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HUMAN WEAKNESS AND THE NEED OF GOD IN BIOETHICS

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Abstract

The theological statement in the Old and New Testaments, according to which man is created in the image and likeness of God (Gen.1.27), represented a liberating force in the world, inspiring humanity to respect and protect the dignity of every human being.

However, the various interpretations given to "the image of God" sometimes create confusion and cancel the liberating force of the syntagm.

Abusive use of "God's image" was possible because of the conception that it reduces only to the way people are different from animals, that is, they have the will and the sense to turn to God.

For a better understanding of biblical meaning, the article describes the theological perspective on the weaknesses of humanity and the need of God, or more precisely, the finding in the image of God

Key words: bioethics, image of Good, human weakness

1. Man, a being created in God's image

The way in which the human being is to be viewed and treated from the Christian perspective is founded on the fact that man was created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1: 27). So every person bears this inalienable image in his own consciousness, in the depth of his being.

It is the image of God that gives absolute value to each human being and makes it sovereignly, worthy of respect, whatever his sex, race, age or state. This means that man is a dynamic being, existing in relation to the Trinitarian God, He imagines Him and it relates to Him (Buta, 2017).

In connection with this subject, the grammatical plural of the biblical reference on the creation of man is carefully observed: "*Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness "*" (Gen. 1: 26). Saint Parents see in this the first scriptural revelation on the people of the Trinity.

Relying on the statement in Holy Scripture that "*God formed a man from the dust of the ground*" (Gen. 2.7), the inspired author of the Genesis teaches us that in the beginning God's creation was good in its entirety (Gen. 1.31) and from the comments of the Holy Fathers it appears that man from the beginning of his nature completely ignores illness, infirmity, pain and corruption: "*Man lived in the joys of heaven ... possessing the integrity of his faculties, in the natural state in which he was created*"(Teachings I). The same thing is shown in the statement of St. Maximus the Confessor: "*The first man, having taken his Being*

from God, came to existence ... free from sin and corruption, for neither sin nor corruption were created with him"(Answers to Talasie 21) .

As far as the body is concerned, the respect is due to the fact that it is a constituent part of the human being, which is why it also bears the image of God in man (Larchet, 2004). In addition, the value is given by the fact that the Son of God being a man, thus taking the human face, sanctified it, so that the body of every man became, as Apostle Paul says "*the temple of the Holy Spirit*" (I Cor. 6:19). In other words, Christ incarnating Himself has assumed both the body and the human soul. The body is meant to rise and be deified by grace with the soul. Therefore, at any age, it can not be treated as a simple means and therefore can not be the object of experiments, a biological product bank or a reserve of organs.

2. What it means to be created in God's image

The biblical concept of God's image embodied in Genesis 1: 26-27 does not indicate that people are the image of God, but are created in God's image. How do we understand this statement? Being God's image means not only having a special relationship with Him but also a special reflection of God.

The idea of being an image means having a special connection highlighted in Daniel 3: 1-7, which presents the desire of King Nebuchadnezzar that his followers should worship a golden face set in Dura in the land of Babylon. Whoever disdained this image was thrown into a burning furnace as they did to the Jewish Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who refused to worship this image, had shown that they really did not want to respect the original. In those times, the picture provided something about a king or a leader.

The other element, present in an image is how a reflection of the particular features of the original is provided.

In the Old Testament times, the picture provided something about a king or a leader. In Daniel 3, "*the golden face of 60 cubits and six cubits wide,*" was meant to reflect the grandeur and richness of the king.

When the New Testament discusses the "*image of God*", both connection and reflection are considered. For example, St. Paul states in the Epistle to the Colossians: "*Christ is the image of the invisible God*" (Col. 1:15). In other words, Christ gives people the opportunity to see God. Jesus himself says this: "*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father... believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me*" (John 14: 9,10, 12:45). Even more, "*I and Father are One*" (John 10:30). So Jesus is a reflection of God, that is, someone who can be seen in contrast to the "*invisible God*."

