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Cedars in Lebanon, February 2017

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Editorial

Looking critically at the last ten centuries of our history—so as not to adopt a perspective which is too broad, we are able to observe how the texts of the Bible have been used quite frequently to defend and justify every type of injustice and atrocity: to defend slavery, to justify the oppression of women and discrimination against them, to argue against blood transfusions or the vaccination of children, to justify wars and colonial invasions and to rationalize the unrestrained and destructive exploitation of nature. All these realities have been and continue to be justified by biblical texts, read and interpreted outside of their spatial and temporal coordinates or in a distorted form due to preconceived ideas.

For many people situated on the periphery or beyond the Christian horizon, this type of “biblical teaching” has been the principal reason or one additional reason to distance oneself from Christianity or to consider it a violent and oppressive religion and to view the Bible itself as an instrument of oppression. During Pope John Paul II’s visit to Peru in 1985, a group of indigenous people, in a symbolic act, gave the Pope the Bible with a letter in which they said: “We, Indians of the Andes and of America, have decided to take advantage of John Paul II’s visit in order to return his Bible to him, because during five centuries it has given us neither love, nor peace, nor justice. Please take your Bible back and return it to our oppressors, since they need its moral precepts more than we do. Since the arrival of Christopher Columbus, namely, a culture, a language, a religion and the values which belong to Europe have forcibly been imposed on America.”¹

It is not our intent to enter into apologetic debates nor to pretend to justify this abusive form of reading and interpreting the Bible, which, it might be said in passing, is also a form of violence and abuse committed against the Bible itself. In this issue of the bulletin we would like to invite our readers to reflect on the theme of the Bible and justice. It is a wide-ranging theme and cannot be properly presented in a publication as limited as ours. We

propose in this issue to indicate some points which might help us in the later study of and reflection on this so important theme.

Fr. Thomas Malipurathu introduces us to this theme by confronting us with our world in its state of metamorphosis and by raising the question of how we situate ourselves within this complex process of transformation. In his conference, presented during the CBF congress organized in Rome in 2010 and which we now republish, Cardinal Turkson evokes the commitment of the Catholic Biblical Federation with a reading of the Bible incarnated in reality; he leads us through the pages of the Bible, showing us how the concepts of justice and peace constitute the thread which guides the entire biblical tradition and teaching. The Bible scholar and Argentinian pastor Samuel Almada complements this path from the perspective of the Protestant tradition.

In the following series of studies, we offer the contribution of four women biblical scholars, coming from different contexts and traditions. Sr. Yara Matta from Lebanon offers us a study of the second book of Maccabees from the perspective of martyrdom in the context of the social issues in the Mideast. Srs. Maria Anicia Co and Miriam Alejandrino from the Philippines present us with a similar study with their analysis of the gospels of Luke and of John respectively, interpreting them from the reality of Southeast Asia. Elsa Tamez, a Mexican biblical scholar and pastor, offers us a rereading of the letter to the Romans from the perspective of the neoliberal economic crisis and intercultural dialogue. Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole closes this series with his inspiring study which shows how the African theology of reconstruction is able to contribute to improving the new forms of understanding and translating the Bible in Africa.

In the section on “experiences in Biblical pastoral Ministry”, which we open with an inspiring testimony of the master Carlos Mesters, one can encounter various examples of Christian commitment inspired by an incarnated reading of Sacred Scripture. We hope these may serve as motivation for your personal and communitarian commitment.

Jan J. Stefanów, SVD

¹ Vigil, J.M., *Teología del pluralismo religioso. Curso sistemático de teología popular*, Colección “Tiempo Axial 5, Quito, Ecuador 2005, 38-39 [*Theology of Religious Pluralism*, Wien/Berlin: Lit Verlag 2008].

Forum

The Best of Times, the Worst of Times: Reflections on the Contemporary Challenges Summoning Humanity to a Radical Change

THOMAS MALIPURATHU, SVD •

The concept of metamorphosis proposed in Ulrich Beck's monumental work is immensely evocative as it invites perceptive readers concerned about the future of humanity to a deep introspection and some proactive response. However, the desired radical turn for the better may not come off just from human good will and efforts alone. The gathering of moral forces that is essential for an ecological conversion should be built on such values as faith in the Transcendent, biophilia, commitment to preserve the integrity of creation, harmony and sustenance. This paper is an attempt to add that critical dimension to the narrative on metamorphosis.

Introduction

Victorian era literary genius Charles Dickens's classic novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, opens with the following famous sentence: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way ..." The times we are living in can easily be described in the language used by the renowned 19th century English novelist. Scientific advancement and technological breakthroughs have gifted humanity with the comforts of life unimaginable merely half a century ago. Many consider the opportunity to live in the present times as an unsurpassable privilege. Yet, on the other hand, because of the host of problems staring hard on humanity's collective face, life has become precarious as well. Some of the projections about the future are profoundly disturbing. It would appear that we are about to pay for the material magic of the consumer society. The best of days indeed are proving to be the hardest as well. It is this situation that has set many people thinking about an alternate mode of living our life.

1. The Imperative of Radical Change

Ulrich Beck's cogently argued thesis that the concept of "metamorphosis" offers the best way to understand the complex processes playing out on the contemporary world-scene is both insightful and challenging. The turmoil of the present and the resultant maze of intractable problems that it yields are truly disconcerting to most thinking people. In so far as the traditional notions which social scientists have been using, such as "evolution", "revolution" and "transfor-

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mation", are incapable of offering a satisfactory explanation for what is going on around us, the introduction of a new concept is intellectually stimulating. Samuel P. Huntington, author of the influential monograph, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, had spoken of Thomas Kuhn's seminal proposal regarding "paradigm shift" in a similar context, asserting that breaking new ground "consists of the displacement of one paradigm, which has become increasingly incapable of explaining new or newly discovered facts, by a new paradigm which does account for those facts in a more satisfactory fashion."¹

The word metamorphosis in Greek could be resulting from the combination of the preposition or prefix *meta* (which has a host of meanings such as "after", "beside", "with", "among", "beyond" and "adjacent") and the verb *morphoō* (= in active voice "to form" "to shape" and in passive voice "to take on form, shape") or the noun *morphē* (= "form", "external appearance"). The middle/passive form of the compound verb *metamorphoōmai* also is attested in the New Testament (Matt 17:2; Mark 9:2; Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18). In most contexts the sense conveyed is that of "change", "transformation" or "transfiguration". In the present book the author seems to attach the connotation of a "radical change" to the word metamorphosis.

What Beck shares with his readers as an existential *angst* is certainly the common plight of large sections of population today.² He says that, despite having had a long career as a sociologist, he is unable to give a reasonable explanation for the global events unfolding on the television screens in our times.³ The fact is that it cannot be explained in terms of mere change or transformation; there is more that is involved. Operative behind it is, holds Beck, as exemplified by the Chinese case, a massive shift from closed to open, from national to global, from isolated to more involved. What it implies is an epochal change of worldviews or a reconfiguration of the worldview. And the fixed certainties of the national-international *Weltbild* which provided the constituent elements for our understanding of the happenings around us are no more fixed.⁴ "The world is unhinged," he laments.⁵

The author also maintains that metamorphosis is a descriptive expression and not a normative one. It is something that happens and not a programmed process. So, too, everything that happens in society today cannot be thought of as a metamorphosis. There is much that is happening in the economy and in politics, the world of work, the education system and the family, etc., which can be understood as part of the normal programmatic change that happens in society. Metamorphosis adds a complementary dimension to the understanding of that change.

2. The Context of Climate Change

The widely talked-about phenomenon of climate change and all that it portends for the future of the planet is the specific background against which Beck discusses the notion of metamorphosis. Global warming is now regarded by the majority of serious world scientific opinion as the

¹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Touchstone, 1997) 29. American physicist and philosopher Thomas Kuhn had proposed his own thesis in his famous book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962).

² In recent years some exceptionally well-informed authors have come up with best-selling accounts of the crisis-ridden world that we inhabit. See for example, Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Viking Press, 2005): the author examines historical instances of societal collapse particularly those involving environmental changes, the effects of climate change, hostile neighbours and trade partners. He argues that humanity collectively faces, on a much larger scale, many of the same issues, with possibly catastrophic near future consequences to many of the world's populations. Further, Lester R. Brown, *Plan B: Rescuing a Planet under Stress and a Civilization in Trouble* (Washington DC: Earth Policy Institute, 2006): Through this and a series of similar books, Brown, head of the Earth Policy Institute, has been showing the world how perilous is the course that we are taking. Also, James Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia: Why the Earth is Fighting Back and How We Can still Save Humanity* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006): Lovelock speaks in detail about the precarious state of the dynamic physiological system that has kept our planet fit for life for more than three billion years.

³ Cf. Ulrich Beck, *The Metamorphosis of the World* (Cambridge, UK/Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2016) 3.

⁴ Ibid, 5-6.

⁵ Ibid, xi.

biggest medium to long-term crisis facing humanity. Climate change evidently is the most drastic and most immediate among the many deadly consequences of the mindless exploitation of nature that human beings have been indulging in starting from the post-industrialization epoch, accelerated manifold in the past 100 years or so. Whatever may be the justification that interested parties may come up with in defence of it, the truth is that the irresponsible handling of ecology has pushed the planet to the brink of disaster. There are many informed commentators who hold that the limits have been crossed and some of the consequences are irreversible.

The term *climate change* is often used to refer specifically to the anthropogenic climate change. Anthropogenic climate change is caused by human activity in contrast to changes in climate that may have resulted as part of Earth's natural processes. Indeed, climate has always evolved from the time the planet came into being. In the context of framing environmental policies, climate change always refers to anthropogenic global warming. In scientific parlance, global warming refers to surface temperature increases, while climate change includes global warming and everything else that increasing greenhouse gas levels affect.

Global warming itself is becoming a fervently fought issue that could turn into a latter-day religious war. Most scientists accept the overwhelming evidence that global warming poses a major threat to the world. But there are still small groups of non-believers, with powerful political and business backing, who demand more evidence or more time to prove dire fears. U.S. President Donald Trump's shocking decision, soon after taking over the reins of power in that country, to withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement on climate (PA), is seen by many as a reflection of the uncaring attitude of this small but influential creamy layer of modern society. There are other fringe groups which argue that the topic of global warming has stolen the limelight, and other issues such as environmental degradation, nuclear proliferation, global hunger and social injustice are more serious and immediate dangers to the planet.

Greenhouse gases are really the villain of the piece and their uncontrolled increase is caused by the excessive burning of fossil fuels, large scale destruction of forest land for raising cattle⁶ and illegal logging in rain forests in different parts of the world to meet the escalating demand for timber. When the planet's eco-system is no more capable of absorbing all these excess gases, it fills the air and traps the heat radiating from the Earth's surface instead of allowing



*All illustrations from the Regina pacis chapel.
See Bible and Art Forms.*

⁶ In fact, according to respected agencies such as UK's Food Climate Research Network and UN's Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), there is enough evidence to conclude that livestock sector is one of the two or three most significant contributors to the most serious environmental problem in the world, global warming and climate change. The increasing popularity of meat-intensive Western diet, according to a recent World Wildlife Fund report (entitled, ironically, "Appetite for Destruction"), is causing serious strain on water and land resources, making serious dent on biodiversity, adding to increased emission of greenhouse gases and accelerated loss of forest cover.

it to escape into the outer space. This is how global warming happens. Its destructive effects are here for everyone to see. They include rising sea levels, melting of polar ice-caps, torrential downpours and more powerful storms, frequently-occurring hurricanes, typhoons and cyclones, heat waves and droughts and increased acidification of the oceans. All these are ominous signs fraught with devastating short term and long-term consequences. Hence, global warming and climate change have assumed life-threatening proportions, capable of wiping out all forms of life from the face of the Earth.

Renowned theoretical physicist and cosmologist, Stephen Hawking, through some of his recent communications, has spread real shock-waves across the world. According to him, life on planet Earth may face extinction in the next 200 years, or even sooner, within a span of 100 years! Climate change is one of the major causes that might accelerate this frightening eventuality. The spectre of mass extinction is no more to be dismissed as a mere theoretical possibility!

Hawking says that the planet is heating up at an alarming rate and warns that we are close to the tipping point where global warming will become irreversible.⁷ Among the list of additional causes that can lead to a dreaded mass extinction are: asteroid strikes, epidemics, overpopulation and artificial intelligence. Asteroid strikes are not unheard of and have resulted in large scale destruction of life and property in the past. For example, the dinosaurs' era is believed to have ended as the consequence of the impact created by an asteroid strike some 66 million years ago. Earth's population is expanding at an exponential rate. The natural resources vital to our survival are running out faster than we can replace them with sustainable alternatives. Multiplying ourselves to unsustainable levels can open the doors for deadly epidemics striking us at will. Stephen Hawking also mentions the developing of artificial intelligence as posing a real threat to the survival of humans. Once humans develop artificial intelligence, it will take off on its own and redesign itself at an ever-increasing rate. Humans who are limited by slow biological evolution, could not compete and would be superseded.

Among all the villainous factors that threaten the survival of life on earth, however, the most menacing appears to be climate change. That itself is the end-result of a series of mindless operations carried out against the benevolent Earth. Humankind's selfish and aggressive instinct has inflicted heavy wounds on the body of our fragile planet.

3. The Larger Question of Ecological Degradation

The concern for ecology is mercifully gaining ground steadily.⁸ The ominous implications of a degenerating environment are becoming clearer to more and more people thanks to the media campaigns spearheaded by committed organizations.⁹ Until very recently most people thought of the ecological problem as somebody else's problem and as something that affects the far away polar regions and the outer space. Many presumed that their responsibility to protect the environment ended with the planting of a few trees and keeping their backyards free of litter. But alarmingly, a large number of people still try to downplay the issue or dismiss the warnings about ecological disaster as doomsday prophecies. They are the ones who feel threatened by the

⁷ The celebrated scientist in a conversation with BBC's Pallab Ghosh was reacting against Donald Trump's decision to withdraw the United States from the Paris Climate agreement (PC). He was unequivocal in asserting that "climate change is one of the great dangers we face, and it's one we can prevent if we act now."

⁸ Rachel Carson's ground-breaking 1962 book, *Silent Spring*, is credited by many to have provided the initial impulse for the start of the ecological movement. The book alerted the American public about the disastrous consequences of the uncontrolled production and indiscriminate use of pesticides. Concretely she focused on the disappearance of the American song birds. Her cautioning against the domestic and agricultural use of certain poisons actually had the effect of drawing public attention to the terrible side-effects of thoughtless industrialization. Within a short time of its publication, despite the chemical industry putting itself into overdrive to disprove the book's claims, it became a runaway bestseller and spent several weeks on the New York Times best seller list.

⁹ For a more detailed treatment of some of the views on the ecological question mentioned here, cf. Thomas Malipurathu, "Our Earth—Our Mission," *SEDOS Bulletin* 39 (2007) 74-79.

life-style changes and the change of consumption patterns that would follow in the wake of accepting the need to adopt a more eco-friendly approach to day-to-day living.

Governments everywhere in the world are proclaiming economic development as the be all and end all of their very existence. Unfortunately, however, ecological concerns are neglected when development needs are pursued with immediate gains as its sole driving force. In projecting no-holds-barred development as the ultimate aim of human progress, the phenomenon known as the process of globalization has played a vital role. This process sometimes reveals itself as something that goes beyond the realm of economic activity, a predatory process that has no regard for environmental concerns, national boundaries or cultural sensibilities. A mindless exploitation of nature which feeds the frenzy of production and consumption is generally recognized as the defining element of globalization. The culture of consumerism which globalization has produced considers consumption as the main form of self-expression and the chief source of identity. The truth is that the economic and social dynamics that result from this stretches the eco-system beyond endurance level, giving rise to a series of lethal consequences. With all its beneficial aspects, then, globalization is doing immense harm to the long term good of the planet and its life-sustaining properties.

In recent years a series of weather-related natural disasters that caused heavy losses to life and property in various parts of the world have sent shock-waves across the globe. Experts who scientifically analyse the frequency and intensity of such happenings inform us that they are directly linked to the consistent exploitation of nature and its gifts and that these are wake-up calls coming from a distressed Earth. Indeed, many of the ecological problems that we are facing today can ultimately be traced back to the total disregard for the laws of nature which humans exercise in ways both evident and subtle. Air and water pollution that impairs the health of vast sections of population, depletion of the ozone layer that provides the protective cover to the planet, global warming, shrinking bio-diversity and the unusual and harmful weather fluctuations are already foreboding. Add to them such potential threats as the rapidly dwindling non-renewable sources of energy, the gradual disappearance of wetlands and water bodies, depleting ground-water levels, melting of the polar ice-caps, expanding deserts and the large-scale erosion of topsoil, and the picture becomes dismal. It is to this situation Ulrich Beck calls attention when he says:

Climate change is the embodiment of the mistakes of a whole epoch of ongoing industrialization, and climate risks pursue their acknowledgement and correction with all the violence of the possibility of annihilation. They are a kind of collective return of the repressed, wherein the self-assurance of industrial capitalism, organized in the form of nation-state politics, is confronted with its own errors in the form of an objectified threat to its own existence.¹⁰



¹⁰ Beck, *Metamorphosis*, 36.

4. Normative Metamorphosis

It is climate change with all its concomitant realities that Beck posits as the defining factor in the ushering in of metamorphosis. The religious world order provided direction to the unfolding of the world events up until the Middle Ages. From then, the modern international world order, the sovereign state, industrialization, capital, classes, nations and democracy set in. As things stand now, global climate risk contains a sort of navigation system for the threatened world.¹¹ “The surprising momentum of metamorphosis is that,” he asserts further, “if you firmly believe that climate change is a fundamental threat to all of humankind and nature, it might bring a cosmopolitan turn into our contemporary life and the world might be changed for the better”.¹² Calling it “an agent of metamorphosis,” the author points out that it has already altered our way of being in the world – the way we live in the world and think about the world and the way we seek to intervene in the affairs of the world through social action and politics.¹³

It is against this background that he introduces concepts such as “world risk society” (= humanity besieged by the serious consequences of climate change), “global risk” (= the day-to-day sense of insecurity brought on by the accelerating threat), “methodological nationalism” (= the teachings of turning the world around the nation-state) and “methodological cosmopolitanism” (= the teachings of the turning of the nation around the “world at risk”, resulting from the awareness that no nation-state can cope alone with the global risk of climate change).

Beck’s theory of metamorphosis is built on the positive impact of the crisis situation that the world is face to face with. Focusing not so much on the negative side effects of the goods, but on the positive side effects of the bads, he is projecting the scenario of them producing normative horizons of common goods that propel us beyond the restrictive national frame of reference towards a more liberating cosmopolitan outlook. This is how the challenge of climate change can transform the world for the better. It can even be used as an antidote to war. When the focus shifts from petty border issues to threats emanating from the logic of global risk, we can see a movement away from cross-border conflicts to cross-border cooperation to avert catastrophe. This in effect means the emergence of a vision diametrically opposed to war. This can open the path of transcending the “we-they” opposition to acknowledge the other as a partner rather than an enemy to be destroyed. “The logic of risk directs its gaze towards the explosion of plurality in the world,” insists the author, “which the friend-foe gaze denies.”¹⁴ We are thus led to a situation where world risk society opens up a moral space that might give birth to a culture of responsibility that transcends old antagonisms and creates new alliances.

5. A Metamorphosis Informed by Religious Values

Beck approaches the whole issue of metamorphosis with the characteristically detached attitude of a social scientist. His incisive analysis of the contemporary world-scenario – one that is both professionally competent and logically convincing – takes into consideration every single aspect of the socio-political drama that is unfolding on the global stage. His effort to bring together the many apparently disparate elements into a coherent continuum is truly impressive. The big picture that he attempts to paint appears as the fruit of a dispassionate reflection carried out by a brilliant mind.

But what seems to be missing in it is an effort to connect the whole process in any way with the human search for the Transcendent. Religion and the ubiquitous signs of religious revival in recent years¹⁵ do not figure anywhere in the reasoning of the author. The world risk society,

¹¹ Ibid, 7.

¹² Ibid, 35.

¹³ Ibid, 4.

¹⁴ Ibid, 43.

¹⁵ The revival of interest in the topic of religion may well be a fleeting phenomenon, a case of the proverbial swing of the pendulum. Yet it is a sobering thought that after surviving numerous predictions of its imminent demise and out-living many a prematurely published obituary, religion is alive and well today. Indeed, according to the American sociologist of religion, Peter L. Berger, with the probable exception of

urged on by the perception of imminent catastrophe, Beck argues, can close ranks and jointly move towards normative horizons of common goods and save the day for the world. His presumption seems to be that human goodness alone is sufficient to achieve this goal. But it is doubtful that a society entirely devoid of the religious impulse could stir itself in pursuit of the common good. Human mind is wired to look beyond itself to a superior power when it readies to set itself on the path of moral action that has as its finality something more than an instant gratification. In fact, belief in the Transcendent, biophilia, commitment to preserve the integrity of creation, harmony and sustenance are the critically important ingredients of a mindset that will eventually propel us to the pursuit of the common good especially in these trying times.

