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**CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

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***Abstract***

In the present study I want to emphasize that only in a saving relationship with God we can speak of the so-called human rights, the human being and continuing to be what he is, only when he centres and stabilizes in God. From our point of view, we will analyse the relationship between human rights and Christian ethics, which common or discordant points of view exist between the two, if they are perfectly compatible or irreconcilable. Christian ethics recognizes the revealed foundation of these rights, and places them at the will of the Creator and the divine in the human being. As a model of respecting human dignity, human rights and freedoms, the Church offers God-the Creator Himself, the Saviour, and Perfection of Man.

**Keywords:** Christian ethics; human rights; freedom; responsibility; God;

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Due to the fact that the human rights and fundamental freedoms were first issued in a form close to what we know today, during the French Revolution (considered to be an anti-skeptic and anti-skeletal movement), many theologians or Christians are afraid to discuss about them or integrate them into a moral discourse. But if we take into account Divine Revelation, we find that the human being is endowed with rights and has many responsibilities right from creation.

And, if from the ontological point of view we originate human rights in the divine will, the first practical attempt to apply them can be found in the first written legislative code: the Hammurabi Code in Babylonia (Iraq, 2000 BC) or Carta Cyrus, (Iran, 570 BC), initiated by the king of Persia or the Magna English Charter and the Declaration of Rights (1215), elaborated by the English nobles and members of the clergy against the abuse of power of King John I.

**2. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

In the modern age, we can talk about the fundamental rights and freedoms of man after the Second World War, when after so much violence and disregard for human dignity, especially by the Nazi regime and the great Nuremberg trial (1945-1946), people of all nations decided in New York in 1948 in the General Assembly of O.N.U., to adopt the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Objective of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, elaborated by the General Assembly of O.N.U. on September 10, 1948, is to encourage respect for the human being's rights and freedoms. It promotes the personal, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of man.

Among the rights listed in the Declaration, we mention: the right to life, to freedom, to security, to a fair trial, to privacy, to free thinking, to express freely, the right to own opinion, the right to choose a religion, the right to education. Out of its 30 articles, only the 18th article refers to religion: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes the freedom to change religion or belief, as well as freedom to manifest religion or confession, either alone or with others, both publicly and privately, through teaching, religious practices, worship and the fulfilment of rites. "

Human rights are a topic that has raised interest in the theoreticians and practitioners of law, philosophers and theologians, both secular and religious.

In legal terms, subjective rights are prerogatives that entitle the holder to conduct a certain conduct or to claim the conduct of others, by resorting, if necessary, to the coercive power of the state.

By their degree of opposition, the subjective rights are absolute and relative. Human rights have an absolute character. The absolute right is the subjective right that its owner executes without appealing to another person.

According to Joel Feinberg, human rights are precious and indispensable possessions:

"A world without them, no matter how benevolent and preoccupied with fulfilling their own responsibilities, would suffer deep moral poverty. People would no longer hope for decent treatment from others, based on legitimate merits and expectations. Moreover, they would come to believe that they have no right to expect kindness or respect from others, so that when they even benefit from a minimum of decent treatment, they will rather be lucky than inherently justified to that treatment, and their benefactors will be considered to be particularly virtuous and worthy of gratitude. On the other hand, rights are not only gifts or favours motivated by love or mercy, for which gratitude is the only right answer ... A world with rights that can whenever be claimed is a world in which all people ... are objects worthy of respect, both in their own eyes and in others "(Joel Feinberg, *Duties*, 1966, p. 8).

The author of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights document, René Cassin, founder of the Strassbourg International Human Rights Institute in Strassbourg, the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, says the ideological origin of the Declaration is in the ten commandments.

This statement seeks to be a minimum guarantor of respect for human dignity in the world, beyond the social, political or religious organization, a true barrier against evil.

Closely related to our subject, is the question of human freedom. Being a creature, man also has a "borrowed existence." The created ones are not free by their nature, due to the fact that they are not the cause of their being. Having a given existence means that freedom is given to man.

