HOW MUCH HUMAN CAN YOU GET OF A CONSTRUCTED SELF?

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INTRODUCTION

Ecclesiastes 7:29 states, "Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions." The essence of this scripture encapsulates a profound truth: humanity often stands as its own most relentless adversary. Individuals are not only at odds with their authentic selves but also with one another, leading to a destructive cycle of self-rejection.

In a world where authenticity is often viewed with embarrassment, people are hesitant to acknowledge their true nature. This fear of rejection and perceived inadequacy compels them to present a façade, concealing their genuine selves both from themselves and others. To escape from their true identities, individuals adopt artificial personas—what I refer to as self-images—constructed through social norms, achievements, and roles. These fabricated identities mask the original self, leading to confusion as people mistakenly equate these images with their true selves.

Consequently, many define themselves through fragmented identities, relying on superficial labels rather than substantial self-awareness. For them, identity becomes a fragile construct, subject to perpetual renovation based on external influences. This process of self-definition often leaves individuals as mere role-players, engaged in constant self-impression management to satisfy societal expectations. Unlike social mimicry, where only the audience might be misled, individuals deceive themselves as well as those around them.

When asked, "Who are you?" responses typically revolve around societal roles, professions, or affiliations—such as "I am a man," "I am a mother," or "I am a national citizen." Many individuals prioritize roles tied to ethnicity, religion, or geography over their intrinsic humanity. Their sense of worth hinges upon accomplishments and societal recognition, leading them to equate success with personal value.

Human beings are inherently action-oriented; therefore, happiness and meaning are often derived from achievements rather than internal fulfilment. This fixation on external validation can lead to confusion—where success is mistaken for fulfilment, self-worth for self-image, and genuine love for mere romance. As a result, society often values those who achieve the most, reinforcing the notion that identity is rooted in outward accomplishments rather than inner self-awareness.

However, this relentless pursuit is fraught with fear—fear of worthlessness, rejection, and misunderstanding. Such fears render individuals vulnerable and powerless, often making them captives to their anxieties. The modern understanding of neurosis suggests that fear stems from a lack of basic needs. However, it is essential to recognize that fear is an intrinsic part of the human condition, unrelated to deprivation. Thus, it is inaccurate to associate neurosis solely with unmet needs, as fear itself is a universal experience that can lead to feelings of shame and victimhood.

True freedom is elusive for those caught in a cycle of escapism, conformity, and superficial pleasures. Rather, it rests on the willingness to embrace vulnerability, take creative risks, and confront authentic truths, including the acceptance of mortality. To find genuine freedom, individuals must cease their inventiveness and arms-length relationships with their true selves. They must dare to cease wearing masks and instead present their authentic selves to the world.

In this light, "How Much Human Can You Get of A Constructed Self" serves as an exploratory work on human identity. It is divided into two parts, namely:

Social Identity

– This section examines how identity is socially constructed and how such constructs can be mistaken for authenticity.

What is a Man?

– This segment seeks to delve into the true essence of humanity.

In confronting the eternal question “What am I?”, individuals may begin the journey toward self-discovery, reconnecting with their original selves and fostering a more profound relationship with authenticity.

My approach to writing this book is fundamentally critical and analytical. I do not write to endorse any existing tradition or promote a specific theory; rather, I aim to articulate what I believe to be the truth. I am convinced of its validity. Consequently, my methodology leads me to explore ideas that go "beyond and above" as well as "against" popular beliefs and cultural norms on certain topics.

If this results in a work that may appear to convey a new teaching, I find no surprise in that. Furthermore, if it is perceived by religious conservatives as resembling "heresy," I do not feel the need to apologize. Like all authors, I acknowledge that I am subject to criticism, and in my case, I must also recognize that my patience is limited.

I could not afford to wait for "nice words," "tactful language," or the finesse of rhetoric and flattery before embarking on this writing endeavour. If you find my style or expressions to be exasperating or impolite, I offer my sincere apologies. My limited

patience prevented me from adopting a more diplomatic tone, and I hope you can understand this aspect of my personality.

PART ONE: SOCIAL IDENTITY

CHAPTER ONE: THE SOCIAL DRAMA - ROLE PLAYING

Let no one refer to me as a "social being"; I identify as anti-social. Do not impose a social label upon me, for I reject the concept of role-playing. Humanity is not inherently social; we are living, caring beings. Anyone who perceives themselves as a social entity is deceiving themselves and others; they are unaware of their true nature and are, in essence, strangers to themselves. We wear masks to perform roles, concealing our authentic selves beneath a superficial facade. In this societal construct, one becomes a character rather than a true person.

Social life resembles a theatrical production—an illusion where all participants engage in role-playing. Each individual assumes various roles: sister, brother, father, mother, teacher, governor, scientist, philosopher, soldier, and many others. What is typically heralded as socialization or civilization is, in reality, a process of manipulation and exploitation, a form of social conditioning that restricts individuality. The process of socialization effectively leads to the stagnation of true human potential; the socialized person becomes a conformist or an uncritical loyalist—often a zealous activist or a prisoner of their own environment.

The socially conditioned individual is often the least productive type of person—they outsource their thinking to educators, their decisions to leaders, and their entertainment to friends and loved ones, comfortable in their complacency. The security that the social individual seeks is found in the constructs they support—religion, government, laws, education, language, and material possessions. Questioning any of these can provoke hostility; challenge their beliefs and face their wrath. This individual is often unwilling to confront the truth, finding solace instead in their comforting illusions.

