

image of Christ, the incarnate Son of God, that humankind was created. Humanity is the "image of the Image,"¹⁰⁰ existing "in Christ," in whom the human being is adopted by God. It can only be understood "through Christ."¹⁰¹

- 122 As affirmed by the Holy Fathers, humankind in its essence is the image of the Prototype—the inexpressible, unknowable, and immortal God.¹⁰² Humankind has the capacity of "intellect and free will"¹⁰³ and the interior power of self-determination.¹⁰⁴ Thus, the Holy Fathers affirm that the image of God in humankind is the ground of our being, existence, and personal self-determination.
- 123 Humankind, as the image of God, always aspires to its Prototype: "As a deer longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for you, O God" (Ps 41[42]:2). The Holy Fathers referred to this aspiration as the longing of humankind to attain the likeness of God. In the words of Gregory of Nyssa, "truly herein consists the real assimilation to the Divine, that is, in making our own life in some degree a copy of the Supreme Being."¹⁰⁵ Saint John of Damascus believes that "the phrase `after his likeness' means likeness in virtue [to God] so far as that is possible."¹⁰⁶
- 124 Every human being that comes into the world is called to grow in likeness to God—to achieve divinization [also known as deification, the process of theosis]: "God has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pt 1:4). This partaking in God's nature constitutes human happiness. Likeness to God can be attained by us only by free choice and assent, and by cooperation with God's grace. "Our likeness to God requires our cooperation. When the intellect begins to perceive the Holy Spirit with full consciousness, we should realize that grace is beginning to paint the divine likeness over the divine image in us."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁰ See JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Orientalis Lumen* [Light of the East], (May 2, 1995), 15; see also GREGORY OF NYSSA, *On Perfection, To the Monk Olympius*: PG 46, 272.

¹⁰¹ See JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* [The Redemption of Man] (March 4, 1979), 11.

¹⁰² GREGORY OF NYSSA, *On the Making of Man*, 16: PG 44, 177.

¹⁰³ JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, II, 12: PG 94, 920.

¹⁰⁴ See GREGORY OF NYSSA, *On the Making of Man*, 16: PG 94, 177.

¹⁰⁵ GREGORY OF NYSSA, *On the Soul and Resurrection*: PG 46, 89-92.

¹⁰⁶ JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, II, 12: PG 94, 920.

¹⁰⁷ DIADOCHOS OF PHOTIKI, *On Spiritual Knowledge and Discrimination*, 89: PG 65, 1203.

1) Growth of the Person from Image to Likeness of God

- 125 Jesus Christ—in the image of whom the human being was created—is the incarnate Son of God, the Second Person of God, who took on human nature. Like Christ, human beings are persons. The growth of the human being from the image to the likeness of God is a personal growth. It takes place in the context of a free relationship between human beings and God. From the state of the first Adam, described in the book of Genesis, the human being grows to the state of the new Adam—Christ the God-man. "The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit ... The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven" (1 Cor 15:45-49).
- 126 Created good, humankind was supposed to achieve gradually perfection. For this reason Saint Irenaeus compares the condition of the first Adam in Paradise with the innocence of a child: "It was possible for God himself to have made the human being perfect from the first, but the human being could not receive this perfection, being as yet an infant."¹⁰⁸ To grow into the second Adam—Christ—is to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit to the point of our permanent abiding in it, "until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Eph 4:13; emphasis added).
- 127 In accordance with God's eternal plan, the divinization of human beings is possible. It is possible because of the incarnation of God's Son, through which we receive the gift of becoming partakers in the nature of God (see 2 Pt 1:4) as gods by grace, and attain to eternal life. "We have not been made gods from the beginning, but at first merely human beings, then finally gods; for God has adopted this course out of his pure benevolence, that no one may impute to him invidiousness or grudgingness [i.e., envy or reluctance]."¹⁰⁹ It is precisely because God has loved us that he desires for us to become like him: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48; see 1 Pt 1:16).

¹⁰⁸ IRENAEUS OF LYONS, *Against Heresies*, IV, 38, 1: PG 7, 1105.

¹⁰⁹ IRENAEUS OF LYONS, *Against Heresies*, IV, 38, 4: PG 7, 1101-1102.