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## Personhood and Bioethics: An Eastern Perspective

### Abstract

The secular and theological prominence of the word “person” in bioethics creates ambiguity. This is perceptible in the conclusions of the scholars who assess the cognitive abilities of a human to define whether that human is a person or not. The very ancient philosophical thought ‘a human being is a rational being’ is ingrained in the analysis. This article studies how this methodology is pertinent in the light of Eastern Christian theology. The theological anthropology affirms that each human is the image and likeness of God and hence it prevents to separate a human from the state of ‘personhood’. A human should be considered beyond his / her physical and cognitive abilities and understood as a burgeoning being towards *theosis*. It affirms that a human has the capability to represent



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the whole universe and to engage in dialogue with the creator. This approach presents a human as a unique person and calls for a holistic perception pertaining to human beings in bioethics discussion.

### Keywords

Personhood, Bioethics, Theosis, Burgeoning, Image of God

## 1 Introduction

There are many philosophical, theological and psychological interpretations of words such as *soma*, *sarx*, *pneuma*, *psyche* and soul create ambiguity in Bioethics discussions.<sup>1</sup> Secular philosophers from Plato to Kant established that a human is composed of body and soul. Then they construed soul as the source of reason, which is based on the cognitive abilities of humans. This assumption persuades them to conclude that the human person is a rational being. Contemporary secular bioethicists like Peter Singer, Michel Tooley and Steven Wise identify and interpret the soul as mind. In other words, the cognitive ability, which is the result of brain function, is the source of rationality. They employ these abilities as tools for the analysis of personhood in modern bioethics problems. They claim that rationality is the criterion for personhood and hence the absence of proper rational ability in some human beings might result in not having the full rights as a person. They perceive that these cognitive abilities are present at least in certain non-human animals. Therefore these non-human animals are also to be called

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<sup>1</sup> P. Stevens, "Soul," in: R. Banks, P. Stevens (eds.), *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity*, (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press 1997), p. 923; J. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1965), p. 836.

persons. They also reject any immaterial soul in a human being and they argue that all human beings are just biological beings.

Many Western theologians like Joseph Fletcher also adopt the above mentioned secular philosophical interpretation of the soul as the source of reason, and attribute rationality as divine nature (image of God), which is unique to humans. Modern Christian bioethicists, like Richard McCormick and Norman Ford, argue that the divine image (rational soul) is present from the time of development of the brain and nervous system.<sup>2</sup> They consider personhood is present after the development of the neuron in human body.<sup>3</sup> Mary Ann Warren advocates five criteria to qualify for the title of person: a) consciousness and the ability to feel pain, b) a mature capacity for reasoning c) self-motivated activity d) the ability for communication and e) the presence of self-concepts.<sup>4</sup> In this context, I endeavour to understand the Orthodox Christian perspective of personhood based on the significant Biblical teaching that man is created in the image of God (Gen.1.26).

In contrary to this mainstream Western anthropology, consider the Orthodox theology's approach to the anthropological difference between the two terms "person" and "human". It teaches all humans are created in the image of God irrespective of the development of organs.

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<sup>2</sup> Modern embryology proves that McCormick's and Ford's conclusions are ambiguous. According to O'Rahilly and Müller, the first neurones appears only after 23-25 days. R. R. O'Rahilly and F. Müller, *The Embryonic Human Brain: An Atlas of Developmental Stages* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2006), pp. 12, 25.

<sup>3</sup> N. Ford, *When Did I begin*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 170.

<sup>4</sup> A. M. Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion," in: A. J. Sterba (ed.), *Morality in Practice*, (Belmont: Wordsworth Publishing, 1980), pp. 144-145.

Consequently Orthodoxy could reject the arguments for denial of personhood based only on biological or cognitive capabilities.<sup>5</sup> Since humans are created in the image of God and they are in the process of growth, we may call them as “burgeoning beings”, burgeoning from conception to birth, birth to death and even beyond.

## 2 Human person: A burgeoning being

Burgeoning is the unique nature of a human being as a growing person in communion with God and nature. Every human being is born with the image of God and has the potentiality to grow towards the likeness of God. Humans

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<sup>5</sup> Western secular anthropology is mainly based on the rational nature of human beings. In the Western theological perspective, however, the image of God and its interpretation is relevant. For example, Augustine and Aquinas identify the image of God in human beings as which reflects in the rational characteristics of human beings and is the unique nature of human beings. (M. Lamberigts, "A Critical Evaluation of Critiques of Augustine's View of Sexuality," in: R. Dodaro and G. Lawless (eds.), *Augustine and His Critics*, (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 177: Aquinas speaks of the image of God according to virtue of knowledge particularly intellectual, nature, grace and glory (T. Aquinas, "Summa Theologica," ed. by B. Bros (London: William Benton, 1952), I.93.4 For Aquinas, the image of God in human beings is imperfect; and he finds the perfect image only in Christ. (I.93.1-2). However, Eastern Fathers view the perfectness of the image of God in human in the pre-lapsarian state, but Aquinas has not mentioned the pre-lapsarian state of image of God, but he is more concerned primarily with “what we will be.” A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 68-70. According to the Orthodox understanding, the image of God is not only reflected in the rational characteristics of human person. The Orthodox Theology affirms that human person *is* the image of God, which includes the body as well. This holistic approach could not be seen either in Western secular or theological tradition.

are growing physically, mentally and spiritually, even after death. Every person is born with the vocation for growth. “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5.48). This attribute qualifies every human being to be a precious and unique person. It is imprecise to distinguish between “a human” and “a person” based on their capacities, talents, age, and biological and cognitive abilities. The uniqueness of a human being is not attained through physical capacities but obtained as the gift of God. In the process of growth, however, it not only depends on the rational nature or on the genetic makeup, but also on the totality of the person. The Psalmist prays, “I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14).

### **3 The burgeoning being: A mystical union of the body, mind and image of God**

The Orthodox theology might not appreciate the view that the presence of the neuron or rational ability is a requirement for the soul, which qualifies for personhood or humanhood. The intellect or reason is not the dominant factor to determine whether a being is a person or not. The self-emptying intellect is a theme in Eastern theology.<sup>6</sup> Orthodoxy finds personhood in all humans irrespective of their organ function, because they are in the *energia* of God. Personhood and humanhood are not confirmed only by biophysical capacities or medical assessments but by God, who is the source of life.<sup>7</sup> This divine character cannot be summarized as a function of an organ like a brain. Orthodox

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<sup>6</sup> K. M. George, *The Silent Roots* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> J. Breck, *The Sacred Gift of Life* (New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1998), 149.

worship invites all persons to participate, regardless of their cognitive abilities or their productive usefulness. Gregory of Nyssa argues that the omnipresence of the soul is located neither in the head, nor in the heart or in any of the organs, but throughout the body.<sup>8</sup> An attempt to construe human personhood anchored in the components of humans has to be avoided. Rather a *holistic approach* to the concept of personhood is more appropriate in the context of emerging medical technologies and its applications.