The social individual leads life from an external perspective, with their identity and sense of worth derived from societal inventions. Their self-concept relies heavily on public opinion, and fulfillment is contingent upon social acceptance and affirmation. In seeking this approval, individuals often opt for ingratiation, choosing to remain confined within their self-imposed prisons rather than risk rejection.

Moral judgments are shaped by the prevailing majority; goodness equates to what is socially acceptable and broadly practiced. Hence, a "good" person is often one who has succumbed to societal conditioning and confinement. Social engagement is a constructed reality, rarely stemming from authenticity. The intertwining of individuals

within this illusion appears natural and unconscious, as social interactions—characterized by fleeting conversations—serve as a competitive game devoid of true purpose.

Interactions are temporary and transitory; they only evolve into social relationships when sustained, primarily in the context of marriage. Thus, it is entirely feasible to have social interactions devoid of meaningful relationships. While relationships express unity and oneness, interactions signify mere togetherness. Individuals may coexist without genuine connection, even within the confines of marriage, which can often devolve into a series of role-playing scenarios.

As each person engages in this social masquerade, they are assigned specific roles—once defined, their behavior becomes predictable and constrained by the expectations of society. For instance, if societal norms dictate my role as a student, my behavior must align with those expectations. Any deviation can invalidate my status as a "good" student. This societal assignment of roles pressures individuals to either suppress their true selves or present a façade.

Ultimately, these roles are society's means of recreating, controlling, manipulating, and exploiting its members. Conformity to societal norms prevails over individual authenticity. Those with neurotic tendencies—rooted in unmet basic needs—often become submissive to societal dictates, fearing rejection and judgment. Such individuals epitomize social determinism.

Only a select few possess the capacity to be authentic social agents, demonstrating innovation and individuality. Regrettably, society often scapegoats these few, viewing them as threats to the established order that must be sacrificed.

CHAPTER TWO: LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

The innate creativity of human beings deserves acknowledgment and respect. Humans are inherently creative; however, this gift often leads us to become constrained by our own creations. We have constructed a society that, paradoxically, can imprison us. Language, a sophisticated system of human communication, is one such creation—it serves as both a tool of expression and a defining feature of our identity. We shape our self-perceptions through our language, which often constrains us as much as it liberates us. Indeed, we are defined by our language; we are what our language reflects.

The essence of our identity is frequently conflated with language, leading to a problematic human tendency to shape our identities through the words we use. This process begins early in life, during infancy and childhood, primarily within the family. The practice of nomenclature—essentially the science of naming—marks the inception of this self-reconstruction, serving as the simplest form of stereotyping and conceptual

misunderstanding. Naming is a way through which we recreate ourselves, creating fixed identities that can be anticipated.

Upon birth, every child is assigned a name by their parent(s), which signifies an immediate re-creation and categorization of the child. Names such as John, Peter, Elijah, or Karen not only redefine the child but also impose limitations on them. Words—whether they be names or descriptors—function as symbols; through them, we perceive ourselves and the world around us. By assigning a name, we conceptualize an individual in a specific manner, based on the meaning attributed to that name. When we reference a named person, we are engaging only with our conception of that individual, rather than the individual themselves.

This naming process inherently classifies and categorizes us: we become black, white, male, female, wise, foolish, good, bad, living, or non-living. This leads to generalizations that oversimplify complex realities. For instance, concluding that "all Blacks are fools" on the basis that "Audu is Black" is an example of such reductive thinking. Unfortunately, classification does not equate to identifying essence as commonly assumed; it reflects social convenience that varies across different contexts.

Audu, as a name, does not encapsulate my true self; it is merely a symbolic representation shaped by the perceptions of those who named me. The understanding I have of myself and how others perceive me is invariably colored by physiological, cultural, and circumstantial factors, all of which influence the purpose and perception of naming itself.

Questions emerge: Does an individual possess a name? What does that name signify? Is my name Audu? Am I solely defined by this name? A name serves as a lens through which others perceive us, but it does not constitute our entirety. To label me a "fool" does not encompass my true self; similarly, labeling me "intelligent" is an incomplete understanding of my essence.

We are inherently more expansive than the labels we are assigned. Our essence transcends language and the confines of words. To think that a name or categorization defines our identity is an oversimplification. I am always more than what others may think or imagine.

This understanding of language’s limitations is reflected in the divine. God, aware of the pitfalls of human nomenclature, declined to accept a name for Himself. When Moses inquired about God's name, the response was, "I am." This declaration affirms that God is beyond any name; He represents a continual presence, an essence that exists independently of language.

In essence, God is not merely an "existence," a term laden with implications of causation. Unlike beings that exist due to a cause, God simply is; He has no origin. This

distinction underscores the futility of attempting to confine the divine within human language. Both God and humanity resist redefinition through language, emphasizing our shared existence beyond mere nomenclature.

CHAPTER THREE: FASHION, CONSUMPTIONS, AND IDENTITY

In contemporary society, individuals are increasingly defined by their clothing and outward appearances—transformed into mere artifacts. The notion of identity has shifted; we are often perceived as what we own—our possessions become integral to who we are. Fashion plays a crucial role in shaping our identities, conveying our age, gender, social standing, role, class, and even personality. It serves as a passport into global society, granting us acceptance and respect from our peers.