Any affirmative action, I submit, to reverse humanity's thoughtless march towards devastation by a radical change of attitude – call it metamorphosis or any other name that is suitable – needs to be powered by a vision built on a quintessentially religious foundation.¹⁶ Sacred texts of all faith traditions may have symbols and metaphors, in addition to explicit exhortations, that will provide impulses for fashioning such a foundation.

In the Bible's first story of creation, the book of Genesis makes it clear that God created the universe for the sake of the human beings and indeed placed the humans at the head of creation. That is the unmistakable implication of the creation of humans at the end of a gradated process (cf. Gen 1:1-25). It is made explicit through clear statements, first in God's own words in direct speech (cf. Gen 1:26) and then in indirect speech in the words of the narrator (cf. Gen 1:27) – a double affirmation – that human beings are created in God's image. Subsequently God entrusts the whole of creation to the humans in words ringing with supreme significance: "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all the living creatures that move on the earth" (Gen 1:28).

According to the biblical story, what humanity received from the bountiful God was the noble task of being the steward of creation. We understand the task of a steward in terms of taking care of things for the owner. God is the owner of creation and God passes on this valued possession to the humans for safe-keeping. While being appointed stewards, human beings are also endowed with the supreme liberty of subduing creation and making use of it for the advancement of the common good. There are certain limits and responsibilities implicit in the process of subduing and making use of creation. Freedom always entails responsibility, as indeed there is nothing called unconditional freedom. Perhaps initially the human family was mindful of those limits and responsibilities, but somewhere down the line, we lost sight of this important dimension of God's generous act of trust.¹⁷ Global warming and climate change are the consequences of a long series of irresponsible and exploitative actions perpetrated against God's gift proffered to us as the bounties of nature. As a result of the relentless rise of industrial monoculturalism egged on by the unprecedented growth of consumerism with its supporting ideology has brought us to where we are.

Europe, the new century will be more furiously religious than the previous one, a development brought about by two crucial factors: militant Islam and Christian Evangelism; quoted by Cardinal Paul Poupard, President of the Pontifical Council for Culture and for Interreligious Dialogue in an interview with Konstantin Eggert, published in (the British Catholic Weekly) *The Tablet* (4 August 2007).

¹⁶ I found the following thought-provoking submission in an article dealing with responsible intervention in environmental matters in the African context: "When we put God back into the center of environmental and agricultural matters, where our Creator deserves to be, he equips and enables us to begin making the critical changes that are needed." Cf. Craig Sorley, "Christ, Creation Stewardship, and Missions: How Discipleship into a Biblical Worldview on Environmental Stewardship Can Transform People and Their Land," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35 (2011) 143.

¹⁷ In this context there are people who point out that the absence of a strong patriarchal figure among the deity is a distinguishing mark of many of the cosmic, tribal religions. They raise the question if it is not such concepts (and conceptualizing) which paved the way for all subsequent dominating social formulations. Is not God who gave total control of nature to humans which eventually became the source of inspiration for the mindless exploitation of Earth?

Interestingly, an examination of the contexts of the few occurrences of the word *morphē* and its cognates in the New Testament can offer us some helpful insights for the effort of seeing the metamorphosis of the world as a religiously motivated process.¹⁸

The noun *morphē* has only three occurrences in the NT. The occurrence in Mark 16:12 forms part of the “Longer Ending” of the Gospel (Mark 16:9-20). The verse speaks about the Risen Christ’s appearance “in another form” (*en hetera morphē[i]*) to two disciples who were headed to the countryside, presumably on the same day of Easter. Commentators generally believe that it is a cryptic reference to the Emmaus story elaborately treated in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 24:13-35). “In another form” means in human appearance but different from the form which Jesus bore during his earthly life. It points to the new existence which the Risen Christ assumed, the new life he stepped into, that became the seedbed for the community that was now coming into existence, the apostolic community. This was the “little flock” that he intended to be the symbol and servant of the redoubtable reality of the kingdom of God which he launched through his words and deeds during his earthly ministry. This community bore the seeds of radical transformation within itself and was to be in a permanent revolution mode. A social formation that intrinsically assimilates the implied disposition will be capable of directing itself to a metamorphosis that will be life-enhancing.

The other two instances of the occurrence of *morphē* are found in the renowned Christological hymn in the letter to the Philippians (Phil 2:6-11). The contention of the hymn is that Christ Jesus, having been in possession of divine form prior to incarnation (*en morphē[i] theou huparchōn*), took the form of a slave (*morphēn doulou labōn*) upon becoming a human being. This shift from being of divine image to the image of a mortal human is indeed the most radical of metamorphosis possible. His act of self-abasement is not just the opposite of a selfish exploitation of his position but stands in the sharpest possible contrast to his former mode of being in divine power and splendour. He sets aside the height of glory that was rightfully his and assumes the lowly state of a human being in order to bring about redemption for his brothers and sisters of the human family. The virtue of self-emptying (*kenosis*), which was demonstrated in the most insuperable manner in the event of incarnation, forms the bedrock of the attitude that must undergird humanity’s collective effort towards a genuine metamorphosis, if it has to nudge it back to a safer location from the precipice it has pushed itself to.

Allowing such an attitude to take root in us can be compared to the process of forming Christ within us. In Gal 4:19 Paul speaks about the birth pangs-like pain that he undergoes until Christ is formed within the heart of his fellow Christians in the church of Galatia. The Apostle uses the aorist, subjunctive, passive form of the verb *morpoō* to refer to the “Christ-forming” process that takes place in the innermost core of each believer as he or she matures in Christian faith. The growth of Christ in believers is compared to the development of the fetus in the womb. It is a delicate process and needs careful nurturing, but what results from it is a kind of spiritual maturity that moves one resolutely to the goal of metamorphosis.

The evangelists Matthew and Mark use the compound verb *metamorphoomai* to refer to the change that came about in the external appearance of Jesus on the occasion of the Transfiguration (cf. Matt 17:2; Mark 9:2). Both Gospels use the identical verb form *metemorphōthē* (aorist, passive, indicative, III person, singular of *metamorphoomai*). At a crucial point of his public ministry, when even his close followers were assailed by doubts and uncertainties about his Messianic claims, Jesus revealed his divine identity to a select group of his disciples in order to give them reassurance. The change was so profound that the embattled disciples were left terrified and at a loss for words, but obviously also their sagging morale steadied.

The same verb also is found in Rom 12:2 and 2 Cor 3:18. Both contexts speak of a positive change or deep transformation that keeps one unwavering on one’s journey of faith. In the context of Romans Paul is speaking about the need to desist from conforming oneself to the standards of the present age that is passing and imperfect. On the other hand, the Apostle urges be-

¹⁸ For the views cited here, cf. J. Behm, “morphē, etc.,” *Theological Dictionary of New Testament* (TDNT), Vol. IV, 742-759.

lievers to be transformed (*metamorphousthe* = passive imperative of the verb *metamorphoomai*) with the help of God's grace and under the influence of the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ The same idea of depicting God acting through the Spirit as the agent of transformation is implied in 2 Cor 3:18 where the verb form used is *metamorphoumetha* (passive indicative). While contemplating the glory of God through the enlightenment gained through the acceptance of faith, believers are being progressively transformed into the image of Christ, for salvation is a process whose goal is conformity to Christ.²⁰

The brief survey carried out above of the contexts in which the New Testament speaks about the purpose-driven process of transformation places before us a clear idea of how the religious dimension refurbishes the concept of metamorphosis.

Conclusion

Restructuring of society is what metamorphosis ultimately aims at and what is projected as resulting from the process. This, under the present circumstances, can be initiated only through a massive gathering of moral forces for which the religious component is an indispensable factor because at the heart of the whole enterprise should be an effort to stimulate and sustain an ecological conversion. Given the fact that our world is presently perched on a precarious precipice, facing serious challenges from multiple fronts, such restructuring has become an imperative. The prospects are dire and immediate action is required not merely for ensuring the welfare of the present generation or the prosperity of future generations, but for the very survival of the race. Against the background of the neo-liberal economic model with its hegemonic, messianic claims monopolizing the entire world, the mindless exploitation of the bounties of nature steadily on the rise, the increasing frequency of natural calamities resulting from climate change causing incredible devastation, the possibility of a nuclear holocaust ever nearer and the growing impoverishment of the vast sections of world population becoming an undeniable reality, the only hope of salvation for our besieged planet may lie in the intensified efforts to ring in another model of being society.

It is beyond all doubt that the currently prevalent culture is perilously out of touch with the reality of a religiously-informed way of life. The biblical model of a community built on the covenantal foundation of God's parenthood and human brotherhood/sisterhood and one that is supported by the pillars of freedom, fellowship and justice is hardly in evidence.²¹ There are of course a considerable number of people who naively persist in believing that Mother Earth is magnanimous enough to forgive all the multitude of indignities heaped on her and that she will get rid of all the ill effects of human commission and omission just like a furry dog, after a plunge, in a paroxysmal effort to make itself dry, shakes off all the water sticking to its body! Perhaps there is comfort in the thought that more and more people – of Ulrich Beck's tribe – are becoming aware that the nemesis might overtake us sooner than later. The premonition of an impending catastrophe is motivating many to think in terms of an alternative model. It might take still more time before such efforts gather the desired momentum and hopefully much of our world today will last that long! In any case, some purposeful action is long overdue, for what is at stake are not the fortunes of a few millions or only a part of the beleaguered humanity, at stake is the survival of Earth as a life-bearing planet!

¹⁹ Cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland: Doubleday, 1992) 640-641.

²⁰ Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "The Second Letter to the Corinthians," in Raymond E. Brown et alia (eds.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1991) 820.

²¹ For a more elaborate treatment of this idea, cf. Thomas Malipurathu, "Contrast Community: Its Meaning and Relevance for Our Times," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 62 (1998) 606-623.

The Reading of the Bible as a Source of Justice and Peace ¹

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Introduction

With the title “*Word of God in the Life and the Mission of the Church*”, this Congress has certainly been a privileged time of shared meditation on the new Papal Exhortation, *Verbum Domini*. For me too, the publication of *Verbum Domini* is a special joy, given not only my participation in the XII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2008, but also my participation in the Synod Committee that worked on the drafts of the exhortation.

I am particularly happy to be with you, members of a Biblical Federation, because your particular area of interest and study, the Bible, reminds me of a memorable experience in my life: when an attempt to force my Bishop to allow me to study science (physics and chemistry) led rather to being sent to Rome to study Scriptures. By hindsight, I have learnt to attribute everything that happened on that autumn day of 1974 to divine providence; for over and above the ministries of seminary formation and pastoral care of a diocese, for which my formation in Scriptures was of an incomparable advantage, even the ministry I exercise now in the Roman Curia (as President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace) benefits greatly from my study of and familiarity with the Bible. The *Social Doctrine of the Church*, indeed, is rooted in the Scriptures and the Tradition of the Church; and not only rigorous biblical studies, but every familiarity and intimate exposure to the Bible helps enrich one’s appreciation of the *Church’s Social Doctrine* and their application.

And so, a year after the Synod on the *Word of God*, the second Synod of Bishops for Africa was convoked (October 2009) to consider the experience and the journey that the first Synod for Africa was making on the continent.

When the first synod for Africa gathered (April 1994) to consider evangelization (the missionary preaching of the Word of God) on the continent and its islands on the threshold of the third millennium of the Christian faith, it adopted *Church as Family of God* as its guiding idea for the evangelization of Africa.² The imagery of *Church as Family of God* evoked such values as: care for others, solidarity, dialogue, trust, acceptance and warmth in relationship. These, however, are values which converge to describe *communion* and a *network of relationships* as basic features of family life. With that imagery, the synod sought to affirm how the new evangelization would aim at building up the Church, as a “family”, without any estranging and divisive attitudes. The synod “dreamt” of a reconciled church, with different ethnic groups living in communion and in solidarity.³ “*Reconciled to live in communion*”: this was really to be the life of the Church! For, the Church is a body (= family), whose members live in communion with God and with one another.

¹ Editorial note: Cardinal Turkson’s conference was delivered in English during the Catholic Biblical Federation’s international congress on “The Word of God in the Life and the Mission of the Church”, held in Rome in December 2010 in order to study Pope Benedict XVI’s post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini*, published earlier in the year. The conference was first published in Italian in *Ascoltare, rispondere, vivere: atti del Congresso Internazionale “La Sacra Scrittura nella vita e nella missione della Chiesa”* (1-4 dicembre 2010) a cura di Ernesto Borghi, Milano, Edizioni Terra Santa, 2011, p. 159-170.

² Cfr. *Ecclesia in Africa* #63.

³ Ibidem.

Indeed, *communion* after the manner of the life of the Trinity is the life of the Church. It is the work of God's saving deeds. It thrives on and is nourished by *justice*; and the fruit of both (*communion* and *justice*) is *peace*. Accordingly, when *justice* is disregarded and trampled underfoot, *communion* is broken, damaged and impaired; and it takes *reconciliation* to repair and to restore it to wholeness.

The Basic Sense of Justice: The Justice of God and of His Kingdom

The notion of *justice* appears to have been attached to the sphere of religion from the beginning, in ancient Greece,⁴ in African Traditional Religions, but more specifically in the Old Testament, where *justice* is both religious (salvific) and social. In fact, the Old Testament is strong in its outlook that *justice* cannot come to man through his own strength, for it is a gift of God; and the New Testament develops this outlook more fully, making *justice* the supreme revelation of the salvific grace of God. Thus, there is a transcendent character as well as a social character to *justice*; and it is critically important that *social justice* be firmly rooted in transcendent *divine justice*, the justice of God and of his kingdom (Matt 6:33).

The Sense of the "Righteousness of the Kingdom"⁵

The righteousness/justice of the kingdom is not really retributive justice, although that is sometimes the sense of its attribution to God (Rev 15:4; 19:2,11; 16:5-6; Heb 6:10; 2 Thess 1:6); nor does it have the sense of "conformity to a norm or a set of norms". At least, this is not its primary sense; and it can never be applied to God in that sense.

The justice/righteousness of God and of his kingdom is a revelation of God's justice (his justifying deeds) which is destined to make man (human beings) just and to constitute their life before God. It is an initiative of God; and it is the just action of God, conceived as deeds of salvation on behalf of Israel and humankind, through which God establishes (re-establishes) communion or relationship with man. It is therefore a concept of relationship; and he who is *righteous* is he who has fulfilled the demands laid on him by the relationship in which he stands.

Variouly presented as *tsdaqah* and *tsedek*, *justice / righteousness* is the fulfilment of the demand of relationship in which one stands, whether that relationship be with God or with man;⁶ and when God or man fulfils the conditions imposed upon him by the relationship, he is, in terms of the Bible, "*righteous*" (*tsadiq / dikaios*).

Fundamentally, three events correspond to/constitute the initiatives of God which account for and establish all the relationships which exist between God and humankind; and they, inci-



⁴ Plato, *Gorgias*, 5076; *Republic*, 1, 331a.

⁵ Cfr. *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol.4, 88-85, 91-99.

⁶ "Justice", in whatever form it occurs, has the basic sense of all that is due a person by reason of his dignity and vocation to the communion of persons, (cfr. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, #3, 63).

mentally, also account for the various forms of relationship among people. Human beings are radically set in a relationship with God by reason of:

- The creation of humanity “*in the image and likeness of God*” (Gen 1:26-27); wherefore, humanity’s common origin and common fatherhood radically relates all members of the human family, one to another, as brothers and sisters.⁷
- God’s covenant election of Israel, whence Israel is “*God’s firstborn*”, “*his inheritance*” and “*his portion*”.
- The new Covenant in the blood of Christ, whence all followers of Christ bear the “*seal of the Holy Spirit*” (Eph 1:13-14), which makes them “*temples of the Holy Spirit*” and “*households of God*”.

These constitute the basis of relationships between God and humankind, at various points in history. They are initiatives of God and acts of his love. Man/humanity either opens up and accepts the relationship or closes up and rejects it; and *justice/righteousness* describes the conduct of both God and man in these sets of relationship. In this sense, *righteousness* is a radical and a comprehensive *justice* of a religious character, which requires that man surrender himself/herself to God, in obedience and in faith, and which makes every sin an “*injuria*”, an injustice and impiety.



Righteousness/Justice based on the Divine Initiative of Creation

The question about the paying of taxes to Caesar (Matt 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26) gave Jesus an opportunity to define the basic relationship between God and man as *justice* (righteousness). God has constituted humanity in a special relationship to himself, as his *image and likeness*; and human existence knows no other authentic form and character.

The episode evokes the practice of expressing ownership through imprinting labels, images and titles. Caesar’s ownership of the coin by reason of his imprinted image allows God to claim ownership of man by reason of his creation in God’s image. Jesus’ answer: “*Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar; and give to God what belongs to God*”, therefore, addresses the fundamental issue of whether God is given his just due from those who bear his “*image and likeness*” and must belong to him, namely, human beings (Gen 1:26-27). The belongingness of humanity to God, by reason of its creation in his “*image and likeness*” is the basis of the life of communion between God and humanity; and it takes

the form of *justice*: humanity giving God his just due. This takes the form of “obeying God’s voice”, “believing in Him” and “worshiping Him”. The absence of these expressions of belongingness to God, as when man turns to idols, makes man guilty of injustice (*injuria*), and invites him/her to show “*repentance*” (Acts 17:30).

The same divine initiative did constitute humanity as *offspring of God* (Acts 17:28-29), having one God as Father, sharing in the sonship of Christ, and all being brothers and sisters. There are,

⁷ This, incidentally, is also the basis for that fundamental imperative which calls for a positive respect for the dignity and rights of others, and contribution in solidarity to the meeting necessities (cfr. *Gaudium et Spes* #23-32, 63-72; Pope John XVIII, *Mater et Magistra*). The common sonship of humanity requires men to be righteous, acting in conformity with God’s will, and bound in solidarity by God’s love, as by a Father’s love.

therefore, relationships within humanity, which are based on creation and which have demands (rights and obligations), the observance of which describe a person as *just* and *righteous*.

Righteousness/Justice based on God's Covenant

The different covenants in the Old Testament established

1. Various relationships between God and

- individuals: Abraham (Gen 17:4), Isaac (Gen 17:19,21), Jacob (Ex 6:4), David (2 Chr 21:7),
- households and families: Abraham (Gen 17:11), David (2 Sam 7), and
- the people of Israel (Deut 4:12-13) hence, Exod 19-20; 24:8; Lev 24:8; Isa 24:5).

2. Relationships also between human persons: Isaac and Abimelech (Gen 26:28-29), Jacob and Laban (Gen 31:44), David and Jonathan (1 Sam 20:16).

The covenants established special relationships, which made demands on the partners. Keeping and upholding the demands of the relationship made a party *just* and *righteous*⁸; and *justice/righteousness* was the observance of the demands of relationships, which ensured fellowship and communion, vertically, between God and humanity, and horizontally, among people. The opposite terms in the Bible are "*wicked/evildoer*" and "*wickedness*" (*rasha*); and they denote evil committed against one, with whom one stands in relationship. Thus, the "*wicked*" destroys the community (communion) by failing to fulfil the demands of community relationship.⁹

The covenants between God and individuals and the people of Israel represented God's initiatives, which drew the individuals, families and people of Israel into a special relationship and required them to live the demands of the relationships towards God and towards themselves. The demand(s) of the relationship, on the one hand, was submission in faith and trust to God's offer, expressed sometimes through the performance of a simple rite of circumcision (Gen 17:10-11), but often through the observance of the laws (*torah*) of God (Exod 19:5; Deut 7:9 etc.). On the other hand, the Israelites had to fulfil certain demands among themselves (*social justice*) by reason of their covenant relationship with God.

When the individuals and people failed to fulfil the demands of the relationship, by breaking the law (sinning), they acted unjustly towards God (*injuria*), and subtracted themselves from the relationship. They could however not abrogate it. Their re-instatement in the relationship had to be the work of God, the injured partner, who would pardon the "*injuria*". Israel itself would not have a way of re-introducing itself into the relationship. All Israel could do was to repent and allow itself to be brought back into the relationship by God. God's *justice* offended against, could be repaired (re-established) only by God. It is God who *justified* Israel, making it worthy again of covenant relationship; and God did this out of mercy and love. God proved his *righteousness* by making Israel *righteous* and worthy again of covenant relationship; and Israel's response was to show repentance and to return to accepting covenant relationship in faith.

