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Response to Ellie Hughes

Myrto Theocharous

Ellie Hughes's essay is extremely significant because it highlights the importance of self-perception among the women that she serves. I have seen this same element in my ministry when I have interacted with trafficked women. Of course, operations of rescue and opportunities for employment are invaluable, but they are often ineffective due to the low or completely distorted self-perception of these people. The personal affection, care and meaningful inclusion in the close circle of family, friends and church community is fundamental to the restoration of these souls. If they do not perceive themselves as genuinely loved and, most importantly, as sacred creation, they remain prone to abuse, manipulation and even self-destruction.

In my essay, I see the reverse problem of a distorted self-perception. The king of Tyre thought of himself in narcissistic terms, that is, as higher than others while on the contrary, the people we serve are made to think of themselves as lower than they are. Ezekiel shows that dehumanization occurs when people can no longer see their fellow humans as equals; thus, for Ezekiel, it is *not* the poor that are dehumanized. The one who views people as less than humans and himself as higher is the one who becomes 'dehumanized', that is, he loses something of his humanity. In this sense, I have used the word 'dehumanization' in a slightly different way than Ellie has.

Ellie mentions Gen. 1.26, 'Let us make humankind in our image', in order to show the communal being of God. This communion, also reflected in Gen. 2.18, 'It is not good for the man to be alone', argues against a human identity that is autonomous, self-sufficient and self-referential. This was the beginning of the king of Tyre's demise: he built his identity outside the sanctity of human and divine relationship and allowed his own intelligence and wealth production to be the determinative factor of his value and importance. His identity was exclusively self-referential and, in a paradoxical way, ended up 'removing' himself from the human race. For Ezekiel, a true Adam/human is one aware of his boundaries before God and of his responsibility towards others.

Ellie admits very honestly the existence of bleak moments. These are instances when we think change will never happen and it is the common experience of every social worker, activist and anyone who has dedicated their lives to the ministry of restoration. She uses Rom. 4.17 as her encouragement, reminding us that God 'gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not'.

All of Christian history proceeds on this transcendent vision of restoration/resurrection. This vision is present in Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones, as well as in most of the Old Testament prophets. There is something crucial about holding onto this 'irrational' inherited horizon of the dead living again and not succumbing to the acceptance of a world consisting of humans and dehumanized. I believe that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for us to work in the present for restoration and justice in the absence of a teleological, end-focused vision of the *fulfilment* of such restoration and justice.