

# **Identity and Responsibility**

By Father Omar A. Huesca - ©IMAGO DEI APOSTOLATE

## **I AM – *I am***

Back in 1959, when I was nine years old, I recall waking up on the first day of that year to a strange sound. It was the noise of shouts and nervous laughter coming from the crowds that were moving, seemingly without any specific direction, through the narrow street of the central district of Habana.

We lived in a big old house that dated back to colonial times, and in spite of its architectural beauty and charm, I must confess, that it was in dire need of repair. Its old wooden shutters opened, from the high sealing to the old and cracked marble floor, unto the narrow street the house faced. I recall how, in that morning my mother pulled us children away from the front of the house to the rear area, where, protected by thick stone walls, we could not see the crowd, or understand the words that their clamoring contained.

My mother's effort to protect us from the confusion did not come soon enough to shield me from a stunning event the memory of which I still carry. I remember seeing a man run through the frame that the opening of our door created for my vision. He went by at top speed, wearing a tattered shirt. In a flash, the man disappeared from view, and another man took his place. The second man did not run by. He squatted down on one knee, assuming a position that strangely reminded me of the genuflection we were taught to make every time we went by the Blessed Sacrament in Church. But this man, who was wearing a drab, olive green uniform, with a military cap, and sporting a reddish, gnarled beard, was holding a long rifle, taking careful aim at something. Suddenly, my stomach felt the shock of the concussion caused by an explosion. The man had fired his weapon, and in a moment of unmitigated fear, I knew what had happened, and I cried.

The adults at home seemed sullen from then on. There was much monitoring of television programs and radio broadcasts so that the children could not hear or see what occurred in the following days and months. A feeling that something overwhelming and ominous was happening filled the very air we breathed. The seeds of atheistic Communism, which had been nourished in the soil of recklessness and corruption of the past, had begun to bear their poisonous fruit.

After a short time, a wholesale rewriting of history began, which, not only exaggerated the folly of the past, but extirpated all references to whatever good existed in years gone by. Populations were shifted from cities to countryside, and from countryside to cities. The lives of national heroes were revised to show them as precursors of communism. Streets and plazas were renamed. Even the geographical references and indicators were changed. A new identity was manufactured for the people. Those who did not conform to this identity, were seen a threat to the new order, and had to pay the price for their personalism, a price that was couched in inhumane cruelty, as seen in the events recounted above and carried in my memory.

In a society of mass identity, those who dare say “I am”, must deal with the consequences of such an affirmation: ridicule, ostracizing, persecution, and sometimes, even death. But the loss of personal identity always results in mass mentality, and never in a true community. I must be “I” before I can be part of “we”. Herein lies the urgency to ask ourselves the question, who am I?

## **I AM**

While it is true that God is immutable from all eternity, and is eternally One true God, and Trinity of consubstantial Persons, because of our incalculable limitations as creatures, He revealed the sublime Mystery of the Most Holy Trinity in latter times through the Incarnation of His beloved Son, the second Person of the Holy Trinity. In the beginning of His Self-revelation, while fullness of grace had not yet come, He revealed His Oneness. Even though in the book of Genesis God speaks in the royal plural, already foreshadowing the blessed revelation of His Triune identity, nonetheless He reveals Himself to Moses, His servant as the One true God. When Moses insistently asks God to reveal His Name, the Most High responds “I AM WHO AM”. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ (*Exodus 3: 14*)<sup>1</sup>.

## ***I am***

God created human beings in His own image and likeness. If we are to live, and truly be whom we were created to be, we must know who we are, that is to say, image of God, by God’s condescendence and grace. Again, before I can be part of “we”, I must be “I”; before I can experience “we are”, I must be solidly

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<sup>1</sup> This biblical reference is taken from the New International Version; all others are taken from the New American Bible.

grounded in “*I am*”. The enemy has always been intent in pulling us away from this principle, so as to deprive us of our original, august identity as image of God, and this in order to have his way we us. I must know who I am, or I will be easy pray to the cruelty of the devil, who, in his arrogance, always tries to mimic God. The enemy, by distorting our identity, would try to “re-create” us in his miserable image and likeness. May God have mercy on us!

