

The Tripartite Nature of Man

My Soul Magnifies the Lord, My Spirit Rejoices in God my Savior:
Bishop Kallistos Ware's: *The Orthodox Way*

And what is man's place in God's creation? "I pray to God that your whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23). Here St. Paul mentions the three elements or aspects that constitute the human person. While distinct, these aspects are strictly interdependent; man is an integral unity, not the sum total of separable parts.

First, there is the *body*, "dust from the ground" (Gen. 2:7), the physical or material aspect of man's nature.

Secondly, there is the *soul*, the life-force that vivifies and animates the body, causing it to be not just a lump of matter, but something that grows and moves, that feels and perceives. Animals also possess a soul, and so perhaps do plants. But in man's case the soul is endowed with consciousness; it is a rational soul, possessing the capacity for abstract thought, and the ability to advance by discursive argument from premises to a conclusion. These powers are present in animals, if at all, only to a very limited degree.

Thirdly, there is the *spirit*, the "breath" from God (see Gen. 2:7), which the animals lack. It is important to distinguish "Spirit," with an initial capital, from "spirit" with a small s. The created spirit of man is not to be identified with the uncreated or Holy Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity; yet the two are intimately connected, for it is through his spirit that man apprehends God and enters into communion with him.

With his soul (*psyche*) man engages in scientific or philosophical inquiry, analyzing the data of his sense-experience by means of the discursive reason. With his spirit (*pneuma*), which is sometimes termed *nous* or spiritual intellect, he understands eternal truth about God or about the *logoi* or inner essences of created things, not through deductive reasoning, but by direct apprehension or spiritual perception -by a kind of intuition that St. Isaac the Syrian calls "simple cognition." The spirit or spiritual intellect is thus distinct from man's reasoning powers and his aesthetic emotions, and superior to both of them.

Because man has a rational soul and a spiritual intellect, he possesses the power of self-determination and of moral freedom, that is to say, the sense of good and evil, and the ability to choose between them. Where the animals act by instinct, man is capable of making a free and conscious decision.

Sometimes the Fathers adopt not a tripartite but a twofold scheme, describing man simply as a unity of body and soul; in that case they treat the spirit or intellect as the highest aspect of the soul. But the threefold scheme of body, soul and spirit is more precise and more illuminating, particularly in our own age when the soul and the spirit are often confused, and when most people are not even aware that they possess a spiritual intellect. The culture and educational system of the contemporary West are based almost exclusively upon the training of the reasoning brain and, to a lesser degree, of the aesthetic emotions. Most of us have forgotten that we are not only brain and will, senses and feelings; we are also spirit. Modern man has for the most part lost touch with the truest and highest aspect of himself; and the result of this inward alienation can be seen all too plainly in his restlessness, his lack of identity and his loss of hope (pgs. 47-48)