Nexus Between Human Nature and The Problem of Sin in Christianity: A Theologica-Philosophical Expose

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Abstract

This theological and Philosophical expose delves into the intricate relationship between human nature and the concept of sin within Christian doctrine. It explores how Christian theology interprets the nature of sin as an inherent aspect of human condition, rooted in the concept of original sin and its subsequent impact on human behavior and morality. It also examines the nexus between the biblical account of the nature of humans and their `inherent helplessness' to sin in view of the prevalence of sin in contemporary society. It adopts the descriptive and historical methods in exploring the biblical presentation of human nature as the only authentic source of knowledge in establishing truths about human beings, their activities and potentials. By examining key theological perspectives of contemporary scholars, it reveals how human nature is perceived as fundamentally flawed or predisposed to moral failings according to Christian thought. The analysis further considers the philosophical implications of this Christian doctrine, including the tension between the un-fallen, fallen and the post-fallen state of human nature, and the existential struggle of reconciling human imperfection with the pursuit of God. This expose provides a comprehensive understanding of how Christian teachings on sin are deeply intertwined with the broader philosophical questions about human nature and ethical responsibility.

Key Words: Human Nature, Christian, Sin, Theological, Reconciliation

Introduction

The correlation between the nature of humanity and its inherent vulnerability to sin or otherwise has been subjected to diverse understandings and interpretation in the theological discourse. Over the years, there have been continued attempts to link the problem of sin in the world to the feeble and faintly nature of the human person, thereby providing a ready justification for sin and evil to thrive unabated. For instance, the position of philosophical naturalism, which views sin as naturally intrinsic to human nature, establishes humanity's predisposition to the inevitability of sinfulness. There is, therefore, a need to explore a correlation between humanity's creaturely sinfulness and weakness in the light of the prevalence of sin in contemporary time.

Whereas secular anthropologists have done much to address the lingering questions on the nature of humanity to diverse perspective including the historical and classical views, there are still controversies and debates surrounding a great number of submissions and perceptions. For instance, is humanity to be understood in terms of its rational and spiritual powers, as in classical philosophy or primarily in terms of physical reality, as argued by Epicurusm, Marxism and materialism? (Milne, 1982). Also, should humans be subjected to psychological interpretation of humanism or be understood primarily as individuals, as argued in existentialism and other modern philosophical presuppositions? (Milne, 1982).

Examining the Biblical Concept of Human Nature

Attempts made here to examine the human nature as affirmed in the Bible by alluding to various references both in the Old and New Testaments. The human nature in its unfallen state, its nature in the fallen state, and its nature in the post-Fall state shall be examined.

A. The Human Nature in Its Pre-Fall or Un-fallen State

Genesis 1:26 gives the first insight into the nature of humanity as being in the image of God, wherein God said, "Let us make mankind in our image like, in our likeness...", while verse 27 affirms the human race as creature in the image of God: "So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them (Gen 1:27). Although some of the theologians have advocated a differentiation between "image" and "likeness", Nihinlola (2002), maintained that "no distinction should be made between the two, since they are used synonymously in the Bible."

Bird (2013), asserts that throughout the Scripture, both the Old and the New Testaments, there are clear-cut emphases on the image of God as an integral aspect of the human make-up. Garrett (1990) noted that the image of God in human beings, identified with Christian theology as *imago Dei*, is described with the noun *selem*, meaning "image" or "shadow", as used in Gen. 1:26a, *demut*, "likeness" or "similitude", is used in Gen 1:26...and in Gen 5:1b. Erickson (1998) supporting Garrett said the *imago Dei*, that is, the image of God is what makes Humans Human. Erickson stated further that the image is the powers of personality that makes Humans, like God, capable of interacting with other persons of thinking and reflecting, and of willing freely.

