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The Human Being as “Creator of Love” according to Saint John Chrysostom

Abstract

By creating a “very good” world, God called human being to cooperate him in order to transfigure the whole *ktisis*. Human being becomes co-creator with God when s/he creates interpersonal relationships in the image of the communion of freedom and love of the Holy Trinity. So, according to St John Chrysostom life is a harmonious communion of human beings with God and therefore, by extension, with themselves, their fellow humans and nature.

Keywords

Co-creator, freedom, love,
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“The melody [of love] gladdens God.”
Saint John Chrysostom

Church: Life as a Harmonious Communion

Life as a harmonious communion of human beings with God and therefore, by extension, with



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themselves, their fellow humans and nature is the purpose of life, which the Church proclaims to the world. God is a communion of persons, the human being is a gift, the fellow human is a brother or sister, nature is a great house: these are the fundamental dimensions of existence. The knowledge of God and the knowledge of one's self, sociability and physical theory are the Church's mode of life.¹ Humans experience this mode of being when they freely adopt love as the secret axis of the world, around which the whole human life revolves.

Knowledge of God: God as a Communion of Persons

God is a communion of freedom and love between three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In this communion the "I", the "you", the other, cohabit in the "we"; the one with the other, through the other, for the other. Monad-in-trinity and trinity-in-m Monad; otherness that does not divide and unity which does not confuse.²

As a communion of love God is not one person only, since, by definition, in one person alone no communion is possible. A person enclosed in itself, blissful in its autarky cannot experience love. One person alone implies indifference, loneliness and distance. God is not just two persons either, for then God would have been a binary relationship, which would exclude the third part —the other. Even though a communion of love between two persons really exists —as in eros, friendship etc.— every binary form of love runs the risk of a deadly danger, that of exclusiveness. Love is limited to a certain group and number of people, leaving others on the outside. A relationship between just two persons implies an underpinning

¹ "What I call Church is not only the place but also the way of life, not only its walls but also its laws. (...) The Church is faith and life." *On Eutropius*, 1, PG 52:397.

² See *On the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 30, 2, PG 61, 608. Cf. *On the Holy Trinity*, 1, PG 48, 1087-1088; *On the Epistle to the Romans*, 13, 8, PG 60, 519.

narcissism: someone loves those who love him or her. Thus, the Trinitarian life of God denotes that love surpasses both the singleness —the individualism and enclosure— and the dualness —dualism and exclusiveness. The existence of the third person prohibits any twofold selfishness; any fusion of the two persons within an impersonal unity. That is why, “those who have the right perception of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit cherish love for one another and experience the perfection of love.”³

Otherness and unity coexist harmoniously within the triune communion. Otherness: each person is exceptional and unprecedented; in its communion with the other persons its complete otherness is marked out. Unity: each person is in full communion with the others; their life is its life. Otherness and unity, unconfusedly and undivisibly, is the very way of living of the Holy Trinity. This way of life, “the true knowledge of God,”⁴ is revealed to humans through Christ. The person of Christ, his life and action, discloses the authentic life, the life of absolute otherness and personal immortality.⁵ Human beings are called to participate in the triune life: “the heavenly state”⁶ can extend into the society of humans. The triadic life becomes, *mutatis mutandis*, an archetype of life for humans; it turns out to be an earthly “novel state.”⁷

Thus, the society of human beings has to act and live in a way which reflects and resembles God’s way of life.⁸ Each and everyone is called to overcome the re-coiling into their ego and

³ *On Love*, PG 60, 775. “The Church’s name does not imply division but union and conformity.” *On the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1, 1, PG 61, 13. “Church is a name of system and synod.” *On the Psalms*, 149, PG 55, 493. Cf. *On the Gospel of John*, 15, PG 59, 102.

⁴ *On the Perfect Love*, 1, PG 56, 280.

⁵ See *On the Psalms*, 48, 5, PG 55, 229.

⁶ *On the Nativity of Christ*, PG 56, 391.

⁷ *On the Epistle to the Romans*, 10, PG 60, 480.

