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THE VALUE AND DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON IN THE LIGHT OF CHRISTIAN TEACHING

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Abstract

Life ruled by law and the legality of our culture have in common the oblivion of the right and the demand of saving yourself through your deeds. Life ruled by law deals only with individual saving, because it does not see the total good; it always balances, for its whole horizon is nothing but a changing, as it is the report between God and human being. Love has every virtue and it is contrary to all sins. This is the source of all forms of good. The one who has love is on his way to perfection. Between love and consciousness there is a real complementarity. Consciousness is the instrument through which law becomes operative in our being. St Apostle Pavel underlines the fact that a pure moral consciousness is kept by belief (Tit. 1,15-16). Christian love that springs from a pure moral consciousness and heart is what God wanted from his creation, man having the possibility to take the resemblance with God, as his nursing to “God’s image”.

Keywords: love; consciousness; freedom; perfection; virtue, belief;

1. INTRODUCTION

"Life is not traded," say the bishops of the Italian Episcopal Conference in their message for the 25th Day of Life, February 2, published on the website of the Italian Catholic Church (www.chiesacattolica.it).

The human being is not a consumer who can be studied, manipulated, used, said Mons. Elio Sgreccia, vice-president of the Pontifical Academy for Life, in an interview with Fides, on the Message of the Italian Episcopal Conference for the Day for Life.

- Monsignor Sgreccia: Why "with life you can't trade?"

Trade in human life does not consist only in the exploitation of prostitution or in forms of pedophilia; Unfortunately, there are other very serious forms such as scientific research, reducing spending on health administrations. For example, today there is a debate in the United Nations about the use of frozen, cloned human embryos to obtain from them root cells useful for curing diseases. These cells are put on the market and the market starts trading with research laboratories. It is said that these cells are needed to cure some diseases, but this is not true. It is not necessary to "kill" another human being to obtain root cells; they can also be taken from living people.



2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

On the road to seeking God, asceticism is a conscious and persevering training, and it involves constant tension. It requires both spiritual and physical effort, for both sides of our being sigh after salvation. There are three fundamental dimensions of Christian asceticism: fasting, almsgiving, and, of course, prayer. This is because all fundamental dimensions of our being are called to participate in the purification and sanctification of the whole man. Fasting is directly related to the body. Acts of almsgiving, the deeds of which we know to be both bodily and spiritual in nature, start from the soul, and prayer is connected to the human spirit.

Prayer is man's entry into connection with God. The Holy Fathers say that prayer is the raising of man with his mind, heart, faith, and voice to God, to glorify Him, to thank Him, and to ask of Him all that we need spiritually and physically, knowing that He hears and helps us. In order to be obeyed by God, it must meet several conditions: sincere and true faith, obedience to the commandments (out of love for God), and perseverance in prayer.

Fasting involves a complex and very effective exercise in educating the will. When it is dedicated to God, it is the second most powerful "weapon" of the Christian against bodily and spiritual temptations, the means of strengthening the faith, exercising almsgiving, and acquiring Christian humility.

Charity. When made out of love of God and our neighbor, almsgiving is the third "weapon" and consists of the material and spiritual help of those in need. True Christian almsgiving must spring from a sincere love of our neighbor and be done discreetly, not in a spirit of pride (Matthew 6: 2-4).

Christian selfless and spiritual love is not touched in an instant. It is the project of the believer's whole life. It presupposes a sustained struggle, a continuous asceticism, a constant effort to achieve genuine repentance, a radical conversion of our way of thinking, feeling and acting. Orthodox spirituality pursues the perfection of the believer in Christ. And since perfection cannot be attained in Christ except by participation in His divine-human life, it can be said that the goal of Orthodox spirituality is the perfection of the faithful man by his union with Christ and his fuller imprint on the face of Christ's humanity, full of God. It can therefore be said that the goal of Orthodox Christian spirituality is the union of the faithful with God, in Christ. But as God is endless, the goal of union with Him, or of our perfection, never corresponds to an end from which it can no longer advance. All Eastern parents say, therefore, that perfection has no boundary.