When people receive Christ, they see the features, the expression of all divine things, and the way God interacts and shapes humans.

If, in the Old Testament, human beings are not God's image, but only created according to the standard of what God is, in the New Testament, it becomes much clearer that Christ, as God's image, is the standard that people must comply (Kilner, 2017).

Commenting on the condition of Christ in relation to people, the Apostle Paul warns us about the difference between Christ, which is the image of God and humans who need growth and transformation after the standard of this image (Kilner, 2017).

If people are created in God's image (Genesis 1: 27), it means they have a special connection with Him, which is why annoying a human being presupposes to upset God (Genesis 9: 6, James 3: 9). Even more, people are an intentional reflection of God. The concept does not mean "are like God," but rather "in likeness to God" (Gen. 1: 22; James 3: 9), thus calling into question God's intent.

3. God and human weakness

There are moments in life when, consciously or unconsciously, people believe themselves to be powerful as God. But to be strong as God means not to depend on anything else, because He is infinite, omnipresent, self-sufficient and eternal. For all these, the pantheists have identified Him with the whole of the universe, and the polytheists have multiplied His faces.

We wonder, of course, whether people are powerful in themselves and like God in different ways, or on the contrary, are weak and need the power of God.

We do not know people well than in the big events. How many of them did not appear cowardly, crazy or shy, and others brave or even fierce in front of catastrophes? Some are shirking from the first difficulty, others take a tremendous upsurge in front of unbearable obstacles, so we often do not recognize them anymore. It is as if they get an external impulse, or on the contrary, as if a force is hiding and only expects a moment to explode. Man is not only what he seems to be, we should see him in all imaginable situations, in the face of unrelenting obstacles and tasks, to discover what exists in the depths of his soul. But this is not always possible because man is limited by time and space.

Throughout his life he experiences only partial, limited and obscure experiences. There are, however, moments when man manifests himself fully in his actions. It is often higher than them, but they betray him in both meanings of the word, that is, reveal him and hide him. It reveals him when he engages with all his soul and hides him when he is led by events, habits and actions of all kinds.

But the level of events, circumstances and deeds must be overcome to observe the mystery of the person herself, the secret of individuality, unity, singularity, and also, no matter how paradoxical it may seem, we are easily deviated from creature to creator and taken to see the hand of God, because there is an imbalance, a power that must be released. It is about that unstable human ontological constitution of the human that makes him at the same time bigger and smaller than himself (Comte, 1999). So we discover that man has something divine.

We have talked so far about the fact that he was created by the image of God, and now we see him possessing an aspect of the infinite, one corroborates the other. We then understand the drama that a child's death can cause: it is the collapse of an infinity blooming. We understand the irrationality of an authentic love: for when we love someone, we do not only do it for wealth, not even for his beautiful eyes, but only "because is him or her, because they are"(Comte, 1999).

The human person has value in himself. He is not and can not be either a means or a tool; he is a supreme value destined to define everything that happens. So man can not be the object of a passive receiver Ego and ultimately a victim through the absence of existence, but rather the active Ego, inventive and creative Ego, an Ego that opens, turns and flourishes, a Self-like Creator God that is only discovered in novelty, diversity, individuality and life.

Among the sins that appear to provoke God the most is pride in one's own strength, as it happened to Israel on multiple occasions. Thus God vows to make Egypt "*the lowliest of kingdoms and it will never again rule over the nations.*" (Ezekiel 29:15) and explains that this is due to pride "*Because you said, The rivers are mine and I made them*"(Ezekiel 29: 9). The people of Teba (Nahum 3: 9) and Babylon (Hab.1: 11) "lose their own powers," because they depended more on them than on God. When Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, became arrogant and hardened with pride, "*God drove him away of people, and gave him the mind of an animal*" (Dan. 5:21). What follows is a sad illustration "*like father, like son.*" Daniel announces, "*But you, Belshazzar, his son, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this*" (Dan. 5:22). So God ended his reign that very night by definitively removing his strength, and in the end God will expose all who say, "*I am strong*".

