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## **BIBLICAL CONCEPTS OF HUMAN NATURE AND DEATH- AN ANALYTICAL AND COMPARATIVE STUDY IN THE LIGHT OF ISLAMIC TEACHINGS**

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**Abstract:** Human nature is a debatable topic. The views on several aspects of human nature vary from philosophers to philosophers. One such aspect is how the concept of death plays a role in human nature. Death is such a serious issue, that it can change the way we view and live our lives. Life after death is a mysterious as it is frightening. This paper is an overview of the beliefs of Islam and bible about death and human nature. There are many similarities between these traditions but there are quite a few differences also. This is with regards to what has been mentioned in the Judeo- Christian Scriptures.

**Keywords:** Man, Human Nature, Death, Old Testament, New Testament, Quran, Hadith

## **The Concept of Human Nature in Bible**

### **The Old Testament Theory of Human Nature**

#### **a) Formation of Man**

##### **i) Man is formatted in the likeness of God**

The Bible depicts man as the peak of creation. The opening chapter of Genesis tells a story of the formation of the whole universe, including human beings. The Hebrew conception of man is primarily related in relation to God, who has created mankind. Man is created in the image of God. This statement is described time and again in bible.

“And God said: let us make in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and every creeping thing that creepth upon the earth.”<sup>1</sup>

In the next verse the “Bible” says:

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”<sup>2</sup>

So man alone is produced in the likeness of God. All things are made for him. God made him in the likeness of “Him”..... according to Jewish tradition is the fundamental statement about the nature and meaning of man.

Man is never seen in isolation out always in relations to God who is the creator, the king and judge of all begins. The problem of man revolves round God’s relation to man. This passage may serve an illustration.

“The Lord is gracious and compassionate, forbearing, and constant in his love. The Lord is good to all men, and his tender care rests upon all his creatures.”<sup>3</sup>

The power and intensity of God’s concern one at times beyond the endurance of man. “In the image of God”, a likeness is shown for the cause of strength, given to man, on the other. This is the judo Christian view.

##### **ii)Clay Product:**

Man is a clay product according to the teachings of Bible.

The Bible Says:

“Behold, I am according to thy wish in God’s stead: I also am formed out of the clay”<sup>4</sup>

##### **iii)Dust of Ground**

The Bible regards man as the dust of ground.

According to the Bible:

“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul”<sup>5</sup>

Thus man is made from the dust of ground. His origination is meek and submissive in nature.

##### **iv)Furiousness**

Furiousness is the part of man's nature as has been described in the Bible:

"Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward."<sup>6</sup>

Abdul Karim Langha comments that:

"A state of furry gives rise to the troubles for a man, just like a flame of fire, which goes upward. The man loses bodily control and flares up like a bubble and creates trouble for him as well as for the others, in the society."<sup>7</sup>

#### **v)One Blood:**

The whole generation was created by one blood as it is described in the Holy Bible:

"And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation."<sup>8</sup>

#### **vi)Creation of Eve:**

The first man created by God was Adam, have all characteristics which are mentioned above.

The connection between man and woman in the Hebrew scheme of formation is considerably enigmatic from the beginning. One account of creation shows the whole humankind as has been mentioned in Genesis that:

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female crated he them."<sup>9</sup>

While the other story tells:

"Eve being made out of Adam's Rib."<sup>10</sup>

One description proposes non-discrimination, whereas the other demonstrates subordination of woman.

#### **Free Will and the Wrong Choice**

The most important point in the biblical comprehension of human nature is the notion of freedom of choice by which a man may distinguish between right and wrong.

According to Encyclopedia Judaica

"There is still another aspect of the divine image reflected in man, which plays a crucial role in the profound parable of the Garden of Eden. In a supreme act of self-limitation the absolute God gave man freedom of moral choice. He could will to do right or wrong, to obey or disobey his maker. It was heaven's greatest gift, to man: he was not to be automation. However, the immediate consequences were calamitous. Man rebelled against the creator, he introduced disharmony. Sin was born and in turn begot suffering and death. History had begun."<sup>11</sup>

#### **Sinful Nature**

The biblical concept of human nature consists of two parts i.e. good nature and bad nature. Adam was made on the likeness of God. His nature was

good and pure, but after his fall and his first disobedience towards God, he became sinner. The optimistic conception of man's nature was converted into pessimistic notion. As a result of it the whole human race, became sinful and the whole human race shared the same sin with Adam. In his article on "man" in the new catholic Encyclopedia, F.J. Corley notes:

"Adam's sin forfeited the supernatural endowments of human nature not only for himself but for all his descendants, since he was the primeval man from whom and according to whom others were to be formed."<sup>12</sup>

So The Bible gives a very pessimistic notion of human nature.