Thus, our perfection or union with God is not only a goal, but also an endless progress. However, two great stages can be distinguished on this path: one, of advancing towards perfection, through efforts to purify passions and to acquire virtues; and another, of life ever more advanced in union with God, in which the work of man is replaced by the work of God, man giving on his part more receptivity, or openness to fill himself with more and more divine life.

Thus, the following features of Orthodox Christian spirituality can be distinguished:

1. The culmination of the spiritual life is a union of the soul with God.
2. This union is accomplished by the work of the Holy Spirit, but until it is obtained man is indebted with a long effort of purification.
3. This union takes place when man has reached "the likeness of God" and it is also knowledge and love.
4. The effect of this union consists, among other things, in a considerable intensification of the spiritual energies in man, accompanied by many kinds of charisma.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

The sale of embryos for host uteri, the actual hosting of women's uteri are forms of trade dedicated to artificial procreation. The more subtle forms are those that influence the health market. Attempts are made to privilege the forms treated in the laboratory rather than those provided by health administrators. No one cares that an elderly person is abandoned in an asylum, or that in poorer countries like Africa, medicines are not enough. Everything influences the health market, a firm position being one that warns against these different forms. Against them we must appeal to the dignity of the person, which is the most worthwhile value in the world (<http://www.catholica.ro/stiri>).

Christianity is founded on the unique and supreme teaching of Christ the Savior. Believers conform their lives to this teaching, living intensely on all levels of spiritual life, in communion of love with God and with fellow men, on their way to the salvation that was objectively brought to us by Jesus Christ through His Incarnation, life, teaching, Passion, Cross, Resurrection and Ascension, leaving the fruits to be appropriated by each one by grace, faith and good deeds, in the Church. So Christianity is not a philosophical system, a sum of philosophies or a religious doctrine.

But Christian morality is not a simple fulfillment by the Christian of duties that lead him nowhere in this earthly life and provide him with only an outward reward in the life to come. These debts are for the external plan of human life, for an orderly coexistence, for example. But in Christian Morality that is not enough. Christian, sacrificial, giving love intervenes, which is required to be fulfilled, so emphasis on the "inside", on the inside of man. "Free action is always the transposition into deeds of the soul, its concrete, external expression. And its value does not spring from its external appearance, but from its soul, from its inner springs. Inside is the root, there is the life-giving sap from which the leaves, flowers and fruits sprout".

4. FINDINGS

The Christian leads a life in Christ, true life, full of the flowers of virtue, in sacrificial love, and gradually grows (not suddenly) in Christ, a building in the Spirit of Christ, from the course of earthly life, since the fulfillment and living of the Its teachings ontologically transforms his being. That is why when we speak of Christian Morality we must not understand it as a purely scientific, theoretical discipline, but as an explanation or description of the life of believers in Christ, in His Church.

Christian morality raises the individual boundaries between people and affirms the universality of all people through the principle of Christian love, sacrificial and giving love, the foundation of freedom and equality of all in Christ. Christian love is based on the love of Christ, which is boundless, pouring out on all that there is, filling and radiating all with light. It considers the value and dignity of the human person created in the image of God with the possibility of reaching the likeness of His Creator through a synergistic act, working together with divine grace through faith and good deeds.

The face simultaneously contains two seemingly contradictory realities at first sight: particularity and communion. To be the "image" of God is fundamentally different from being an individual, because the image cannot be conceived in itself, but only in its relation. Its essence consists in the fact that it is a revelation of the truth of the being not as "substance" or "nature", but as "way of existence".

This is the profound understanding of the Cappadocian Fathers that comes to show that man as a hypostasis shows a special aspect: through and in communion, the "face" affirms its own identity and particularity. Thus the face is the horizon in which the truth about the being is discovered, not as a simple nature, subject to individualization and combination, but as a unique face of the totality and "universality" of the being.

The essence of Christian love is to love both God and neighbor. Dorotheus of Gaza says that by loving God as we approach Him through love, we are united with our neighbor in love.