Peter Singer and Michel Tooley could be right that the early secular philosophers' interpretation of soul is more identical with the modern interpretation of mind. However, their endeavour to distinguish mind from the body might be acceptable and it could be argued that they are interlinked and complementary to each other. Based on the modern animal psychology, a kind of mind is present in almost all animals from ant to ape. However, an argument based on the presence of mind or brain or neuron or reason or cognitive ability and its function-based analysis are curtailed criteria in assessing human beings in the contest of bioethics. K. M. George rightly puts forward the view:

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<sup>8</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *On Making Man*, in: P. Schaff, H. Wace (eds.), *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1893), pp. 395-398: "Let there be an end, then, of all the vain and conjectural discussion of those who confine the intelligible energy to certain bodily organs; of whom some lay it down that the ruling principle is in the heart, while others say that the mind resides in the brain, strengthening such opinions by some plausible superficialities". "And although I am aware that the intellectual energies are blunted, or even made altogether ineffective in a certain condition of the body, I do not hold this a sufficient evidence for limiting the faculty of the mind by any particular place, so that it should be forced out of its proper amount of free space by any inflammations that may arise in the neighbouring parts of the body ... ; for the intelligible nature neither dwells in the empty spaces of bodies, nor is extruded by encroachments of the flesh".

“The hesitation in certain circles of Christian theology to consider the human body and through it the material creation as constitutive of the image of God may be due to a fear of falling into an anthropomorphic concept of God. So the image of God is understood in terms of exclusively non-material and psychological qualities. This tendency, however, ignores the fact that a human being is rooted in matter just as a tree is rooted in earth, though in a different mode. It is the bodylines of the human person that provides the roots and sustains the image in its wholeness. The modern celebration of the cerebral has neglected these roots.”<sup>9</sup>

In all animals including humans, and even within the human species, the cognitive ability varies from one to another. Hence, it is hard to draw a line between person and non-person merely based on the brain’s capacity. For the same reason, the above said views of theologians like Joseph Fetcher, Richard McCormick and Norman Ford cannot be accepted. Scientists have already created headless frog embryos in the laboratory;<sup>10</sup> and if a scientist could create a human without an organ, the above bioethicists could confirm that they are not human!

The cognitive ability (rational soul) is not the only indication of the divine presence in humans. The human as a whole being is the icon of the Trinity and the image of God. Epiphanius of Salamis (c. 315-403) rightly said: “tradition holds that every human being is in the image of God, but it does not attempt to define in what aspect of the person this

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<sup>9</sup> K. M. George, *The Silent Roots*, p. 31.

<sup>10</sup> T. Mosteller, "Aristotle and Headless Clone", in: *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics* 26 (2005), p. 339.

image should be located.”<sup>11</sup> The above secular and theological approach of the term soul creates much confusion in the context of bioethics literature. Most of the Orthodox theologians follow Athanasius of Alexandria, Ephrem the Syrian and Gregory of Nyssa and affirm the term soul along with body.<sup>12</sup> They suggest that it is the spirit of God in a human.<sup>13</sup> Hence some theologians employ spirit instead of soul.<sup>14</sup> In the Orthodox understanding, both terms express the divine character in a human being, which is the image of God. Mar Gregorios explains Nyssa’s thought:

“Matter is nothing but energy - God’s creative energy, moving dynamically from one form to another. The basis of matter is energy, the coming

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<sup>11</sup> K. Ware, "The Soul in the Greek Christianity," in: J. M. Carbbe (ed.), *From Soul to Self* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 51: quotes from Epiphanius, *Spiritual Homilies*.

<sup>12</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, "On the Making of Man," p. 395: Gregory explains the relation of soul and body in the following way, "Now since our Maker has bestowed upon our formation a certain Godlike grace, by implanting in His image the likeness of His own excellences, for this reason He gave, of His bounty, His other good gifts to human nature; but mind and reason we cannot strictly say that He *gave*, but that He *imparted* them, adding to the image the proper adornment of His own nature. Now since the mind is a thing intelligible and incorporeal, its grace would have been incommunicable and isolated, if its motion were not manifested by some contrivance. For this cause there was still need of this instrumental organisation, that it might, like a plectrum, touch the vocal organs and indicate by the quality of the notes struck, the motion within."

<sup>13</sup> S. N. Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, trans. by T. Hopko (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988), p. 67, J. Breck, L. Breck, *Stages on Life's Way* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005), p. 83.

<sup>14</sup> L. A. Smith, "An Orthodox Christian View of Persons and Bodies," in: J. C. Mark (ed.), *Persons and Their Bodies: Rights, Responsibilities, Relationships*, (New York: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), pp. 95-106. J. Breck, L. Breck, *Stages on Life's Way*, pp. 199-120.



together of God's will that it exists, and God's word which brings it into existence. Thus God's will and word, which is the *energeia* of God, is the basis of matter. Matter is the manifestation of God's *energeia*, contingent upon his will and word, dynamic and changing."<sup>15</sup>

Here, Mar Gregorios completely rejects the view that matter is evil; rather he defines it as the energy of God. This thought leads to define body as the energy of God and which is interlinked with the image of God in humans. In other words, it is possible to suggest that a human being is in the process of growth, involving body, mind, and the image of God. These characteristics are interlinked in a created human being and consequently any attempt to identify human being with partitioning of the human body or nature will be futile. Therefore, a human person is an irreducible psychosomatic unity with the image of God and is part of the process of salvation.

#### 4 Burgeoning physically and mentally

One of the most important aspects of personhood is that human beings are in a process of growth. It is a proved scientific truth that growth is a basic character of a living organism physically and mentally.<sup>16</sup> In human beings, this

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<sup>15</sup> P. M. Gregorios, *An Eastern Orthodox Perspective of Nature, Man and God* (accessed 12/02 2007); available from <http://gregorianarticles.paulosmargregorios.info/AN%20EASTERN%20ORTHODOX%20PERSPECTIVE%20OF.htm>.

<sup>16</sup> B. L. Batzing, *Microbiology* (Pacific Grove: Words worth / Thomason Learning, 2002), pp. 50-51. R. R. Seeley, T. D. Stephens, P. Tate, *Anatomy and Physiology* (Missouri: Mosby books, 1995), p. 5.

growth starts from the single cell zygote and continues even after death.<sup>17</sup>

Physical growth starts from the single cell zygote<sup>18</sup> and continues by the cell division into two, four, eight and so on. Growth proceeds through the formation of various cells, tissues, organs and systems that make their phenotype in an undifferentiated and immature form. Before birth the undifferentiated and immature tissues, organs and systems

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<sup>17</sup> Normal growth will generally end in the age between 18-22 (A J Vander, J H Sherman, and D S Luciano, *Human Physiology* (New York: Mc Graw-Hill Inc, 1994), 626ff), but still our cells are growing and reproducing. This process continues until the death of a human being. According to the Orthodox faith, the believers will continue their life in the Church. They are in communion with our Lord. "My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better" (Phil. 1.23). The scientific discoveries reveals that the so called "dead matter" contains tremendous possibilities for change and transformation. Twentieth century witnessed the discovery of atomic fission involving the splitting of an atom which releases immense amount of energy from the 'dead matter' (N Bohr and J A Wheeler, "The Mechanism of Nuclear Fission," *Physical Review* 56, no. 5 (1939), 426-450. When we read Paul's teaching that "who (Saviour Jesus Christ) will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself" (Phil.3:21), along with this scientific truth, we could see the transformation and a nature of burgeoning in the body after death. K M George, "Easter and Nanotechnology," *San Thome* 3, no. 2 (2006), 6-7. Breck and Breck, *Stages on Life's Way*, 200-201

