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**HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY  
BETWEEN MORALITY, ETHICS AND RELIGION**

by

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## **HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY. BETWEEN MORALITY, ETHICS AND RELIGION**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

#### **“MORAL RESPONSIBILITY AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY”**

We'll try to explore the concept of human responsibility attempting to go beyond a moralistic understanding of it. A moralistic approach to behaviour is not necessarily a false one but could be incomplete. And if incompleteness goes with renouncing rather than with seeking truth then a half truth could become a complete falsehood. It's typical of our human experience to accept and live the truth only partially. The mechanism involved could be the following: since truth, after a while, has a tendency to impose itself as evidence, then the only way left, for someone who doesn't want to mature, to grow up and to know it deeply, is to limit and reduce its meaning and scope. To accept the truth only partially means, after all, to deny it, to deny its transforming power. On the other hand nobody can know the total truth and even less know it immediately. Our whole life is a continuous learning about truth. This is why truth must not only be discovered in a moment. It must also be followed in a lifetime in order to be understood in all its interdependent implications. To accept truth completely means to be ready to follow it. It pushes us to become disciples. Partial truth is not necessarily falsehood but it very easily becomes such.

In this essay we'll attempt to go beyond a moralistic understanding of responsibility by trying to situate it in the broader context of the person. In that sense this reflection comes near to Personalism. We'll be speaking of "human responsibility" as a larger concept in which "moral responsibility" is included. But since human responsibility refers to the person as a whole, we need a pluralistic approach to the concept. We need to devote our attention more specifically to two aspects, or better two orientations, of human responsibility.

The first orientation will lead us back, as a kind of archeological journey, from the ethical action to the ethical agent. That is, back to the person. Here the question will be: which presupposition lies behind the action itself? The simplest answer to this question is: the agent. If we mention the agent before the action we are no longer exclusively in a moral level. We are involved with this in an anthropological one and also, as we'll try to show, in a religious level because we can't really speak of a person without presupposing a transcendental dimension which can be brought back to God himself. Only a person makes me a person. Orphan actions don't exist. Actions always belong to a Person.

In the second orientation of the concept of responsibility we'll consider the forward movement which leads us from the person to the ethical circumstance where the action actually emerges as an ethical one bound in this to the concept of lifestyle. Here the question will be: what are the historical implications of the action when it emerges as such? We will see that these various implications of the ethical action are not disseminated and spread each in its corner but come together in the frame of the "lifestyle" concept. The morality of the historical action needs to be supported by coherence, the integrating and the amalgamating power of the "lifestyle" experience. Isolated actions don't exist. They always form habits and tendencies and through them structure a specific "lifestyle".

Moral responsibility is not yet human responsibility. Human responsibility can't be impersonal or utilitarian. Responsibility has its more immediate coherence when it refers the action to the norm. By referring the action to the norm responsibility structures itself as moral responsibility. But this reference to the norm must be integrated in a broader concept of responsibility which implies on one hand fidelity to the person and on the other hand fidelity to a project. In other words, a responsible individual is the one who acts on the one hand as a person and on the other hand is able to tie up his actions and structure them in a sound "lifestyle".

## **I. FROM MORALITY BACK TO ITS FOUNDATIONS: “THE PERSON”**

### **A. MORALITY AND ETHICS: THE PERSON**

When we speak of ethics we presuppose at least two elements: the ethical action and the value system to which the ethical action refers. Both of the terms ethics and morality, one from Greek and the other from Latin, incorporate these two elements and at this level could be considered synonymous. But attempting to go deeper, let's assume a functional difference between them, calling ethics the basic presuppositions and the fundamental concerns of action and morality the action and the immediate norms and rules to which the action refers itself. This preparatory definition allows us to see ethics as a more theoretical and general approach to action and morality as a more direct and pragmatic approach. We usually think that what really matters here is the concrete action. In fact we do not call moral or ethical a person who has a sound theoretical system but rather the one who acts with moral integrity and coherence.