⁸ Thus, Tamar was more righteous than her father-in-law, because he would not fulfil family custom (Gen 38:26), David would not kill Saul, "for he is the Lord's anointed" (1 Sam 24:17, 6) and a "father" to him (1 Sam 24:11). When a relationship changes, demands also change. One who cares for the fatherless, the widow and defends them is righteous (Job 29:12,16; Hos 2:19). One who treats servants humanely, lives at peace with neighbours, speaks well is righteous/just (Job 31:1-13; Prov 29:2; Isa 35:15; Ps 52:3 etc.).

Righteousness/Justice as a conduct, which devolves on members of community is sometimes safeguarded and enforced judges and settled at tribunals. This is a forensic sense of justice; wherefore, both God and king play the role of judges (Deut 25:1; 1 Kgs 8:32; Ex 23:6f; Ps 9:4; 50:6; 96:13). Righteous judgements restore a community to wholeness; and it is in this sense that righteous judgment and rule are made attributes of the Messiah-King.

⁹ The "*wicked*" = רשע is one who exercises force and falsehood, ignores the duties which kinship and covenant lays upon him, tramples underfoot the rights of others etc. Cfr. *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol.4, 81.

Righteousness/Justice based on the New Covenant in Christ

The Old Testament is, to a large extent, the story of broken covenant relationships. It ends, however, on the hopeful note of the promise of a *new covenant*; and the coming of Jesus Christ fulfils the promise and seals the new covenant relationship between God and humanity with his death on the cross.

Not having been able to uphold the demands of its covenant relationship with God, Israel set itself outside the relationship and could only pray that God would save it by “*causing its return*” (Ps 80:3, 7, 19), confessing its sins. This was the principal theme of Hosea and the post-exilic prophets. God’s righteousness now consisted in his *justification* of Israel, bringing Israel back into covenant relationship despite its failures; and Israel’s righteousness consisted in confessing its sins, in acknowledgment of its failure and accepting in faith God’s gracious offer of salvation.

This, in fact, was the content of the ministry and baptism of John the Baptist; and they fulfilled all righteousness in the sense that the repentance and confession of sins, which they demanded, were Israel’s (humanity’s) acknowledgement of its inability to be faithful to the covenant demands, of its undeserved experience, nonetheless, of God’s justifying pardon and favour, and the recognition that God acts only out of love and mercy. When Jesus underwent the baptism of John, he joined humanity to confess all the above as God’s righteousness.

In Jesus and in his ministry, one sees the justifying grace of God at work, overlooking the just demands of the covenant relationship, and re-instating humanity, out of mercy¹⁰ and love, in a covenant relationship. One also sees the constitution of a new covenant community, endowed with the Holy Spirit and enabled, therewith, to respond to God’s righteousness in faith through the confession of sins. For, “*by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your doing; it is the gift of God*” (Eph 2:8).

In God, *justice* is not an attribute, but a gift, a *justifying* grace, manifested in his saving deeds towards man and received in faith. The believer, baptized into Jesus (the teacher of *justice*), becomes the *justice of God in Christ* (2 Cor 5:21), witnessing to it, in the power of the Holy Spirit, as utterly gratuitous. He is justified (i.e. re-introduced into communion with God through pardon) by God’s mercy and love.¹¹

In conclusion, one may note that the *justice* of the Scriptures, the *justice/righteousness* of God and of his kingdom, is characteristically “*rooted in divine love and exercised in mercy*; for as Pope John Paul II taught, justice is not enough in the fashioning, restoring and maintenance of communion and relationships. It needs mercy and love; and it is the presence of the Spirit, as a gift and as a force of love, which affirms *justice*.”

The “Peace” that the World Cannot Give

Justice /Righteousness, we observed above, is a concept of relationship; and he who is *righteous* has fulfilled the demands laid on him by the relationship in which he/she stands. In the case of sinful Israel and fallen humanity (Rom 5:6ff.), whom God justifies, imputing righteousness to them in Christ out of love and mercy, the demand(s) of the relationship in which they stand is to confess God’s righteousness/justice. This means: to show repentance and to accept in faith God’s offer of covenant communion in Christ, and to accept also the covenant community of Christians as the *locus* for one’s living of one’s imputed *righteousness*.

The *just* and the *righteous* person is, therefore, one who both recognizes his need for God’s pardon, submits to its offer in faith, and thus enters into communion with God. In so doing, namely, as *justified* and in *communion* with God, he/she also accepts the Christian community of believers and the rest of humanity as people with whom he/she stands in covenant relationship

¹⁰ Pope John Paul II defines “mercy” as “a special power of love, which prevails over sin and infidelity of the chosen people” (*Dives in Misericordia* #4.3).

¹¹ Thus, Pope John Paul II teaches that in relationships between individuals and social groups etc., “justice is not enough”. There is need for that “deeper power, which is love” (cfr. *Dives in Misericordia* # 12).

before God, and with whom and among whom he/she must live the demands of their various types of relationships as covenant partners.

Now, curiously, in the Gospel of Luke, “*peace*” is bestowed, on earth, “*on whom God’s favour rests*” (Luke 2:14). The sense of the phrase: “*on whom God’s favour rests*”, is, according to some authors, “any who will receive God’s grace and respond with faith”.¹² This understanding of the phrase coincides with the sense of the “*just*” and “*righteous*” above. It would seem then that the “*just/righteous*”, as those who are disposed to accept God’s works of salvation in faith, are the beneficiaries of God’s “*peace*” on earth.

There is here an underlining of the close relationship between *peace* and *justice / righteousness*. The psalmist sees them embrace (Ps 85:10); and Paul witnesses to their interdependence: “*Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...*” (Rom 5:1).

The Sense of the Peace of Christ

“*Peace*”, which is the fruit of “*justice*”, does not, therefore, have just a secular sense, it being the absence of conflict (Gen 34:21; Jos 9:15; 10:1,4; Luke 14:32), the presence of harmony in the home and within the family (Isa 38:17; Ps 37:11; 1 Cor 7:15; Matt 10:34; Luke 12:51), individual and communal (national) security and prosperity (Judg 18:6; 2 Kgs 20:19; Isa 32:18). Peace certainly exists when human beings and their societies fulfil their respective duties and recognize the rights of other persons and societies;¹³ and it is one of the results of working for justice.¹⁴ But “*peace*” also transcends the world and human efforts.¹⁵ It has also a religious sense, all “*peace*” being a gift of God (Isa 45:7); and the condition of peace being the presence of God (Num 6:26). Generally expressed as “*shalom*” (Old Testament) and “*eirēnē*” (LXX & New Testament), “*peace*” of any kind is a wholeness determined and given by God. Thus, while evildoers have no peace (Isa 48; Ps 34:14), a man’s righteousness under the covenant makes him peaceable.

“*Peace*” is causally related to “*justice*” as its effect (Isa 32:17); and it is used with “*uprightness*” (Mal 2:6), and “*truthfulness*” (Zech 8:19) as virtues of covenant living. The setting of their occurrences and usages is the covenant, as an act of God which restores man to wholeness and relationship with God. Precisely, on account of this covenant setting of Israel’s experience of “*peace*”, and in the light of Israel’s covenant failures, the post exilic writings of Israel would begin to see “*peace*” brought about by the chastisement of God’s servant (Isa 53:5).

Jesus Christ, in his mission and ministry, fulfilled the vision of the latter prophets of Israel; for he “was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification” (Rom 4:25). If “*peace*” comes from God (Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Rev 1:4) and is of God (Phil 4:7; Col 3:15; Rom 15:33), it is Christ himself who is that “*peace*” (Eph 2:14); and it is his gift (John 14:27). It is he who proclaims and establishes it (Eph 2:17). He is the presence of God, which brings the peace we cannot bring to ourselves. It comes with the kingdom/reign of God which calls for conversion. Ultimately, the “*peace*” of the kingdom is a gift, bestowed by the risen Christ on his community of followers; and it is also a gift which must be made manifest in the life and the conduct of members of the community towards one another.

As Jesus Bestows Peace

At his birth, the gift of “*peace*” was announced, as well as the disposition for receiving it: *those on whom his favour rested*, namely, the “*just/righteous* before God”.

¹² “Throughout Luke’s Gospel, ‘peace on earth’ comes to outcasts, disciples, foreigners, any who will receive God’s grace and respond with faith”; (cfr. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green et alii, InterVarsity Press 1992 pg. 605).

¹³ Cf. *Pacem in Terris* #91

¹⁴ *Gaudium et Spes* #84.

¹⁵ Although it is a task, something to work for, “peace” is a gift of God, something our earthly peace only dimly anticipates.

When Jesus healed the sick, he sent them away *“in peace”* (“go in peace”: Mark 5:34). “Go in peace” was not a mere parting blessing. It was the bestowal of *shalom*. The cured were not restored only to wholeness in their body; they were also set at peace with God by means of their faith, and made totally wholesome before God and man. In the case of the woman with haemorrhage (Mark 5:24-34), not only did Jesus heal her of her *“issue of blood”*, with whatever other social and religious uncleanness it implied. Jesus also exposed her faith: her healing before God (Mark 5:34; 2:5; 10:52). The miracle of her healing was a restoration to wholeness, to her community and to the God of her faith.

Jesus’ greeting of *“peace”* to his disciples on the morning of the resurrection (John 20:19-21) was both the pardoning of their betrayal and abandonment of Jesus as well as the restoration of friendship. Jesus did not require an admission of guilt on the part of his disciples. There was no request for pardon; and no apology was proffered. There was simply a benign glossing over of all failings. In its place are given a free pardon and a conciliatory greeting of *“peace”*.

The *“peace”* of Jesus is our peace for which he bore our chastisement (Isa 53:5). It is thus a free and an unmerited restoration to wholeness and to communion with God and with human community; and it is received by all who recognize it as God’s grace and respond with faith... i.e. *“those on whom God’s favour rests”*. Christians need to be *“those on whom God’s favour rests”*, so that they may receive, on earth, the peace which the angels announced: *the peace of Christ*. It is as such bearers on earth of Christ’s peace that Paul would exhort his Christian communities to pursue peace (Rom 14:19; Eph 4:3; Heb 12:14) and to be at peace with each other (Rom 12:18; 2 Cor 13:11). But it is also as such bearers on earth of the peace of Christ that we need to recall, as we did with *“justice”*, that “peace is an experience that goes beyond the strict application of justice. It requires *love*; and the love that makes peace possible enters the picture, when human beings share not only of their goods, but of themselves.”¹⁶

This then is a way in which the Bible can be considered a *“source”* of *“justice”* and of *“peace”*. It is in the sense of the Bible’s revelation and teaching about *“justice”* and *“peace”*.

“Justice” and “Peace” as Social Virtues: Commitments in the World of Christian Living

But there is also a sense in which the Bible, especially its reading, can be considered a *“source”* of *“justice”* and of *“peace”*. It is in the sense of the Bible *instructing and equipping for the exercise and the living of “justice” and of “peace”*. It is how the reading of the Bible, as Word of God, makes a person an *instrument of justice and of peace*, enabling him/her to live the implications of his *justification/justice* by God and Christ’s gift of *peace*. It is the living of what the Papal exhortation: *Verbum Domini*, calls the Christian’s *“commitments in the world”*.

“Justice” and “Peace” as Attributes of Humanity Redeemed

In its sense of *“justification*, God’s *justice* towards humanity, which constitutes the *justice* of humanity describes its redemption. “Humanity justified” is “humanity redeemed” and restored to communion both with God and among itself. Christ, the Word of the Eternal Father, is the means of humanity’s justification and redemption. Thus, the *Letter to the Hebrews* talks about the *“eternal redemption”* of humanity through the *“blood of Christ, offered through the eternal Spirit without blemish”* (Heb 9:12ff.). The *Letter of Peter* takes up the theme of humanity’s redemption through the *“precious blood of Christ”* (1 Pet 1:18-19), but it goes on to identify humanity’s redemption as a *“rebirth through the imperishable seed of the living and enduring Word of God”* (1 Pet 1:23). Jesus, the Word of God and God’s Word in the Scriptures is the means of humanity’s *justice* (justification/redemption).

It is as such that Jesus and his Word would cause the conversion of the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1ff.). As the Word of the Pentecost preaching of Peter, it would cause the conversion (*justification*) of three thousand listeners; and it would go forth in

¹⁶ Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes* #78.

the apostolic ministry of the followers of Jesus to bring “*the other sheep that do not belong to this fold*” (John 10:16). These are “*those who will believe in me (Christ) through their word*” (John 17:20).

As the means of our *justice*, the *Word of God*, then needs to be read and meditated to understand the import of our *justice (justification)*.

Humanity redeemed, Architects of an Earthly City which anticipates the Celestial City

Humanity's *justice* must become its way of life. God desires that his *justice* towards man becomes man's own *justice*. It must be made manifest, not only in humanity's relationship to God, but also in human relationships. It does so when it inspires, for example, human commitments and solidarities, including solidarity with creation.

The post-Synodal exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, under “The Word of God and Commitments in the world”, identifies several areas of such human commitments and show of solidarity (VD 99-108); and in all of them, as the Holy Father observes in the post Synodal exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, it is “God's word (which) inspires men and women to build relationships based on rectitude and justice, and testifies to the great value in God's eyes of every effort to create a more just and more liveable world” (VD 100).

Belonging to social communities, a common, but important, area of a show of commitment inspired by Christian sense of *justice* is the pursuit of the *common good* of the social community. To desire this and to strive towards it is, according to the Holy Father, *a requirement of justice and charity* (Civ. 7). “*Like all commitment to Justice*”, the Holy Father continues, “*it (the commitment to the common good) has a place within the testimony of divine charity that paves the way for eternity through temporal action. In an increasingly globalized society, the common good and the effort to obtain it cannot fail to assume the dimensions of the whole human family, that is to say, the community of peoples and nations, in such a way as to shape the earthly city in unity and peace, rendering it to some degree an anticipation and a pre-figuration of the undivided city of God* (Civ 7).

This vocation to *transcendence* of “the earthly city”, built by human activities inspired by the *justice* and *peace* of God, becomes possible because of the revelation and the self-manifestation of the heavenly in human history. For, indeed, “*the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright and godly...*” (Titus 2:11).



From Word to Commitment: *Implications of a Reading of the Bible which Takes Sides*

SAMUEL ALMADA *

Introduction

Certainly, all exegesis, scientific or not, is determined by the context of the life of the reader, by his concerns and existential questions which determine the perspective of the reading (eise-
gesis). In this way no exegesis can be absolutely objective or universally valid. In the first place the very weight of the reality which now surrounds us is what conditions and determines in great part our horizon of understanding and our questions and makes it irresponsible to attempt whatever kind of exegesis or interpretation of the text without taking into account this funda-
mental aspect. This has greater force today in a context of a greater flow of global information and of globalization in the area of communications.

And so today we cannot ignore that our Latin American context continues to be dominated by a picture of poverty, dispersion and disenchantment which characterize our perspective in read-
ing and understanding. This life situation determines our search for change and the articulation of sustainable programs of life, and stimulates us to assume responsibilities for the decisions which affect our own destiny.

As well, we ought to recognize that the situations of poverty and marginalization are the product of an old and current history of oppression and injustice which is very difficult to re-
verse quickly; and where external and internal factors and agents are mixed together. The result was the beginning of the social fabric where the integration of different sectors of society existed and impeded a productive system and egalitarian distribution of goods and benefits. As a result, the social imaginary and its possibilities of establishing ideas and alternative viable projects are seen to be affected. For example, if the original peoples of Latin America are not consulted or do not participate fully in social pacts it is natural that they oppose whatever type of program as good as it might appear; and this is one of the principal reasons that leads to a chronic impossi-
bility of establishing agreements and concrete projects which might be fully representative. As such the movements of liberation currently ought to focus on the full integration of the different actors of our society and in the articulation of projects which are based on dialogue and take into account their own social and cultural processes, which in its own way is a more relevant way of participating in a globalized world.

To take into account the context of life as the starting point for the reading of the text and its projections on community life converges with the theological and hermeneutical principle that understands God as the God of history who is revealed in the events of the world and of peoples and not only in the already spoken word.¹

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¹ This fundamental guideline is more fully developed and explained by J. Severino Croatto, *Liberación y libertad – Pautas hermenéuticas*, Buenos Aires, Mundo Nuevo, 1973, 8 and 17.

We talk about communal reading or reception because in the final instance every text exists thanks to a living community which receives it, transmits it and also is moulded by the received text. In this way the reader finds himself included in the text and forms part of it; and at the same time, he is interpreting his texts but just as the said community interprets itself to itself.

If the reference to the author and to the *Sitz im Leben* of a text constitutes its background, the reading community finds itself in what we call the foreground of the text; and even though these two levels imply each other, the foreground always goes beyond and determines the perspective and the ways of approaching the text; and since every reading is done from a determined context what is relevant is the message for the life of the one who receives it.

"The significance of the text is always an event which is born from the intersection between the obligations that a text imposes which are determined in great part by its *Sitz im Leben*, and the different expectations of a series of communities of reading and interpretation which the presumed authors of the text being considered would not be able to anticipate."² In this sense the hermeneutic attentive to the history of the reception of the text always will be conscious and respectful of the irreducible plural meaning of the same and of its permanent reserve of meaning.

1. Perspective of a Community of Reading

Evangelical Perspective

We define our perspective of approaching the text as *evangelical* in reference to the context of the churches and evangelical thought. This means assuming some general theological presuppositions in the frame of evangelical history, traditions and identity. For example, we can point out the centrality of the Bible in theological debate and the orientation of its practices; in Latin America congregational organization and the autonomy of local congregations predominate; history is marked by dissidence in front of the dominant religion and its influences in the power of national states. In different ways we evangelicals have expressed the right to be different, which shows a considerable degree of conviction and commitment to beliefs and practices.

In the last 20 years the number of evangelicals has grown significantly as also has the number of denominations, all of which reflects a dynamic process of changes in transformation in the interior of the evangelical world. This has provoked a crisis in evangelical identity and has led to a profound replanting of its perspectives of insertion and interaction with the world which present concrete challenges for theological reflection and the reading of the Bible. One of the particular and current challenges of the evangelical world is to move from dissidence and protest to a more protagonist role and one committed to public and



² This is the definition proposed by André LaCocque and Paul Ricoeur in *Penser la Bible*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1998, 9 (my translation). We are also taking from here some concepts concerning the role which the reading community plays in the determination of the meaning of a text (see 12-13).

social life and to collaboration in the elaboration of new social and cultural paradigms.

Community Perspective

Communal reading of the texts maintains an affinity with the characteristics of the history of the reception of the text of the Bible on the part of diverse reading communities of different eras; and it also falls in line with the process of the production of the text as a collective work which is a characteristic of the majority of the biblical books. The diverse types of reading and interpretation which were being established in the Jewish tradition such as *midrash* were arising from reflection in the heart of the community not from the work of specialists.

Prophecy for example is an expression which is produced from the heart of the community and is not the preaching of an outsider. In the majority of cases one ought to be talking as well about collective authorship, since the composition of the text reflects a long process in which different communities, sectors and persons of different places and errors intermix. Therefore, it is relevant to speak about prophecy as a communitarian phenomenon; and in turn, when the receiving community incarnates the prophetic message and is transformed into a bearer of the same, we are able to talk about prophetic community.

A communitarian reading of the Bible is a modality widely developed in evangelical circles and in many ways similar to what is known as popular reading or as reading from the grass-roots. This modality implies particular ideological concepts about the methods of the production of knowledge and also about the modes of participation in an organization or a group.

The communitarian perspective is opposed to the individualistic one but the participation and the role of individuals is fundamental for the creation of the community which requires an individual and voluntary solidarity. It is important to understand individual responsibility as the basis for the communitarian project in which individual and group interests are subordinated to the common good. The communitarian presupposes a horizontal form of organization in which knowledge and other goods are distributed in equitably. The hierarchies and priorities ought to be established attending preferentially to the situation of the most weak and disfavoured.

Ecumenical Perspective

The ecumenical perspective presupposes a biblical reading which is open to dialogue among diverse foci and emphases, but also which permits and stimulates the interchange with communities reading other books sacred or not and includes those which have no book. If the Bible, which is one of the principal references of the evangelical world, does not help us participate in a frank and open dialogue with all, we ought to re-plant our own theological paradigms and those of biblical reading.³

In the context of a world evermore interrelated, the ecumenical perspective is even more necessary and relevant; nevertheless, for many evangelical sectors continues to be problematic since it is perceived as having a certain relativism which impedes whatever pretension to the truth, and therefore it is not seen as an affirmation of values and beliefs which lead to commitment and the strengthening of participation in the community.