<sup>18</sup> Modern embryology shows that the possibility of identical twins from the same zygote (monozygotic twins) can be developed. (K L Moore and T V N Persaud, *The Developing Human : Clinically Oriented Embryology* (London: W. B. Saunders Company, 1993), 134-135). But still we cannot neglect the fact that the growth of a human starts from this single cell zygote because according to the present scientific knowledge without this cell it is not possible to develop a human, even in the case of cloning. There is a debate in cloning literature as to whether the cloned cell is a zygote or not. This will be discussed in Section 9.9.

must be matured to the point of being able to survive outside of the uterus.<sup>19</sup> Modern Physiology admits the fact that “even at the birth the maturation process is not complete, and in fact, continues for many years.”<sup>20</sup> Medical science provides different names to each stage of growth, such as morula, blastocyst, embryo, foetus,<sup>21</sup> infant, toddler, child, teenager, adult, the old, etc. It may not be denied that the cell divides through the mitosis<sup>22</sup> in each of these stages, and thus the physical growth continues until the last breath.<sup>23</sup>

Psychological growth with cognitive abilities is also recognized by developmental psychologists in these

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<sup>19</sup> D. O. Overman, "Overview of Human Embryonic Development," in *Bioethics and the Beginning of Life*, ed. J Miller and B H Brubaker (Ontario: Herald Press, 1990), p. 65.

<sup>20</sup> Idem, p. 65

<sup>21</sup> During the stages of embryonic development a morula forms after the zygote stage and is a stage on the third day after fertilization. Blastocyst is the third stage, in which the inner cell mass can be found and which will be 4-5 days after fertilisation. During this time the blastocyst will move through the fallopian tube and will attach to the uterus and then it will be called embryo. Then from eight weeks until birth the organism is called a fetus. D. O. Overman, "Overview of Human Embryonic Development," p. 65. S. F. Gilbert, A. L. Tyler, E. Zackin, *Bioethics and New Embryology* (Gordonsoville: W. H.Freeman & Company, 2005), p. 8, L. A. Lefton, *Psychology* (Sydney: Allyn and Bacon, 1994), p. 280.

<sup>22</sup> Mitosis means the process by which a cell separates its duplicated genome into two identical halves. D. W. Schwertz and K. M. McCormick, "The Molecular Basis of Genetics and Inheritance," *Journal Of Cardiovascular Nursing* 13, no. 4 (1999), pp. 1-18.

<sup>23</sup> It can be possible to reduce the size of the physical growth of a human being by hormones. For example, in the case of Ashley, a disabled child, the doctors along with the parents decided to stop the physical growth of the mentally and physically retarded child, Ashley, by the injection of hormone and surgery. K. B. O' Reilly, *Growth - Curbing Therapy Spurs Rights Dispute* (2007, accessed 06/02 2007); available from Amednews.com. Still the cell division and the growth of the person are evident.

stages.<sup>24</sup> The researches show that psychological growth also starts from the zygote stage. The psychologist Lester A. Lefton writes:

“Within the minutes after the zygote is formed, basic characteristics are established. They include the colour of the hair, skin, and eyes; the sex (gender); the likelihood the person will be tall or short, fat or lean; and perhaps basic intellectual abilities and personality traits.”<sup>25</sup>

Candida Peterson, a developmental psychologist also agrees that the human “may begin to learn about their physical and sensory world even before they are born”.<sup>26</sup> There are research findings for the influence of sounds such as music, emotional state of mother, etc on the embryo.<sup>27</sup> Based on the research done by Decasper and Spence, it can be articulated: “infants can remember things they experienced during prenatal life did emerge in another intriguing longitudinal study spanning the last six weeks of the foetal period.”<sup>28</sup>

If they can remember, it could be argued that they have memory. Memory has a close relationship with self-consciousness and both are related to the brain function.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Psychological growth may vary from person to person. Even for the mentally retarded children they have some kind of psychological growth.

<sup>25</sup> L. A. Lefton, *Psychology*, pp. 280-281

<sup>26</sup> C. Peterson, *Looking Forward Through the Life Span* (Sydney: Prentice Hall, 1996), 94

<sup>27</sup> Idem, p. 95; M. B. Carlson, *Human Embryology and Developmental Biology* (Philadelphia: Mosby, 2004), pp. 153-155

<sup>28</sup> C. Peterson, *Looking Forward Through the Life Span*, p. 97.

<sup>29</sup> Cognitive psychology says: “the emotional intensity of a memorable event is not only in which emotions, moods, and state of consciousness affects memory. Our moods and state of consciousness also may provide a context for encoding that affects later retrieval of semantic memories.” R. Sternberg, *Cognitive*

The development of human brain continues for many years even after birth. The modern research findings proves that brain development is a long process through the stages *induction, proliferation, migration, aggression, differentiation, synaptogenesis, selective cell death and functional validation*. In addition, it also depends on many environmental factors and these environmental factors are not similar for every human.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, it is not scientifically justifiable to argue as Peter Singer, Michel Tooley and Joseph Fletcher do that the unborn and the newborn are not self-conscious beings or persons. The above theories somehow attribute self-consciousness and reason only to adult (physically and mentally healthy) people. The degree of self-consciousness and reason are not always static, they are in the process of growth. Eric Berne proves through his theory of Transactional Analysis that almost all people in all stages have *ego states* which contain the parent, adult and child natures.<sup>31</sup> Hence an analysis of whether a human being is a person or not on the basis of 'organ maturity', or of its function might be inappropriate. The development of a human being is not completed in a particular stage of life. It is an ongoing process with their genetic code and environment. Bruce Singh explains developmental psychologist Erik Erikson's view:

"The term epigenetic is drawn from biology and means that the structure of an organism and its

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*Psychology* (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1996), p. 273.

<sup>30</sup> D. P. Kimble, *Biological Psychology* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1992), pp. 108-121. N. G. Martin, *Human Neuropsychology* (Hertfordshire: Prentice Hall Europe, 1998), pp. 379-382, B. Kolb and I. Q. Whishaw, *Fundamentals of Neuropsychology* (New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1996), pp. 350ff.

<sup>31</sup> E. Berne, *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975), pp. 9-229.

sequence of development are precisely laid down in that organism's genetic code. For the organism to reach full development of its potential structure, the environment must provide specific stimulation. The structure that thus develops was rigidly predetermined by the organism's genetic endowment, but its unfolding was governed by environmental variables."<sup>32</sup>

The growth of a human not only depends on his biological components but on his environment as well. Thus John C. Linton rightly defines the personality of a human being as: "the integration of an individual's enduring or lifelong attributes into a unique organization, which determines how that person adapts to a continually changing environment."<sup>33</sup>

Therefore it is hard to specify the exact moment of expiring human growth. The continuous mutation and the changes with the interaction of environment may create new phase in every moment of life.

## 5 Burgeoning being towards *theosis*

According to the Orthodox anthropology, every human being is in a process of growth towards *Theosis*, not only physically and mentally, but also spiritually. The word '*theosis*' is unfamiliar in the theological dictionaries of the Western Christian world.<sup>34</sup> However, some other words similar to 'deification' such as 'sanctification' noticeable in

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<sup>32</sup> B. Singh, "Book reconsidered," *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 34, no. 3 (2000), pp. 537-538.

