

Contemporary Man's Need for Spiritual Life

It was rightly stated that theologically, and not only, the 21st century will be the age of anthropology, that is, of the vision on man. Throughout history, different conceptions on man have emerged, which placed him either closer to the animal world, seeing physical resemblances between the last one and man, or understanding him in a spiritualistic way, seeing man as a mere embodied spirit. Obviously, such conceptions of man do not express the truth about him, but in fact they are caricatures of what man really is. Echoes of these reductionist anthropologies are also present in our time, which exacerbates the biological part of man, his peripheral, and immediate needs, and, especially, those related to his bodily life and senses. In this way, man is reduced to a purely biological, and material existence, without any reference to his depth of mystery which is also a reality he expresses himself through the truth of his existence.

In order to truly understand the existence of man on earth, some of his essential coordinates must be considered: the beginning of his existence (or in other words his origin), the stages of his life, the lines of force his life relies upon and which is the purpose of his actions and of his life, in general. Without taking these human aspects into account, it is impossible to outline a unified vision of him, and, above all, it is difficult to reach the true understanding of the human being.

From the scientific or philosophical point of view, the beginnings of human life on earth are viewed differently, depending on the stages of scientific development that mankind has gone through, on the one hand. Of course, the analysis of this beginning of human life bears the imprint of the school or the scientific direction that studies it, on the other hand. All these attempts of the human spirit to understand the origin of man do not go beyond the status of simple or scientific opinion, which can directly clash with other opinions of another scientific direction in relation to man.

The essential question that arises is this: can we remain captive to such conceptions of man, or is there another vision which explains better the beginnings of man on earth, and, which is more appropriate to his structure and, especially, to his legitimate, and deep aspirations?

In order to better understand man's need for an authentic spiritual life, we must resort to understanding of man in all the complexity and finality of his existence. And opening this perspective on man cannot be given exclusively by man himself, but this vision rests on another cause of his existence. The Revelation itself give us relevant explanations regarding the origin of man's appearance, that is, the intervention of God in the history of existence, in general, and of man, in particular, that is, His personal Discovery or Revelation.

Thus, according to this Revelation, the origin of man is not the product of the mechanical actions of matter and its evolution, from simple forms to more and more complex ones, but on the contrary, man differs radically from all forms of existence that are inferior to his. Moreover, all who exist in this world discover their significance in man, who is meant to know them all, to protect them, possibly to cultivate or develop them and to use them according to his own duties, on the one hand, but also according to the purpose each of them has.

According to the Christian teaching, man is created by God as a person, that is as a complex being, consisting not only of matter, that is body, but also of a distinct part, the spiritual one, called the soul, which cannot come from the material world. Viewed in this light, man could not appear at random, but only when God decided to call him to life. The Holy Scripture of the Old Testament has clear words about the origin of man and his creation by God. He created man from the matter also created by Him, that is from the earth, and "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Genesis 2, 7; see the entire chapter 2 from Genesis). Then God placed the man created by Him in the garden of Eden to work and guard it. This fact from the Holy Scripture has a special value, because it reveals that the existential roots of man are neither in himself, nor in the things of the universe, but exclusively in God the Creator who called him to life. Man should always know that God is the foundation of his existence, and he must maintain the bond of faith, love and obedience to Him. To the extent that man has such a grateful consciousness of his Creator, he can continually enjoy His gifts.

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In this sense, the Holy Scripture offers us several testimonies that express the deep aspiration of man according to the spiritual values he wants to partake with as much as possible. He feels this need, because he is not satisfied with all this world offers him, that is goods and pleasures. Most of the testimonies of man's aspiration to the high and holy ones are found in both the Old and the New Testament. In the Old Testament, most expressions of the human soul outpouring in order to share God's gifts, His help and care, are found in Psalms. They are a living fresco of the deepest aspirations of man, to enjoy the attention, help and care of the Most High. Some biblical texts in this regard are enlightening: "I cry aloud to the Lord, and he answers me from his holy hill. I lie down and sleep; I wake again, for the Lord sustains me" (Psalms 3, 4-5). Or: "Answer me when I call, O God of my right! Thou hast given me room when I was in distress. Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer". (Psalms 4, 1).

The testimonies of Psalms are extremely relevant in regard to man's hunger and thirst of God, who responds to man in all the circumstances of his life when he turns to God. When the heavenly Father answers man's prayer, then he feels fulfilled and full of love for Him and of hope for his purpose in the world.

But the most relevant words about man's hunger and thirst for God, that is, for the spiritual values, are spoken by the Saviour Jesus Christ. In the desert of Quarantania, being at the beginning of His messianic preaching, Jesus Christ was tempted by the devil. The first temptation the Lord was subjected to was that of eating bread after a fast of 40 days. The devil tempted Him thus: "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread" (Matt. 4, 3). The Saviour answers: "it is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matt. 4, 4). Jesus Christ's rejection of devil's temptation is especially helpful in terms of man's attitude towards material goods. But beyond this explanation made by the Lord, in fact He emphasizes another aspect, namely, that man has not only material needs but also spiritual. These varied needs of man are based on the fact that he is not only matter, but also spirit, not only body, but also soul. Due to the "breath of life" received by man from God through the very act of creation, the human being is extremely complex, with different aspirations and needs. It explains his existential duality, on the one hand, and, his material and spiritual needs, corresponding to this structure of his being, body and

soul, on the other hand. As man needs material nourishment and the daily bread in order to live biologically, he likewise needs spiritual nourishment, which does not come from the material world, but from God. There are different tendencies of one kind or another in people's lives, which distort and disturb this balance between material and spiritual needs in human life. The Saviour does not say that man does not need bread, but that he must know that *he lives not only with bread*, but also with *the word of God*, that is, with spiritual bread and drink.

In this sense, Jesus Christ Himself explains what the spiritual bread and drink mean. In the framework of this work, we should highlight only a few words of the Saviour in this regard, which are illustrative of what the spiritual hunger and thirst of man mean. The Saviour's meeting with the Samaritan woman from Jacob's well offers him the opportunity to point out that besides the physical water from this well there is another water, *the living water*. "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4, 13-14). The spiritual drink which the Saviour talks about with the Samaritan woman is the living water of divine grace, which springs from God and is shared with people through the Holy Church. Also, in the Gospel of John, the Saviour speaks of the bread that came down from heaven and gives life to the world. "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst" ... "I am the bread of life" (John 6, 35 and 48). The origin of this Bread of life is from heaven, that is, it has a different causality or origin than the material bread. While the material bread sustains the bodily, material and transient life, the upper Bread prepares for eternal life. "This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh" (John 6, 50-51).

Through these words, the Saviour anticipates the establishment of the Eucharist Sacrament in the Church, which is the way he remains with those who believe in Him, until the end of the ages.

So, Jesus Christ brings to light people can be truly fulfilled and quench their hunger and thirst for God only when they partake to His Word and Person, through His life-giving Mysteries.

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How does contemporary man relate to such a vision of his origin and aspirations? Is he aware that he must be in a permanent relationship with God? Does he understand his purpose in the universe? These are questions which the contemporary man should personally and properly answer to, in order not to transform his life and work into a disfigured caricature of his life and purpose in this world.

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