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ȘCOALA DOCTORALĂ „ISIDOR TODORAN”

INFLUENȚELE EPIGENETICE ALE PĂCATULUI.
REFLECȚII TEOLOGIC-ETICE ASUPRA EREDITĂȚII ȘI
RESPONSABILITĂȚII UMANE
- REZUMAT -

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Keywords: epigenetics, original sin, heredity, moral responsibility, biological determinism, transgenerational effects, bioethics, Orthodox theology, gene expression, human freedom, collective responsibility

INTRODUCTION

This doctoral thesis constitutes a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of the intersections between two seemingly disparate fields, yet fundamentally connected to the human condition: Orthodox theology, with emphasis on the concept of sin and its moral and spiritual implications, and the modern science of epigenetics, which investigates the molecular mechanisms through which environment and experiences can modulate gene expression and be transmitted to future generations.

In our approach, we aim to overcome unilateral approaches and build a constructive dialogue between these perspectives, often considered irreconcilable. Far from limiting ourselves to a simple juxtaposition of these fields, we seek to create a coherent and relevant synthesis that integrates theological and scientific perspectives into a unitary vision of the human being.

The ultimate goal is to enrich our understanding of human nature, moral responsibility, and ethical implications of our actions, offering an integrated vision that takes into account both the spiritual and biological dimensions of human existence. We aim to contribute to a better understanding of human complexity and how our choices, both individual and collective, can influence the course of future generations.

In this sense, we will strive to highlight how certain human behaviors, qualified as sinful in the Christian tradition, can influence not only the individual's spiritual state but also their physical health and, implicitly, influence various aspects of future generations' lives. We will also analyze how these influences can be transmitted through epigenetic mechanisms, offering a new perspective on heredity and the role of environment in shaping the human being. Moreover, we will strive to identify possibilities for healing and transformation, both at the individual and community levels, offering an optimistic perspective on the human potential to overcome the negative effects of sin.

The current context, marked by increasing fragmentation of knowledge and growing specialization of disciplines, makes this interdisciplinary investigation not only relevant but also necessary. The complex problems facing humanity, from bioethical dilemmas to environmental crises and social inequalities, require a holistic approach that integrates diverse perspectives and offers innovative solutions based on a deep understanding of the

interconnection between material and spiritual aspects of reality. In this context, it becomes imperative to transcend disciplinary boundaries and promote constructive dialogue between science and religion, recognizing that both can offer valuable perspectives on the human condition.

This thesis is thus part of a broader trend to transcend disciplinary boundaries and promote constructive dialogue between science and religion. We believe that by addressing fundamental themes such as sin, heredity, and moral responsibility from an interdisciplinary perspective, we can contribute to a better understanding of the human condition and a more responsible ethics. It is essential to recognize that science and religion are not antagonistic domains, but rather complementary perspectives on reality, which together can offer a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the mystery of human existence.

The main motivation for this research stems from the need to create a bridge between theology and science, to unite the visions of these two fields into a coherent and relevant synthesis for contemporary humans. In the context of new discoveries in epigenetics, it becomes imperative to reevaluate how environmental factors and human behaviors can modulate gene expression and, implicitly, affect the health and destiny of our descendants.

Therefore, this thesis is not limited to theoretical analysis but aims to provide a conceptual framework for an ethics of transgenerational responsibility, helping us make wiser and more responsible decisions, taking into account the impact of our actions on humanity's future. Therefore, it is essential to assume responsibility not only for our own salvation but to contribute to the healing and transformation of all humanity, recognizing that we are interconnected and that our life is linked to that of future generations. This perspective calls us to overcome our selfishness and engage in a sustained effort to build a better world for all, considering that our choices have consequences extending far beyond our own existential horizon.