Through fashion, one can achieve celebrity status or notoriety, potentially leading to greater financial rewards. Fashion can attract romantic partners and help maintain those relationships. Additionally, it can open doors to lucrative careers in various industries, including fashion, entertainment, and politics. As such, fashion stands as a defining characteristic of the postmodern individual, encapsulating a generation that often confines its identity to externally imposed norms.

Fashion is a form of magic, holding the power to present unlimited opportunities and blessings. Yet, this power is derived from a cultural fabric that we ourselves have woven, often leaving us more comfortable in these constructed identities than in our authentic selves. There exists a pervasive confusion where fashion is equated with beauty and health, leading us to mistakenly believe that societal approval hinges on outward appearances.

The perception of worth becomes entangled with self-image, where the fashionable individual is often mistaken for the truly beautiful. In this societal landscape, decency is often measured against fashion, and the embodiment of style becomes a superficial value and a shortcut to societal acceptance. The language surrounding fashion has morphed, with compliments like "You look good!" becoming common currency.

Individuals have come to embody a singular image, and interactions are often initiated with visual appraisals before deeper sentiments are expressed. In this environment, goodness is frequently equated with appearance, reinforcing the idea that one is first seen through their artifacts—clothing and style.

This superficial lifestyle is perpetuated by the advertising industry, which utilizes television and other mediums to create and reinforce false identities. Advertisements lead individuals to believe that they cannot be whole or accepted without acquiring the latest goods. The danger emerges when people conflate their self-worth with their

possessions. Absent the right fashion items—whether it's high heels, tailored suits, or trendy accessories—many feel diminished in their humanity.

Society has indoctrinated individuals into a mindset that prioritizes conformity over authenticity, prompting some to pursue an illusion of acceptance at the cost of their original identities. In this narrative, goodness becomes indistinguishable from blind conformity, freedom is misconstrued as immediate gratification, and happiness is reduced to fleeting economic success.

Those who resist these societal pressures may find themselves marginalized, often viewed as outcasts or misfits. The struggle for self-acceptance can breed feelings of loneliness, guilt, or irrelevance, leading to a crisis of identity. This environment poses a significant challenge of our time: while the conformists are often valued and treated with dignity, the truly free individuals may find themselves ostracized.

In essence, society has transformed individuals into mere images, manipulating perceptions and expectations to achieve its objectives. Alarmingly, a significant portion of both literate and illiterate communities invests their resources and time in a culture fixated on superficiality, from entertainment to advertising. This fixation skews the definition of achievement, placing human dignity and worth in direct relation to performance and success in an action-driven context.

The consequences of this paradigm are profound, but it need not continue. We must strive for a deeper understanding of identity that transcends material possessions and social conformity—one that celebrates genuine human dignity, goodness, freedom, and fulfillment beyond mere achievement.

What many individuals mistakenly perceive as beauty is, in fact, a construct shaped and defined by societal standards. Society dictates, "This is beautiful," and consequently, anyone who aligns with these societal norms is also deemed beautiful—at least in the eyes of that society. Those who embrace these so-called standards receive societal acknowledgment and admiration, while those who diverge from them risk being labeled as ugly or primitive, implying a lack of civilization.

The archetype of the culturally accepted woman typically includes traits such as height, an ectomorphic physique, a sharply defined nose, a long neck, and a friendly smile. Individuals who do not conform to this description are often deemed unattractive, leading to a hierarchical classification that places them beneath the culturally ideal figures. The individuals recognized as culturally beautiful—both ladies and gentlemen—often command a degree of respect, power, and control, which is established even before society overtly acknowledges it.

Men, too, find themselves ensnared by the expectations of fashion, suffering on a physical level from these established norms. The pursuit of beauty manifests through

physical transformation, often leading to the overuse of chemicals that strain the body. Furthermore, certain diets are adopted primarily to enhance appearance, aligning one's body with the ever-evolving fashion standards. Daily routines frequently include rigorous physical discipline aimed at maintaining the coveted ideal shape. Prayer and fasting have, regrettably, transitioned from spiritual practices to mere lifestyle choices aimed at achieving physical health.

Perseverance, traditionally viewed as a Christian virtue, is now adopted by those in the fashion world as they undergo the arduous process of self-recreation through cosmetics and other means. However, it is important to recognize that cultural beauty is inherently deceptive and susceptible to erosion. Its allure is temporary, and the inevitability of aging renders these societal standards meaningless. This suggests that the investments made in our physical appearance are bound to deteriorate, yielding a return on investment that is ultimately lost.

Fashion, then, can be viewed as an unprofitable business that provides no tangible gain. Engaging in such pursuits may seem irrational; indeed, it is often only those described as 'fools'—individuals consumed by hedonism and instant gratification—who partake in this fleeting endeavor. These individuals focus solely on immediate pleasure, neglecting to consider the future or to cultivate enduring values.

In light of this analysis, one might be tempted to make a sweeping observation regarding women and the societal pressures to conform to these beauty standards, suggesting that many may find themselves ensnared in this cycle. Ultimately, it is a complex interplay of culture and personal choice that dictates our understanding of beauty, highlighting the need for deeper reflection on the values we uphold.

