom appears for a while. In a short-lived experience, the actor appears as person, who lives his or her freedom and transcends the eternal necessity of being part of a substance. But, as we have noted before, humanity is created for the cosmos, and the actor returns to the eternal reality by taking away what made him or her a person, or a *prosopon*.

**Second, the citizenship:** From Greek to Latin, the word *prosopon* was translated *persona*. Rome ruled by the law and the army, while Greece ruled the mental life and gave to the empire its culture and philosophy. The Roman law was no different from Greek philosophy. The empire came to organize human relationships and, like modern states, was not interested in personhood, but in how the individual is related to society. Thus the individual is seen as acting not on a stage, but in daily human relationships in which he or she adopts various personae depending on the circumstances. The dilemma of both Greek and Roman thinking is that a human being develops a sense of identity in spite of the eternity of the cosmos and the law. If the individual is related to society through a complicated relationship, he or she will discover a social and political identity which assures some freedom. We must not forget that the word "Roman" means "citizen" of the empire, and citizens had more freedom than the slaves. This identity is acquired and is in fact given by the state and protected by the law. It does not say anything about the reality of the human individual, just as today a passport is the national certificate of identity which says nothing about the life of the carrier or in what sense he or she is different from the rest of society.

How did the Fathers manage to develop the idea that a human being is a person? As we have said before, with creation ex nihilo, God is no longer bound to the cosmos, and humanity is also freed. Humans are no longer under the power of an eternal form of existence, but, as created by God from nothing, are called to grow and transcend their nature and become a new creation. Humanity carries the image of God, which means that a human is as God is, or, in the ancient words of Athanasius, 'man is by nature mortal in that he was created from nothing. But because of his likeness to him who exists .... man would have blunted his natural corruption and would have remained incorruptible, as the Book of Wisdom says, "The keeping of the law is the assurance of incorruptibility." But being incorruptible he would thenceforth live as God as also

somewhere the divine scripture declares saying, "I said that you are gods ....." (On the Incarnation 4, p 145).

It is the conversion of mankind and liberation from death and sin that paved the way for the rise of the personhood of man. We need to spell out the components of this conversion.

1. Creation ex nihilo means that man has no everlasting being. The human race is not made of individuals who belong to an enduring substance, but of persons who share in the image of God and are called from non-being by the grace of God. If the human race continues in existence, it is due to the grace of God, not to a substance. 'For God did not only create us from nothing, but he also granted us by the grace of the Word to live a divine life. But men, turning away from things eternal, and by the counsel of the devil turning towards things corruptible, were themselves the cause of the corruption of death They are, as I said before, corruptible by nature but by the grace of the participation of the Word they could have escaped from the consequence of their nature if they had remained virtuous. For on the account of the Word who was in them, even natural corruption would not have touched them', (On the Incarnation. 5, p 145).
2. Conversion was a restoration of the damaged image, a work which the Creator of the universe alone can accomplish. Athanasius considered the virgin birth as the beginning of a new creation, (On the Incarnation. 8, p 153). The famous simile of Athanasius provides us with a good hint at the ontological change that was granted to humanity by the incarnation of the Word: 'when a figure which has been painted on wood is spoilt by dirt, it is necessary for him whose portrait it is to come again so that the picture can be renewed in the same material for because of his portrait the material on which it is painted is not thrown away, but the portrait is redone on it - even so the all Holy Son of the Father, who is the Image of the Father, came to our realm to renew man who had been made in his likeness' (On the Incarnation 14, p 167).

According to Origen of Alexandria, "Some things are made for their own sake, others by consequence and for the sake of the former. Made for its own sake is the living being endowed with reason; made for its use are the animals and the plants of the earth." (PG 12: 1089C) We were not created for God, but for our own sake.

### **From *prosopon* to *hypostasis***

The word 'face', *paneh*, and its plural, *paniym*, appear about 316 times in the Old Testament. It is used to denote a great variety of applications. It means the whole person, or his or her presence. The same word is used in the context of theophany: Jacob sees in his mysterious struggle the face of God (Gen. 32:30). The face is the most expressive part of the human person, because the eyes, the mouth and the ears are part of the face and so seeing, speaking and hearing are located in that part of the body. Words and expressions are both means of communicating, sharing and revealing not only

feelings, but also ideas. Our perception does not separate words, actions, feeling and facial expressions unless we are suspicious and cannot trust the person with whom we are communicating.

The fact of the Lord, which means the Lord in his reality, or as he is, cannot be seen by a human being (Ex. 33:20). Face can replace our modern word 'will' (Lev. 17:10, 20:3, 26;17). The presence of God is expressed in the blessing of the old covenant: 'The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you....' This old liturgical blessing ends with a puzzle: 'So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them' (Num. 6:22-27). It seems from verse 27 that name and face refer to the same reality. Even for a modern person, names cannot be easily separated from faces, especially in our age of visual identification of human beings and objects.

