

KHRISTIANSKOYE CHTENIYE
[Christian Reading]

Scientific Journal
Saint Petersburg Theological Academy
Russian Orthodox Church

No. 1

2022

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Falling in love with the invisible

UDK 271.2-1

DOI 10.47132/1814-5574_2022_1_50

Abstract: Even though the requirement to love God, who is unseen, is one of the most well-known concepts in Christian theology, there are not many commentators who really explored the idea of loving something which cannot be seen. Can we love God who is invisible? On a simple plane one can understand the commandment to love ones neighbour, since at least one can see this neighbour or observe him or her (even though as we have observed above our enemy or neighbour is often “unseen”). How can a person love something which he has not seen? The central idea of the article is that the Love cannot be limited to one point or aspect but is a feature of movement it is dynamic. This dynamic nature of love implies that it cannot dwell on one feature or substance or image or aspect.

Keywords: Unseen God, Love, Image, movement, unseen/seen paradox, Gregory of Nazianzus, Eucharist.

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For citation: Ježek V., archpriest. Falling in love with the invisible. *Khristianskoye Chteniye*, 2022, no. 1, pp. 50–68.

Introduction

Whether one can love the “unseen God”? In order to understand this commandment, we explore what visible reality means and here we associate visible reality with images. To make it clear we understand “image” in a broad sense, including all beings, animate and inanimate, or physicality but also mental imagery. Image is therefore reality itself, since images are the only means in our life that enable the human being to “see” things mentally and physically. We only see images but not substances or prototypes. This is the nature of our perception. Here I also give a broader meaning to substance, essence, prototype, relating them to how things work, how they are in themselves and their identity. Of course on a more general sense we can see in some circumstances “the substance” of things but for our purposes we postulate that one cannot see the substance of things or their prototype in a completely all-encompassing and therefore objective sense.

If we look at the standard ethical commandments to love ones neighbour and especially God in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, one can observe an interesting feature. Often one is compelled to love something “unseen” be it God or ones neighbour. Loving ones neighbour or ones enemy is just as difficult as loving God who cannot be seen, because we do not “see” our neighbour or our enemy since he or she can be clouded by a veneer that we cannot reach through or see through (be it evil, sin, or simply something unsympathetic). Loving the other is perhaps just as difficult as loving the unseen God, since we have to find in the other or ourselves a reason to love.

On a completely superficial basis one can observe, that the commandments to love seem to presume that in all human beings there is a quality or inherent propensity to love. The Bible automatically links God with love. The question one may ask is whether there is a possibility when one does not feel any emotion or love at all? Here we can understand love also as an emotion. Cases in human history where there are individuals who seem unable to love are many. But this is not our central concern. The ability to feel emotion or love is a complex subject dealt with by many branches of anthropology.

The word in Hebrew for love (*Hesed*) has various shades of meaning. Both *Hesed* and the Greek *Agape* can convey various meanings of love. All these meanings have theological consequences, and include meanings such as love in relation to grace, love in the context of a covenant and many other meanings. *Hesed* can also be linked with action and not merely mental love. Generally said the Biblical testimony can be linked with love understood as implying the relationship between two or more people. An important meaning is also linked with sacrifice or even a form of kenotic love in relation to Christ.

Even though the requirement to love God, who is unseen, is one of the most well-known concepts in Christian theology, there are not many commentators who really explored the idea of loving something which cannot be seen. Can we love God who is invisible? On a simple plane one can understand the commandment to love ones neighbour, since at least one can see this neighbour or observe him or her (even though as we have observed above our enemy or neighbour is often “unseen”). However, is it not ridiculous or strange to love something one has not seen? How can a person love something which he has not seen?

This seems to be even more interesting given the statements made by Christ in Matthew. “But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they came together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, to test him. Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets” (Matt 22:34–40).

Here Christ indicates that the first commandment is to love God and then to love our neighbour. Importantly, the commandment to love ones neighbour is considered as the second commandment even though it is considered as like the first one (ὁμοία αὐτῇ). Importantly, this is a commandment seen in the context of “law”. A lawyer ask him this question, which is a little strange, even though of course, it is meant here in the sense

of knowledge of the contents of the Scriptures. Whatever the case the judicial context of the analysis of love is a little strange.

The strange thing further is that in the New Testament there seems to be a greater emphasis than in the Old Testament about loving the “unseen” God. Loving the unseen God is a prominent commandment in the New Testament literature. There are many passages on love in the epistles. Notably 1 John explores the theme of love very prominently. Again the “unseen God” is a theme here: “No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us” (1 John 4:12). Here importantly the author of the epistle links loving our visible neighbour with loving God. Loving our neighbour presumably facilitates our ability to love the invisible God.

We can immediately speculate that the emphasis on loving the “unseen” God in the New Testament has to do with the Incarnation of Christ, who took on our body and therefore the authors of the New Testament literature are unafraid to use the concept of the “unseen God” more liberally, since they know that the Incarnation offers a grounding for ones relationship with God. The Incarnation revealed God in a bodily form and thus anyone would now relate more intimately to the “unseen God”, through the mediation of Christ.

In any case the Biblical literature speaks of different modes of loving the unseen God. In the Old Testament as well as Jewish literature the ethics of love is well developed. If we project the later Pharisaic tradition back to the period of Jesus and suggest that later rabbinic Judaism was already well developed in the time of Jesus, we can perhaps see similar ethics of love in the Pharisaic tradition as in the sayings of Jesus. Thus a well known example: “Once there was a gentile who came before Shammai, and said to him: Convert me on the condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot. Shammai pushed him aside with the measuring stick he was holding. The same fellow came before Hillel, and Hillel converted him, saying: That which is despicable to you, do not do to your fellow, this is the whole Torah, and the rest is commentary, go and learn it” (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 31a)¹.

The Old Testament especially mentions the love of God towards creation. Regardless of how we view love in the biblical literature the dynamics of how love begins and ends is not so clear. On a superficial reading one can observe modes of how love begins and expresses itself. Thus God reveals himself as the lover of mankind in one way or another. However, regardless of being within the presence of God and being loved, the human being rebels against him. The Genesis story is very interesting in this regard. If the human beings were in paradise feeling the presence of God and his love, how is it possible that one rebelled? One does not choose something else when one is satisfied with what he or she has. Further God often loves Israel, and yet there is no response to this love. This is a very prominent feature of the Bible. The concept of love not being returned by the one or ones loved. In a sense it culminates in Christ and his rejection by the people a rejection of God himself.

Literature related to the Bible also addressed the issue of conditional and unconditional love. Thus to quote a Jewish source from the Ethics of the Fathers: “A love that is dependent on something when the thing ceases, the love also ceases. But a love that is not dependent on anything never ceases. Which is love that is dependent on something? The love of Amnon for Tamar. And one that is not dependent on anything? The love of David and Jonathan” (Ethics of the Fathers/Avot 5:16).

The mechanics of love between the human being and God seems to be a one way process regardless of the manifestations of love that are in the Biblical narrative by human beings. The brunt of love lays on God. The mode here offered is a pedagogy of love, where the love of God somehow teaches the human being to love. The inability of the human being to love God is a theme popular in theology and even has led some in the Reformation to doubt any possibility of love or action on the part of the human being.

