

Homosexuality in the Light of Image and Likeness: A Christian Anthropological Approach

Marvellous Tawanda Murungu, O.Carm.

Introduction

The article discusses the Theology of the Body's concept of Man as created in the Image of God which can be traced from antiquity since it has a rich and long tradition. This is evident in the works of Patristics and doctors of the Church like Augustine and Aquinas, who devotedly wrote about "the body and its relation to the soul, created by God in his image and destined for bodily resurrection" (Pope Pius XI) although some promulgated doctrines are now understood erroneous in some way. Furthermore, the article examines the relevance of the pedagogy of this concept that man was created in the image of God in light of the challenge of homosexuality which can be traced from the Old Testament excerpts for example, Leviticus 18 and 20. To begin, it is worth familiarizing with the Theology of the Body to help one understand the scope of this project. John Paul II describes Theology of the Body as "a specific, evangelical, Christian pedagogy that unfolds and explains the revelation of the body by reflecting on human experience".¹ "Pedagogy seeks to educate man by setting the requirements before him, giving reasons for them, and indicating the ways that lead to their fulfilment".² Given that, this article's scope, will investigate in an in-depth manner the concept of Man-not in the literary sense as some have mistakenly interpreted-created in the *imago Dei* and examine the significance of that teaching to the modern-day challenge of homosexuality as understood by varied disciplines.

Imago Dei (Image of God)

The origins on which this symbol of image and likeness has been referenced is the Genesis account found in the Pentateuch. Genesis promulgates that God said "let us make man in our own image (*tzelem*) after our likeness (*demuth*)".³ They were to have dominion over all creation for instance, over the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, cattle and every creeping thing on earth (Gen 1:26-27). There is a shift from

passive verb “let there be” in the previous verses which narrates other days of creation to a hortative “let us a make” which alerts one to anticipate something special and, in this case, it was the human beings created in the image of God. As a result, this gives human beings a prominent place because God now understood to be Triune made a deliberate action. However, this position is mostly likely to be abused at the expense of other creatures because there is the element of dominion and superiority above other creatures as evidenced over the centuries.⁴

It is important to note that this Genesis account has become the hinge of a tradition that has led the Theology of the Body to understand that God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them (Gen 1:26-27). Following from that first chapter of Genesis which is the point of departure, it means that humanity is created in the image of God “not only through the gift of our intellect and free will or through our ability to know and to choose, but it is also through our ability to possess ourselves and then give ourselves to another person, forming a communion of persons in love, since God who is love and also a communion of persons in the Trinity”.⁵ This serves to help one to understand the image of God in terms of the holistic approach. The holistic approach dismisses views like that of Philo which emphasized the intellect and will. This tradition of Philo was even exacerbated by prominent doctors of the Church, for example Augustine who emphasized the power of the soul, intellect and will. However, the holistic approach understands the image of God to capture a human person as a whole that is body, soul and spirit. The Genesis account does not emphasize one aspect of God at the expense of the other. Thus, a human person is a psychometric unity-the corporeal animated man-, body and soul together that is the image of God. This takes one to another dimension of respecting the body as much he or she respects the soul. Henceforth, an abuse of the corporeal nature is a misunderstanding because we will be considering it not necessary and not making it fully functional yet it is the image of God.

The Function of the Image of God

It is in that light that St John Paul II promulgates that “Man became the ‘image and likeness’ of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons which man and woman form right from the beginning...Man becomes the image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion. Right ‘from the beginning,’ he is not only an image in which the solitude of a person who rules the world is reflected, but also, and essentially, an image of an inscrutable divine communion of persons”.⁶ In addition, “the human body bore in itself, in the mystery of creation, an unquestionable sign of the image of God”.⁷ On this note the Theology of the Body opens up to the function of the Image of God that is relational. This aspect of relationality in the genesis account is developed until chapter 2. God is triune, relational hence human beings are called to be relational with God, other human beings and whole creation. To state that a human being is created as a being like God means that persons can enter into a relationship with the creator.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* concurs with the above assertion and summarizes God’s intention and work to his own image but also to all creation as it stated that “the Word of God and his Breadth are the origin of the being and life of every creature”.⁸ In other words God created everything through his word and action (Gen 1:7-16). So, the *ruach*-breadth was the protagonist of creation which is expressed by the Psalm: “when you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breadth, they die and return to the dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth” (Ps 104:29-30).⁹ This affirms Pauline’s literature (Romans 8) that God created Him that he might be preeminent to everything. Henceforth, the affirmation that the Spirit sustains creation means that creation is marked by divine goodness. The Spirit becomes the eternal link between Father and the Son. Analogously, the Spirit acts in creation so that creation can experience the essential mystery of life that is the communion of human beings with God, with others and with all reality. This prompts the salvific meaning of creation: God creating with a plan that human beings participate in the divine will and contemplate the very life of the Trinity.¹⁰

As a result, it becomes plausible to state that humanity was created to be in communion with God, others as well as creation since everything resembles divine goodness and the spirit in us provides the link between creation and the Godhead.