THEOLOGICAL AND SCIENTIFIC FOUNDATIONS

Sin and Its Hereditary Consequences in the Christian Tradition

The concept of sin occupies a central place in Christian theology, generally defined as a violation of divine will, disobedience to God's commandments, and a departure from the original relationship of love and communion with the Creator. However, the specific understanding of sin and its consequences has varied considerably throughout Christian history, giving rise to various theological interpretations and nuances.

In the Orthodox tradition, sin is not reduced to a simple moral wrongdoing but is understood as an existential state that affects the entire human being, corrupting it deeply and

creating a fundamental rupture between man and God. This state of sinfulness is not limited to the individual who commits the sin but has profound consequences for all humanity through the concept of original sin.

The Orthodox understanding of original sin differs significantly from the Western one, especially regarding the transmission of guilt. Unlike the Western tradition, which emphasizes the idea of hereditary guilt as culpability inherited from Adam and Eve, the Eastern tradition emphasizes the ontological consequences of the fall, which affect human nature itself. These consequences include the corruption of human nature, a weakening of its inherent capacities, an inclination toward evil, and a loss of communion with God.

The Holy Fathers have emphasized that human nature was altered through sin, and this alteration is transmitted through bodily birth, influencing the capacities and inclinations of descendants. However, the Orthodox tradition firmly affirms that man is not condemned to an immutable inheritance of evil but can overcome the effects of sin through life in Christ and through the restoration of communion with God. This optimistic vision of human potential for transformation is a distinctive element of Orthodox theology, which emphasizes the importance of human freedom and divine grace in the process of healing and deification.

More precisely, the concept of "corruption of nature" refers to a diminishment of man's natural capacities, a weakening of the will, and a darkening of the mind, which make him more susceptible to temptations and wrong choices. This corruption does not mean a total loss of original goodness but a deformation of it, a deviation from its natural purpose, which is union with God.

Regarding the transmission of this corruption, Orthodox theology avoids speculating on precise mechanisms, preferring to emphasize the reality that Adam's descendants are born into a world affected by sin and are subject to the same temptations and weaknesses as their ancestors. However, Tradition affirms that each person has the responsibility to take on the fight against sin and seek inner transformation through divine grace.

This perspective emphasizes the importance of personal effort in overcoming the inheritance of sin. Although we are affected by the consequences of the fall, we are not prisoners of them. Through faith, repentance, and a life lived in accordance with the Gospel, we can cooperate with God's grace to transform ourselves and approach the original state of communion with Him.

Therefore, the Orthodox understanding of sin and its hereditary consequences is nuanced and complex, recognizing both the reality of inheritance and the importance of human freedom and divine grace in the process of healing and deification. This perspective

calls us to take responsibility for our own choices, but also to pray for the forgiveness of our sins and for the healing of all humanity, recognizing the interconnection between us and our common life in Christ.

The Origin of the Soul and the Transmission of Sin

To better understand how sin is transmitted from one generation to another, it is necessary to analyze different theories about the origin of the soul:

Pre-existentialism: This theory, supported by Origen, postulates that souls exist before the conception of the body and unite with it at birth. Although influential in certain circles, this perspective was rejected by the Church because it contradicts the teaching about the direct creation of the soul by God.

Traducianism: This theory, supported by Tertullian and other writers, affirms that souls are generated by parents, similar to bodies. Thus, the soul is not directly created by God but is transmitted hereditarily, as a spiritual seed.

Creationism: This theory, dominant in Orthodox theology, maintains that God directly creates each soul at the moment of conception. Thus, the soul is not inherited from parents but is an individual divine gift.

Each of these theories has different implications for understanding how sin is transmitted. Although creationism is the dominant perspective, the thesis suggests that the transmission of sin can be realized through the irrational dimension of the soul, which acts as a connection area between the body and the spiritual dimension.

Epigenetics: The Interaction Between Biology and Spirituality

Epigenetics represents a revolutionary field of science that studies reversible and hereditary modifications of gene activity, without involving modifications of the DNA sequence. These modifications, known as epigenetic mechanisms, include DNA methylation, histone modifications, and the influence of microRNAs.

