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**GOODNESS AND BEAUTY ACCORDING TO THE
COMMENTARIES ON GENESIS BY ST. BASIL THE GREAT
AND GREGORY OF NYSSA**

(Six Days of Creation of the World and Man by God)

Every cultured nation has taken interest in the notions of goodness and beauty throughout the entire existence of humankind. The point was closely considered by ancient Greeks; Holy Fathers attached particular relevance to the notions and regarded them as supreme categories; likewise, the modern community in all its diversity regards goodness and beauty with close interest from varied angles. We will dwell on the Holy Fathers' ideas – in particular, on their commentaries on the Biblical Book of *Genesis*. While considering goodness and beauty, we do not mean the terminological analysis of the text. We aim to throw light on these two notions as understood by the Holy Fathers while commenting on the Six Days of Creation, as all was brought into being by the Lord and was created good. This idea is confirmed by John Chrysostom, according to whom everything created by God is very good.¹ We will attempt to provide a consistent analysis of *Genesis* and highlight the points of our immediate interest. Moses relates about the first day of Creation: "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light the day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day" (*Gen.1.1*) Basil the Great gives the following comment to the above abstract from the Bible:

¹ *Old Georgian Language Monuments, Fathers' Homilies According to the Manuscripts of the 10th and 11th Centuries*, issued by I. Abuladze as redacted by A. Shanidze, Tbilisi, 1955, 46.

"...let us say with Moses "God created the heavens and the earth". Let us glorify the supreme Artificer for all that was wisely and skillfully made; by the beauty of visible things let us raise ourselves to Him who is above all beauty".² The deep concept of the words glorifies the Lord as the Great Creator, who, perfect and fair Himself, creates from nothingness the likewise beautiful heaven and earth by means of grace, power and wisdom. Vl. Loski's opinion on the creation of the universe from nothing is quite interesting. According to the scholar, the making of the world from nothingness implies the following: What the universe was created from was not the divine essence, neither was it material (as the matter can not be referred to as nothing). Creation of the world from nothingness means that God created an altogether new plot which had not existed before and which the Lord granted existence and "allotted a place" beside His completeness. This plot is infinitely distant from Him "not in space but in its nature" (οὐ τοπῶ, ἀλλὰ φύσει), as John Damascene put it.³ So, God initiates the creation of a being and of existence from nothingness through His good will so as to share His own grace and divine existence with another being whose nature is different from His, and who is a creature.

"In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth..." – these are the first words of the Bible and according to Basil the Great, the making of the heavens and the earth implies that God laid the foundation from which the heavens and the earth were created. He writes: "But God, before all those things which now attract our notice existed, after casting about in His mind and determining to bring into being time which had no being, imagined the world such as it ought to be, and created matter in harmony with the forth which He wished to give it. He assigned to the heavens the nature adapted for the heavens, and gave to the earth an essence in accordance with its form"⁴ – i.e. before creating the visible world, the Lord projected in advance the way He would appreciate the universe to look like and designed the nature to fit the heavens in accordance with His (God's) decision and the "matter" to fit the earth in accordance with his intention and will as concerns the image of the earth. In connection with the above mentioned "heavens" Basil the Great comments that God adapted to them the "nature" and not the "matter" as according to Basil (and the same idea is substantiated by Gregory of Nyssa), the heavens mentioned here are not the heavens we see (the heavens visible to us, i.e. the material heavens were created on the second day of the Biblical Crea-

² Basile de Cesarée, *Homélie sur l'hexaéméron*, Texte grec, introduction et traduction de Stanislas Giff, Gerf (Source Chrétiennes No 26, bis.), Paris 1968, 134, 28A.

³ В. Н. Лосский, *Очерк мистического богословия восточной церкви, Догматическое богословие*, издатель Центр "СЭИ", Москва 1991, 71.