Secondly, the other function is dominion. This suggests that humanity is created to represent who God is and execute authority. It is in the “nature of an image to allow what is represented to appear; so, where the person appears God also appears. In other words, humanity are stewards in creation, in the event that there are no stewards they dehumanize themselves”.¹¹ The duty of humanity is to co-create, not abuse. Following from the above role of the Holy Spirit in creation, it is evident from scriptures that the word of God was made into reality owing its existence to the action of the Holy Spirit.¹² Two important tenets that come clear, is that the universe began and is sustained through the Holy Spirit. So the world exists in virtue of the creator Spirit. In addition, the continuance is profoundly spiritual because everything is sustained in the Spirit. Therefore, the expression that “it is good ” finds its relevance (Gen 1:10) in understanding creation. In other words, creation in the spirit becomes the manifestation of the Word through which the Father created the universe because All things came into being through Him (John 1:3).¹³ Therefore, it is plausible to practice contemplation of creation understanding it in-terms of the divine traces hidden in each and every being that is the wisdom and goodness of God the Creator who created everything through His Word. *Laudato Si’* stated in the same line of thought that “the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature has become conflictual” because of anthropocentrism (Gen 3:17-19).¹⁴ Humanity because of dominion over creation they have exploited the earth for their benefit to the extent that they have caused climatic changes like global warming and water pollution making the mother earth inhabitable. It is in this light that humanity ought to take care of creation because they are stewards of earth since creation is like an open book capable of making known God and his design of love.¹⁵ It becomes all humanity obligation to use the earth’s goods responsibly, co-create because other living beings have a value of their own in God’s eyes: “by their mere existence they bless him and give him glory”¹⁶ and indeed,

“the Lord rejoices in all his works” (Ps 104:31).¹⁷ Thus, understanding creation that exists and is sustained by the Spirit, will help humanity to understand their second function as the image of God in creation.

Theology of the Body on Relationality between humans

Moreover, the Theology of the Body develops on the facet of humanity’s function of relationality. It states that human beings ought to relate with others through their bodies which adds up to the discussion to understand the significance of the Imago Dei according to St John Paul II on the challenge of homosexuality. On the basis of the Genesis account, the exegesis highlighted that in the beginning, the naked body prompted Adam and Eve to live their call to love, their call to spiritual and bodily communion. This call to form a communion of persons was meant to be lived through their bodies. The ability of the body to show us our call to love is the nuptial (spousal/conjugal) meaning of the body. Their nakedness, far from being of less significance, carry with itself a lot of pearls of wisdom about their love for each other and about the purity of their hearts. Since shame is a result of being viewed as an object to be used by another person, Adam and Eve’s lack of shame demonstrates to us that they both saw and received each other as a gift and sought only to give themselves to one another, not to use the other. Therefore, we fulfil the reason for our existence by loving.¹⁸ Our physical bodies were made precisely to show us this and be the means by which we accomplish this. Hence, for John Paul II “the human body includes right from the beginning...the capacity of expressing love, that love in which the person becomes a gift – and by means of this gift – fulfils the meaning of his being and existence.”¹⁹ Given that, Adam and Eve understood their calling and as a result they beheld each other with God’s eyes, who “saw everything he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). They read in each other’s body, which was a sign of the other person, a language of love, which each welcomed and reciprocated.

Homosexuality vis-a-vis the Imago Dei

Scripture as a source of theology highlights that homosexuality has been perceived as an abomination, a sin that invited God’s wrath for

instance, the account of Sodom and Gomorrah and Leviticus 18 and 20. It is plausible to understand it and possibly how it is challenged by the Theology of the Body. Homosexuality can be defined as a “persistent and predominant attraction of a sexual-genital nature to persons of one’s own sex”.²⁰ Predominant in sense that there might be a degree of erotic interest in the other sex and persistent is used to mean that erotic feelings toward someone of the same sex have persisted beyond the adolescent phase.²¹ Varied theories have been postulated as to how it becomes a reality. For the sake of this discussion, I will propose two that are Moberly’s thought and Aardweg’s thought. Moberly states that depth psychology gives data that same sex love is a normal and legitimate developmental need. However, this valid and universal love need was not fulfilled on the usual developmental time table. In other words, a homosexual has been unable to meet the normal developmental need for the attachment to the parent of the same sex.²² Homosexuality in this theory is a reflection of the past relationship difficulties that is the emotional unavailability of the parent, neglect, and this led to the repression of the child’s attachment to the parent of the same sex. So, homosexuality becomes a manifestation of the person trying to make up for the missing growth. Whereas, Aardweg promulgates transitory homosexuality which maybe a phase of development and chronic homosexuality which lies in one’s feelings, not in one’s manifest behaviour. For Him homosexuality is learned not innate.²³ Given that, one can have a sense how homosexuality come to manifest.