A dialogue or an encounter between two people is called 'face to face', which means 'person to person'. Thus, when the relationship between God and Israel is going through a difficult time, 'the OT expresses it as 'the Lord hid his face' (Ps.13:1, 22:24). We must also consider the meaning of the words 'hide your face from my sins' (Ps. 51:9), which seems to mean 'see not my sins'.

To know God is to gain fellowship and communion with his self-revelation as the Father through his self-giving in his Son and in the Spirit. Thus knowledge is not knowledge of words, but knowledge of life in a personal relationship. 'The very centre of a saving faith is the belief not merely in God, but in God as the Father of Jesus, not merely in Christ, but in Christ as the Son of God in him, not as a creature, but as God the Creator, born of God' (Hilary, *De Trin.* 1:17 and 3: 17-22, 5:20, 6:30). It is the knowledge of the grace of adoption. 'It is God's kindness to human beings, that of whom he is the Maker, of them according to grace, he afterwards becomes Father also, becomes that is, when human beings, his creatures, receive into their hearts as the Apostle says "the Spirit of his Son, crying, 'Abba, Father' ", and these are they who, having received the Word, gained power from him to become children of God, for they could not become children being by nature creatures, otherwise than receiving the Spirit of the natural and true Son. Wherefore, that this might be "the Word became flesh" that he might make man capable of Godhead, (Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, 2:58). So our knowledge is grounded in the event and purified from all misconception by the goal, and that is our union with God.

Moreover, though we know God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, our knowledge is guided not by words or, by definitions, but by eternal life itself we cannot comprehend the boundless God and that in itself is a warning against both orthodoxy and heresy, if either claims that words contain all truth about God. Words are signs and, as signs, they point to a reality which cannot be contained in words. Here the warning of Hilary is very useful and important, for he says that our knowledge of God is limited by our capacity, but God has left some signs of himself and made himself known. This knowledge is not perfect, or complete, but being part of a whole it corresponds to the whole, and the whole is eternal life (*De Trin.*, 2:6-7). Heresy and orthodoxy can make the same error if either

claims that truth about God is fully contained in words, rather than in the life of the one who said, 'I am the truth'.

## **The identification of *hypostasis* with person**

Salvation is the grace of adoption through the true Son of God, who is the Son by nature, i.e., as a hypostasis alongside or with the hypostases of the Father and the Holy Spirit. It is this knowledge and experience of salvation that led all the Fathers of the church to see in the grace of adoption a reality that is grounded in God himself. In other words, the Son must be true Son and must also be eternal Son. Thus sonship is not a category added to God as a result of the incarnation and redemption, but is the distinct hypostasis of the Son himself. What is revolutionary is that an attribute is no longer something added to a nature or a substance, but the attribute and the person or the hypostasis are one and the same reality of being. Similarly, it is the person that reveals the attribute, rather than the attribute that defines the person.

Let us translate this into the simple language of St. Paul, who says that, because we are the children of the Father, he sends the Spirit of his Son, crying in our hearts, 'Abba, Father' (Gal. 4:4-6). Let us discern the following:

1. The Father is really the Father, the Son is really the Son and the Spirit is really the Spirit, i.e., each has his distinct hypostasis. Because of this distinction, the Father really sent his Son, born of a woman, and also pours out the Spirit, who cries in our hearts, 'Abba'.
2. This movement of sending and pouring cannot be real if the Son or the Spirit are mere attributes in God like mercy, love and power.
3. We who are at the receiving end cannot receive the Son as Son if his sonship is no more than an attribute that he received or had added to him in time and history. Why? Because, if he was not a Son and then became a Son, sonship was not an integral part of his reality.
4. Moreover, if the Son is not Son by nature, or if his personhood consists in something other than his sonship, then we who receive the grace of adoption will also remain what we are, and our adoption would be a mere mask given to us to hide our reality.

Therefore a change in the attitude to humanity and the understanding of our existence took place as a result of Christian teaching and understanding that uses person, nature, face, substance, being and existence all used to convey one message: To be a person is to be real and not a category or abstract concept. The person is the hypostasis (being) and that being and person are the same. As we have just observed, it was the message of salvation that changed the words and adjusted them to the reality of the new creation.

Our eternal destiny in Jesus and in the Spirit means that both the Son and the Spirit are eternal and that we share in their eternal life, which they share with the Father. In the

classical language of ancient theology, this means that our being, our entity, is not saved as a nature, i.e., as something abstract and non-personal. Rather we are saved as persons. What constitutes our salvation is not our nature, or the nature of grace, or a nature of any kind, but our person who is in communion not with a divine nature, but with the three persons or hypostases of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.