



## Amsterdam Lectures 2011-12:

### Eastern Orthodox Theology: a Personal Introduction

#### Lecture VI: Being Human – Being in the Image of God – Becoming God.

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It might seem rather strange to wait until such a late point in the series to consider what it is to be human. After all, we have already talked about creation, including the creation of human kind, as well as about the Fall and the human plight. Furthermore, last time we discussed Christ – God become man: surely we need to know what it is to be human to discuss the Incarnation. And indeed, if we look at a classic outline of Orthodox doctrine – St John Damascene’s *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* – we find that he treats of human nature along with creation, after discussing the nature of God the Trinity, and before coming to discuss the Incarnation. Nevertheless, despite these objections, and the weighty example of the Damascene, there is reason for the ordering of these lectures.

Absolutely central to the way in which the Fathers understand the nature of humanity is the notion that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. But this doctrine is not only central to the Fathers’ understanding of human nature, but central to their theology as a whole. In a little-known article, written over half-a-century ago, the Dominican theologian, Père Camelot, remarked:

Now this theme of the image is, in the theology of the Fathers, above all the Greek Fathers, truly central: there one sees at the same time the encounter of Christology and Trinitarian theology, of anthropology and psychology, of the theology of creation and that of grace, of the problem of nature and the

supernatural, the mystery of divinization, the theology of the spiritual life, the laws of its development and of its progress.<sup>1</sup>

The foundation of the doctrine of the image is to be found in the creation narrative of Genesis. There we read:

And God said, Let us make human kind according to our image and according to our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and the cattle and all the earth and all the creeping things that creep upon the earth. And God made human kind, according to his image God made him; male and female he made them. And God blessed them, and said, Increase and multiply and fill the earth and rule over it... (Gen. 1:26-8a)

However, in the rest of the Bible little is made of this doctrine. In chapter 5 of Genesis, the events of the creation of man are summarized: 'In the day that God made Adam, he made him in the image of God; male and female he made them, and he blessed them' (Gen. 5.1-2). In the next verse, we are told that 'Adam begat a child according to his form and according to his image; and he named his name Seth'. Thereafter, there is no mention of the doctrine of the image until the Wisdom literature, where we read that God 'made [human kind] an image of his own self [or eternity]' (Wisd. 2:23) and that God 'made them according to his image' (Sir. 17:3). Wisdom itself is said to be 'an image of his goodness' (Wisd. 7:26). In the New Testament we are told that man (not woman) is 'the image and glory of God' (1 Cor. 11:7), but it is Christ, too, who is said to be the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4, Col. 1:15). Language of the image is used of our relationship to Christ: we are to be 'conformed to the image of his Son' (Rom. 8:29); in 1 Corinthians it is said that 'just as we have borne the image of the earthly, so we shall bear the image of the heavenly' (1 Cor. 15:49), and 2 Corinthians that 'we all, reflecting with unveiled face the glory of the Lord, are being changed into the same image from glory to glory' (2 Cor. 3:18). Colossians, too, speaks of our being 'clothed with the new [man] who is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of him who created him' (Col. 3:20): which is not entirely clear, but certainly sees the new creation as the restoration of the image in man.

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<sup>1</sup> Th. Camelot OP, 'La théologie de l'image de Dieu', *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* XL (1956), 443 ff.; here 443-4.

