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HUMAN DIGNITY AS THE FOUNDATION OF AN ETHOS OF WORK AND SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

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Abstract

Sociologists affirm that all people are equal before God, yet in earthly life true equality remains unattainable. Inequality, privilege, poverty, and subordination persist as inevitable consequences of a society in constant flux. Crises of every kind, especially war, expose the profound challenges confronting modern humanity. Human labor is impressed upon the material world and, in turn, offered back to God as a response to His divine gift; this is the foundational premise of work. This unwritten law underscores the enduring significance of labor throughout human history. Sociologists, psychologists, historians of religion, and social policy makers regard work as a path to human fulfillment and enrichment, yet their perspectives rarely transcend the material dimension. They emphasize labor as imposed after the fall into sin, when humanity turned away from God through disobedience and rebellion. By contrast, Christian labor fulfills the 'law of heaven': it is the work entrusted to humanity in the paradisiacal state, an unceasing effort to become 'god' by grace, in which divine existence is revealed and truly lived.

Keywords: philosophical anthropology; human dignity, morality; work;

1. INTRODUCTION

The order and hierarchy of the community, the roles that each person must play, the functions of social rank, the moral and legal rules that everyone must respect are established by the criterion of justice and Scottish equity. All citizens tend towards a Good – economic, social, moral – general. The idea of a

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state of the general Good implies the imperative that the state should not limit itself to establishing the rules of the social game, leaving each participant to reach the performance of which he is capable, but that it should intervene directly to promote the interests of all (justice, education, order, welfare, happiness, equality, etc.). Social cohesion and order, the ethical conduct of community life is based on a complicated system of duties and, as such, the emphasis is always on duty, not on rights. Social duty is an obedience to the laws of society.

Thus, Man is defined not so much by himself, by personal characteristics, but by the fact that he fills a previously prepared empty place, in a certain hierarchical social structure (Morse Peckham). "As the way in which man perceives the world changes, moving from the theological to the positivist perspective, the social order also changes" (Bryan Wilson, 2000, 11).

Towards the 15th century, the first Renaissance took place, when the philosophy of Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle were then the target of a religious respect, which merged in perfect harmony with the Christian faith. But this attitude of the spirit lasted extremely short. The second Renaissance soon followed, of the opposite orientation: it produced what we call our modern civilization. The transition from utopia to ideology, which historically represents the transition from feudal to bourgeois society, is marked by the processes of economic and administrative rationalization, initiated in the era of Enlightenment absolutism. But the rational state imagined by the French philosophers of the 18th century left unresolved the economic contradictions that had already appeared with mercantilism and physiocratic theories.

2. DIGNITY A VALUE INHERENT TO THE HUMAN BEING

In the 16th and 17th centuries, the perception of self-interest changed profoundly: the pursuit of self-interest began to appear as natural; self-love became a normal characteristic of human nature. The individual's acquisitive inclinations, his concern for his own good (pursued even to the detriment of others, for, as Hobbes declared, man compares himself to other men like a wolf: *homo homini lupus*) seemed general and inevitable. While philosophical research is either materialist (therefore, it ignores information processing) or idealist (therefore, it ignores the energetic - material - component of social existence) and scientific research is positivist, so it wants evidence validated within the limits of materialist premises, theoretical interrogations can only be unilateral and, as a result, fail to truly investigate the object itself that we call social existence.

Dignity is a value inherent to the human being. Although lacking materiality, dignity has always been a sensitive point in the manifestation of the individual in society, implicitly in his relations with others. In Ancient Rome, for the term dignity there were the noun dignitas, -atis the adjective dignus, -a, -um and the verb dignor, dignari, dignatus sum, which referred to value (<https://lege5.ro/gratuit/ha3tsmzxy3q/demnitatea-umana-si-dreptul-la-replica-in-sistemul-constitutional-roman#N3>).

