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STRUCTURAL ANATOMY AND FUNDAMENTAL UNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSONALITY IN PAULINE THEOLOGY: A SYNTHETIC APPROACH

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Abstract

The question of the constitution of human beings is an age long debate. The ancient and the modern humans grapple with the question without achieving consensus on the subject. The Bible scholars, theologians and Church leaders are not exempted from the debate. Is man made up of spirit/soul and body, or spirit, soul and body. Or are these mere terms used to depict the various activities of the human personality? This paper, using survey method, argues for Paul's holistic conception of human personality. More so it is without serious theological and practical implications for the Christians as other alternative interpretations. For sure, due to the complexity of the subject matter, one counsels against dogmatism over the issue.

Keywords: Structural Anatomy, Human Personality, Fundamental Unity, Pauline Theology, Synthetic Approach.

Introduction

Paul's theology of the structural anatomy of the human person is not expressly and systematically expounded in his writings. New Testament scholarship is in accord on the occasional nature of Paul's epistles. They were products of specific circumstances that arose in the local churches. In the vein, Thomas Schreiner comments, "they are not systematic treaties that were intended to present a complete Christian theology. They are pastoral works in which Paul applied his theology to specific problems in the churches. With particular reference to human beings, Paul's concern was not to give detailed estimation of their origin and composition. His reference to humans was primarily in the context of sin and need for salvation and future life. George E. Ladd writes, one of the chief limitations of the ad hoc nature of Pauline letters is that we do not have Paul's complete thought (Ladd, 1993: 415). So much has been taught and written about biblical concept of human person and several theologies have been formulated as a result. Some of these theologies are anything but unbiblical with serious practical implications for the Church. This paper attempts to piece together various thoughts on human make up from various references in Paul's letters and reflections of Scholars. The chief purpose is to synthesize the structural anatomy and the basic unity of the human person and to engage some doctrines emanating from analysis of Paul's human constitution.

Paul's background on the subject matter would very much enhance one's understanding of his thought. Hence the paper investigates Jewish and Greek ideas on the subject. It is followed with survey and synthesizes of Paul's thought in his letters especially 1 Thessalonians 5: 23 and its implications for some current doctrines of some Churches in Africa.

Background of Paul's Theology on Human personality

Antecedents of Paul's teachings are usual Jewish and Greek. His teaching about human on constitution is no exception. It is considered here howbeit briefly.

Jewish thought

The Scripture proclaims that God created the universe and man. Only him is created and endowed with special features and abilities not found in other creatures. However the basic constitution of the human beings is still a subject of debate. The account of creation of man (Genesis 2:7), seems to distinguish two basic natures of man: the body (dust) and spirit (breath). . A good number of scholars argue, the two (body and spirit) are integral. For example, it has been stated that the real man is the spirit and that the body is just the casket. Rather the Body and spirit belonged together in the unity of the personality (Orgu, 2002: 45). In other words, it is unlikely the two are separable as some believe.

Various terms are used to describe the makeup of human nature in the Old Testament. Notable among these terms are Soul (Nefesh), Spirit (Ru- ah), flesh body (Ba – sar), Heart (Lev) Blood (Dam). What does one make out of these? Do they depict separate part of the make-up of human beings? It is the most likely they stress the diverse aspects of the activity of man (Chamblin, 1993:376).

The Greek Thought

The Greek thinkers conceive the human body as made up of soul and body. While the Soul/spirit is considered to be good, the body is seen as part of matter therefore is evil. According to them the body is inherently evil. Thus, the soul seeks salvation from the body (Chamblin, 1993:767) the prison of the soul. The body is considered as inferior to the soul. The Greeks divided man into two separate parts stressing the spirit as higher and the body lower and evil.