Epigenetic mechanisms regulate gene expression, determining how genetic information is used to produce the proteins necessary for cell functioning. These mechanisms can be influenced by a variety of factors, such as lifestyle, stress, nutrition, exposure to toxins, and individual experiences.

Research has shown that epigenetic modifications can be transmitted to future generations, providing a biological explanation for how a person's experiences and choices can influence the health and behaviour of their descendants. This discovery has profound implications for understanding heredity and the role of environment in shaping the human being.

The Correlation Between Epigenetics and Free Will

A crucial aspect of the thesis is exploring the implications of epigenetics for the concept of free will. Epigenetic discoveries could suggest a certain biological determinism, questioning man's ability to autonomously determine his actions.

However, the thesis argues that epigenetics does not deny human freedom but rather demonstrates that man has a certain margin of control over gene expression through the choices he makes. This perspective is consistent with the Orthodox vision of human freedom, which recognizes both biological and social conditioning, as well as man's ability to transcend these conditionings through grace and personal effort.

EPIGENETIC EFFECTS OF SIN

This section of the thesis explores how sinful behaviors and negative experiences can induce epigenetic modifications, which can affect the health and behavior of future generations. We will analyze in detail the epigenetic effects of alcoholism, smoking, drug addiction, fornication, and abortion, demonstrating how these behaviors can leave a biological imprint on descendants.

Alcoholism, Smoking, and Drug Addiction

Excessive consumption of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs represents a major public health problem, with devastating consequences for the individual and society. Beyond the acute effects of these substances, recent research has shown that they can induce persistent epigenetic modifications, which can affect not only the consumer's health but also that of their descendants.

Studies cited in the thesis show that prenatal exposure to alcohol can affect fetal brain development, leading to cognitive, behavioral, and emotional problems in children. Similarly, smoking during pregnancy can induce epigenetic modifications in the fetus, affecting the immune system and increasing the risk of asthma and other respiratory conditions. Drug dependence can also have devastating effects on fetal development, affecting growth, brain development, and immune system functioning.

The epigenetic mechanisms involved in these effects include DNA methylation, histone modifications, and the influence of microRNAs. These modifications can affect the expression of genes involved in brain development, metabolism, immune function, and stress response, having long-term consequences for the health and behavior of descendants.

Fornication and its Hereditary Consequences

Disordered sexual behaviors, such as promiscuity and disordered sexual relationships, can also have negative epigenetic effects on genetic health. Promiscuous sexual relationships are associated with an increased risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and some STIs, such as human papillomavirus (HPV), can induce epigenetic modifications that favor the appearance of cervical cancer.

Additionally, disordered sexual relationships can affect a woman's hormonal and emotional balance, having consequences for pregnancy and fetal development. Stress and emotional instability associated with multiple sexual relationships can induce epigenetic modifications that affect fetal brain development and immune system, increasing the risk of health and behavioral problems in offspring.

Therefore, it is essential to promote responsible and monogamous intimate relationships, based on mutual respect and commitment, to protect the genetic and spiritual health of future generations.

Abortion: Impact on Epigenetics and Future Generations

Abortion represents a complex problem, with implications not only moral and spiritual but also biological and psychological. The physical and emotional trauma of abortion can induce epigenetic modifications that affect a woman's reproductive health and hormonal balance, with potential consequences for subsequent pregnancies.

Studies have shown that women who have had abortions present an increased risk of infertility, miscarriage, premature birth, and other pregnancy complications. Also, children born after the mother has suffered one or more abortions may present an increased risk of developmental problems and emotional disorders, partly due to epigenetic modifications induced by trauma.

Therefore, it is essential to approach the abortion issue with sensitivity and compassion, offering support and counseling to women facing this difficult decision and promoting viable alternatives to abortion, such as adoption.