I will suggest here an anteriority of ethics to morality, a precedence of the anthropological possibility of action to action itself. We could say that ethics has a priority “De jure” while morality a priority “De facto”. Both are essential but at different levels. We could also call morality the deontological dimension of action and ethics the teleological dimension of the same. By these last two terms we are getting in touch with two very respectable ethical traditions in western philosophical thinking. On the one hand we have the Aristotelian tradition which could be described as a teleological one for the emphasis it puts on the concept of “Good” as a target to be reached as well as on the “perspective of Good” as the framework where action emerges as such. Aristotle was interested in describing the “good person”. Only the good person can act well. On the other hand, we have the Kantian tradition. This tradition puts the emphasis on “duty” and underlines the obligatory nature of action as a universal experience and in experience emphasizes strongly the deontological dimension of action. Protestants churches are more kantian than aristotelian in this respect, including us seventh day adventists. But here I would like to plead for a precedence of Aristotle to Kant, for the anteriority of the teleological respect to the

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deontological dimension of the ethical action, for the priority of the agent to the action. And I think that our best Adventist tradition also goes in the same direction.

How does the concept of responsibility come into play here? A preliminary definition of this term could be: responsibility is the capacity of ensuring the passage from the norm to the action. This is a functional definition of responsibility. Responsible, then, would be a person who is able to concretise the norm in a coherent and historical action or, said in the other way, a person who acts according to the norm. Nevertheless I believe that the step from the norm to the action is a short step. Moral responsibility is not yet human responsibility. It must be inscribed in a larger framework where the action is brought back not only to the norm but through the norm to the person himself. It is the person who is behind the action. It is the person who acts. Action is a derivative concept. It never appears alone. If we assimilate moral responsibility to human responsibility we are mistaken. This reductive view of responsibility emerges when we call responsible only a person who is, morally speaking, a predictable individual, someone who follows scrupulously, minutely and somehow mechanically an established digest of norms and rules, a kind of well-trained individual. This definition of responsibility appears to be reductive because it favours almost exclusively the deontological dimension of action, leaving behind its ethical and anthropological implications. Underlining the anteriority of "good" as a target rather than "duty" as an obligation, ethics provides the foundation for morality because it reminds us that only a "good person", someone who cares and who is vulnerable to goodness, can also be a "reliable moral person".

Seeking to apply this concept from another perspective we could say, concerning the agent, that before respect of self -and this is a strong moral category- comes the appreciation of self, that is self-esteem. Nobody can really respect himself if he doesn't first accept and take care of himself. Self-esteem comes before self-respect. "Love your neighbour as yourself", is what the Gospel says. This is not only a fundamental ethical requirement but also an anthropological one. First comes the affirmation of life and then the affirmation of duty. Only from the richness of the person, can action derive its consistency. The same anteriority of the ethical "goodness" over moral obligation can be seen in regard to other elements of the ethical experience. For instance, let's consider the "Other" as the person who

benefits from the ethical act of the agent. Before the respect of others comes the appreciation and concern for others. I can't really respect my neighbour if I don't first accept him as a human being, as equal, as someone deserving to be loved just like me. This pre-moral and ethical dimension of my relationship with others is said to be "solicitude". Before respecting my neighbour I should have good feelings and concern for him. That's solicitude. Solicitude for others is the precondition to helping others. Before moral good actions for others come good attitudes and intentions for others. That is ethical solicitude.

## **B. MORALITY AND RELIGION: THE RESPONSIVENESS**

We said that ethics presupposes the agent before the action. This represents the anthropological anchorage of ethics. A reflection about action must be preceded by a reflection about the person. Otherwise how could an action be ethical if it can not be attributed to someone? The concept of imputability of action to someone, which presupposes a reflection on the person as such, is decisive in ethics because there can't exist a true ethical action which can survive as such without being attributed to someone. Through this concept of the imputability of the action we go immediately beyond morality to ethics and to anthropology.

But there is more, because behind the agent himself we find the one who calls him, the one to whom the ethical agent is accountable. Here the religious anchorage of morality emerges. It is in the religious concept of "calling" and of "being called" that we perceive the primary level of the concept of responsibility. In fact, an anthropological analysis of responsibility brings us immediately back to a dialogical structure of man. The one who is able to respond is responsible. The person is never alone. Someone is always there before the agent, calling him to answer. That's responsibility, human responsibility. Here we perceive the contribution religion may offer to the foundation of morality.