CHAPTER FOUR: BE-LIKE-JESUS CHRISTIANITY

Christianity, as a salvation-oriented faith, holds the belief that humanity has fallen from its original state of goodness into a condition of evil. It asserts that sin has tainted humankind, stripping individuals of their essence and causing a rift in their relationship with God. Consequently, it is believed that God must intervene in order to heal and restore humanity to its true self and to Him. According to this view, humans are rendered worthless on their own; the essence of their being, along with their goodness, meaning, and hope, hinges upon their ability to wholly surrender themselves to God. This entails relinquishing personal reasoning and decision-making, transforming oneself into a religious vessel.

In light of this perspective, it is worth considering whether the root of humanity's issues lies within sin itself or within religion. I contend that it is the latter. There is no doubt that religion can lead individuals to construct a false self, as they attempt to detach from what

they perceive as their sinful, fallen nature. In seeking redemption, individuals often reject their original selves in favor of a new identity granted by God. Humans are meant to exist as they truly are—unique beings who cannot become angels. Yet, the desire to transcend their original state results in the aspiration to become "supernatural humans," an ideal that Christians identify with Jesus Christ, the epitome of humanity.

Within the framework of "Be-Like-Jesus Christianity," followers are encouraged to emulate Jesus as the ultimate human model. The aspiration to embody the characteristics of Christ is seen as the primary mission of any individual identifying as a Christian. Stanley J. Grenz articulates this notion succinctly, stating that the aim of Christian ethics is "to imitate Christ, who is the revelation of the living God, because in doing so we fulfill our purpose, which is to be the image of God."

However, this variant of Christianity presents challenges: it calls on individuals to become what they are inherently not, and will never be. Each person, whether human or spirit, possesses a uniqueness that is irreplaceable. One cannot transform into another, either through human effort or divine intervention; I cannot become Jesus, nor can He become me. To idealize Jesus and attempt to model one's life on Him risks diminishing one's individuality and humanity, relegating oneself to the role of a mere participant rather than an authentic person.

The label "Christian," like many other titles, suggests a form of role-playing. Those who adopt this title may find themselves constrained to behave in accordance with societal expectations associated with it. This descriptive title, while it appears in the Christian Scriptures (Acts 11:26), did not originate with the founders of the faith, the apostles. Rather, it was bestowed upon them by the Antiochene community, who observed the disciples' way of life and characterized them as Christians.

This origins story underscores the challenge of self-identification—when one accepts a socially constructed title, they may feel compelled to conform to a predetermined behavior pattern. In the eyes of the Antiochenes, a Christian embodies certain expected traits and actions reflective of Jesus' life. Anyone unable to align their conduct with this model risks being labeled as "not a Christian," thereby categorizing them as unbelievers, with the dire consequence of eternal separation from God if they do not repent.

Moreover, the designation "Christian" reflects the Antiochenes' perception of both Jesus and Christianity, rather than a comprehensive definition of what it means to be a Christian. It is noteworthy that, despite no historical evidence substantiating that the original Antiochenes knew Jesus personally, the context of the narrative supports that their understanding of Christians was that they were good individuals—moralistic and engaged in social good, as exemplified by Jesus' own actions.

It was ultimately after a year of the disciples living in Antioch that the community recognized their lifestyle and identified them as Christians. While it is uncertain whether

they were associating the label with the resurrected Christ or the historical figure who inhabited Jerusalem, the term bears connotations of the Christ figure already known by them.

Lastly, we cannot ascertain the sincerity of the Antiochenes in their designation; it may have originally been a mockery, akin to the term "puritan," which was once intended as a derision. Regardless, the acceptance of this title by the disciples indicates how they saw themselves: as Christians, striving to embody goodness and engage in moral action within their communities.

The figure of Jesus, as I understand him, did not bestow titles upon his followers. In fact, he was notably opposed to such distinctions, and I share this perspective. Throughout the Scriptures, he never explicitly accepted the title "Christ," embodying a life beyond mere labels. He was not a role-player; Jesus lived authentically, not confined to societal roles.

This conviction is why I identify not as a Christian in the traditional sense, but rather as a committed disciple of Jesus—a learner dedicated to gaining wisdom from his teachings.

PART TWO: HUMAN IDENTITY

CHAPTER ONE: ST. PAUL AND SIGMUND FREUD'S VIEW OF MAN: CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

"But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

– Romans 7:23

"For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."

– Galatians 5:16

St. Paul presents a complex figure, whose multifaceted identity as a Jew, Pharisee, Essene, Platonist, Christian, and even a psychologist—particularly in a Freudian sense—enriches our understanding of his life and teachings. To narrowly define Paul by just one of these identities, such as his Jewish or Christian roles, is to overlook the rich tapestry of influences that shaped him. Each facet of his identity significantly impacts his writings and perspectives.

It is crucial to acknowledge that some Christian adherents may find it contentious to juxtapose St. Paul and Sigmund Freud, as they often perceive a stark division between the realms of religion and psychology. For them, these fields exist in separate spheres with minimal intersection. Their main concern may be: What does Paul have in common with Freud? While I empathize with those holding such binary views, I must assert candidly: religion and psychology are intimately intertwined. Traditional definitions of religion explore the relationship between God and humanity, with mankind as the actor in this dynamic. Conversely, psychology seeks to decode human behavior, which is inherently complex and unpredictable.