It is helpful to remember that in a certain way ecumenism is the child of Protestantism and perhaps the space where Protestantism has made one of its principal contributions to Christianity; part of the inheritance of the reformers was their attempt to achieve a catholicity or poly-catholicity.

Ecumenical also implies the affirmation of universal values such as freedom of conscience and its expression, justice, human rights, the right to life. The ecumenical requires a disposition and attitude favourable to dialogue and needs to be conscious that a true dialogue produces

³ Raimon Panikkar offers some clues with regard to reflection on an ecumenical dialogue, “¿Es universal el lenguaje cristiano?”, in *Los caminos inexhauribles de la Palabra* (homenaje a J. Severino Croatto, Buenos Aires, Lumen-ISEDET, 2000, 585-607).

transformations in all the participants and enriches them in different ways. Lastly, the ecumenical perspective also requires the taking of a position and a commitment. There can be no dialogue about any theme if the different interlocutors do not define their positions or are not coherent in their praxis. Therefore, contrary to what is thought in some cases, the ecumenical perspective affirms and strengthens the identity of the interlocutors, their history and their traditions, and it is from this particular place that each interlocutor ought to articulate the ideas and projects which contribute to dialogue.

2. The Text of the Bible and the Word of God: Closing and Opening

When we refer to the text of the Bible we sometimes about think about something “fixed”, “closed”, whose development ended with the last redaction and later canonization and modern exegesis and historical-critical methods have also contributed to this idea. The written tradition, although it represents a certain determination or limitation, was not conceived as a form of closing off the sense of the text or interrupting its development, but entirely to the contrary, the fixing of the text permits its own new openings and interpretations. “To announce the closure of the text is like giving a funeral eulogy about a person still alive. The eulogy can be faithful and appropriate but is not therefore less awkward and premature.”⁴

We ought not to deny that part of this tendency for the “freezing” and the “closing” of texts came from the pretension of some sectors to monopolize the right to interpretation of the same, and so to exercise control over other sectors and other reading communities. Biblical fundamentalism, literalism, the concept of inerrancy and other types of reductionist or exclusionary reading reflect such a tendency. On the other



hand, we ought to be conscious that every reading of the text, in a context and in a determined situation, necessarily implies a form of closing, but does not set itself up as an exclusionary and unique criterion but in order to be pertinent and relevant for the specific situation; and in every case such a closing at the same time offers new openings.

Fortunately, there have always been and are ways of opening texts and producing new readings. Different traditions and foci of eras and different places have enriched the laudable spiral of interpretation and meaning of the texts. For example, the Jewish tradition speaks of a *written Torah* accompanied by *orally transmitted Torah*. There is no separation between the two; the second constitutes a prolongation of the former and gives it vitality and the capacity to fill the temporary space.⁵

The Christian tradition relates the Bible to the word of God. There is no reference to a text or writing of God; in this sense the Scripture signals and refers to the word of God and not the reverse. The *word* implies orality and the *scripture* implies texts; now it is impossible to reduce the

⁴ Cf. A. LaCocque and P. Ricoeur, *Penser la Bible*, 11-12.

⁵ Ibid., 10.

word to a text, and this is one of the reasons because of which a text keeps an irreducible polyvalency and a permanent reserve of meaning. A text is always able to say more than it has said or says.

The concept of the word of God applied to the Bible offers us new clues for understanding the written tradition as a horizon of an always open reading, not one finished with the last redaction. The word pertains to the orbit of the spirit. Therefore, we can speak about the Word of God as a permanent word, a living word, that which is impossible to reduce to a text.

3. The Centrality of the Bible in the Theological Debate

We rescued this principle inherited from the Reformation, since it is a symbol of evangelical identity which manifests itself in the central role which the Bible plays in theological debate and the orientation of the practices of the community. The Bible results in this way in a kind of mirror or parameter (*canon* = cane for measuring, measurement) by which the community looks at itself and interprets itself; it is a point of encounter and the basis for dialogue and the agreements of the community; it is a font of authority and a criterion for truth.

The evangelical hermeneutical principle of *sola scriptura* also implies considering the text of the Bible as a whole, a unit; the establishment of a *canon* has to do with this idea. The Bible is made up of different parts which speak about the same thing but in a different manner. The principal axes which structure the great narrative of the Bible as a totality are justice, love and fidelity, hope, the covenant, prophecy, the presence of God as grace, judgment, liberty;⁶ and this also illuminates and orients the fragmented reading or its parts.

This evangelical hermeneutical perspective has enriched generations of Christians and has stimulated dialogue both within and outside of the community; but it is important to attend to some implications of this principle so that it does not arise from reductionist or authoritarian practices.

In the first place, the principle of *sola scriptura* does not imply that the whole world ought to accept this parameter or that there is only one way to interpret the Bible. Readings of a literalist and/or exclusionary type which some evangelical sectors support do not respond to this principle, because they are the product of radical positions in front of existential situations which the community experiences. It is important to remember that the reformers, together with this, also supported other principles equally important which had and continue to have a great influence on the later evangelical traditions (*sola gratia, sola fides, solo Christo*).

Secondly, the affirmation of this principle at times serves to conceal or hide the lenses or "prejudices" with which the reader approaches the text. It is obvious that a text cannot be read in a vacuum and in every case it is important to be conscious of the cultural, ideological and personal baggage which conditions our reading. This in turn permits us to consider and improve our criteria for reading and its articulation with the life of the community.

Thirdly, the essential relationship of the text to the living community which receives it and transmits it should not be severed. For example, in Christian exegesis it is important to consider seriously the relation between the text of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and its community of origin, the people of Israel. Currently whatever type of approach to the biblical text also has to consider its relation with the community of faith which receives and transmits it (see what is mentioned below about confessional reading of biblical texts).

4. Critical Methodology and Sociopolitical Reading of the Bible

A concrete example of how the hermeneutical principle of the Reformation of *sola scriptura* brought about new perspectives in approaching the Bible is the fact that the reformers were among the principal driving force of the initial critical study of the Bible, something which later continued to deepen in different evangelical traditions, developing what is known as the histori-

⁶ Cf. J. Severino Croatto, *Hermenéutica bíblica*, Buenos Aires, Lumen, 1994, 92.

cal-critical methods which protect the validity into our own times as the mark of the scientific study of the Bible.⁷

In the last century, traditional historical-critical methods were also seen to be enriched by new approaches to the biblical text coming from linguistics. Without doing damage to what we have said about the close relationship between the text and the receiving community, and the appropriateness of historical-critical methods, linguistics has offered a complementary perspective which emphasizes the synchronizing of the text with approaches of a different type, among which we can underline structuralism and the semiotic analysis of the text. This has offered new perspectives for understanding texts and has been a significant step toward the enrichment of its sense, their appropriation of and rereading.

Currently, an unavoidable aspect of critical methodology is created by the sociopolitical and economic reading of the text, which just as do historical-critical methods it works on what we have earlier called the background or what lies behind the text. The sociopolitical and economic reading allows us to discern in the texts sociological and ideological aspects and those of power which are present in the context of the production of said texts, and in this way it offers useful and pertinent criteria and parameters to illuminate the sociopolitical context of the current reader (who is in front of the text), enriching the hermeneutical spiral.

The sociopolitical and economic reading encourages a committed reading and offers a greater consciousness of the criterion of subjectivity with which we understand our own reality and read our texts. This aspect is shown with clarity in the Bible's own history and in the different forms of utilization of the same by distinct groups or sectors of Christians. It is not the same to read the Bible from the position of the rich and powerful, as from the position of the poor and oppressed; it is not the same to use the Bible to justify and support inhumane policies, sow the seeds of war and destruction, and appropriate what belongs to another which in order to reclaim the right to a dignified life is the goal of all oppression and solidarity among peoples. Meanwhile some read in the Bible that God wants peace and security; others read that God demands justice and liberation; it all depends on who, how and in what conditions one reads it.

5. Scientific Method and Confessional Reading

All the methods mentioned above fall within what is frequently designated as the scientific study of the Bible, while reading from the angle of faith or a confessional reading of the Bible is seen as excluded from this category. In the first place, we ought to recognize that the perspective of a confessional reading is constitutive of the Bible and has been fundamental in the reception, transmission and relevance of the text, and therefore is a necessary and central focus when one is considering and pondering our methods of approach. In addition, if we have affirmed that every method implies a certain subjectivity, and so one can speak of the human and social sciences, equally we are able to accept a confessional reading in the scientific and academic dialogue.

It would be impossible to read for example the story of the Exodus and the liberation from the country of slavery without considering or understanding the language of faith which expresses the presence of a God who intervenes in the history of his people in order to save them. Such a story has an undisputed theological value, and so the "more historical" narrations are interpreted in order to express a dimension of faith.

Until recently the irreconcilable positions between the scientific methodology and the focus that comes from faith have different objectives. One of them is the domination achieved in the modern era by the scientific paradigm and its positivistic rationality which was invading different spheres of knowledge in the Christian West; and in this way believing that it was overcoming the obscurantism and superstition nurtured by religious expressions which heretofore were dominant, it was excluding God, theology and confessional hypotheses from the scientific paradigm. If indeed it is certain that religion was losing its dominant role with the heyday of the En-

⁷ See for example the exegetical and hermeneutical indications developed by Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher and others, in F. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutik*, Heidelberg, H. Kimmerle, 1959 and 1974.

lightenment and of modern science, it is also clear that obscurantism and superstition continued to exist; and on the other hand, it is no less certain that scientific rationality also had recourse to faith in order to affirm many of its fundamental axioms and paradigms.

In Latin America, where religious experience has always been significant, in recent years the perspective of faith in reading the Bible was seen to be reinforced by means of a certain questioning and disenchantment in central countries with relation to the paradigms which support modern scientific rationality. In this process also the mutually exclusive and antagonistic positions of the scientific and confessional approaches to the Bible have been lessened, and today there exists a greater openness to move toward new dialogic and complementary paradigms. We might be able to fit this issue in the same line of thought which Ricoeur develops in one of his last reflections: *La Critique et la Conviction*;⁸ it is there that some dialogic and reciprocal relations are established which are valid and appropriate for our reflection, for example, between the critique and the conviction, emancipation and loyalty, between clarity and what is vague, accounting for and to saying no (place a limit), between changing and holding on to a fixed point.

6. Ecumenical and Intercultural Reading of the Bible

If indeed it is certain that the confessional reading must be done in close relationship to the community of faith, which implies a closing and an affirmation of identity, this does not mean that we ought to isolate ourselves in our criterion or transform it into a unique criterion. On the contrary, it is precisely from our reading (interpretation, closing) and from the affirmation of a particular identity that we are able to go to the encounter with the other and that we are able to dialogue.

For some it is not possible to enter into an ecumenical and intercultural dialogue which takes as its point of reference the Bible; and if indeed it is inappropriate to impose on others a determined criterion of truth or a source of authority (as the Bible is for Christians), it will not be renouncing our convictions or excluding the Bible as we come to contribute to the dialogue and to the understanding with other religions and cultures. The Bible is a valid platform from our identity and culture in order to contribute to the dialogue, although we ought to remember that it is not a book which is read in a vacuum, but which is closely related to the living community and also which comes mediated by the criteria of interpretation of its readers.



Therefore, a responsible way to move toward an ecumenical and intercultural dialogue is by making ourselves aware of our history and traditions with their potential but also by making ourselves aware of the complexity and contradictions. It also implies a rereading of our knowledge and the definition of the theological and ideological positions which orient our commitment. Finally, it requires an attitude open to the voice of the spirit which allows us to expose

⁸ *La Critique et la Conviction – Entretiens avec François Azouvi et Marc de Launay*, Calmann-Lévy, 1995.

ourselves to dialogue and to the gaze of the other, in order to receive what is different as a truth sent from God.

7. Regarding the Word which Frees for Commitment

The reading of the Bible in a liberating key accompanied the movement of the theology of liberation from its beginnings and was one of its fundamental resources. One of the characteristics of this movement is that it extended itself beyond the churches, reaching to the universities, the social movements of workers and other actors; it also served as an inspiration in other continents to illuminate and accompany different movements of liberation, offering alternatives to the theology and biblical reading realized in central countries.⁹

With the passing of the years this paradigm began to exhibit some limitations and difficulties in responding to the social and cultural changes with their new challenges, but nevertheless it is important to hold on to the principle of its original intuition. Its relevance comes given by the social situation in Latin America which, far from improving, in many aspects and for the majority, is worse than 30 years ago.

Given this reality we again affirm that the Bible pertains preferentially to the poor and the oppressed, who have a more adequate perspective in order to reread the biblical curricula. A current challenge along this line of thought is the emergence of new subjects and situations which reclaim their right to interpret and to be interpreted by the Bible: *First Nations, Afro-American cultures, the ecological perspective and that of sustainable life, the perspective of gender*.¹⁰ This represents an opportunity to re-create the biblical message and to offer new understandings which support specific contexts and situations. Reading as the production of new understandings has been fundamental to the composition of the Bible itself and in the history of its reception, and is the way to transmit a living word, relevant and pertinent for every time.

Another challenge is to place the focus of the debate and action on our own possibilities to change and to overcome the history of injustice and inequality, articulating a coherent discourse with the processes and dynamics which belong to our social and cultural reality. Following that guideline cited earlier about the revelation of God in history and in its events, *praxis* is the decisive point on which the spoken word is based. It is also there where ideas are proven and where the validity and efficacy of theory ought to be demonstrated. In the schema of a liberating hermeneutic, *praxis* occupies an essential role in the production of meaning and the enrichment of the hermeneutical circle.

About Commitment: Conviction, Ethics and Mission

Commitment is the first step in beginning to walk on the road of liberation. In the first place, we talk about conviction as an essential constituent of commitment and of ethics, and it also represents a significant emphasis in the evangelical confession. Conviction is the identification with the ideas and beliefs which are adhered to; it is a reflection of intellectual honesty which is not always so obvious. In evangelical thought, conviction is intimately related to the act or experience of faith and is a basic expression of belonging to the community; therefore, we talk about the "baptism of believers", we utilize preferably the term "believer" to refer to the Christian and in general there is less space for only nominal belonging. This position also involves the experience of conversion and a tendency toward differentiation and dissidence relative to the mentality of the world, which in its turn represents a significant potential for the change which perhaps has still not encountered a defined channel and is not sufficiently benefited from.

⁹ A current and more detailed review of this history, and some valiative considerations of the same can be read in the article by Néstor Míguez, "Lectura Latinoamericana de la Biblia – Experiencias y desafíos" in *Cuadernos de Teología XX* (2001) 77-99, and also in Juan José Tamayo and Juan Bosch (editors), *Panorama de la teología latinoamericana*, Estella, Verbo Divino, 2001.

¹⁰ See the proposal of Pablo Richard regarding this matter in "Hermenéutica – Camino de encuentro con la Palabra de Dios – Diez principios teóricos sobre la Lectura Comunitaria de la Biblia", *Los caminos inexhauribles de la Palabra*, 539-541.

Secondly, we affirm the necessity of an ethic which is consequent and coherent with the ideas and beliefs to which we hold, something which is also not always obvious. The Hebrew term *halajá*, which means road or journey, illustrates for us this idea of an ethic as the concrete conduct by which we express and interpret the word. Ethics does not allude to what one ought to do or to what one would do, but to what one effectively does, the deeds, which habitually are more eloquent than words.

Thirdly, mission will be almost a consequence of conviction, ethics and commitment, but it helps to develop a little more the concept since for some the term is conflictive and may result in confusion. Unfortunately, many times the term mission has been used to refer to the practice of imposition of ideas and compulsive proselytism which has sufficient historical basis to provoke the refusal of many. But still, we ought not allow the idea or basic concept of mission to fall away since it has a highly positive and constructive weight, which implies a commitment to the ideas and involvement in the actions of transformation.

The concept of mission is closely related with ecumenism, and in both cases the lack of definitions is just as prejudicial as indifference. At times one gets the impression that for some to express their own beliefs, to take positions or to have a point of reference, is not compatible with openness to dialogue and with tolerance. Tolerance is not to accept whatever, but rather the capacity to listen to and to understand particularly the person who thinks differently, in order to establish dialogue and to seek together those points of encounter and cooperation.

Toward a Mobilizing Prophetic Ideology

Prophetic ideology is an essential component of the hermeneutic and the movements of liberation. Here we might note three pertinent dimensions of biblical prophecy which Croatto emphasizes in one of his works:¹¹ *the critic, the conscientizer, and the interpreter of the times*. Prophecy is in the first place a critique of sin and of the lie in the midst of the people; and so it denounces evil and injustice in all its forms and demands conversion and a change of attitude. Prophecy is a factor in conscientization of the inauthentic and alienated person; it unmasks what is false and situates itself in reality; for instance, it unmasks the false cult of God and the deceitful announcements of peace. Prophecy interprets the times and discerns the history, and so it affects the political and those factors of power. Prophecy also has a fundamental role in the orientation and elaboration of proposals, and it proclaims the establishment of covenants. The force of the prophet is in the word, not in his political, economic, military or priestly power; he is not a popular chief or leader. The authority of the Word comes from the spirit of God which is manifested in the community, in accord with what we have said earlier with reference to the communitarian perspective.

The privileged ambit of the application of a mobilizing prophetic ideology is the education and culture which is where the moral crisis and the crisis of humanity which affect society are also reflected. The processes of transformation and improvement of the conditions of life are intimately connected to education and culture, since they work to produce a genuine change from below; from there will come a better distribution of riches, politicians obedient to the voice of the sovereign people and a more just integration with the world.

This also leads to a renewed meaning of political and social action, in a context where a great part of political leadership is devalued and contaminated by deeds of corruption and the system of representation is in crisis. It is fundamental to reclaim politics as the space for the exercise of freedom and re-vindication of citizen rights, which implies a greater presence and protagonism of society in the control of the public life.

¹¹ See *Liberación y libertad – Pautas hermenéuticas*, Buenos Aires, Mundo Nuevo, 1973, 71-91.

The Bible and the Culture of Martyrdom in the Near East A Theological Reading of 2 Maccabees 6-7

YARA MATTA •

Introduction

For those who explore the Holy Scriptures, to speak of the Bible and culture would spontaneously send us back to the environments which transmitted and produced the revealed Word, handed on by numerous generations, through a complex and complicated history. Now, would exploring the vestiges of the past and the depths of all these civilisations of the ancient East illuminate the link between the Bible and the culture of the Near East today? What repercussions does one or other biblical theme have in the present existence of a Christian in this region, exposed to persecution, to martyrdom, each day? What has become of the rich heritage for which the blood of a host of martyrs has been shed, since the Christian era? Already at the end of the first century Ignatius of Antioch (who died towards 107) wrote to the Romans: "It is with a good heart that I am going to die for God (...). Let me be food for the beasts, by way of which it will be possible for me to find God. I am the wheat of God and I am ground by the teeth of the beasts, to be pure bread of Christ" (*Romans* IV,1). His desire for martyrdom has only one reason: "provided only that I find Jesus Christ", he says in the same letter (V,3). He continues further on: "It is he whom I seek, who died for us; he whom I desire, who rose for us. My coming to birth is near" (VI,1).

Today, nineteen centuries later, Christians in the East are faced with the painful reality of a similar situation. They must be ready at any moment to give an account of the hope that is in them (1 Pet 3:15). It is in this context that the Maronite Patriarch Béchara Raï named the year 2017 in the Maronite Church "*the year of martyrdom¹ and of the martyrs*", inviting the faithful to live it as "a unique occasion to renew their Christian commitment in witnessing to Christ and to be ready to crown this witness with martyrdom if need be, "so that love would triumph over hatred; peace over war; fraternity over enmity, and justice over injustice" (Circular letter of February 9, 2017, n. 20).

This set of circumstances places the culture of martyrdom in dialogue with the biblical data. Is the believer therefore called to witness to his faith and to his hope while preparing to give life even to the shedding of his blood? What are the Old Testament foundations of the later Christian theologies of martyrdom? And what sense can be derived from them for today? In the context of this modest presentation I propose simply to reread two passages of the second Book of Maccabees. After some preliminary remarks, I will dwell briefly on the historical and socioreligious context of the book before paying particular attention to 2 Macc 6-7, as a key text on the theme of martyrdom in the Jewish tradition and also as an important foundation for Christian theological reflections on the same theme.