Religion has always been connected to morality through its transcendental dimension. A moral action, to remain such, needs to put the norm in a transcendental level, which is very near the transcendence of religion. To be categorical and impelling values need to share the absoluteness of the

transcendence. Without denying the possibility of bringing together the transcendence of the norm and the transcendence of religion I would like to connect them through their more basic and shared presupposition: the dialogical structure of the ethical agent. Responsibility as a concept goes back to the concept of responsiveness. The responsible person then, is the person who can hear and perceive what is going on outside of himself. The ethical agent can not be concerned only with the internal coherence of his action. The coherence of his action depends on his capacity to answer, on his responsiveness to the one who is calling him. What provokes him are not things as such, but persons, and among and over the persons, the person per excellence, God himself. Without a transcendent calling, coming from a transcendental Person the ethical experience becomes poor, a very poor one. It is reduced to governing in a utilitarian way the urgencies of the immediacy.

Religion and ethics are put in relationship also through their deontological dimension. In the experience of duty we discover the common place where religion needs ethics and ethics religion. They become interdependent. On the one hand we underline in religion, specially in western religions, the "must be" experience. By underlining this level of the religious experience, we underline the need of change in the life of believers. Doing this, we bring religion very close to morality. So close that it is nearly absorbed by it and becomes almost indistinguishable from it. On the other hand the "must be" experience imposes itself as fundamental in ethics with the result that it often becomes the one all encompassing dimension of it. An ethics that doesn't foster change becomes inevitably only a descriptive discipline, a kind of statistical casuistry of what people do on the average. It is the specificity of morality as well as that of religion to promote change. This is what brings them together.

Curiously the "must be" experience of morality and religion can be guaranteed only through their teleological foundation. This foundation is concerned not with the "must be" dimension but with the "can be" dimension. It is concerned, in other words, with what "can be" changed in human life while behaviouristic and mechanical morality is uniquely concerned with what "must be" changed. It's at this level, at the teleological one, that we perceive an enriching connection between ethics and religion. It's true, the risk of absorbing one into the other is always there. If accentuating the deontological dimension of ethics and religion increased the risk of reducing

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Religion and ethics in their teleological dimension offer deeper roots to morality because by describing "what can be changed" they make possible the passage to "what must be changed". At this point we could ask how religion differentiates from ethics? In that Religion offers a broader definition of "what can be changed". For ethics "what can be changed" has a limit determined by the boundaries of human historicity and nature. In Christianity "what can be changed" is radical and absolute because it is founded in what God can change and not on what man can change. Religion's surplus in the capacity of changing has a salvific connotation not a moral one. It means that it is God who intervenes producing changes man is not able to produce. In other words, Christian religion, is from beginning to end concentrated with changing. But not all changes in the Christian religion are moral changes. Some could be described as such. Those which are related to the person. But some are different. Those referred to God. These are not moral but soteriologic changes. Changes produced by God, given as gifts and lived in the dimension of grace.

## **II. FROM THE FOUNDATIONS FORWARD TO THE HISTORICAL PROJECT: "LIFE STYLE"**

Human responsibility is not only concentrated with going back from the ethical action to the person but also with exploring the way of going from the person forward to the action and to real historicity. Once the person is reaffirmed, the action must find its place. But is the context of the action always and only a context of duty? Does morality totally pervade the blossoming of action? I don't think so. Sometimes I act because I feel the weight of duty and constraint. It is good and somehow also refreshing. Some other times I act spontaneously without any particular sense of obligation, as if being drawn creatively forward by a project. In the concrete action there always exists an element of duty. But this never becomes the one all encompassing dimension of ethics and acting. In order that action doesn't become only utilitarian or legalistic we need to bind it also to a broader framework and not only to the person. This framework could be described as a "life style". If in the "person" not only actions but also and fundamentally the attitudes were important, in "life style" not only the actions but also the habits and with them particularly the orientations and the tendencies will be important. Since life style deals with healthy orientations, let's go back first to the concept of alienation because that is supposed to be the very place where a biblical "life style" proposal rescues people from.

### **A. WRONG ACTIONS, POOR ATTITUDES : THE ALIENATION**

As an isolated good action doesn't create a good person but only actions structured together in a sound "lifestyle", in the same way an incorrect action doesn't make a person unsuccessful, oppressed, unreliable, immoral or unethical. Only bad, erroneous and repeated actions create alienation. If we want to promote human responsibility in coherent and renewed people, not only erroneous actions but especially perverse and alienating mechanisms need to be corrected by a sound "lifestyle".

