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„DUMITRU STĂNILIOAE”

DOCTORAL THESIS

THE ASPECT OF DIVINE LOVE FROM A BIBLICAL
POINT OF VIEW

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Argument

Divine love represents one of the most convincing realities of the relation between God and the world. Love is not just a simple affirmation, an ipotehsis or an intellectual suposition, but it is revealed by the redemptive action manifested in human history, because divine love is an active love.

The Concept of Love in biblical languages

The hebrew language uses more words which show how the love and affection feelings are manifesting: אָהַב (ahab), חָפֵץ (chapeṭ), חָשַׁק (chasaq), רָצַח (raṭach), רָחַם (racham), דָּבַק (dabaq), חֶסֶד (chesed), חוּס (chus), חָמַל (chamal) וְדָד (dod).

Unlike the Hebrew language, the language of the Greek philosophers has only four verbs for expresing love feelings: ἐράω (erao), φιλέω (fileo), ἀγαπάω (agapao) și στέργω (stergo). Some of them are used very rarely in Bible texts.

Love, a major characterstic of God

Any reader of Bible can see in it a truth that is impossible to deny: the fact that the God described there is in a total relation with the world and all its inhabitants. If Dumitru Belu had defined love as a disparsal o barieere between the lovers ant the loved one, then surrely the revelation of God is an act of love.

A loving and merciful God, slow to anger and full of compassion

A main aspect of any theological speech is that man can understand God only if He reveals Himself. God reveals to Moses, at Sinai, as a loving, merciful and long-suffering God. The verse from Exodus 34, 6 (“Yhwh, Yhwh, God merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth”) is the first Bible’s reference about these characteristics of God.

The qualities revealed by God Himself will become part of Jewish thinking and belief and they will remain in their consciousness forever. Starting with this text from Exodus 34, 6, Yhwh will be identified through these words in some other biblical texts: Nehemiah 8, 17; Psalms 86, 15 (85, 14); 103, 8 (102, 8); 145, 8 (144, 8); Jonah 4, 2; Joel 2, 13.

Mercy, kindness, long suffering and graciousness are inner qualities of God, as seen in the Sinaitic confession and they will always be the mark of God’s work in the world.

„God is merciful and compassionate”

The mercy of God is shown almost all the time through the adjective „chanun” (חַנּוּן), while „chesed” is used quite rarely with this meaning. The compassion is described by the word „rachum”. Only according to divine revelation man can present Yhwh in such image. The fact that mercy is a divine characteristic is stated first of all on the

divine confession. God states first about Himself to be merciful and only after that the man can place himself, by faith and experience to this confession.

God is never referred as ἐλεήμων in the New Testament writings, even if the word is used later in Christian literature. The richness of divine grace is described in Old Testament through the expression “great is Your mercy” or other similar expressions. Saint Paul says the same thing in his epistle to Ephesians (2, 4) “God, who is rich in mercy”. The word οἰκτίρμων appears in New Testament writings as referring also to God. The Gospel according to Luke (6, 36) presents Jesus words from the Sermon on the Mount when He is giving a commandment about mercy and compassion “be merciful as your Father is merciful”. The text is well known to all Bible readers.

„God is longsuffering”

God’s quality as longsuffering is described by the Hebrew term „erek-appaim”. It can be translated also by “slow to anger”. The expression speaks always about God who is seen as an example of patience while His anger is manifested. The Proverbs (14, 29; 15, 18) use the same expression when referring to the man who is longsuffering. This kind of man is given as an example for his life and for his behavior. When reporting to God, “erek-appaim” is found in a few biblical texts, mostly discussed above: Exodus 34, 6; Nehemiah 9, 17; Psalms 86, 15 (85, 14); 103, 8 (102, 8); 145, 8 (144, 8); Jonah 4, 2; Joel 2, 13.

Man can make use this divine characteristic because the Lord is abundant in kindness (rab-chesed) and this abundance of kindness impose a divine patience in waiting man's returning. The expression „erek-appaim”, longsuffering can be found in Nahum prophecy (1, 3). It appears in the context of a prophecy against the great city of Niniveh. Nahum reminds that God is longsuffering and it is of a great straight and e does not leave anything unpunished. The verse is a statement of Lord's patience in waiting the returning of sinners.

The image of longsuffering and slow to anger God is a characteristic mark of biblical text. It is manifested through Lord's grace toward sinners who are called to repent. Longsuffering and slow to anger is a time of waiting.

„God is good”

The Hebrew language uses more words that can be translated with “good”. Among these there are three words which are more important: *ṭaddik*, *chasidei* *šei tob*. But *tob* is the only word meaning good, while *ṭaddik* means just and *chasidei* can be translated by the word kind or pious. „*Tob*” is used for many times in Old Testament writings. It can be connected with men, with different things or with God. The humans can be good and also their work can have the same characteristic. But in the same way, God can be described as being good. When saying that God is good is like a comparison with someone, mostly with idols. The purpose of such comparison is to prove that Yhwh is the only true God. So according to Bible, the expression “God is good” becomes a

confession of faith of entire Jewish community. By this Israel is choosing his true God despite the evil work of idols and demons.

By the expression “God is good” the Holy Scripture testifies that God is the main source of entire goodness and that no one but Him can be characterized this way. Man can benefit this kindness only if he participates in giving kindness to the entire world.

