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ENDANGERED MAN
AND THE REPLY OF THE CHRISTIAN
FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF THEOLOGY*

In the story of creation (Gen. 1:26-2:3 and Gen. 2:4-25) the full emphasis falls firstly on the fact that man is the high point of Creation and then emphasis shifts to the fact that man represents the point of departure for history. On the one hand man is related to the lower orders of reality as he has been created out of the "dust of the earth". On the other hand he should be distinguished on the grounds of principle as it emerges that he was created as the result of a deliberate mutual deliberation of the Trinity; God initiated his life by giving him breath; and it is of the greatest import that man was created in the image of God. As would appear from Genesis 5:3 where these same words are used in a reversed order, this double expression indicates that man was a likeness of God. This image has determined his humanity and has meant that he has a claim on communion with God through faith.

In particular this likeness to God has implied the dominion of man over all of creation. Also as regards his physique man is created in the image of God and is thus a totality.

At creation this world found its point of concentration in Adam who had the covenant of the word of God, to whom God gave his communion through the only Logos and who has to reply to God in love and so keep the covenant.

Through a lack of faith and disobedience, however, Adam negated the covenant wilfully. The most important traits of the image of God were lost, and only distant sparks remained in the extent to which man remained man (albeit dishonoured) and did not become either beast or devil. The image in a narrower sense, viz. the true knowledge of God, justice and holiness, can only be restored through regeneration (Ephesians 4:24; Colosians 3:10).

Through sin man has become endangered. Sin is a negative, destructive

* Translation from the original Afrikaans lecture.

force. It is a lack of what should be there. That negative force gnaws like a cancer. Sin extends itself continually. It can thus be described as an active privation of the good (Latin: *privatio actuosa boni*). Holy Scriptures intend to indicate this in speaking of missing an aim, of transgressing the law (1 John 3:4) and so forth. The doctrine of sin in Adam, in our fathers, in contrast to wilful transgression, is based inter alia on the following Scriptural text: Job 14:4, Romans 5:12, Psalm 51:7 and St. John 3:3-6. In general, the punishment for sin is death. This implies the breaking up of the communion of the covenant. God is wrathful about the rejection of his love and avenges this through death. A distinction should be made between the temporary ("physical") death as a breaking of communion with the visible world, spiritual death as a breaking of communion with God and eternal death as eternal curse and rejection of God. The Heidelberg Catechism distinguishes between temporal and eternal judgement (Question 10). There are judgements emanating as by themselves from sin and judgments imposed by God "from outside". Eternal judgment is indicated as being amongst others, as the outer darkness, the rejection by God, eternal fire and the wrath of God.

In order to typify the effect of sin on man one could use the imagery of a worm and a python. Man is devoured *from the inside* as by a worm and suffocated *from outside* as by a python which squeezes its prey preparatory to swallowing it.

Although he lacks Scriptural foundation to a large extent, Jürgen Moltmann's view holds that endangered man is caught in a *vicious circle*. The main lines emerging in this respect would seem to indicate adequately that man is indeed gravely endangered:

1. The vicious circle from an economic viewpoint

In Revelations 17 to 19 the city of Babylon is typified as the anti-divine secular power, the source, the core of the power of godlessness. The secular rootedness, the idolization of the material world, emerges from the fact that next to the nations *of the earth*, the kings *of the earth*, mention can also be made of the traders *of the earth*. The entire world with its national life, its politics and diplomacy but especially its trade, moves away from God and is held in the thrall of Babylon in rebellion to God. It appears that the kings of industry, factory bosses and large traders will be the giants of the earth (18: 23). When Babylon comes to a fall, we read of three groups standing and lamenting, viz. the kings (representing world politics), traders (representing economic forces) and the pilots and sailors (representing communication).

Antichrist will apply the power of state, he will, through the offices of the false prophet (his Minister of Propaganda), e.g. through the press, radio and television disseminate his poison into our homes and through economic pressure he will enforce his will. Cf. in this respect Rev. 13, where it deals with the mark on the right hand and the forehead so that nobody without the mark can engage in trade. Men will thus have to do as the dictator, the Antichrist, demands and will have to think as he does. In Rev. 18:12 and 13 a whole series of trade articles on the Babylonian market is summarized. Mention is made first of gold and silver and ultimately of the souls of men. Man, created in the likeness of God, is thus degraded to an article of merchandise — and above all one of the least importance.