In Christian Morality, virtues culminate in love. Through virtues we help to form our fellows to whom we must prove our love not only through words, but also through our work toward them.

Human life (both in the Christian and spiritual sense and in the biological sense) is a gift of God. Because it comes from God, its absolute master is God himself. Human life is a unique reality, so it must be defended and cared for by its bearer no matter what the situation is. Being created by God, human life is intrinsically good and deserves to be always respected and defended, whether it will fully manifest itself or will take place with deficiencies due to known or unknown causes. As beings created, biologically, by the will of God, we enter and exit history. This is a right of the human person, the person who does not exhaust itself between the time span represented by his entry and exit in and out of history.

The human person is the most sublime expression of God's creative activity. Adam and Eve, male and female, are created in the "*image of God*" (Acts 1:26). God is the source and destiny of created human life. His "face" is realized in human beings not so much by particular attributes (love, reason), but by the distinctive personal quality that places them above other bodily beings. The "*image of God in man*" is identified by many contemporary Greek Orthodox theologians (Yannaras, Zizioulas, Nissiotis, Nellas) with human "*personality*": the possibility - as a divine gift - that man has of entering into a relationship

with God, with himself and others, exercised in freedom and love. Therefore, we are truly "*people*", plural of *person*, only as long as we mirror the essential personality of God, characterized by a total reciprocity of love shared between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We tend to distort the meaning of person in everyday language. But what we generally call "person" or "personal" applies rather to the individual and the individual. We often confuse and consider almost identical the two terms - person and individual - we use these two terms indistinctly and indifferently, to express the same thing. But the two terms, person and individual, have opposite meanings. The individual is the negation or ignorance of the otherness of the person, it is the human existence with objective properties of the common nature, with quantitative comparisons and analogies. But when we want to define a person, we detail individual properties and natural signs that are never "personal", that is, unique and irreplaceable, even when we manage to express the most detailed quantitative nuances of individual loneliness. Personal otherness is not revealed and is only known in the core in which it participates to the personal manifestation or to the loving and creative energy that distinguishes the person from the common nature. This revelation and knowledge of personal otherness is all the more total as the event of communion and relationship is fulfilled in love. Love is par excellence the way to know the person. The otherness of the person is the image of God in man, known through the five attributes: reason, will, feeling, conscience and freedom.

According to Orthodox theology, we study man as the image of God, but not God as the transcendent and absolute image of man. The image of God in man is saved precisely by the tragic character of freedom, the personal way of existence being able to fulfill or wither the "true life" of love (Yannaras, 2004, 16-18).

If we are indeed obliged, as Yannaras states, to first of all face the "existential adventure of our freedom", it is because fall (individual and collective) puts us in a continual situation of choice. Our free decision to rebel against the divine will banished us from Paradise. Man, according to St. Basil, "*is an animal that has been commanded to become God*" (John Breck, 2001), or as Panayotis Nellas calls his work "*Man, Deified Animal*". By giving in to temptation, we have become estranged from God and have betrayed our essential vocation. In Christ we have the possibility of progressing "*from glory to glory*" (II Cor. 3:18) toward that full and perfect communion with the divine Life which provides us with the indispensable foundation for authentic humanity or personality. However, the constant need to choose light and truth instead of darkness and lies engages us in a constant inner struggle against demonic temptation and our tendencies to self-idolatry.

The human person finds its dignity in the very creative act of God, who according to the account of the creation, made man from dust with His hand after which he breathed before him the breath of life and became man a living being (Genesis 2: 7). Therefore, man is the unitary being, in which the image of God is not limited to the soul, but also includes the body. The human constitution has a dichotomous character, being made up of God in body and soul, but this dichotomy finds its unity in the image of God, who embraces both the soul and the body (Dumitru Popescu, 2005, 168).