⁸ “For God nothing is more important as the unity of the human beings.” *On the Gospel of Matthew*, 16, 8, PG 57, 250.

the enclosure into exclusive relationships, to be open towards a communion of love with everybody. So that “the many will be one and the one many.”⁹ The challenge is a universally fraternal community, whose main characteristics will be otherness and unity. Otherness: each person will be unique and unprecedented; it will express its human nature in an absolutely distinct way. Unity: each person will realize and experience their one essence with the whole humanity and presume that “your possession and my possession, this mentality which disrupts everything”¹⁰ does not exist, for everything belongs to everyone.

Church’s above described perception of God —and its consequences for human beings and their life— is adversative to some other false perceptions, two of which are the following: God as punisher and God as a just and rewarding being. In the first case, God as punisher resembles a heavenly gendarme; a cruel and austere watcher of every human act, who is eager to pleasurably chastise each one of human’s trespasses.¹¹ Humans relate to such a God in the way that a servant relates to his master: humans don’t do a bad deed because they are afraid of the chastisement. God is hostile towards human beings and poisons their life in various ways. This is of course a view which does not coincide with the Christian doctrine according to which “God is never hostile to anybody.”¹² In the second case, God as a just and rewarding being resembles a heavenly accountant, who carefully sums up the good and the bad deeds of humans, in order to justly reward them. Human beings relate to such a God in the way that the employees relate to their employer: they do a good deed because they expect to be rewarded. This is again a view which does not coincide with that of the Christian faith, according to which “if someone is not

⁹ *On the Acts*, 40, 4, PG 60, 286.

¹⁰ *On Faithful Father*, 11, PG 47, 366. Cf. *On Philogonius*, 1, PG 48, 749.

¹¹ See *On the Psalms*, 117, 1, PG 55, 329.

¹² *On the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 11, 3, PG 61, 478.

friendly to you, then you should be ever more loving towards them.”¹³ Because “one thing is to be judge and another thing to be merciful.”¹⁴

Church must prevent humans from espousing either of the above perceptions, so as to encourage them to experience the communion of love with Christ and love as a participation in the divine life. This will be achieved through the experience of authentic, interpersonal relationships, which cultivate cooperation and co-existence. Only through experiences of friendship and fraternity the goal of Church will be pursued. This goal is nothing less than the participation of every human being in the great symphony of creation which lovingly praises God.¹⁵

Self-knowledge: Self as a Gift

The harmonious communion of the faithful with God, fellow humans and nature is experienced through their entire psychosomatic dynamism. Church comprehends the human being as a unified psychosomatic entity. Therefore “a soul without a body” or “a body without a soul” cannot imply human being.¹⁶ Precisely because he/she is a perfect unity between the body and the soul, a human being denotes that spirit and matter can coexist harmoniously, thereat a human being is an “utmost bond of both.”¹⁷ This implies the rejection of every fractional understanding, which underestimates either the somatic or the psychic dimension of the human being. Materialism —the perception that humans are the outcome of biological processes— and idealism —that the human being is a spirit imprisoned within a body— are both denounced. Accordingly,

¹³ *On the Epistle to the Romans*, 27, PG 60, 647.

¹⁴ *On Poor Lazarus, and the Rich Man*, 2, 6, PG 48, 989.

¹⁵ “Love resembles a guitar whose sounds are similar to those (humans) who love one another. (...) Its melody gladdens God.” *On the Acts*, 40, PG 60, 286.

¹⁶ See *On Love*, PG 60, 774.

¹⁷ *On the Ambiguity of the Old Testament*, 2, 5, PG 56, 182.

Church ought to evenly cultivate a single and multi-dynamic, psychosomatic human being.

