

THE IMPLICATION OF SACRIFICE AND PRAYER IN MARTIN BUBER'S PHILOSOPHY OF RELATIONSHIP

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ABSTRACT

What nourishes relationship between couples, friends or relatives is communication. Hence, once there is a communication gap in any of these relationships, therefore, suspicions will surely set in. Meanwhile, relationship is founded and is sustained in a genuine dialogue, give-and-take of talk. This is equally applicable in man's authentic relationship with the eternal Thou- God himself. For man to man relationship to be genuine there is serious need for communication and commitment. In like manner, man to God relationship is accomplished and sustained by way of sacrifice and prayer. What communication and commitment is in person to person relationship is exactly the function of sacrifice and prayer in the relationship between God and man. However, God is a being of intellection and man is necessarily endowed with intellect. Hence, this man that is endowed with intellect must be able to hear something from God should God wishes to say something. Consequently, God does communicate through creation and in every day happenings and events of life. Hence, in the sight of God every event, situation and circumstance of life becomes a language. This man who stands before God should be able to decipher God's communication in the events, situations and circumstances of life. These and more are what the researcher sets out to unfold in this paper. However, to achieve this, therefore, he employs the philosophical method of reflection and appraisal.

KEYWORDS: Implication; Sacrifice, Prayer, Relationship & God

INTRODUCTION

Man-to-man relationship is nourished and sustained in a genuine dialogue, give-and-take of talk. In the same vein, relationship with God is nourished and sustained in give-and-take of sacrifice and prayer.

The importance of sacrifice and prayer in man's relationship with God, therefore, cannot be overemphasized. They are not only important but essential just as dialogue is as regards man's relation to man.

They are the two hinges upon which man's relationship with God is supported and sustained. Hence, it is through sacrifice and prayer that man's metaphysical and metapsychical tendencies to God can be manifested and achieved. Buber is aware of this for he has high regards for prayer and sacrifice. He calls them, two great servants pace through the ages.

Sacrifice

It is in a living self-sacrifice that living relationship blossoms. Even man-to-man relationship demands the willingness to give-and-take. In a living self-sacrifice, man transcends his egocentricism in a total self-giveness. He moves over and above himself in a bid to meet the other(s). As a result of this, man's relationship with God demands man's sacrificing of his little will. In this sense, man is no longer moving along his own selfish will but desires only what God wills. It is when man sacrifices his little will; he will then be better disposed to be able to do the will of God. Hence, Buber writes:

we can and ought to give to God. This is known by him, too who offers up his little will to God and meets Him in the ground will (Buber; 1958, p. 83).

When a man's will is sacrificed at the altar of God's will, then and only then can the will of God automatically become man's will. It is only then can man will what God wills, as man's will has been purified in God's will; and there is absolute union.

Moreover, sacrifice and service for Buber are one and the same. In order to arrive at a living relation, there is the need for a man to give out his affectivity. This is done through service. To refuse to serve is to refuse to love and consequently, to refuse to come into a meaningful union in relation.

In service, man sacrifices not only time but also his will. Following Buber's injunction, there is divine nature in the life of the world, man and of you and me. Hence, man by serving his fellow men, indirectly serves God. Therefore, the degree of man's service to God is measured by the services he renders to fellow men. Thus, Buber convincingly asserts that:

He who serves his people in the boundlessness of destiny and is willing to give himself to them, is really thinking of God (Buber; 1958, p. 106).

He, who cannot go over against himself in order to serve, can hardly give himself in a relationship. As a result, such a one will be outside that road which leads to God. But in sacrificing oneself to God, one is disposed to listen to God in prayer.

Prayer

God is not some impersonal ultimacy nor some blind cosmic force as some might think. God is a personal Being. He understands His creatures and His creatures also should be able to hear Him and carry out His will. God is not an indifferent Being. He understands. His act of understanding must be his essence and existence'...(Aquinas; 1941)

God is a being of intellection and thus, able to communicate in an intelligible manner. Man who is related to this God is also endowed with intellect. Consequently, man is able to understand an intelligible communication should God speak. Hence, Buber maintains that "man is fundamentally the being who is able to hear from God and converse with Him". The man who is able to learn from God must allow that word to be decisive in his historical existence. He should allow himself to be measured by that word which is itself unmeasured. Meanwhile, man's life should respond to God's word. Hence, prayer is a special kind of response to God's will. Consequently, prayer is a life process and demands more of attentive listening.

Prayer is crucial in our relation with God. It does not necessarily demand words though it begets words. Prayer implies communication between God and man. As healthy dialogue moves man to action, so prayer moves God. With emphasis, Buber highlights:

The man, who prays, pours himself out in unrestricted dependence and knows that he has – in an incomprehensible way – an effect upon God..., for when he no longer desires anything for himself he sees the flame of his effect burning at its highest (Buber; 1958, p.113).