Preliminary Remarks

The Greek words *martus* and *marturion* appear in the Greek Bible of the Septuagint, while the Hebrew Bible contains no cases of martyrdom in the strict sense of a violent death, inflicted by

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¹ In Arab, the word *chahâda* means both martyrdom and witness.

hostile authorities and which the persecuted believer chooses rather than apostasy. The terms in the *LXX* are often used in the sense of a judicial or juridical statement, of a specific witness. However, despite lacking this terminology, the books of Maccabees offer one or more theologies of martyrdom, which prepare the ground for Christian theological reflection.² Besides, the first Fathers of the Church freely make allusion to this Maccabean literature in the context of the stories of martyrdom,³ in spite of the diversity of the theological approaches of each book.

Among the four books which have come down to us, only 1 and 2 Macc belong in the Catholic Bible, while 3 and 4 Macc are found in the canon of certain oriental Orthodox churches. It is necessary to remember that the history is not continuous in these books and that they do not necessarily belong to the same milieus or to the same periods. Furthermore, the first two deuterocanonical books do not carry the same ideology of resistance, as has been well shown by K. Berthelot.⁴ In fact, she reveals two different modes of presentation: one of armed resistance, and another of martyrdom. A certain polemical tension can be perceived between 1 Macc and 2 Macc. The first book acknowledged the strength of the armed opposition and sets up a laudatory portrait of Judas the warrior and of his successors who had led the revolt against the Seleucids. By contrast, 2 Macc honours the way of martyrdom.⁵ K. Berthelot concludes rightly that Maccabean ideology is “plural”, because “if 2 Macc contains the first examples of Jewish martyrs, 1 Macc, while still reporting the same events, does not produce a eulogy of martyrdom, but rather presents a call to armed struggle against the oppressors of Israel and against the apostates who are within the nation”.⁶ What is at stake is fidelity to the Law and to Jewish customs in the face of Hellenism. The two books of the Catholic canon relate the reaction of the Jewish conscience, attached to ancestral traditions, to every apostasy or subjection. But it is 2 Macc which is particularly attached to the way of martyrdom and which therefore invites our attention. Before looking at the famous stories of the martyrdom of Eleazar and that of the seven brothers and their mother (2 Macc 6:18–7:41) we will consider briefly the historical and especially the socioreligious context of this book.

Second Book of Maccabees: The Historical Context

Experts consider that this work dates to 120-110 before our era, and that it was produced by an anonymous writer who summarised the Greek work of a certain Jason of Cyrene, otherwise unknown (2 Macc 2:23). The events recounted cover the persecution ordered by Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164) and the victories of Judas Maccabee. This persecution seems to have originated from a party of priests and bourgeoisie in Jerusalem who wanted to become part of the surrounding Mediterranean culture so as to be able to participate in international trade.⁷ These Jews did not seek to abandon the Law or ancestral traditions as such, but rather everything which suggested they were an isolated and special people, things like circumcision, sabbath, or food laws (cf. 1 Macc 1:11-15). Now, the ideology of *2 Maccabees* celebrates the fidelity to the Law of



² See for example C. Tassin, *Une théologie du martyre* (the full bibliography is at the end of the article).

³ See R. Ziadé, *Les martyrs Maccabées*.

⁴ See K. Berthelot, *L'idéologie maccabéenne*.

⁵ With a distance of almost two centuries, the fourth book takes up through a slightly different partial reading the story of Eleazar's martyrdom together with the seven brothers and their mother in 2. Macc.

⁶ K. Berthelot, *L'idéologie maccabéenne*, 101.

⁷ See the interesting presentation in C. Tassin, *Des Maccabées à Hérode le Grand*.

certain Jews and condemns the apostasy of others. Even if the focus is not on active zeal and extirpation of the impious as in 1 Maccabees, this attachment to everything which displays Jewish identity becomes a sign and a guarantee of ability to die for the Law. Thus, as K. Berthelot⁸ correctly states, the general tendency of 2 Macc is to establish a privileged link between martyrdom and the insistence on respect for food laws, up to the point of showing Judas Maccabee “as a hermit preoccupied particularly by ritual purity” and “respect for *Kashrut*”.

The hardening of positions of identity derives then not only from religious membership, but also brings a sociological dimension which is both political and cultural. Judaism (*ioudaismos*)⁹ does not simply describe the Jewish religion in general but rather, in contrast to Hellenism, the zeal of Jews who are attached to the Law of the Fathers, at risk of losing their lives. Besides, if for the Greeks other peoples are uncivilised *barbarians*, 2 Macc 2:21 reverses the perspective and salutes “the courageous ones who struggled generously for *Judaism* (...) and pursued the crowd of *barbarians*...”. We can note with C. Tassin¹⁰ “the contradiction all through the book between the armed struggle to save the values of Israel and, on the other hand, the apparent passivity of the martyrs” as “a way of showing that it is the exemplary sacrifice of the latter which inspires the combatants”.

In fact, when Judas and his companions implore the Lord in 2 Macc 8:3-4, they ask him to hear “the blood which cried out to him, to remember the evil massacre of innocent little children...”. Immediately after, Judas becomes invincible fighting the Gentiles, because the divine anger turned to mercy (2 Macc 8:5). It is in fact the blood of the martyrs which permits the action of Judas, supported by the divine blessing. In short, for the author of 2 Macc the martyrs play a capital part in the struggle against Seleucid power and for the defence of the Law, even if they do not take up arms. It is a form of resistance against those who wish to bring to an end the particular nature of Israel in a complex historical and political context. How does this attitude of fidelity to God at the religious level emerge through the story of the martyrdom of Eleazar and of the seven brothers?

The Martyrdom of Eleazar (2 Macc 6:18-31)

In the reign of Antiochus IV, the Jews were obliged to take part in pagan feasts, as shown by 2 Macc 6:7. In the surrounding culture these ritual displays encouraged more political submission than the declaration of an act of faith in the king. However, the reality is more complicated. For the Jews, it is God who is the King of Israel. How then could they separate the political from the religious? Besides, according to 2 Macc 7:3, king Antiochus is present at the torture of the martyrs, a way the author has of imposing his own reading of the events. Furthermore, the author speaks in a moving exhortation before relating the death of Eleazar and of the seven brothers:

Now I urge anyone who may read this book not to be dismayed at these calamities but to reflect that such punishments were intended not to destroy our race but to discipline it. Indeed, when evildoers are not left for long to their own devices, but incur swift retribution, it is a sign of great benevolence. In the case of other nations, the Master waits patiently for them to attain the full measure of their sins before he punishes them, but with us he has decided to deal differently, rather than have to punish us later when our sins come to full measure. And so he never entirely withdraws his mercy from us; he may discipline us by some disaster, but he does not desert his own people. Let this be said simply by way of reminder; we must return to our story without more ado. (2 Macc 6:12-17)

As an introduction to the narrative of martyrdom, the author traces the context in which it should be understood and thus encourages the readers to interpret theologically the sufferings of the just. Persecutions have firstly an educational value for the people, but they are also the

⁸ K. Berthelot, *L'idéologie maccabéenne*, 106.

⁹ The term is used four times in 2 Macc: 2:21, 8:1, 14:38*. See the use in Paul's letter to the Galatians where the apostle explains his zeal for the traditional Jewish traditions (Gal 1:13-14).

¹⁰ C. Tassin, *Une théologie du martyre*, 80.

sign of God's goodness, because the impious will be punished.¹¹ According to a traditional Old Testament response the just will have their reward and the wicked will not prosper for ever (cf. Gen 15:13-14; Ps 94:3.5; etc.).

In this context the harrowing account of the martyrdom of Eleazar shows its rich meaning. His tormentors want to force him to consume pig's meat, which is forbidden by the law of Moses (Lev 11:7; Deut 14:8). The context of the affair seems to be cultic, concerning offerings and sacrifices, which accentuates the outrageous offense against the culture and the religion of Israel. There are some who counsel Eleazar to pretend to submit to the ordinance of the king. The refusal of the old man can be understood by his concern to be an example for younger generations:

Pretence (hupokrithênai) does not befit our time of life; many young people would suppose that Eleazar at the age of ninety had conformed to the foreigners' way of life and, because I had played this part for the sake of a paltry brief spell of life, might themselves be led astray on my account. I should only bring defilement and disgrace on my old age. (2 Macc 6:24-25)

This man, "already advanced in years and of most noble appearance", does not register in the text the hope of resurrection. His conviction and his faith in the living Lord God determine his irreproachable conduct: "Even though for the moment I avoid execution by man, I can never, living or dead, elude the grasp of the *Pantokratôr*" (2 Macc 6:26). In spite of the absence of the teaching of the resurrection, Eleazar recognises and proclaims the dominion of the Lord over the whole earth. Even if the text stays with the traditional concept of *Shéol* (*Hadès*, 2 Macc 6:23), it shows that the Lord God is master of the world and treats the living and the dead with justice. Similarly, according to Jewish tradition, a long life is regularly connected to the blessing of the Lord (Prov 3:1-2). Eleazar receives such a blessing and at the same time proclaims values appreciated in the Greek world, such as dignity, courage and noble example. His portrait is thus able to win the esteem of all, but what marks a true difference is its being rooted, not in any philosophical doctrine, such as Stoicism, but in attachment to the "holy legislation established by God" (2 Macc 6:23), "to the venerable and holy laws" (v. 28) and to the "fear of the Lord" (v. 30). To die for the Law is the same in this sense as wishing to die for God. The aim of this is not to receive the reward of eternal life, but to express profound faith in God, so as to give to the young a convincing example so that their zeal for the faith and for the values of their fathers is aroused.

At the end of this story, the reader understands that the evocation of the martyrdom of Eleazar is not intended to *report a tragedy*, but to give *a lesson of life, courage and virtue for the later generation of readers*.¹² The noble old man has in mind the edification of his people persecuted and despised by their oppressors. In this enterprise the hope of resurrection does not yet enter, while the motif of *Sheol* reveals a just Lord God who saves and rewards the faithful immediately after their death. Presented as an eminent teacher of the Law (2 Macc 6:18), Eleazar¹³ is different however from the "teachers of the people" evoked in similar circumstances in the book of Daniel (11:32-35), because the prophet takes the perspective of resurrection (Dan 12:2-3).

The conclusion of the story in v.31 makes clear that this memorial of virtue touched not only the young but also the great majority of the nation. In fact, this moving narrative insists less on the horrifying details of the public execution and more on the edification of the reader. The theology which it presents can be explored in three directions. Firstly, God is shown as a teacher who educates his people. Secondly, God remains faithful to his promises and his judgement is unavoidable even if not immediate. Finally, the sublime act of martyrdom is recounted in view of the younger generation and of potential future readers. The heroism of Eleazar will bear fruit, but a new motif will be set forth in the following story (2 Macc 7) to justify the acceptance of martyrdom, that of resurrection.

¹¹ See J. A. Goldstein, *II Maccabees*, 280, who offers a historical review of this theological idea: When 2 Macc was composed, Antioch IV had already disappeared, in 164, and that shows the readers that God keeps his promises.

¹² C. Tassin, *Une théologie du martyre*, 88.

¹³ 4 Macc 7:6-11 presents Eleazar as a priest. For C. Tassin, *Une théologie du martyre*, 85, Eleazar might represent the group of lawyers related to the priesthood (see Sir 38:34-39:11).

The Martyrdom of the Seven Brothers and of their Mother (2 Macc 7:1-42)

The tale of this martyrdom is immersed in a style which is both profoundly sad and suggestive, as it “betrays the depth of feeling of Jason and of his summariser”.¹⁴ The first book of Maccabees makes allusion elsewhere to such events, noting that “many in Israel stood firm and found the courage to refuse unclean food; they chose death rather than contamination by such fare or profanation of the holy covenant, and they were executed” (1 Macc 1:62-63). In spite of the typical legendary traits of oral transmission and popular traditions, the event undeniably has a historical basis. Emphasising the horror with detail simply intends to win over the readers to a noble cause; this explains the gruesome display of tongues cut off, of heads stripped of skin, severed limbs and burned bodies.

The seven brothers and their mother are faced, like Eleazar, with the impudent command to consume pork. The first of the boys explains right away the reason for his refusal: “We cannot break the laws of our ancestors” (2 Macc 7:2). The positive impact of the example of the old man Eleazar is already at work. The second son addresses the king by evoking the Lord, King of the world: “Cruel brute, you set us free from this present life, but the King of the world will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, since we are dying for his laws” (2 Macc 7:9).¹⁵ Thus there begins to appear an implicit connection between creation and resurrection. This will be continued by the declaration of the third son: “From heaven I received these limbs; for the sake of his laws I have no concern for them; from him I hope to receive them again” (v. 11). The link between the human body and the resurrection is clearer, and far from the concept of immortality which will later be taken up by 4 Macc.

The fourth son completes this theological perspective when he nobly addresses the royal torturer in these terms: “It is the better choice to meet death at men’s hands, yet relying on God’s promise that we shall be raised up by him; whereas for you there can be no resurrection to new life” (v. 14). In this conception resurrection concerns only the just.

With the fifth son the narrator passes to another motif: in spite of what may appear, God has not abandoned the people of Israel. The sixth son will take up this motif adding that the king and his descendants will suffer divine torments. The author announces in this way *a posteriori* the end of Antiochus (2 Macc 9) and of his son (14:2). This is the traditional idea of divine retribution through history. The author in addition attributes to the dying king an admission of defeat as he faces the God he had battled: “Then and there, as a consequence, in his shattered state, he began to shed his excessive pride and come to his senses under the divine lash, spasms of pain overtaking him. ‘It is right,’ he declared, ‘to submit to God; no mortal should aspire to equality with the Godhead’” (2 Macc 9:11-12).

The way in which the author constructs this story shows that the wicked person shows no repentance but a simple regret. In the Maccabean stories there never appears the idea of pardon granted to the executioners. The perspective of the redactors concentrates on quite another theme: the final and unavoidable victory of God over impiety. On the other hand, according to the words of the sixth son, the persecution suffered is linked to the sins committed by the peo-



¹⁴ Following *Traduction Œcuménique de la Bible*, Notes intégrales, 1722.

¹⁵ C. Tassin, *Une théologie du martyre*, 90, footnote 30, thinks that through the Greek term *anabiōsis* (return to life) there is still the search for an appropriate vocabulary for resurrection.

ple, that is to say probably the treachery of the “hellenisers” who are abandoning the values of Israel. One often finds in the sacred history the idea that God uses enemy nations to punish his chosen ones. But, at the same time, he does not permit that the instruments of this corrective action go beyond the punitive function which is given to them. Does the martyrdom of the seven brothers have an expiatory value? The final stages of the account suggest this through the mouth of the seventh son: “I too, like my brothers, surrender my body and life for the laws of my ancestors, begging God quickly to take pity on our nation, and by trials and afflictions to bring you to confess that he alone is God, so that with my brothers and myself there may be an end to the wrath of the Almighty, rightly let loose on our whole nation” (7:37-38).

Before the torture of the last son, the author makes the mother speak, and her words complete the theology of resurrection, basing it on the mystery of maternity and of creation. She underlines in her speech that life is a gift of God: “I do not know how you came to be in my womb; it was not I who endowed you with breath and life, I had not the shaping of your every part. And hence, the Creator of the world, who made everyone and ordained the origin of all things, will in his mercy give you back breath and life, since for the sake of his laws you have no concern for yourselves” (2 Macc 7:22-23). And later on the valiant mother continues her speech considering the Creator who gives and re-gives life, declaring that he had made things “out of what did not exist” (v. 28). This is the first witness to creation *ex nihilo* (*Vulgate*), different from the *tohu wa bohu* organised by God in Gen 1:2.

This moving and literarily well-constructed account leads to some conclusions. Firstly, the reader notices that the language of resurrection in 2 Macc 7 is still evolving, as is the vocabulary of martyrdom. On the other hand, the stoic theme of heroic courage is strongly present, suggesting “the difficulty for ancient Judaism in finding its theological and spiritual originality in relation to the Greek philosophical world”.¹⁶

In any case the witness of fidelity to the divine law at the price of their own lives permits the Maccabean martyrs to announce their faith in the resurrection while also underlining the punishment of God for the sin of the people. The stories in 2 Macc 6-7 are not content with presenting a troubling account of tortures endured, but also invite the reader to recognise the ancient values and traditions of the Fathers in the faith and, as regards the martyrdom of the seven brothers, they anchor the reflection of the believer in a genuine teaching on the resurrection in connection with the Creator God. This exemplary behaviour offers to the Jews a lesson of courage and of fidelity, faced with the temptation of invasive pagan Hellenism, “so that the nations recognise that you are our God”, as the introduction to the book says (2 Macc 1:27).

However, two significant differences distinguish this presentation of martyrdom from the Christian conception. The Maccabees die also for the divine laws and fidelity to the covenant, while the first Christians proclaim their belonging to a person: the living Christ. Furthermore, the Christian motif of forgiveness for executioners is absent here. How then has the conception of martyrdom in ancient Judaism influenced later Christian theologies and what is the later Christian use of such re-readings?

Christian Re-reading and Actualisation

The author of the letter to the Hebrews must be well aware of the faith of the martyrs for he writes in 11:3: “Women received their dead by resurrection, others were tortured, refusing to accept release in order to gain a better resurrection.” But the conceptions of martyrdom in the New Testament have also other emphases. The example of Stephen in Acts 6-7 shows a martyr-witness who is identified with the Master Jesus Christ.¹⁷ His behaviour, his words and his fate are in conformity with the Christ in whom he believes. Martyrdom becomes identification with the Christ who gave his life for the multitude. It is no longer for the divine law but because of a person that the first Christians die in the hope of the resurrection. Furthermore, this blood shed becomes for the first Christian generations a life force. In his *Apology* (50,13), Tertullian strongly

¹⁶ C. Tassin, *Une théologie du martyre*, 94,

¹⁷ See Y. Matta, *La figure d'Étienne, témoin et martyr* (Ac 6:1 – 8:4).

bears witness to this: "Your most refined cruelties are useless. They are rather an attraction for our side. We become more numerous each time you reap us; it is a harvest, this blood of Christians." Besides, the narratives of martyrdom of 2 Macc 6-7 experienced an exceptional continuation in the writings of the Fathers of the Church and in Antiochian spirituality.¹⁸ The oriental patriarchs do not cease bringing to mind on every occasion the chain of Christian martyrs who watered the land of the Orient with their blood. Our intention here is not to analyse the cult of the martyrs in Christianity, but to understand in the light of biblical texts the theologies of martyrdom and the value of the witness of faith in Christ in the near East in our day. Following Jesus who gave his life, the Christian accepts being a witness until the end, even to giving his own life.

In this sense Christian martyrdom cannot be merely a worthwhile performance, even less a freely sought suicide. When Jesus predicted to his disciples persecutions and suffering (cf. Matt 10:16-18; Mark 10:30; John 15:18-20; etc.), he did not incite them to the glorification of death with numbers of victims, but to transform their love by the supreme gift of life and the pardon of enemies. To give one's life like Jesus is an act of love, for God and for the world. Pope Benedict XVI defines it in this way: "Martyrdom is exclusively an act of love, for God and for people, including the persecutors."¹⁹ Christians do not believe in something, they believe in someone, who is Love. They are invited, in the name of this Love named Jesus Christ to pardon their executioners. We do not see the motif of forgiveness in the stories of martyrdom in ancient Judaism. As in 2 Macc 6-7, the Talmud reports the martyrdom of Rabbi Aqiba in the same way of fidelity to the law and to Jewish traditions. Executed by the Romans at the beginning of the second century of our era, Rabbi Aqiba was first condemned for political reasons, namely his support for Bar Kokhba, who rebelled against Rome between 132 and 135, and was venerated by Aqiba as the Messiah, the "Son of the Star". As in the time of Antiochus IV the martyrdom includes different elements, religious, social and political. The spectacle of the atrocious sufferings inflicted on this great master of the Law is sublimated by the expression of his love for the one God and of his profound prayer in rhythm with his breath until his last gasp:

As they took Rabbi Aqiba away to be executed, it was the hour for reciting the Shema Israel.²⁰ As they lacerated his flesh with combs of iron, he committed himself to accept with love the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven. His disciples asked him: "Until when will you pray, master?" He said to them: "All my life I have been troubled by this phrase: You shall love the Lord with all your soul [Deut 6:4], that is to say even if he takes your soul. I asked myself when could I accomplish that. Now that it is within my grasp, how could I not accomplish it?" As he pronounced the One (ehad), as he prolonged the word, he expired. A voice came from heaven and said: "Blessed are you, Rabbi Aqiba, for you are already in the world to come!" (Berakot 61b).