Although the theories have elucidated homosexuality, the theology of the body can be of significance to this challenge. However, it is plausible to state that the Sacred Scripture, particularly the genesis account, cannot be the only source that needed some elucidation. The theology of the Body as already highlighted emphasized the image of God that is God ordained as that between man and woman relationship. The Genesis 1 and 2 shows that the heterosexual relationship is both ideal and norm of sexual behaviour. Which implies that incorporating other social sciences like depth psychology theories, one can realise that homosexuality is a disability. Theology of the body informs the challenge of homosexuality that there is need for change of this sexual orientation. Even if the

hormonal feelings of a person are homosexual, it does not give the person the right to actualize it because it becomes a sin. Thus, in consultation with reported literature and pastoral care, theology of the body will help people change their homosexuality orientation. They are people who have been helped who are now physically and emotional heterosexuals in successful marriages.²⁴ However, this help will need self-motivation on the person who is homosexual, that he or she needs to change and find a skilled therapist who in turn fosters self-acceptance, self-insight and the spiritual dimension essential for the personal change. Unfortunately, this demands stable financial resources since this therapy is not affordable to many people which is a call for pastoral concern to ensure that the theology of the body relationality is put into praxis.²⁵ Given that, the essence of the theology of the body to this challenge is to inform the expected relationality and possibly inform the pastoral care for the need to attend to this challenge and curb it.

Conclusion

This article has discussed in an in-depth manner the concept of the image and likeness from the Theology of the Body. It has been demonstrated that this concept is hinged on the Genesis account and the human person ought to be understood holistically, because giving priority to one aspect of this concept will endanger the other to more vulnerability and dehumanization of the person which is the hindrance to being fully alive. Furthermore, this concept was discussed in terms of functions that are dominion and relationality. This enlightened to the view that God intended that humans relate to Him rather, to other humanity and creation as well fuelling the aspect of co creation when understanding the dominion function. Theology of the body has been elaborated on the relationship of humanity in order to inform the challenge of homosexuality. Given the significance of theology of the Body, one can plausibly hold that homosexuality is an abnormality which pastoral care ought to consider to help those implicated in such regard. So, *Theology of the Body* informs humanity about the God ordained relationship so that those with this disability find necessary assistance.

- ¹ John Paul II. *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*. Trans. M. Waldstein. (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006.) 360.
- ² *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, 360.
- ³ Hall Douglas, John. *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship*. (New York: Grand Rapids. Friendship Press, 1986.) 70.
- ⁴ Manobo, Blazio. Class Lecture. *Christian Anthropology*. Holy Trinity College. Harare. August 2020.
- ⁵ *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, 2
- ⁶ *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, 46.
- ⁷ *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, 113.
- ⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. (London: Geoffrey Chapman-Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1999.) 703.
- ⁹ Theological-Historical Commission for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. *The Holy Spirit, Lord and Giver of Life*. Trans. Bono Agostino. (New York: The Crossword Publishing Company, 1997.) 34-35.
- ¹⁰ Edwards, Jonathan. "The Priority of Holiness". *Theological Journal* 7 (2013) 48.
- ¹¹ Edwards, Jonathan. "The Priority of Holiness". *Theological Journal* 7 (2013) 48.
- ¹² Edwards, Jonathan. "The Priority of Holiness". *Theological Journal* 7 (2013) 49.
- ¹³ Theological-Historical Commission for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. *The Holy Spirit, Lord and Giver of Life*. Trans. Bono Agostino. (New York: The Crossword Publishing Company, 1997.) 27.
- ¹⁴ Hall Douglas, John. *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship*. (New York: Grand Rapids Friendship Press, 1986) 66.
- ¹⁵ *The Holy Spirit, Lord and Giver of Life*, 26.
- ¹⁶ Pope Francis. *Laudato Si': On the Care for Our Common Home*. (Vatican: 2015.) 61. http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_encyclica-laudato-si.html. Accessed: 22 August 2020.
- ¹⁷ *Laudato Si': On the Care for Our Common Home*, 69.
- ¹⁸ *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, 57-58.
- ¹⁹ *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, 63.
- ²⁰ Harvey John, F. *The Homosexual Person: New Thinking in Pastoral Care*. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987.) 27.
- ²¹ *The Homosexual Person: New Thinking in Pastoral Care*, 27.
- ²² *The Homosexual Person: New Thinking in Pastoral Care*, 38.
- ²³ *The Homosexual Person: New Thinking in Pastoral Care*, 48.
- ²⁴ *The Homosexual Person: New Thinking in Pastoral Care*, 76.
- ²⁵ *The Homosexual Person: New Thinking in Pastoral Care*, 76-78.