The intersection of Paul and Freud does not lie in their beliefs about God or their biological or cultural backgrounds. Rather, it resides in their conceptualizations of humanity. With some exceptions and modifications, both thinkers express similar views about man. This exploration seeks to illuminate their shared perspectives and highlight relevant exceptions, presenting a complementary understanding of humanity from both religious and psychological angles.

To begin, it's essential to note that Paul, as a Christian, perceives man through the lens of sin and redemption—the so-called Fall—even when not explicitly articulated in scripture. His insights, while potentially perplexing to his contemporaries in the Pharisaic tradition, are well-rooted in Christian doctrine. This understanding stems in part from his transformation; after his conversion (Acts 9), Paul diverges from many of his previous Pharisaic beliefs, asserting that in Christ, one becomes a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

Now, let us briefly examine how Paul's understanding of humanity aligns with Freudian psychology. According to Paul, man is depicted as a "battlefield," where two opposing forces—the spirit and the flesh—are in constant conflict. The term "spirit" refers to the redemptive work of Christ (John 1:12; Romans 8:14-17), while "flesh" pertains to humanity's inclination toward sin (Romans 3:23; 8:3-10; Galatians 5:19-20). Thus, it can be inferred that man, as a "battlefield," is not merely a passive victim; rather, he is an active participant in this profound spiritual struggle.

Understanding this conflict emphasizes its nature as an internal one—a spiritual warfare rather than an external physical conflict (Eph. 6:12). It is crucial to recognize that this war is not against "flesh and blood"; it is an inner battle that must be fought from within the individual. Recognizing the character of this warfare is vital in determining the appropriate strategies and weapons for engagement (Eph. 6:12-18). Importantly, the soldier in this conflict is both the battlefield and the combatant; the struggle occurs within, and the fight must emerge from that internal landscape.

From the lens that portrays humanity as both the “battlefield” and the soldier, it would be erroneous to conclude that Paul depicts man as a mere victim caught between two overpowering forces. Paul argues that the struggle is fundamentally spiritual, rooted in theoretical conflict and driven primarily by the suggestion of ideas. In this framework, man's will is meticulously outlined and maintained, emphasizing personal responsibility for one's decisions.

According to Paul, these two opposing forces merely propose competing ideas to humanity, presenting individuals with the freedom to choose but not compelling them to accept any particular idea as ultimate truth. Thus, it is incumbent upon each person to discern and decide for themselves what constitutes truth. Consequently, individuals become slaves to whichever force—the spirit or the flesh—they decide to obey (Romans 6:16). One can only serve one of the two forces; there is no neutral position in this spiritual struggle.

I have no doubt that this teaching is not original to Paul; rather, it reflects a modified interpretation of Essene beliefs. The Essenes maintained that humanity exists in a state of conflict between two powerful forces. This paradigm suggests that one's position within the universe hinges on allegiance to either force. For the believer in Christ, this scenario transforms them into a soldier of God, perpetually at war against Satan and his malign forces. Consequently, prayer and vigilance become vital components of the believer's daily life.

In rabbinical tradition and Judaism, which profoundly influenced Paul, humanity is commonly depicted as a “flesh-and-blood” entity. This characterization stands in stark contrast to the concept of God’s omnipotence. The flesh represents frailty and susceptibility to corruption, while the spirit is viewed as the ideal, resonating with a

Platonic psychological framework. Accordingly, the flesh-and-blood nature of man renders him “unworthy of God” and prone to wrongdoing, particularly in surrendering to evil influences. Conversely, the spirit of the righteous is considered the “spirit of truth,” positioning him on the front lines on God’s side against malevolent forces.

Thus, "flesh" juxtaposes with the spirit that governs the pious individual and shapes their virtuous actions, residing within them. Consequently, the flesh emerges as a zone of vulnerability, almost interchangeable with the concept of evil. Such beliefs epitomized the teachings of the Essenes and the Rabbis concerning humanity—an influence from which Paul, given his background, could not entirely escape.

Where Paul diverges from his Essene and Pharisaic counterparts is in his understanding of sin. Paul contends that sin functions as an internal force that corrupts, a notion that would have been perplexing to the Pharisees, who traditionally viewed sin as an external entity that dominates the individual (Genesis 4:7). It becomes evident why Paul's perspective would conflict with those of his contemporaries: he adheres firmly to the teaching of Jesus, asserting that corruption arises from within rather than from external sources, as the Pharisees maintained (Matthew 15:17-20).

This distinction is crucial. One's understanding of sin and its origins profoundly influences their approach to addressing it. The Pharisees, who perceive sin as external, tend to confront it through external means; in contrast, Jesus and his followers, who see sin as an internal issue, aim to tackle it from within. For the former group, the focus is on religious laws, rituals, and observances; while for the latter, emphasis is placed on moral integrity and virtue (Matthew 5:1-16).

Paul and Freud: A Critical Assessment

The potential existence of transcendent powers—both positively transcendent (God) and negatively transcendent (the Devil or Satan)—cannot be entirely dismissed. However, the assertion that two opposing forces reside within mankind, engaged in a constant battle with humans as their primary battleground, is a notion that requires further justification (Romans 7:23; Galatians 5:17). Paul appears to present a contradictory viewpoint: he describes humans as "helpless victims" of these powers (Romans 7:24), yet simultaneously challenges this implication (Romans 6:16).