In a divine word of wrath over Babylon we read in Isaiah 13:12: “And I will make man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir”. This trade centre lay on the river Euphrates in antiquity. Babylon in all its wealth arose as the queen of the earth. Its name, however, means confusion. Human existence will be threatened and men will become few in number. This means that the individual will be swallowed in the negated mass. Pulverizing socialism already has this process in train today. One can justly speak of the deterioration of personality. General J.C. Smuts regarded this as man’s greatest threat (“The disappearance of the sturdy, independent-minded, freedom-loving individual and his replacement by a servile standardised mass mentality is the greatest human menace of our time” — in his book *Freedom*). This is the rot of the mechanization and technical misshapen quality of life. Humanity increasingly consists of preservers of buttons (“An increasing dependence on the machine has equalised, and is equalising more, the natural inequalities of mankind” — R. Murray, *The good pagan’s failure*). In an overpopulated world of teeming multitudes, man increasingly finds himself being dehumanized. Strong personalities will become scarcer, as we have observed, even among leaders of men. Personality is bleached to conformity. Man becomes a mere cipher. He develops a slavish, standardized mass mentality. Quantity and uniformity are reigning factors. So develops the myth of a new messiah, viz, the proletariat. Man is endangered by communism with its collectivization of man and communizing of property.

In this century of idolization of violence and contempt of man, of increasing dehumanization and crude bestiality, man, as explicitly prophesied in Isaiah, is worth less than gold, and is of infinitely less importance than oilfields, the gold market and wool prices. In a cold metallic world of the thunder of factories and the thunder of bombers man atrophies and dies.

2. The vicious circle seen from the political viewpoint

In Rev. 6:3 and 4 we read of the second seal being opened. John is specially commanded to come and witness as it is a matter of utmost significance for earth-dwellers. The announcement from the throne room of God implies that peace has been taken away from the earth and that men will “slaughter” each other – it is said literally. Here approaches a horse – fiery red. A horse is a martial animal. The colour is of blood. The rider receives a great sword. In this respect we have to remember what Christ has said in Matthew 24:6 and 7 of “wars and rumors of wars”. There will be wars on an unimagined scale as we have already come to know them in this century. Satan has been a murderer of men since the beginning (St. John 8:44) and moves about like a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8). He seeks one to devour. He delights in death and slaughter. As the time of the second coming approaches, and Satan’s time becomes more brief, the fiery red dragon will be increasingly wrathful and seek to devour the faithful (Rev. 12:12, 17), but also mankind in general. Not only a few nations at a time will be involved in wars – these will be *world wars*. The one will involve the other. Ultimately the whole world will be divided into two camps and will clash in a battle where the armies will number two hundred million (Rev. 9:16). A spirit of war will be all-pervasive, and mankind will become like an individual seeking release in suicide. The lust for killing will increase shockingly – cf. Isaiah 19:2. So man will always feel himself threatened in his earthly existence. The world will become demoniac. The god of this world will blind the senses (2 Corinthians 4:4). The Antichrist will act on the ruins of human existence as the mighty Napoleon rose as a ruler from the ruins of the French Revolution in 1789. In the demonic condition at international level the stamp of hell will be impressed. Mankind will be driven so far by the rot (in Hebrew: Abaddon and in Greek: Apollion – Rev. 9:11) as to seek out death and not to find it. Mankind will long to die and death will evade them (Rev. 9:6). Man, exhausted beyond measure, will in a sin-induced spiritual nausea fear that he will not be able to die. Evil spirits rising from the abyss of darkness will foment revolution (Rev. 9:2, 3) and will induce destruction through world wars. Driven by evil spirits, human ingenuity and science will increasingly be directed at the manufacture of destructive arms. Nations will be incensed to participate in the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:12-16) and to fall upon the Saints and the beloved city (Rev. 20:9). One third of the people will be destroyed (Rev. 9:15, 18). This would entail many millions, seeing the size of the present world population. Evil spirits will aid men in killing. At Nagasaki and Hiroshima respectively 250 000 and 300 000 inhabitants have al-

ready been destroyed. Aeroplanes play an enormous rôle here (cf. Isaiah 60: 8). In formation they release terrible bombs which rain fire, smoke and sulphur on men and cities. The clouds of the atom bombs reached to a height of 40 000 feet and pushed aside natural clouds. Research is being done at present to create even greater fear and destruction by employing cosmic rays. Millions of demonic spirits ride their "steeds" of fire, smoke and sulphur, sowing havoc on earth. Gravely endangered man is indeed suspended over a thousand abysses.