Did both of these backgrounds, Jewish and Greek, have influence on Paul's concept of human make up? If both, which is greater? The Jewish influence on Paul's thought on the subject seems not to be in dispute as much as that of the Greek. A number of scholars deny latter's influence. It is a fruitless attempt to locate Hellenistic dualism of the human nature in Paul's anthropology. It is likely such influence was more of in terms than in content.

Structural Anatomy and Human Personality in Pauline Writings

Paul believes God created humans beings. He implies this in many passages in his letters. In Ephesians 3:9, he refers to God as one "who created all things." Since man is part of creation, he is certainly included in the all things (Bruce, 1988: 337). As F.F Bruce notes with reference to Paul's speech in Acts 7: 28 "The creator of all things in general is creator of the human race in particular"(Bruce, 1988; 337) Many Pauline scholars will readily admit Paul like the Old Testament writers and Greek thinkers, uses many terms to describe human nature. This nature is categorized as corporeal (physical) and incorporeal (spiritual). Paul may have used two Greeks words Soma (body) and Sarx (flesh) to refer to the corporeal nature of man. And he employs terms such as pneuma, kardia and nous for the spiritual (incorporeal) . Udo Schnelle concludes his analysis of the body in these words, "for Paul therefore, soma means both bodily existence, as one's self- understanding in the present world, and being incorporated into God's creative saving act" (Schnelle, 2003: 498). The body refers to the

outward visible, physical part. The spirit denotes the invisible spiritual part of human. Here Paul's man is consistent with The Old Testament teaching of the two inseparable human personality.

Flesh

The Greek word sarx (flesh) appears in Pauline letters mostly in Romans and Galatians. Paul used flesh to mean the following: First is the Fleshy or bodily substance. In 2 Cor. 12: 7 Paul speaks of his flesh being afflicted to keep him humble. Again, in Galatians 6: 12, 13 he talks of the Judaizers insisting on the circumcision of the Gentiles for the purpose of boasting in their flesh. These two texts indicate the flesh has the tendency of boasting and that it can be afflicted by disease. Second, the physical human body. In 1 Cor. 6: 16; 17, Eph. 5: 31, for example, one's body may be united with a prostitute (in sexual immorality) or with the Lord (1 Cor. 16; 17). Paul and his fellow workers had no rest in their bodies because of trouble.

Third, the whole person. This refers to (Rom 6: 19) the natural man or the whole human nature in its natural weakness. Fourth, natural descendants. In Rom. 1:3 Paul speaks of Christ being a descendent of "David (kata sarka) according to the flesh" Israelites were Paul's Kinsmen by flesh (Race) (Rom. 9:3; Rom 11:14). Fifth, the whole of physical existence. Paul says Jesus Christ had lived in the flesh (Phil 2:6). "To be in flesh" is not incompatible with being in the Lord .The life Paul the Christian lived was in the flesh (Gal 2: 20).

It can be inferred that flesh in Pauline teaching refers to physical nature as well as to man's earthly existence. The latter meaning could be termed fleshly if man and woman pursue worldly things instead of devotion or service to God. According to Paul, those who live according to the flesh, have their minds set on what it desires (Rom. 8:5), are dead (Rom. 8:6),are hostile to God (Rom. 8:5), and do not submit to God's law and cannot do so (Rom. 8:7). Flesh has desires which are contrary to the Spirit (Gal. 5:19) and manifests in sinful acts (Gal 5:19). "Thus flesh in its moral or ethical connotation refers to the total human nature conditioned by the fall." (McDonald, 1981:19).

Body

The Greek word *soma* is translated into English as body. In Roman 2:28 and Gal 2:15, Paul uses flesh/body to mean the physical part of man. It is the basic idea of body in Pauline usage. In Gal. 6:17 Paul talks of bearing the mark of Christ on his body. Body here is definitely the tangible part of him. The same usage is found in 2 Cor. 4:10 and 1 Cor. 13:3. In the latter "to surrender my body to flames" indicates the destructible nature of the physical body. Paul sees the body as God's temple (1 Cor. 6:19) and member of Christ. "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself" 1 Cor. 6:15). He appeals to believers to submit their bodies to God as a sacrifice totally surrendered to God (Rom. 12: 1-3). On the one hand, the body under the influence of sin could be instrument of unrighteousness (Rom 6: 12-13).