When the people of Israel were dwelling in Egypt as an oppressed people, the major problem was not to free them but rather to keep them free. To be liberated "from" Egypt didn't mean for Israel to be liberated "for" the promised land. In fact only two persons from the desert generation enter that desired



land. It is often the same for us today. To be liberated “from” sin doesn’t equal to be liberated “for” life. In fact there are some “sinless” Christians, at least they believe they are, but who only look like a beautiful and luxurious plant or flower. They are appreciated and admired. But when you come near them you find out they are artificial, they are plastic, they are lifeless plants and lifeless flowers. That’s surely no real freedom. That’s holy death perfection. Freedom is always a biophilic experience not a necrophilic one.

Let’s come back to the Hebrews in Egypt. What was their true condition there? Had slavery robbed them of their soul as much as their external freedom? Yes, liberation was harder to attain because not only the body but also the mind had become enslaved. It was not the external chains that needed to be broken but the internal attitudes that had grown together with them. Pharaoh wasn’t their worst enemy but probably they themselves, that is the poor image they had entertained inside their souls with an obsessive rituality. The biggest obstacle for their liberation was probably the huge diet of fixed, extatic, and then idolatrous, poor ideas about themselves and about God. The Egyptians had only contributed to form that image but they were not alone in doing so. The Hebrews themselves were their accomplices. They had allowed that image to be created and paradoxically continued to support it. If the Egyptians had not been there, the Hebrews would have invented them -in a psychological not in a historical way- because they needed the Egyptians as much as the Egyptians needed the Hebrews. Even if the Egyptians oppressed them and made them suffer, the Hebrews had become so poor inside that they desperately needed their aggressors’ presence and their commanding and despising voice to keep them going. They needed the oppressor to organise their life and to care for them even if this provided a negative care. They couldn’t state their dependence in that way so they sublimated it by describing it as a refined and exquisite legitimate cultural need: “all we want is to taste and to eat Egyptian fish and leeks” (Num 11:5)

This is cultural addiction. They became an alienated people, alien, strange to themselves. And thus dependent on the will of others and unable to be themselves they lost touch with their soul and became poor. Sure, they had also lost all they had. They couldn’t possess anything nor do whatever they wanted. But this material poverty and physical vulnerability was not the worst thing. Worst still was the cultural, the linguistic, and religious alienation.



Why do we say cultural alienated? Because the people no longer created. They just survived by receiving what others had done, thought and felt for them. To be creative doesn't mean to consume more, to have more money, to drive a Mercedes, to have internet, to study in a famous university, or to live in a huge downtown apartment. Alienated people can live without shoes and under a tree on the Peruvian andean or in the African jungle as well as in Berlin, New York, Paris or Milan wearing Giorgio Armani clothes and holding an ultramodern technocrat handbag. They share the same alienation, the same estrangement, the same existential poverty. Just receiving what others have thought, what others have felt, what others have created. The qualitative difference between the person who doesn't have enough to eat and is concentrated only on that and the person who has enough to eat and whose life revolves only around that, is minimal. Only eating, drinking or dressing is the worst way of surviving. Sometimes it's difficult to learn to be creative and to build up culture. It's hard for the person who doesn't have money as well as for the person who has plenty of money. The Gospel says that in the last days people will be only concentrated on that: eating, dressing, drinking, getting married and in so doing forgetting not only true religion but also true culture. In this sense the Gospel fosters culture in that it motivates people to be creative.

Let's move to a more sociological level of alienation. The economically rich first world countries try to help the poor third world countries by giving food, money and a few other things. For most of what they give they make sure to receive back still greater material advantages. This is mercantilist philanthropy. This is not what the third world countries really need. We need to make those people culturally productive, culturally independent, culturally strong, culturally self-accepting. This is a mature way of being philanthropic. Most of the first world intervention, even in the church, is still paternalistic because the people who help are interested only in giving and not in receiving. After helping people we leave them with the desire to become like us: to speak American, to eat McDonald's or to sing our songs. It's the worst legacy we can offer them. To really help people means to appreciate their culture, their language, to foster in us the desire of being like them, to be enriched by what they have, to be astounded and amazed by the living human treasures and resources not always visible. People's principal need to be liberated is to feel meaningful. The Egyptians, as most of us modern well respected, philanthropic people, were not interested at all in doing that.