<sup>33</sup> C. Linton, "Personality Assessment," in: *Behaviour and Medicine*, ed. D. Wedding (St. Louis: Mosby, 1995), p. 241.

<sup>34</sup> P. M. Gregorios, *Human God* (Kottayam: Mar Gregorios Foundation 1992), p. 25.

some Western writings.<sup>35</sup> Despite the fact that the word *theosis* is alien to the Biblical language, just like the word *trinity*, the theology behind *theosis* is one of the core aspects in Orthodox anthropology. Indeed, the word came from the ancient Hellenistic world but it rejects the Platonic counterpart of 'becoming God' and goes beyond the Greek intellectual world.<sup>36</sup>

Some important Biblical verses form the basis of the concept of *theosis*. One of them is regarding God's commandment in the account of creation, saying, "Let us make man in our image and likeness" (Gen.1:26). God created human beings in his image and blessed him to grow in the likeness of God. To achieve this goal He bestowed

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<sup>35</sup> Western theology has the concept of sanctification of human beings, who can grow more and more towards being the image of God (it is growth from the 'imperfect image of God' in human to the 'perfect image of God' in Christ). Some recent studies interpret Aquinas' thoughts of human nature, reason and will (summa.I-II.62, 1, 3, I.93.4) as the direct reference to 'deification', (Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas*, pp. 35-39, pp. 69-70). Aquinas sketches the image of God according to nature, grace and glory. In this process, rational nature is the fundamental for being 'capable of god'. However, Aquinas would be reluctant to use the concept of *theosis* (deification in Latin) probably because of his deep thinking of the ontological gap between Creator and creature. Some of the other modern studies also claim that even the protestant Western theological traditions also have the concept of *theosis* (for example, D Yeago, "The Bread of Life: Patristic Christology and Evangelical Soteriology in Martin Luther's Sermon on John 6 " *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 3 (1995), pp. 257-279. T. Mannermaa, "Theosis is a Subject of Finnish Luther Research," *Pro Ecclesia* 4, no. 1995 (1995), pp. 37-48. Nevertheless, all these Western construal mainly concentrate on the human intellect, reason or free will. In Eastern concept of human person, however, deification has a holistic approach, which not only includes human intellectual or metaphysical faculty, but also the human body, which is the 'temple of God'.

<sup>36</sup> Gregorios, *Human God*, pp. 25, 26.

freedom on humans. Thus, a being becomes a human person responsible for his / her destiny and God does not want them to be like a puppet in God's hands. This is a call and this call is clear from Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount, saying, "Be perfect like your heavenly father is perfect" (Mt.5:48). Paul has also developed the notion that human vocation is to partake in God's 'incorruptible immortality' (I Cor.15:50-54, II Cor.3:18, Rom.8:29, Gal.3:26, Col.1:3, 16).

Church Fathers in the early centuries have developed the theology of 'to be like God' and have made it clear that the aim of the Christian life is to bear witness to Jesus through one's life and thus achieve the ultimate goal of *theosis*. Even if Ignatius of Antioch addresses the Ephesus Church as *Theophorus* (God bearing people),<sup>37</sup> it is Irenaeus of Lyons has laid the foundation for the patristic discussion of '*theosis*'. He differentiates the *image of God* from the *likeness*. According to him, the birth of humans is not just a single act in a particular time rather it is a process.<sup>38</sup> The process starts with the human being as an embryo and continues as an infinite process.

Athanasius connects the potentiality of human beings to become 'god' with the incarnation of Jesus. He elaborates the thought of Irenaeus: "the word (became) man, and the son of God (became) son of man so that man might become son of God"<sup>39</sup> with the use of more anthropological terminology. Athanasius stresses the fact that the ultimate aim of incarnation is the deification of the human being. He explains this concept as, "the Word became flesh that he

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<sup>37</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, "Letter to the Ephesians," in: *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, ed. W Jurgens (Bangalore: Theological Publication India, 1995), p. 17.

<sup>38</sup> Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," in: *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), I.4.1-4.

<sup>39</sup> Idem, III.19.1, IV.33.4



might hallow and deify men."<sup>40</sup> He also emphasises the right use of 'the free choice of a human to be adopted or to be away from God's economy'. The positive response to God's call is the basic cause contributing towards deification. However, God's grace is needed for the process of becoming the partakers of God's nature. "We become sons of (God), but not in the same manner as He is, not by nature and reality, but by the grace of Him who called us."<sup>41</sup>

Basil and his brother Gregory of Nyssa also nurture the concept of deification and contribute to a great extent to the Orthodox anthropology. Mar Gregorios writes that Basil employs the phrase of '*theon genesthai*', meaning 'to become god', and teaches that the "Holy Spirit who deifies human beings must himself be divine."<sup>42</sup> For Gregory, *theosis* is a race from darkness to light and is a participation in the divine presence. He differentiates *theosis* from *theoria* (the vision of God) and says that it is "the infinite and continuous transfiguration of all creation, in proportion to the capacity of each being, into the God-bearing image of Glory."<sup>43</sup>

Gregory of Nazianz courageously applies the word *Theosis* for deification while other Fathers are reluctant to use this Greek philosophical term, and he tries to connect this term with the incarnation of our Lord.

He holds:

"Being God, You became man and mingled with mortals: You were God from the beginning, and You

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<sup>40</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, "Contra Arius " in: *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. P. Schaff and H. Wace (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1882), III.3.

<sup>41</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, "Contra Arius ", III.19

<sup>42</sup> Gregorios, *Human God*, p. 31.

<sup>43</sup> Idem, p. 38.

became man later in order to make me god, since You became man."<sup>44</sup>

"Since man did not become god, God Himself became man - in order to reconstruct what was given through what is assumed."<sup>45</sup>

"As a man, He is interceding for my salvation, until He makes me divine by the power of His incarnate manhood."<sup>46</sup>

He stresses the point that the goal of the incarnation of Christ is human deification and thus he challenges the teaching of Apollinarius<sup>47</sup>. He affirms that humans can participate in the transcendent God's immanent nature.

As exposes in the beginning of this article, 'becoming God' has been familiar to the ancient Greek philosophical world through Plato and Plotinus; but they are not concerned with the deification of the human body, because according to them, the human body is 'matter', which is opposite to divine, and thus it is evil. On the contrary, the early Christian Fathers emphasise the deification of the human body as well. The Biblical reference to this teaching could be attributed to be Paul's thought about the transfiguration of the human body as seen in I Corinthians. 15.46-54). Gregory of Nazianz asserts:

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<sup>44</sup> Gregory of Nazianz, Carm. 2:1.1, H Alfeyev, "The Deification of Man in Eastern Patristic Tradition," in *ANZATS* (Melbourne: 2004), p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> Gregory of Nazianz, Carm. 1:1.11, Alfeyev, "The Deification of Man in Eastern Patristic Tradition," "The deification of man in Eastern Patristic Tradition", p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> Gregory of Nazianz, Disc.30.14.8-11, Alfeyev, "The Deification of Man in Eastern Patristic Tradition", p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> Apollinarius was a 5th century philosopher. According to his school of thought, Christ is only a divine person not fully human, and His incarnation assume presuppose only human flesh, whereas the human faculties like intellect (mind) and soul were replaced in Him by the divine Word. W. Pannenberg, *Jesus God and Man* (London: Westminster Press, 1968), p. 40.

