

Sunday, December 9, 2012

Distinct Characteristics of the Christian Faith (1)

The Value of Mankind

Christian faith has distinct characteristics that differentiate it from any other belief system. By this I mean the practical aspect of the Christian faith rather than the theoretical foundation of Christian doctrine. For instance, who is this God? Who is man in the eyes of his Creator? What is the nature of the relationship between man and God? With the grace of God, we will address this topic in a series of articles starting with “The Value and Honor of Mankind.”

The Image and likeness of God

In Christian doctrine, man has a great value. He is the only creature created after the image and the likeness of God. This distinction gives mankind eternal nature, intellect, free will; dominion over other creature that God created so man has mastery and rule over them. Saint Basil the great emphasizes this: “But of these gifts the supreme benefit was that the human person was created in the image and likeness of God.” [Beginning to read the fathers, Boniface Ramsey, Paulist Press, P. 67].

The Incarnation of the Son of God

Man is the creation of God, he is distinguished from all other creations. The devil envied and tempted him through Adam and Eve to disobey God, thus death entered into the world through this envy of the devil. Here, God demonstrates the greatest sentiment of love towards mankind. God gave us the incarnation of His only-begotten Son who took the form of a servant to renew the nature of mankind by uniting with the human nature through the mystery of incarnation. We see that mankind is greatly valued and honored through the incarnation of the Son of God and uniting with his nature to become the Son of man.

God is the source of value of man

God is the sole source of the value and greatness of man whether in the original creation after the image of God and His likeness or in the incarnation of God the logos, the existent before all ages. He created a new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him (Colossians 3:10), created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24).

Recognizing the value of man in Christ Jesus

It is very important for man to recognize his value in Christ Jesus. Many important outcomes which are tied to the Christian doctrine are based on recognizing this value:

1. **Man rejects sin categorically** for it is, by far, the most demeaning to man and devaluing of his honor. The origin of sin was the devil that is known to be “*a murderer from the beginning...*” (John 8:44). Also sin is the thorn of death, it is separation from God. But he who realizes his own value in Christ Jesus, will find sin to be thorny because he sees it unfit for him as a child of God.

Being free in Christ: When man recognizes his value, he holds on to his freedom in Christ Jesus, which is the greatest gift to mankind: “*Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.*” (John 8:36). To the contrary, sin robs man of his freedom as he becomes enslaved to it, “*whoever commits sin is a slave of sin*” (John 8:34).

2. Therefore, sin leads man to lose the dominion that God gave him when he was created, to the extent that he loses control over himself. In this regard, St. Gregory of Nyssa says about Adam: “the human person was the image and likeness of that power which rules over all existing things. This is why he also possessed mastery over himself, as a likeness to Him who exercises universal sovereignty. In no sense was he the slave of any external necessity. No, he made up his own mind about what was right, and by his own free will chose as he pleased, with the result that, to this very moment, the disaster he chose dominates the human race.” [Ibid., P. 69]

3. **Love and Mercy.** Recognizing one’s value in Christ Jesus does not only affect how man perceives himself but also how he perceives others. Thus we see the relationship between loving God and loving one’s neighbor as the greatest divine commandments and at the same level of importance, “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart... and your neighbor as yourself.*” (Luke 10:27). He who recognizes the value of mankind, his heart moves with mercy and love towards mankind without any barriers of race, color, or religion, or even towards all other creatures. This is what makes the difference between societies that do not appreciate humanity and others that have the greatest appreciation to humans and even animals. Here we need to emphasize that the society’s appreciation to humanity, in and of itself, should not overlook the reason that this appreciation is because man is created after God’s image and His likeness and that Christ died for his sake.

Man outside of the circle of God loses all value and meaning of his life.

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