They only wanted to exploit the Hebrews as much as they could, and paradoxically also by giving. But they were not clever people, at least at this level, because in spoiling the Hebrew soul they became as poor as those who they oppressed.

Jesus, on the contrary, acted creatively and showed his greatness by making great those who were despised and alienated. That's liberation. He could do that because he was free. He didn't need to persuade anybody of his internal value or beg for others' admiration. He was rich in the Father, this is why he came to share his richness by trusting people. Only really free persons can foster freedom in others. Only productive people approach others with a desire to give and not to solicit admiration. Jesus admired humans while we humans were not ready to give a cent for ourselves. That's what the incarnation and the Cross are all about. By becoming human he made us feel worthy and noble. We needn't to desire to become angels. That's not necessary. We humans are not so unworthy. Jesus demonstrated that explicitly coming to dwell among us as one of us. We'll always be human, for all eternity. This is Jesus' promise. We need only to be renewed in our humanity. The one we currently have has been ruined, spoiled and impoverished by sin and alienation.

Why do we say linguistically alienated? People who want to destroy another's identity have always tried to destroy their language. But languages can be destroyed in two manners. First by making them disappear. An example of this is Daniel at Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar tried to substitute his mother Hebrew language by giving him Babylonian as a step-mother language. But any step-mother language is as worthy as a true mother language. Language can also be destroyed by reducing it to one of its dimensions. When it is used only in a technical or in an analytically reductive way. Language is impoverished when it limits itself to describe and not to change reality, when it becomes only precise and obsessed with accuracy, thus losing its metaphorical and poetic power. In a language impoverished in this way values, projects, dreams and transcendental meaning have disappeared. That was the language used by the pharisees. It's clear, precise, correct but from the creative point of view, lifeless. The Hebrew slaves had to learn to speak again to pharaoh, to God, to themselves, to each other in a different way, in a honest, creative and personal way. They had to reappropriate their own language. The entire Exodus can be described as the process in which the Israelites learn to

speak again. God gives speech back to them. And this tremendous legacy is in our hands today. The Pentateuch, the Torah and all of scripture is the story of a God who speaks to his people. But synchronically it's also the story of delivered men who in the presence of their Lord learn to speak again. When God speaks man doesn't get his mouth shut, as we are often told. When God speaks man gets back his speech. He starts creating words, playing with them. He starts singing, praying and witnessing.

Why do we say religious alienated? Religious because their religion was based on a mechanical and fear based relationship, not on a trusting experience. Sure the Hebrews in Egypt never stop believing in God. But in fact this was an image of the true God, an idol. Idols are not always made of material, rough, touchable things. They can be simple and current ideas, spiritual mechanical thoughts, ideologies, obsessions or fixed and immobile convictions. Ideas which were perhaps true in the past but which, in the present no longer express the power of a living and transforming God. A true religious experience is made of an every day renewed experience of the living and caring God. The problem of alienation and impoverishment is not a fact for others, but for ourselves. Yes, also for us Adventists. We share with the all humanity the same ground of tensions, stress, sickness, delusions, disillusion, fear, anxiety or even addictions. We are not in a situation very different from the Hebrews in Egypt.

## **B. SOUND ACTIONS, RICH ATTITUDES: THE "LIFESTYLE" STRENGTH**

Here the Adventist life style is crucial because it offers a truly realistic and creative way of dealing with that space between being liberated "from sin" and being liberated "for" life". Since, at this level, the principal problem is not the bad actions but the bad attitudes which are inside, which remain in time and condition our lives deeply, we need continually to learn freedom. Here to act well, sincerely and honestly, or to have some sound attitudes is not enough. Learning freedom is tough. It can't be reduced to a few formulas or quotations. Here the support, the strength and the committed and healing power of a correct lifestyle is tremendously needed. The adventist lifestyle is one of the biggest treasures of our tradition. It is a tremendous blessing our church received. But we are spoiling it by ignoring it or by reducing it to a moralistic and behaviouristic program. There is a vast majority of adventists who have remained at the elementary level: they don't smoke,

don't drink, don't eat pork. The Adventist life style is much more important than that for various reasons. I'll mention only two of them.