“By a narrow and difficult way through narrow gates which is impassable for many, with a solemn escort, Christ led me to God –me, a god made of dust, who was not born god, but was made immortal from mortal. Together with the great image of God (soul), He draws also my body, which is my (part) in the same manner as a magnet-stone attracts black iron”<sup>48</sup>.

Thus deification is an open door for all human beings to become ‘god’ with their entire faculty, body, mind and spirit, opens to those who are willing to lead a holy life with the right use of free will with the image of God, and in the right track towards likeness of God. That does not mean to gain *Ousia* of God or to become the part of the *Ousia* of God or to become God. But it is the process of growth towards the nature of God as human (Ref. Mt. 5:48, Col.2:10, II Cor.3:14).

Deification is not an instant state, but it is the process, which can be achieved through the gradual partaking in the divine nature through a life of worship. Every human being can start from the present here and now and could be possible to reach the fullness by the time of the second coming of our Jesus or later. In this growth towards the likeness of God the human beings fulfil God’s plan.<sup>49</sup>

The Orthodox teaching of deification can be summarised as Kalistos Ware writes,<sup>50</sup> where the first aspect regarding deification is that the state of being deified is one of doing unceasing repentance upon the occurrence of sin, rather than being perfect. Deification can be achieved through

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<sup>48</sup> Gregory of Nazianz, Carm. 2.1.1, Alfeyev, "The Deification of Man in Eastern Patristic Tradition", p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> V. A. Karras, "Patristic Views on the Ontology of Gender," in *Personhood*, ed. J T Chirban (London: Bergin & Garvey, 1996), p. 118.

<sup>50</sup> K. Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), pp. 236-238.

worshipping and the invitation is for all human irrespective of any criterion. It gives importance to the existence as a community or a group (*koinonia*), to the sincere and practical aspect of love to God and brethren, and presupposes church life. The call for *theosis* is kindly given to a righteous person by the grace of God and may not be taken as a birth right.

## 6 Burgeoning being in communion

One of the main characteristics of the human is, to be a social animal as sociology described.<sup>51</sup> God creates humans as relational beings, and as male and female, in His own image and in relationship with the cosmos.<sup>52</sup> The word 'man', which refers to all humankind in general indicating that God creates a human not simply as an individual.<sup>53</sup> Being human, they need three types of communion: 1) as creature, the human has to have communion with God, 2) as a fellow being, the human has to have communion with fellow human beings, and 3) as the steward of world the human has to have communion with nature. The basic source for the nature of communion of personhood is the Holy Trinity. The Holy Trinity in itself is a relational Godhead. Orthodox theology emphasises the Trinitarian image in human beings and views humans as the icons of Trinitarian God, the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Stanley Harakas describes, "the relationships of the persons of

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<sup>51</sup> E. Aronson, *The Social Animal* (New York: Worth Publishers, 1999), p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> Both creation accounts tell us God created the human as a relational being and God found the human to be in community. (Gen.1.25-28, Gen. 2.20, RSV), McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 538.

<sup>53</sup> G. Buttarick, ed., *The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible* ( New York: Abington Press, 1962), p. 243.

Trinity as characterized by love: a more free, caring, mutually supportive, and sharing love that goes beyond 'structures'."<sup>54</sup> Therefore, the original nature of humans is 'to love' and 'to be loved'. In this perspective humanhood or personhood acquires more comprehensive meaning. Trinitarian love is a paradigm for human existence and interaction (I Jn.4:16). It is the sharing love, which is vertical (with God) and horizontal (rest of the human and creation) (Jn.17.21, Mk.12:30-31). This love proves the basic essence of the Holy Trinity. In the Trinity there is no inequality, as the three persons, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, are united in one divine essence or nature (*ousia*). There is no qualitative difference of divine essence among the persons in Trinity. This Trinitarian faith constitutes the foundation for human equality. Paul asserts this "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ" (Gal.3:27-28) because all humans bear the image of the Holy Trinity and thus humans are the icons of Trinity.

Thomas Hopko asserts:

"It is the present task to show clearly that human community, as the created epiphany of the uncreated Trinity is made male and female so that it can realise and achieve the divine life given to it by its uncreated Archetype."<sup>55</sup>

Humankind is the created *epiphany* and the icon of uncreated Trinity. The ontological nature of humanity proves the potentiality to witness as the 'image' of Trinitarian love. This Trinitarian love calls humans to share

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<sup>54</sup> S. S. Harakas, *Wholeness of Faith and Life: Orthodox Christian Ethics*, vol. III (Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1999), p. 7.

<sup>55</sup> T. Hopko, "On the Male Character of Christian Priesthood," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 19 (1975), pp. 147-173.

and be an *agapic* community. Basil writes about these social characteristics of human being:

“Who does not know that the human animal is a tame and a social animal, not solitary and wild? For nothing is so characteristic of our nature as to communicate with one another, and to love our own kind.”<sup>56</sup>

This social nature of *agape*, communion, communication, sharing and caring in human beings reveals that they are in the process of growth as burgeoning being.

As beings in communion with God and with their fellow beings, humans are also in communion with the rest of the creation. In the created world, the human being only combines the material and divine elements. K M George rightly asserts, “humanity together with the material creation constitutes the ultimate image of God.”<sup>57</sup> Human existence is thus differentiated from non-human creation in a qualitative way. In the light of this fact, the Church Fathers often refer to human being as a ‘microcosm’ (little world) in the macrocosm, which is the epitome of creation.<sup>58</sup> By this concept, the Fathers instruct that the humans contain all levels and parts of existence of the physical world in themselves, as it in the order of the creation, and the physical elements that build up the human body are regarded in that of the elements, which constitute the physical world. Mar Gregorios explains Nyssa’s thought and affirms that the human involves the lower elements involving animal and vegetative elements, however, is also capable of thought processes, and as such, they represent

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<sup>56</sup> Basil, “Longer Rules,” in *Saint Basil Ascetical Works*, ed. M M Wagner (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1962), p. 55.

<sup>57</sup> George, *The Silent Roots*, p. 31.

<sup>58</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, “Homilies: 38, 42” in: *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* ed. P. Schaff and H. Wace (New York,: Christian Literature Company, 1882).

the whole universe, which is in dialogue with the creator.<sup>59</sup> This thought integrates and reveals the depth of human relationship with the rest of the creation.

The concept that the human is a relational being and has communion with the nature is also evident in the writings of Gregory of Nazianz. He upholds that we are fully involved with the material creation by virtue of our physical existence, and that the material of created reality is deeply involved with us. If we move towards the direction of deification, our human nature, progressing towards God, will somehow carry the created material world with it. If, however, we move towards the opposite direction, the created world will suffer with us as well (cf. Rom.8:19-22).<sup>60</sup> Unfortunately, in the *post-lapsarian* state, most human beings choose the second option, which leads us into the state of disintegration. The path to be chosen is the means toward *theosis*, for which it is necessary to create an intimate relationship with God and nature. Humankind as such should strive towards attaining harmony between the human element and the other creations such as minerals, plants and animals. As we are created with components of material (body) and image of God, we are called to offer the whole of God's creation back to Him as a sacred offering. Christos Yannaras writes:

“The human being is a personal existence because it is established, constructed, and acts as an event of relationship. It is not simply placed, as every biological being is, in to the web of interrelations and interlinking exchanges of energy that make up the biosphere. Rather, its very existence is a

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<sup>59</sup> Gregorios, *An Eastern Orthodox Perspective of Nature, Man and God* (accessed). 12/03/2007)

<sup>60</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, "Homilies: 38, 42".

dynamic realization of relationships, the impetus of desire for a fulfilling existential relationship.”<sup>61</sup>

These dynamic relationships of a human person with God, other humans and nature reveal the signs of growth and life. This communion forms the breath of each human being. Without this communion, no one can exist and exercise the personhood or be a true human. Thus, Orthodoxy affirms that every human being is in communion with God, fellow beings and nature in every moment of the whole.