Evidently, Paul conceives the body as something neutral. It is the use one puts it that matters. This is made clear when he instructs believers not to offer their bodies as instruments of sin but of righteousness to God (Rom. 6: 12 – 13). Thus, the body is not inherently evil but good. Paul would never have imagined a person without a body in the physical realm of existence. Man will never be without a body. Even after death, Paul teaches that at the resurrection

human beings will put on spiritual body (1Cor. 15: 35-45). Paul and other Bible writers did not see man as having existed as a spirit and latter put in a body.

Spirit

The Greek word for spirit is *Pneuma.* In Rom. 8: 14 Paul used it to designate the Spirit of God. It is those led by the Spirit of God that are sons of God. Paul's usage of spirit with reference to human beings is contrasted with his body. He writes in Rom. 8:10 "But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness." In this context, it refers to the inner nature of humans. It is man's spirit that makes it possible for him to relate with and serve God (1 Cor. 7:34). Paul teaches that man's spirit could be contaminated through sexual sin and immorality (2 Cor. 7:1).

Soul

The Greek word Psyche is translated soul. Paul uses psyche mostly to stand for human life. Hence in Phil. 2:30 Epaphroditus nearly lost his soul or life for the work of Christ (cf Rom, 11:3).Soul also refers to the elements that compose the human being as a "thinking, working and feeling person (Ladd: 1993; 503). (2 cor. 12:15; 1 Thess. 2:8).It is likely a man's soul or life as used by Paul does not survive death. For example, the wicked sought to take Elijah's life while Epaphroditus risked his because of the Philippian church.

Heart

Kardia is the Greek word translated into English as heart. Paul sees the heart as the seat of both good and bad emotions. For example, the heart desires sinful things in Rom 1: 24 while in Rom 10:1-2 Paul's heart desire was for the salvation of Israel his people. Also, believers sing and make music in their hearts to the Lord as in Ephesians 5:19 as well as enjoy a peaceful state of heart.

Furthermore, Paul sees the heart as seat of intellectual activity. To the Corinthians he instructs to give whatever amount of money they decided in their hearts. Also, the heart is the treasure of motives whether good or evil (1 Cor. 4:5). It is in one's heart according to Paul that he/she decides to repent or not (Rom. 2:5) Paul states that the motives of the unrepentant hearts would be judged by God. Also, the Apostle designates the heart as the seat of spiritual experience. For it is through Christ's dwelling in the heart by faith that the saints can comprehend the love of God (Eph. 3: 17). God pours his love into the hearts of believers by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5; II Cor. 4.6).

Mind

The word mind is translated from the Greek word *Nous.* Paul says the minds of humans have the capacity to approve the law of God (Rom 7: 22,25). The mind set on things of the Spirit pleases God and leads to life and peace (Rom. 8: 5-8).On the contrary, the mind of the unconverted person could be, rendered corrupt(Rom. 1: 28), Vain (futile) Eph 4:17, fleshly (Earthly) Col, 2:18, and victim of death (Rom 8:6). The mind has the capacity for good and evil.

Conscience

The Greek word translated into English as conscience is *Suneidesis*. It is a combination of two Greek words: sun which means "with or together" and eidesis which means knowing.

Sunedesis literally means joint or co- knowledge. The conscience, according to Paul, is capable of approving all that are good and disapproving bad things. In Rom 9:1 Paul's conscience confirms the sincerity of his desire for Israel's salvation.