First of all, because it describes very accurately, the space where the battle for freedom is to be enhanced. Freedom is not an abstract concept. It's related to the concrete life of people. Many sincere and honest secular and religious churches and ideologies don't know where to find the necessary targets. They perceive the uneasiness and diffuse pain of people but don't know where to orient their efforts. An easy answer is to say that the world needs Jesus, that Jesus and only he is the priority. Any Christian would agree with that. But that is not very helpful. The Adventist life style puts, in my view, the correct emphasis in the areas where Jesus needs to be revealed as victorious. We don't need only a gracious idea of Jesus to feel freedom. We need to recognise him as victorious in our lives, in our habits, in our time, in our bodies. We need to feel his life coming to us. Today people suffer because they don't know how to deal with eating, drinking, playing, dressing, loving, relaxing, and so on. And this not only in third world countries. Alienation is a world wide reality and also has to be overcome within the church.

Second, the Adventist life style is important because it produces immediate results even if these results are not total, absolute and definitive. The results are not delayed for heaven or for an eschatological time. Here Daniel's experience is precious because after only ten days people could see health, intelligence and grace in his face, and the results of the biblical life style were impressive. God's blessings, sure, are not mechanical nor can they be reduced to a formula. Any sort of retributive theology is outdated. But nobody can cancel out the immediacy, the nearness, and the efficiency of God's presence through his blessings. These are immediate, according to the specific historical situation, and that is what keeps people going. That's Daniel experience in Babylon.

Nevertheless I think that the emphasis of the Adventist life style surely needs to be refocused. I don't think that the Adventist life style should be referred principally to man even if this style of living requires a lot of personal discipline and personal commitment. The Adventist life style has its principal protagonist in God. He is the one who gives health as a gracious gift. Man can never buy salvation. That's clear. At least theoretically we believe that. But neither can man buy health, by trying to be vegetarian or even vegan.

insufficient amount of sleep and stress. A diet high in sugar and fat can also contribute to weight gain and insulin resistance.

Another common cause of hypoglycemia is excessive alcohol consumption. Alcohol can interfere with the liver's ability to produce glucose, leading to low blood sugar levels. Additionally, certain medications, such as beta-blockers and diuretics, can also contribute to hypoglycemia.

It's important to note that hypoglycemia is a symptom, not a disease. The underlying cause of the low blood sugar levels needs to be identified and treated. If you experience symptoms of hypoglycemia, it's essential to consult with a healthcare professional for a proper diagnosis and treatment plan. They may recommend blood sugar monitoring, dietary changes, and medication adjustments.

In conclusion, hypoglycemia can be a concerning condition, but it's often manageable. By understanding the causes and symptoms, you can take steps to prevent and treat it. If you're experiencing frequent episodes of low blood sugar, don't hesitate to seek medical advice.

Remember, maintaining stable blood sugar levels is crucial for overall health and well-being. Stay informed, stay healthy, and don't let hypoglycemia get the best of you.

Diabetes is a chronic condition that affects millions of people worldwide. It's a complex disease that can have serious complications if not managed properly. However, with the right treatment and lifestyle changes, you can effectively manage your diabetes and live a healthy, active life.

There are two main types of diabetes: Type 1 and Type 2. Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune disease where the body's immune system attacks and destroys the insulin-producing cells in the pancreas. Type 2 diabetes, on the other hand, is a metabolic disorder where the body becomes resistant to insulin or doesn't produce enough of it.

The symptoms of diabetes can vary but often include increased thirst, frequent urination, and unexplained weight loss. If you suspect you have diabetes, it's important to get a blood sugar test. Early diagnosis and treatment can significantly reduce the risk of complications. Your healthcare provider will work with you to develop a personalized treatment plan, which may include medication, diet, and exercise.

Managing diabetes involves a combination of factors. For Type 1 diabetes, insulin therapy is essential. For Type 2 diabetes, lifestyle changes like a healthy diet and regular exercise can play a major role in controlling blood sugar levels. Regular monitoring of your blood sugar is also crucial to ensure you're staying within target ranges.

It's also important to be aware of the potential complications of diabetes, such as heart disease, kidney problems, and vision loss. By keeping your blood sugar under control, you can significantly reduce the risk of these complications. Don't be afraid to ask your healthcare provider for help and support. You're not alone in this journey, and there are many resources available to help you manage your diabetes effectively.

