

Lights on the Mind

By Bishop George Khodr

The question that has been asked by both simple people and [more] educated ones is: If the mind rules us, how could we reach at revelation? The space is too narrow here to look at *Ibn Sina* [Avicenna], *Al-Farabi* [Alpharabius] and *Ibn Rushd* [Averroes] from the Muslims or at Thomas Aquinas, who were engaged with the relationship between the Holy Books and philosophy and they had different answers. Thus, I will not raise the question of the relationship between revelation and reason. In Christianity, and among the different denominations, there is no one answer. The Catholic Church has stated at the First Vatican Council (1870) that God can be known by reason alone, while in the Orthodox Church there is no such attempt to reach at reason apart from any power within us. The independence of reason, from any other power within us, is inconceivable by my understanding of faith.

The skeptical ones depart from the point that every person should perceive the truth. If this was true, why then people differ in everything? Why does a person change his/[her] mind from time to time? Truth exists in itself and it reaches you through means already present within you. However, is there only one mediator between you and Truth and that is reason? or is it the heart, or a union between both? so that reason descends to the heart in order to be purified in it and thereupon rises to its rank purified, and then it can know God.

An attempt to respond to this research is that God “breathed into his [the man’s] nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” (Genesis 2: 7) The soul is the whole inner human existence, including the feelings, the mind and the will. And if we consider Darwin’s theory on the origin of species, we find out that there is a big chasm between the animal and the human being, since the human spirit, with all its energies, has no parallel with the animal. The human being is a speaking being not in the sense that he/[she] can utter or speak, but in the sense that his/[her] speech is unified and he/[she] can communicate with another making use of his/[her] rationality and all these powers merge in him/[her] to express about the human being in a unified way. Thus, there is no such pure rational expression, or pure psychic expression, rather all these energies interact and receive reason by viewing the light and it conveys this view through words, behavior and attitudes.

It has been written by Paul, “The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam (i.e., Christ) became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical”. [1Cor. 15: 45-46 (RSV version)] (NJB version: ‘natural’ [in place of ‘physical’]) Both translations of the word are incorrect. The Greek term ‘*Psuchikos*’ [ψυχικός] is related to the soul or the psychic. Adam was born with a soul in the sense of a natural person, while the spirituality of Divine Spirit

descends upon him later on through Christ. Paul did not say a rational being, or a speaking being, in the sense of being able to pronounce words. The emphasis of the New Testament is that the inner power facing the body is not the mind, rather the soul, which involves the mind and other things with it (feelings, will).

At ancient times, the Greek had said that the human mind is distorted by the desires. Thus, the mind is susceptible to disturbance. The human being does not speak only out of mere, pure mind. He/ [she] speaks [also] out of affection and intention. In Christian Orthodox theology the mind, like all our inner powers, has been stricken by the ancestral sin (the first ancestor), thus it is incurred like any other energy in the soul. The human being is not mind, rather he/[she] is endowed with mind. However, we might say that the human being is a soul, since it embraces all its energies.

Once, in a religious conversation, a friend of mine has insisted on the mind. I responded to him telling that there are thousands of things we do without using the static closed mind, thus without [making use of] all our energies. Then, I added, was your marriage the result of a mental procedure?

If truth is the light that God has thrown into the heart, the heart might become free of its caprices, i.e., God molds your soul in order that you might see, since your soul must approach the innermost divine so that it might perceive. Thus, if a believer is asked to give rational evidence, you may try some ways, and here perception might support your mind. However, most of the times, you would not be able to elucidate fully whatever is happening within you.

First, you submit your heart to God, and whenever you believe, then, you would be brought to reason. Thus, it is not that you come to reason first and then you believe. People have told me more than once: prove to us the existence of God. I have said I cannot, since I start with God. God is my proof, and I do not reach at God through decisive proofs. God does not need proofs to reveal Godself to you and you do not need proofs in order to embrace God. There is an inner understanding to which Christianity refers as the grace of the Creator. And the Book says, “[God] who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1Tim.2: 4) This is a biblical testimony that God bestows grace upon all humanity, and that some accept it, since their soul is in a state of receptivity of the light, other souls are not; and no one provisions the secret of one’s own self or of others. We, the believers, can witness and the testimony is either attained or not. You have seen, heard, accepted, settled for and obeyed, thus, you have lived the new life as if you have moved, from now, to the face of God. There are however those who are still in need of the Savior’s touch so that their eyes might open and see.

You believe in God because something has moved in your soul, while your Lord has founded [that thing] within you. St. Maximus the Confessor, who had

lived in Palestine and most probably was an Arab, said that you read God in the universe, who made everything in it through the Word, which was from the beginning. Truly, the universe is [of] words. Justin Martyr (second century), the philosopher from Neapolis [today's Nablus], said that before the New Testament God has sown God's words in creation and in Greek philosophy. These were somehow divine incarnations before God has accomplished the incarnation of the Son of God in creation. Maximus concluded that the Holy Spirit is everywhere, and whenever you try to clarify his thought he would be saying that the Divine Spirit is disseminated everywhere. You have to search for it in this or that Christian or non-Christian, to search for it in persons, whoever were they. Maximus had denounced Judaism as a religious system; however, he did not deny the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Jewish persons.

You might perceive this Spirit in all people surrounding you, whenever they were devout, and you might observe their ascent to the Truth. This does not mean that Jesus of Nazareth reveals Himself to them through His Gospel, since God has ways through which God reveals Godself to the ones God has loved. In this sense the Church is not limited to the ones baptized, rather it extends to all whose Lord [God] has chosen them through God's compassion. They might be Monotheists, Hindus or Buddhists. And God will elucidate at the Last Day who are God's, and God's are all whom God had touched through God's Spirit and had put God's Word according to God's volition.

It remains that there is evangelization or calling whenever you think that whatever you believe in is the proper way, [however] this is based on the reality that people are free. They might see what you see, yet, you should neither condemn anyone nor pronounce judgments concerning the other ways [of different religions] or any human being, who does not believe in what you believe. Thus, do not pass a judgment concerning the way anyone pursues [in faith], rather share life with him/[her] in love and peace. Love is the culmination of revelation, while peace accompanies freedom.

This presumes the coexistence of people from different religions. Thus, do not kill anyone, do not suppress anyone and do not impose a life, or orders from your own on him/[her], and God will not give an opinion in the religion of anyone of us on the Last Day, rather God judges the person as a person. Do not condemn anyone to fire, since the Creator has not entitled you to pronounce such judgment. God [the Creator] manifests Godself to every creature on the Last Day and saves him/[her] from suffering, whenever he/[she] was not among those condemned to suffering.

“When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves” (Rom. 2: 14). Your conscience rules over you and if you were sincere to God, God perceives you as belonging to God and tells you this

on the Day when God judges the inner depth of every person. Then, this glory comes.