Therefore, without division or confusion, Church must cultivate the psychic capabilities of the human being: reason, emotion, and will. Thus Church should primarily promote the cognitive growth of humans.¹⁸ Every human being learns how to develop in depth and wideness and also how to use words and symbols, by which they depict and interpret the world. Familiarity with causalities and analogies, generalizations and conclusions, analyses and symbolisms will bring about the understanding and the critical view of both the content and the methodology of knowledge. The cultivation of reason leads to the “dissolution of ignorance and the shaping of correct judgment on things.”¹⁹

Along with reason, Church must cultivate emotion. A human being must learn how to acknowledge their feelings and, beyond any attempt to repulse or suppress them, deal with them and express them in a way that is acceptable and beneficial to everybody.²⁰ Being in tune with their feelings helps humans to rightly confront them, because in order for someone to be open towards the fellow human, they have to “be a stranger not only to bad deeds but also to moods of malice.”²¹ Furthermore, Church has to cultivate will.²² A human is called to develop the ability of accomplishing things, which were conceived as logical thought or as positive feeling. Or, on the other hand, a human being is called not to do things that are irrational or emotionally negative. The cultivation of will boosts self-acting and formulates a person who makes plans, schedules and also acts. In other words, it leads the human being from theory into action. The correct use of will distinguishes a

¹⁸ See *On the Psalms*, 48, 7, PG 55, 233.

¹⁹ *On the Gospel of Matthew*, 20, 4, PG 57, 291.

²⁰ See *On Vainglory and the Right Way of Parents to Bring Up their Children*, SC 188, 164-76.

²¹ *On the Epistle to the Romans*, 21, 2, PG 60, 604.

²² See *On the First Epistle to the Thessalonians*, 5, 4, PG 62, 428.

human being from an animal that is subjugated to its nature, since a human being “is not committed to their nature but is blessed with the capability to freely make a choice.”²³

The entire psychic world of a human being has to be cultivated homogenously and in multiple and diverse ways. Thus reason, emotion and will co-nsult, co-feel and co-will in their efforts to reach their existential destination. The human being will learn how to think about God and his fellow humans; how to feel one with them and how to desire the realization of such a unity. For God “wishes that the heart is in a state of serenity and quietness, the thought is unperturbed and free of every passion and a human being treats their fellow human with lots of goodness.”²⁴

At the same time, along with the cultivation of the psychic potential of humans, education is called to develop their physical capabilities.²⁵ The body of every human being is their incarnation as a tangible and particular person, the visible part of their inner world.²⁶ One’s body draws limitations but also offers a bridge through which they meet with others, since, “for those who love one another the psychical connection is not enough, because they also need the somatic presence.”²⁷ This implies that all the senses must be exercised, so that each human being experiences the fullness of love through all their sensory.²⁸ For, love “instructs the body, warms the spirit and whitens the soul.”²⁹

The above imply that underestimating and overrating either the soul or the body results in a dichotomized self. Devaluation of the soul and overestimation of the body leads to “biologism” whereas devaluation of the body and overestimation of the soul

²³ *On Poor Lazarus, and the Rich Man*, 6, 9, PG 48, 1042.

²⁴ *On the Myriads Talents*, PG 64, 448-449.

²⁵ See *On the Epistle to the Romans*, 13, 3, PG 60, 511.

²⁶ See *On Prophet Isaiah*, 3, 8, PG 56, 50.

²⁷ *On Love*, PG 63, 572.

²⁸ *On the Epistle to the Ephesians*, 4, 3, PG 62, 34.

²⁹ *On Love*, PG 60, 776.

leads to “angelism.” Moreover, the underrating or the overrating of a psychical capability ends up to partial growth of one’s personality. The underestimation of reason leads to superstition and its overrating to technocracy. Underestimation of emotions leads to insensitivity and the overrating of them to sentimentalism. Underestimation of the will leads to passivity while its overestimation leads to fanaticism.³⁰ In all the above cases a human being’s relation to themselves is problematic.³¹ The psychosomatic cultivation of one’s self is not performed for its own sake. It is pursued for the sake of experiencing the harmonious unity with God, the fellow humans, and nature, that is, for the sake of humans’ existential destination.³² The knowledge of one’s self is the prerequisite of every true acquaintance with other persons. For “could anyone who does not know themselves, know someone else?”³³ Thus, Church ought to guide one’s acquaintance with their true self.³⁴ For, only those who have an awareness of self can contribute to the realization of the harmonious communion with others.³⁵ The utmost characteristic of self-knowledge is humility, which is the “foundation of Christian philosophy.”³⁶ A faithful realize that their existence is a charisma, a grace of God.³⁷ Their life is a gift which has been donated to them by God and humans, therefore they ought to gratefully offer it back to others as a gift in return.