But neither can man buy health, by trying to be vegetarian or even vegan. The true Adventist life style, the noblest one, is focused on God not on the Adventist people. You see we are not better than other Christians or believers, neither in spirituality nor in health. To live a few months or years more is not really a big deal. For me this is not a motivation, or rather is a bad one because it usually pushes Adventists to presumption and to a meaningless pride. Personally I would prefer to live less time but with the peace of Jesus in my heart and surrounded by gentle and relaxed, non adventists rather than to live a few years more believing that it's my nutritional discipline which made that possible, and surrounded by irritable and stressed out vegetarians. Life, wether spiritual or physical, does not come from man but uniquely from God as a gift. To show that to people is our mission.

### **III. TWO BIBLICAL METAPHORS FOR RESPONSIBILITY. “THE NECESSARY AND THE SURPLUS”**

The methodology we have been exploring in this essay can be described as a de-moralising one. Not in the sense of proposing immorality as an ethical category but in the sense of trying to base morality beyond morality, that is in ethics and religion. Morality can't give a person a foundation. It's too shallow. But morality with its deontological dimension offers an unrevokable and indispensable station in the ethical process. Responsibility then appeared to be the capacity of connecting this moral moment on one side back to the person, and on the other side forward to the concrete historicity of the agent, that is toward a coherent life style perspective which is irreducible to the isolated actions and even less to their mechanical morality. That's human responsibility.

In the reconfiguration of responsibility we've tried to elaborate, we now need to introduce some examples in order to make the main point clearer. We'll take two biblical metaphors or descriptions of responsibility. The first one refers to God himself and seeks to describe what indeed divine responsibility implies. This will represent the model. The second example refers to man, specifically to the believer and seeks to protract in him and through him the dimensions found in divine responsibility. We will consider the symmetry between both types of responsibility.

#### **A. DIVINE RESPONSIBILITY**

##### **“Milk and Honey” (Exod 3:8)**

To this very heavily alienated people, as the Hebrew people were, God decided to reveal himself as a liberator. How did he do it? What did he do? What kind of responsibility did God show by liberating his people? The Bible says that he took care of them by giving them the promise of a land with abundant milk and abundant honey. In this image a twofold dimension of true responsibility is described. Only a particular and special motivation like that could push a group of slaves to initiate a new life and to start learning about complete freedom. God's motivation to his people was the reality of the “promised land”, a land flowing with abundant milk and honey. It made them

start dreaming. In a utilitarian way of thinking dreaming is superfluous. You can get rid of dreams without suffering great damage. In God's perspective, on the other hand, true life and human reality begin with dreaming. God makes people dream. "When my spirit will come over you, in the day of the lord, your young people and even your old people will start having visions and dreams". (Joel 2:28,29). Where the Spirit of God arrives, life takes over and dreaming as well. It happened thus with the slaves in Egypt. They wanted to reach a new land, a new situation. So they start dreaming. Dreaming pushes them to walk.

What did God say to them to provoke such a change? In what manner did God show his responsibility toward his people? Giving them milk and honey. Milk represents what is essential in life. Without it it's not possible to survive. This is particularly true in the first months of life. But to have the assurance that not only at the beginning of life but during an entire lifetime, until the end, God will personally take care of our basic needs gives us a great sense of security and certainty. We find here a great promise. The promise of a responsible God who will take care of the essential needs of his children. He is a responsible Father in that he gives us what is necessary for life. With him we have our basic needs met.

But can a father who provides what is necessary for his children be described as a responsible father? The metaphor seems to say "not yet". In fact, is only responsible if along with the necessary he also gives surplus. That is the meaning of the honey. That's a bit confusing because honey looks more like a superfluous thing. But this is just the point. Responsibility must integrate this surplus element that seems superfluous because life is not reducible to the necessary but has a gracious element that here is represented by the honey.