Originally, human nature was perfect by virtue of having being created by God. The pre-Fall state of mankind in Gen 1:31 as described by God himself was good. The bible teaches that human beings were created "good" by a loving God (Gen 1:31), before that goodness was marred by the sin of Adam and Eve. This as humanity's original nature before the Fall. Erickson noted that the real human is the being that came from the hand of God, unspoiled by sin and the Fall. This was the nature of mankind in its uncorrupted state. By creating mankind in His image, God makes them to have some understanding of Him and His vast and complex designs. Our human nature reflects some of God's attributes, although in a limited way. We love because we are made in the image of God who is love (1 John 4:16). Because we are created in His we can be compassionate, faithful, truthful, kind, patient and just.

In the words of Milne (1982), "Traditional interpretations of 'the image' refer to features such as human knowledge, moral awareness, original moral perfection and immorality..." In other words, humanity in its un-fallen state was perfect and sinless with high sense of moral uprightness and probity.

B. The Human Nature in Its Fallen Sate

Although the human race was in perfect moral and spiritual state or relationship before the Fall, that goodness was marred by the sin of Adam and Eve. The gory story of the disobedience of Adam and Eve Is recorded in Gen 3, pointing to the historicity of sin that infested the entire human race. By eating the forbidden fruit in the garden (Gen 3:6), they became totally depraved. The term "total depravity" has been used to describe the immediate concomitant effect of the first sin, which implies that the image of God in Adam and Eve became defiled and tainted due to the disobedience. It resulted it a situation that affected the entire human race, leaving no part of its nature untouched, and affecting every aspect of the human body and soul (Gen. 6:5; Ps 14:3; Rom. 7:18) (Berkhof, 2003).

Part of the theories linking the sin of Adam to the sin of the entire humanity is the Realism Theory of imputation of guilt, rooted in Platonic philosophy, and expounded by Augustine of Hippo, W. G. T. Shedd, et al. This theory teaches that every human nature was present in Adam so that when he sinned, all sinned (Garrett, 1990). Garrett insist that there is also the covenantal or Federal or Representative Theory popularized by John Cocceius and Francis Turretin, and well defended by Charles Hodge. He added that this theory teaches that God appointed Adam as the representative of the entire human race and engaged him in a "covenant of works" with a humanity. Garrett "thus on the condition of his disobedience, human beings would have eternal life, and on the condition of his disobedience, Adam and all humanity would be subject to corruption and death." This consequently made God to impute the guilt of Adam's sin on the entire humankind.

Apart from the early Fathers such as Augustine of Hippo who has the natural headship of imputation of sin, Paul also maintained that because of Adam's sin, all persons received a corrupted nature and were, therefore, guilty in God's sight as well. It was not merely Adam but all human who sinned, because "we were all present in undifferentiated from in the person of Adam, who along with Eve was the entire human race". However, it does not mean that sin belongs to the

original constitution of human nature, in order not to presume that God created man as a sinner. In describing the word "original" Garrett says it assumes the imputation of the sin of Adam in the rest of his descendant as our representative head through which the biblical and theological correlation of Christ's representative head is also affirmed. There are six references to the sin of Adam in Rom. 5:12a, 15b, 16b, 17a, 18a, 19a:

Therefore as sin came into the world through one man... For if many died through one man's trespass brought condemnation... If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man... Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men... For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners... (Garrett, 467).

As a result, the Bible teaches that Adam's sin was passed on (Rom5:12). In Ps. 51:5, David says, "Look, I was prone to do wrong from birth; I was a sinner the moment my mother conceived me." (cf. Romans 3:23). Also, the bible teaches that "They have all gone astray, they are all alike corrupt; there is none that does good, no, not one" (Ps.14:3; 36:1-4, 53:1-3; Luke11:13). Mcdonald posits another associated theological concept employed to describe how the sin of Adam affected the human race is transmission of sin. This is a fundamental premise of the gospel that human beings are sinners and need a savior. The consequence of disobeying God's command is that the human race squandered its lasting relationship with God, and it is on this basis that man's mortality was well pronounced (Gen 3:19 cf. Job 4:17; Rom. 8:11)

However, there are also a few theories that imputation theories, such as the Palagius Theory that Adam's sin was not imputed to his posterity and the Voluntary Appropriated human beings lack original righteousness or primitive holiness and, apart from divine help, are unable to obey God. This inability is physical and intellectual, but does not include the will..." On the contrary, Berkhof (2003) maintain that total depravity affected the will and the thinking faculty of humans, manifesting itself as spiritual inability and resulting not only in spiritual death, but in physical death aw well... Having sinned, the human race was doomed to return to the dust. This means that the sin of Adam and Eve came with grievous consequences on the entire human race.