⁴ Basile de Cesarée, *Homélie sur l'hexaéméron*, 148, 33A.

tion). While dwelling on the heavens created on the first day of Creation, Basil the Great refers⁵ to St. Paul, who mentions the "third heaven" (*II Cor.* 12, 2) and to the Psalms saying "highest heavens" (*Ps.* 184, 4), which implies several heavens. The idea is specified by Gregory of Nyssa, who says that the created universe consists of three heavens, which are 1. The sky cover right around the earth; 2. Galaxy; 3. The Paradise, which St. Paul was honored to see.⁶

"... the earth was a formless void ...". According to Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa, it was invisible as the matter was invisible and shapeless,⁷ and being a "void" means that it lacked flowers, trees and all that embellishes the earth and what is referred to as its embellishments.⁸

"... and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters" (σκότος ἐπάνω τῆς ἀβύσσου, καὶ πνεῦμα Θεοῦ ἐπεφέρετο ἐπάνω τοῦ ὕδατος) St. Basil interprets "the deep" as the multitude of waters and their depth difficult to reach,⁹ while the seemingly controversial phrase that the darkness was over "the deep" and "a wind from God" moved over it, is explained by Gregory of Nyssa as follows: God is the unattainable light and is distant from the darkness as well as from every kind of evil; and as God and the Holy Spirit are one essence, "a wind from God" that "swept over the face of the waters" was also light.¹⁰ Moreover, Gods' creations are all good in their structure and consequently, the deep was also good in its structure. So, how shall we understand the darkness over the deep? In this connection, the Bishop of Nyssa writes that the light represented by the Holy Spirit that moved over the deep was not yet brightened in that matter, has not yet penetrated it, and therefore darkness was over the deep while the Spirit of God moved above on His own. Here "darkness" conventionally refers to the lack of light.¹¹

So, the deep awaited the order of God to brighten up with light; the text logically continues with God's words: "Let there be light". The first words uttered by God as known to men and as written in the Bible are "Let there be light" – the words that grant beauty and light brightened up the matter with the grace that had abode over it and had not yet penetrated it. As soon as the

⁵ Ibid, 198, 57B-200, 57C.

⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *Apologia*, PG 44, 121, A, B, C.

⁷ Ibid, PG 44, 80A.

⁸ Basile de Cesarée, *Homélie sur l'hexaéméron*, 140, 29A.

⁹ Ibid, 156, 37A,B.

¹⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *Apologia*, PG 44, 81,B,C.

¹¹ Ibid, PG 44, 84A.

words were uttered, they were turned into the deed and the grace and light of the Holy Spirit brightened up the material world.

"And God saw the light was good" – the Greek text says "καὶ εἶδεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸ φῶς ὅτι καλόν" (Γεν.1,4). In the Book of Creation, every daily deed, every single episode ends with God's vision and appreciation of His creations, with the admission that what He created is "good": "And God saw the light was good". The phrase, like the preceding sentences, reads in the Greek text (according to *Septuaginta*) as follows: "καὶ εἶδεν ὁ Θεὸς ὅτι καλόν". The word "καλός" means "beautiful", "fair", "good", "serving good purpose", "morally beautiful". "right", "noble".¹² Its Hebrew equivalent "tov" also denotes "good", "corresponding", which in the given case may imply "corresponding to God's will" – when God saw the world of his own creation, He saw it the way He wished it to be; what He saw corresponded to his intention and will. In this connection, Al. Men writes: "The Bible says that God is fond of the light He created, and of the world He created. That "tov", "tov" means "beautiful", "good", and in the end the Book says: "tov neod", i.e. "very good", "very beautiful" and "perfect".¹³ While providing profound comments on Gregory of Nyssa's above writing, the German scholar Fr. Risch notes that all created by God is beautiful and this fullness of beauty should be discerned in all beings. The general word "good" is used when the material world was created as the creatures – animals, plants, etc. – are all diverse; while after creating a human being, it is said: "very good", which refers to the perfection and faultlessness of man; "very" implies the sense of "faultlessness".¹⁴

While commenting on *The Six Days of Creation*, Basil the Great highlights all senses of "καλός" and explains that the primary components of God's intention is goodness and usefulness of the creations while outer, visible beauty is not essential; however, it is implied that all God's creatures are beautiful.

