

God and Man, Part Two

By Metropolitan Saba (Isper)

Humans have created intellectual and religious movements that have depicted different images of God. However, if we closely examine any of their views of the human being, we can easily then understand their views of God. When the image of the human being is distorted and his unique personality is negated, and he is not considered a unique being with a divine breath deserving respect, then the image of God will inevitably be distorted. If, for example, you do not respect human freedom, how can you believe that God respects freedom (even if man often denies God and fights Him in the name of this freedom)? As Tagore said: "I love you, O God, because you have given me the freedom to deny you."

These reflections lead me to highlight the great responsibility that believers bear regarding their role in manifesting the image of God, lest they distort it. How many people have loved God because they saw believers manifesting, in their elevated behavior and conduct, a bright image of a loving God, to an indescribable degree? How much of the opposite is true? An atheist once said to me: "If I were sure that God is as you tell me, I would become one of the first to believe in Him, and I would devote my life to telling others about Him." Unfortunately, he could not be freed from a distorted image of God engraved in his mind since his childhood.

The renowned theologian, Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, considers that entering into the mystery of man and defining his unique personality is the first task of Christian theology, in general, and Orthodox theology, in particular, in the twenty-first century. The Church Fathers called it a "small universe," "a large universe," and a "mystery," but delving deeper, a "eucharistic being." Emphasizing these dimensions can provide basic answers to our contemporary world in crisis.

The word Eucharist is derived from the Greek which means thanksgiving. In the Divine Liturgy, the world is re-presented to God, not through God's natural gifts of wheat and grapes, but after man turns them into bread and wine.

Man is the priest of God in this world, and his main role lies in tending creation and presenting it, with thanks, to the Creator. Isn't this what we chant, in every Divine Liturgy: "Thine own of Thine own, we offer unto Thee, in behalf of all (in some translations, in all ways), and for all?"

Humanity has known various images of God. Different spiritual, religious, and philosophical movements in the world often depicted the image of God based on the image of man, which resulted in a faded, deficient and distorted image of God because the starting point was the creature and not the creator.

Christianity did the opposite. God revealed Himself to humans so they could know their value to Him and their role in creation. Movement in Christianity is from top to bottom, from heaven to earth. It is a divine providence, not a human endeavor. This forms, in Orthodox Christianity, man's quest to constantly rise to the level that befits him as a creature with the breath of God in him.