The Judaic dynamics between the Creator and His Creation, is of course a dynamic of the unseen or invisible God with the visible creation. It is a revolution in terms of ancient

¹ See: [Neusner, 2003].

traditions, where the visibility or tangibility of God or gods was more or less a given fact. The manifestation or theophany of the unapproachable God to Abram set of an unparalleled religious revolution based on the non-physicality of Divinity. The situation is even more complex if we realise, that in the Old Testament, God is portrayed as an emotional being full of anthropomorphic manifestations which however at the same time have to be viewed through a prism of absolute unknowability of God by any human being. Thus on the one hand God is unknowable and indescribable, and transcendent and at the same time he is immanent almost like a human being. Similarly in the New Testament God as incarnate is fully visible but at the same time unseen in the sense that he is inapproachable through our subjective concepts of God. The situation is further complicated by love, which is presumably a bridge between the unseen and seen, and the lack of this love amongst human beings. Here one obviously remembers “In the Image and Likeness” sentence. Without implying the necessity of creation, we can state that any being has to have its image to be known. An image is confirmation and the existence of being or substance. If God created someone as not in the image and likeness but as a copy, he would not express his existence but his being. Further creating an exact being from the prototype does imply the cessation of the prototype being. There must be something outside of me to be confirm me as a distinct me. Even the revelation of God at the burning bush was a case of visibility even if through the voice of God, who confirmed his existence in contrast to beingness. One further wonders, why God has such problems with His “image and likeness” which does not want to love him back, as we would expect from an image.

Cain and Abel

Regarding the Old Testament one may ask, whether in the story of Cain (from the root kinyan /acquire) and Abel there is the first indication of the inability to love, the inability to feel compassion. Cain kills his brother and we have a cold statement of the inability of a human being, here Cain to feel compassion or love or anything of this sort. The word used to describe Cain’s act is linked to the root “harag” (kill). The Hebrew term for murder is however linked with “ratsach” [Rosenberg, Rosenberg, 2001]. Tubal Cain the son of Cain according to other Midrashim sources killed his father and improved weapons of murder. The story is interesting because it is a lecture in early personal relationships incorporating God and the first people. The personalist dimension of the story is also emphasised in Jewish exegetical traditions.

Interestingly, the Midrashim sources further view the two brothers as archetypes, dividing the world between them. Cain took the land and Abel took the “personality” (1 Midrash Rabbah, *supra* note, 1, *Gen* 22:7, at 187)². It is possible that Abel offered a more suitable offering due to his temporal proximity to creation [Rosenberg, Rosenberg, 2001, 56]. Even though we are speaking of a Midrashic source, the association of Abel with personhood is very interesting. In this sense, the land associated with Cain, would somehow rather unsurprisingly be linked with that which was low, whereas the personhood of Abel, would imply a renewed and personal love. Personhood symbolised by Abel would be the preferable model for God, who would accept it as an acceptable form of “communication” and “offering”.

In a way Cain is offered the possibility of repentance. On the condition that he would learn how to use his free will properly. The Ramban interestingly comments on this passage in the following way:

“The correct plain interpretation is that it is a confession...The sense of this is that Cain said before G-d: ‘Behold, my sin is great, and You have punished me exceedingly, but guard me that I should not be punished more than You have decreed upon me for by being a fugitive and wanderer and unable to build myself a house and fences at any place, the beasts will kill me for your shadow has departed from me’ Thus Cain confessed that man

² Cit. in: [Rosenberg, Rosenberg, 2001].

is impotent to save himself by his own strength but only by the watchfulness of the Supreme One upon him” (Ramban Commentary on the Torah, *supra* note 1, Gen 4:13, at 91)³. This is an important exegetical statement. It suggests in other words, that God is a primary mover who will be the one leading one’s redemption and renewal. It offers us the alternative that in the absence of love, one can be cured by the love of God. Here the Ramban offers us a redemptive framework similar to Christina ethics. The midrashim statements further believe, that the words “Where is Abel thy Brother”, offer Cain the possibility of repenting (Chumash with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth, and Rashis commentary, 1934, 18).

Love and the image

As we have reminded ourselves above, the human being is created in the “image and likeness of God”. Our intention here is not to dwell on the complex theology behind this statement. However we can ask ourselves, whether being in the image and likeness of God entails some form of ability to love on the part of the human being. Whether this capacity to love is something intrinsically linked with the human being or more concretely whether it is something that cannot be lost by sin or any other action. One here is reminded of Karl Barth, who offered a more personalist understanding of “In the image and likeness of God”. In the sense of an affirmation of a relationship based on the “I and Thou” tension which is even further confirmed by the plural⁴. In other words the “Image and Likeness” is an opening of a relationship presumably based on love.

Often some of the fathers of the church are being accused of emphasising a detached noetic understanding of the “image and likeness of God” to the detriment of the body⁵. This is of course an unjust accusation given the overall theology offered by these fathers. But in any case the criticisms do reveal a certain tension between the heart and the *nous* which further complicates the role of love and its manifestation or origin.

In any event the “image” abstractly speaking, is an indication of a certain distance between image and its prototype. One does not have to have philosophical learning and study Aristotle’s relatives or any other concepts to realise that the image is not its prototype. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons for the commands to love the “unseen” God in order to overcome this distance between image and what it signifies in order not to be lost in a “mere image”. The Bible wants us to reach the substance and essence of God, while at the same time preventing us from doing so.

In our contribution we suggest that the image is in fact to a certain extent “free” from its archetype. If we maintain a close distance and dependence between the archetype and the image there is a risk that the image is not really free. Why would we reach such a conclusion? Because for our purposes we associate the image with the context of love and generally personhood. In terms of the anthropology at hand, we may state, that the human being in the “image and likeness of God”, is actually free from its archetype (God) in terms of love and its ability to love. That is we do not subscribe to the theology which would suggest that by virtue of being related to the archetype, (in the image and likeness) one is limited in his or her freedom and in a way is determined to “love”, which a close affinity between image and prototype would seem to affirm. Any distance between image and its prototype presumes the existence of freedom.

If indeed being created in the “image and likeness of God” would curtail ones freedom “not to love”, then one would be forced to love and therefore one would not have a free will and whether we subscribe to that or this interpretation of the “image and likeness” of God none would hold true because all in one way or another presume a free will and love. The upshot of this thinking would mean, that the discussion would relativize the absence

³ Cit. in: [Rosenberg, Rosenberg, 2001, 64].

⁴ See: [Clines, 1968].

⁵ Recently, in the article [Padilla, 2016], the author argues that the patristic exegesis on the image and likeness denies the worth of the body, which we can contend is not correct.

of love on the part of the human being as not being a cataclysmic and irreversible event, but simply a side-effect of personal relationships.

In this context one can remember Karl Rahner, who perhaps viewed the link between God and the world in a more intimate manner. The world as Gods product is full of grace and is to an extent dependent on this grace. For Rahner, the human being is created as the recipient of God's love of his grace. Steinmetz summarises his thought: "More specifically, God creates humans in such a way as to be recipients of God's love, which is Godself. Rahner makes it clear that the human person has no right to this gift, that it is pure grace, a gift from God, and thus "supernatural". This grace is freely offered to all. This is a concrete foundation of each person's existence (thus "existential") [Steinmetz, 2012, 2, footnote].

Generally said, if Karl Rahner wanted to liberate the "image and likeness of God" from its noetic background, he more or less risks the danger in viewing the human being as "only" the product of God's love. Of course, the human being is the product of God's love, but if we introduce grace as Rahner does, this would mean that the human being is completely dependent on God's love for its existence (this is of course true also), and "has to love God" in order to exist. The question one may ask whether this line of thought does enable the possibility "not to love God", which is the mark of any freedom and the precondition of our being like God. If the possibility of "not loving God" is not accepted, there cannot be any real love on the part of the human being. We are not talking about the consequences of not loving God, we are talking about the possibility of not loving God as an option characterising the human person. Of course, not loving God means non-existence, which we are not speaking about here. The freedom is strongly related to "the unseen" God, which means that one has to see Him in visible creation but not automatically as his by-product but as His image which is moving and indeterminate.

Related with this theme is the question of loving ones enemies. Is it not the case that loving ones enemies is just as difficult as loving the unseen God? All Christians who hear this exhortation immediately struggle to find this love for ones enemies. But is this process correct? Can one force himself or herself to love something if the love is not there? If one would have perfect love, he or she would not be able to see anyone as enemies, which defeats the point of the argument.