### **Dual Nature**

The biblical concept of human nature consists of two parts i.e. good nature and bad nature

"In Bible, the word vayyitzer is used for man. This word is used for two yods. These are: Yetzer, which means impulse, and the existence of two yods here indicates that humanity was formed with two impulses: a good impulse (the yetzer tov) and an evil impulse (the yetzerra)./ The yetzertor is the moral conscience, the inner voice that reminds man of God's order and law when he considers doing something that is forbidden. The yetzerra is usually conceived as the selfish nature, the desire to satisfy personal needs i.e. food, shelter, sex, etc. without regard for the moral consequences of fulfilling those desires. The yetzerra is not a bad thing but it can lead to wrong when it is not controlled by the yetzer tov. People have the ability to choose which impulse to follow: the vitzer tov or the vitzerra. That is the heart of the Jewish understanding of free will"<sup>13</sup>

### **The New Testament Theory of Human Nature**

In the New Testament many of the phrases and statements regarding man's nature are same like the Old Testament. However, some conceptions and ideas are more developed in the New Testament.

#### **i) Two Different Entities of Man's Nature**

The New Testament illustrates the two different entities of man's nature is the 'spirit' and 'flesh' and lower and higher nature.

According to Bible:

"The Conclusion of the matter is this: there is no condemnation for those who are united with Christ Jesus, because in Christ Jesus the life giving law of the spirit has set you free from the law of sin and death. What the law could never do, because our lower nature robbed it of all potency, God has done: by sending his own son in a form like that of our own sinful nature, and as a sacrifice of sin, he has passed judgment of the law may find fulfillment in as against sin within that very nature, so that the commandment of the law may find fulfillment in us, whose

conduct, no longer under the control of our lower nature, is directed by the spirit.”<sup>14</sup>

## ii) States of Human Nature

Nature is defined in Christianity in five different states.

“(1)Pure nature, with no preternatural or supernatural elevation;(2)Integral nature, with preternatural endowments;  
(3)Elevated nature (the original state of man prior to the fall with preternatural and supernatural gifts; (4) fallen unredeemed nature, in capable of attaining its and because of sin;(5)Redeemed nature superabundantly restored to its original elevated state by the redemption of Jesus Christ.”<sup>15</sup>

Infact the last state is considered to be the actual state of human nature.

## iii) Man’s Sinful Nature

The sinful nature is that facet in man that inspires him on rebellion against God.

The Bible elaborates the cause for the issue. Human kind is wicked by nature. Sin is basic instinct of our essence. The Bible expresses “sinful flesh”<sup>16</sup> in Romans 8:3. Paul admits that “the trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin.”<sup>17</sup>

Even children are embodiment of sinful nature. David regrets the actuality that he was born sinful: “Surely I was sinful at birth/ sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”<sup>18</sup>

## The Concept of Death in the Bible

Death may be simply defined as the termination of life. It is represented under a variety of aspects in scripture:

- “The dust shall return to the earth as it was.”<sup>19</sup>
- “Though takest away their breath, they die.”<sup>20</sup>
- “It is the dissolution of our earthly house of this tabernacle.”<sup>21</sup>
- “Being unclothed.”<sup>22</sup>
- “Falling on sleep.”<sup>23</sup>

## The Concept of sin and death

The concept of sin in man’s nature is related to the concept of death in the biblical teachings.

In accordance with Genesis 2:17, “ God gave to man, created his own image, the command not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and added thereto the warning, in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.”<sup>24</sup>

Reference is undeniably given here in the first place to describe the bodily death.

“Death is seldom connected with the transgression of the first man either in the Old Testament or the New Testament or mentioned as a specific punishment for sin.”<sup>25</sup>

But this is not conflicting to the notion that death is a result of, and a retribution for offence, speaking in the same way, “Death though come into the world through sin, is nevertheless at the same time a consequence of man’s physical and frail existence now; it could therefore be threatened as a punishment to man, because he was taken out of the ground and was made a living soul, of the earth earthly.”<sup>26</sup>

### **The Origin of Death**

The New Testament expands our apprehension of the origin of death. Death demised on all men because of “one man’s disobedience so that in Adam all die.”<sup>27</sup> “The wages of sin is death.”<sup>28</sup> “Even the mind set on the flesh is death.”<sup>29</sup> “The letter of the law kills by giving knowledge about sin.”<sup>30</sup> Thus the “law is considered the ministry of death.”<sup>31</sup>

### **The Sleep of Death**

Death is like a sleep. The New Testament describes “that are fallen asleep in Jesus”<sup>32</sup> The term “sleep” is used in the Scriptures to describe the condition of matter in death.