Let us come back to the text analysis and see how Basil the Great understands the goodness and beauty of the light. "How can we worthily praise light after the testimony given by the Creator to its goodness? ... how in a simple and homogeneous essence like light, can this idea of beauty be preserved? Would not the symmetry in light be less shown in its parts than in the

¹² A Lexicon Abridged from Liddell and Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford, at the Clarendon Press. Printed and bound in Great Britain by Butler & Tanner Ltd, Frome and London. 1993.

¹³ Александр Мень, *Шестоднев*, ihtik. lib. ru / philosopher.

¹⁴ Gregor von Nyssa über das Sechstageswerk Bibliothek der Griechischen Literatur, B. 49, eingel., übers. und komm. von Franz Xaver Risch, Anton Hiersemann / Stuttgart 1999, 78-79.

pleasure and delight at the sight of it?"¹⁵ – Basil the Great writes and explains that despite the comprehensive, all-embracing beauty of light, it is not for its visible beauty that God calls it good; far more essential and important are the usefulness and goodness that light brings to men – light is accompanied with brightness, which helps the world around open its eyes, i.e. the important thing is that the beauty bears goodness.

The following words of the Bible "and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day" (*Gen.1, 4-5*) delimit the first day and may be understood in the following way: God separated light from darkness i.e. the "lightless" space; and the light or the period when the heaven and the earth are lit were called Day while the "lightless" period was called Night, and both together were called not Day and Night but One Day because Day as existing in light was regarded superior: "Evening is then the boundary common to day and night; and in the same way morning constitutes the approach of night to day. It was to give day the privileges of seniority that Scripture put the end of the first day before that of the first night, because night follows day: for, before the creation of light, the world was not in night, but in darkness. It is the opposite of day which was called night, and it did not receive its name until after day".¹⁶ As the words make it clear, Moses mentions evening prior to morning as evening is the end of the day and morning the hour when the night meets the day. And as the day is superior to the night, evening is superior to morning. According to Basil the Great, this is why time is counted through days and this is why David the Prophet says, "the length of our days" (*Ps. 89, 10*). This is how the first day and the creation of order, Cosmos from Chaos started on the earth.

Moses describes the start of the second and the third days as follows: "And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters". So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear". And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together He called Seas. And God saw that it was good" (*Gen.1, 6-10*).

The first verse already mentioned the making of the heavens and the earth while the above cited passage, as Basil the Great comments, implies the sky

¹⁵ Basile de Cesarée, *Homélie sur l'hexaéméron*, 174, 48A.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 176, 48C-178, 49A.

which "... is different from the heaven which was made at the beginning; ... it is of a stronger nature and of an especial use to the universe".¹⁷ I.e. this is the visible sky – "strong" (as Basil the Great puts it), solid in its essence, so-called material sky – where rain and snow come from and where one sees lights, and not the heaven mentioned in the first verse. While the earth, which was invisible as it was covered with waters, became visible after the waters were "gathered together": "Let the waters be gathered together, and let the dry land appear". The veil is lifted and allows the earth, hitherto invisible, to be seen"

("Συνέλεκεται τὰ παραπετάσματα, ἵνα ἐμφανῆς γένηται ἡ τέως μὴ ὄρωμένη").¹⁸ Writes Basil the Great comparing in an eloquent manner the act of unveiling the invisible to God's deed when the dry land was made visible by means of placing the waters aside.

Basil understands the waters above the sky as the vapor produced by rivers and seas that turns into clouds and protects the earth from the heat.¹⁹

As concerns the lower waters, it is clearly written that "the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good". The passage, like that about light, refers to the favorableness of creating the sea, its benefit and usefulness. Basil the Great describes the fascinating charm of the violet-blue placidity of the sea; however, he concludes that "It is not with eyes that the Creator views the beauty ("τὰ κάλλη") of His works....., it is not in this that Scripture makes God find the goodness ("καλῆν") and charm of the sea. Here it is the purpose of the work which makes the goodness ("τὸ καλὸν")."²⁰ I.e. God called good those qualities of the sea that put this fascination to the service of goodness, of human's kind deeds. While considering the favorableness of the sea, Basil the Great dwells on the waters with which the sea nourishes the earth, and on the large number of activities that link humans to the sea: navigation, connection of lands through seas and trade, evaporation of water and rainfall and many others. The divine Eye saw all this in advance and while appreciating it said it was all good.²¹ The words, like entire *Genesis*, clearly imply that God makes all beautiful and fascinating: from the nothingness and chaos the heaven and the earth are created and light is cast over the deep; the sky and the earth appear, and the sea acquires its place. All created is beautiful but the most important is that everything is good as they imply the potential service to a man, and were made to be highly

¹⁷ Ibid, 202, 60A.

