

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NATIONAL UNITY AND IMAGO DEI

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Abstract: This study places itself on the convergence coordinate of Sociology, Anthropology and Systematic Theology fields, as its aim is to establish whether there is any connection between national unity and the way in which man was created, in the image of God, known in theology under the Latin name *imago Dei*. The author will proceed to study what *imago Dei* actually means in the first part of his attempt. Afterwards, he will analyze the relationship between national unity as a form of social organization and the constitutive nature of man. The article will end with conclusions of the further study.

Keywords: National Unity, *Imago Dei*, Personality, Trinity, Inter-human relationship

Introduction

The author of this article will proceed from the premise that there is a connection between the way in which man was created and the necessity of the national unity as a form of organizing human society. Along the first part, the author will define the Judeo-Christian perspective, based on the Biblical precepts, that is, the image and the likeness of God. The second part will attempt to analyze the social consequences of the fact the man is the bearer of the *imago Dei*, at national level altogether.

1. Man as bearer of *imago Dei*

In the first book of the Bible, the Genesis, God reveals the fact that He created man in His own image and likeness on the sixth day of His creation:

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness [...]” God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (Genesis 1:26-27).¹

The syntagma “image and likeness”, known in theology as *imago Dei* in Latin, has been interpreted by theologians in many ways. The attention this syntagma has captured is a rightful one, as it expresses the essence of the human being and it is the very existential purpose foundation of man in the universe. The fact that man was created as the last being in the creation chain is not at all randomly established; man was created to round off the whole creation as Dr. Charles C. Ryrie mentions:

The act of creating man was based on the deliberate counsel of God. Though all that God had done in Creation up to that point He pronounced as good, Creation was incomplete without man. Man was no afterthought, but the result of deliberate forethought on the part of the Godhead. And after God created man, He then said that everything He had made was “very good” (Genesis 1:31).²

What is the significance of “in God’s image and likeness” syntagma in the Holy Scripture? In Hebrew the term צֶלֶם [*tselem*] is used for the word likeness/face which is translated as “image, likeness (of resemblance) [...] semblance (fig.)”, as James Strong writes in his Lexicon.³

The term “likeness” used in Genesis 1:26-27 is the Hebrew word דְּמוּת [*d^emu^t*], which means “likeness” and “similitude” and deepens the meaning of the word צֶלֶם [*tselem*], in order to emphasize the fact that man is “a God-resembling image”.⁴

Theologians have elaborated many theories concerning the significance of phrase “in God’s image and likeness”, some of which will be mentioned hereafter: the structural theory, or the substantive view; the

1 *New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*. (1995). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

2 Charles C. Ryrie (1999). *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth*, Moody Chicago, IL: Press, Chicago. p. 216.

3 James Strong (2001). *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software. #6754.

4 V. P. Hamilton (1999). 437 דְּמוּת. In R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, Jr. & B. K. Waltke (Eds.), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Chicago: Moody Press. p. 192.

relational theory; the functional theory; and the representation theory. The substantive theory identifies the image with a certain characteristic of physical quality, a psychological or a spiritual one, that belongs to man.

The relational view has more variants, one has been elaborated by Emil Brunner and identifies “the formal image” with the way in which man was created as a rational, responsible and free being. Brunner states that man has also received “a material image”, meant by God to be different than the other living beings. Another relational theory, elaborated by Karl Barth, sustains that the image refers to both man’s relationship with God, that is vertical, and his relationship with his fellows, that is horizontal. The followers of the functional view sustain that *imago Dei* refers to the mandate man has received directly from God, namely the mastership he must exercise over creation. The last signifying theory is representation one, which interprets the image of God as the role man must represent for God on earth.

As the syntagma “image and likeness” is used by the authors of the New Testament, the analysis of the New Testament texts is required; these texts contain the concept of *imago Dei*. Such a text lies in Colossians 1:15, where it is written that the Lord Jesus Christ is “the image of the unseen God”. The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:4 the following: “Christ, who is the image of God”.

The syntagma “image and likeness” applies to humans in the New Testament altogether, not only to the Man Jesus Christ. Thus, in 1 Corinthians 11:7 it is written man “is the image and glory of God”. James warns about the punishment that will pursue the ones who curse men, “who have been made in the likeness of God” (James 3:9)

The terms that were used in Greek are εἰκὼν [*eikōn*] for image and ὁμοίωσις [*homoïōsis*] for likeness. The word εἰκὼν [*eikōn*] is translated “an image, portrait, likeness, having the same form as something else, representation, pattern; used of the moral likeness of renewed men to God”.⁵ The word ὁμοίωσις [*homoïōsis*] is translated by Louw as follows: “the state of being similar to something— ‘similarity, likeness, being similar’”.⁶

5 James A. Swanson (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc. #1635.

6 Johannes P. Louw, & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: Based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies. p. 1:616.