C. The Human Nature in Its Post-Fall State

The first thing to establish is that after the Fall, the human race became morally corrupt by nature and lacked spiritual discernment. The Genesis narratives also give accounts of resultant effects of sin as violence, egotism and polygamy of Lamech (4;19, 23-24); the cowardice of Abram (12:10; 20:1-18) and Isaac (26:6-11); the rivalry and heartache of Sarai in relation to Abram and Hagar (16;1-6); the deceiving of Isaac by Rebekah and Jacob (27;5-29); Shechem's rape of Dinah (34:1-31); etc (Garrett, 1990). In other words the Fall resulted in total breakdown of law and order and evidential manifestations of acts of rebellion to the commandments of God.

However, total depravity should not be understood as a state of absolute impossibility to discern some good. Berkhof (2003) says it "does not mean that human nature was at once as thoroughly depraved as it could possibly become." He went further to say that it neither implies that humanity is perpetually inhibited from having an innate knowledge of God, nor that "every unregenerate

man will, by virtue of his inherent sinfulness, indulge in every form of sin." Erickson says although the image of God in the human person was tainted and marred by sin due to the Fall, the image of God has not been totally lost as a result of sin. This is because the image is something inseparably connected with humanity. Hence "the presence of the image and likeness in the non-Christian is assumed." The problem, however, is that spiritual standing of humans with God and sense of moral uprightness has been greatly hampered. People need special help to be able to live a life of freedom from sin and death.

The Problem of Sin in Contemporary Society

The fact that sin has become an essential norm in the contemporary society cannot be over-emphasized. There are various terminologies used in the bible to explain the concept of sin, some of which have been considered most appropriate for this work. According to Erickson (2003) the first terminology attributed to sin is "transgression," from the Hebrew 'abar. It appears approximately six hundred times in the Old Testament. It means literarily "to cross over" or "to pass by"....the idea of going beyond to establish limit (Numbers 1:41-42; Esther 3:3; Deut 17:2). Erickson, says in Greek, the closest meaning is parabaino, and its noun form parabasis (Matt. 15:2-3). The second word is "perversion" from the Hebrew Awah, that is "to bend or twist." It means as well "to be bent or bowed down" (Isaiah 21:3; 24:1; Prov.12:28). The noun form speaks of the destruction of cities (Ps79:1; Isa.17:1; Jer.26:18; Mic.1:6;3:12) (Erickson).

The next word is "abomination", which is the most common English translation of *shiqquts* and to '*ebah*. Berkhof (2003) observed that "these terms generally describe an act particularly reprehensible to God such as idolatry (Deut.7:25), homosexuality (Lev. 18:22;20:13), sarcrificing sons and daughters (Deut. 12:31) or blemished animals (Deut. 17:1), and witchcraft (Deut. 18:9-12). These praticies virtually nauseate God." The commonest O.T. term for sin is *hattat* (e.g. Ex. 32: 30) and its cognate term *het* (Ps. 51: 9). It occurs several hundred times in the O.T. and expresses the thought of missing the mark, or erring. *Pesa* (Pr. 28:13) " has the sense of active rebellion, a trespass or transgression of God's will." More so, the major word for sin is the Greek N.T. *hamartia* (Mt. 1:21), also conveys the idea of missing the mark; failure, fault and concrete wrongdoing. *Adikia* (1Cor. 6:8) conveys the sense of righteousness or injustice. Most of this terminologies used in the bible describe sin liken it to an act of evil or wickedness against God (Erickson, 1998).