How can we love moving images?

The simplicity of God can be related to the "unseen" God. In fact many fathers of the church especially Gregory of Nazianzus have a tendency to speak of the simplicity of God. For example, a modern theologian writes: "A single quest and a single search must be substituted for all these questions. To seek God, to avoid the inner turmoil of overly subtle investigations and disputes, ..., to flee from the other noise of controversies and to eliminate futile problems, such is the foremost note of simplicity..., 'holy simplicity' is the humility, which safeguards the integrity of the mind, which ensures the search for God alone. All these including intellectual pursuits should remain subordinate to the search for God" [LeClerq, 1960, 254].

The emphasis on the simplicity of God, also presents certain challenges for the notion of love. Plantinga generally addressed problems related to Gods simplicity and relationship with complexity some years ago. Thus he writes: "According to Augustine, God created everything distinct from him; did he then create these things? Presumably not; they have no beginning. Are they dependent on him? But how could a thing whose non-existence is impossible – the number 7, lets say, or the property of being a horse – depend upon anything for its existence? Does God (so to speak) just find them constituted the way they are? Must he simply put up with their being thus constituted? Are these things, their existence, and their character, outside his control? [Plantinga, 1980, 4–5]. At first glance Plantinga states, that if there is a God, there is no escape of being dependent on him and therefore nothing really exists.

From our perspective, the discussion on the simplicity of God is important if it hinges on the relationship of love. If God is simple and we assume, that his creation and the images are

multiform and outside of God (that is not identical to his essence), and therefore complex, a question can be raised as to how to love this kind of God? Either our love will be non perfect, since we will love what we do not know, or our love will never be perfect since it will be a love of an imperfect being, since we will love his images and his creation (at least not as perfect as God) and therefore not God.

The discussion here can also refer to the problem of possessive love. Does God by virtue of his love for his creation actually “own his creation”. Does He limit creation by his love?

For philosophers such as Nietzsche love can be characterised as egoistical. The more one loves somebody the more one enriches himself. In terms of the male and female Nietzsche seems to see a difference also, in that women and men love differently. The woman desiring to be possessed in love while the male desiring to possess. He writes: “Our love of our neighbours- is it not craving for new property? And likewise our love of knowledge, of truth, and altogether any craving for what is new? We slowly grow tired of the old, of what we safely possess, and we stretch our bands again; even the most beautiful landscape is no longer sure of our love after we have lived in it for three months, and more distant coast excites our greed: possession usually diminishes the possession” [Nietzsche, 2001, 40]. On a negative note, Gods creativity can be seen as an endless compulsion to possess through love, which leads him to a never ending imagination in creativity in order to produce more and more objects of love and therefore of possession. In Christian terms this is certainly true for the creativity of man, which can go down the path of this kind of destructive love.

He further observes: “This ridiculous overestimation and misapprehension of consciousness has the very useful consequence that an all too-rapid development of consciousness was prevented. Since they thought they already possessed it, human beings, did not take much trouble to acquire it- and things are no different today! [Nietzsche, 2001, 37]. This statement by Nietzsche, if related to our concerns demonstrates again the danger of projection. If the image is a mere projection of the prototype it risks a delusion of its own self, since the image is merely a confirmation of the prototype or substance. The subject creates images outside of itself in order to delude or confirm its own beingness and existence.

In terms of love we have to refer to an important concept related to our concerns which is also related to the unity and relationships of things. In the Stoic world the concept of *Sympatheia* expresses a unity of the cosmos. *Sympatheia* is however determined by the relationships of the things “sympathetic”. There are structures which are different and are not unified and “not sympathetic”. This unity of the cosmos is beyond mere structural unity.

We read in Sextus (perhaps the argument was developed by Chrysippus): “For in the cases of bodies formed from *conjoined* or *separate* elements the parts do not “sympathise” with one another, since if all the soldiers, say, in an army, have perished (save one), the one who survives is not seen to suffer at all, through transmission; but in the case of *unified bodies* there exists a certain sympathy, since when the finger is cut, the whole body shares in the condition. So then, also the cosmos is a unified body” (Sextus. Against the Physicists. I 78 ff.)⁶. The argument concludes that what unifies things is nature, which itself is before all things and is God, and is morally good. This Stoic argument is a rather successful argument for the definition or existence of “nature”. In its general purport it defines nature by liberating it from its parts or expressions, while maintaining a congeniality with them. While *Sympatheia* is not exactly love, in terms of its unifying nature based on “congeniality” it is an important observation. However, the problem with this concept is its emphasis on relatedness of things which are sympathetic to each other, therefore dictating unity by virtue of relatedness. Love on the other hand cannot count on the relatedness of things.

How do we discern substances or objects?

The physicality of reality necessarily has to indicate, that our perception is based on “real and objective” perception and observation as far as the mental cognitive faculties

⁶ In: [Meijer, 2007].

of the human being are capable. Whether we are capable or not of perceiving the physicality of reality, the bodies and causal relationships are a given fact in the world around us. There is a substance (agreeing here with the primeval definitions of Aristotle) that can have a form and to this extent is an “object of reflection”. The emphasis on matter and form is an important aspect of Aristotle in this context.

The Fathers of the Church such as Gregory in comparison to other schools of thought in his period would never deny the physicality or matter or bodily form of things and beings. The basis of the controversies surrounding Christ would often touch on the bodily reality of Christ. The strong affirmation that one cannot be saved unless Christ did in reality assume our bodily nature with all its characteristics is a given fact in fathers such as Gregory. This is often underappreciated in modern reflections because the conclusions of this view are often left unexpanded. The emphasis on corporality undoubtedly set these “realist” fathers apart from the extreme spiritual (gnostic) schools surrounding them.

What needs to be emphasized from the outset is the fact, that given this line of reasoning, Gregory would never deny the “objectiveness” of reality. Gregory does not need to escape to forms of matter-less spiritualism to prove the truthfulness of his anthropology. For him there is “reality” a “substantial” existence. Existence and substance are linked here, since without an expression into “existence” one would not now that there was or is a “substance”. In this regard in terms of the Divinity there is a perfect correspondence between existence and substance, since how God exists, or acts is a perfect reflection or correspondence with his substance.

Gregory generally stresses the fact that God is not a composite being. This is very important. If God is “simple” this does not mean that Gregory is subscribing to some non-personal forms of God, but he is pointing to the very important fact, that there is no object in creation that can fully circumscribe God. Therefore any form of analogy is doomed to failure. It can only serve a pedagogical purpose. Even a comparison is inadequate. Thus in his Fifth Oration (XXXI) he observes: “I have very carefully considered this matter in in my own mind, and have looked at it in every point of view, in order to find some illustration of this most important subject, but I have been unable to discover anything on earth with which to compare the nature of the Godhead.”⁷ Gregory is perfectly aware that any object or in fact image is in danger of “delusion” or “illusion”. Obviously the “simple” nature of God is paradoxically a reflection of his superior complexity which is non comprehensible for anything outside God.