The beauty of this witness does not rule out a comparison with the way in which Ignatius of Antioch, in his letter to the *Romans* (V,3), envisages his coming martyrdom, a dozen years before that of Rabbi Aqiba: "Let all the tortures of the devil come upon me, provided only that I meet Jesus Christ." Aqiba dies to bear witness to the one God and his Law summed up in the *Shema Israel*. Ignatius dies, according to a theology of the cross, to join Christ. There are two distinct conceptions, each of them admirable, coming from common ancient traditions.

On the other hand, we witness today an extension of the concept of martyrdom from Christianity to Islam, which raises the question of the passage from a properly religious context to the political realm. In fact, "jihadists", extremist Moslems and kamikazis are often presented as *martyrs* for Islam. Nevertheless, there is a fundamental undeniable difference with Christianity. The basis of what is called, by extension, Moslem martyrdom, comes from the principle "kill or be killed while fighting on the way of Allah" (*Surah* 9:111: *At-Tawbah, The Repentance*). In other words, violence can come either from the persecutor or from the believer who defends his faith. So, the "holy war" declared by certain Islamists today cannot be compared to Christian martyrdom as described in the Scriptures. The issue is pressing today. Many Christians, from Iraq, to

¹⁸ See R. Ziade, *Les martyrs Maccabées*.

¹⁹ Benedict XVI, *Angelus*.

²⁰ Deut 6:4-9: „Hear, O Israel, The LORD our God, the Lord is one..."

Yemen, to Egypt, passing over the whole region which saw the birth of Christianity, can say with St Paul: "For your sake we are being put to death all day long, reckoned as sheep to be slaughtered" (Rom 8:36). How, in the face of this growing culture of violence and the elimination of the other, can we keep together fidelity to the faith and to Christian identity, while preserving openness and love? Is the Christian of the near East in this time called to be a martyr and at what price?

In the light of *2 Maccabees*, several issues are presented to the conscience of the witness who believes in Jesus Christ. The first issue concerns witness for truth and justice. In fact, it is in everyday life that the believer is called to witness to his profound belonging in Christ. True martyrdom is not achieved necessarily by the death of the witness, but is seen in perseverance and fidelity in the ordinariness of everyday life, where the gift of self is continual and courageous. In our near-eastern societies a genuine interreligious dialogue cannot take place at the expense of the truth which drives the Christian, that is the person of Jesus Christ! The human and spiritual values inspired by the Gospel and lived in all kinds of difficult circumstances become thus a witness which is more eloquent than the "politically correct" speeches so often heard in our dealings.

A second issue is more difficult to resolve: the issue of love. The ancient Jewish tradition had not mentioned any appeal by the martyrs that persecutors should be forgiven. Shown by Jesus (Luke 23:34) and reiterated by Stephen, the first martyr according to the New Testament (Acts 7:60), the act of forgiveness is a specific Christian feature which has accompanied generations of martyrs throughout the centuries. Unfortunately, the socio-political reading of the present international situation leaves for the Christians of the East a deceptive impression: the concept of martyrdom risks sinking amid the reality of victims eliminated in derisory fashion. Everything, even the Christian witness, is politicised in favour of particular interests, exploitation, imagined conflicts. How can we struggle against the emigration and the massacres of these Christians so that they can continue to be a sign of hope in a world thirsty for peace and justice? It is the responsibility of everyone and of all, at every level.



The third issue begins here below, but directs the gaze of the witness to eternal life in Christ. Faith in the resurrection marks the Christian with the seal of the Easter Christ. The dimension of the cross, present in the daily life of the Christian, identifies the Christian with the Lord while awaiting with confidence the light of the resurrection. The Jewish-Christian heritage calls us to life. Later, in the talmudic tradition, a well-known saying insists that the life of man is the ultimate objective of the Law: "Live by the Torah, do not die by it. But, if need be, you may die for it! (Yoma 85b); just as Rabbi Yehuda who, at the moment of martyrdom, wrapped in a scroll of the Law and burnt alive, witnesses to the survival of the words of the Torah when he exclaims: "The parchment burns, but the letters of the Torah take flight!" For this love for the Law of God, Saint Paul substitutes the love of Christ: "For to me life is Christ, and death an advantage" (Phil 1:21). Crucified with Christ, it is no longer he who lives, but Christ lives in him (Gal 2:20).

This is the hope about which we are ready to testify, knowing that the promise of life announced by Christ Jesus is truthful and that "hope does not disappoint, since the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us" (Rom 5:5). But to allow these Christians to continue to testify to the divine Word in the Orient torn apart, the appeal is urgent to the international community. If, in Christ, "you have been granted the privilege for Christ's sake not

only of believing in him but of suffering for him as well" (Phil 1:29) we should also not forget that "the dead shall not praise the Lord, nor those who go down into the silence" (Ps 115:17).

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Luke's Good News to the Poor: Ambiguities and Challenges

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Introduction

The gospel of Luke has been called a "gospel of the poor." It contains more references to the poor than the other gospels and gives particular importance to concern for the poor. The inaugural preaching of Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth in Lk 4:16-30 introduces the ministry of Jesus as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah (Luke 4:18-19, cf. Isa 61:1-2; 58:6). Jesus is the one anointed and sent by God to proclaim good news to the poor. This is echoed in Jesus' reply in Luke 7:22 to the question of the messengers of John the Baptist: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news proclaimed to them." These two texts highlight the poor as the recipients of Jesus' proclamation. The proclamation of good news to the poor summarizes Jesus' ministry in the Gospel of Luke. This appears to be the key to interpret the different texts in Luke on wealth and poverty, possessions and renunciation of possessions.

What does Luke mean by "good news to the poor"? This paper will explore Luke's understanding of "good news" and how it clarifies the meaning and challenges of the teachings on poverty and wealth in his gospel.

"Proclaiming the Good News" in the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles

The story of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke has a continuation in the story of his disciples after his Resurrection and Ascension. This continuation is found in the Acts of the Apostles. The two books were written by one and the same author.

The Greek noun *euangelion*, "gospel," does not appear in the gospel of Luke but is used twice in the Acts of the Apostles (15:7; 20:24). It is the verb *euangelizō*, "to bring good news," which is characteristic of Luke's vocabulary (Luke 10; Acts 15). A survey of the use of this word in Luke-Acts helps us to see its significance for Luke.

In Luke's gospel, the verb appears four times as part of the narrative setting or summary and six times in direct speech. "Preaching the good news" is Luke's overall description for the activity of John the Baptist (3:18), Jesus' ministry (8:1; 20:1) and that of the Twelve (9:6). Based on the immediate context of Luke 3:18, John the Baptist's proclamation is about the coming of the Messiah (cf. 3:15-17). Luke 9:6, on the other hand, shows that the Twelve act on the instruction of Jesus (9:2). They proclaim the good news and cure diseases. The reference of the proclamation of John the Baptist and the Twelve is Jesus. Jesus describes his own mission and activity as that of proclaiming the good news (4:18.43; 7:22; 16:16). The two other instances of the use of the word are in the message of the angel Gabriel to Zechariah, proclaiming the good news that his prayer has been heard and he is going to have a son (1:19) and of an angel to the shepherds proclaiming the good news of birth of Jesus, who is Messiah and Lord (2:10).

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In Acts the word is used three times in direct speech with Peter as the speaker (10:36 address to Cornelius and his household), Paul (13:32 speech in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia), Barnabas and Paul (14:15 speech in Lystra). Acts 10:36 speaks of Jesus Christ as the one who proclaims the gospel of peace and states that the origin is God. In Acts 13:32 Paul proclaims the good news of the resurrection as the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel. In Acts 14:15 the good news of Barnabas and Paul is that the people turn to the living God. In these three instances we find three groups of addressees of the proclamation of the good news: the Jews, the God-fearers, the Gentiles. As a summary or part of the narration, the word is used to summarize the activity of Peter and the apostles (5:42), the disciples who were scattered because of persecution (8:4), Philip (8:12.25.35.40), converts from Cyprus and Cyrene (11:20), Paul (13:32-33; 17:18) with Barnabas (14:7.15.21; 15:35) and with Timothy (16:10). The disciples proclaim the words of Jesus (8:25; 15:35), the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ (8:12; 28:31). Their proclamation includes the good news of Jesus' resurrection as the fulfillment of God's promises.

From this brief survey we can see that the use of *euaggelizō* in specific places of Luke-Acts is deliberate and serves to connect the mission of Jesus and that of his disciples and to convey the origin and progress of Christian proclamation.



“Good News” in Luke

As noted above, there are six instances of *euaggelizō* in direct speech in the Gospel of Luke. Four times, Jesus is the speaker who proclaims himself, his mission and the kingdom of God (4:18.43; 7:22; 16:16). The other two occurrences are found in the infancy narrative, where the angel is the one who proclaims the good news (1:19; 2:10). A brief examination of these texts reveals something of Luke's understanding of good news.

1. Luke 4:18-19

Lk 4:18-19 is part of the dramatic episode (4:16-30) which Luke composed to introduce the ministry of Jesus. In this scene, Jesus reads aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah. Luke depicts Jesus proclaiming his identity and mission using the words of Isaiah the prophet. Luke thus illustrates how Jesus begins his ministry by announcing the good news and shows the effective force of this proclamation through Jesus' own commentary, “Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing” (4:21). Luke uses the Isaiah text to give the reader an insight into the mission of Jesus: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.” In this quotation from Isa 61:1-2 the second part of 61:2 is omitted and a text from Isa 58:6 “to let the oppressed go free” has been inserted before Isa 61:2a.

- 4:18 a The Spirit of the Lord is upon me
 b because he has anointed me
 c to bring glad tidings to the poor
 d He has sent me
 e to proclaim liberty to captives
 and recovery to sight to the blind
 f to let the oppressed go free
 4:19 and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.

The text may be divided into three main statements:

- A. 4:18a "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" – introduction and main affirmation
 B. 4:18bc "He has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor"
 C. 4:18d-19 "He has sent me to proclaim liberty... a year acceptable to the Lord"

Luke 4:18a is the introductory and main idea that governs the whole text. The verse calls to mind the previous texts that mention Jesus' relationship to God and the Holy Spirit. Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit (1:35). The Angel Gabriel whom God sent to Mary (1:26ff) revealed to her the child's identity and mission (1:30-33.35). Jesus "will be called the Son of the Most High," "holy," the "Son of God." "The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end" (1:32b-33). His birth was announced to the shepherds by the angel who also proclaimed his messianic identity: "to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (2:11). Simeon calls the child "salvation from God ... a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of the people of Israel" (2:30-32). Through the notices of growth (2:39-40; 2:52) which describe Jesus' progress in strength, wisdom and grace before God and people, Luke conveys that God has always been with Jesus. In Luke 2:41-51 Luke illustrates Jesus' wisdom and understanding and consciousness of the Father (2:46-49). While he is praying after his baptism, Jesus receives the Spirit and the revelation of his identity as God's beloved Son (3:21-22). Luke then describes Jesus returning from the Jordan "full of the Spirit" and led by the Spirit in the wilderness (4:1). After his experience in the desert, overcoming all temptations, Jesus returns in the power of the Spirit into Galilee (4:14). Luke 4:16-30 is a high point in the narrative development of the revelation of Jesus' identity and mission.

The first words of Jesus are addressed to his parents and talk about the Father (2:49). Luke describes Jesus as praying after his baptism but allows the reader only to hear the voice of the Father and not Jesus' words (3:21-22). In the story of Jesus' temptation in the desert, Jesus confronts the devil with words from Scriptures (Luke 4:4, cf. Deut 8:3; 4:8, cf. Deut 6:13; 4:12, cf. Deut 6:16). Here again in Lk 4:18ff Luke depicts Jesus reading aloud the words of Scripture. The declaration of the fulfilment of Scriptures comes from Jesus' own utterance (4:21). This is consistent with Luke's characterization of Jesus in the Emmaus story where Jesus interprets "in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (24:27). Jesus is the one who opens the scriptures to the disciples and explains to them how these are fulfilled in him (24:32.44-47).

The parallelism in this text is rather evident. "He has anointed me" is parallel to "He has sent me." The reason or purpose of the anointing "to bring glad tidings to the poor" is parallel to the purpose of the sending: "to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery to sight to the blind," "to let the oppressed go free," and "to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord." Based on these parallelisms, the poor to whom glad tidings is proclaimed (4:18bc) can be identified with the people mentioned in the parallel verse (4:18d): the captives, the blind, the oppressed. "To proclaim" appears twice (4:18e and 4:19). The two parallel texts frame "to let the oppressed go free" (4:18f).

- | | |
|---|--|
| (4:18b) because he <u>has anointed</u> me | (4:18c) to <u>bring glad tidings</u> to the poor |
| (4:18d) He <u>has sent</u> me | (4:18e) to <u>proclaim</u> liberty to captives
and recovery to sight to the blind |
| | (4:18f) <i>to let the oppressed go free</i> |
| | (4:19) to <u>proclaim</u> a year acceptable to the Lord. |

It is also to be noted that the word *aphesis* is found in 4:18e (liberty) and 4:18f (free). “Proclaiming liberty to captives” has the same idea as letting “the oppressed go free.” Between these two statements is “recovery of sight to the blind.”

From the parallelism and structure of the text, we can infer the following: a) Luke 4:18e-19 elaborates the meaning of “to bring glad tidings to the poor” (*euaggelisasthai ptōchoi*); b) the anointing (4:18b) and the sending (4:18e) overlap in meaning which is related to Jesus’ identity and authority (cf. Luke 20:1-8); c) Luke 4:19 incorporates the ideas in 4:18e-f; d) the meaning of “poor” (*ptōchos*) is clarified by “captives,” “blind,” and “oppressed”; e) the good news is about release, freedom, liberation, forgiveness, somehow evocative of the jubilee year, which could be the meaning of the “acceptable year of the Lord” (4:19).

2. Luke 7:22 (parallel to Matt 11:5)

The Isaiah prophecy is fulfilled in the person and effective proclamation of Jesus (Luke 4:18-19,21). The fulfilment of this prophecy in the ministry of Jesus is affirmed in Luke 7:22. The context of this verse (Luke 7:18-23) deals with the question of John the Baptist about Jesus’ identity. He sends his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come or shall we look for another?” (7:20). In Luke’s version of the story (compare Matt 11:2-6), the question is repeated (7:19-20) and the actions of Jesus are described as happening then and there (7:21). Luke makes John’s disciples actual witnesses of Jesus’ activity. “At that time he cured many of their diseases, sufferings and evil spirits; he also granted sight to many who were blind” (7:21). Jesus tells them, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news proclaimed to them” (7:22). The beginning and end of the enumeration recall Lk 4:18: “the blind regain their sight” corresponds to “recovery of sight to the blind” and “the poor have the good news proclaimed to them” points back to “bring glad tidings to the poor.”

In Greek the enumeration in Luke 7:22 consists of two parts joined by *kai* (“and”) with each part having a series of three: the blind, the lame, the lepers in the first part and the deaf, the dead, the poor in the second. The verse echoes Isa 29:18-19 (“the deaf shall hear ... eyes of the blind shall see ... the poor rejoice...”); 35:5-6 (“the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf be cleared, then will the lame leap like a stag”); 26:19 (“your



dead shall live"); 61:1-2 ("glad tidings to the poor ... recovery of sight to the blind"). In Isaiah the common pairing is the blind and the deaf. It appears, based on the structure of the verse that Luke extended the pair to include the lame, the lepers, the dead and the poor. Luke's narrative from Luke 4:14 to 7:21 includes stories of Jesus' ministry to these people. An illustration of Jesus' preaching to the poor within this section is found in Luke 6:20ff. The last phrase "the poor have the good news preached to them" appears to be not just one of Jesus' activities but as the summary of his ministry. The people who experienced healing and salvation from him are among the poor who receive and experience Jesus' proclamation of good news.

3. Luke 4:43 (parallel to Mark 1:38)

After Luke 4:16-30, Luke follows Mark's narrative closely in Luke 4:31-44 (see Mark 1:21-39), then inserts an episode (5:1-11) before following Mark again in Lk 5:12-6:11 (see Mark 1:40-3:6). Lk 4:43 is Luke's rendering of Mark 1:38.

Mark 1:38

Let us go to the nearby villages that I may
preach there also. For this purpose have I
come.

Luke 4:43

To the other towns also I must proclaim the
good news of the kingdom of God, because for
this purpose I have been sent.

Luke changes Mark's *kērussō* ("to preach") to *euaggelisasthai* ("to bring glad tidings/good news") here but uses the verb in the following verse (4:44, see Mark 1:39). Luke 4:43 clarifies the content, purpose and origin of Jesus' proclamation. The words "proclaim the good news" and "sent" in this verse echo Jesus' inaugural preaching in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:18f).

4. Luke 16:16 (parallel to Matt 11:12-13)

Luke 16:16 is part of Jesus' words to the Pharisees in Luke 16:14-31. The Pharisees are described in 16:14 as lovers of money who scoffed at Jesus. Jesus' reply consists of sayings (16:15-18) and a parable (16:19-31). Following his criticism of the Pharisees in 16:15, Jesus speaks of the kingdom of God in Luke 16:16: "The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and every one enters it violently." This text is significant because it clearly states that the good news is the kingdom of God. It mentions John who in 3:18 is said to be proclaiming the good news and reminds us of the connection between John and Jesus.

5. Luke 1:19 and 2:10

Both 1:19 and 2:10 contain the word "proclaim the good news". Luke 1:19 is the response of the angel Gabriel to Zechariah's question (1:18). It contains the verbs "send" and "proclaim the good news" which are also found in Luke 4:18-19 and 4:43. Common to these texts are the ideas of being sent, proclaiming the good news and God as the origin of sending and proclamation. Luke 2:10 is the introduction of the angel's proclamation to the shepherds (2:10-12) after the birth of Jesus (2:1-7).

Luke 1:19 I am Gabriel who stand before God.
I was sent
to speak to you and
to announce to you this good news.

Luke 2:10 Do not be afraid: for behold,
I proclaim to you good news of great
joy that will be for all the people.

In Luke 1:19 and 2:10 the angel is the one proclaiming the good news which is about the birth of a child. Zechariah is the recipient of the good news from the Angel Gabriel in 1:19; in 2:10 the angel addresses the shepherds. In Zechariah's case, the news is given before the event. The angelic proclamation here is promise and prophecy. The proclamation to the shepherds, on the other hand, happens after the event. The news of great joy is the birth of the Savior, Christ the Lord (2:11). As the angel announces to the shepherds the birth and identity of Jesus as Messiah, so in Luke 4:18ff Jesus is the one who proclaims his identity and inaugurates his messianic mission.

Besides highlighting the significance of their birth, the texts also function in the interest of comparison and parallelism between John the Baptist and Jesus. Also in the interest of Lukan parallelism is the use of the verb *euaggelisasthai* for the activity of John the Baptist in Luke 3:18.

6. Luke 20:1 (added to Mark 11:27)

The last occurrence of *euaggelizein* is in Luke 20:1 which describes the activity of Jesus in the temple. It is found in the setting of the episode that deals with the question of his authority (20:1-8, see Mark 11:27-33). Jesus responds to the question of the chief priests, scribes and the elders by asking about the origin of John's baptism (20:3-4). They cannot agree on how to answer Jesus; so they tell him they do not know (20:5-7). Jesus then replies, "Neither shall I tell you by what authority I do these things" (20:8). From the beginning of Luke's gospel, the reader knows that Jesus' authority comes from God.

Luke 20:1-8 in a way recalls Luke 7:8-23. Both texts deal with the question of Jesus' activity and identity; both mention John the Baptist. In Luke 7:8ff, Jesus answers the messengers positively making John's disciples witness his activities; in Luke 20:1ff, on the other hand, the chief priests, scribes and elders are left in the dark. Viewed in the light of Luke 20:1-8 and 7:8-23, it is clear that Luke 4:18ff and 2:10-11 do not convey only Jesus' identity and mission but also his authority.

The final words of Jesus before his Ascension (24:44-49) announce the fulfillment of His messianic mission (24:46). He has fulfilled what has been written of the Messiah through his suffering, death and resurrection and opened the possibility of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He, thus, entrusts his disciples the mission to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins in his name (24:47). This implies that part of the mission Jesus has accomplished is the formation of disciples to continue his mission and proclamation to all nations (24:48). Jesus in this scene not only talks of fulfillment but also of promise. He instructs his disciples to remain in Jerusalem because he is sending the promise of the Father, the power from on high, the Holy Spirit (24:49).

The final words of Jesus in a way summarize the whole ministry of Jesus. Not only does it refer to his passion, death and resurrection, it also evokes the beginning of his ministry in Galilee (Luke 4:14ff) where he announced his mission to proclaim release. At the end of the gospel, the release has come to refer to forgiveness of sins. Luke 24:44-49 also looks back to the beginning of the gospel where the opening scene shows the Angel Gabriel announcing the good news to Zechariah. In his announcement, the angel brings hope and evokes expectation for the fulfillment of a promise. Towards the end of the gospel, after proclaiming the good news of fulfillment, Jesus gives a promise, evokes new hope and expectation for the coming of the Holy Spirit who will empower His disciples to continue proclaiming the good news Jesus himself has begun.