Man, in the paradisiacal condition, was himself constituted as the combination between the materialistic stihinic element and the spiritual element which in fact personalizes and shapes the human dimension in the reflection of the divine. Thus, being conceived from its building up for deification, man had in himself all the potentialities that would have been necessary for him to reach the level of resemblance to which he had been destined by creation. The Creator gave special dignity to our creature, in that by doing it in His image, He offered him the opportunity to do the same with Himself, giving him other gifts, but we cannot say of thought and knowledge that He gave them to us them ready made, but made us partakers of the very adornment of His nature when He put His image in us. The power of thought, which is something spiritual and incarnate, would not be able to communicate or share something with anyone if no special means were found to make its living creation known. That is why it needed an organic composition through which, just like pinching with the help of a plectrum, the sensitive parts of the voice are touched and thus one or the other of the tones of the song we want to hear is externalized.

The defining element of the human face is the free will, which in the thinking of St. Gregory of Nyssa, the free will of man is thought of as one of the main divine features, which by the breath of life that constituted man, were impregnated with dust.

But just as the whole constitution of the cosmos after the elements was determined by the harmony of reason, of all opposites and of all parts in this whole, so the primordial constitution of man, of one who had not yet been clothed in clothes and skin, was harmonious constitution. The fall into sin determined precisely the destruction of this harmony, the departure of man from his state of balance between faculties, the reversal of his order, hence the meaning of morality as disorder. Human disharmony determines, by reflection, the disharmony of the whole because man stood as the finality for the cosmos, or, the fall puts the cosmos itself in the condition of the lack of finality, so it induces the chaos of the exit from the teleological.

The concept of harmony will stand as a determinant in all the spirituality of St. Gregory of Nyssa. Cosmic harmony is reflected in human harmony and vice versa. Consummation will involve reaching the reflection of the other harmony, including harmony possessing an archetype, and this is Christ.

In limiting the Christ nature intended as harmony, the parts that must be harmonized in man and that give value to human dignity are reason and sensuality, so the relationship to be restored is the right relationship between *logos* and *sarx*, but its space is the soul, the soul seen not only as psychic but as spirit, source of life of the whole which is man. The soul is not only the entelechy of the human, but is a participant in two realities, being, on the one hand, the breath of life given by God to man through the act of creation, and, on the other hand, the one that makes the whole psycho-somatic work, thus placed at the meeting of the two worlds: the sensual nature and the rational nature.

But what gives extraordinary value to man is the union between soul and body in the unity of the human person, a mystery because the human species, which unites nature with spirit, is the conscious and free spiritual factor inserted in nature as soul. This allows the person to make a contingent use of nature. Thus our person is a spirit capable of feeling and knowing through the senses, but maintaining self-awareness and the freedom and power of his movement through the movement of the body (Dumitru Stăniloae, 1996, 261).

Human nature, its value and dignity, as a dichotomous unit, in order to make the world transparent to God, has its origin in a special creative act of God. God continually arouses people's freedom in their attitude toward Him by remaining in His free relationship with them. Thus, each person who comes into existence represents a new and continuous way of manifesting human freedom in dialogue with God and with his fellows, by nature, which he organizes and develops properly, but also represents an integration of all in the common responsibility of this work.

A characteristic of the face is also the fact that it is unknowable: *"Therefore, because one of the characteristics considered around the divine nature is the incomprehensibility of the being, with necessity also in this face, it has the imitation of the archetype. Because if the nature of the face could be understood, but the prototype would be above comprehension, the contradiction of these considered qualities would demonstrate the illusory character of the face. But because the nature, in correspondence to our mind which is in the image of the Creator, escapes knowledge, it has an exact resemblance to the higher one, engraving by its unknowable character in itself the incomprehensible nature". "The eikon is the fundamental gift of God through which and in which God gives himself fully to created humanity. For this he contains all the divine attributes, all the divine gifts, his nature as energy, understanding by this the character of incomprehensibility, and not that of infinity. The unfathomable mystery of the human soul is the reflection of the divine incomprehensibility"* (Dumitru Stăniloae, 1996,265).