### **Preparation for the Death**

After death there is no opportunity for repentance or salvation. Such concepts as “a second chance after death,” “baptism for the dead,” and “purgatory,” are totally without basis in the scriptures.

One must “believe in Christ”<sup>33</sup>, “turn from sin”,<sup>34</sup> and “unite with the Lord in the likeness of his death through immersion in water.”<sup>35</sup> “Then, as a newborn babe, long for the word and grow thereby.”<sup>36</sup>

## **COMPARISON BETWEEN ISLAM AND BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF HUMAN NATURE AND DEATH**

The “Biblical concepts” of man or man’s nature and death are somehow complex, ambiguous and perplex. The phrase “image of God” as speaking about man, appears somewhat scarcely in the Bible. In Gen Chapter 1, this phrase is described in these words:

“And God said: Let us make in our own image”.<sup>37</sup>

The image of God is elaborated by different theologians in different senses. For instance, according to Anthropomorphize view:

God has a body like man. Image of God as “refers primarily to man’s physical nature.”<sup>38</sup>

This is a false interpretation of “the image of God”. It does not make any sense. God is divine, superior, and powerful whereas man is human, dependent on others for his basic needs. This contradiction upholds all biblical teachings that The creator of the universe is never human and mortal, and human beings are not immortal Divine. According to Hosea, Chapter II:

“I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim, for I am God and not man.”<sup>39</sup>

And, in numbers the fact is described in these words:

God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man that he should repent.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, the resemblance of Divine means the resemblance of Him who is dissimilar from man. According to S. Radha krishnan:

“Indeed, the words image and likeness of God conceal more than they reveal. They signify something which we can neither comprehend nor verify. For what is our image? What is our likeness? Is there anything about man that may be compared with God? Our eyes do not see it; our minds cannot grasp it. Taken literally, these words are absurd, if not blasphemous.”<sup>41</sup>

This interpretation is not compatible with Islam. Islam declares that God (Allah) and man can never be equal. Their nature and actions are different from each other. The Holy Quran explains the nature of Allah in these words:

"قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ - اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ - لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ - وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ" <sup>٤٢</sup>

“Say (O Muhamma SAW): He is Allah, (the) one Allah-us-Samad [Allah – the self-sufficient Master, whom all creatures need (He neither eats nor drinks)]. “He begets not, nor was He begotten. “And there is none co-equal and comparable unto Him.”<sup>43</sup>

There are many other interpretations of the image of God too. The Socinians, Unitarian Sect holds that:

“Man’s being in the image of God consists solely in his domination over the lower creation.”<sup>44</sup>

According to the description of Roman Church:

“The image (eikon) and the likeness (homoiosis) of God refer to different aspects of man. The image includes man’s natural gifts, such as personality, intellect, will, etc. The likeness is the so called donumsuperadditum, a superadded gift endowed upon man’s nature after his creation but before his fall, consisting of the spiritual gifts of righteousness and holiness.”<sup>45</sup>

Both the Socinian and Roman Catholic views seem to be right. According to these interpretations the phrase “In the image of God” refers to the different faculties of the humans i.e. intellect, will, knowledge etc. which make man superior to other creatures. The same thing is elaborated in The Holy Quran. Allah عزوجل says:

"فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتَهُ وَنَفَخْتَ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي فَقَعُوا لَهُ سَاجِدِينَ" <sup>٤٦</sup>

“So, when I have fashioned him completely and breathed into him the soul which I created for him, then fall (you) down prostrating yourselves unto him”.<sup>47</sup>

“... (when I have) breathed of my spirit into him ...” means “when Allah cast a reflection of his Divine characteristics on man. This indicates that the soul of man implies life, knowledge, power, will, discretion and other

human characteristics in the aggregate which distinguishes him from other creatures and which has raised him to the position of vicegerent of Allah.”<sup>48</sup>