³⁰ See *On Vainglory and the Right Way of Parents to Bring Up their Children*, 65, SC 188, 162-64.

³¹ See *On the Gospel of Matthew*, 64, 4, PG 58, 614. For the war of human beings against themselves see *On the First Epistle to Timothy* 7, 1, PG 62, 535.

³² See *Catecheses*, 2, 1, PG 49, 232.

³³ *On the Gospel of Matthew*, 25, 4, PG 57, 332.

³⁴ It is an art to hold a dialogue with one’s self. Cf. *On the Acts*, 28, 4, PG 60, 220.

³⁵ See *On the Acts*, 52, 5, PG 60, 366.

³⁶ *On Humility*, 1, PG 51, 312.

³⁷ See *On the Gospel of Matthew*, 25, 4, PG 57, 332.

Here is why “nothing is more noticeable and pleasing to God than the thankful human being.”³⁸

Consequently, humans who are not thankful beings, who “are deducted from love,”³⁹ are primarily unfair towards themselves, since they do not experience the thing for which they were created: the gifted and gift-receiving love. Hence, hell —i.e. not taking part in the communion of love⁴⁰— is ultimately the outcome of an existential choice on the part of the human being, a self-punishment.⁴¹

Sociability: the Fellow Human Being as Brother/Sister

If the growth and cultivation of one’s entire psychosomatic dynamism —so that their whole existence is continually donated— is a main existential goal of the Church, which is an expression of the greater existential aim i.e. the communion with God, then another existential goal is the communion of human beings with their fellow humans.

There are biological differences in life: sex, tribe, color, age, features. There are cultural differences as well: language, religion, ethnicity, culture. Therefore Church has to teach human beings how to meet their fellow humans and cultivate a brotherly relationship with them, without discrimination of any kind. For, “in the Church there is no discrimination between the slave and the free, the foreigner and the native, the old and the young, the wise and the illiterate, the citizen and the master, the man and the woman.”⁴² None of the existing differences has to

³⁸ *On the Psalms*, 116, PG 55, 327. Cf. *Catecheses*, 5, 18, SC 50bis, 209. *On the Epistle to the Romans*, 7, 7, PG 60, 450.

³⁹ *On the Epistle to the Romans*, 15, PG 60, 546.

⁴⁰ Apostle Paul “had inside him the greatest thing of all, the love of Christ, and this is why he believed himself to be the happiest man in the world. (...) To him, hell was only one thing: to lose that love.” *On St Paul*, 2, PG 50, 480.

⁴¹ *On the Epistle to the Romans*, 12, 2, PG 60, 487.

⁴² *On the Apostolic Saying “But I Do Not Want You to Be Ignorant,”* 3, PG 51, 247.

be conceived as a reason for rupture and animosity; on the contrary, differences have to be understood as a stimulus for communion, participation and sharing. A human being has to become a “creator of love.”⁴³

Thus, human beings are called to learn otherness and unity through their relationships with others. On the one hand, they are called to realize that they are exceptional and unprecedented persons while, on the other hand, they are a member of a community. All humans have to learn that others are different, hence their ability to accept and welcome them has to be cultivated. This is why they must be taught, that they should not reject or criticize others,⁴⁴ that they should have a friendly attitude towards them and show understanding.⁴⁵ Thereat, they will learn that the truth is expressed through personal otherness, something which will disincite intolerance as well preoccupation due to one’s physical features.⁴⁶ Accordingly, human beings will discover that beyond their biological family there is also a spiritual family to which everybody belongs. Then, they will learn that one of the main characteristics of “the Godly love is that it includes everyone. But if someone loves this one and do not love the other one, then this love is limited to the human level.”⁴⁷ In this family miracle occurs: joy increases when shared; because it is shared sorrow decreases.⁴⁸

Within their communion with the fellow humans the faithful will learn that the decent and most essential things in life presuppose bonds by which the uniqueness of a person and the communality of life with everyone are marked out. The

⁴³ Cf. *On the Acts*, 37, PG 60:266.