The human will represents the dynamic character of the human person who lives itself consciously. This is free, fact in which lies the dignity of man, this freedom being a sign of the dignity of the created person. God's creative, merciful, and judgmental work toward man is neither influenced nor can it be influenced by this freedom. Man has freedom of decision in his life, but not over his life. From this freedom result the alternatives of life for man. He can choose between the true freedom of the children of God and the false freedom of vital interests and self-defined lusts. True freedom responds to God's love with love, false freedom emancipates itself from God and goes its own way, for *"God has given people the opportunity to choose freely and an existence without a conscious and happy relationship with Him"* (Jürgen Henkel, 2003, 292).

But what leads to the distortion and destruction of a person's dignity is individualism. Individualism opposes universalism; it is the rupture of the human person with the universal. Such individualism leads to the destruction of man because the freedom involved in him is isolated, separated

from the world. However, any isolation, any distance from the world leads to subordination to the world because everything that is distant and foreign to us is a mandatory necessity for us.

For the individualist, the world is always a burden on him. It can be said that in extreme individualism the world is rejected outside of human individuality. In reality, however, the cosmic condition of man is denied. Individualism does not want to know in man the universal content. In him man strongly desires to free himself from the world, but he reaches only subordination because the inner separation from the universe results in the necessary external dependence. Individualism, says Nikolai Berdyaev, may be a symptom of the universal crisis, but it still remains in the pre-creative period of the world, and the will that manifests itself in it is non-freedom.

Such a form of human existence underlies fragmentation of current socialization, of our spraying in isolated groups and maintained in artificial borders, in which only self-affirmation is pursued. This destructive anti-universalism is characteristic of the schism of individuals.

Vitalism causes man to lose his true spiritual freedom given to him by faith, the personal edification in it, only to become the slave of his own body, the victim of his fatal dissociation. The cause of this neo-paganism – in the words of Visser't Hooft, one of the pioneers of the ecumenical movement – is the dualism between soul and body that has penetrated Western Christianity and culture through the Augustinian chain.

The condition of person belongs to every human being by virtue of a singular and unique relationship with God. This personal moment in anthropology, discovered through Christian thought, highlights a relationship of analogy: just as the God who created man in His image is personal, so man is not uniquely "nature."

This aspect of the image of God in man is, according to Lossky, the repercussion of Trinitarian theology in Christian anthropology. The divine image in man is a face of the Trinity. In it we see the reproduction of the Trinitarian mystery and therefore man reflects in himself the structure and life of this mystery. Vitalism carries within itself its own desecration, the germ of disintegration, as opposed to the principle of unity. The illusion of the union he announces is always accompanied by a reaction, a return, a division. On the other hand, the energy trained in this sense no longer has a creative character, being additionally related to the loss of personality in the species. Only the transfiguration of this energy through love, creative- as it is found in Christianity- can overcome the natural necessity, necessity that gradually leads to the renunciation of any expression of the soul. Creative love is the only thing that can stimulate such an expression made visible on the face of the loved one, it is the way that leads to the discovery of the secret of a face, of the person's understanding of the depth of his being. The face of another is no longer a means of interpretation in accordance with instinctive tendencies, but the place of an epiphany, which makes us move from "fear of another to fear of another."

But true communion is achieved through feeling, through love, as an edifying part of the Face, love being the true coordinate of spiritual perfection.

Solipsism, a particular case of egocentrism, consists in attributing reality only to one's own self and seeing in others only representations, in recognizing them only as a diminished and secondary reality: they are considered only in the perspective of the self itself, as testimonies of its value or instruments of its interest; they exist only "in relation to him." In his eyes, other people have an existence, but a "shadowy existence", an existence which in its way is only relative to this self, to its "reality".

Love as a fundamental form of communication and communion between me and the other is possible only in a religion with a personal God, who communicates to the human person. It is not possible outside of the interpersonal relationship. The transcendent person is the only source of love, love conceived according to the triadic model. With all its strength, love does not work without will. Love is born out of the will and does not arouse echo in the subject against his will. Love is only a great help toward producing love in the one who knows. Love is, moreover, the proof of our eternal existence and the means of our perfection (Dumitru Stăniloae, 1993, 20,124,166).