## 7 Burgeoning being as a free being

Free will is an important subject of study and analysis in Christian anthropology. In fact, the term ‘free will’ is not biblical, but it has been borrowed from Stoicism. The term was introduced in Christianity by Tertullian and elaborated by Augustine in the Western world.

Tertullian writes:

“I find that man was constituted by God with a freedom of both his own will and his own power; for I observe in him the image and likeness of God by nothing so clearly as by this, the characteristic of his estate.”<sup>62</sup>

Tertullian asserts that the image of God in humans makes them be free humans and enable them to exercise the power according to their will. In the Eastern world Origen asserts

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<sup>61</sup> C. Yannaras, "Psychoanalysis and Orthodox Anthropology," in: *Personhood*, ed. J T Chirban (London: Bergin & Garvey, 1996), p. 88.

<sup>62</sup> Tertullian, "Against Marcion," in: *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, ed. W Jurgeens (Bangalore: Theological Publication in India, 1995), pp. 2.5.5.



that each human has a free will for the right and wrong choices.”<sup>63</sup>

This free will endorse human beings to have the freedom either to grow in virtue or to give way to evil. Moses says to the Israelites “Behold, before you are the good and evil, choose the good” (Deut.30:15, 19). Thus, the freedom to choose between good and evil is vested upon human beings. Justin Martyr writes: “If the human race does not have the power of a freely deliberated choice in fleeing evil and in choosing good, then men are not accountable for their actions, whatever they may be. That they do, however, by a free choice, either walk upright or stumble, we shall now prove...God did not make man like the other beings, the trees and the four legged beasts for example which cannot do anything by free choice.”<sup>64</sup>

Gregory of Nazianz states that our salvation comes both from ourselves and from God.<sup>65</sup> If God’s help is necessary for doing good, and if the good will itself comes from Him, it is equally true that the initiative rests with the human free will.

John Chrysostom similarly insists that without God’s aid we might be unable to accomplish good works; nevertheless, even if grace takes the lead, it co-operates with free will. He comments:

“Is it not perfectly clear that anyone can, by his own choice, choose either wickedness or virtue? For if, this was not the case, and if such a faculty did not pertain to our nature, it was not right that some be

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<sup>63</sup> Origen, "The Fundamental Doctrines," in: *The Faith of the early fathers*, ed. W Jurgeens (Bangalore: 1995), p. 191.

<sup>64</sup> Justin the Martyr, "First Apology," in: *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, ed. W Jurgens (Bangalore: Theological Publication in India, 1995), pp. 53-54.

<sup>65</sup> Gregory of Nazianz, "Second Theological Orations," in: *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, ed. W. Jurgens (Bangalore: Theological Publication in India, 1995), 1995, p. 30.

punished while others receive the reward of virtue. But since everything depends, after grace from above, up on our own choice, so too are punishments prepared for sinners and recompense and reward for those who do right.”<sup>66</sup>

In the West, however, although Augustine recognises free will in humans, he upholds that human free will has been weakened by sin, the reinstatement of which could only be brought about by divine intervention.<sup>67</sup> Augustine emphasises the huge gap between God and man and establishes God’s sovereignty. The concept of Original Sin compelled Augustine to play down human freedom. Eastern Fathers like Gregory of Nyssa, Ephrem the Syrian and Mar Gregorios have thought differently. They highlight the relevance of human freedom and the sovereignty of God, without denying the ontological gap between God and humans.

Augustine takes the Biblical reference “the desires of the flesh are against the spirit and the desires of the spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other to prevent you from doing what you would” (Gal.5:17) to support his argument. However, Paul does not mean that all human desires are evil or sin forms an integral part of human ontological nature, rather it asserts that the worldly selfish desires are against the spirit. Paul’s theological teachings about sin never meant that human beings are sinful by nature. On the contrary, he says that ‘your body is the temple of God’. Paul also exhorts in his letter to Romans, “therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that

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<sup>66</sup> John Chrysostom, "Homilies on Genesis," in: *The Faith of the Early fathers*, ed. W. Jurgens (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1995), pp. 102-103.

<sup>67</sup> Augustine, "The City of God," ed. H. Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), V.9-11, Augustine, "The Confessions," ed. J. G. Pilkington (Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark, 1876), pp. 77, 143-144; A. E. McGrath, *Christian Theology* (London: Blackwell, 1994), p. 372.

you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness" (Rom.6:12-13).

Therefore, it is difficult to affirm that the human person or all human desires are evil. The human desire to grow in the likeness of God is the reflection of the image of God in humans. God, who turns this desire into reality, however, the origin of this is from the free will of the human beings. This demystifies the element of virtue in them and is characteristic of the "image of God" in them. Although Augustine recognises the image of God in humans, he rules out the idea about human free will, by saying that human by himself cannot do right if the Godliness is withdrawn, but the image of God prompts him to turn to God, who could only make human virtuous.<sup>68</sup> Mar Gregorios calls this viewpoint as 'childish dependence of man on God'. He continues:

"It is an affront to human dignity, and certainly not the view which Christ and apostles hold about man. The 'world come of age' cannot brook this insult to humankind. It is not the Christian gospel, which undermines man in order to exalt God. It is too petty a god who can have glory at only the expense of the glory of man."<sup>69</sup>

In the Semitic tradition, Ephrem the Syrian asserts that free will is one of the unique characteristics of human beings.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Augustine, "On Genesis," in *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991), pp. 77-78, 98-103, P. Varghese, *Freedom and Authority* (Madras: CLS-ISPC-K-LPH, 1974), p. 46.

<sup>69</sup> Varghese, *Freedom and Authority*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>70</sup> In the words of Murray, "Ephrem is among the fathers of the Church who have laid the greatest emphasis on the reality and value of the gift of free will to mankind." R. Murray, "St Ephrems Dialogue of Reason and Love," *Sobornost* 2 (1980), p. 29. However,

Ephrem finds free will as the central concept of ethics rather than the deterministic systems of horoscopes and astrology, which were prevalent then.<sup>71</sup> Like Gregory of Nyssa, Ephrem denies the concept of Original Sin. For him, human sin is the 'misuse of freedom'.<sup>72</sup> He completely condemns the concept that 'sin is inherently positioned in human nature or transformed into evil'.<sup>73</sup> In this discussion, Mar Gregorios combines the oriental thought of Gregory and Semitic Fathers: "If sin were a part of human nature, then we would not be responsible for what we do according to the nature, argues the whole Asian tradition including Gregory."<sup>74</sup>

The Orthodox theology insists the fact that the freedom bestowed to human beings enables them to choose between good and evil. God permits human beings to choose between the two, and those who choose the way of virtue will be gifted by God's grace.