Buber acknowledges here man's dependency on God. Also, it is right to note here that man's prayer as indicated

above begins to have its effect on God only when man ceases to desire anything for himself. Thence, possessiveness and greediness make our prayer unheard.

Prayer creates an intimate union between God and man. It is a total act of man's spiritual nature. Through prayer, man attains permanently to that absolute relation with the eternal Thou.

Prayer is not Meditation

However, it should be understood here that prayer is not the same thing as meditation. Meditation and prayer are often used interchangeably or differently by various authors. It was Plato who maintains that meditation is not necessarily prayer. Meditation does not indicate any communication at all. Hence, "Plato repeatedly called meditation a voiceless colloquy of the soul with itself" (Plato; 1947, p. 45).

Assuming someone is looking at me without communicating anything either by way of word or any gesture or sign, then, no communication has taken place between him and myself. The same thing happens in meditation.

Prayer does not simply consist in mere artistic meditation or thinking. One can meditate without praying. An artist who stands against what he is about to draw, has a form disclose to him. That the form is disclosed to him does not imply any communication between him and the form which is over against him. He is merely thinking about that which is over against him.

So too in art: form is disclosed to the artist as he looks at what is over against him. He banishes it to be a "structure" (Buber; 1958, p. 41).

The artist is aware of what is over against him but his awareness does not make any intimate union. The awareness is only in him. Meditation then is not prayer. Meditating on God, depicts no dialogue with Him, which is why you can get an artist or a musician who is highly contemplative but is still a non-believer. Again, you can get a theologian who has studied the scripture, composes songs and even teaches methods of prayer, yet never prays. However, meditation can aid prayer but does not mean prayer.

In prayer, God appears to man in a mysterious way. Thus, Buber writes:

the Thou appears to man out of a deeper mystery, addresses him even out of the darkness, and he responds with his life (Buber; 1958, p. 42).

God addresses man in prayer, who in turn responds to this God's address with his life. Hence, man who hears from God should allow this word to be decisive in his life. Meanwhile, prayer is a personal response to God's presence.

Admittedly, prayer should not be divorced from life. Prayer and life are interchangeable. We are alive because we are still linked with God. And we are conscious of our relation with God because we are alive. Hence prayer is life-long activity. It is a continuum. Buber in his philosophy maintains his position against any radical distinction between life and prayer when he writes:

prayer is not in time but time in prayer and to reverse the relation is to abolish the reality (Buber; 1958, p. 9).

Life is not measured in time but otherwise. Man needs God to exist. If man's continued existence yearns for God, man necessarily must need to pray. If God cannot be removed from man's life, then he needs to communicate with Him in prayer.

The meeting point of God and man is living and dynamic relation. Also, Buber calls this religion. Religion as the meeting point of God and man should consist in prayer which is a form of dialogue with God. This is why he maintains that:

true prayer lives in the religions witnesses to their true life: they live so long as it lives in them (Buber;1958, p. 118).

Communication gap brings suspicion and eventual death to union as between man and man. Consequently, religion as the meeting point of God and man degenerates as a result of the degeneracy of prayer in it. Buber puts it thus: "Degeneration of the religions means degeneration of prayer in them" (Buber; 1958, p. 118). He who claims relation with the eternal Thou but is lacking in prayer life, therefore, is very far from the truth.

Consequently, in prayer, cult is united with belief. When this is achieved, the possibility of man's entrance into relation with the eternal Thou becomes a reality. Hence:

In true prayer belief and cult are united and purified to enter in the living relation (Buber; 1958, p. 118).

It is in prayer that our belief and worship come into action. And it is in the context of our belief and worship that God is revealed to us.

Obliviously, God is more important than man. God is a necessary being while the being of man is possible. Consequently, God's word is more important than man's words. What God has to say is more important than what man has to say. Again, what God is saying is more important than what man is saying. Hence, prayers consist mainly in listening to God if He chooses to speak. Man should not only be attentive, but should be also desirous to hear something from God should this God choose to speak. However, if God chooses not to speak, man should also respond to the silence. He should also endure that silence of God and in that silence knows Him as a God who keeps to Himself. But God always communicate Himself to man. What is demanded of Man is to respond to every action of God and this demands silence.

Meanwhile, in order to listen to God in prayer, one needs to cultivate the habit of silence just as Buber says:

Only silence before the Thou-silence of all tongues, silent patience in undivided word that precedes the formed and vocal response- leaves the Thou free, and permits man to take stand with it...(Buber; 1958, p. 39).

Implicitly, prayer does not only demand silence but also silence patience. God should be given time to act and to speak. Man should not be too hasty in prayer. But for Karl Jaspers, the habit of silence is cultivated:

Not by refraining from thought and speech, but by earning them to extremes where they revert to silence. In time, they will shortly make us speak again (Jaspers; 1965, p. 125).