But love is characterized by this paradox: on the one hand, it unites the subjects that love each other, on the other hand, it does not confuse them. Love leads one subject to another, without confusing them, for in this case love would cease. It would kill loved ones and not ensure their imperishable existence. This paradox cannot be explained otherwise, except by the irradiation of love, as energy that is communicated from one person to another, without them being exhausted in this communication (Dumitru Stăniloae, 2002,47).

5. CONCLUSION

Romanian theology contains impressive pages on the community function of love. Transposition through love into the depths of another's intimacy is not only the path of the deepest knowledge, but at the same time it marks the path of the closest brotherhood or communion between human beings. Through the fusion of one's own intimate life with the intimate life of the other, through the mutual envelopment in the warmth of the heart, love succeeds in connecting people to each other. But love does not only mean the opening and launching of one's own person to the other, only the determination to offer yourself, but it also means the intention and will to achieve a communion with the other. A communion is not realized unless the love you show to someone is taken into account and answered with a similar love. Only when the other responds positively to the requests made by your love, only when love becomes a dialogue, can we speak of the accomplishment of a communion.

In fact, the Moral of the Church is a morality of communion that identifies with the ontological content of ecclesial truth: the truth of life which is communion. Communion is life. Existence is an event of communion. Communion is an ontological event for the Church. Not an emanation or a consequence of the ontological event, but a constitutive event of the Being. Communion constitutes life, but it also constitutes the morality of life, the dynamics of life, the impulse and movement that fulfill life. If we definitively objectify the ontological event of communion in its historical and phenomenological dimension, we remain prisoners of the metaphysics of conventional conceptual identities, we simply replace with the idea of communion the ontic conception of Being-itself. Thus, freedom and otherness define the ontological event of communion: there is no communion without otherness and without the freedom to participate in communion. Freedom and otherness are the hypostatic fulfillment of life, that is, of the existential event of the person. The freedom of the person hypostasizes life, the ontological event of communion. Only in this vision is communion not an objective given, but a personal existential realization of the authenticity of life.

We find with fear that on the street, in factories, in the family, the "masks" multiply and the "people" disappear. People usually have lifeless roles. It looks more and more like the accessories of a mechanism, they are no longer "people". Very often we have the feeling that we are in a "sui generis" dance of people in disguise, where the participants hide their identity, with an original note that consists precisely in the fact that, every time a mask is removed, another one appears. In such a crisis of human authenticity, it is impossible for living together to become real communion. People, when they no longer love each other, can no longer be sincere, open, but, being selfish, they pretend, they hide their true face and true intentions (Vasile Citirigă, <http://www.crestinortodox.ro/editoriale/70257-omul-fara-Hristos>).

The "masks" worn by postmodern people have generated the phenomenon of mistrust in interpersonal relationships, a general suspicion that makes one person no longer fully trust the other. Lack of confidence carries with it the fear of man of his fellow man and all this contributes to the accentuation of the state of stress and insecurity. The chief cause of this dramatic situation in which postmodern man lives is in his opposition to God and to the revealed Truth. Instead of God, he prefers to expend much energy, to establish new and new human institutions, to live in fear and insecurity, and all this without ever being sure whether truth and justice have been restored.

In our time, new and new institutions are being created for the purpose of defending life and human rights. Indeed, a world without God can only be ruled by weapon. Dangers lurk everywhere in postmodern man, because everywhere there are those who believe that "everything is allowed" and have no respect for human life, for the dignity of the person, everything comes down to consumerism, individualism and secularism, because they are postmodern and to be postmodern means to stop believing in God and, therefore, in the value of man.

But all these sufferings that modern and postmodern thinking has caused to man are together a real tragedy that man experiences today and that is stressed out every day. That is why today we speak more of crisis than joy, more of fear than hope; more of what separates people than what brings them closer. The spiritual, moral, political, economic crisis, the crisis of administration, of the family, of education and of culture that are so much discussed today are nothing but expressions of the tragedy of postmodern society, as a result of the break-up with God.

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