3. The vicious circle of the annihilation of personal identity

In Rev. 9:1-12 a vision reveals to John that the well of the abyss is being unlocked. From this had welled smoke as from a great oven, and sun and sky were darkened by this smoke. From the smoke emerged locusts. The remarkable fact about these locusts is that they do not destroy any greenness belonging to grass or tree, but that they torture men. It is typical of locusts that in the realm of plants they devour all the rich complexity and diversity leaving behind them only bare stalks. In this way these locusts envisioned by John will consume the characteristic identities of men and nations so that ultimately only stalks will be left on the great acres of the world. This is to be attributed to demonic spirits from hell. Their aim will be to dissolve the organic links in families and nations which impart variation and complexity, so that in the process of disintegration only collections of anchorless, dehumanizing grey masses will be left behind.

4. The vicious circle of the pollution of nature

In creating man, God created him landlord in dominion over nature when He said: "Be faithful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Genesis 1:28). Man was appointed guardian over nature. Because of the fall this relationship within which man was supposed to realize his full humanity has been distorted. Harmony has become jangled sounds. Man has become an enemy of nature and nature has become a threat to man. The exploitation of nature now threatens to destroy life on earth. Man does not revere the potential of nature — instead he abuses it recklessly. Industrialization disturbs the balance in nature, so that intercommunication between culture and nature has been disrupted. Nature is subdued so callously and unthinkingly that man is in the process of destroying his habitat. This is evidenced for

example in the gaping wounds created by erosion. Man is forever taking out and not replacing anything. He destroys, pollutes, annihilates birds and game and is ever driven by an inner discontent, tension and anxiety that cannot be dissipated in eating and drinking. An ecological death will ultimately grimace at him. Nature will become like an abandoned house. The book of God's general self-revelation in the works of His hands is contaminated more and more in the exploitative hands of men.

This flagrant abuse is not regarded in the first place as being a crime against the high majesty of God as Owner of all. Concern is widely expressed about man's continued existence. Mr T.N.H. Janson, erstwhile Deputy Minister of Planning and the Environment and of Statistics, pointed out the limitations of natural resources (Virginia, *Die Volksblad*, 11 November 1978). He also declared that the threat to the environment and to man has become a community problem. His further words: When a laissez-faire development is allowed, there is a mal-exploitation of resources and manpower and so develops an imbalance between man and his environment. He pointed out the danger of stripping of resources. The energy crisis is also assuming graver proportions.

Holy Scriptures warn that man as the mandated guardian of nature in the name of God will lose his grip. Nature will rear up like an enraged beast and devour man. Nature will attack man like a baited lion, breaking the links binding him, and initiate terrible catastrophes. There will be earthquakes, floods, broken harvests and epidemics — and throughout all these the signs of disintegration of human society. Revelations 6:12-14 "And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places".

Man has achieved stunning heights through his science, determination and ability to work. He has penetrated the deepest secrets of the universe, he has invaded the treasuries of creation and has taken possession of the untamable powers of nature. Now ultimately he is confronted according to prophecy with the proofs of his radical helplessness and powerlessness. His sluices and dams, his irrigation projects are destroyed and his laboratories are ruined. Revelations 16:21 speaks of great hailstones, weighing as much as a talent, falling on man from heaven. Man is the most vulnerable being. Shelter in the cities disappears. Chunks of ice of plus-minus 60 kg, as those transported by ice trucks, fall from a tempest-torn heaven while the

earth reels like a drunkard (Isaiah 24:20).

In Revelations 16:8 mention is made of the sun which for centuries has blessed creation with its beneficent rays. Now, when the fourth angel is pouring "his vial upon the sun; ... power was given unto him to scorch men with fire".

The heat is consuming. There is no relief because dams, rivers and oceans have become polluted. There is no cooling because water has changed to blood. The plagues have a cumulative effect on the brains and spirits of men, bringing incalculable spiritual suffering. Suffering desperately, men chew their tongues in pain, gnashing their teeth in rage and frustration. It is no wonder then that in Revelations 6:15 and 16 we read of a massive head-long flight from skyscrapers and apartment buildings, from teeming cities, farms and holiday homes, hotels, cinemas and concert halls, the palaces and government buildings – to caves and rocks and mountains to find shelter against the horror surrounding them on all sides; and to escape from conscience and God. From the cold inhospitality of caves and holes rises the heart-breaking song of mourning, inviting rocks and mountains to "fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lord; for the great day of his wrath is come: and who shall be able to stand?" (Rev. 6:16, 17).