⁴⁴ See *On the Ambiguity of the Old Testament*, 2, 9, PG 56, 188-189.

⁴⁵ See *On the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 24, 3, PG 61, 567.

⁴⁶ See *On Poor Lazarus, and the Rich Man*, 6, 5, PG 48, 1034.

⁴⁷ *On the First Epistle to the Thessalonians*, 4, 3, PG 62, 419.
Cf. *On the Gospel of John*, 15, 3, PG 59:101.

⁴⁸ See *On the Wishes of Christ*, 1, PG 48, 784; *Homilies on Genesis*, 22, 1, PG 53, 185.

previous entails that one person must supplement and enrich another. Each human being “has to use their charismas for the common benefit. Wisdom and power, wealth or any other gift should not be used in order to harm others or destroy one’s self.”⁴⁹ Consequently, all charismas are useful, because all of them serve the human community; therefore they are all equal.⁵⁰ The utmost fulfillment of one’s self is to offer to other fellow humans.⁵¹ It is through self-offering and self-sacrifice that human beings highlight their authentic self. Because “nothing else can do human being more friend with God than to live for the sake of the others.”⁵²

Otherwise, the connection to fellow humans will lapse into one of the following: the sadistic behavior whose main characteristic is domination over others as well as their utilitarian exploitation or the masochistic attitude, whose main characteristic is subjugation to others and degrading self-nihilism. Both result in estrangement and alienation of the self and of fellow humans, the deduction from philanthropy into inhumanity.⁵³

Physical Theory: Nature as a Great House

The harmonious communion of human being with God and fellow humans goes through nature, through particular use of the goods of earth. Therefore, another main existential goal of the Church is the harmonious communion of human beings

⁴⁹ *On the Gospel of Matthew*, 77, 3, PG 58, 706.

⁵⁰ “It is precisely difference which brings about equality.” *On the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 30, PG 61, 253 *On the Epistle to the Romans*, 21, PG 60, 601.

⁵¹ See *On the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 31, 2, PG 61,260; *To Those Who Have Virgins as Housemates*, 4, PG 47, 500.

⁵² *On the Gospel of Matthew*, 78, 3, PG 58, 714. Cf. *On the Gospel of John*, 15, 3, PG 59, 101.

⁵³ See *On the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 9, 4, PG 61, 80-81; *On Repentance*, 7, 7, PG 49, 335.

with nature. Nature is the great “house,”⁵⁴ into which the humans host the creatures of God. The duty of the human being is first to acknowledge the importance of each creature within the creation and second, to understand its role within the great cosmic function that we call life.⁵⁵ They need to be familiar with other beings and know in what ways those other beings contribute to life.⁵⁶ Thus, starting with the most familiar, humans are called to become respectful and caring towards them.⁵⁷

Nevertheless, the relationship of human beings with nature implies much more than the mere protection of the environment. For, God “created the earth and the sky and asked that humans undertake the task of making the earth resemble the sky.”⁵⁸ Human beings are invited to depict God’s beauty upon the world, to “adorn the created things.”⁵⁹ Consequently, respect towards material things, the organization of things, the aesthetics taxis, are required to highlight the beauty of creation. The human beings are gifted with creative ability and required to become co-creators with God, to metamorphose his gifts.⁶⁰ This is always performed on the basis of the harmonious communion and, including other virtues, it presupposes the distinction between real and artificial needs,⁶¹ so that production serves humans, quantity goes along with quality and technology keeps up with ecology. Through the accomplishment of their priestly task human beings will lead the whole of creation towards the final transfiguration.⁶²

⁵⁴ *On the Gospel of John*, 15, PG 59, 102. Cf. *On love*, PG 63, 568.

⁵⁵ See *On the Saying of Abraham*, 3, PG 56, 557.

⁵⁶ See *On Those Who Had Been Scandalized*, 7, PG 52, 494.

⁵⁷ About the love of saints towards animals, see *On the Epistle to the Romans*, 29, 5, PG 60, 659-660.

⁵⁸ *On the First Epistle to Timothy*, 15, 4, PG 62, 585.