Silence makes us apt for that prayer in which we meet and converse with God. Silence engenders tranquillity of the spirit and thereby disposes man to dialogue with the eternal Thou. Thus: ".we speak with Him only when speech dies within us" (Buber; 1958, p. 104).

The silence in question is not limited to physical silence but also metaphysical silence – interior silence. It is only when this is observed that the spirit is allowed to commune with God in a spiritual dematerialized way. The question of what is to be heard is unfounded in a genuine prayer. We do not hear God's words, because we are often overwhelmed by the desires of the flesh and worries of life. God however, speak and always communicate Himself to man. Hence, Buber

writes:

Often enough we think there is nothing to hear, but long before we have ourselves put wax in our ears (Buber; 1958, p. 137).

The wax here depicts man's lack of confidence in God. To hear from, God, man must first place his trust in God. After which he can then convince himself that God has something to tell him, and is telling him something. You can imagine what you will feel like to see a man speaking to the void. Since God always communicates Himself to us, we should always be kind enough to listen to God's word. Hence, prayer is essentially listening and being vigilant. God speaks and does speak via creation and natural phenomena. But Buber says:

The relation with man is the real smile of the relation with God; in it, true address receives true response; except that God's response everything, the universe, is made manifest as language (Buber; 1958, p. 103).

In the sight of God, every event becomes a Language

Buber then confirms that "God speaks to man through man himself, the world and through natural phenomena to man's understanding".

Insistently, Buber hold unlike some philosophers, that God is not in exile but always present in the world. He is among His creation. He is not afraid of the world he has created by Himself. Man journeying through life as a stranger in the world. Then, as a pilgrim of the divine, God never abandons man when he sent him forth.

God remains present to you when you have been sent forth, he who goes on a mission has always God before him: the truer the fulfilment the stronger and more constant His nearness. To be sure... he can converse with Him (Buber 1958, p. 116).

In addition, Buber says:

He who is sent out in the strength of revelation takes with him, in his eyes, an image of God (Buber; 1958, p. 117).

Man is on a mission. His mission is to love God in His (God's) creation and to come to God through His creatures. The absence of God which man feels at times is as a result of man's inability to fulfil this mission. Consequently, this results in fear and anxiety. Man should abide by God's plan for him. Whenever man deviates from God's plan of life for him, he is immediately overwhelmed with anxiety and fear as happened in the "Garden of Eden"- Adam and Eve began to worry and to fear after disobeying God.

Perhaps, it might be this feeling of insecurity which Nietzsche meant by "The death of God". God is not dead. Rather, man through his human ingenuity and engulfment in the world of "it" veiled himself off from perceiving God's activities in the world. Probably, this phenomenon is what man has translated as "the absence of God" or "the death of God"; a syndrome generated by scientific evolution. In his opinion, Buber affirms that he who has God has Him always:

He who knows God ...does not know the absence of God. It is we only who are not always there (Buber; 1958, p. 99).

Through man's lust for possession, he has backed God. He is always with man. Entirely God is wholly the same and omnipresence for He is also unconditional inclusiveness. Hence, in prayer docility to divine presence is prerequisite.

Man receives, and he receives not a specific “content” but a presence, a presence as power (Buber; 1958, p. 110).

It is in this recognition of God’s presence that man’s power of communicating with God in prayer depends.

Man at whatever level seeks what is necessary. However, this factual need has to be established on its true basis. The true basis of all that exist necessitates the existence of God. It is only when man comes to this reality and realizes God’s presence that man can feel free. Consequently, then, can he stand and take decision. Considering this Buber says:

Happening upon happening, situation upon situation, are enabled and empowered by the personal speech of God to demand of the human person that he takes his stand and makes his decision (Buber; 1958, p. 136-137).

Man takes his stand to make decision only through God’s personal speech which is perceivable in happenings and situations of life. It then means that in every happening or situation man should be careful to decipher what God wants of him. This is why Buber contends that prayer is a lifelong process.

Then again, man’s taking of decision implies freedom which is in turn accomplished in a living relation.

Here man is assured of the freedom both of his being and of Being. Only he who knows relation and knows about the presence of the Thou is capable of decision. He who decides is free, for he has approach the face (Buber; 1958, p. 51).

It is in freedom that man becomes himself, because it is in the nature of man to be free. Buber maintains that it is in the right and proper use of this man’s freedom that man encounters God’s plan for him. Hence, he writes, “Only the man who makes freedom real to himself meets destiny” (Buber; 1958, p. 136). So, it is in this context of freedom which is in the nature of man that man can freely communicate with God in prayer.