Although weakness accompanies sin, particular weakness is not necessarily an indication of particular sin. More often, the weakness that comes with human finiteness is simply a context, as with the man blind since birth (John 9: 3). In man's weakness, the strength of God may sometimes appear only human strength, and Job stands as, perhaps, the clearest illustration of this weakness (Job 1: 12-19). Says God about him, "*Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.*" (Job 2: 3). Not until the end of the story does Job learn from God that at stake here was whether or not God's justice would be discredited (Job 40: 8). Job's experience opens the door wide to an awareness that human weakness is about far more than meets the eye.

Paul himself was no stranger to weakness, in his second letter to the Corinthians, he explains the benefits that God can work through people's experience of weakness, by observing that weakness can free people both from their inappropriate strength and for God's all-sufficient strength. In Paul's case, he had such a vivid experience of God that pride was a great temptation for him: "*To keep me from becoming conceited,*" he writes, "*there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me*" (2 Paul, 1: 11, 16-25). This weakness, which God permitted, saved Paul not only from conceit, but also connected him with God's strength. The lesson was so crucial that God spoke directly to him: "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness!*" (2 Corinthians 12: 9). And to make this message an enduring one for Paul and for the entire church, God did not remove the weakness from Paul, but instead gave him the strength to endure it in an ongoing way.

4. God in bioethics

Being God's image has great bioethical implications, influencing the way bioethical challenges are addressed and solved.

Of course, Christian bioethics are not legalistic, ie their answers to questions about correct or wrong behaviour should not be understood based on the model of legal judgments of guilt or innocence, but in terms of bringing people closer to union with God (Hierotheos, 1998).

Here is a telling example from Paterikon reported by Greek Metropolitan Hiertheos Vlachos and taken over by H. Tristan Engelhardt Jr.:

A brother asked Avva Pimen saying, "*I did great sin, and I want to repent for three years.*" He told the old man, "*It's a lot.*" And the brother said, "*But up to a year?*" And the old man said again, "*It's a lot.*" But those who were present said, "*But up to 40 days?*" And again he said, "*It is a lot.*" And he added, "*I say that if the man repents deeply from his heart and will not sin anymore and in three days he receives God*" "... Here is not about emphasizing certain rules, but about the capacity that we have to turn from ourselves to God (Hierotheos, 1998).

Christian bioethics appears absolutist, since it is an integral part of the answer to the call of Christ: "*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect!*" (Matthew 5: 48), but he also enjoys some laxity or indulgence, because for us, forgiveness is always accessible. "*If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.*" (John 20:23)

Asking love for "*your neighbour as yourself*" (Mt 22:39), loving Him at the same time "*the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and all your mind*" (Matthew 22: 37) is the standard that Jesus set for Christian bioethics, a standard that puts God's intentions for humanity first.

One of the requirements that the New Testament highlights is to bear the burden of one another (Gal. 6: 2). Whenever a bioethical problem involves the temptation to kill an uncomfortable person with the thought of relieving the family or society of the burden of

care, there are secondary considerations for those who recognize God's stated priority of not killing people, because they are created in His image. Considerations such as people's benefit and freedom of choice must be made only to the extent that they do not invalidate God's laws and priorities for human protection and prosperity.

For the traditional Christian, bioethics always goes beyond this world to the next one. Therefore, the decisions will be different because of the concerns to treat the soul and gain salvation.

The fact that Christian bioethics is based on a transcendent God, for someone outside faith, can only appear as an erroneous perspective towards the world beyond. Thus, marriage, sexuality, human reproduction, and so on, come into the journey of man to holiness, and they can not be seen in purely biological terms or with reference to purely human concerns.

The approach of consent in terms of limiting free moral agreement to the use of gametes, zygotes, embryos and fetuses leads to the persistence of culpability without specifying why. In order to understand what is wrong, a return to God is needed. The revelation of holiness and the experience of God are pursued in cult and love, which can only be correctly oriented in terms of Eucharistic Liturgy (Buta, & Buta, 2008).

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