God cares a lot about the superfluous. Were he give us only necessary things, life then would turn out to be monotonous and very mechanical. He gives us the necessary and the surplus. That's his responsibility, his complete responsibility and he enforces it thoroughly. A responsible father is not the one who brings something to eat to his children but especially the one who gives them the desire for living. Responsibility means to care about giving to our own children what "to live on" but especially and fundamentally what "to live for". Not only the possibility of living but with it the desire for living. When we give our students the necessary instruments to live with we give them

only half of what we should be giving and they receiving. The other half is giving them love for life, the sense that life is worthy living, the enthusiasm for living. That is what milk and honey mean. That is God's creative responsibility.

## **B. HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY**

### "The Commandments and Jesus" (Rev 12:17)

If these two features, caring about what's necessary and about surplus in life, are the modelling features of divine responsibility, this simple means that, symmetrically, human responsibility will be modelled also by the same features. Thus, as human beings, if we want to be responsible, this means that we need to care about people's (children's, students', brothers') essential necessities and synchronically to care about people's deep satisfaction. This means that before moral duty or at least with it comes the sense of grace and belonging. Nobody can act well if he is not a good person, an accepted person, a person feeling well, feeling forgiven and loved, receiving God's honey every day. Before action is the person, and the complete person is the one who has been reconciled with God and with life and who feels in his heart the richness of God's grace manifested in a satisfactory life opened to the future.

This is exactly what this verse of Revelation says of the true believers. They are safely established in what is necessary, the commandments, and synchronically in the gracious gift of life, that is the Gospel. This verse describes the importance of what we as "end times believers" are supposed to be bringing to the world. This is our responsibility, human responsibility.

This is our present mission. On the one hand we are supposed to give what's necessary: the commandments, the instructions, the principles, the norms, the essential, the priorities. But our mission doesn't stop here. We are called also to share, together with the commandments the joy of the Gospel, God's "honey" for the world, the enthusiasm of having been saved. That's eu-angelion, that's the Gospel. "Eu" means, good, pleasure, well being, harmony, acceptance, grace, belonging. We, as God does, are supposed to give the world milk and honey, what's necessary for living and the surplus in living, the commandments and the life of Jesus. That is human responsibility.



## CONCLUSION

A theonomous ethics goes beyond a mechanical morality and beyond the ethical action to focus through the ethical agent and through the pertinence of a sound "lifestyle" in God himself. There is no ethics without the person and there is no true person without God. There is no ethics without a "lifestyle" and there is no sound "lifestyle" without God. This is a theonomous ethics. Not an autonomous ethics which cuts itself off from its source, God; neither is it a heteronomous ethics, an ethics which cuts itself from human real historicity.

Secular ethics presuppose the capacity of differentiating between good and evil in order to elaborate a choice and then an action. That's the first presupposition of any ethical system. At this level, Christian ethics, contrast with humanistic ethics, in the sense that Christian ethics begins with a different presupposition. This is the unethical element of Christian ethics. Christian ethics starts by speaking, before speaking of man's supposed ethical capacity of distinguishing between good and evil, about communion and belonging to God. Knowing good and evil is already a sign of a fallen state. Christian ethics begins by speaking of the union between God and man and of the state where man knows only the good because he knows only God. God is the supreme good and at the initial stage man doesn't know evil but only God. It's in man's attempt at being autonomous that he starts wanting to know good and evil and in so doing he precipitates in ruin, confusion and alienation. Then he knew good and evil but at the same time he wasn't healthy and balanced any more. So the first task of Christian ethics is not the coherence of action, but the reconciliation of the agent with his creator through love. This is the unrenounceable soteriologic anchorage of Christian ethics.

Religion can contribute to morality but not in what seems more near to what is moral, that is the experience of duty. Religion can contribute to morality through its own specificity: the experience of salvation. Only a true change of heart such as that of regeneration can guarantee a true experience of morality, that is, an experience of the "must be" type.

It's a paradox that the two pillars of our Adventist beliefs often, at least existentially, are reduced to its moralistic dimensions: the sabbath and the adventus. The sabbath is often seen as a commandment to be kept rather

than as an experience of grace to be lived, in the same way that the second coming of Jesus is seen as something to be well prepared for rather than the gracious gift of God coming freely to us. All this needs to be constantly refocused. In a theonomous ethics values are combined with experiences, meaning with life, action with principles, the necessary with the surplus, the commandments with the Gospel, milk with honey. Only in such a renewed perspective can human responsibility become what it is supposed to be, a wholistic experience reflecting God's own refreshing and uplifting responsibility.

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