¹⁸ Ibid, 148, 81A.

¹⁹ Ibid, 224, 69B.

²⁰ Ibid, 270, 92B.

²¹ Ibid, 274, 93B.

favorable and useful to humans in many diverse ways, and thus the sky, the earth and likewise the man through the kind deeds to be accomplished with their help will fulfill their respective functions before God and will give glory to their Creator.

In the second half of the third day, plants emerged, and on the fourth day the lights appeared. "Then God said, "Let the Earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it. And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seeds of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth". And it was so. God made the two great lights – the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night – the stars (lights). God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day" (*Gen.* 1,11-19).

Light is already mentioned in the first verse; however, as stated above, that was the divine, eternal, non-made light – the Spirit of God that has ever existed with God; while on the fourth day, the material light was created, i.e. the light issued from material, physical, created energy, and as the source for this physical energy, lights were created so as to separate day from night. So, first the vegetation is made, which, at the first sight, could not have appeared without the sun, and then, on the fourth day, the sun and the moon were created, while day and night had existed even before that.

Basil the Great praises God, whose one verbal order made the barren and dry land produce grass, trees and beautiful flowers: "Let the earth bring forth". See how, at this short word, at this brief command, the cold and sterile earth travailed and hastened to bring forth its fruit, as it cast away its sad and dismal covering to clothe itself in a more brilliant robe, proud of its proper adornment and displaying the infinite variety of plants" ("βλαστησάτω ἡ γῆ. Νόησόν μοι ἐκ μικρᾶς φωνῆς, καὶ προστάγματος οὕτω βραχείως, τὴν κατεψυγμένην καὶ ἄγονον ὠδίνουσαν ἀθρόως καὶ πρὸς καρπογονίαν συγκινουμένην, ὥσπερ τινα σκυθρωπὴν καὶ πευθῆρη ἀπορρίψασαν περιβολὴν, μεταμφιεσμένην τὴν φαιδρότεραν καὶ τοῖς οἰκείοις κόσμοις ἀγαλλομένην, καὶ τὰ μυρία γένη τῶν φυομένων προ

βάλλουσαν").²² According to Basil the Great, God created plants and trees prior to the sun so that each and everyone could realize the power of God and that God is the Creator, and not ascribe the embellishment of the earth to the lights, neither worship the sun as the god: "The reason why the adornment of the earth was before the sun is the following; that those who worship the sun, as the source of life, may renounce their error. If they be well persuaded that the earth was adorned before the genesis of the sun, they will retract their unbounded admiration for it, because they see grass and plants vegetate before it rose".²³

While talking about lights, God's intention to create them envisaged the considerable benefit that their movement, also time recording and weather forecast with their help would bring to the mankind. One can tell the weather according to the shape of the moon – whether full or crescent, which is very beneficial – especially for those (e.g. sailors) whose job is connected with the weather, and whose experience helps them avoid a lot of dangers if they closely watch the nature – according to the moon, the sailor can be certain whether to expect the rain and wind or not, and will not enter the sea thus avoiding danger. By describing this and some other cases, the Bishop of Caesarea points to the purposefulness and consistency of all beings and their respective existences as implied in the *Genesis* – of the sky covered all over with lights and bright stars and of the earth decorated with trees, wonderful grass and flowers; of the movement of lights and cultivation of plants with seeds – all fulfilling their respective functions so as to build up the common purposefulness and co-existence (e.g. the lights favor the cultivation of plants) and to meet in their unity the daily needs of men: wood for warmth and living, plants for nourishment, etc.

On the fifth and the sixth days the first living creatures appeared on the earth, in the sea and the sky. "And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky". So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth". And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind". And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle

²² Ibid, 284, 97B.

