



The First Fratricide of the Old Testament (Genesis 4): Responsibility/Exemption of Responsibility

Salvan Alexandru-Adrian

Ph.D. Student, „Babes-Bolyai” University Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Orthodox Theological Faculty

ABSTRACT

Responsibility is an attitude towards the word of God and towards the Divine call. Even if the term responsibility cannot be found in the Holy Book as such, still the lack of form does not lead to the lack of content. That is why, the deep content carried by the human *responsibility* is shown throughout the Bible texts, especially in regard to human freedom, to motivation and results of man's acts, to guilt and punishment, to the relationship between man and God, between man and his neighbor.

KEYWORDS

Cain, Abel, fratricide, exemption of responsibility

Introduction

The present study has the scope of highlighting the nature that the term *responsibility* delivers in the image brought to us by the fourth chapter of Genesis, where the scene of the first fratricide of The Old Testament is exposed. Here, responsibility becomes on one hand *responsibleness*, that is one's involvement to the response-ability, sprang from an appropriate engagement of the being to the Word and from an identification of the self with the Word in the case where participative thinking recurs. On the other hand, it becomes an exemption of responsibility, leading to the loss of human values and introducing evil in the intimate structures of the human being.

Cain – from responsibleness to exemption of responsibility

The fratricide committed by Cain brings into the area of the fallen human nature the responsibility related to the first life that was taken away by man, but also brings to light the absence of responsibility assumed for the act. Evil gradually occurs on earth by the rational being's revolt against the Creator: Life - whose initiator is not man but The One who is infinite and whom the human mind cannot grasp, - is cut by man, by power abuse and anger followed by force. Therefore man, influenced by the malice brought by the exemption of responsibility, swipes away what God offered and what He offers with love and kindness.

Thus, we can observe a similitude between chapter 3 where we are spoken about the fall of the First Parents into sin and chapter 4 where the scene of the first fratricide of The Old Testament is depicted. The two can be described by an analogy: man's fall does not make God want death represent a final point and thus He asks Adam: "Adam where are you?" (Genesis 3, 9) and in chapter 4, He asks Cain: "Where is your brother Abel?" (Genesis 4, 9). God questions the one who committed the murder but the attention is not upon the one who sinned, upon Cain – as in the case of Adam – but upon the one who is missing. The question had the scope to make the murderer confess his act, to re-engage in talk with God and to re-connect to the state of responsibility so that its acceptance would become a state of humility, a rebounding to the true response in front of His Creator.

Committing fratricide, Cain does not only place himself outside the dialog with his Creator, but because of the sin he becomes exempted of responsibility, separating himself from the communion with others and from the love communion with God. This intensified the malice which was followed by the corruption or attenuation of responsibility's perception. Related to this, Saint John Chrysostom says: "What does the ungrateful, the disrespectful, the bold, the barefaced do?... God

does not ask him because he did not know where his brother was, but because he was waiting to hear his confession... He should have said what he had done, to show the wound to his Doctor and to receive remedy from Him. But no! He makes the wound even bigger and deeper... If you would have done everything, as it is natural, if you would have listened the blood's cry you should have been the guardian of your brother's deliverance."

And Saint Ambrose of Milan says the following about the one who committed the fratricide: "Cain, because he wanted to conceal his guilt was not considered worthy to redeem his mistake immediately afterwards, but it was delayed...", proof that God offered him a chance to confess. Having a corrupted will and bared of values, he preferred to conceal the sin and to be freed of the responsibleness. Disregarding this fact, God knows and discloses the sin he had committed: "Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground" (Genesis 4, 10), revealing also the strong connection that exists between creation and human being: "It's not the brother who cries; that is, the brother keeps his innocence and the grace of brotherhood even dead...; it is not his soul that is accused, but the cry of the blood that you spilled accuses you; thus your sin itself accuses you and not your brother. And He did not say: your brother's body cries but "from the ground it cries. Even if the brother absolves you, the earth does not. If your brother is silent, the earth judges you."

Regarding this murder act, Saint Cyril of Alexandria points out seven sins of Cain: firstly, the lack of judgment in offering the sacrifice to God; secondly, the decision to commit murder, despite the woe expressed to him by God; thirdly, Cain is possessed by envy, fact which leads to the fourth sin: the wickedness depicted in the invitation: "Let's go out to the field" (Genesis 4, 8) and which lead to crime followed by the lie in front of God and by the hope he will remain unpunished. The lack of judgment comes with a barrier to a healthy thinking, to the idea of doing good, to give all that is positive from the inner self and to recognize the good that was seeded in a person characterized by responsibility. It also emphasizes the envy on the neighbor, which finally leads to the decision to commit murder. Then, this can have the meaning, in what concerns Cain, of being indifferent to the gifts received from the Creator. The second sin generates, on the one hand, the hate against the neighbor, and on the other hand, the run from responsibility by cravenness: "Where is your brother Abel?" And he answered: "I don't know! Am I my brother's keeper?" The LORD SAID, "WHAT HAVE YOU DONE? LISTEN! YOUR BROTHER'S BLOOD CRIES OUT TO ME FROM THE GROUND." (Gen. 4, 9-10). The degeneration of human thinking also affects the attitude of "responsibleness" which brings along contrivance,

that is, the refusal to be responsible by committing murder. In the same time, man wants to possess everything without having done anything worthy, and which leads the man to the denial of responsibility in front of God. These sins mentioned by Saint Cyril have the role of showing us the affects around responsibility but also to highlight the two kind of fights that are led for the idea of responsibility: the first between man and man and the other between man and God.

The Call from God addressed to Cain to come to responsibility remains unique. There isn't any form in which we can see that Cain redeems his mistake nor his comeback, but the lack of judgment and the self-absorption make Cain become the archetype of all those who run away from giving a correct answer by the involvement to the Word that designs.

Conclusions

Since the soul's eyes of Cain were blinded by perceivable things, he began and accomplished everything by his metaphysical eyes, melting with and identifying himself with the property right. In regard to this, Saint Ephrem the Syrian says: "God told Cain: Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? Instead of being conquered by anger you should have

staid away from danger and instead of the downcast on your face, you should have had tears falling from your eyes." All these acts of man who led to the exemption of responsibility of the human being were to be restored by the New Adam by His Sacrifice.

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