In order to find freedom, man approaches God and obeys all His will. Listening to God is similar to consensus with liberty (Georgios Mantzaridis 2006, p. 209). Human freedom is achieved through participation in divine freedom, the necessary condition for participation in divine freedom being our communion with God, materialized in obedience to His commandments. God is hiding in His commandments. Being free is in accord with the human nature. True freedom means not only freedom of choice but also freedom from sin. The man who sins is no longer free. Sin robs and makes man fall from his state. Only to the extent that man restrains himself and complies with the divine will, does he overcome his passions and gains spiritual freedom (Georgios Mantzaridis 2006, p. 213). To fight passions is to fight for freedom. Our freedom ceases where the freedom of others begins. The man who sins does not love himself and therefore can not fulfill the divine command to love his neighbor as himself. Achieving the highest state of freedom consists in obtaining the perfection in the love, towards yourself, others and God. Only the person who truly loves is free to do what he wants, and in this sense, the best of Augustine's quotes "ama et quod quis" (loves and do what you want) can be better understood.

God's commandments are commandments of liberty. The Christian must not only know the commandments but apply them in his life, so that they can save him. Commandments are not mere moral (ethical) norms, but divine works or energies (Georgios Mantzaridis 2006, p. 173). In every command we find God, therefore their fulfilment is the encounter and communion with Him.

Only in freedom man has a right relationship with himself, with God and with his neighbor. From this perspective, human rights can not be broken or separated from the rights of God. Only when they are related to the rights of God, human rights are secured, making man accountable to Him.

Professor Mantzaridis observed this accurately: "The rights of God, which presuppose the following of His commandments, bring with them the application of justice in the everyday life of human beings. When all of these rights are respected, then human rights will also be respected. The respect for man is based on his quality of being "in the image and likeness" of God. And his real value lies in his continuous report to the prototype. It becomes possible in Christ, in which any physical discrimination and truffle is abolished "(Georgios Mantzaridis 2006, p. 272).

Human rights, as they are understood today, whether we are talking about the first article of the French Proclamation of "human and citizen rights" or the first article of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights that says "people are born and remain free and with equal rights, "are a tribute to a secularized meaning for which God is something to put in reserve.

Unfortunately, today under the guise of the phrase "human rights," we are trying to base a series of things and practices that contradict God's moral order in creation. Thus, for the secularized world in which we live, abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia, eugenics, different practices of genetic engineering, prostitution, etc. can be easily sustained by calling for "human rights" (sic!).

In the present study I want to emphasize that only in a saving relationship with God we can speak of the so-called human rights, the man remaining what he is, only when he centers and stabilizes himself in God. From our point of view, we will analyze the relationship between human rights and Christian morality, which common or discordant points of view exist between the two if they are perfectly compatible or irreconcilable.

### **3. THE CHRISTIAN ETHICS' PERSPECTIVE REGARDING HUMAN RIGHTS**

The question is whether Christian morality recognizes the existence of fundamental human rights and freedoms? Certainly yes, because they are embodied in what Christian theology calls God's image, that is to say, in the unique and defining print of the Creator that exists in man. And if God is love, justice, freedom, goodness, faithfulness, etc. and man, the image of the Creator has these qualities en gardents les propores.

That is why, from a Christian point of view, it is not only possible to talk about these rights, but it is even necessary. We must also bear in mind that the environment of the emergence of these rights is a European one, France of the eighteenth century, even if it was anticlerical, it was still fertilized by the Christian spirit, something of it remained impregnated indestructible in that mentality. And just as Evdochimov showed, only Christianity was the perfect ground for the appearance of even atheism, because in the spaces where it developed, it allowed liberty and justice (The Age of Spiritual Life, Christiana, Bucharest, 1993, p. 17).

We must also note that no right or freedom from the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms is anti-human or anti-Christian, so from the point of view of Christian morality there is no problem integrating them into its system of values. They are rather, in a way, a political and social application of the Gospel.