There is no gainsaying the fact that evil acts, wickedness and all forms of sinful habits permeate every stratum of contemporary society, be it family social or religious aspect. In contemporary society, the problem of domestic violence, child abuse, human trafficking, political and religious violence, terrorism, tyrannic leadership, corruption, armed robbery, kidnapping, rape, prostitution, sexual immorality and perversion, and destruction of lives and properties have become everyday occurrences.

In the past weeks, Nigeria dailies have been laced with news of all manners of sinful habits, defiant acts and break down of law and order in replica of the Fall experience. The Guardian Newspaper on March 3, 2017 reported "Suspected Fulani Herdsmen Kill Four in Fresh Attack on Benue

Community" (Wantu, 2017). Again, page 12 of the same newspaper reported, "End of the Road for 'Vampire' Nigeria's deadliest kidnapper", with the rider "Police say killed over 200 people through criminal activities" (Wantu, 2017). The Nation on Saturday February 25 had this to say about a National Assembly member lamenting the state of dastardly killings by Boko Haram in northern Nigeria. He raised an alarm over the state of 14.8m people affected by the crisis and the state of over 2.5m children being currently malnourished due to wicked killings that have claimed the lives of many people (Ojiabor, 2017). The Nation on Sunday February 26 in its front page reported, "FG recovers 7 billion naira and 10 million dollars in private homes," while Tribune on Monday 27 February reported, "200 Containers of Fake Tyres Seized, 2 Chinese Importers Arrested"—SON (The Nation, 2017). Investigations later revealed that the smuggled fake tyres were capable of taking away the lives of millions of Nigerians.

Moreover, Nigeria and other foreign countries will not forget soon the report of the xenophobic attack in South Africa where human beings were burnt alive and properties looted. Saturday Punch, Feb 25, 2017, recounted the recent attacks in an article that, at least, 20 shops and homes of foreigners were looted and burned, as stated by South African Police. It was reported that the current violence was reminiscent of the last major wave of the xenophobic attacks in Johannesburg and Durban in 2015, in which about seven people died (The Nation, 2017).

In addition, sin, moral failure and breakdown of law and order are not limited to the society alone; they are also rampant in Church and other Christ's body. According to Akinbobola (2006) the Church of God is not exonerated from the moral failure and all manner of unfaithfulness, fraudulent practice, idolatry and all sort of immoral practices that plague the contemporary society. Sahara Reporters in its Facebook post of April 27, 2017, titled "Inner City of Perversion and immorality" reported a familiar incident about a school. Although the director and management staff of the school are pastors, it is unfortunate that the school, owned by a popular Pentecostal denomination in Nigeria, stills allows all manner of sinful habits and atrocities to thrive on daily basis. Testimonies from other people also affirmed the illicit sexual activities going on in that particular denomination, and so, some members have decided to take their leave Nwanguma, 2017).

No doubt that all these can be described as ripple effects of the fallen, degenerated and morally impaired human nature occasioned by the Fall. This paper now examines the nexus between the fallen humane nature and the problem of sin in the contemporary society. To what extent is the problem of sin unavoidable in the world due to the fallen nature of humanity?

The Correlation between the Human Nature and the Problem of Sin

Having established the fact that as a result of sin the human nature in which the human was created (the image and likeness of God) was being rubbished and marred, this paper now proceeds to examine the extent to which humanity is perpetually under the grip and power of sin and what other option is available to live a live pleasing to God. Biblical inferences reveal that human in their natural state are usually prone to sin (Ps. 51:5; Romans 3:23). From the biblical terminologies and usage of the word "sin" examined above, it must be noted that while some of them "point to

definite and specific sins, others seem to suggest a condition or state or tendency" (Erickson, 1998). In other words, for the unregenerate there is always the inner disposition and tendency to sin. This inward disposition to sin is clearly expressed in Psalm 51, which is referred to as the great penitential psalm (Erickson, 1998).