From the study of the New Testament it results that man was created as a bearer of *imago Dei*, but God has revealed Himself entirely in His Son, who is the very *imago Dei*. Professor Ian A. McFarland draws the attention to the fact that “in the Christian thinking, though, the idea of a divine image is not understood and does not infer any weakening of the faith in God’s transcendence”.⁷ On the contrary there are more forthcoming benefits from the fact that God has revealed Himself through creation of man and His Son Jesus Christ becoming flesh and blood: God revealed Himself and He can be known in Jesus Christ.⁸

In Jesus Christ, man may acknowledge the unseen and transcendent God. Theologian Millard J. Erickson concludes, after a thorough analysis of the theories concerning *imago Dei*:

The image of God is universal within the human race. [...] There is no indication that the image is present in one person to a degree than other. Superior natural endowments, such as high intelligence, are not evidence of presence or degree of the image. The image is not correlated with any variable. For example, there is no direct statement correlating the image with development of relationships, nor making it dependent upon the exercise of dominion.⁹

Another researcher that has studied the concept image of God is Dr. Richard Middleton, who states that God has transmitted man *imago Dei* as an act of generosity, for the Same God is both the Creator and the Savior.¹⁰

We may conclude that *imago Dei* refers, mainly, to the way in which man was created, not to what he owns or does. The relational theory and the functional one focus on the consequences and the effects of the presence of the image of God in man. *Imago Dei* consists in those particular components of the man that render him the possibility to fulfill his destiny. The afore mentioned components are: (1) the personality of

7 Ian A. McFarland (2005). *The Divine Image: Envisioning the Invisible God*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press. p. 51.

8 *Ibidem*.

9 Millard Erickson (2013). *Christian Theology*. (Third ed.) Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group. pp. 469-470.

10 Richard Middleton (2005). *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press. p. 297.

man with its cognitive, affective and volitional elements; (2) the spiritual component, which consists of morality, worship, faith, conscience.

Sadly enough, this glorious status of man, as a bearer of *imago Dei*, was a short-term one: man rebelled against his own Creator.

2. The social consequences of *imago Dei*

Man was created after God's image and likeness, as a personal, self-aware and able-to-establish-interpersonal-relationship person. Surely enough, God's Person is incomparably more complex than the man He created, as the Creator is a Trinity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

For Christian Anthropology, the doctrine of Trinity is essential. Likewise, as professor Paul Enns states, the Triunity doctrine is fundamental for the entire Christian faith, not only for the science of anthropology: "The Trinity of God is a doctrine that is fundamental to the Christian faith; belief or disbelief in the Trinity marks orthodoxy from unorthodoxy".¹¹ A definition of the Triunity concept, which is also agreed upon by theologian Charles Ryrie, is the one provided by professor Benjamin B. Warfield: "There is one only and true God, but in the unity of the Godhead there are three coeternal and coequal Persons, the same in substance but distinct in subsistence."¹²

God is one Being, within Who the three Persons share the indivisible divine nature. The relationship between the three Divine Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, are characterized by perfect harmony, love and collaboration. When God created man as a personal being, He intended humans to establish interpersonal relationship. In Genesis 2:18 it is written: "Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.'" Mankind was created from the very beginning to consist of two complementary genders. The fulfillment of the human beings is accomplished through harmonious interpersonal relationship. Professor Kenneth Daughters wrote:

11 Paul P. Enns (1989). *The Moody handbook of theology*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press. p. 198.

12 Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, "Trinity," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1930). p. 5:3012. *Apud in*: Ryrie, C. C. (1999). *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press. p. 61.

God intended man to live a series of relationships. He did not intend for man to be alone. That is why he instituted marriage. That is why we live in family units. The church is like a body with interdependent parts. Government regulates our societal relationships. Why are there so many relationships? It is a reflection of God's own nature. God is relational, and he is teaching us to improve as relational beings.¹³

Daughters emphasizes in a correct manner that man is alike his Creator also through the fact that he is a relational being. The most intimate inter-human relationship is the one between man and woman in the holy realm of marriage as God established from the very beginning.

In marriage, children are born, and thus deep family bonds are created between parents and children. As the family extends, the relationships between the relatives develop and vary, even if they do not have the same intensity like the husband-and-wife relationship or the children-parents relationship.

The local community is a wider circle of relationships, within which persons share a set of common values, a cultural unity, and a form of organization so that the community can function. The existence of human communities at the local level is also a reflection of the likeness of man with God as a relational being.

The national organization of society establishes inter-human relationships around values, traditions and customs shared by a whole nation.¹⁴ In the modern world, the language of a nation is also important, together with its people, territory and its own form of government. National organization is much more complex than that of a local community, but the inter-human relationship is not as tight as the family or community, although they may share a certain cultural and historical unity at the national level.

A legitimate question may arise: Why is mankind torn apart by conflicts, if God created it with an intrinsic nature oriented towards harmonious interpersonal relationship? The answer of the Bible is that man rebelled against his Creator and then, his being underwent a

13 Kenneth Daughters. "The Trinity and the Christian", in John H. Fish III (ed) (2006). *Understanding the Trinity*. Dubuque, IA: ECS Ministries. p. 369.