What follows is in no way intended to minimize the importance of the communion between man and women, with its fruit of new life in their children, as a living image of the Most Holy Trinity. Neither should any erroneous assumption be made that, by referring the human family to God, I am in any way stipulating that God, in whose Image we are made, was at some time One, and then became Trinity. In the contrary, as stated before, God is immutable from all eternity, and is eternally One true God, and Trinity of consubstantial Persons, equal in glory dignity, power and divinity, yet distinct one from the other. It is by pointing to the distinctness of man and woman, united as one, and bringing forth new life in their children, that I intend to reaffirm the power Christian marriage and family have to reflect the Trinitarian Mystery. At the same time, I wish to point to the danger of confusing or blurring that distinctness. Blurring or denial of the distinct identities of man and woman in their marital and familial communion, is always a lamentable travesty, as the blurring or denial of the distinctness of the Divine Persons in the Holy Trinity has always constitute heresy, as history has proven.

While it is true that the first account of the creation of human beings in Genesis 1: 27 speaks of both male and female being created at the same time, I propose that there is no contradiction with the second account, which I see as being complementary; The first relates to the equality in dignity of man and woman, and to their imaging of God together, while the second, found in Genesis 2: 16-25, reveals the distinct characteristics of male and female that, together, constitute that fullness of image of God which we are. In any case, our modern, western understanding of action and sequential events is very different from the mentality and mode of expression of the Hebraic writers who recorded God’s revelation in Genesis. As men, it behooves us to look at that second account, to identify those traits proper to us, and to see the dreadful consequences of not living them.

***Equal in dignity, distinct in role identity, and complementary in imaging God fully.***

We see in the second account of the creation of humanity that the man (*in Hebrew* **הָאָדָם** - *Genesis 2: 7*) was 'made' first. Interestingly enough, we also see that the prohibition against eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was given to the man in *Genesis 2: 16-17*, before God 'made' the woman from the man's side, in other words, the command was particularly given to the man, who, therefore, was to be the guardian of this commandment. The woman was not 'made' by God until later, as related in verses 21 and 22 of the same chapter.

Later, in the third chapter of *Genesis*, we read the account of the fall, and we see that the serpent engages the woman in a deceiving conversation, beginning with a question that is a distortion of the truth: "Did God really tell you not to eat from **any** of the trees in the garden?" (*Genesis 3: 1*) *emphasis added by the author*. Thereupon, the woman commits the deadliest of mistakes by engaging the devil in conversation. The serpent then proceeds to issue the full lie, for he is the father of lies: "the serpent said to the woman: 'you certainly will not die'..." (*Genesis 3: 4-5*). The woman ate, gave to the man and he also ate, and the rest is history, the saddest of histories.

The question is: **Where was the man while all this was happening?** He had been entrusted with the commandment of God. He had been charged with guarding original grace by not entering into knowledge of evil, and all this, before the woman ever appeared on the scene. The man had failed to be the guardian, the protector, which God had established him to be. He was not true to the identity given to him by God; He had forgotten his very identity and mission, since the Hebrew word for *man* here זָכָר stems from the root of the verb *to remember* לִזְכּוֹר .

The man was made first, indicating that he was to be the foundational member of the unity of man and woman (*Genesis 2: 25*), called to image God, who, being Trinity, is One. The woman was made from the side of the man, bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh, as he joyfully declared. She was to be his support, as a buttress that assures that a structure does not collapse under the stress of its own weight, his equal in dignity, yet distinct in personal identity and role. The man was to be the head<sup>2</sup>, and the woman was to be the heart of this

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<sup>2</sup> H.H. Pius XI, Encyclical "Casti Cannubii", No. 27. December 31, 1930

communion, this exchange of love that is called to image the very Trinitarian Oneness who is God.