This free will makes a human a free being and it helps him to grow as a person. This is not an attainable mental capacity or a cognitive ability; rather it is a gift bestowed upon the ontological nature of humankind. Mar Gregorios affirms:

"The created nature has thus both possibilities, that of self-destruction and that of self-creating. This is its freedom. To adhere to evil is to choose destruction and non-being. To

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as said above Gregory of Nyssa and Ephrem the Syrian, both fathers present a well-balanced explanation of the concept of human free will.

<sup>71</sup> Ephrem the Syrian, "Hymnen Contra Haereses" in: *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, ed. E Beck (Louvain Peeters, 1957), pp. 51.13.

<sup>72</sup> Idem, p. 18.3.

<sup>73</sup> Ephrem the Syrian, "Hymni de ecclesia," in: *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, ed. E Beck (Louvain Peeters, 1960), p. 3.4.

<sup>74</sup> P. M. Gregorios, *Cosmic Man* (New Delhi: Sophia, 1980), p. 167.

turn to God and to cleave to him, separated from evil, is to choose being and growth in the good."<sup>75</sup>

This Oriental thought asserts the responsibility of each individual for the right exercise of human free will. A human, in his or her different stages of life, can influence or be influenced by their fellow being's decisions and will. This dependence can be considered as a being's relational character, which cannot eliminate the ontological character of free will from a burgeoning person.

## 8 Burgeoning being as a unique being

Peter Singer not only fails to perceive any sanctity in human beings, he also is unable to consider human beings as unique, and treats them as zoological beings like any other animals.<sup>76</sup> Singer admits his conclusion is the result of a zoological / biological assessment of human life and the arguments for infanticide, abortion and euthanasia are basically generated from Darwin's theory of evolution.<sup>77</sup> He questions the traditional Western theory of anthropocentrism and the concept that earth is the centre of the world. He tries to prove the inaccuracy of the ethics, which is based on this traditional theory.<sup>78</sup> In rejection of this argument and in defence of the uniqueness of human personhood Oliver O' Donovan advocates:

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<sup>75</sup> Idem, p. 165.

<sup>76</sup> P. Singer, "Sanctity of Life or Quality of Life?," *Pediatrics* 72 (1983), pp. 128-129.

<sup>77</sup> P. Singer, *Rethinking Life and Death* (Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company, 1997), pp. 169-172.

<sup>78</sup> The Copernicus theory (earth moves round sun) that changed the traditional concept (earth and human are the centre of the universe), and Singer uses that new theory to criticise the ethics which is based on the concept that human is the centre of the cosmos. P. Singer, *Rethinking Life and Death*, pp. 187-189

“If we look at a herd of cattle in a field, we can pick out individual cows from the mass. But no cow has a ‘history’ in the sense that an individual human being does (...). Individual humanity does not lose its significance when its part of multitude; rather the history of the multitude gains its significance from the fact that it is multitude of persons, not of ants, each of whom has significant history in him- or herself.”<sup>79</sup>

O’ Donovan’s argument is mainly based on the biographical sketch of a being or on one’s historical identity. He condemns human slaughter and defends animal slaughter. He supports the view that human values are based on his / her stories and names. Many protestant bioethicists employ these criteria of personhood as the basis for their argument in bioethics debate.<sup>80</sup> Another argument for human uniqueness is human rationality, which is introduced (as we have seen) from the ancient Greek philosophers (Plato and Aristotle) and developed later by many theologians. As discussed earlier, the theologians are of the opinion that the presence of the image of God in human beings enables them to be rational. Combination of this philosophy and theology became the tool to subdue the non-human and even the vulnerable human. This concept has led the Spanish-Portuguese colonialists in Latin America to a question that “whether the native Indians had a human soul, where they were really human or just subhuman creatures.”<sup>81</sup> The interlinked philosophy and theology and the claim of

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<sup>79</sup> O. O’ Donovan, *Begotten or Made* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 51

<sup>80</sup> For example, Gilbert Meilaender uses O’ Donovan’s anthropology in the stem cell debate. G Meilaender, "Some Protestant Reflections," in *The Human Embryonic and Stem Cell Debate*, ed. S Holland (London: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 178, 143.

<sup>81</sup> George, *The Silent Roots*, p. 27.

rationality is the God's image God in humans is employed to exploit the entire nature. Many religions have questioned his distressing approach and many religious and secular environmentalist appeals to rethink the claim of uniqueness of human beings.<sup>82</sup> Modern animal psychology supports them to prove that rationality is not the unique nature of human.

This sociological, historical, and cognitive analysis to explain human uniqueness seems to be ambiguous and feeble. Many animals have a history and are remembered by their names and they have more prominent place than many human beings do. For example, Dolly, the first cloned mammal, gained the 10<sup>th</sup> place in the world news in 1997 along with Mother Theresa and Diana and she has gone straight in at number one in the list of top ten scientific breakthroughs awarded by the journal *Science*.<sup>83</sup> This sheep has a story, a name and a great place in the history. Ian Wilmut has portrayed her last days and death in a meticulous way. He writes: "for a moment there, in my office, I held my head in my hands. (...) I was both taken aback and genuinely sad. (...) There many very upset people that afternoon..."<sup>84</sup> Her name is placed in many books including the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.<sup>85</sup> The large majority of world population does not have such a popular history. Dolly's physical remains are kept in the Museum of Edinburgh. Only a few people have achieved such a prominent place in history. In this

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<sup>82</sup> R. G. Peterson, "The Evolution of Consciousness and the Theology of Nature," *Zygon* 34, no. 2 (1999), pp. 283-306.

<sup>83</sup> Biotechnology and Biology, Science Research Council, (1997, accessed 15/5 2007); available from [http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/media/pressreleases/97\\_12\\_18\\_dolly.html](http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/media/pressreleases/97_12_18_dolly.html).

<sup>84</sup> I. Wilmut, R. Highfield, *After Dolly* (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 2006), pp. 26- 27

<sup>85</sup> *Clone*, (2007, accessed 25/05 2007); available from <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9024429/clone>

light, many human beings, including many children both in developed and developing countries have died without leaving any trace to be remembered and grieved. Dolly the sheep has thus obtained a more prominent place in history than many other human beings have. Many other animals like Makybe Diva,<sup>86</sup> Polly,<sup>87</sup> and Tetra<sup>88</sup> have attained prominence and are remembered. Several police dogs have honourable funerals with great salutation received from human beings. According to O' Donovan's argument, the honour and historical importance given to such animals raises them to the same level as human beings. Hence, this kind of argument is not sufficient to the uniqueness of humans.<sup>89</sup>

According to Orthodox theology, the human is not only just a biological or zoological or sociological or psychological being. Christianity journeys beyond and affirms that all the whole humanity along with the rest of the creation belongs to God. Every person's life is the reflection of God's glory,

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<sup>86</sup> In 2005, Makybe Diva, a horse made history by being the first horse to win the Melbourne Cup three times, winning consecutive races in 2003, 2004 and 2005. Jockey Glen Boss rode Makybe Diva in all three of her Melbourne Cup wins. In October 2006, a bronzed statue of Makybe Diva was unveiled in the South Australian city of Port Lincoln, the home-town of her owner Tony Santic. (Australian Government Culture and Recreation Portal web Site) <http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/melbournecup/> (accessed 15/02/2007)

<sup>87</sup> A. E. Schnieke and others, "Human Factor IX Transgenic Sheep, Produced by Transfer of Nuclei from Transfected Fetal Fibroblasts," *Science* 278, no. 5346 (1997), pp. 2130-2133

<sup>88</sup> S. Ramsay, "Embryo Splitting Produces Primate Clone," *The Lancet* 355, no. 9199 (2000), p. 205.