Erickson (1998), noted that the Old Testament is even clearer and emphatic in describing the inward disposition of humans to sin. Accordingly, Jesus expressed the fact that just by a lustful look at a woman, sin is already committed in the heart (Matt. 5:27-28). For as long as the human person and beings are being controlled by the sinful, Adamic nature, their vulnerability to sin remains inevitable. Apostle Paul maintained that it is the corruption of human nature that usually produces individual sins. He recalled that "when we are controlled by the sinful nature, the passion aroused by the law were at work in our bodies so that we bore fruit till death" (Rom 7:5). According to Motyer (1984), there is always "another law at work in the member our body, waging war against the laws of our minds and making us to be prisoners of the law of sin at work within our members" (cf Romans 5:23). On its part there is always the desire to gratify the desires of the flesh by the sinful nature.

This was why Paul used the concepts of "old man" (Adamic nature) and new man to express the contrast between a life without Christ and a life in union with Him (Rom. 6:6; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:9-10) (Erickson, 1998). While a life in Christ is under the control of spirit that translate to work of obedience, righteousness, kindness, justice an love, the old man is controlled by the flesh the works of which manifest in sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, hatred, discord, fits of rage, selfish ambitions, dissensions, faction and envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like (Gal 5:19-21). The condition of any human under the sinful nature likened to that of the heathen, who "because of their separation from God, are darkened in their understanding having given themselves over to sensuality as to indulge in any kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more" (Eph. 4:18-19). The sinner cannot alter his or her life by a process of determination and will power. For the fallen nature "sin is inescapable." And no one can live a perfect life in his own strength" ((Erickson, 1998).

However, for the old man, there is an escape route of freedom in Christ to attain victory over sin. Christ is the "new (Son of) Man" of a new creation or kingdom or humanity established in contrast to that of Adam. Our union with Christ (through baptism into his death and resurrection, Rom 6:3-5), therefore guarantees our transfer from the old creation to the new, with the crucifixion of our Adamic nature by which we are able to reflect or "put on" God's image (1Corithains 15:45-49) (Motyer, 1984). This is why God has put the necessary measure in place to restore the lost image and re-unite humanity unto himself. Carey (1988), observed that "The task of Jesus' mission leads us back to God and restore the image in us. To be 'in Adam' is to belong to the old sinful humanity (Heb 1)." Hence there is need for every man to reconcile with God through Christ. As a result, we experience full humanity only when we are properly related with God.

The coming of Christ became necessary so that the problems of sin, guilt, and depravity could be resolved; means to atonement needed to be provided to restore humanity to its spiritual state

(Eeickson, 1998). Only the death of Christ on the cross met the divine severity and turned aside the wrath of God. Not only that, the sacrificial death of Christ grants humanity direct access to God and guarantees reconciliation in place of alienation. Sanctification is the process by which God develops our new nature enabling us to grow into more holiness through time. This is a continuous process with many victories and defeats as the new nature battles with the old (2Corinthians 5:4) in which it resides, the flesh (The Human Nature, 2016). The good news is that the moment a person trusts in Christ, he receives a new nature. The gospel leads us to believe that the divine image is restored in humanity by Christ and the image is even defined by the humanity of Christ (Gen. 5:1-2; 1Cor. 15:49; 2Cor.3:18) (Bird, 2013).

The fact that Christ bypassed the natural process of biological birth made Him free from the Adamic nature and inherited sin that common to all humans. This is a more logical an tenable reason why the uniqueness and sufficiency of Christ to guarantee victory over sin is established. The cause of sin has no effect over Him so that He was uniquely qualified as the sinless One to go to the cross to die as the Lamb of God (Bird, 2013). Even those who are portrayed as perfect in the Bible such as Noah, Job etc., still had their shortcomings (cf. Job 1:8 and 14:15-17) (Erickson, 1998). The priestly office of Christ and His mediatory role in the history of mankind are veritable theological justification for His exceptional qualities as the only way to salvation and victory for over sin.