²³ Ibid, 280, 96B.

of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good" (*Gen.* 1, 20-25).

First of all, it should be mentioned that as soon as the living creatures appeared, God blessed them, which Moses had not stated before. The second important point to highlight is that as soon as the animal loses blood, its flesh joins the earth and "Do not suppose that ... [its soul] survives the dissolution of the flesh"²⁴ – i.e. unlike the man, the animal does not have the immortal soul.

It is noteworthy that birds are created from waters, which Basil the Great explains by the similar build and movements of birds and fish. The bird cleaves through the air with its wings the same way as the fish does through the water with its fins both maintaining the direction of their movement by means of their caudal appendage. God created all good, and took care of all of them – created them so as to fit the environment they would exist within, for their own sake: the swallow was created short-legged as it does not need long ones, and the hen was made long-legged as it needs to walk on the earth and find food.²⁵

Basil of Caesarea is the great exegete and preacher. Admittedly, his *Hexaemeron* was delivered during the sermon, and his commentaries were intended for the congregation. Therefore, along with exegetic content, the work includes as well edifying episodes, which makes it more multicolored and attractive. We may bring several examples to illustrate the above statement. Basil refers to birds and animals and this way preaches the faith in God, kindness, lack of evil, wisdom and purity. Let us recall these wonderful passages from *Hexaemeron*: it is commonly known that bees are useful to all, their activities are quite interesting to observe – they obey the king, none of the bees flies up earlier than the king in order not to pass ahead the latter. The most surprising thing is that the king is not elected, neither does it claim its position by force – it is born distinct from all: "It is nature which makes the king of the bees, for nature gives him superior size, beauty, and sweetness of character".²⁶ And the king bee, who is superior to the rest of the bees not by its force but by its inward placidity has one more distinction: it does not have a sting and is completely harmless; never takes revenge, while the bee that disobeys the king bitterly regrets that later and dies from his own sting. Here Basil the Great refers to St. Paul's Epistle and offers his words as an aphorism: "Listen, Christians, you to whom it is forbidden to "recompense evil for evil" and commanded "to overcome evil with good" ("

²⁴ Ibid, 434, 168A-436, 168B.

²⁵ Ibid, 440, 169A,B.

²⁶ Ibid, 448, 173B.

Ἄκουέτωσαν Χριστιανοί, οἷς πρόσταγμά ἐστι μηδεὶν κακὸν ἀντὶ κακοῦ ἀποδιδόναι, ἀλλὰ νικᾶν ἐν τῷ ἀγαθῷ τὸ κακόν".²⁷

The Bishop of Caesarea relates about the bird halcyon (Gr. Lat. *alcedo hispida*), which lays eggs along the shore and hatches its nestlings in winter when the wind rages. During the seven days when halcyon broods, the wind drops and the sea calms down, and on the seventh day the eggs are hatched. More than that, God grants the bird another seven calm days so that it could raise its nestlings, and "All sailors know this, and call these days halcyon days. If divine Providence has established these marvellous laws in favour of creatures devoid of reason, it is to induce you to ask for your salvation from God," – this is how Basil the Great addresses men, for if the sea was ordered to calm down for the reason of one bird, how much more wonders God will make "for you-you have been made in His image".²⁸

After that Basil the Great talks about the turtle-dove, which, separated from her mate, does not seek to contact a new one in remembrance of her first mate. The Bishop of Caesarea addresses widows: "What veneration for widowhood, even in these creatures devoid of reason, how they prefer it to an unbecoming multiplicity of marriages".²⁹

We will not dwell long on animals and will only give an example of the sea urchin. Basil the Great states: This creature, ugly and small at the first sight, can in fact be a teacher as concerns the unrest and appeasement of the sea, it feels in advance the pending wind and the tempest, gets under a large stone and clings to it in order not to be taken away by the waves. This way, sailors understand that they are threatened with the tempest and do not enter the sea. So, God endowed this contemptible creature with great wisdom and vital goodness.³⁰

The "unfinished" earth of the first day of the Creation became "finished" on the sixth day. The sky was embellished with lights and stars, the earth with herbs, birds and animals, and the sea with fish. "Then God said: "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness ("καὶ εἶπεν ὁ Θεός· Ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον, κατ' εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ κ

²⁷ Ibid, 448, 173B, cf.: "Do not repay anyone evil for evil; ... Do not be overcome by evil but overcome κακὸν ἀντὶ κακοῦ ἀποδιδόντες... μὴ νικῶ ὑπὸ τοῦ κακοῦ, ἀλλὰ νίκα ἐν τῷ ἀγαθῷ τὸ κακόν (Ρωμ. 12,17-21).