That may not seem very much, but the influence of ideas is not necessarily in accordance with their frequency, so much as their resonance. And the notion that human kind was created according to the image found an enormous resonance in the hearts and minds of the Fathers. There seem to me to be several converging reasons for this. First of all, the importance, that we have already seen, of the doctrine of creation. We are what we are, because God created us. He created us out of nothing; everything that we are is from God. Then, as many of the Fathers remark, there seems to be something special about the creation of human kind: for the rest of creation, God simply said, Let something happen – ‘Let there be light’, and so on – but in the case of human kind, God seems to consider: ‘Let us make human kind...’ in verse 26 and then in the next verse, ‘And God made human kind...’ There seems an especial act of deliberation about the creation of human kind. Furthermore, there is this specification of being made ‘according to his image, according to likeness’; there is something special, too, about the relationship of human kind to God – he is ‘according to his image’, he is like God in some way, he reflects in who he is something of what God is. The Greek Fathers read Genesis in Greek – I have been careful to quote from the Greek Septuagint – and the Greek, to an educated ear, makes further suggestions. These are twofold. First, ‘according to the image’, κατ’ εικόνα: κατὰ is quite a strong preposition; it would suggest the question, ‘According to what image?’ The English ‘in the image’ just suggests that man was created as the image of God; the Greek raises the possibility of something more complex: man created according to the image of God. Who is? The New Testament suggests Christ, the image of God, the one who images forth God in his Incarnate state. So there is the idea here perhaps that human kind was created according to Christ, who is the image of the Father. It may remind one of the depiction of creation in the north portal of Chartres Cathedral, where the cruciform halo makes it evident that it is Christ who is the creator (as the Nicene Creed affirms: ‘through whom [that is, the Son] all things were made’), and in making man he makes one who is like him, who is in accordance with – κατὰ – him. So our very creation entails a relationship, not just to God as Creator, but to Christ, the Son of God Incarnate. I’ll develop this later. Before we move too far on, there is another point to note: verse 26 adds – ‘and according to likeness’. The word translated ‘likeness’, ὁμοίωσις, suggests rather more in Greek: the ending –osis implies a process, not a state (the Greek for likeness as a state would be ὁμοίωμα). Not only that, the word ὁμοίωσις would have very definite resonances

for anyone who had read Plato, who envisages the goal of the human life as likening, assimilation, to the divine. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates remarks at one point, in a phrase very popular among some of the Fathers: φυγή δὲ ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν – flight [from the world] is assimilation to God so far as is possible (*Theat.* 176a). So, to be created according to the image of God and according to his likeness suggests that we have been created with some kind of affinity for God which makes possible a process of assimilation to God, which is, presumably, the point of human existence. Not only that, but such an idea chimes in very well with the few uses of the language of image in the New Testament, for it is in the context of saying something about the goal of our being disciples of Christ, that the New Testament resorts to the language of image: we are being changed into his image from glory to glory. Even without using the language of image, there are passages in the New Testament that suggest much the same notion: for instance, in the first epistle of John we read, ‘Beloved, we are God’s children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is’ (1 John 3:2). The language of image is the language of sight; the suggestion of these passages is that being in the image means that there is a likeness between human kind and God that enables us to see, to know, God – it is a kind of epistemological principle of much ancient philosophy that only ‘like knows like’: to know something is to discover an affinity. It suggests what I would call a contemplative understanding of what it is to be human – nothing new in that, both Plato and Aristotle thought the same, and something similar is implied in Isaias’ vision of the Lord in the Temple in Isa. 6. It is something else we shall pick up again later.

What then is it to be in the image of God? Often enough, we find the Fathers giving an answer in terms of human qualities, and these turn out to be qualities of the soul. ‘The “according to the image”’, says John Damascene, ‘is manifest in the intelligent (νοερόν) and free will (αὐτεξούσιον)’ (*exp.* 26). Being in the image means being a rational, or intelligent, being with free will. Sometime the answer is more complex. Athanasios, for instance, talks about God’s creating us and our being ‘given something more’:

not simply creating men like all irrational animals on the earth, but making them in his own image and giving them also a share in the power of his own

Word, so that having as it were shadows of the Word and being made rational, they might be able to remain in felicity and live the true life in paradise, which is really that of the saints. (*incarn.* 3)

Being in the image, however, is not, for Athanasios, simply a matter of being rational, for otherwise the angels would be in the image, too, something that he denies (*incarn.* 13): being in the image is a gift to man, body and soul, which grants to man rationality, but must mean more than this. The more is, I think, for Athanasios, tied up with the fact that the image of God is the Word of God, whom we cannot understand apart from the Incarnation. It is in some way according to the Image of God, understood as the Word of God Incarnate, that human kind was fashioned. This more complex notion unfolds in two ways.