Alas, the roles were inverted, and identities were confused. With the woman assuming the initiative proper to the role of the man, who was established to be guardian and protector, but who had acted out of forgetfulness, in negligence and passivity, as expressed in the biblical narrative, the stage was set for the disastrous consequences of sin, the distortion and fracturing of the divine image in us.

### ***Identity and responsibility***

The loss of identity will lead to the blurring of our awareness of responsibility. The more blurred our sense of responsibility becomes, the easier it is for us to become passive and disengaged, leaving a vacuum in the relational order which God created for man and woman, and for the family they are ordained to form as a source of ever new and ongoing life, imaging the Triune God who is Life Itself.

Is this not what has happened, in an alarming manner, to the identity of men over the past four decades, particularly in their role as fathers? Even the most superficial look at our cultural indicators, such as what is being produced by the cinema industry, the electronic media, and much of what is written today for popular consumption, will show an image of fathers as soft, inept, disengaged characters, or silly and pathetic buffoons, that would hardly be missed if they disappeared from the scene. Other caricatures of the father abound, such as the brutal, womanizing, dictatorial tyrant, who should be cast out forthwith.

The former, compounded with the advance of liberal feminism and its hatred of men, the push of the homosexualist movement to reconstruct the human family to accommodate all kinds of bizarre configurations, and the efforts by socialistic ideologies to increase governmental control of the family, among other trends in our society, has resulted in the distortion, and almost eclipsing of the image of fatherhood, as established by God.

While it is obvious that all caricatures contain an element of truth, it is just as evident that what makes a caricature is the singling out of certain traits and exaggerating them into a comical, or pathetic distorted image of the reality being portrayed. Yet, if we passively accept these terrible caricatures of manhood in general, and fatherhood in particular, which are being pedaled in contemporary society, because of the inadequacies of some, or perhaps many men and

fathers of our time, then we will be accomplices in the dark work of rejecting God's order and design for the human family.

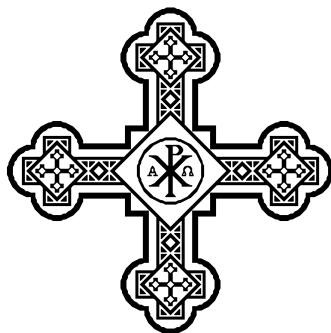
By running from the challenge of rediscovering the biblical role of man as guardian and protector, as servant-father, we would deny our sons the wholesome and holy model of manhood so sorely lacking in today's society.

Only when men rediscover their identity as lovers and protectors of their wives, their most precious treasure, whom they are called to love and give themselves for (*Ephesians 5: 25-33*), will women regain their true identity as equal in dignity, but free to be who they are uniquely as wives and mothers, without having to carry the burden of the unfulfilled role of their men. Then, the fullness of dignity will crown man and woman in the mystery of marriage, which in itself is the image of Christ's life-giving love for the Church, in His act of redemption.

After our women, the immediate beneficiaries of this recovery of the identity of men as protectors and servant-fathers, who head their families in service and obedience of God, are our children, who will grow within the warmth and safety of a family that affords them the blessing of clearly defined, yet lovingly united parents. Children need this clarity, this structure, to feel safe as they grow in awareness of their own identity, and of the providential love of God.

The recovery of the biblical identity of man in general, and father in particular, is crucial for the healing of our wounded families and our disintegrating society. Catholic men and fathers of today can not procrastinate in their consideration of these realities, or in their commitment to be part of the solution for the confusion and distortions of our troubled times. Can we not hear the plea of Philip echoing through the centuries, and with particular urgency today: "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us" (*John 14: 8*). It is the vocation of every Catholic man, to show forth the Father, in imitation of Christ, whose mission was to reveal the Father and lead all to Him.

As the image of fatherhood goes in our civilization, so goes our remembrance of the One True God, and our desire to relate to Him in reverence and obedient love, for He has revealed Himself to us as the Father. Let us turn to Him, who is our salvation, for, "have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?" (*Malachi 2: 10*).



***Maranatha!***  
***Come, Lord Jesus!***