The fundamental objections are related to minor issues, such as, for example, that left-wing movements (socialist and communist atheists) promote these rights but forget that these movements have largely violated them, and that the great Western democracy that defends these rights belong to the Christian Euro-Atlantic area (even if the degree of secularization is obvious). Being created in the image of God and towards the endless likeness with Him, man is considered the crown of creation, the administrator of creation (cf. Psalm 8: 1, Jeremiah 28: 12, 14) or a true mediator between the material and spiritual worlds, a joint worker of the creation with God (Berdiaev 1992, p. 87). From the point of view of importance, we could say that the first human right and his first responsibility is to enter into free dialogue with his Creator (Meyendorff, 1996, p. 185).

There is also a classification of these rights, a classification that originated in the Middle Ages and which refers to:

**I. Rights and freedoms derived from human ontological status.** And because most theologians believe that the image of God in man refers to reason, will, and sentiment, they are in turn classified into: *rights and freedoms of reason*, which mainly refer to the right to knowledge and rational organization of creation, *rights and freedoms of the will*, which relate to man's ability to choose his own way of existence, *rights and freedoms of sentiment or love*, which manifest itself in relation to: himself, God, and the his kind.

**II. Rights and freedoms derived from the social organization that have less or no character revealed and are sometimes exclusively human rights.**

Returning to the relationship between fundamental human rights and Christian morality, we must note that Christian morality recognizes the need for these human rights and fundamental freedoms, which have as their primary purpose the observance of human dignity and the preservation of world peace.

Insisting that man is a special creation of God, Christian morality believes that respecting the dignity of man means ultimately respecting the Creator's dignity, and vice versa, dishonoring man, we dishonour his Creator. And the historical experience of man has shown that when man is despised, war and murder is made against man and impiety to God.

The fundamental principle underlying human rights and fundamental freedoms is the promotion of human life that must not be restricted by: slavery, inequality, injustice or humiliation. That is why we can not find any inconsistency between these rights and the fundamental principles of Christian morality, and the analysis of these rights and freedoms through the Christian ethics fully testifies of their humanism (in their Christian sense). Human values, values, such as human dignity, equality, freedom and interpersonal existence are also based on human rights (Nellas, 1994, p. 9).

In terms of freedom and equality in human rights and dignity, as well as brotherhood based on reason and conscience, we can say that they have a profound biblical foundation. The biblical idea of freedom means "the happy state of having been freed from slavery for a life of joy and satisfaction that was not previously possible" (Douglas, 1995, p. 754). So it has a deeply spiritualized, internalized character.

And who does not know that the fundamental postulate of Christian morality affirms that human freedom and his (as God's creation) rights really rise and draw their strength only from the relationship with God, for in God alone, man is truly man (Zizioulas, 1997, p. 46). As man approached God-the source of freedom and justice, he approaches his neighbor and values him correctly. When you are in a living and dynamic relationship with God, you can no longer injure your neighbor.

But freedom is connected in the Christian moral system with the great concepts of good and truth (and hence the concept of *kalocagathia* which expresses in particular the good and the beautiful in the relationship), and especially with gnoseology, because without knowledge there is neither a relationship (with God or with one's kind) nor virtue. That is why, P. Evdochimov, an Orthodox theologian but perfectly embedded in the western cultural paradigm, says "freedom is of spirit, of person. When it rises, at its end it only wishes good and truth" (Evdochimov, 1995, p. 54).

It is also to be noted here that the Incarnation of the Son of God maximizes human freedom (the maximum of human freedom leads to deification if we use the right freedom) and shows the great appreciation that God - the Creator has for man.

So to say that God alone is the freedom of man, it is to give a component, a divine orientation to the human rights. Only in, with, and through the Son of God incarnated, Jesus Christ, can we say that our freedom can be full. By Him, the Great Liberator, man can be free from the constraints of the universe, his own limitations and death. Due to Christ, freedom is called resurrection. In this last devastating century of human ideologies and foolinesses, it has become clearer than ever that the person and freedom, as well as the defense of human rights and fundamental freedoms, are the great revelations and values of humanity. From the Christian point of view, man's ability to be a subject of freedom or law is given by man's quality of being a person, that is, of being open to the other, of being a social being.

