

FOR A WORLD IN SEARCH OF HUMANIZATION

(Dialogue with the youth– Number 9)

Recently I received an e-mail from an old friend of mine from Boston, U.S.A., who, referring to my lecture at the Notre Dame University, wrote: to achieve an all-encompassing spirituality as you described in your lecture, there must be a complete transformation of humanity; man must become true man.

Indeed, one of the complex problems facing humanity today is the way the human beings perceive and fulfill themselves. Man distorted the image of God at the very moment when he questioned his imperfection and failed to respond to God's call for responsible stewardship and accountability. According to biblical teaching, every human being bears the burden of original sin. In the course of time, original sin has acquired new dimensions and manifestations. A general diagnosis today will identify among many the following trends that destroy the image of God in human being:

1) ***Human claim for self-sufficiency.*** Striving for self-sufficiency is a human desire arising from the urge to satisfy basic human needs. Every individual, organization or community aims for self-sufficiency in all spheres of life. However, this inherent desire turns evil, when it becomes a source of arrogance and superiority; when it is abused and misused as a means to achieve absolute and uncontrolled power; when it oppresses, overpowers, and impoverishes. Taken in its exclusive sense, self-sufficiency also generates unilateralism and hampers progress. It leads to self-centeredness and self-isolation.

Hence, the endeavor for self-sufficiency must aim at self-reliance, creativity and progress. It must be undergirded by ethical values. Otherwise, it may undermine the dignity of human being, violate human values and rights, ignore human obligations, and jeopardize the unity of society and the integrity of the creation.

An exclusivist understanding of self-sufficiency distorts the image of God in human beings and becomes rebellion against and alienation from God.

2) ***Human drive for absolute liberty.*** In theology liberty means freedom from the bondage of sin. It is therefore a God-given gift and vocation. In social and political language liberty implies breaking the chains of oppression, which is a fundamental component of human rights. Hence, liberty is both an ethical and political imperative. The human being is called not only to exercise fully his liberty but also to become its advocate.

Human societies are facing two contradictory trends:

First, oppression of liberty. In many societies, the individual and community, civil and political, economic and religious liberties are being denied or reduced. To violate

liberty is to sin against God, for it undermines human dignity and jeopardizes God's image in the human creature. Liberty belongs to all humans and societies. No worldly power has the right to suppress the liberty of another. This gift of God must be equally shared by all, without any distinction or discrimination.

Second, the human claim for absolute liberty. Today, the term liberty has become identical to greed, limitless acquisition of power and justification for new values. The exercise of liberty in its absolute and exclusive form and expression has increasingly become a political tool and a dominant trend of technologically advanced, morally permissive and economically globalized societies. For such societies, liberty has no limits and limitations.

This is indeed a misconception of liberty. Liberty must be sustained by moral values and be expressed responsibly within the framework of laws and regulations to help people make appropriate choices. Liberty must not become a goal in itself but only a means to attaining a quality of life driven by a sacred purpose. Absolute liberty belongs to God. Human beings must recognize and accept their imperfection. Claiming perfection and absoluteness is a denial of God.

3) *The human rejection of accountability.* Being human means being accountable. Human beings are created by God and are accountable to their Creator. Human beings are given particular responsibility in the created order. As God's stewards and co-workers, they are accountable to God.

Accountability both in its vertical and horizontal dimensions is an essential component of human nature. Its rejection generates evil: human denial of his stewardship towards the creation has resulted in environmental degradation; human disobedience to law and order in society causes violence; human failure in accountability disrupts families, destroys organizations and threatens the fabric of society.

Accountability applies both to those who are denied power and particularly to those who are in power and who exploit and exclude the powerless. It is an interactive process between the powerful and the powerless. Lack of accountability on both sides leads to violence.

Accountability does not oppress, it liberates; it does not marginalize, it empowers; it creates sense of mutual responsibility and belonging to each other. Accountability encourages interaction and interdependence; it builds community. Accountability is a source of progress and success.

To reject accountability is to ignore the other and, therefore, practice the arrogance of power. To reject accountability is to reject God's presence in the human being through His image.

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Claim for self-sufficiency, exercise of absolute liberty and rejection of accountability endanger the creation, destroy community, disintegrate society and create violence.

The world of today is suffering from this chronic selfishness. Cosmetic approaches and short-term remedies will further deepen and intensify it. Time is running short. We need new paradigms, new value systems. This ill may be cured if human beings become consciously aware that they carry in them the image of God. The way to authentic humanness is commitment to:

- mutuality over against self-centeredness;
- vulnerability over against arrogance;
- empowering over against overpowering;
- inclusiveness over against exclusiveness;
- accountability over against unilateralism;
- responsibility over against domination;
- participation over against marginalization;
- education over against ignorance.

When such common values are developed in our own selves, in our families, in our public life and in all aspects and domains of our individual and community life, then all sorts and forms of ills, which shake the very foundations of societies, will disappear, and "man's inhumanity against man" will be transformed into man's true humanity towards God, towards creation and towards his and her fellow human beings.

These values transcend religious, cultural and ethnic identities and barriers. When common values are in jeopardy, they must be addressed through common efforts, locally and globally.

Youth have a major part in wrestling with these concerns and challenges. Youth have a particular role to play in advocating these values in societies in dire need of humanization.

**ARAM I
CATHOLICOS OF CILICIA**

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