First, we need to remember that it was in Greek that these ideas were thought through, and that something of what is meant is lost in translation, whether into Latin or into English (and I daresay Dutch!). For the key word here is *λόγος*, *logos*, which can be translated (as we have already seen) as word, or reason, or meaning, or principle; and the word translated ‘rational’ is, in Greek, *λογικός*, *logikos*. So the translation ‘rational’ only preserves part of the meaning of the Greek *logikos*, and disguises the link the Greek suggests between the Word, or *Logos*, and *logikos*. The word *logikos* suggests, as its root meaning, participating in the *Logos*, or Word; it suggests a relationship, rather than simply a property. And there is a parallel invoked between the relationship *logikos–Logos* and the relationship ‘being according to the image’–Image, *kat’ eikona–Eikon*. In passing, it is striking that what is rather a clumsy expression in English, ‘that which is according to the image’, *to kat’ eikona*, is a common term in Byzantine Greek, so, for instance, in the apolytikion for St Mary of Egypt, we sing

In you, Mother, was preserved unimpaired that which is according to the image (τὸ κατ’ εἰκόνα); for you took up the Cross and followed Christ, and by your deeds you have taught us to despise the flesh, for it passes away, but to care for the soul, which is a thing immortal. And therefore your spirit, holy Mary, rejoices with the Angels.

What I am arguing is that in two respects saying that being in the image of God is to be rational and possess free will falls short of what the Greek Fathers generally mean. First of all, being *logikos* means more than simply being rational; it means participating in the *Logos*, the Word, of God, including rationality, certainly, but also a capacity for recognizing meaning and conveying meaning, for communicating, with one another and with God, and ultimately an affinity with God, that enables us to know Him. Secondly, possessing *to kat' eikona* means having a relationship to God through his Image, that is, the Word; it is not just a property or a quality, but a capacity for a relationship, a relationship that is fulfilled in attainment of *to kath'omoiosin*, being according to the likeness, assimilation with God. To think of the human as 'according to the image' in this sense sets up a pattern: we have been created by God the Father in the image of the Word through the Word, so that, through the Word who created us we might come to the knowledge of God the Father; this whole process takes place by grace, that is, through the Spirit.

My second point here is a development of this. To be human is to be in the image, and being in the image, according to the image, entails a relationship to Christ, who is the image. Certainly he is an Image in virtue of being the Word of God, the Logos, God's self-manifestation; but this is something we only fully understand through the Incarnation. Human kind is created according to an image – the Word of God – that we only truly know through the Incarnation. It is only through the Incarnation that we can truly understand what it is to be human. This is the main reason why I have kept reflection on what it is to be human until this point in the series, for it is only in the light of Christ that we can grasp what is truly meant by being human. And the Fall only reinforces this. What we know from experience of being human is what it is to be fallen humanity, but to be in the image is, at the very least, to bear some trace of true humanity, unfallen humanity, and it is unfallen humanity that we see in Christ. For the Word of God, in becoming man, became what we were meant to be. To be human is to have a nature with capacities, faculties, that are never properly realized in our fallen state; we have a glimpse of these faculties in Christ. I was reminded of what this might mean the other day, reading the recent translation of Fr Sergii Bulgakov's essay on the Gospel miracles.<sup>2</sup> There he argues – and I find the argument

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<sup>2</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *Relics and Miracles. Two Theological Essays*, translated by Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2011).

convincing – that it is a mistake to see the miracles as simply evidence of Christ’s divinity (though that is the way in which they are taken by the Fathers, as a rule), they are evidence of the potentialities of the human, cooperating with divine grace.

Bulgakov remarks:

In their content miracles are works of love and mercy; in their significance they are manifestations of human power in the world, human power that is reinforced and illuminated by God’s power... These tasks are *human* tasks, and these works are human works; and all of them are accessible to man, are assigned to him as a natural being, who at the same time is placed by God as the lord of creation and endowed with the gift of compassionate human love for man and for all creatures... It is true that not all of them are capable of being accomplished by human powers. Man is not yet able to eliminate death by natural means and to awaken people from the swoon of death, although he is approaching this; nor has he yet eliminated hunger, although he is seeking means to do so, and all this is something that does not surpass human powers. The proof of this is that all of Christ’s miracles, in their content, could have been worked by divinely inspired saintly men, strengthened by God’s grace; and consequently these miracles belong to the category of human power, to the category of man’s lordship over the world, given by God to man at his creation.<sup>3</sup>

To sum up: being in the image certainly entails being rational and free, but that is not what it *means*; what being in the image means is having an affinity with God, not a natural affinity, but one granted us through God’s grace, in virtue of which affinity we can know God, have some kind of communion with Him. Put more bluntly, I would say that being in the image of God means being able to pray. For one of the aspects of the language of images is that images are not just likenesses or pictures, but that they are derived from an original. An image of God is derived from God, it manifests him as a kind of theophany, and the purpose of an image is to enable others to recognize the original, to draw them to the original. If one understands image in this sense, then the whole of St John’s Gospel is concerned with the image: the Son imaging forth the Father, so that Christ can say to Philip, ‘He who has seen me has