Man's conscience could be good. In Acts 23:1 Paul himself testifies before the Sanhedrin that he had served God in a good conscience even before his conversion to the Christian faith. The implication of this is that one could be sincerely wrong while his conscience approves such acts. It therefore follows that conscience functions with knowledge of good and bad concerning a particular action. Again, in Acts 24: 16 Paul talks of conscience devoted of offence. This refers to a clear conscience.

On the other hand, conscience could have bad connotation when qualified with negative adjectives. Seared conscience as used in 1Tim 4:2 describes a conscience that has become insensitive as a consequence of stains of sin. Paul refers to the Gentiles in this state as having lost all sensitivity to morality and indulged in all kinds of impurity with continual lust for more (Eph 4:19). Also, Paul used the word defiled to describe a conscience that has been soiled or contaminated by sin of unbelief (Rom 14:23) and sexual immorality (Rom. 14:14)

However, a weak conscience does not denote any sense of good or bad but quality or maturity of conscience. It refers to a conscience that is unable to distinguish between what constitutes proper from an improper conduct (Orgu, 2000: 8). For example, some Christians in the Corinthian Church (with weak conscience) were undecided on the question of eating meat sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 8:7). Paul lists sin (1Tim. 4:2) unbelief, false doctrines and seeming innocent actions of others as (1Cor. 8:7) as capable of impairing one's conscience. He conceives conscience as a common possession of all man irrespective of their religious inclination. I H. Marshall and others state the two fold significance of conscience thus, 'It is the means of moral judgment, painful and absolute because the judgment is divine, upon the actions of an individual completed or begun, and it also act as a witness and guide in all aspects of the believer's sanctification (Marshall and others,1996 :456).

A Synthetic Approach

> Αὐτος δε ὁ θεος της εἰρηνης ἁγιασαι ὑμας ὁλοτελεις, και ὁλοκληρον ὑμων το Πνευμα και ἡ ψυχη και το σωμα ἀμεμτως ἐν τη παρουσια του κυριου ἡμων Ιησου Χριστου τηρηθειη 1Thess 5:23.

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To begin with, 1 Thessalonians is indisputably Pauline and the text 1Thess 5: 23 is free of any textual variant. So, then one is dealing with the original words of text. The content of the text is Paul's prayer for the church in Thessalonica. Paul is in the habit of praying for and giving thanks on behalf the churches (cf Rom.1:10, 1 Cor., 1:4). The context was for the sanctification of the church- his readers. The Greek word *agiasai* (sanctify) means being morally pure. Another word is *oloteleis* (whole) which means completely / totally. Also *amemptos (*blameless) simply means being without blame or fault (cf. 1 Thess 2:10). *Agiasai* and *amenptos* connote moral quality or purity while *olotoleis* refers to degree of completeness (Scripture Direct, 1 Thess. 5:23). It is the same as the phrase through and through (NIV).

What are the elements to be made totally pure? Paul prays that the whole/entire spirit, soul and body of believer be made pure. The prayer of Paul was not separate sanctification of the spirit, soul and body, but the totality of person's being. No part of man is to be excluded in the act of sanctification.

Thus, Paul's focus is not on whether human beings are made up of two or three parts. While not denying some form of dichotomy or what J.P Moreland and Scott B. Rae term anthropological dualism in the Bible(Moreland and Scott, 2000: 23, 39).Paul's emphasis in 1 Thess. 5:23 is the totality of the human person. To this he prays for its through and through sanctification. One therefore agrees that the terms spirit, soul and body are but different ways of viewing the whole person (Ladd, 1993:499). In the Synoptic Gospels, one finds the same stress on the unity of human persons by the use of different terms such as, soul, heart and mind (Matt 22:37). Mark and Luke add strength (Mk 12:30-33, Luke 10:35). As many commentators have pointed, the point in these passages is the loving of God with the whole of one's being (Gruden, 1994:473). One may submit that that the Old Testament sees (Unlike the Greek thinkers) humans not as different separate parts but as indissoluble. Paul seems at home with the Old Testament. The soul is not higher part of humans standing over against the body but designates the vitality of life or life principle in a person (Ladd, 1993:500).