The first definition of dignity was made in international legal order in relation to social rights. In this regard, the Declaration of Philadelphia of 17 May 1944 states that: all human beings have the right to pursue their material progress and their spiritual development in freedom and dignity, in economic security and with equal opportunities.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (<https://fra.europa.eu/ro/eu-charter/title/title-i-dignity>) defines in Article 1 as follows: *Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected.*

Article 2 - Right to life. (1) Everyone has the right to life.

(2) No one may be sentenced to the death penalty or executed.

Article 3 - Right to the integrity of the person

(1) Everyone has the right to physical and mental integrity.

(2) In the fields of medicine and biology, the following shall be observed in particular:

(a) the free and informed consent of the person concerned, in accordance with the procedures laid down by law. (b) the prohibition of eugenic practices, particularly those aimed at the selection of persons; (c) the prohibition of the use of the human body and its parts as such as a source of profit; (d) the prohibition of the cloning of human beings for the purpose of reproduction.

Article 4 - Prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 5 - Prohibition of slavery and enforced disappearance

- (1) *No one shall be held in slavery or servitude.*
- (2) *No one shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labor.*
- (3) *Trafficking in human beings shall be prohibited.*

Dignity from a sociological perspective has a positive side given that it facilitates the way of life of man, making him aware of his social role, but it also has a negative side given how it is achieved in modern secularized society, how its result is equitable for the whole society. "The progress of civilization, the changes produced over the centuries impose on authority more respect for the customs, for the feelings, for the independence of individuals. It must bear upon them a more prudent and lighter hand" (Benjamin Constant, 1872, 556).

3. SHORT PHILOSOPHY OF HUMAN DIGNITY

Dignity in ancient philosophy does not have a spiritual character but is recognized as a means of ennobling the human being, its social character being recognized. The foundation of dignity is human reason, which is an imperfect image of cosmic reason, a washed-out image of it. Socrates (469-399 BC), for example, considers the most useful and most worthy work to be the knowledge of man, conceived exclusively as a systematic form of applying self-awareness. "Know thyself" does not have the meaning of a precept that would invite a simple individual "inspection". Applied exclusively on the plane of consciousness, Socratic exploration ultimately aims at the detachment of those features of universality in which subjectivity converts itself into objectivity (Ioan Acsan, 1984,130).

At the heart of all Socratic thought, there is thus the appeal to the exercise of reflection, of rational discernment; the judgment of reflection acquires "ipso facto" a moral character, substituting itself for the subjective impulses of instinct and momentary desires. Basing the entire moral life on the indications of reflection, Socrates seeks to establish its foundation on the ground of an ideal reason: success, happiness depends only on the intrinsic, rational quality of our activities (Ioan Acsan, 1984,130).

The central idea that runs through the Middle Ages, as Albrecht Magnus (1193-1280) shows, is the union of man with God, achieved in three ways: dispassion, self-knowledge, and the inner discovery of the mind.

With the economic and technical development of the world, the man of European philosophy seeks its origin in the explanation of natural phenomena, in the action of a natural factor and not in the action of a divinity (determinism, evolutionism, creationism).

In the Renaissance, a reversal of the situation occurs, appealing to the ancient classical spirit, man occupies the central place. Nature is presented as the perfect temple of God the Architect, - Pico de Mirandela, man is free, he can create himself through work; his supreme mission being the discovery of the divine dwelling within him (See, On the dignity of man, Speech by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Count of Concordia). After about two hundred years in the Enlightenment era, Blaise Pascal considers that man is a rational animal, endowed with the power to rationalize, to think, but he is a weak being: "man is but a reed, the weakest in nature; but a thinking reed..." (Provincial Thoughts). Nevertheless, man and the world are creations of God, - Voltaire "the universe surrounds me, and I cannot even think that a clock can exist without a clockmaker"; or Kant, who reflects on the beauty and splendor of creation in which the greatness and love of the divine Archetype is placed. Immanuel Kant considered dignity as an absolute value inherent to the human being, emphasizing the fact that, based on goals, everything has a price and dignity.