The substance according to Patristic understanding by virtue of being Divine and full of love is not a substance which is without activity. An especially important passage in Gregory stresses the unique nature of God who even before creation was full of activity contemplating his own self, by reference to beauty. Gregory observes: “Πήχθης, φραζώμεσθα τί κίννυτο Θεία νόησις, (Οὐδὲ γὰρ ἔστιν ἀρηκτος ἐμοὶ Θεός, οὐδ' ἀτέλεστος), Πρὶν τὸδε πᾶν στήναι τε καὶ εἶδεσι κοσμηθῆναι. Αἰῶσιν κενεοῖσιν ὑπέρτατος ἐμβασιλεύων, Κίννυτο κάλλεος οἷο φίλην θεγύμενος αἴγλην, Τρισσοφαοῦς Θεότητος ὁμὸν σέλας ἰσοφέριστον, Ὡς μούνη Θεότητι, καὶ κόσμοιο τύπους οὓς στήσατο λεύσσων Οἷσιν ἐνὶ μεγάλοισι νοήμασι κοσμογόνος νοῦς Ἐσσομένου μετέπειτα, Θεῶ δέ τε καὶ παρεόντος” (Gregory Nazianzus. Fifth theological Oration, XXXI. PG 37. 420–421). These verses describing God are of paramount importance just as the other statements in the other parts of this poem. The verses describe the unceasing activity and beauty of God, who was reigning before ages and this reign is a form of activity here. Importantly, it also mentions Gods mind or thinking process, which is presumably linked with his creativity or contemplation of beauty.

We can state, that an important conclusion which generally stems from Gregory’s thought and not noticed by modern commentators is that the Divine “substance cannot move”, since movement essentially means a change or transformation, which means that

⁷ For St. Gregory’s orations I have offered the text from the translation of [Browne, Swallow, 1894]. However, I have altered the translation in some areas according to the original text from [Gallay, 1978]. For the other citations of Gregory not from the Orations I have used my own translation. See also: [Reynolds, 2011; Norris, 1991].

a substance cannot remain attached or synchronised to its expression/image and in an abstract sense then cannot express itself as full truth, since it is by virtue of movement “moving” and “untrue” to its own essence. Of course, here we mean by “movement” a more complex category not physical movement only. Generally, the negative connotations about movement is that it entails a change from one position which belongs to substance at least in the abstract sense. Thus a moving substance means a substance which through movement somehow loses its former trace and position and therefore “part of its substance”. This is very important, to emphasise because otherwise the theology of the image so prominent in patristic thought is left incomprehensible.

However, through contemplation, emphasised by Gregory, this issue is partly overcome. Since contemplation is static in a sense even though being dynamic at the same time. Contemplation paradoxically entails a dynamic/stationary position.

In Oration 28 Gregory discusses the character of God and his substance. “For what effect is produced upon his Being or Substance by His having no beginning, and being capable of change or limitation? Nay, the whole question of his Being is still left for the further consideration and exposition of him who truly has the mind of God and is advanced in contemplation.” Τί γὰρ ὄντι αὐτῷ κατὰ τὴν φύσιν καὶ τὴν ὑπόστασιν ὑπάρχει τὸ μὴ ἀρχὴν ἔχειν, μηδὲ ἐξίστασθαι, μηδὲ περατοῦσθαι; Ἀλλ’ ὅλον τὸ εἶναι περιλαμβάνειν λείπεται προσφιλοσοφεῖν τε καὶ πρεσσεξετάζειν τῷ «νοῦν θεοῦ» (I. Κορ 2:16), ἀληθῶς ἔχοντι καὶ τελωτέρῳ τὴν θεωρίαν (Oration 2 (28), 9, 6–13). Here the important thing to mention is that in the English translation of Brown and Swallow the term Hypostasis is missing. The term Hypostasis is of paramount importance here since it relates to the central concept of how a substance expresses itself that is through personhood.

In oration 5 (31) Gregory observes “But it is not possible for *me* to make use of even this; because it is very evident what gives the ray its motion; but there is nothing prior to God which could set Him in motion; for He is Himself the Cause of all things, and He has no prior Cause. And secondly because in this case also there is a suggestion of such things as composition, diffusion, and an unsettled and unstable nature... none of which we can suppose in the Godhead. **In a word, there is nothing which presents a standing point to my mind in these illustrations from which to consider the Object which I am trying to represent to myself, unless one may indulgently accept one point of the image while rejecting the rest**” (Fifth Theological Oration, (31) 33). This last statement is a clear manifest of the theologians limits or more precisely the limits of the image to “fully express” itself. What does this mean for the theology of the image? This line of thinking leads Gregory to reflect on imagery generally and its relationship to what the image depicts or to its archetype. Here image is not only a mental or verbal picture, it is all physical and mental reality and even virtual reality if we please. The more one desires to touch such an image the more it escapes. The question is then, for Gregory do images have any relation to truth?

In the first theological oration, paragraph III, Gregory observes: “Not to every one, my friends does it belong to philosophize about God; not to every one (Οὐ παντός, ὃ οὔτοι, τὸ περὶ Θεοῦ φιλοσοφεῖν, οὐ παντός) the Subject is not so cheap and low; and I will add, not before every audience, nor at all times, nor on all points; but on certain occasions, and before certain persons, and withing certain limits. Not to all men, because it is permitted only to those who have been examined, and passed masters in contemplation, and who have been previously purified in soul and body, or at the very least are being purified. (Οὐ πάντων μὲν, ὅτι τῶν ἐξήτασμένων, καὶ διαβεβηκότων ἐν Θεωρίᾳ, καὶ πρὸ τούτου καὶ ψυχὴν καὶ σῶμα κεκαθαυμένον, ἢ καθαιρωμένων, τὸ μετριώτατον)... It is when we are free from all external defilement or disturbance, and when that which rules within us is not confused (ἡγεμονικὸν ἡμῶν συγχέεται) with vexatious or erring images (μοχθηροῖς), (τύποις); like persons mixing up (ἀναμιγνύοντων) good writing with bad, or filth with the sweet odours of ointments. For it is necessary to be truly at leisure to know God; (Δεῖ γὰρ τῷ ὄντι σχολάσαι, καὶ γνῶναι Θεόν) and when we can get a convenient season, to discern the straight road of the things divine.”

Gregory continues to argue that the subject of theology is so lofty that it cannot be subdued by discussions at the table, dinner or theatre. The people who are low, often

enter futile arguments (ἐρεσχολία), into self gratifying discussions and nice contradictions (ἀντιθέσεων).

The discussion here obviously understands the possibility of “meditation” about things divine commensurate to the degree of purification one undergoes. Discussing things divine without preparation means that these are mere images “without meaning” and therefore liable to be subject to profanity. Here there is a particularly important thought present. It is as if the very content of the theology in question gains substance to the degree of the reality it expresses, which itself is conditioned by purification. There needs to be an external and internal connection between theology and its substance. This can be achieved when this theology gains life through purification, since it is actualised. It becomes a living theology, and therefore a substantial theology. However, the unpurified person is unprepared to unlock the substance of theology, and therefore he or she seemingly can speak about theology but this is merely an image of theology even though the subject and theme can be the same. Thus paradoxically, both the purified and an unpurified person can speak about let’s say Christ’s natures, but each will understand and express this theology in a different manner even though the subject is the same and the content is the same. This is the danger Gregory points to here, that in his own day, people could speak about the same subject and then wonder why everybody reached different understandings. Gregory is annoyed here, since the sophists are doing exactly this. This deliberation leads one to state, that one’s discussions about theology are always limited to the degree of the preparedness of the audience, etc. Sophistic theology is theology of images without substance.

Are images and the reality around us forms of illusion and delusion?

In patristic thought generally, especially the tradition of fathers associated with the tradition of the Philokalia and hesychasm “images” seem to have a bad reputation. Often images are associated with that which causes temptations and problems. Especially “images in the heart”. Gregory of Nazianzus with his emphasis on beauty and contemplation however seems to present a useful corrective to this line of thinking, because in any event “imagery” is linked to beauty. How can we reconcile this positive and negative opinion about imagery? Already Plato established the fundamental problem of the image, imprint and the original⁸.

In order to understand the idea of the image, we would also have to address the complex theology of the creation of man in the “image and likeness of God” (Gen 1:26–27; 5:1; 9:6; James 3:9 etc.). As we have indicated above, we do not have the possibility of entering a discussion on the theology “of the Image and likeness” as developed on the basis of the Greek Septuagint.