Religious thought, as exemplified by Paul, has traditionally sought to understand humanity within the framework of biological existence, character, and nature. This perspective often overlooks the biological origins of man, and, in fact, associates biological life with sin. The biological man—an essential aspect of human nature—is labeled a sinner or a "carnal" individual in Christianity (1 Corinthians 2:14; Romans 8:6-7). This distinction may explain why there is no concept of a "biology of religion," but rather a "sociology of religion."

The tension between religion and biology mirrors a broader conflict between biology and sociology—representing the dichotomy of nature versus culture. The underlying reasons for these conflicts are relatively straightforward. Culture is a human construct, while nature is not; individuals often prefer their cultural inventions over embracing their natural selves. Culture is a controllable construct, whereas nature represents elements beyond human control, often viewed as an "evil" force to be conquered and understood. Humans possess an inherent desire for domination, yet the self—a concept akin to the thermodynamic law—cannot be created or destroyed; it can only be discovered. The true self is thus immutable.

Nature is often perceived as instinct or impulse, which Freud describes as "lust"—the psychic energy that constitutes the unconscious mind. According to Freud, the unconscious mind operates amoral and illogical, driven solely by the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. In contrast, culture is seen as the domain of the conscious mind, which governs various civilizational constructs such as language, law, government, and religion. These cultural activities rely heavily on the mind's ability to suppress the pleasure-seeking tendencies of the unconscious.

Humans are, therefore, characterized by the ongoing conflict between their instincts (natural, biological, and unconscious) and the moral, rational faculties of the conscious mind—qualities that Paul describes as the "fruits of the Spirit." For Freud, this struggle serves as the foundation of neurosis. The parallels between Paul and Freud are notable; both address similar themes using different terminologies. Where Paul refers to "spirit and flesh," Freud interprets this as "instinct and culture," "natural" versus "social," "conscious" against "unconscious," and other dualities that represent the human experience.

Consequently, the biologically driven individual—described in religious terms as "natural" or "carnal"—is subject to the influences of the unconscious mind, characterized by pleasure-seeking, lawlessness, and irrationality (Galatians 5:19-27). Conversely, the individual guided by the spirit aligns with the conscious mind, demonstrating self-control, rationality, and moral integrity (Galatians 5:22). It is intriguing that Paul asserts it is the "flesh" that lusts against the spirit rather than the reverse (Romans 7:23; Galatians 5:17). This reflects a deep psychological reality: the unconscious mind consistently dominates the conscious mind, and throughout human history, mastery over the unconscious has proven elusive.

As Carl G. Jung posited, the unconscious mind embodies a force to which man must surrender. Furthermore, Paul's use of the phrase “against the law of my mind” in Romans 7:23 highlights a significant point; he appears to equate "mind" with "spirit" in contrast to the flesh. This suggests a persistent crisis between the unconscious and conscious mind—an issue Paul interprets through the lens of sin.

Ultimately, both Paul and Freud are engaged in a dialogue about the human condition, albeit from distinct perspectives: Paul from a religious angle and Freud through a psychological lens. Each addresses the complexities of humanity, emphasizing the multifaceted struggles that define the human experience.

It would be misguided to assert that there is no distinction whatsoever between the positions of Freud and traditional religious views. The simplistic characterization of Freud as "anti-religion" should be categorically dismissed as both inaccurate and disrespectful to his work. Freud did not outrightly deny the existence of religion or God; rather, he theorized that religion arose as a response to humanity's vulnerability to natural forces. In seeking to cope with this helplessness, primitive people relied on emotional appeals—a sort of magical thinking to navigate their challenges.

However, Freud believed that Homo sapiens, as more evolved beings, should leverage reason and intellect, rather than looking externally for security. He argued that mature individuals should confront reality directly. This perspective fundamentally counters the narrative that Freud's ideas catalyzed a so-called sexual revolution, framing him instead as a proponent of restraining impulses. Freud championed virtues of the mind, such as self-control, reason, development, maturity, independence, and beauty. He did not advocate for reckless or irrational behavior regarding sexuality. In Freud's view, individuals who remain trapped in carnal desires fail to reach the final stage of personality development—the superego—and thus live under an illusion.

Freud considered religion as an emotional expression but insisted that rational, critical-thinking individuals should not be swayed by emotions. He proposed replacing the need for religion with reason, a notion that stands in contrast to Paul's perspective. For Paul, human dilemmas are a product of self-creation, where blame resides solely with the individual for poor choices. Paul's solution lies in looking outward for divine assistance; thus, humanity transitions from an autonomous being to a patient in need of constant support. This results in an expectation of gratitude and worship towards a benefactor, which, on the surface, appears contrary to the idea of man being created in God's image—a being given life and agency (Genesis 2:7).

Consequently, one wonders whether religion has undermined human dignity by promoting a view of man as fundamentally flawed, sinful, and helpless. It encourages individuals to escape into fanciful realms described as "heaven," "Nirvana," "Paradise," or a "Golden Age." Such teachings can instill a sense of worthlessness, pushing adherents to model their lives on idealized superhuman figures embodying both divine and human qualities.

From Freud's perspective, religion hinders personal growth and psychological development, potentially serving as the root of neurosis and a life dominated by shame. It compels individuals to adopt false identities, promoting a mechanistic existence.