14 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru (2018). "Editorial", *RAIS Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 2, no.1, pp.5-6.

dramatical alteration in his inner nature. The Priest Emanuel Copăcianu describes man's fall into sin as it follows:

Being created in God's image and likeness means we are supposed to continuously aspire towards God; our forefather, Adam, did not know how to cherish this splendor that he had been endowed with. There was one single step between our free will and our falling into sin. Our falling was made easy by Satan, committed by Eve and made perfect by Adam. This is the way we lost Paradise.¹⁵

From the teaching of the Holy Bible we infer that the image of God in man was distorted by sin, but not completely lost. Sin affected the human being and the relationships man establishes, therefore both family and society are characterized by conflicts.

The Bible tells the way in which the human society developed in the circumstances of man's nature affected by sin. Marriage was established by God even from the beginning, in the Garden of Eden. After man's fall, God continued to develop mankind through the children born to Adam and Eve. Other families grew and continued to diversify in time. They built local communities, based on family relationships.

Mankind was unitary in the beginning, "the whole earth used the same language and the same words" (Genesis 11:1). Humans set their minds to build the Tower of Babel with a declared purpose to: "make ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:4). This was contrary to God's plan, who commended man, even from the beginning: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it." (Genesis 1:28). Therefore, God said when humans started to build the Tower of Babel: "go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another's speech" (Genesis 11:7). Thus, the nations of the world were born.

In Genesis 12:1-3, God continues His plan with mankind and He chooses a man, Abraham. God establishes a covenant with this man and promises to make a strong nation out of him, through which He was going to bless all the nations of the earth. God fulfills His promise to Abraham, therefore, at the beginning of the book Exodus, Abraham's descendants has formed a numerous people. In order to establish a nation, the Jews

15 Emanuel Copăcianu (1994). *Fiul lui Dumnezeu*. București: Editura All. p. 256.

needed their own government and a land. This was the reason why God took the people of Israel out of the Egyptian slavery, and at Mount Sinai establishes the Mosaic Covenant to govern the relationship of the people with the Creator and the relations between the Israelites. At the end of the book of Joshua, Israel had become a powerful nation.

Unfortunately, the nation of Israel failed in becoming a blessing to all the nations of the earth, except for short periods in the history of this nation. Still, God never fails, for He is able to fulfill this last promise from Abrahamic Covenant. God blesses the entire mankind through a descendant of Abraham, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is both God and man at the same time. The Lord Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, who was a daughter of Abraham. In Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, all the nations are blessed.

The solution God offered is that He will restore in man *imago Dei*, which was distorted by the act of sin. This structural change in the human being is called "being born again" (John 3: 3-7) and can only solely be accomplished by the Savior Jesus Christ, who is "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). Through His death on the cross, the Lord Jesus Christ reconciled man to God (Ephesians 2:16). Thus, man becomes, by faith in the Lord Jesus, a child of God (John 1: 12-13). Through this new relationship with God, new relationships are established between Christians.

For the people in whom the image of God has been restored, the family relationships have become harmonious, full of love, altruism and kindness. The community of the born-again people, the local Church, is characterized by heavenly relations. Obviously, conflicts may occur, as the image of God is not fully restored yet in any human on earth, and the sinful nature manifests itself even inside the most righteous men. Still, such issues have been much diminished.

In order that the Romanian nation to become strong and harmonious, it needs more people who have developed a personal relationship with God, Who Alone can restore, through the Lord Jesus Christ, the *imago Dei*. They can be the foundation of the Romanian nation. National unity has at its very core families in which characters that bear the image and likeness of the Perfect Man, the Lord Jesus Christ. The more families based on the authentic Christian values there will be, the

more morally, economically and socially stronger the Romanian nation will become, with a significant impact on the international level.

The Church may have an important contribution to the development of the society both locally and nationally, if it is a community that reflects the relationship in the Holy Trinity, filled with love, harmony and kindness. This is possible only if the Church submits totally to the Lord Jesus Christ, who “is the head of the church” (Ephesians 5:23).

Conclusion

To conclude with, man was created by God in His Own image and likeness, with personality, able to establish interpersonal relationships. As it is not good for man to be alone, God created man and woman, so that they may establish families in which there will exist unity and harmonious relationships.

Sadly enough, man sinned, thus the *imago Dei* was distorted, even though not completely lost. God did not abandon man, He continued to develop the human society through families, local communities and nations. The people of Israel were meant to be the nation through which God wanted to bless all the nations of the earth. Israel failed in accomplishing this grand purpose, but God blessed all humans in His Son, who was born in Israel and offers them eternal salvation through His sacrifice on the cross and His resurrection from the dead.

Romanian national unity can be strengthened around the fascinating Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, who can restore *imago Dei* in every man who trusts in Him. Such people establish families which can reflect the perfect relationships in the Holy Trinity, thus creating a solid basis for the nation. The Church has a fundamental role in the national unity, if it submits to the Lord Jesus Christ.

May God bless Romania!

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