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<sup>3</sup> Bulgakov, *Relics and Miracles*, 78–9.

seen the Father' (John 14:9). The way in which images are essential to our understanding of – well, almost anything – is something that we shall pursue further next time, when we think about the place of icons. Now I want to follow some other paths. But before I leave our consideration of being in the image, I want to add one further reflection. We have already seen in earlier lectures the way in which the doctrine of creation out of nothing by God entails that, whatever havoc we humans have inflicted on the created order, the *logoi*, the 'deep structures', as we might think of them, of creation remain inviolable. One of the most moving moments in the biblical account of the Fall occurs after the eating of the apple: 'And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden' (Gen. 3:8). Part of what is was to be human was the natural converse with God who walked in the garden with the human couple. It is that natural converse with God that we seek in prayer; it is that natural converse with God that has been restored by Christ's paschal mystery, that *parrhesia*, somewhat over-translated as 'boldness' in the words with which the priest invites the people to pray the Lord's Prayer in the liturgy: 'And count us worthy, Master, with boldness and without condemnation to dare to call upon you the God of heaven, as Father, and to say...'

'And God made man, according to the image of God he made him; male and female he made them' (Gen. 1:27). I've abandoned gender-inclusive language, because the word translated 'man' here, τὸν ἄνθρωπον, is not an abstract noun, like 'human kind', but a concrete noun: man. In the first part of the sentence we are told God made man in the singular, but in the last clause we are told that he made 'them' male and female. It is hardly a mistake. We are being told about the unity of humanity, and yet, also, that humanity is also a manifold, based on the distinction between the sexes, between male and female. This combination of one and many comes again in the next chapter when God makes woman from man's side, for 'it is not good for man to be alone' (Gen. 2:18), and presents her to him, and says that he should cleave to her, and 'the two will become one flesh' (2:24). 'One is one, and all alone, and ever more shall be so': not a good idea! The Scriptures present humanity as one-in-many, a unity embracing different persons. In the New Testament, similar ideas are introduced. We are all, as baptized Christians, members of Christ, forming one Body, the Body of Christ. The apostle Paul presents a picture of the Church, consisting of many

members, who are all bound up with one another: ‘And if one member suffers, all the members suffer together; if a member is glorified, all the members rejoice together. For we are the body of Christ, and members in particular’ (1 Cor. 12:26–7).

The Genesis text, however, seems to suggest that the manifold that is humanity is in some way based on the distinction between the sexes. The Fathers, however, are not very good at handling what an American poet has called ‘the archetypal cleft of sex’.<sup>4</sup> I am not sure we are much better, either. We (and they) can see that the relationship of man and woman forms the basis of the family and that that is the primary unit of human society. We can see (most of us; they, the Fathers, rarely) that the relationship is one that offers human beings the deepest human delight, but we (all!) recognize too that this ‘archetypal cleft’ lies behind the most painful and destructive aspects of human experience. Genesis, furthermore, seems to present the division into male and female as fundamental to what it is to be human, not just something that anticipates the conditions of the Fall, as many of the Fathers were tempted to think; and if fundamental to what it is to be human, fundamental to any kind of human society or community, including the Church. Even in the New Testament there are hints of this in the way in which the Church is spoken of as the (female) bride of the (male) Christ (see Eph. 5:25–32, and the Apocalypse 21–2).

However, this verse from Genesis does suggest that we are not to consider human beings as individuals, but as bound together within the unity of humanity, a unity that is embodied in the communities to which we belong. The doctrine of the image of God embraces this aspect of what it is to be human, too, for if being in the image means that we have an affinity with God, that entails, too, that we have an affinity with one another, on the basis of which find some kind of togetherness. And if the Church is the community embracing those who, in Christ, have set out on the path to the restoration of fallen humanity, then the community of the Church should give us some sense of what a true human community should be. The Church, too, is part of the fallen world, so we should not expect to find in any unambiguous way the ideal human community in the Church.

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<sup>4</sup> From ‘Dodona: Asked of the Oracle’, in *The Collected Poems of Amy Clampitt* (New York, 1997), 207.