„God is love”

“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways” (Hebrews 1, 1). God had revealed to forefathers as being longing and merciful, longsuffering and full of compassion. It was necessary that Saint John should unite all these characteristics in one: God is love (I John 4, 8; 4, 16). This johannine confession it’s like a deduction of all confessions Bible made up to this moment. Compassion, mercy, longsuffering and kindness were in fact acts of love. But John was the first to say it load and clear so that all the world should know this. This is way Saint John words are like a summery of Gospel teaching and of the entire Scripture.

Man as receiver of divine love

God free will and and love are the reason of decision of creating the entire world. Love is in fact a creative action. The famous words from Genesis (1, 1) “in the beginning God created heaven and earth” are the starting point of love of God to entire creation.

Law and commandments emanates from God's love to men

To prevent any failure from the right behavior and the lack of loving each other, God will set laws to facilitate humans relationships. Torah will become the gift of God to chosen people and to all mankind. Law is love because it springs from love and incite to love.

The commandments concerning the relation with other people are often repeated as a proof that God is concern about how man respects and loves his fellow. in how man Poruncile ce privesc relațiile cu cei din jur, cu ceilalți oameni revin de nenumărate ori în textul biblic ca o dovadă puternică a faptului că Dumnezeu se îngrijește de modalitatea în care omul respectă și iubește pe semenul său. This is the purpose of restrictions imposed by the Ten Commandments. This commandments indent to draw a way for keeping human love. Divine law creates the directions to observe in order to walk to the kindom of heaven.

Keeping commandments will bring life

Acting according to divine words is a concrete proof of faith in God. In the same manner, if the man observe the law and acts in its paths it means that he loves the One who gave the law, he loves God. When Jesus Christ speaks at the Last Supper to His disciples, He shows th relation between law and love of God: “if you love Me, you will obey what I command” (John 14, 15).

Any commandment, any divine word, any law with divine authority is given so that the one who obeys it shoul inherit earthly

goods, a long life and especially, the eternal life. Proverbs (3, 1-2) describe the relation between observing divine rules and a long life on earth.

By keeping commandments and divine words any one will have life. Those who love God and respect His words will have probably a long life and will inherit surely eternal life.

Lord's attitude toward those who love Him

When someone prefers to obey divine words it means that first of all, he loves Torah and the entire law of God. This love is manifested through concrete actions in daily life.

God's justice imposes to respond with love and blessing to the fulfillment of divine words. Any man who walks in Bible ways, according to God's law will be under the protection of the Lord. The simple wish of receiving divine blessing and love should make man to desire to love God by obeying His commandments.

God takes care of all humans, mostly to faithful and just ones

The believer manifests through his belief the intention of belonging to God. He tries to confess and show this by all his actions. The faith puts him close to the Lord. Belief and faith in God assume a confession proved by his actions. The person who knows and strongly belief that Yhwh is the true and almighty God he shows his belief by committing his entire life to the Lord. Such person doesn't need any help

except the one given to him by his Savior. And God is anxious to love and protect those who believe in Him.

Yhwh loves the just people

The fulfilment of justice was a social desire planted by God in the conscience of every Israelite especially through Moses law. This is why justice was rewarded by God. The Book of Psalms testifies that God “love justice”. When he fulfils justice in the middle of human community, the right person finds his help in the One he eagerly looked for, in God.

Man’s good actions draw in divine blessing and love

Commanded by God, good actions are the clear mark of anyone who wishes to belong to the Lord. Even through the divine words seemed not be indispensable for this world, they surely are necessary for the person who wants to enjoy divine love and blessing.

God’s attitude toward the just and the sinners

God looks at the good people in order to repay them. In the same way He looks for the sinners in order to punish them for their outlaws. In Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 11 and 28 can be found those texts also called after theirs message “blessing and cursed”. According to these statements the fulfilment of God’s commandments brings divine blessing. When someone breaks the law and disrespects them will be punished by slavery, poverty, dryness and death.

God's attitude toward those who repent

If divine justice suppose punishing the sins, divine mercy then God tempers His judgement. He dallys His judgement in order to wait for the repentance of the sinner. The relation between repentance and divine mercy seems to be a mark of biblical revelation. The prophets relate the life on Israelite nation to their turning back to God: "Turn to me and be saved" (Isaiah 45:22); "Seek me and live" (Amos 5:4).

Social classes who are under God's special protection

All social commandments intend to create a special relation between the members of Jewish community or between different peoples. Those who are oppressed benefit most a special attention from God. The Lord Himself says about Him to be the "Revenger" of the widows and of the orphans (Proverbs 23, 10-11). Deuteronomy identifies God as protector of oppressed ones: the widows, the orphans, the strangers and the poor.

God's love for special people

Yhwh connects in a intimate way with certain persons which are choosed by Him. By the act of choosing these persons rise up to participate in the mistery of divine love. Any reader of the Bible will observe that there are special persons who benefit of the God's love attention.

Among those loved by God there are the fathers of human race, Adam and Eve. There are also the three patriarchs, the forefahers of Israel (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). The same divine love is given to

other two very important categories from Israel history, prophets and kings. The Bible speaks about others who are also loved by God such as Enoch, Noah, Sem, sons of Jacob (with a special view on Joseph, Judah and Levi), Joshua, judges, Job and so on. From the New Testament writings there are emphasies the Apostle, especially John, Peter and Paul.

So the love of God comes to every person who was chosen by God to fulfil His plans with Israel and the whole human race. But divine choice expects and impose love.

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