<sup>89</sup> These modern days many humans keep their pet's photo in their drawing room along with that of their relatives'. I believe that those animals have history and names, but do not believe that they are equal to humans. Similarly, many police dogs' dead bodies get guard of honour before the burial, whereas many humans do not get any honour even for their living body.



which is created in the image of God and ought to be celebrated and nurtured. This quality of nature that humans are in the image of God is not a license to alienate themselves from the rest of the creation. On the contrary, humans created in the image of God are to burgeon, flourish and cherish by their presence and along with rest of the creation. Their vocation to royal priesthood<sup>90</sup> expects human beings to mediate for the reconciliation of all creation. Human as an image of God is incorporated with the rest of the creation. God is creator, author and giver of life. According to this basic principle, any action or approach, which devalues human life, should be rejected. The unborn, disabled, poor, aging and dying are particularly vulnerable to such injustices. It is the responsibility of their fellow beings to care for the defenceless. As God is the author and designer of life, humans have no authority to take any fellow being's life. It is important that when God calls them as humans, they are not mere biological substances, and they have the presence of the Holy Spirit in them. John Chrysostom writes, "for a man is not merely whosoever has hands and feet of a man, nor whosoever is rational only, but whosoever practices piety and virtue with boldness."<sup>91</sup> One does not only have to be born biologically in order to be called a human, but must also have the Holy Spirit in him. Thus a living and real human is one who is "favoured" with the grace of God. Otherwise, he is a human dead to God and swayed by various passions. Such a human is like the

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<sup>90</sup> P. M. Gregorios, *Our Presence in the World: The Royal Priesthood of Christ*(accessed 12/03 2007); available from <http://gregorianarticles.paulosmargregorios.info/Our%20Presence.html>.

<sup>91</sup> John Chrysostom, "Instructions to Catechumens," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* ed. P Schaff (New York: Christian Literature Society, 1889), p. 165.

animals. That is why the Fathers call the human a profound animal.<sup>92</sup>

The Orthodox theology, on the other hand, presents the human as an inclusive being in the cosmic reality. The exclusive anthropocentric vision of life based on the above theory, has permitted the killing of any animal according to human will. Singer's criticism to this Western exclusive anthropocentric perspective that it has caused severe cruelty to animals and to nature,<sup>93</sup> needs to be reconsidered. Lindsay Wilson finds the rationale for animal slaughter to be due to the absence of image of God in animals.<sup>94</sup> As Gregory and Ephrem asserts, the human's role is as that of a steward rather than dominating and subduing all other creatures based on reason.

Orthodox theology defines the human being as a created being in the image of God who is called to the participation in divine personhood and to the growth towards the likeness of God. This anthropology leads to the definition of a human as a burgeoning being. This concept inspires to think that a *person* is a human being, who is created in the image of God with a vocation to grow towards *theosis*. Any endeavour to limit the personhood to a few humans, based on their physical, psychological, sociological and economic growth, is an error because every human being is a burgeoning being.

2. Do we really need the word 'person' in the bioethics discussion?

As illustrated above, it is knotty to find any differences between the meanings of human and person, and hence the

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<sup>92</sup> Basil says: "man is a civilized and gregarious animal neither savage nor a lover of solitude" Basil, "Longer Rules," p. 3 .

<sup>93</sup> P. Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: New York Review book, 1999), p. 195ff.

<sup>94</sup> L. Wilson, "Human Being – Species or Special?," in: *Rethinking Peter Singer*, ed. G Preece (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2002), p. 113.

question comes up as to whether we need the word 'person' as it stands as a confusing word in the bioethics debate? Many bioethicists, even in the Western tradition question the use of this term in bioethics and philosophy. Gordjin stated, "the concept of person is unsuited to be a central concept in bioethical debate and it creates serious problems in the Anglo-Saxon bioethics."<sup>95</sup>

An in-depth analysis about the origin and development of the concept of person is a spin-off of Kantian and Lockean influence. The methodology and measurements to analyse the qualities of person apart from the status of human is ambiguous. The attribution to the status of a person is intimately interlinked with the biological and psychological functions and it can be changed by mutation. He argues that the concept of person is superfluous, confusing and can easily be used as a cover-up concept. Gordijn argues that the concept has no pragmatic use and its use leads to simplifications.<sup>96</sup> He rightly insists that viewing personhood simply as a matter of having certain qualities may limit the moral status to deploy certain properties. This approach could lead to construct a distinction between "*person / non person or moral status / no moral status.*"<sup>97</sup> Hence he suggests that the concept of the person should be relinquished which could enhance the clarity and quality of bioethical debate. Though he argues for relinquishing the concept of person, he still would like to maintain the criteria for moral status, which are the *properties* and *capacities*. He argues,

"We all agree that certain beings can possess capacities or properties that have moral meanings or implications. Instead of focusing on the person in

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<sup>95</sup> B. Gordijn, "The Troublesome Concept of the Person," *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics* 20 (1999), p. 347.

<sup>96</sup> Idem, p. 348.

<sup>97</sup> Idem, pp. 354-355.

the bioethical debate it is necessary to think systematically about the question of which properties and capacities within a being are a sufficient or necessary condition for which kind of moral status.”<sup>98</sup>

This ethical criterion again brings confusion and ambiguity in ethical debate, as to who are the “*certain*” beings? What are the capacities and properties that carry moral weight? Does morality exist only in the biological molecules? For Gordijn, a comparison between the fetus of a chimpanzee and a human fetus based on its nervous system could be able to proclaim the moral status between them.<sup>99</sup> In essence, this approach is another way of interpreting Peter Singer’s Preference Utilitarianism without using the word person, but maintains the criteria to assess the moral status based on capacities. Though the word ‘person’ or ‘personhood’ is not relinquished, the criterion of using the word person to discriminate human beings based on their capabilities need to be relinquished. In other words, even though the word person is avoided while the method is maintained, the confusion and ambiguity will remain in the bioethics debate.

## 9 Conclusion

As discussed above, the Orthodox perspective does not assess moral status based on a being’s capacities. Since all human beings bear the image of God, they all have the same moral status irrespective of biological and psychological competences. Despite the fact that the word person is not necessary in bioethics, it is not essential to be avoiding it. Since the word person is so deeply in use in daily human

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<sup>98</sup> Idem, p. 356.

<sup>99</sup> Idem, p. 356.

life, it could be used synonymous to the word 'human'. However, any endeavour to repudiate any human being's rights or to disrespect the dignity of human body by elevating the concept of person could be questioned. The exercise of the word person or human, or, personhood or humanhood in the bioethics debate deserves more clarification. The above Western and Eastern analyses provide different approaches to the terminology of person / personhood. Hence, different anthropological understandings could lead to different bioethical conclusions. This is very evident in the debate of biotechnological applications in human beings.