The New Testament gives us some pointers, and we can glean some others from the history of the Church. The apostle Paul has much to say about the nature of the community of the Church and its unity, though this very fact demonstrates how threatened this unity and harmony was in practice. To the Galatians, he affirms that ‘in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith... There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus’ (Gal. 3:26, 28). National differences, rank, and even the ‘archetypal cleft’ are to be transcended in the Church. And he talks of the way in which this is to be achieved: through the fruits of the Spirit, found in the Church, which are ‘love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control’ (Gal. 5:22–3). He speaks, too, of bearing ‘one another’s burdens’ (Gal. 6:2). And of the ‘more excellent way’, that of love: ‘Love is patient and kind, love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things’ (1 Cor. 13:4–7).

What these add up to immediately is, I think, something like this. We are to think of the Church as many embraced by oneness, and oneness expressed in the many: both poles – the one and the many – are important, irreducible. It is in this sense, I think, that the doctrine of the Trinity is relevant to our understanding of Christian community, or communion; not that the Trinity is some kind of model that we should try to emulate – that would be to think in anthropomorphic terms, though it has been very popular in the last few decades, not least among Orthodox – but rather that in the Trinity we see that neither one nor three are ultimate: at the very heart of reality, or the source of reality, there is both one and three, together. So in human community, as it is meant to be, neither the one nor the many are ultimate; the many does not yield before the one, as if what mattered was the one community, and the many has to be compressed into it (by some unitary authority, say), nor is the one simply to be thought of as some kind of harmony among the many, as if it were the individuals who were important, and their harmony secondary. Another way of putting this is to say that we find our own identity as persons in the togetherness we share with others, and that unity is an expression of something that we genuinely hold in common. Many ways of understanding human community either start with the

individual or with the community, but it seems to me that what we are to learn in the Church is that neither the one nor the many are more fundamental: we find our identity through our communion with others, and yet we are not just units in a group, which is really what counts. When the apostle Paul talks about the human community that is the Church, he talks about ways of behaving that yield to the others and support the others, not ways of asserting ourselves over against the others. There is, to use a word we are familiar with in another context, a *kenosis*, a self-emptying, that enables us to make space for the others, and in that space allowed by the others find ourselves.

In the history of the Church, the kind of community about which we learn most is something that has always been a minority pursuit, though sometimes a large minority: monastic community. It is no wonder that the passage from Galatians referred to above (Gal. 5:22–6:2) is the passage from the Apostle set for a monk or nun who lived in community. And yet, much monastic literature is marked by a sense of the fragility of human community in a fallen world: much stress is placed on obedience, as if the exercise of free will is most likely to be a misuse, and there is a good deal of fear about what came to be called ‘particular friendships’, again with fear of abuse driving out any attempt to consider what true friendship might have to offer.

I want to take this sense of the fundamental nature of community to what it is to be human further by reflecting on a notion that has been made much of in Russian Orthodox theology for about a couple of centuries now, and that is the notion of *sobornost*. The term is associated with the Slavophiles, especially Aleksei Khomiakov and Ivan Kireevsky, though it appears that the abstract noun *sobornost* is not actually found in their writings.<sup>5</sup> The word *sobornost* is derived from the word used in the Slavonic version of the Creed to translate *katholikos*, Catholic. The older texts of the Slavonic Creed simply transliterated *katholikos* as *katholichesky*, as did the Latin version, and virtually all European versions, but in the fifteenth century *katholichesky* was replaced by *soborny*. It is often said that *soborny* is derived from the word for a council in Slavonic, *sobor*;<sup>6</sup> but I suspect the truth is more interesting. In replacing *katholichesky*, the Slavonic translators went back to the root meaning of

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<sup>5</sup> See *On Spiritual Unity, A Slavophile Reader*, translated and edited by Boris Jakim and Robert Bird (Hudson NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1998), 8, n. 1.

<sup>6</sup> *On Spiritual Unity*, 15.