Suffice it to say that in authors such as Gregory we cannot discern a tension or still better a negative stance towards the image in contrast to its prototype. Gregory writes in the context of the Divinity of the Father and Son: “And the Image as of one substance with Him, and because He is of the Father, and not the Father of Him. For this is of the Nature of an Image, to be the reproduction of its Archetype, and of that whose name it bears; only that there is more here. For in ordinary language an image is a motionless representation of that which has motion; but in this case it is the living reproduction of the Living One, and is more exactly like than was Seth to Adam, or any son to his father”. («Εἰκὼν» [Col 1:15] δέ, ὡς ὁμοούσιον, καὶ ὅτι τοῦτο ἐκείθεν, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐκ τοῦτου Πατῆρ. Αὕτη γὰρ εἰκὼν φῦσις, μίμημα εἶναι τοῦ ἀρχετύπου, καὶ οὐ λέγεται, πλὴν ὅτι καὶ πλεῖον ἐνταῦθα. Ἐκεῖ μὲν γὰρ ἀκίνητος κινουμένου· ἐνταῦθα δὲ ζῶντος, καὶ ζῶσα, καὶ πλέον ἔχουσα τὸ ἀπαράλακτον ἢ τοῦ Ἀδαμ ὁ Σῆθ (Gen 4:25), καὶ τοῦ γεννῶντος παντὸς τὸ γεννώμενον) (Fourth Theological Oration (30), 20, 21–28, 268).

⁸ See the Theaetetus of Plato. Modern philosophy often recapitulates the discussion already found in earlier authors. Thus, the patristic tradition already firmly established the discussion of the dynamics between image, imprint, mimesis and the original, typos. For a modern re-interpretation see for example [Riccœur, 2004].

The emphasis on the living image, and the image as related to a living prototype is especially important here. The relationship of the Son with the Father in terms of the image would open up an avenue offering greater intimacy between the image and the prototype and also a greater dynamism of love. The remark about motion cannot be underestimated here. Motion liberates the image from being static or dead and offers a dynamic a dynamic we can associate with love. Obviously as we have already suggested the reference to Christ enables the fathers to provide a more solid basis for love and reality in relation to the image.

There are further two levels of meaning here. If we understand creation/the human being as a kind of image of its prototype, this image cannot be understood as a negative image. However, the problem that the fathers point to is, that due to sin and other factors the image no longer corresponds to its prototype or archetype. This is not a permanent condition, but is linked to the degree of our sin and rebellion as human beings. Thus understandably such a deformed image (including images in our heads and heart) cannot be good for or spiritual well-being. However, there is also another problematic dimension. Any unqualified intimate relation between the image and its prototype encounters a problem, since in Christian theology the Divine substance, can never be fully explored. On first glance therefore, the image can never be equal to its substance or to the archetype. This would presume a position of inferiority for the image. In terms of Gregory of Nazianzus and his school of thought this is not really a problem. The image regardless of its distance from its prototype is never really inferior, since it offers each individual and observer a window to beauty through contemplation equal to the degree of perception available to each person. Any image leads to another image as a wonderful dynamic movement towards beauty which is an endless process just as Gods substance is non-circumscribable in its nature. Therefore no image is inferior, since it is related to the Divine substance in a dynamic movement of the contemplation of beauty. Gregory observes: „Πλέον δίδωμι τοὺς ζένους ἡμῶν ἔχειν, Τοῦτοις λέγω δὴ τοῖς κεχρωσμένοις λόγοις Εἰ καὶ τὸ κάλλος ἡμῖν ἐν θεωρίᾳ. Ὑμῖν μὲν οὖν δὴ τοῖς σοφοῖς ἐπαίξαμεν. Ἔστω τις ἡμῖν καὶ χάρις λεόντιος. Τέταρτον εὖρον τῆ νόσω πονούμενος“ (“On his own Versus”, Carm 2. I. 49–55 // PG 37, 1333)⁹.

In Oration 30 Gregory mentions the ancient Judaic restrictions on naming God. He cannot be expressed by “divisible” words. The Greek expression of the original is even more poignant. Οἱ γὰρ χαρακτηρῆσιν ἰδίους τὸ Θεῖον τιμήσαντες καὶ οὐδὲ γράμμασιν ἀνασχόμενοι τοῖς αὐτοῖς ἄλλο τι γράφεσθαι τῶν μετὰ Θεὸν καὶ Θεόν, ὡς δεόν ἀκονώνητον εἶναι καὶ μέχρι τούτου τὸ Θεῖον τοῖς ἡμετέροις, πότε ἂν δέξαιντο λυομένη φωνῇ δηλοῦσθαι τὴν ἄλυτον φύσιν καὶ ἰδιάζουσαν; Οὔτε γὰρ ἀέρα τις ἔπνευσεν ὅλον πῶποτε, οὔτε οὐσίαν θεοῦ παντελῶς ἢ νοῦς κεχώρηκεν, ἢ φωνῇ περιέλαβεν (Or 30, 17, 4–9). Further, he writes: “But we sketch Him by His Attributes, and so obtain a certain faint and feeble and partial idea concerning Him, and our best Theologian is he who has, not indeed discovered the whole, for our present chain does not allow of our seeing the whole, but conceived of Him to a great extent than another, and gathered in himself more of the Likeness or adumbration of the Truth, or whatever we may call it.” (Ἀλλ’ ἐκ τῶν περι αὐτὸν σκιαγραφοῦντες τὰ κατ’ αὐτόν, ἀμυδρὰν τινα καὶ ἀσθενῆ καὶ ἄλλην ἀπὶ ἄλλου φαντασίαν συλλέγομεν. Καὶ οὗτος ἄριστος ἡμῖν Θεολόγος, οὐχ ὃς εὔρε τὸ πᾶν, οὐδὲ γὰρ δέχεται τὸ πᾶν ὁ δεσμός, ἀλλ’ ὃς ἐὰν ἄλλου φαντασθῆ πλέον, καὶ πλεῖον ἐν ἑαυτῷ συναγάγῃ τὸ τῆς ἀληθείας ἴνδαλμα, ἢ ἀποσκίασμα, ἢ ὃ τι καὶ ὀνομάσομεν) (Fourth Theological Oration (30), 17, 11–16, 262). The term σκιαγραφοῦντες, which could be translated as outlining or sketching is very important here. It is also related to rhetorical discussions of God and his divinity.

Perhaps it is unsurprising, that the later Byzantine writer Michael Psellos found so much in common with Gregory of Nazianzus, whom he admires. Just as Gregory before him stressed beauty and contemplation as a key to unlock the dynamics of our life, so Michael Psellos rediscovers this concept in the later Byzantine world. To what extent Psellos remains in the standard framework of Patristic thought in this context remains subject to debate¹⁰.

⁹ For further discussion see: [Gilbert, 2001, 154; Norris, 2006].