Moreover, God created us human beings; He wants us to be saved not as animals or as angels but as human beings he created us. God will not be happy if after the work of creation, he climbs up to heaven only to look down and behold angels or animals walking. God wants human beings to remain human beings they are. He did not make any mistake in creating them so. Therefore, communication with God does not demand deserting our course of life neither does it mean leaving the world. For this very reason Buber warns:

One must, however, take care not to understand his conversation with God... as something happening solely alongside or above the everyday. God’s speech to men penetrates what happens in the life of each one of us... and makes it for you and me into instruction, message, and demand (Buber; 1958, p. 139).

Therefore, God, though over and above human comprehension, speaks to man at a level which is within human comprehensibility. God endowed man with intellect that would enable him to understand from God, should he choose to speak to man.

In prayer also, man is required of the acknowledgement of God’s goodness and for His gifts. As a result of this, man should be showering gratitude to God for His benevolence. Nietzsche being loyal to reality here admits that man should and ought to be always thanking God for His gifts and benevolence. He therefore, says:

We take and do not ask who it is there that gives (Nietzsche; 1958, p. 139).

Man should not only be good in receiving, but should also acknowledge the giver. This acknowledgement will then enable him to be able to give up his little will to God.

Surely, according to Buber, man needs to pour himself out in prayer in an unrestrained dependence. It is when man realizes that he can do nothing without God can he repose his faith in God. Only then can man request for his need from God with uprightness and trust. Hence, petition is part of prayer.

However, man need not to be too possessive in prayer. Too much "give me" withdraws man from relating to God as Thou but as an it. And in regarding God as an it, man instead of entering into union with God, draw himself away from God. Hence, Buber stresses that "You cannot both truly pray to God and profit by the world" (Buber; 1958, p.107). He further explicates thus:

He who knows the world as something by which he is to profit knows God also in the same way. His prayer is a procedure of exoneration heard by the ear of the void (Buber; 1958, p. 107).

In essence, Buber meant that God never hearkens to prayer that is egocentric in dimension. An egocentric man prays with his thought not setting on God but on possessions and experience. Consequently, such a prayer is no prayer at all. It is a self-exoneration.

Moreover, he who is dwelling in the "It" world knows no God. His God is always his wants and whatever that pleases him. "Such a man functionalizes relation. He judges man according to what that man can do- what he can offer. This kind of man can never pray, because, for one to pray, one has to do away first with all selfishness" (Onwuatuegwu; 2010, p.69). But this selfishness is what characterizes I-It relationship. Hence, God has no ear for prayer that is selfish or possessive.

Buber also insists that "feelings are not essential in prayer for it centres on the self, the ego". For him, complete relation is to be understood as the coincidence oppositions of feeling. It is not man's end that matters in prayer but what matters is God's end. Hence, prayer should be God-centred. Consolation in prayer though is important, should not be the yardstick for measuring prayer.

When man has abandoned all forms of selfishness, he then longs for the unification of all men in God. The closer man is to God in prayer, the clearer his incompleteness is to him himself. According to Buber, it is in this man's consciousness of his nature and destiny that he desirously "...longs for extension in space, for the representation in which the community of the faithful is united to God" (Buber; 1958, p. 114).

This man's tendency for the in-gatheredness of humanity in God necessitates his option for communal prayer. At this point, man is no longer satisfied with the merely factual to its true basis. Hence man's relationship with God is actualized in the community of the faithful in God. Here, Buber agrees with St. John who says:

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love (1Jon.4:7-8).

He further says:

Beloved, if God so love us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us (1Jon.4:11-12).

The evangelist however, shuns the love of the flesh which keeps us away from recognition of fellow men as persons. Thus, he argues:

If anyone loves the world, love for the father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the (1Jon.2:15-16).

Contextually, the world of experience is implied here, the world of having and the world of using. It is when this world is shunned, that man will be able to relate with fellow men as "Thou". And only then is he able to see God in every human being. Hence:

The personal prayer is no longer supported, but displaced, by the communal prayer and when the act of the being, since it admits no rule, is placed by ordered devotional exercises (Buber; 1958, p. 114).

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusively, therefore, man is geared towards the re-unification of all the faithful in God – the eternal "Thou" that does not pass away. In this in-gatheredness of all human in God, individuality ceases and only this eternal Thou is what will remain. It is at this point can man's life be tempered and empowered to deal with blind selfishness and concupiscence. Now, man makes a "turning" towards reality. This in-gatheredness of humanity in God is man's destiny on earth.

In conclusion, Buber distinguishes sacrifice and prayer from all magic when he asked himself a question and answers it in the following words:

What distinguishes sacrifice and prayer from all magic? – Magic desires to obtain its effect without entering into relation, and practices its trick in the void. But sacrifice and prayer are set "before the face in the consummation of the holy primary world that means mutual action: they speak the Thou, and then they hear" (Buber; 1958, p. 83).

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