Ultimately, religion may become a tool for social manipulation and exploitation, obscuring rather than elucidating the essence of humanity.

The religious framework often leads to the belief that individuals are not accountable for their actions if they are deemed powerless or helpless. This perspective undermines the foundational premise of Christian ethics, which is rooted in the belief in human freedom. Without this belief, the concept of Christian ethics loses its grounding. If God were to manage all aspects of human life while still holding individuals accountable, it would contradict the essence of personal agency. Furthermore, the existence of love is intertwined with the belief in human goodness and individuality; to love is to recognize the other person's existence and their capacity to reciprocate that love.

In summary, while Freud's critique highlights the potential limitations of religion, it simultaneously invites a deeper examination of human autonomy, reason, and the complexities of interpersonal relationships.

CHAPTER THREE: THE BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL MEANING OF MAN

"*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.*" – *Genesis 2:7*

There is an urgent need to re-examine the theological meaning of humanity for several reasons. The rapid advancements in science and technology, particularly in medical technology, have obscured our understanding of identity more than we may realize. Humanity must reassess its identity, ethics, and values; otherwise, it risks facing dire consequences.

From a scientific perspective, humanity is often reduced to a mere collection of chemical elements in predictable proportions. Biologists and chemists emphasize DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) as the fundamental substance that encodes the information of human inheritance and biological function. This reductionist view posits that one's identity is tightly linked to their genes, placing individuals at the mercy of their genetic makeup. Richard Dawkins, a prominent zoologist, infamously described humans as "gene machines," created solely for the survival of those genes, implying that the human body is simply a "colony of genes." Consequently, under this framework, the essence of man is not the whole person but rather the genetic material one carries, making the body an interchangeable machine of sorts.

This perspective leads to a troubling conclusion—that humanity is not found in the body itself. While this notion may initially seem reasonable, suggesting that humans must be more than mere physical entities, it ultimately presents a dangerous view that gives rise to a phenomenon commonly referred to as the medicalization of human life. This

perspective is evident in practices such as reproductive technologies, stem cell research, organ donation, and artificial body part replacements.

In light of scientific advancements, both Jewish and Christian theologians are compelled to revisit the creation narrative found in Genesis 2:18-25, particularly concerning the nature of woman as derived from man. If modern science dismisses the body as central to identity, we must critically ask: Is a woman, created from what is deemed merely a machine—an identity-less body—a true person? What constitutes her identity, and does she indeed possess one?

Furthermore, ethical dilemmas emerge from advancements in medicine and reproductive technologies, raising critical questions about parenthood and family dynamics. The concept of brain death, with its focus on cognitive functions as the true measure of identity, challenges our understanding of personhood and the ethical implications surrounding organ donation.

This landscape of ethical uncertainty necessitates that theologians re-evaluate our understanding of identity. I firmly believe that accurate and hopeful answers concerning our existence and identity rest with theologians—if we embrace our roles authentically. While science, whether natural or social, does not furnish the complete answers, theologians are uniquely positioned to explore these profound questions.

I acknowledge that I am neither the first nor the last theologian to ponder the meaning of humanity, and I greatly respect the contributions of other thinkers, including Paul Tillich, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Rudolf Bultmann, Jurgen Moltmann, H. A. Williams, and Wolfhart Pannenberg. Their insights offer valuable perspectives, although they may not encapsulate the entirety of human experience. For instance, Pannenberg expands upon the “image of God” doctrine by affirming that humanity is defined by freedom and openness toward oneself, God, and others.

While the “image of God” framework provides a foundational element for understanding humanity, limiting our discussion to solely this religious perspective fails to capture the complexity of our existence. Based on the text from Genesis 2:7, I assert that humanity is fundamentally a creation-being. This duality implies that humanity is both a creation, existing within the confines of space and time—subject to change and decay—and at the same time, a non-creation that transcends these limitations, remaining unbound by the laws of time and change.

For those who might view this understanding as heretical within established religious discourse, I encourage a careful and critical re-examination of Genesis 2:7. We must strive to embrace a more nuanced view of humanity that honors its profound complexity and significance.

The scripture unequivocally states that God created man and breathed into him the breath of life, resulting in man becoming a living being. It is a misconception to assert that the man created in a broader sense—like the creation of animals—was without breath, or respiration, until God infused him with His breath. Such an assumption misleads us into believing that God formed a lifeless body, a mere vessel, and then "imprisoned" His spirit within it, suggesting that man is alive solely because of the spirit residing in him. Should this notion hold any truth—which it does not—then we would have to align ourselves with Plato, viewing the body as inherently 'evil' while regarding the spirit as the only true ideal.

Furthermore, this perspective leads to the religious interpretation that upon death, the body returns to the earth from whence it came, while the spirit ascends to God. This narrative resonates with certain medical interpretations discussed earlier. However, the passage, "and man became a living being," directly counters this erroneous view. It is man himself who undergoes transformation, not merely his spirit! This emphasizes that man is active in his becoming, rather than passive. The text does not state, “and the spirit enabled man to become…” The spirit does not encounter an empty vessel or a lifeless body. Instead, it supports man in his endeavors without rendering him devoid of life.