Implications of Fundamental Unity of Human Personality for Doctrines of some Christians in Africa

From the forgoing one can deduce the following which will form the basis of consideration of some doctrines of the church. First, Paul seems to be in agreement with the Old Testament writers on the human persons as material and immaterial beings. Both parts are not separate parts of human beings. None is a human being with the other. As Udo Shnelle puts it, "for Paul there is no human identity apart from bodily existence and so he also thinks of the resurrection reality and thus post mortal existence in bodily terms.(Schnell, 2003: 497). Second, the Exegesis of 1Thess 5:23 is a pointer to human elements not as separate entities but the totality of the persons. Terms such as spirit, soul and body are understood as different ways of viewing the whole person (Ladd, 1993:499).Third, it seems Paul does not consider spirit/ soul and body as superior to each other. The body though corrupted still belongs to God and is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Fourth, the body is not evil nor is it a shackle or prison house of the soul and spirit. Such thought has its origin in Greek thought. The thought of the body as evil and the soul as seeking escape from it is foreign to the Bible. It is therefore wrong to suffer or mutilate the physical body in order to be holy or the spirit to find expression. The expression that flesh is at war against the spirit as been have demonstrated refers to sinful nature not the physical body.

What are therefore the doctrinal and practical implications of the unity of the human person expressed in its various activities? First is with respect to demon possessions. The view of the human spirit as superior and purer than the soul and body is responsible for the doctrine that demons can possess the human soul and but not the spirit. To begin with Paul teaches the human spirit like the body is contaminated or defied (2 Cor,7;1). So, if the spirit is superior to the soul it is not in the sense of it been without contamination of any sort. It can be argued that the devil can access or possess any element defiled by sin; he can equally possess their spirit. After all, both are parts of the human person affected by sin. How does one understand 2 Corinth 7:1 (Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us

purify ourselves from everything that contaminates **body** and **spiri**t, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God) with respect to the sinfulness of the whole part of man? Is not that humans need cleansing from every defilement of the body and spirit to holiness to God? If the spirit of man needs cleansing it means it is affected by sin as every element of the human nature.

Second, the conception of the human body as evil, the prison house from which the soul/spirit is seeking escape is largely responsible for the abuse of the body. The abuse is often in terms of ascetism, deliberate mutilation of the Body and fasting as a means of disciplining one's body. In all this the body is construed as a hindrance to spirituality or holiness.

God created man and woman bodies. He did not put them in bodies. Human body is part of creation that God pronounced good. The body should be loved and cherished and cared for as creation of God. As Michael Horton beautifully puts it "we are not saved from our bodies but with them, in the general resurrection of the dead (Horton, 2011:379).The human body is meant for the Lord (1 Cor,6:13) and the Christians' bodies are the Temple (dweling place) of the Holy Spirit I Cor,6:19). Believers are to honour God with their bodies (I Cor, 6:20). Evidently, as already observed, Paul conceives the body as something neutral. It is the use one puts it that matters. This is made clear when he instructs believers not to offer their bodies as instruments of sin but of righteousness to God (Orgu, 2000: 58).

Conclusion

The use of the words, spirit, soul, and body has occasioned much debate on the view of the human nature. The three main interpretations emerge from the debate. These are dichotomy, trichotomy and holism. Unbiblical concept of the human constitution has led to some doctrinal errors. Some churches believe that the Holy Spirit inhabits the human spirit hereby setting it free from the bondage to the body. The soul and body are inferior to the spirit. In other words, the spirit is superior to the rest. It is with the spirit that humans communicate with God (Stott, 1991: 133).Paul believes the unity of the human person. The different terms used to depict humans should not be construed as indicating separable independent parts. Human beings should be viewed holistically not as separate parts leading to the abuse of the physical body. Paul's concern is the sanctification of the totality of human person not the different parts.

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