⁵⁹ *On the Saying of Abraham*, 3, PG 56, 557.

⁶⁰ See *On the First Day of Cosmogony*, 6, PG 56, 436.

⁶¹ See *On the Gospel of John*, 80, 3, PG 59, 437.

⁶² See *On the Epistle to the Galatians*, 6, 3, PG 61, 679.

The inadequate cultivation of the humans' relationship with nature will again lead to one of these two deviations: the pagan view of things, characterized by the subordination of the human beings to their environment; the consumerist view of things, which drives to the degrading comprehension of nature. Both result in conflict and battle between humans and nature.⁶³

Life: Freedom as Love

The communion of humans with God and, by extension, with their selves, their fellow humans and nature is the mission of the Church. This harmonious communion is revealed in the Divine Liturgy par excellence. The faithful know that their life and the whole world are given to them by God. This is why their entire life becomes a loving gift in return: "We offer to You these gifts from Your own gifts in all and for all."⁶⁴ Thereat they take two natural materials —wheat and grapes—, transform them into bread and wine —symbols of the things which sustain human life— and transfer them to the temple in order to offer them to God as a gift in return. God, by a new gesture of love, metamorphoses bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ —the necessary food for a humans' life. And the faithful, by sharing the bread of life, the Christ, become one body, the people of God.⁶⁵ Thus Divine Liturgy recapitulates the aim of the Church: God is the Father, humans are brothers and sisters, and nature is a great supper. Accordingly, life is the participation in God's love and its sharing with the fellow human —a reality which is manifested in everyone's access to the goods of the earth. This *ethos*, which entails *philothēia* and *philanthropy*, love towards God and humans, is also transferred outside the temple and in a liturgy-after-the-Liturgy, whose sanctuary is every human being in need.⁶⁶ So that every aspect

⁶³ See *Homilies on Genesis*, 17, 9, PG 53, 146.

⁶⁴ *Admonitory for Repentance*, 3, PG 60, 687.

⁶⁵ See *On the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 24, 2, PG 61, 200.

⁶⁶ See *On the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 20, 3, PG 61, 540.

of life should serve humans: economy should satisfy the special needs of concrete persons and not the impersonal figures of statistics; sexual love should be a psychosomatic participation of loving persons and not a superficial skin touch; work should express human creativity and not only a slavery to earn the livelihood; policy should unite the citizens and not divide supporters.

It should be self-evident that this existential targeting is not superimposed or compelled from the outside,⁶⁷ but it can be personally and dynamically conquered.⁶⁸ Therefore failures and fall are on the way. But a faithful will never despair for they know that their inability is replenished by the grace of God.⁶⁹ Through the acceptance of that grace a faithful experiences interpersonal affairs which surpass both the ethics of fear and the ethics of reward: “The one who warmly loved the philosophy of the New Testament became what they had to be, not due to the fear of hell, threaten and punishment, but through the divine love and the passionate *eros* towards God. So, they weren’t in need for dictates, commandments and laws in order to chose virtue and avoid malice. But as a noble and free child [of God], who had understood their worthiness, moved unto the camp of virtue, with no fear and hellish punishment.”⁷⁰ The relationships of Christians reach onto the ethics of love, a love that, in the image of God’s love, is offered to everybody, continually and eternally.⁷¹ “God is love” (*I John* 4:16), therefore “nothing else can raise the soul as to love and be loved.”⁷² this is the best news in human history.

⁶⁷ See *On the Epistle to the Colossians*, 5, 2, PG 62, 334.

⁶⁸ See *On the Delight of Things to Come*, 4, PG 51, 349-351; *On Those Who Had Been Scandalized*, 21, PG 52, 522.

⁶⁹ See *On the Epistle to the Romans*, 32, 2, PG 60, 677. Cf. *On Genesis*, 58, 5, PG 54, 513.

⁷⁰ *On the Apostolic Saying “And Since We have the Same Spirit of Faith,”* 6, PG 51, 286. Cf. *On Love*, PG 63, 575.

⁷¹ See *On the Acts*, 44, 4, PG 60, 313.

⁷² *Epistles*, 223, PG 52, 735.