¹⁰ See for example, Michael Psellos: [Barber, Papaioannou, 2017; Papaioannou, 2011]. However the relationship between Psellos and Gregory of Nazianzus has not been sufficiently explored in modern

Gregory continues to observe: “Therefore, this darkness of the body has been placed between us and God, like the cloud of old between the Egyptians and the Hebrews (Ex 14:20); and this is perhaps what is meant by He made darkness His secret place, namely our dullness through which few can see even little”. Διὰ τοῦτο μέσος ἡμῶν τε καὶ Θεοῦ ὁ σωματικὸς οὗτος ἴσταται «γνόφος» (Ἐξ 10:22), ὡσπερ ἡ νεφέλη τὸ πάλαι τῶν Αἰγυπτίων καὶ Ἑβραίων (Ἐχ 14:20). Καὶ τοῦτό ἐστιν ἴσως, ὃ «ἔθετο σκότος ἀποκρυφὴν αὐτοῦ (Πς 17:12), τὴν ἡμετέραν παχύτητα, διὰ ἣν ὀλίγοι καὶ μικρὸν διακύπτουσιν... Further “so it is quite impracticable for those who are in the body to be conversant with objects of pure thought apart altogether from bodily objects. For something in our own environment is ever creeping in, even when the mind has most fully detached itself from the visible, and collected itself, and is attempting to apply itself to those invisible things which are akin to itself” (Second Theological Oration (28), 12): Οὕτως ἀμήχανον τοῖς ἐν σώματι δίχα τῶν σωματικῶν πάντη γενέσθαι μετὰ τῶν νοουμένων. Αἰεὶ γάρ τι παρεμπεσεῖται τῶν ἡμετέρον, κἄν ὅτι μάλιστα χωρίσας ἑαυτὸν τῶν ὀρωμένων ὁ νοῦς, καὶ καθ' ἑαυτὸν γενόμενος, προσβάλλειν ἐπιχειρῆ τοῖς συγγενέσι καὶ ἀοράτοις. Γνώσι δὲ οὕτως.

If Gregory had the occasion of living in our age, he would probably ask himself, if reality itself is a problem for us in seeing the truth and God, is it not the case that virtual reality would be an even greater problem? If virtual reality is further removed from reality, how much more is it removed from the truth? If it is difficult to discern aspects of reality in the world surrounding us, is it almost impossible to see it in “virtual reality”. The only thing that Gregory would probably agree on here, is that obviously, reality is a kind of “pointer” to higher things. This is of course the same with virtual reality, since even in virtual reality, we are driven to other objects behind it. We may speculate whether virtual reality does not push us towards greater oblivion, if oblivion is understood as the absence of reality/substance.

On one plane the imagery in virtual reality can push the relationship between what is real and what is interpretation or illusion to further extremes, especially given the obvious limits of virtual reality itself. The fundamental issue at hand is that if reality itself or its objective existence can be a source of our own illusion and delusion is it not true that “virtual reality” is even further in danger of distortion of the truth? Here the issue is not only linked with the Divine, but with reality as such. One may argue that this distortion of the truth in the image is only linked to the Christian presupposition of morality and sin. But this is clearly not the case, since any basic non-theist philosophy has to admit that there is a problem in our perception of reality, truth etc., regardless of moral notions of sin and other concepts.

Gregory emphasises the fact that one needs guidance through the field of knowledge and contemplation. The contemporary stress in humanist schools is, that reality is objective enough and one does not need to have any guidance whatsoever apart from general abstract ethical principles which however cannot in their own right have no grounding since they are relative to the desires and needs of the contemporary society. Gregory speaks of the Spirit as a guide. We may ask, whether the observer living in virtual reality needs such a guide or if such a possibility of a guide indeed exists. The world without rules, which is the internet, does not have a guide.

There is a liberation offered by Gregory from the reality or virtual reality of moving images seemingly without order and sense. Without a guide (just as is the case with the internet), there is a risk that we will be lost. However, this guide cannot be static itself otherwise it will be just another image. For Gregory it is the Holy Spirit. Here in the thought of Gregory and others the Spirit is something more than a Divine being. It is the spirit of unpredictability. Rather to be more precise only a “spirit” can manoeuvre in a complex virtual world or any world at all, since nothing is defined in advance. The association of the freedom of spirit with the internet is a theme not commented on by any contemporary author. The Divine Spirit in Christian life is a spirit of freedom and unpredictability, which however has its beginning and end in Christ understood here as the ultimate grounding of reality and truth.

This notion could be useful for understanding the dynamics of virtual reality, if it assumes that the spirit of freedom which is inherent for example in the internet is indeed a spirit leading somewhere or from somewhere (without any moral or ethical judgements involved).

For Gregory, the Christian Holy Spirit is something present everywhere, it is “indwelling” in the human beings (Συμπολιτεύω) (see Oration 41). Therefore it is communion building in its nature. The Holy Spirit seems to reveal itself gradually on a certain level. This seems to be the import of Oration 41, 11, where the Spirit gradually manifests himself. Importantly, Gregory uses three terms ἀμυδρός, ἔκτυπος, τέλειος, to demonstrate the gradual manifestation of the Spirit until a perfection of manifestation. Importantly, he speaks of expression through energy which then also culminates in a substantial manifestation (ἐνεργεία / οὐσιωδῶς). The idea of a kind of self-revelatory and revelatory role of the Spirit appears elsewhere, like for example in Oration 6, 1, where the Spirit is associated with the process of purification (καθαίρω), through the workings of philosophy (τῇ δι’ ἔργων φιλοσοφίᾳ), and then an opening of the intellect, which receives in the Spirit (Ps 119:131), which leads to a good word (λόγον ἀγαθόν), which enables the perfect wisdom of God to be spoken (σοφίαν τελείαν), among those spiritually able to receive it (ἐν τοῖς τελείοις) (Oration 6.1).

In our own spiritual makeup, we have apart from the spirit or Holy Spirit instruments of discernment, which are the physical and mental abilities to discern between images, concepts and so on. Therefore, encountering the image and its perception is not a static direct encounter, unmediated by a filter. We have unique organs which help us to discern the truth and reality which derive their objectiveness only by reference to a Divine Creator. Otherwise they would be relative. Gregory associates the nous with taxonomic qualities. Νοῦς δ’ ἔστιν ὄψις ἔνδον, οὐ περίγραφος, Νοῦ δ’ ἔργον, ἡ νόησις, ἐκτύπωμά τε. Λόγος δ’ ἔρευνα τῶν νοδῶν τυπωμάτων, ὃν ἐκλαλήσεις ὄργανοις φωνητικοῖς. The Nous is the inner vision, which is not circumscribed. The work of the nous is thinking, about the impressions (imagining?). The faculty of “reason” is an inquiry on the impressions or images of the nous, which you make manifest by the organs of speech (Carm. 1. 2. 34. 27–30. PG 37, 947). Further, the poem continues: “Αἰσθησίς ἐστιν εἰσοδοχὴ τις ἔκτοθεν. Μνήμη κάθεξις τῶν νοδῶν τυπωμάτων, Λήθη δὲ μνήμης ἐκβολή. Λύθης δὲ γε Μνήμη τις αὐθις, ἣν ἀνάμησιν λέγω, Βούλησιν οἶδα, νοῦ ῥοπήν καὶ συνδρομήν. Τῶν ὅσσοι ἐφ’ ἡμῖν· τὰλλα δ’ οὐ Θελητέα (36). The important point here is the impression of the senses on the nous, which come from the outside and presumably leave an imprint. It is obvious, and we may conclude, that the nous then classifies these thoughts according to certain criteria. I do not want to use the word “reason” here because of its ambiguous meaning. In another poem we read: Ἄλλα νόον καθαροῖσι νοήμασιν αἰὲν ἀέξων, Ἦδη καὶ Τριάδος ἄπτειται οὐρανίης. (The poem is interesting in its other verses as well) (Carm. II. Historica, Sectio I Peomata de Seipso, 35. PG 37, 1264).

The nous can be linked with reason. Reason in the patristic tradition is a complex reality. The patristic understanding of the nous and reason is linked with a complex and organic understanding of the human person. The radical separation of rationality and reason from the overall human person so adamant in modern philosophy and thought was unknown to the patristic tradition. This is important even for our purposes since if one is to understand our relation to reality and virtual reality a more holistic understanding is useful.

Neuroscientists such as Damasio, have increasingly called for a more holistic and inclusive understanding of emotion and reason. For a “comprehensive understanding of the human mind requires an organismic perspective” [Damasio, 1994, 252]. He addresses the issue of how reason interacts with emotions and thoughts. Importantly, he argues one cannot immediately and clearly agree that reason operates independently from other process including emotion, images and so on. The patristic tradition sees an interconnectedness of all these organs and aspects. This interconnectedness then enables us to interact with reality and virtual reality.