²⁸ Ibid, 456,177A,B. The Latin-Russian Dictionary gives the following definition of the word: "alcedo (*halcedo*), inis, f – halcyon, a bird that hatches its nestlings in the warm days of winter". Its derivatives are *alcedonia* (*halcedonia*)*orum* [*alcedo*] (sc. tempora) 1) Calm, windless days of winter; 2) Calmness, silence, И. Х. Дворецкий, Латинско-Русский словарь, Москва, "Русский язык", 1976.

²⁹ Ibid, 458, 177C.

³⁰ Ibid, 416, 160A,B.

αθ' ὁμοίωσιν"); and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth". "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them" ("κατ' εἰκόνα Θεοῦ ἐποίησεν αὐτόν") (*Gen.* 1,26-27). "Then the Lord formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being" (*Gen.* 2,7). "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good" (*Gen.* 1,31). While creating other beings, God did not judge – He said and the world was created with animals and birds in it, but when God made a human, the Hypostases of the Holy Trinity³¹ – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – judged, which is evidenced by the plural form: "Let us make ..." The participation of the Son in the creation together with the Father is attested by the beginning of the Gospel by John: "In the beginning was the Word ("the Word", as commonly admitted, refers to Christ) and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... All things were created by him, and without him nothing was created" (John 1, 1-3). The participation of the Holy Spirit in the creation is stated in the very first chapter of the Bible: "... a wind from God swept over the face of the waters" (*Gen.* 1,2). The idea is verified by the Holy Fathers: Ephraem Syrus, Cyril of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea,³² Gregory of Nyssa write that He, who said, "Let us make in our image" said it in the plurality of the Trinity.³³

Here we may face the following question: why was the man created on the sixth day, last of all? Gregory of Nyssa gives an answer to the question: "For this reason man was brought into the world last after the creation, not being rejected to the last as worthless, but as one whom it behoved to be king over his subjects at his very birth".³⁴ The Lord first prepared the dominion for the man, which was the earth embellished with all kinds of goodness, and then the man himself was made as the king. God gave the man His own image, and His own spirit as well – the immortal spirit; so He gave the man the superior spirit and flesh, divine, called to be perpetual, and granted him the free will – thus making him immortal and assigning him to be the king. The essence of being a king is presented throughout the entire Holy Scripture and the patristic literature. "For as, in men's ordinary use, those who make images of princes both mould the figure of their form, and represent along with this the royal rank by the vesture of purple, and even the likeness is commonly

³¹ In this connection, see Митр. Антоний Сурожский, ...*Мужчину и женщину сотворил их*, <http://www.pagez.ru/olb/103.php>.

³² Basile de Cesarée, *Homélie sur l'hexaéméron*, 518, 205C, 208A.

³³ Gregory of Nyssa, *De Hominis Opificio*, PG 44, §6, 40B.

³⁴ *Ibid*, PG 44, §2, 133A.