To interpret the phrase “and man became a living being” as merely indicating that man possesses some form of life—be it biological, spiritual, or otherwise—is a misguided perspective. The phrase clearly pertains to human development, highlighting the creative potential inherent within man. What differentiates man from animals is his unique capacity for creativity; this distinction aligns with a certain interpretation of Darwinian evolution—emphasizing that this process of development is not automatic, but rather gradual.

Becoming a living being involves a journey toward self-discovery, actualization, independence, and freedom. It entails mastering oneself and one's environment, leading a responsible life rather than a subpar existence. To become a living being is to be creative and critical, engaging in dialogue with oneself, with God, and with the world. As H. A. Williams insightfully states, the essence of human life is inherently creative. When we say that man is made in the image of God, we acknowledge that man collaborates with his Creator in the act of creation.

To claim that the divine image is tarnished suggests that man has, to some degree, relinquished his creative potential, falling prey to a stagnant existence where he conforms rather than creates. The solution to this predicament cannot be the adoption of new patterns of conformity—no matter how exalted the values may seem. Living goodness must arise from revitalized creativity, manifesting not in adherence to pre-existing values found in a static ideal realm, but through the actual creation of new values.

Ethics, particularly Christian ethics, should not merely compile traditional moral norms, but should dare to innovate and value creatively. This is of utmost importance; goodness does not stem from conformity. Goodness is defined by creativity, independence, and responsibility—being true to oneself and fulfilling one's potential.

Returning to my definition of man as a creative-being, one who exists within both space and time yet transcends them, I underscore that the ultimate justification for this view lies in the term "breath" and the fact that God breathed into man. This “breath” is understood as the “spirit” of God, and this interpretation is consistent with the text. Clearly, there exists a profound union here—it is unfathomable to conceive of the spirit merely residing temporarily within a container devoid of identity, able to evacuate at will.

In conclusion, man is both “divine and human,” as reflected in Christian doctrine. He is human because he is formed from the earth ("below") and divine because he is infused with the spirit of God from the heavens ("above"). The spirit of God, if it contains its own identity prior to this "mystical" union, is not a created entity and is therefore not confined by the constraints of space and time—subject to change and decay. Consequently, man is a being that exists within space and time yet is not limited by it. This definition encapsulates what it means to be a transcendent being.

Thus, asserting that Jesus is both divine and human reveals a profound truth. It signifies that He is a man—a man who became a living soul, achieving a state of freedom and self-actualization.

Man is described as the being who became a living soul, representing the direct inspiration of God, or the breath of God, if you will. If we are willing to uphold and defend the doctrine of the Bible's infallibility based on this divine inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16), it begs the question: how much more should we consider the very essence of man—the living, breathing inspiration of God—when evaluating our understanding of infallibility? Is inspiration confined solely to the Scriptures? If we acknowledge that individuals can be inspired in various fields, why then should we not also recognize the infallibility of their works?

To believe that inspiration is limited to the Bible implies that God uses individuals merely as tools to achieve His ends and then departs. Such a notion is blasphemous; human beings are not mere means to an end; they are ends in themselves. Should we argue for the inerrancy of human works while disregarding the inherently valuable beings who create them? How can the creation surpass the creator? If we assert that inspiration only validates subpar human actions, we must affirm that man, too, embodies God's inspiration, thus rendering him infallible.

The phrase “and man became a living soul” carries profound ethical and moral implications. It suggests that man is not merely a passive recipient of divine influence but an active participant in his own becoming. This process is rooted in personal choice,

will, and the enabling grace of God. Ultimately, every individual shares the moral responsibility of becoming a living soul. The goal of ethics—whether Christian or Muslim—should not merely be to emulate figures such as Jesus, as some Christians may mistakenly suggest, but rather to realize our fullest potential as living souls.

The gravest sin, both on earth and in heaven, is the failure to become a living soul—that is, choosing not to embrace our inherent nature. Our virtue lies in our capacity to be true to ourselves, rather than conforming blindly to societal norms. Goodness is defined by our ability to express our authentic selves—moving beyond constructed identities—and ultimately finding the freedom to live as our true selves.

To become a living soul is to embody true freedom—a state of being where one achieves self-awareness and self-actualization. A living soul is characterized by creativity, independence from both personal and external constraints, and the ability to lead a life that is authentically one's own—a nonconformist life. Conversely, engaging in a substandard existence characterized by vice, such as theft, injustice, or malice, under the guise of freedom is misleading. One is not free while living beneath their potential; such a person remains unfulfilled and has yet to discover their true self. They are akin to a "dead soul."

No one who has genuinely realized their dignity and self-worth can accept living a diminished life, reducing themselves to a tool for personal or others' gratification. True freedom comes from breaking away from the expectations imposed by family, society, or educational systems. Those who merely adhere to roles are not living authentically; they require liberation to uncover their true essence.

At this juncture, some may argue, “What you're describing was true before the fall of man, which you have yet to acknowledge." While I strive to avoid a discussion of sin that detracts from this focus, it is essential to state that man did not create himself nor did he urge God to breathe life into him. The act of creation was entirely God's initiative, independent of any merit on man's part. Therefore, it is illogical to assert that man's disobedience could erase the divine image within him. If this divine image exists, it is neither created nor lost, remaining untouched by moral failings. If sin is linked to human will, it should be noted that man was created without his consent. My actions do not redefine my essence; rather, sin is a moral issue, rooted in actions that do not alter our inherent nature.

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