An interaction which sees a congeniality between the human being and the universe since the human being is a microcosmos. The obvious issue is, if virtual reality is a “reality” at all, it must be linked internally in a dynamic of interrelatedness with the human being and his or her internal and spiritual organs. Ironically this would please the most dominant individualistic philosophy, where the “I” is in the centre.

This microcosmos aspect of the human being is also linked with the fact that we are according to the Judaeo Christian tradition intimately linked with God by virtue of being his creation. The believing Christian of course has recourse to perfect images, being himself or herself made in the image and likeness of God. The human being made in the image and likeness of God, can “recall” true images by reference to his divine origin. This recollection guarantees the truthfulness of reason since it operates with true images. This enables us through images to “remember God” (μυμνήσθαι Θεοῦ), “meditate day and night” (μελετᾶν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός), (τὸ μυμνήσθαι διηνεκῶς)¹¹.

If this is so we can argue using the term *mimesis*, that without this connection to Divine substance, (artistic) *mimesis* /just as Plato and Aristotle argued/ cannot accurately express reality.

In his Fifth theological Oration 31 (XI), Gregory observes: “What was Adam? A creature (Πλάσμα) of God, (Gen 1:27). What then was Eve? A fragment of the creature (Τμήμα τοῦ πλάσματος), (Gen 2:21–23). And what was Seth? The begotten of both (Ἀμφοτέρων γέννημα), (Gen 4:25). Does it then seem to you that Creature and Fragment and Begotten are the same thing? Of course it does not. But were not these persons consubstantial? (Ὁμοούσια) Of course they were. Well then, here it is an acknowledged fact that different persons may have the same substance (ὑποστάντα τῆς αὐτῆς εἶναι οὐσίας ἐνδέχεσθαι). I say this, not that I would attribute creation or fraction or any property of body to the Godhead (let none of your contenders for a word be down upon me again), but that I may contemplate in these, as on a stage, things which are objects of thought alone. (ἐπι δὲ τούτων θεωρῶν, ὡς ἐπι σκηνῆς, τὰ νοούμενα) For it is not possible to trace (εἰκαζομένων) out any image exactly to the whole extent of the truth. But, they say, what is the meaning of all this? For is not the one an offspring, and the other a something else of the One? Did not both Eve and Seth come from the one Adam? Did not both Eve and Seth come from the one Adam? And were they both begotten by him? No; but the one was a fragment of him, and the other was begotten by him. And yet the two were one and the same thing; both were human beings; no one will deny that. Will you then give up your contention against the Spirit, that He must be either altogether begotten, or else cannot be consubstantial, or be God; and admit from human examples the possibility of our position? I think it will be well for you, unless you are determined to be very quarrelsome, and to fight against what is proved to demonstration.”

The passage of Gregory is linked with the oration on the Holy Spirit, which brings us to a related issue and observation that images and elements can be random, that is their movement and interaction can be indeterminate. If images are static our relationship with the image means being imprisoned also to the archetype they are related to if any. General interaction between images means that there is a relation, but this relation is not determined in advance and directed through chance.

We can link this with the Holy Spirit, since the Holy Spirit operates on the basis of freedom, it is not static and “entrapped” with a determinate position. In Christian terms we cannot identify the freedom and movement of images, but we can state that all this movement is a movement from and towards the Incarnation which is its basis. Thus the person operating outside of the Christian theological context has problems in identifying the underlining principle of interaction and movement of things, because he or she cannot necessarily discover the underlining common denominator of movement. Just as the proponents of the Big bang theory have trouble in identifying features and elements of this overall cosmic movement they describe. This fluidity of the imagery means that these images can be but not necessarily “untrue” to their substances.

Needless to say the Holy Spirit and love are the conjoining forces between images and beings etc. Love liberates the image from the imprisonment of its content less or subjective imprisonment, and therefore its relativisation. Returning to Nietzsche, love here does not want to possess the other, but liberates the other by forming a free and undetermined relationship that is giving ground to the other. To describe it in personal terms. If one begins

¹¹ See for ex. (Oration 27.4).

to love an image (be it anything) one gives this image a grounding in the one who loves. Let's say, that a man falls in love with a particular woman. By loving her, (whether she accepts this love or not is beside the point), he communicates with her in one way or another, thereby grounding her own image/personality into a particular relationship which then determines and helps to identify her as a person or her as a substance. The more love such a woman experiences from various people, the more complex her substantial characteristic becomes in the sense that her substance gains a particular identity. Thus interaction in love, helps us to identify who we are, as substances. But this of course does not mean the extreme position that we do not gain an identity unless we are in a relationship. Our beingness and substance must exist regardless of relationships. This is of course an important concept which needs to be properly explored by any theology of Communion.

Of course, this reminds us of the "theology of Communion and being". However, there is a difference because, beingness here is not necessarily linked to image as we understand it here. Love cannot be associated only with beingness and has to operate so to speak between images otherwise it will be imprisoned in one being in comparison to another. This would perfectly agree with the emphasis of Gregory the Theologian that the structure is not necessarily and automatically represented by its image. Gregory developed this theology from obvious reasons if one is reminded of the Trinitarian scheme. Nothing in this world can be representative of the Trinity, but there are fragments of images which can to a limited extent represent the Trinity. This of course relates to all reality.

Returning back to Christological concerns there is a long list of authorities regarding the image and its relation to the prototype in relation to Christology. In Christology the Son can be seen as the image of the Father. Apart from Gregory of Nazianzus suffice it to mention Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa and others.

However, we can mention some important observations from Nicephorus of Constantinople which implied that all images are circumscribable. An image is a relationship with its prototype but not necessarily identical. Nicephorus further implies that this circumscription is a reality of not the fall but of created reality. Christ remains with the flesh even after the resurrection.

He further mentions the concepts of "distinctive properties" (γνωριζομένη ταῖς ιδιότησι), speaks "about physical differences and essential qualities" (φυσικαὶ διαφοραὶ καὶ οὐσιώδεις ποιότητες) (PG 100, 300b)¹². All this is important in a definition of the relationship between prototype and image. In terms of the icon and homonyms he observes "[the name of Christ] is homonymous [to the icon]" (διὸ καὶ ὁμωνύμως αὐτῷ προσαγορεύεται) (PG 100, 316a), "the icon, taking the name common to both natures, is homonymous to the prototype" (ἡ εἰκὼν [...] οὕτως οἰκειωθεῖσα καὶ τῷ κοινῷ τῶν φύσεων ὀνόματι προσχρωμένη, ὁμωνύμως τῷ ἀρχετύπῳ προσαγορεύεται) (PG 100, 324AB). "Further regarding the Aristotelian relatives, he defined the image as related to the pattern, calling it a relative notion (τῶν πρὸς τι) as the effect of a cause. <...> the icon possesses a relation to the archetype as the effect of a cause. Therefore, it is necessary that the icon both be one of the relatives and be called such." (PG 100, 324AB)¹³. As we can see iconoclasm stimulated a new reflection on the image and its relationship with the prototype especially in relation to Christological concerns and iconography.

As is well known the Eucharist understood as the image was a feature of iconoclast discussions¹⁴. The iconoclast idea as also expressed in Theodore of Mopsuestia is interesting also from our perspective. The Eucharist and its intimate link with Christ is not disputed in iconoclasm, but another feature is added, that the Eucharist is also an image of Christ.

In an article, Baranov correctly emphasised that the iconoclasts emphasis on the image is because they distinguished between two different realities of Christ, that is the body before the resurrection and the body after the resurrection. The Eucharist being the image of the resurrected body, therefore "the image" [Baranov, 2009]. This does not mean that

¹² See the reconstruction of his arguments in [Goncharko, Goncharko, 2017, 302].