spoken of as "a king", so the human nature also, as it was made to rule the rest, was, by its likeness to the King of all, made as it were a living image, partaking with the archetype both in rank and in name, not vested in purple, nor giving indication of its rank by sceptre and diadem (for the archetype itself is not arrayed with these), but instead of the purple robe, clothed in virtue, which is in truth the most royal of all raiment...³⁵ Gregory of Nyssa writes and names the virtues through which a man should perceive the true life; "...purity, freedom from passion, blessedness, alienation from all evil, and all those attributes of the like kind which help to form in men the likeness of God...".³⁶ While the evil is the servility to the sin which entails, as Gregory of Nyssa writes, gradual assimilation with brutes until the human nature becomes fully akin to the image of a brute.³⁷ The virtues are obtained by the reasonable behavior of a man. Gregory of Nyssa comments on the role of reasoning in obtaining the divine beauty and goodness: The perfection, fulfillment of every goodness is God, to whom all kindly creatures aspire; therefore, the reason bears the likeness to the goodness provided it is laid on the foundation of beauty – God – in accordance with its own powers; within such a framework it is beautiful. The reason that follows God rules the human body and maintains and enhances his likeness to God. As soon as the reason is detached from God, it loses the control over the body and the opposite process starts: passions i.e. sins dominate the human body, the body enslaved by passions rule the reason and deprive it of the divine beauty and nature. Consequently, the human loses the likeness to God.³⁸ In connection with this commentary by Gregory of Nyssa, P. Bouteneff writes; "νοῦς itself is not God's image unconditionally, it must partake in its likeness to the archetype. It must govern the body, not be governed by it, or else the soul will also lose its iconic beauty".³⁹ So, if virtues contribute to the likeness of humans to God, which humans are called to maintain, abandonment of the virtues entails the loss of the divine likeness and image and alienates them from the Divine Spirit.

Among the virtues, the Disciples as well as the Holy Fathers distinguish the three most important ones: faith, hope and love. St. John of Sinai, the author of *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, mentions the three virtues on the highest, the thirtieth step, and like the Disciples, he also writes that amongst the

³⁵ Ibid, PG 44, §4, 136D.

³⁶ Ibid, PG 44, §5, 137B.

³⁷ Ibid, PG 44, §18, 192D.

³⁸ Ibid, PG 44, §12, 161C.

³⁹ Peter C. Bouteneff, *Essential or existential: the problem of the body in the anthropology of st. Gregory of Nyssa*, Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Beatitudes, ed. by Hubertus R. Drobner and Albert Viciano, Brill. Leiden. Boston. Köln, 2001, 412.

three, love is superior as it is called God.⁴⁰ Two images are distinguished within love: love for God, which, according to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus Christ calls the first and foremost commandment, and the second, similar to that, is the love for a neighbor. "The whole law and the prophets hang on these two commandments" (*Matt.* 22,40). I.e. the Savior reduced the whole Scripture, the Old and the New Testaments, to the two mentioned commandments, out of which the superior one, love for God, is expressed through the obedience assigned to a man in the Garden of Eden: "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (*Gen.* 2,16-17). The man, as a free being, was offered a choice to either get closer to the Creator and succeed to the entire heritage, or lose whatever he possessed, i.e. either obtain immortality which he was called to succeed to through his divine image and immortal spirit, or lose the image through his dishonest deeds liable to death. Gregory of Nyssa writes that every reasonable action resembles the divine beauty, while the deviation towards sinfulness is grave and leads to the abyss.⁴¹ Gregory of Nyssa presents the move of a human towards God as an aspect of the category of beauty and goodness.⁴²

All above mentioned can be put in a few words: God created the invisible and visible worlds from nothingness with all the beauty and goodness that corresponds to His own perfect goodness and beneficial beauty and assigned man to be the king of the earth as He made him in His own image and granted him the immortal soul. God took care of every creature, considered vital needs of each and every being, and created all good. All earthly beings are called to serve man and this way praise their Creator. On his part, man is called to serve God with his kindly deeds, through obtaining virtues so that the creature made in the image of God could maintain likeness to God and succeed to eternal life and immortality. The ascent of the ladder of virtues is everlasting; likewise eternal is the way leading to God and the opportunities of perfection.

⁴⁰ *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* by Reverend John of Sinai Mountain, Zugdidi, 1997, 261, cf.: "God is love" (*I John* 4, 16), "Faith, hope, and love now remain, these three; and love is the greatest of these" (*I Cor.* 13,13).

⁴¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *De Hominis Opificio*, PG 44, §18, 194C.

⁴² In this connection, see T. Dolidze, *Der Κίνησις-Begriff der Griechischen Philosophie bei Gregor von Nyssa*, Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Beatitudes, ed. by Hubertus R. Drobner and Albert Viciano, Brill/ Leiden. Boston. Köln, 2001.