Psychological and Spiritual Aspects of Sin Inheritance

The inheritance of sin is not limited only to biological aspects but also has a profound psychological and spiritual dimension. Transgenerational trauma, meaning the transmission of traumas from one generation to another, can affect individual and collective consciousness, influencing how we perceive ourselves, others, and the world around us.

Children who grow up in families with a history of unresolved traumas can present emotional, behavioral, and relational problems, partly due to epigenetic mechanisms involved in the intergenerational transmission of trauma.

In this context, it is essential to emphasize the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation as processes of healing past wounds and reestablishing harmony in human relationships. Forgiveness is not just an individual act but also a communal act, which can break the chain of trauma transmission and can open the way to a brighter and more hopeful future.

MORAL AND ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY

This section of the thesis addresses the ethical and moral implications of understanding the intergenerational transmission of sin's consequences, exploring how this understanding can influence how we relate to individual and collective responsibility. We will also analyze the role of the community and the Church in supporting the healing and transformation of individuals and families affected by sin and transgenerational traumas.

The Inheritance of Sin: An Individual or Collective Responsibility?

A fundamental question that arises in the context of the intergenerational transmission of sin's consequences is whether responsibility for sin is individual or collective. In the Christian tradition, both the individual responsibility of each person to choose between good and evil, and the interconnection between all members of humanity, which makes us responsible for each other, are affirmed.

Although each person is responsible for their own choices and actions, the thesis argues that there is also a collective responsibility for the evil in the world, and the refusal to accept this responsibility represents, in itself, a repetition of the Adamic sin. Therefore, we cannot limit ourselves to focusing only on our own salvation, but must also assume the responsibility of contributing to the healing and transformation of all humanity.

This perspective is supported both by patristic tradition and by epigenetic discoveries, which show how the choices of one generation can biologically affect future generations. Therefore, we are called to assume not only our own salvation but also to contribute to the healing and transformation of all humanity, recognizing the profound interconnection between us and our common responsibility for the good of the world.

Healing and Restoration in Theology and Science

The Orthodox tradition offers a wealth of resources for healing and restoring the negative effects of sin, both at the individual and community levels. Repentance, confession, prayer, and participation in the Holy Sacraments are means through which man can obtain

forgiveness of sins, healing of spiritual wounds, and restoration of communion with God and fellow humans.

Additionally, the Orthodox ascetic tradition emphasizes the importance of cultivating virtues as antidotes to passions. Fasting, vigils, almsgiving, humility, and other ascetic practices can help reorient our desires and energies toward good, contributing to our inner transformation and spiritual growth.

Epigenetic research confirms that negative epigenetic modifications can be reversible through lifestyle changes and spiritual practices. A healthy diet, regular physical exercise, stress management, and cultivation of positive relationships both with people and with God can contribute to restoring biological and psychological balance, attenuating the negative effects of genetic inheritance.

The thesis proposes an integral vision of human healing through the synergy between ascetic effort and divine grace, which can have effects not only at the spiritual level but also at the biological level, including epigenetically. This holistic approach recognizes the importance of both human effort to transform and divine help offered through the Church and the Holy Sacraments. Therefore, healing is not just an individual process but also a communal process, which involves the support and encouragement of other community members.

The Role of Epigenetics in the Intergenerational Transmission of Moral Values

Besides the transmission of predispositions to certain diseases or behaviors, epigenetics can also play an important role in the transmission of moral values between generations. The way parents educate and care for their children, the values they promote, and the examples they provide can influence their moral development and contribute to the formation of a strong moral conscience.

Epigenetic mechanisms involved in human development can also influence the expression of genes associated with moral behavior, and the environment and individual experiences play a significant role in these modifications. Therefore, it is essential to create a family and social environment that supports positive moral values and offers opportunities for developing an upright and responsible character.

Understanding these mechanisms can contribute to developing more effective strategies for moral education and formation within the community framework of society, promoting a culture of responsibility, compassion, and respect for human dignity.

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