It is in the Acts of the Apostles that the good news of the coming of the Holy Spirit is fulfilled. Acts shows how the disciples carry out the commission of the Risen Lord. Luke also uses the word *euaggelizō* in significant points of the narrative of Acts to remind the reader of the continuity of the mission of Jesus in the disciples' proclamation.

The Poor as Recipients of the Good News

Jesus' inaugural proclamation in the synagogue at Nazareth highlights his prophetic and evangelizing mission to the poor. Earlier after looking at the surface level of the text we inferred from the structure of Luke 4:18-20 that the good news is about release, freedom, liberation, forgiveness and that the poor are those mentioned in the same proclamation – the captives, the blind, the oppressed. What do they have in common? Being in need, afflicted, restricted in their movement, subjugated, judicially disadvantaged. These are the people who are called poor *ptōchoi* in Luke 4:18.

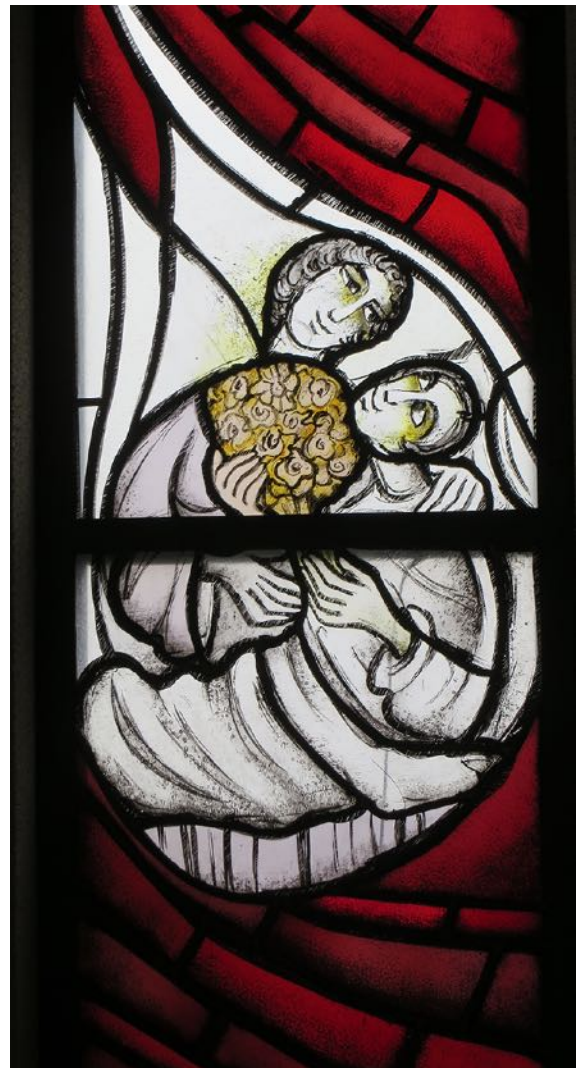
Ptōchos "poor" appears 10 times in Luke (4:18; 6:20; 7:22; 14:13.21; 16:20.22; 18:22; 19:8; 21:2.3) but never in Acts. The word means "destitute, beggar," one in need and affliction. It denotes "complete destitution which forces the poor to seek the help of others by begging." The poor to whom the good news is to be proclaimed are the materially poor who are vulnerable, living in the margins of society, having nothing, including those who are reduced to poverty by unjust means. Considering that this is what Jesus actually did, it is clear that Luke through the Isaiah quotation provides an interpretative summary of Jesus' ministry.

The Poor in Jesus' Ministry

Jesus mingled and had table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners. He defended those who were despised by the learned, the scribes and Pharisees. He healed the sick, touched lepers and made them whole; he pronounced the poor blessed and fed the hungry. He instructed his disciples to continue his mission. If Jesus actually ministered to the materially poor and disadvantaged, then "poor" in Luke 4:18 should be interpreted as the materially poor. Material poverty does not only mean lacking in material sufficiency but poverty too in non-material terms. Although there could be sympathy for the poor, the destitute and the indigent are often despised and scoffed upon, considered vulnerable to exploitation and defenseless, lawless and unworthy of trust.

Jesus is good news to the poor. He proclaims that they belong to the kingdom of God. When people despise and exclude them, they are not excluded by God. In fact, they are the first beneficiaries of the kingdom. This is expressed in Luke 6:20-23: "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for you, for behold your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets." For the poor, the afflicted, the needy and the downtrodden who feel that God is far from them or that they are excluded from the kingdom of God, this is certainly good news. Jesus proclaims that God is on their side, God offers them the kingdom and promises a reversal of situation.

Jesus' proclamation in Luke 4:18-19 and 6:20-23 is a promise of salvation for the poor but Jesus also warns the rich: "Woe to you that



are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you that are full now, for you shall hunger. Woe to you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets" (6:24-26). This reversal of fortunes is hailed in the Magnificat as God's action on behalf of the lowly: "He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away" (Luke 1:51-53).

Similarly, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31), the reversal is expressed by Abraham: "Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish." Nothing is said about Lazarus being worthy, good or righteous, he is simply poor and has a skin disease. The good news of the parable is that God balances the situation. Nothing is said about the rich man abusing Lazarus. He simply goes about his life, feasting sumptuously every day and being clothed in purple and fine linen. While Lazarus is aware of the rich man's life because he desires to be fed with what falls from the rich man's table, the rich man shows no awareness at all of Lazarus' existence. The dogs that lick Lazarus' sores seem to be better than the rich man for Lazarus exists for them. The startling contrast is that Lazarus in his poor condition is able to give a "feast" to the dogs but the rich man in all his riches offers no help or consolation to Lazarus. Thus, the parable is a warning to the rich also. There is a time of reckoning and the judgment on the rich will be based on their attitude and action toward the poor.

Jesus' good news to the poor is his own life of total trust and confidence in God. He lives the life of the poor and dies the death of a wretched criminal, condemned, tortured, scorned and despised. Not only his words and deeds but his very life and death manifest his solidarity with the poor. His resurrection, then, is the climax of the good news he proclaims. His resurrection validates his proclamation. To receive the good news is to live as he teaches; to proclaim the good news is to live the new life He offers by his resurrection.

Based, therefore, on the life and ministry of Jesus, the poor in Luke 4:18 (cf. Isa 61:1) refers to the materially poor who not only lack material sufficiency but other needs as well to live with human dignity.

Luke's View of the Poor

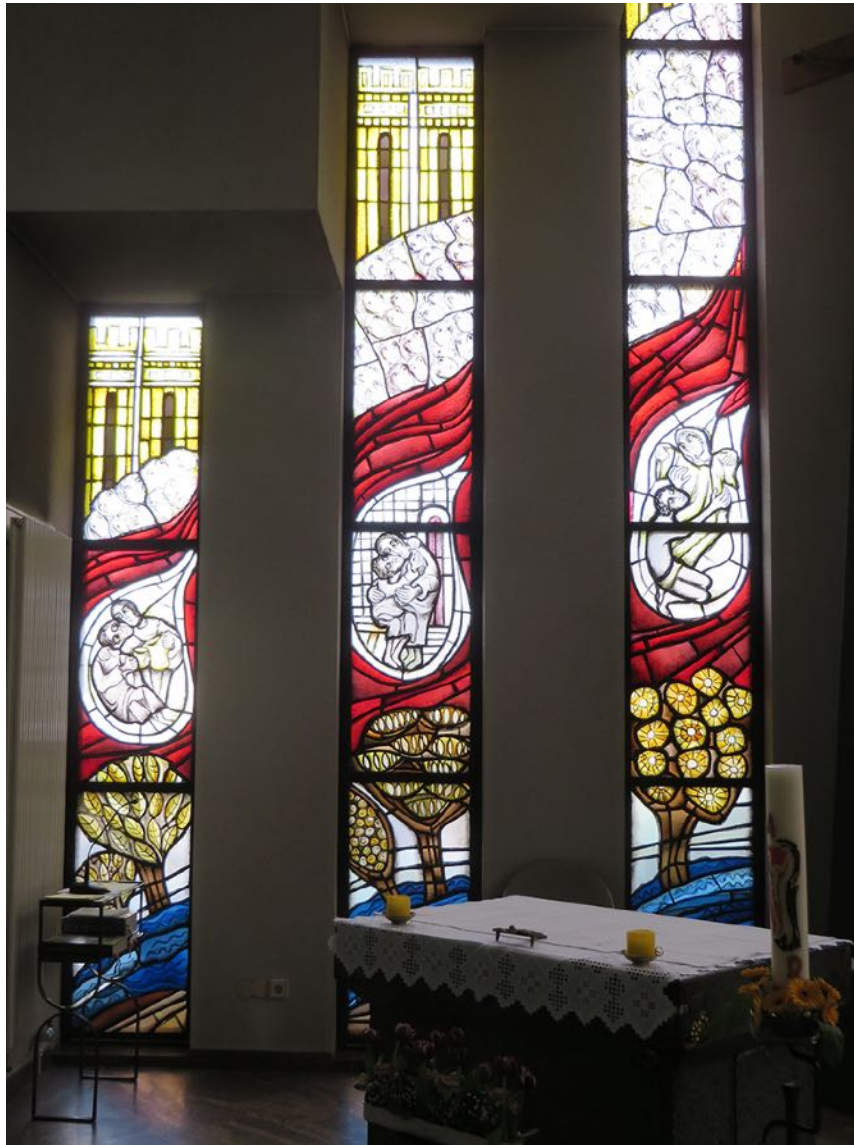
Luke hands on to us the tradition about Jesus who shows concern for the poor in his life, words and deeds. There is a gap of several years between the time of Jesus and the time of Luke's writing. The question is whether Luke means something else than the materially poor in Luke 4:18 (cf. Isa 61:1). We have noted earlier that material poverty entails other forms or dimensions of poverty. The question here focuses on the basic meaning of poor in Luke 4:18.

1. The Poor in Luke 4:18 in the Light of Isa 61:1

Ptōchoi, "poor," in Luke 4:18 is the LXX translation of the Hebrew *'anawim* in Isa 61:1. *'Anawim* is the plural form of *'anaw*, a subsidiary form of *'ani*. *'Ani* denotes primarily a relation rather than a situation of social distress. It comes from the stem *'anah* which indicates the situation of answering and readiness for this. Later it came to describe the position of inferiority in the face of the one who demands the answer. *'Ani* is concretely the hearer, the dependent; eventually it also came to denote one who is wrongfully impoverished or dispossessed. YHWH is the protector of the *'anawim* because they draw to him (Ps 140:12; 40:17; 86:1; 109:22; 69:29; 74:19; 140:12). The word comes to have a religious significance—"humble," "pious" (Ps 18:27 *tapeinos*).

Isa 61:1-2 belongs to the third part of the Book of Isaiah (chapters 56-66) which was written probably in late sixth century B.C.E. The message of Third Isaiah is addressed to the people who returned from exile and were worried about their claim on the land. The city was still devastated and the people were unsure of their status as the holy community. The prophet announced the rebuilding of Zion by YHWH and encouraged Israel to commit itself anew to right worship and

social justice. It will be God's divine action. God will establish justice for Israel. Thus, Isa 61:1ff is addressed to Israel as a whole. The characterization of Israel as the poor of YHWH is found in Second Isaiah (49:13; 51:21; 54:11). The proclamation continues in 61:3ff which speaks of the restoration of Israel. The time of favor for Israel's exiles is also an occasion of God's vengeance on their enemies (61:2.5-6).



The poor in Isa 61:1 might indeed refer to the whole of Israel; however, the context of Luke 4:18ff shows that Luke widens the meaning of poor. The omission of the last part of Isa 61:2 “a day of vindication by our God” and Jesus’ references to Elijah and Elisha (Luke 4:25-27) indicate that the proclamation goes beyond the vision of Jewish nationalism. In Jesus’ proclamation, the Gentiles are included. This message is not received well by Jesus’ hearers. The people’s reaction change from amazement (4:22a) to questioning (4:22b) to fury (4:28) and violence (4:29).

It is said that by the time of Second and Third Isaiah *‘anawim* had a religious significance. Thus, the meaning of poor in Isa 61:1 is humble, lowly, pious. The text offers a promise of eschatological jubilee to the humble poor who are called to trust in God and await his actions of justice and liberation for the poor (Isa 61:4ff, cf. Isa 11:4). The good news of release (*aphesis*) has to do with the release of moral-spiritual debt. This has to do with the forgiveness of sins. The good news is the breaking of “bonds that enslave people to sin in all its various forms.” This does not deny that Jesus releases people from various concrete forms of physical, social and economic oppressions. Forgiveness of sins is indeed a theme that runs through Luke-Acts and is related to

the theme of salvation (Luke 1:77). Towards the end of the gospel of Luke, Jesus is seen entrusting to the disciples the message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins in his name (24:47).

Jesus proclaimed the reign of God to his people and the majority of his hearers were poor. In the first century Palestine of his day, there were only a few rich – the large landowners, Herod and the royal family and their functionaries and some merchants. The poor consisted of day laborers, slaves, small landowners, tenants for large landowners and all those who worked to earn their livelihood. Sometimes they were overburdened with taxes, tithes, rents and became debtors. There were also poor who lived partially or fully on relief: the beggars, sick, blind, lame, lepers, destitute, the unemployed poor and drifters, the fatherless, widows, victims of ill fortune who needed social care and received them. Although they would receive some form of help like daily or weekly food, they were treated with contempt by the well-to-do. Their material poverty involved loss of dignity, status and security and even uncleanness. Jesus' concern for them astounded them. Jesus offered the poor and the sick knowledge of God and forgiveness even when they could not go to the temple and afford to offer sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus was really good news to them. However, not all who heard Jesus and witnessed his astounding deeds believed in him. Jesus preached to the poor but only the poor who were open to God accepted him.

In the light of the above considerations, it can be fairly said that Luke broadens the horizon for understanding the poor. The good news of Jesus is not only to Israel but to the Gentiles as well. This is shown more clearly in the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles. Jesus turned his attention to the materially poor but not all who heard him, poor or rich, were convinced of his preaching. Those who accepted his good news and believed in him are the poor who were humble and open to God. The acceptance of Jesus' message erases the divide between rich and poor.

2. The Poor in Luke's Narrative

By the time of Luke's writings, the Christian movement had progressed through the Mediterranean world of the Roman Empire. He had a broader perspective of Jesus' mission which continued to his own day through the handing on of tradition from the apostles and eyewitnesses of Jesus and missionaries. Though he kept a distance between his own time and the narrated world of the gospel, his worldwide perspective and the concerns of the community or communities he was addressing influenced his writing. The teachings on wealth and poverty in the gospel show Luke's concern both for the poor and the rich. The following section presents the characters that are portrayed in Luke's narrative as receiving and experiencing the good news.

The first recipients of the good news in Luke's narrative were Zechariah and Elizabeth. Both are characterized as righteous before God and blameless (1:5). They belong to the priestly clan. Zechariah was a country priest; he was poor compared to the priestly aristocracy in the temple. Both Zechariah and Elizabeth were advanced in age. They were childless. The good news that the angel brought to Zechariah was the birth of a child, and not just any child, he would be John, who would go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah to make a people ready for the Lord (1:13-17). The good news proclaimed to Zechariah was experienced by Elizabeth herself when she conceived and bore John. She recognized that God looked at her and took away her reproach (1:25).

Mary, a young woman of Nazareth, betrothed to Joseph, accepted the word of the Angel and conceived in her womb the Son of God (1:26-38). Luke does not mention Mary's pedigree. She is simply a young woman from Nazareth and a kinswoman of Elizabeth (1:36). Mary in her song of praise (1:46-55) speaks of herself as lowly servant. God "regarded the low estate of his handmaiden" (*epeblepsen epi tēn tapeinōsin tēs doulēs autou* 1:48). The birth of the Messiah is announced to the shepherds (2:10-11). Although "shepherd" is used as an image of God in the Jewish Scriptures, the shepherds during the time of Jesus were not viewed favorably. They were classed among robbers and cheats because they were suspected of stealing the increase of the flock entrusted to them. With background of the place of the shepherds in Israel's society, the angel's proclamation to them is significant. Here is another instance when God shows favor to the poor and the lowly.

In Luke 3:18 John is described as proclaiming the good news. He was proclaiming into all the regions about the Jordan a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (3:3). He was proclaiming the coming judgment and exhorted the people to “bear fruits that befit repentance” (3:8). He preached to the multitudes (3:10), to the tax collectors (3:12) and to the soldiers (3:14). Each of these groups asked him “What then shall we do?” John replied to the multitudes: “He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise” (3:11). To the tax collectors, he said: “Collect no more than is appointed you” (3:12b) and to the soldiers, “Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages” (3:14b). The concrete acts of repentance John advised are actions of justice, sharing and kindness toward the poor. John’s teaching touched on the social, economic and political issues of his day but there was no hint of questioning the established system. Luke must have found this teaching relevant too for his own time. Only he among the evangelists gives us this teaching of John the Baptist. John could have proclaimed this to his contemporaries or Luke interpreted the preaching of John in this way for his community. The text shows Luke’s concern for the materially poor and conveys the idea of sharing as a way of addressing the needs of the poor.



After Jesus’ proclamation in Luke 4:16-30, Jesus undertook his ministry. Luke gives us stories of people who witnessed Jesus’ teaching and experienced his healing presence. They were those who were sick, men and women, with various diseases and those oppressed by demons (4:40ff; 5:15; 6:17-19; 7:21-22; 4:31ff; 4:38ff). Luke illustrates through stories how Jesus’ activities fulfilled the Isaiah prophecy. Demoniacs were released from the power of evil spirits (4:31ff; 8:26ff; 9:37ff); lepers were cleansed (5:12ff; 17:11ff), a paralytic was forgiven and made to walk (5:17ff), a sinful woman was forgiven (7:36ff), a man with withered hand (6:6ff), a centurion’s slave (7:1ff), a woman with hemorrhage (8:49f), a bent woman (13:10ff), a man with dropsy (14:1ff), a blind beggar (18:35ff) were healed, the hungry crowd were fed (9:12ff), a daughter (8:40ff) and a son (7:11ff) were raised to life. Tax collectors and sinners had table fellowship with him (5:27ff; 15:1-2). His own disciples witnessed his saving power (8:22ff). These were the poor who experienced the joy of the kingdom through Jesus’ care, compassion, healing and forgiveness.

Luke however shows us that Jesus did not associate only with the poor. Jesus also accepted invitations to dine in the house of a Pharisee (7:36ff) or a ruler (14:1ff). The banquet became a means for Jesus to teach about hospitality and liberality to the poor. “When you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just” (14:13-14). Without doubt, the poor refers to the materially poor and the rich are encouraged to open themselves to the poor in view

of future judgment. In his association with the rich, Jesus calls them to turn toward the poor, to relate to them. His concern for the poor also reveals a concern for the rich for he teaches them what they need to do in order to part of the kingdom of God. Jesus invited himself to Zacchaeus' house (19:1ff). Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector and rich yet considered a sinner, received Jesus joyfully in his house. Zacchaeus' conversion is shown in his decision to give half of his possessions to the poor and to restore fourfold anyone whom he has defrauded (19:8).

When Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts in the treasury and a poor widow also putting in two copper coins, he was quick to point out the contrast to his disciples (Luke 21:1-3). He praised the poor widow rather than the rich because the rich gave out of their abundance but the widow "out of her poverty put in all the living that she had" (Luke 21:4). This story in Luke is preceded by Jesus' denunciation of the scribes whom he accused as desiring the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at feasts but devour widows' houses (Luke 20:47). The point at issue is not only the contrast between rich and poor but the actions of the rich and powerful against the poor, actions of injustice that impoverish the widows and the poor more and more. The theme of justice is also conveyed in the parable of the widow and the unjust judge (18:1-8) which is told as a teaching on persistence in prayer. It concludes with the saying, "Will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily" (18:7-8a).

Throughout his ministry, Jesus was accompanied by disciples who left everything and followed him (5:11; 5:28; 18:28). They shared his life of poverty and proclaimed the gospel according to his instructions: "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics" (9:3). He gave similar instructions to the seventy(-two) disciples: "Carry no purse, no bag, no sandal" (10:4). There were women in their company too. These women and many others provided for Jesus and the Twelve out of their means (8:3). Jesus and his community of disciples lived a poor life and carried out their mission in poverty but they were not destitute. At the last supper, Jesus asked his disciples, "when I sent you out with no purse or bag or sandals, did you lack anything?" and they said, "Nothing" (22:35). Their life of poverty was a life of total trust and confidence in God as Jesus was teaching them (6:20ff; 11:1ff; 12:22-34).