Moreover, the other passages refer to believers becoming the image of God through the process of salvation. Romans 8:29 notes that they are being conformed to the image of the Son. Berkhof (2003), noted that in the covenants of redemption, Christ became the last Adam and acted as a surety by atoning for the sins of humans and bearing the necessary punishment to fulfill the demands of the law on their behalf. According to John piper in berkhof (2003), this turn in redemption is... to put Him at the center of all God's saving work. In Jesus Christ, human beings come to know God personally in a redemptive relationship. Akinbobola (2006), noted that Christ, therefore has swung in to mediate on humans' behalf with the power to sustain as many who are willing to appropriate His provision of absolute freedom over the power of sin.

Garrett (1990) posits that the position of philosophical naturalism, which views sin as naturally intrinsic to human nature, was based on an over emphasis on the Old Testament concept of humans as "flesh" (esp. Isa. 40:5-8; Ps. 51:1) to the neglect of the entire Biblical doctrine of sin. Whereas the Old Testament describes humans as "flesh" from the view point of their creaturely weakness and morality, there are other principle terms for sin other than *basar* (flesh). Hence, the biblical emphasis is that humans sin not only because they are creaturely or inherently weak but also due to willful desire in spite of their being created in God's image (Garrett, 1990). Oyelaran (2013), opines that the advent of Christ has taken care of human weakness and helpless vulnerability to sin. In Christ we do not just find narrow escape from perdition. Rather, we find a new way of being human under a new better federal head.

Akinbobola (2006) says every individual person, the Church and society at large can experience renewal and harmony in Christ. The humanity of Christ is a practical demonstration of what true

humanity ought to be. The individual society and Church therefore have a definite hope of liberation from moral corruption through Jesus Christ as they appropriate His life and teachings of the gospel, which is a channel of grace instituted by God to eliminate sin and all its manifestations. While Nihinola (2002) concluded that humans can only find meaning and fulfillment in life through a life of godliness and Christlikeness, and this they cannot do without God through Jesus Christ. When persons imbibe the nature of Christ, the Holy Spirit grants them the enablement courage and grace to be free from the grip of sin.

Recommendations

- 1. In view of the inherited Adamic nature in every human and the corresponding predisposition to a life of sin, it is recommended that the Church intensifies efforts at preaching the gospel of salvation from sin to death. This becomes necessary so that the entire human race will be brought to the knowledge of Christ's work of redemption in order to attain freedom from the grip and power of sin.
- 2. There is need for exemplary Christian living by every believer in Christ. Since God has provided the grace to redeem the fallen human nature through Christ, believers in Christ are expected to emulate God in faithfulness, truthfulness, patience and love, and act as God's agent of transformation in the world. The Church of God should be completely distinct from the moral failure and all manners of unfaithfulness, fraudulent practices, idolatry and other immoral practices that plague the contemporary society.
- 3. Gospel ministers need to continually educate and teach their members and other that a life of victory over sin is possible through Christ. Greater emphasis should be placed on the finished work of Christ and not on believers' perpetual subservience to sin and Satan.

Conclusion

At the beginning of creation, man was in a state of moral and spiritual perfection before the incident of the Fall that corrupted the image of god in him. The sin of Adam and Eve resulted in the entire human race inheriting the distorted nature. However, this does not mean that God created mankind as intrinsically sinners, for even in their fallen state human being can still discern between good and evil, although with limited strength to overcome the sin. It therefore behoves on natural humans to surrender themselves and embrace the offer of redemption in Christ so as to experience inner and spiritual renewal. Therefore, with the provision of salvation in Christ, the inherent tendency in human nature to sin is not a perpetual incapacitation.

It must be stated that the work of redemption is a holistic package. It is the idea of holistic salvation and total freedom from sin, satanic domination and oppression. The world is confused and lost and in need of a Saviour. The essence of Christ's coming is to restore humanity to God. When people come to know Christ they discover meaning and purpose and their full identity is regained. It is only through personal encounter with Christ that humankind's quest for meaning in life perpetually satisfied without gratifying the desire of the flesh.

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