*katholikos*, which is formed from the Greek καθ' ὅλον, according to the whole, and took the word to mean something like 'taken as a whole', 'gathered together', and so used the word *soborny*, an adjective derived from the verb *sbrat'*, to gather together. The word for council or synod, translating the Greek *synodos*, meaning a 'coming together', a 'gathering' and hence 'council', is *sobor*, so the use of *soborny* in the creed, suggested that one of the notes of the Church was that it is a gathering together. It is in this way – as gathering together into unity – that the Church can be seen as an image of God, as St Maximos the Confessor suggests:

For many and of nearly boundless number are the men, women and children who are distinct from one another and vastly different by birth and appearance, by race and language, by way of life and age, by opinions and skills, by manners and customs, by pursuits and studies, and still again by reputation, fortune, characteristics and habits: all are born into the Church and through it are reborn and recreated in the Spirit. To all in equal measures it gives and bestows one divine form and designation: to be Christ's and to bear his name.<sup>7</sup>

The convergence of the Greek *synodos* and *katholikos* in the Slavonic *sobor/soborny* produces a happy association of ideas. The note of the Church, catholic or *soborny*, is manifest in its gathering together in unity humans of any kind, and this is manifest in the gathering together in the church building (also in Russian *sobor*, from the Greek *katholikon*, for a public church, as opposed to a chapel) and in the councils, or synods, of the Church. *Sobornost'*, then, developed by the Slavophiles as an ecclesiological concept to account for what they regarded as the peculiarly Orthodox understanding of unity in the Church is also, as it should be, a term to describe the fundamental nature of human community. As an ecclesiological concept, it suggests a vision of the Church as combining unity and freedom: the unity of the Orthodox Church is a free association of believers, or perhaps better those who belong, and within the Church find their true freedom, in opposition to what Khomiakov saw as the unity found in the Catholic Church, imposed by authority and encroaching on, or overriding, human freedom, and the so-called unity within the Protestant Churches, which is a free association, of those who agree in their interpretation of the Scriptures and confessions – a unity purely human and thus inevitably quite fragile. As a term to

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<sup>7</sup> *Myst.* 1. 163–74 (Boudignan; Berthold 187, modified).

describe the true nature of human community, it also draws together unity and freedom. Clearly some sort of distinction between human community and the community of the Church is needed, but ultimately it is artificial, for it is in Christ, in the Church, that human beings find their true humanity. Khomiakov is often criticized for the vagueness of his notion of *sobornost'*, but that vagueness – or better, lack of an entirely exhaustive definition – seems to me intrinsic to the notion. For it is not some constitutional term that can be cashed in terms of legal norms, rather it is an attempt to indicate the fundamental nature of human community, or association, which springs from the religious nature of humanity, the realization that what is fundamental to being human is the capacity to respond to each other and to God, ultimately the capacity to open oneself in prayer. Khomiakov evokes this in a striking passage from his short pamphlet, *The Church is One*:

We know that those among us who fall, fall by themselves, but that no one is saved alone. Those who are saved are saved in the Church as her members and in unity with all her other members. When someone believes, that person is in a community of faith; when someone loves, that person is in a community of love; when someone prays, such a person is in a community of prayer. For this reason no one can rely on one's own prayers, and each in prayer asks the entire Church for intercession—not as though doubting the intercession of Christ, the one intercessor, but in confidence that the entire Church always prays for all her members. There pray for us all the angels, apostles, martyrs, patriarchs, and the most-high Mother of our Lord, and this holy union is the true life of the Church.<sup>8</sup>

We are saved in the Church, in unity with all her members. It seems to me that Orthodox theology insists on the doctrine of deification, *theosis*, because recovering the fullness of the image will involve real changes in ourselves, changes that mean that the image of God in which we are created becomes more and more evident. We are to become transparent, as it were, to the image of God reflected in who we are most deeply. Others are to find in us, not the fragmented human beings that we are as a result of the Fall, but the love of God, for the sake of which we have been created. In doing this we shall discover our true humanity: deification, as St Maximos makes

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<sup>8</sup> *On Spiritual Unity*, 48.

so clear, is the restoration of our true humanity, not its diminishment or abandonment. And it is a change grounded in the amazing change that God himself embraced, when he became human for our sakes, not abandoning what he is – divinity, but assuming what he is not – humanity. St Athanasios affirms, an affirmation that is repeated by one after another of the Fathers: The Word of God became human, that we might become god. There is this amazing exchange, founded in God's love, that reveals that at the heart of what it is to be human is an openness to God and his love through which we are taken up into the divine life, and discover there what it is to be human, what God intended human life to be – communion with Him in the Spirit.