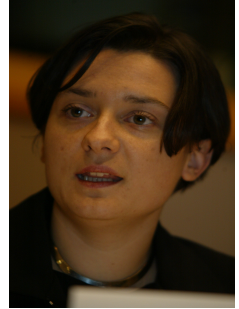


Not for a million dollars

What composes the Christian vision of man?

An elegant American lady was accompanying Mother Teresa as she was taking care of the sick. At the sight of a leper being washed, she turned her face in disgust: "I would not do this for a million dollars!" she said. "Nor would I" answered Mother Teresa.

Mother Teresa had a stronger motivation, namely her Christian vision of man: "understanding man as the image of God", "recognising Christ in every man", and "seeing the value of man in his *being man*" and not as a link in the chain of production, or as an object of one's interest.



Man is awesome: a man is not something, but somebody. He is not simply submitted to his instincts. He is a "person", carrier of a world of his own: perception, reflection, wish, along with aspiration and finally decision, create a unique *interior life* that is in the end centered around the search for good, truth and beauty. Man is the creature to whom truth and reality are disclosed. He can share and discover in the other this internal life. In the same way, the ability to love, that is to say to give one self, is specifically human and personal.

These experiences and observations suffice to prove man's inherent dignity, his rights and his protection. But as Christians we can see further: not only was man created in the image of God, but, by becoming man himself, God raised him to the title of friend and heir.

In a practical sense, what do these observations imply? One man is worth more than the whole universe. This is why he can't be used as a means to an end. This is why man can't be used as a shield, or shouldn't be taken hostage to exert political influence. In the same manner he shouldn't be used as a mere means for personal sexual pleasure. For the state, the Christian vision claims the understanding that the goal of politics is not the greatest good for the greatest number, but the best possible good for all. The weak also must be supported, even if we couldn't see any sense and productivity in their lives. For the state, because of this Christian vision of man, exploitation and coercion are out of the question – and human rights ought to be respected.

Life does not lie in our hands; we do not have the right to take it. Man is designed towards something bigger than him. Only God is master of life and death. Even if life does not seem worth living: it is not up to us to take the decision. Dostoyevski was referring to this when writing: "if God doesn't exist, then all is permitted". Eliminating the suffering - from euthanasia on demand to killing newborn babies – and neglecting our own responsibility to support them – doesn't correspond to the dignity of the person.

Europe is still strongly marked by the values of Christianity: many bear a general Christian vision of the person. But the more this vision is disassociated from its roots and its faith, the more it dissolves and the more everyone is endangered. When Christian convictions are no longer relevant in public life, there comes a fatal unbalance between our technological possibilities and our moral strength. So today's debate about the definition of Europe, is not a combat of nostalgic people, but a great responsibility for humanity today.