In fact, the root of each attribute of each thing is one godly attribute or the other, as is described by a hadith of the Holy Prophet (SAW):

"جعل الله الرحمة في مائة جزء فأمسك عنده تسعة وتسعين جزءا وأنزل في الأرض جزءا واحدا فمن ذلك الجزء يتراحم الخلق حتى ترفع الفرس حافرها عن ولدها خشية أن تصيبه"<sup>49</sup>

“Allah has divided Mercy into one hundred parts, and He kept ninety-nine parts with him and sent down one part to the earth, and because of that one single part, His creatures are merciful to each other, so that even the mare lifts up its hoof away from its baby animals, lest it should trample on it.”<sup>50</sup>

In this relation one must keep this thing in mind that Allah Rab ul izzat is entirely beyond the reach of whole creation. Although God has made man superior to other creatures by giving him the best qualities i.e. knowledge, reason, free will etc. yet he is human. He can never be a God. All his qualities are infact the reflection of God’s power and nature. “The image of God” thus, can be taken in the sense that man is powerful and superior over other creatures due to his extraordinary qualities.

Man, according to the Islamic teachings, born pure. He is naturally, good, pure and sinless. Allah عزوجل says:

"فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا"<sup>51</sup>

“Allah’s fitrah with which He has created mankind.”<sup>52</sup>

A hadith of The Holy Prophet (SAW) explains the pure nature of man as follows:

"كل مولود يولد على الفطرة فأبواه يهودانه أو ينصرانه أو يمجسانه كمثل الهيمية تنتج الهيمية هل ترى فيها جدعاء"<sup>53</sup>

“Every child is born on Al-Fitrah and his parents convert him Judaism or Christianity or Magianism, as an animal gives birth to a perfect baby animal. Do not you find it mutilated?”<sup>54</sup>

The attitude of Christianity towards the creation of man is essentially negative, and contradictory, while the Islamic attitude is essentially positive. According to M. Tahir-ul-Qadri:

“Christianity believes that man is the product of sin: he is genetically tainted, he is congenitally flawed. But Islam rejects this attitude. It believes that the creation of man is positive achievement; His birth is immaculate and untainted. He is an accomplishment, not an aberration; he is the realization of divine will, not a deviation from it.”<sup>55</sup>

So the concept of “original sin” of human nature in Christianity is incompatible with Islam. As for as the concept of “the creation of man” is



concerned, both the Quran and Bible give the same idea about his creation. According to Bible, man is created from clay, dust and furiousness. All these elements are found in the nature of man. Islam also describes the different stages of human creation i.e. dust, clay, nutfah, clot, and little lump of flesh.

The concept of “dual nature” in Christianity refers to two different aspects of human nature i.e. good and bad. According to this concept a man possesses two impulses (Vayyitzer), one is good impulse (the yetzer tov) and the second is (yetzerra) selfish nature which inspired man on unlawful acts. The Holy Quran also describes the same idea of man’s nature. According to the verse no 8 of surah Ash-shams:

" فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا"<sup>56</sup>

“Then He showed him what is wrong for him and what is right for him”.<sup>57</sup>

According to the Bible: “death is an enemy that entered after Adam sinned.”<sup>58</sup>

No reference on the Quran to death being an enemy, or anything other than an integral part of the original created earth could be found.

The Biblical concept of the origin of death contradicts to Islam. According to the Bible:

“Death passed on all men because of one man’s disobedience so that in Adam all die.”<sup>59</sup>

The Holy Quran clearly says: “Allah burdens not a person beyond his scope. He gets reward for that (good) which he has earned, and he is punished for that (evil) which he has earned.”<sup>60</sup>

Death is a sleep according to bible. Islam also resembles sleep to death. The Holy Quran says: “It is Allah who takes away the souls at the time of their death, and those that die not during their sleep. He keeps those for which he has ordained death and sends the rest for a term appointed. Verily, in this are signs for a people who think deeply.”<sup>61</sup>

According to Genesis 2:7 “Our bodies are made from the dust of the ground.”<sup>62</sup>

Biblical concepts of death such as “back to the dust” and “preparation for the death” are somehow compatible with the teachings of Islam.

### **Conclusion**

In the light of above considerations it can be concluded that the concept of death and human nature are interlinked in the biblical teachings. The comparison between Islamic teachings and biblical concept of death and human nature proves that there are many similarities between these traditions but there are quite a few differences also.

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- <sup>27</sup> Rom 5:12-17
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