For Christian morality, human rights and fundamental freedoms have an inner, spiritual, and external social component. The inner component starts from the fact that the more the man advances in virtue, in inner building and in his closeness to God, the more he respects his own rights and freedoms

and his neighbor. So, between peace or inner disharmony and observance or violation of neighbors' rights and freedoms, there is a close relationship of direct proportionality. Christian spiritual authors and Orthodox moral theology insist on inner purification and struggle against passions as an essential foundation for respect for human rights and freedoms. It is essential to respect yourself, to fulfill your purpose of creation, to fight the slavery of sin, because if you do not respect the rights with which the Creator has endowed you with, if you do not protect your own freedom, you will not be able to respect the rights and fundamental freedoms of your neighbor.

A higher development of this reasoning is found in the first Epistle of St. Ap. John, where he refers to the love of God and the love of the neighbor. There is a close and strong connection between love and human rights, since love and human rights are also based on the idea of respect, an idea that the Church promotes in all times and spaces (Ica jr, 2002, p. 45). We also need to consider the following: a vicious man and a slave to sin can hardly respect the rights and freedoms of his neighbor, for sin calls him to sin. Just following the path of perfection established by the Creator as a human development program and which involves freedom from sin, the human being can appreciate his own dignity and his kind's dignity.

As for the model to follow in respecting human rights and freedoms, it is certainly God, for Who respects better than Him the human being? And who is the developer of human freedom and the Redeemer of man, if not God?

Of course, there are voices in Orthodox theology and not only that denies any Christian foundation for the fundamental rights and freedoms of man, insisting rather on the existence of human duties, but they forget at the juridical, philosophical, logical and theological reality: to every right it corresponds a duty, what for me is an obligation, for my neighbor is a right and vice versa. Or, rather, right and duty are two facets of the same reality (Coman, 1997, p. 34).

The Decalogue itself contains in its prescriptions rights and duties without which the social coexistence of the people would be impossible, and so does the Natural Moral Law which contains the minimum prescriptions that make possible the life of people in society. Human rights are attributes of God's image in man, and therefore we can say that they are in some way divine rights. If we are referring to human freedom, we can say that keeping it is an essential part of man's effort to achieve theosis. To keep your freedom is to advance on the path of holiness, and this is the basic work of the ascetic effort.

Despite the theoretical clarity of these realities, it is nevertheless noticed in everyday life that although human rights are considered universal, and people are born equal in rights and freedoms, not everyone has the opportunity to exercise these rights and to demand respect for them, that is why there are still many inequalities in the world that offend man and his Creator. It is important to bear in mind that human rights, even if they are prescriptions formulated by human political instances, have a strong revealed base and do not contradict Divine Revelation or the religious sense of human life.

Because man is destined for a trinity-like existence (communion of love) with God and his fellows, respecting the rights of one's neighbor and promoting his freedom is a true humanistic act in its Christian sense, a truly perfect act.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

As we have seen, human rights and fundamental freedoms are human formulations with bases in antiquity but elaborated as we know them today in the modern age, aiming at preserving human dignity, regardless of the government's system, whether it's social, economic or religious.

Christian morality recognizes the revealed foundation of these rights, and considers their origin the will of the Creator and the divine in man. As a model of respecting human dignity, human rights and freedoms, the Church offers God-the Creator, Savior, and Perfection of Man.

But there are also voices in Christian theology that deny the revealed character of these rights, insisting that biblical morality refers only to duties to the neighbor and not to the human being's own rights.

But these opinions do not take into account the intrinsic dignity of man, his exceptional quality of creation of God, and the great honor with which God blessed man: Incarnation of the Son of God. Then

how can man honor his fellow man, when he does not respect himself, when he is not aware of his own dignity. Only by respecting their own rights can they respect (as duties) those of their neighbor.

It is essential that everything makes humans to take into account the principle of love, to act in human relationships only and only in love and to judge and value everything only through the perspective of love. Here, in fact, is the strong link between human rights and Christian morality, being in fact practical applications of love, social and political projections of the Gospel of salvation.

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