5. The all-encompassing vicious circle is the radical self-destruction of man resulting from his malfunctioning relationship with God

Here is to be found the most fundamental reason why life disintegrates. Man has come far. He is proud of his breathtaking discoveries especially in the natural sciences; he analyses the secrets of the universe. And yet – this is a disabled and confused world. Man, so-called "of age", is inextricably caught in a totally material life and a complete nihilism. Man knows all about atomic energy, radar and so on, but knows nothing of morality, humility before God, forgiveness of sins and the glad expectation of even being with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:17). This inculcates an ineffably impoverishing quality in man, as he is adrift from God, his fellowmen and the world (nature). In a vacuum he grabs frantically for fastness, to achieve lasting peace and tranquillity for the human heart containing the divine seed of eternity. The "Rock of Ages" is overshadowed by the "age of the rock". Man is radically depreciated in the dehumanizing process of technology, mechanizing and materializing.

General J.C. Smuts expressed his deep concern for man menaced by fear of death and destruction. (After World War II he declared: "The feeling of

grief, bitterness, disillusion, despair goes very deep... We have the paralysing sense of having failed. The fair promise of nineteenth-century progress has ended in defeat and frustration and disillusion".) Man has come into possession of unheard-of destructive forces, and he is threatened by the danger of a cosmic catastrophe. (In *Freedom*, General Smuts declares that "Science, the proudest product of human reason, the greatest instrument of human progress, the voice of God to our day and generation, has at the same time become the most dangerous weapon for our self-destruction".) Mannheim has found that the "Entwicklung der technischen Naturbeherrschung meilenweit der Entwicklung der moralischen Kräfte und des menschlichen Wissens um die Ordnung und Lenkung der Gesellschaft vorausgeht". Bishop Pike says that "Science, technology, affluence and secularism have eased God out of the cosmos... obliterated the supernatural dimension of life... an omniscient, omnipotent Creator is not empirically justified by the data".

O. Cohausz does speak the truth when he says that faith in God ennobles man but a denial of God confuses and bewilders man ("Des Gottesglaube veredelt die Menschheit, die Gottesleugnung lässt sie verwildern"). Our times then are characterized by bestial cruelty towards man, for Homo homini lupus (one man is a wolf to nother). It is a refined bestiality, a "civilized" barbarism. It is indeed a world idolizing violence and filled with contempt of man (cf. *Il Principe* by Machiavelli). Revelations 13 leads us to view this brutishness most clearly. It is the element of the jungle, the dehumanizing bestiality sprouting luxuriantly all over.

Gradually it is becoming clear that this idiot game of human arrogance is doomed. Satan unravels men's lives and pulverizes them until only dust and degradation remain. According to Revelations 8 and 9 God will invade the structures of man's arrogance. Unregenerated man with his spiritual suffocation will initiate the last rebellion. Satan will grasp the opportunity to induce the last vestiges of hatred in man. A tempest of fury will shake tortured mankind. With eyes full of horror and fear man will witness the grimacing threats from all over. Passionate curses will be directed at God. Man, arrogant in the grandeur of his split atom, penicillin, military aircraft and television, will be forcibly reminded of the fact that he is in reality an enfeebled and disposable rag. Under these conditions the number of suicides will increase, as is already experienced in our time. Luther rightfully typifies suicide as "tristitia vanissima" - vain and pitiful in a very real sense.

6. The vicious circles with a suffocating grip of dehumanization and death on fallen man have been broken by our Saviour, Jesus Christ

In Revelations 1:18 Christ declares the following as he appears in glory to John on Patmos: "I... have the keys of hell and of death". He unlocks, and He leads into the spaces of peace with God. The liberation does not come through the way of revolution; evolutionism has made a beast of man. Neither does it come through revolution – revolution devours its own children. It has come through Christ's suffering and death, resurrection and ascension, the miracle of the coming of the Holy Ghost (Pentecost) and a clear vision of Christ's impending reappearance. In this sense Wolfhart Panenberg rightly says that because man in contrast to the beasts has an open world, the urgent need of God lives in his heart. Harvey Cox states that "the resurrection points to the radically open character of human history".

Our Lord Jesus Christ is not only the creative mediator, but also the re-creative mediator, as is revealed in Romans 8:19-21: "For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope. Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God".

This implies the complete re-establishment of man in his original and fundamental relationship towards God, his fellowmen and nature. Adam was created to live in close contact with nature. God created man in his image, to be good, just and holy and able to accede to the will of God in all things (Belgic Confession, article 14). He created the world and man and He maintains and governs creation according to his eternal vision and through his limitless power so that creation can serve man, in order that man can serve God. Christ did not only redeem fallen man, but He is also the Redeemer of the whole creation, which was implicated in Adam's fall. He has opened the way to the advent of a new heaven and a new earth when the tabernacle of God will be with men and He will dwell with them and they shall be his people. God will be with them as their God. There will be no threat anymore for man in the safe protection within the walls of the new Jerusalem. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away (Revelations 21:4).

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