¹³ See [Erismann, 2016, 411].

¹⁴ For the doctrine see (Constantine V. PG 100, 333B, 336A, 337A). Further the Horos of the Iconoclast Council of Hieria (Mansi 13, 261DE-264A-C). Further [Gero, 1975].

the iconoclasts did not believe in the Eucharist being the true body and blood of Christ but simply they believed that it is also the image at the same time of the Resurrected body. Here of course there is a belief in the close and substantial affinity between image and the prototype.

In any event all this is strange if we realise, that the iconoclasts rejected icons and images, precisely because they believed that they have no important bearing on reality.

This is also related to question of the Eucharist and love. In a Coptic work, Malaty observes [Malaty, Tadros, 2001, 10]: “True “worship” is not just practicing some ceremonies, singing hymns, reciting prayers, fasting, or offering oblations, but above all it is an acknowledgment of God as the lover of mankind. In the Garden of Eden, Adam, s worshipped God by recognising Him as his lover. But after his fall, his inner insight was darkened. Hence he escaped from his God, and was unable to hear His voice, as he said, “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself (Gen 3:10).” For this reason, God sent Moses, Law based on the “recognition of God as the lover of mankind.” The Ten Commandments begin with revealing God to man, saying, “I am the Lord your God, which have brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” (Exod 20:2). In worshipping, God asks us nothing except to know Him, and when we really know Him, we shall love Him. He says, “I desire steadfast love not sacrifice, the acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings” (Ex 2:2).

In this heart felt citation father Malaty firmly links the Eucharist and worship generally with love. If we do not know God, we cannot love him. His love is here from all ages, and we through worship need to rediscover this love and the status of God as our lover. After the fall we can no longer identify the love of God.

Conclusions

As we have suggested, loving God essentially means loving something which is invisible as the commandment in Mathew suggests. The entire corpus of Jewish thought of the Old Testament milieu clearly suggests, that one cannot depict or make images of God. This is a central feature of Judaism and to what extent is it related to the development of concepts in other religions of the ancient world remains a topic for other discussions. As we have further observed, strangely enough the New Testament speaks of loving the unseen God, while at the same time operating in a distinctively physical and bodily environment of Christ.

As we have seen the central question is, how can we love God, while at the same time realising the imagery around us as being defective in its ability to portray truth. Whether this is because we see things in a glass darkly or due to sin or anything is beside the point here. The commandment to love God seems completely crazy if one realises what is Jesus or anyone else really asking from us. To love something we have not seen. As we have argued earlier, we can explain all these things be reference to various situations of love. That God loves us, and therefore this would simplify matters for us returning our love for him. But again this is beside the point here also. Our central thesis that we offer at the end is that loving the “unseen God” means loving all that is visible and therefore “seen” if the image and its prototype are indeed “essentially related”. Further we argue that a close proximity between image and protype does not risk conflation or mixing of the two, because there is a distance between image and prototype bridged by love and freedom, which paradoxically serves to preserve the autonomy of the two.

As we have observed, the tradition related to the image and the prototype is a tradition of two tendencies both present in the fathers of the church. Either there is a tendency to increase the difference between image and prototype or there is tendency to decrease the difference, and both tendencies have a serious relationship with Christology and other concerns.

Why is the image so important for our thesis? Because, understanding the nature of the image enables us to understand the identity and character of what is invisible or “unseen”. Given the observations of Gregory of Nazianzus and others, one can state, that

all reality is unseen and invisible, if for no other reason than because it is defragmented by sin. Here “seeing” is not simply seeing the image but seeing its essence or substance and therefore seeing it as a true image, since an image has to perfectly correspond to its substance if truth is to prevail and the image is to be true. But importantly, for Gregory, no reality can be truly identified with God not only because of sin, but because of the nature of the distance between image and prototype otherwise we would be able to identify Gods essence by virtue of observing his image. This problem of Gods essence and his expression seriously complicated for the fathers of the church their meditation on the intimacy of image and prototype.

Thus regardless of sin, one is simply jettisoned into a world of images where it seems there is no hope in discovering their prototypes and therefore objectivity and truthfulness. Loving the invisible and “unseen” would logically be the only way how to escape. Loving the invisible God would be a guarantee of one not identifying God or any other form of truth with something that simply cannot bear its substance and truth. This is obviously the Judaic concern for not associating God with any picture or living thing.

However, the problem is that we are supposed to not only worship but to love the Unseen God, and this love is beyond imagery and substance. Simply stating that one learns how to love the Unseen God by reference to his activity and by the love of our neighbour or enemy or what have we, is not a final argument even though it is true that loving our neighbour is a pedagogical form of how to learn to love God. There is a reason for the commandment to respect God coming before other commandments. So even technically and abstractly we must learn how to love (unseen) God and then “deal with other loves”.

Perhaps as we suggest the way out of this conundrum is to state, that images and visibility are moving categories. Moving categories imply freedom and freedom implies love. The question would then be not how to love the invisible or visible, the unseen and seen, but to be “open” to reality as such. This openness is suggested by fathers such as Gregory of Nazianzus, and is called contemplation. **Simply stated one worships and loves the invisible and unseen God, by virtue of jettisoning ones subjective apriori imagery (that had formed a stratum in his mind or heart) and being open to imagery that is around him or her. There is an obvious paradox here. Imagery loses its destructive and relative nature only by not becoming static residue in our minds and stored by our own subjective and limited abilities underlined by sin, which prevents us from loving objectively and being open to the images of love sent from God himself into his creation. Creation is thus an image of love, which we however limit and delineate according to our own subjective imagery and therefore logically a liberation needs to occur into an unseen image [of God].**

Therefore the image and visibility lose their truth not simply by their distance or proximity to their substance or prototype, but by virtue of how we arrange them and direct their natural movements and dynamism. This of course needs to be done by an acknowledgement of freedom which is the mark of love and means that we do not give our own content to the image we encounter. The world and creation is full of moving images and this movement is the primary vehicle for the way how we link image to prototype, person to substance and love with the unseen. Thus paradoxically loving the Unseen God means loving the Seen God in this respect.

Here we can also state, that in this sense the image is a communal event, if communion implies the freedom of movement and love between people amongst themselves and Christ. The prime unity of image and prototype is offered by the Eucharist, which is a sacrament related to what we stated above.

Many discussions about the Eucharist, speak of the Eucharist in static terms. There is an analysis of what the Eucharist is or is not. However, usually, there is no emphasis on the Eucharist and movement relating to the work of the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist is not only linked to the moment when it becomes the body and blood of Christ but to the general movement of love before the Eucharist and after it. A fact not realised by those entering discussions in the Covid crisis, who think that the Eucharist is something happening only

in one particular moment and that therefore one can clean the spoon at will since this is not related to the Eucharist.

Here there is a possibility of a more complex understanding of love. The Eucharist is also a movement, since it is based on the Incarnation of Christ. This Incarnation is of a historical nature and occurred historically, which clearly demonstrates that it is a movement in time. It is not a metaphysical event not seen, if time is understood as real. The central idea here is that the Eucharist is a movement of love. Love cannot be limited to one point or aspect but is a feature of movement it is dynamic. This dynamic nature of love implies that it cannot dwell on one feature or substance or image or aspect. This means that the age all problem of the relationship between image and substance etc., is relativized, since even if we disregard the sinfulness of creation and all that goes with it, love is not entrapped in one image or substance or anything of this sort. This essentially means that one can love the "Unseen", since this unseen is not limited by any particular image or manifestation in creation but at the same time, all the imagery available to our perception is relevant to this love of the Unseen, since this love is primarily related to the movement of all reality. Reality and time as moving images enable us to love. This incorporates all the objects, images and physicality of reality.

The other effect of love is that it substantiates all things around us. It helps to affirm each substance as substance because of the dynamic of love.

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