4. THE DIVINE IMAGE IN MAN THE FOUNDATION OF HUMAN DIGNITY

Man as a free being, created in the image of God, is the factor of morality endowed with the power of grace to sanctify the entire creation through his pure life, and thus glorifies God the Archetype and his existential source. "The natural moral law is the light inherent in human nature, through which the believing man knows what he must do and what he must not do, or it is the knowledge that God shares with us through our very nature, in order to do good and avoid evil" (Nicolae Mladin 2003,104). The natural moral law has an objective, impersonal and permanent reality, which makes it different from whatever faculty of the human being (conscience, reason) that relates to it, all of which legalizes it in pagan peoples. "Therefore, the natural moral law is unchangeable, and its unchangeability is based both on the truth of its content and on the unchangeability of human nature and the divine will" (Nicolae Mladin 2003,113). Man as a free and conscious rational being receives from the Creator the command to

work the earth: "And God blessed them, saying: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over all the animals, over all the creatures that move on the earth and over all the earth'" (Genesis 1:28). The power to work is given by grace through his creation in the image of God, this being the basis of the natural moral law implanted in man by God from the first moment of man's appearance in creation. In addition to its spiritual character, dignity has a socio-moralizing character because man lives in the world through the body, being connected to the cosmos.

Holy Scripture defines the nature and role of man through the expression "image and likeness". Man was created by God through a special act, which gives him a special status: "And God said: Let Us make man in Our image and likeness" (Genesis 1:26-27;5,1,3;9,6). The creation of man in the image defines what man is in himself in a natural, ontological way. The image of God does not only aim at a certain spiritual or moral function of man: perfection, reason, freedom, will, feeling, conscience, etc., but concerns human nature in its psychophysical integrity, because God created the entire human nature at once, and gave it likeness as its final goal, gave it the quality of a person who encompasses the entire human nature and gives it the possibility that through relationship and work it becomes transcendent, deified.

The image represents the ontological, indelible given by which man rises to the knowledge of God, to true gnosis: "that man, as man, is naturally close to God. Just as we do not force a horse to have, nor a bull to hunt, but we use each of these animals for what is proper to them by nature, so we call man, who was made for the contemplation of heaven..., for man is truly heavenly (Plato - Timaeus, 90 a), called to the knowledge of God..." (Clement of Alexandria, 1982, 147)

The image of God in man intrinsically urges him to work, grow and enrich himself until he becomes like God - salvation. Salvation is the result of human effort in collaboration with divine grace. Christian dignity is a high state of deified humanity. The objective conditions of salvation: grace, faith, good deeds, are subjectively concretized through the dignity of a Christian. The person and work of the Savior Christ are the example of dignity, life and peace. The freedom to choose as a prerogative of man is evident not only in the decision willed and taken by him, but also in the free will to gather, to research, to weigh all the possibilities that he could put into practice, to lie. If man is a rational and free being, then certainly his acts are responsible, which makes his life develop on a spiritual level, receiving as a crowning of the efforts made, the true freedom achieved in grace, the deification, in which all created things appear unitary and harmonious, clothed in perfection.

CONCLUSION

The secularized mindset of modern society leaves no place for the salvation of the human soul, pursuing instead the pragmatic fulfillment of material interests. When modern man seeks a form of "immediate salvation," he increasingly turns to the institutionalized procedures that society so readily provides. Though the role of God in creation may be outwardly acknowledged, it is, in essence, denied. As society demands ever-deeper allegiance to rational processes, the inner longings and religious convictions of the truly believing person inevitably fade, leaving him marginalized and burdened by the sense of inadequacy and failure to conform to the shifting, superficial standards of the modern world. Human beings are no longer seen as ends in whom God's love and beauty are revealed, but as mere appendages of a rational machine – components of a system deemed more important than the persons within it, reduced to instruments for achieving empty, impersonal imperatives.

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