From a consideration of the different characters who were addressed by and accepted Jesus' proclamation, we can say that the poor in Luke's narrative encompasses the materially poor, the morally poor and the religious poor. This is in line with the theme of universality of salvation in Luke's gospel. Jesus proclaimed to all who cared to listen.

3. Being Poor to Follow Jesus

Luke gives us the stories of the call of Jesus' disciples who left everything to follow him. Peter and his companions "brought their boats to land, left everything and followed him" (5:11). Levi, who was sitting at the tax office when Jesus called him, left everything, "rose and followed him" (5:27-28). After hearing Jesus' saying on the difficulty of a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, Peter remarked, "We have left our homes and followed you" (18:28). Jesus replied, "Truly, I say to you, there is no man who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God who will not receive manifold more in this time, and in the age to come" (18:29-30).

The story of the rich ruler (18:18-23) shows that riches can be an obstacle to following Jesus. He asked Jesus what he should do to inherit life. Jesus told him to keep the commandments. When he said he had observed them from his youth, Jesus told him "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (18:22). Hearing this, he became sad for he was very rich. Luke's story of the rich ruler appears open-ended. Luke omitted Mark's conclusion "he went away sorrowful" (Mark 10:22). Luke 18:22 calls to mind Jesus' saying to his disciples in Lk 12:32-33: "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys." This saying comes after the

teaching on trust in God's providence (12:22-31). The call to sell possessions and give alms is a call to live a life of trust and confidence in the Father's goodness. It is also a call to a renunciation of property that benefits the poor. Jesus challenges the disciples to an attitude that gives priority to spiritual value over material things, to sharing and concern for others over concern for one's possessions and security. The renunciation of possession has meaning in view of the kingdom but it remains a difficult condition of discipleship. A more radical formulation is found in Luke 14:33: "whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." The demand is unmistakable; it calls for total renunciation of one's possessions. The saying is addressed is addressed to the multitudes (14:25). The response to this call will distinguish the true disciples from the crowd.

The teaching on renunciation of possessions is to be considered in relation to one's view of life and death. In the parable of the rich fool (12:16-21), the rich man whose land brought forth plentiful harvest decides to pull down his barns and build larger ones where he can store all his grain and goods. He plans to live a life of security. But God tells him, "Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" The parable is Jesus' reply to the one who asked him to help him get his share of inheritance from his brother (12:13). Jesus uses this parable to illustrate his saying on covetousness: "Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (12:15). Jesus challenges the attitude of the rich to secure oneself and build his future without consideration of others. No matter how the rich secure themselves with possession, they do not know the time of their death that can bring to naught what they have worked for. Death is a moment when one loses everything. Possessions cannot secure any person from death. In the face of death, one learns the relative value of wealth and possessions (cf. Sir 41:1-2). Luke follows this parable with Jesus' sayings on trust in God (12:22ff). It is the view of the end of one's life that can guide people to make right decisions about their life and possessions (cf. Sir 7:36). For Luke, the end in view is the eschatological reality of sharing in the kingdom of God. It is this eschatological reality that gives meaning to the renunciation of possessions. It appears that the sayings on the renunciation of possessions are really expressions of the value of the kingdom of God.

What Jesus started in his ministry is an alternative lifestyle of radical prophetic poverty. It is an alternative lifestyle that manifests radical trust in God, serves as a protest against rich living and expresses solidarity with the least.

The renunciation of possession may be seen as a manifestation of self-denial that Jesus calls for: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. Whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it" (9:23-24). Possession may be seen as symbolic of the person; thus to renounce possession is symbolic of renouncing the self. Underlying the hoarding of possessions is the desire to preserve the self. Self-denial may be equated with renunciation of possessions. Thus the call to deny the self to follow Jesus appears as another expression of the demand to renounce possessions or it is the attitude that grounds the possibility of fulfilling the demand to detach from possession. Learning to deny the self begins with learning to detach from what one has. Becoming poor to follow Jesus is not



just a matter of ascetic discipline. It is clear from Luke 6:20ff that the poverty of the disciples is for the sake of Jesus and the kingdom of God. Jesus teaches his disciples to be rich toward God (12:21), to seek his kingdom and “these things will be yours as well” (12:31).

Luke appreciates Jesus’ call to renunciation. He highlights what he has received from tradition (Luke 9:23-27, see Mark 8:38-9:1; 18:18-30, see Mark 10:17-22; Luke 12:22-31, see Matt 6:25-45; Luke 12: 33-34 see Matt 6:19-21) by repeating the saying on the renunciation of possessions (Luke 12:33; 14:33; 18:22) and adding stories and parables that challenge people’s attitude towards possessions. This is a challenge that Luke poses to his own contemporaries. The focus is not so much the possessions but the kingdom of God and the good news of the kingdom of God is what grounds and gives meaning the renunciation of possession.

4. Sharing of Possessions as a Way of Discipleship

Besides the teaching on renunciation Luke’s gospel contains parables and saying on having and using possessions. These teachings on possessions seem contradictory. Thus, it was observed that Luke consistently talks about possessions but he does not talk about possessions consistently. Does Luke really contradict himself? Or does he intend to give different views about possessions for his contemporaries? To our mind, all these sayings are governed by the good news of the kingdom.

Luke gives examples in the gospel of people who use their possessions to benefit others. The women in Jesus’ company provided for their needs out of their resources (8:1-3). Zacchaeus decided to part with his possessions (19:1-9). The Samaritan in the parable (10:29-35) who attended to the needs of the man who fell among robbers is an example of using one’s possessions to help the needy (10:33-35). The parable of the dishonest steward (16:1-8) illustrates how one deals with possessions to secure his immediate future and conveys that there is a way of dealing with possessions that leads one to inherit the kingdom. A negative example is given in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31). The rich man’s neglect of his responsibility toward the poor and failure to attend to the need of Lazarus who was just there at his door brought him to Hades. This is a serious warning to the rich who only think of this life and himself.

In Luke’s view, the members of his community need to learn how to deal with wealth and possessions for they can be an obstacle to the kingdom of God as they are a cause of tensions in the community.

Jesus’ teachings on poverty, renunciation, and the use of wealth and possessions are related to the kingdom of God. It is the vision of the life beyond this world, the eschatological dimension that gives meaning to these teachings. Luke shows in the Acts of the Apostles how the early Christian community in Jerusalem fulfilled the Jesus’ teachings on possessions (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35; 5:12-16). Luke describes the community as being together and having all things in common (2:44). They “sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need” (2:45). They lived their community life in joyful table fellowship, prayer and holding fast to the teaching of the apostles. Luke is quick to point out that the sharing of goods comes from an inner disposition of each believer. “Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common” (4:32). Here Luke gives a compelling picture of complete unanimity and profound unity among the believers. The basis of their unity and harmony is their common faith. The union of heart and soul is further described as ingrained in a basic attitude of unselfishness particularly with regard to material possessions. Not one makes an egoistic claim even to what are rightfully their own. Their sharing of temporal goods is an external manifestation of the union of heart and soul, an outflow of their interior disposition of openness, detachment from material possessions and freedom from self-seeking interests. The sale of possessions and distribution to each as any has need results in a situation where “there was not a needy person among them” (4:34), an echo of Deut 15:4. In Acts 2:42ff; 4:32ff, Luke pictures an ideal community inspired by the first group of Jesus’ disciples who lived with Jesus and shared his life of poverty. Luke gives an ideal portrait of a Christian community that is permeated by the spirit of self-giving and generosity.

The absence of the word *ptōchos* in the narrative of Acts does not mean that Luke has abandoned his concern for the poor. The narrative of Acts focuses on the spread of the Christian message yet there are still some stories that show the concern for the poor (Acts 6:1ff; 11:28ff). In the description of the early Christian community in Jerusalem, Luke has united the demand of renunciation of possessions with the practice of sharing of possessions. This is Luke's vision of an egalitarian community of disciples of the Risen Lord. Luke's good news to the poor is a challenge so that in the community there would be no needy person. The goal of renunciation and sharing of possessions is not to impoverish the community but to enable it to witness to the Resurrection of the Lord.

Good News to the Poor

Luke's understanding of good news enables us to look at the teachings on wealth and poverty in a new light. Our study of the meaning of good news in Luke-Acts led to a clarification of Luke's meaning of poor. Luke refers to the materially poor, those who lack material sufficiency and non-material needs, but he also refers to the morally poor and religious or spiritually poor. The proclamation of the good news to the poor gives the proper perspective for interpreting the different sayings and parables on wealth and poverty. Both renunciation of possession and sharing of possession are geared towards an egalitarian community which manifests the kingdom of God.

The good news that the poor are blessed may be met with different reactions. "Blessed are you poor, yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20). Jesus' good news to the poor is that though they were considered of no account and were despised, they were actually the first beneficiaries of the kingdom. Jesus assured them of their worth and the Father's care for them. Jesus challenged his society's prevailing view on and estimation of the poor.

Today there is a lot of discussion on global poverty. Reducing global poverty has been an issue for several decades. It is startling how despite so many international and local organizations, agencies, institutions and groups working for, with and among the poor, the problem of poverty becomes more pronounced and the gap between rich and poor becomes even wider. A discourse analyst draws our attention to the discourse on poverty and stirs people to think about what they communicate by the way they speak of, about and to the poor. How can the fight against poverty not become in reality a fight against the poor people or the program to eradicate poverty a program to eliminate poor people? Is it still appropriate to speak of "poor" as a category or label for people living in poverty? Sandra Jeppesen has this to say about poverty: "Poverty is in my bones. The lessons of poverty are that money is not everything, people come first and sharing can cover you. Free things carved a path into my life. Hanging out with punks and anarchists, poverty is an international way of life, a political anti-consumerist asceticism. If everyone you know lives in poverty, you have a community; it is no big deal... a life of poverty has its good moments too, like any life."²¹ She continues by identifying different situations of poverty. "Poverty is complex in gendered and racialized lives and as it is experienced by indigenous people, people with disabilities, children, homeless people, squeegee kids, alcoholics, sex workers, people with mental health issues, drug addicts, et cetera. People living in poverty become criminalized, objects of targeted policing, automatic suspects. There is a sense of injustice." How is it possible to speak of the poor without labelling them and perpetuating the societal and cultural pre-suppositions about the poor? One challenge for us today is to clarify our notion of poverty and our way of speaking of and about the poor. It is not enough to pronounce a blessing on the poor but to recognize the poor as a blessing too and to work with them so that they can enjoy the blessings of God.

Sadly, the many advancements in our society seem to push the poor farther into the margins of social life. Our globalized world has produced tremendous wealth "to such an extent that if it

²¹ Sandra Jeppesen, "From 'War on Poverty' to 'War on the Poor': Knowledge, Power and Subject Positions in AntiPoverty Discourses", in *Canadian Journal of Communication* 34/3 (2009) 407.

would be distributed equally, all poverty would be eradicated.”²² This might seem an exaggeration but even in our local setting, growth in the country’s economy is reported but the economic growth has little or no impact on the poor. Luke’s teachings on wealth and possessions can at least disturb those who gain wealth at the cost of the poor. Luke reminds us that an unlimited striving for wealth can engulf persons with a passion that makes them slaves of their possessions.

One of Luke’s solutions to the problem of poverty and relationship in his community is for the rich to share their possessions. This is not only a matter of benevolence to the poor but a challenge to establish a condition in the community that will enable the poor to live according to their human dignity.

Luke also makes us aware that poverty is interconnected with other forms of human suffering and marginalization, such as “sickness, mental disturbance and social ostracism... Any association or identifying with the poor for the sake of self-interested political gain which in the end does not benefit the real poor, should be exposed.”²³ This is a challenge to prophetic witness.

The renunciation of possessions is an ideal that may be difficult to follow. In Luke’s gospel, this is not motivated by asceticism but by joy, the good news of the kingdom. The ideal of renunciation may be the narrow door to the kingdom. As the disciples orient themselves to the kingdom of God and follow Jesus in this mission of proclaiming the kingdom, the disciples tread the path towards renunciation that open themselves to embrace the kingdom wholeheartedly.

In 2009, Pope Benedict XVI chose the theme “Fighting Poverty to Build Peace” for his Message on the World Day of Peace. In his homily (January 1, 2009), he distinguished between the poverty to be chosen and the poverty to be fought. The poverty to be chosen is the one Jesus chose and proposed for his disciples; the poverty to be combated is a deprivation which God does not desire, a poverty that prevents people and families from living as befits their dignity; a poverty that offends justice and equality and threatens peaceful co-existence.”



²² Eben Scheffer, “Luke’s view on Poverty in its ancient (Roman) Economic Context: A Challenge for Today,” in *Scriptura* 106 (2011) 131.

²³ Ibid.

The Poor and the Marginalized in the Gospel of John Then and Now

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“No exegetical activity disturbs the tranquility of the ‘empire’ for a single moment. Biblical specialists have curiously little to suffer from the Neros and the Domizianos of our time. But neither do their studies instill light and strength in Christians persecuted by the lords of this world.”¹

Do we belong to this category? The choice of the theme for the 2014 Convention of the Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines (CBAP), and even of those in previous years (e.g., in 2000, “Announcing a Year of Favor of the Lord,” in 2003, “Hope for a Suffering People”), expresses our desire to be relevant and responsive to the needs of the poor and marginalized of our society.

Without presuming to present an exhaustive treatment on the poor and marginalized in the Gospel of John, I want to highlight here some texts that will give us insights into some biblical responses to the poor and marginalized then and now. According to biblical tradition, the poor are those who have no economic and social security. The poor are dependent on others for support. While the Old Testament reveals to us the spiritual riches of poverty, the New Testament sees the truly poor as the privileged heirs of the kingdom.²

I propose the following texts from the Gospel of John for our consideration here: 4:5-42 on the Samaritan woman; 5:2-16 on the paralyzed man at the Pool Bethzatha; 7:53-8:11 on the woman accused of adultery; 9:1-34 on the man born blind; 12:1-8 on the anointing of Jesus by Mary. For our purpose, I do not treat the textual problems. Narrative analysis is applied in our study of these texts.

John 4:5-42—The Samaritan Woman

During our third annual convention in 19-21 July 2002, Niceta Vargas delivered a paper on the “Roles of Men and Women in the Johannine Community: Paradigms for Discipleship Roles in

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¹ Leslie Hoppe, *There Shall Be No Poor Among You: Poverty in the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2004), 175.

² E.g., Luke 6:20.

the 21st Century.”³ In that paper, Vargas did an in-depth study on the Samaritan woman episode, also applying narrative analysis, with special attention to characterization. After a thorough scholarly examination of the text, Vargas concludes that the Samaritan woman is a symbolic figure and at the same time an individual. She writes,

The Samaritan woman also represents a community that is invited to become Jesus’ disciples, notwithstanding ethnic and religious backgrounds as well as gender biases and practices... There is gradual development in the character of the Samaritan woman as an individual: from a stranger, an ordinary woman in Samaria, to a disciple of Jesus.⁴

We may add that the Samaritan woman was not only an ordinary woman from Samaria, she also represents the marginalized woman in society. No name is given to the Samaritan woman. It is not important to know her name because she is insignificant in the society. She had to draw water from the well at noon (v. 6) when no one is at the well to avoid being ridiculed. She has not lived up to the Mosaic Law (Exod 20:14//Deut 5:18) because she has had five husbands, and the one she is presently living with is not her husband (v. 17f). Thus, this woman is not accepted even by her fellow Samaritans. She is marginalized both as a woman and a Samaritan. This is how John described the Samaritan woman and her situation.

Now let us see the portrayal of Jesus in this episode. At the outset of the story, Jesus is presented as being exhausted from his journey, so he sat by the well. Jesus was thirsty and left alone by his disciples, who had gone to the city to buy food. At this moment a Samaritan woman came to draw water. Jesus initiates the dialogue: “Give me a drink” (v. 7b). Jesus makes use of life’s situation and realities—a well, a journey, work, family, thirst, and tiredness—to open a conversation with the Samaritan woman. His very real thirst allows the woman to feel necessary and useful. Jesus awakens in her a willingness to help and serve. Interestingly enough, Jesus declares his thirst, yet does not drink. Talking to the woman makes him forget his thirst and leads her to discover the good news within life itself (v. 14). Jesus takes the woman in her present situation, using her daily experience as the medium of communicating the gospel.

Jesus opens another door to communicate with the woman, that is, through the “family door.” Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” She replied, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband,’ for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly” (vv. 16-18). At this point, the woman identifies Jesus as a prophet.



³ In Niceta Vargas, *The Roles of Women and Men in Scripture* (Manila: Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines, 2002), 28-69.

⁴ Ibid., 48.

Then the woman takes the initiative and opens the door of religion. She raises the question on the true place of worship. "Our ancestors," she says, "worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem" (v. 20). Jesus enters the door of religion and explains, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know, we worship what we know, for salvation comes from the Jews" (vv. 21-22). Jesus endorses accepted norms by acknowledging that salvation comes from the Jews. But he goes on to say, "But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (vv. 23-24). Let us note Jesus' ecumenical attitude here. He is not shut in by his own religion but opens himself to what is different and welcomes it.

During the dialogue, Jesus is guided by what he has learned from the woman in their talk. He does not impose himself, nor does he condemn her, instead he respects her. He makes the Samaritan woman reflect on her own life and discover therein a deeper dimension. On the relationship between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, Vargas writes,

The communication between Jesus and the Samaritan woman shows that they communicate on equal ground, as persons. Jesus' respect for her person enables her to perceive the significant person before her. With her dignity affirmed, she recognizes the identity of the person who converses with her. Jesus, a Jew, and the woman, a Samaritan, are no longer strangers and enemies. He offers her the gift of God; she becomes an insider in his community of disciples.⁵

Jesus breaks through the barriers of race, sex, and religion. Earl Palmer writes, "He breaks through the masks which hide our painful and sensitive feelings about who we are."⁶ William Barclay sees it in another perspective. He says,

Jesus broke the chains that bound them to the past and gave them a power which enabled them to meet the future... Jesus enabled the Samaritan woman to break away from the past and He opened a new future for her – as well as for the Samaritan community.⁷

The story illustrates Jesus' pedagogy in dealing with the marginalized woman from Samaria. Jesus sees the woman as a person deserving of respect, despite her "sinful" situation. Jesus starts from human realities of thirst, family, and religion, and slowly bring the woman to a consciousness of her dignity as a daughter of a loving God and to the recognition of who Jesus is. This new awareness makes her a missionary among her fellow Samaritans. Jesus does not pass judgment on the woman's social status. Rather, Jesus brings her back to the mainstream of society, no longer an outcast but a missionary whose testimony made the Samaritans believe in Jesus as the Savior of the world.

John 5:2-16—The Paralyzed Man at the Pool Bethzatha

Out of the many invalids—blind, lame and paralyzed—one man who had been ill for thirty-eight years was singled out by the evangelist. This man caught Jesus' attention because he knew he has been there for a long time. Jesus opens the dialogue with a question, "Do you want to be made well?" the sick man replies, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me" (vv. 6-7). The sick man had no one to help him get into the water. The sick man is a portrait of a totally discouraged and depressed person. He is in a very desperate situation. Here is another marginalized member of the Jewish community at that time. No one even notices him and offers him help. The Jews become aware of his presence only when he is cured because he breaks the law by carrying his mat on the Sabbath.

⁵ Ibid., 46.

⁶ Earl Palmer, *The Intimate Gospel: Studies in John* (Waco, TX: Word, 1978), 54.

⁷ William Barclay, *The Gospel of John* (vol. 1; Philadelphia, PN: Westminster, 1975), 172.

Jesus treats the chronic problem of despair and depression. However, his healing of the paralyzed man leads to conflict with the Jews (v. 16). This story presents to us two responses to a marginalized person in society. While Jesus shows concern for restoration of the paralyzed man's health, the Jews are more concerned with the law of the Sabbath. For the Jews, the Sabbath law takes precedence over persons.

John 7:53-8:11—The Woman Accused of Adultery⁸

The scribes and the Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman who, they claimed, had been caught in adultery. As in John 4, the woman here had no name: she was simply identified by her sin—adultery. The scribes and Pharisees did not consider her a person with feelings and dignity. Barclay explains that, “She was simply a pawn in the game whereby they sought to destroy Jesus.”⁹ Their statement, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery” (8:4), implies that witnesses (they themselves?) had seen the very act. But where is the man? Why did they bring to public only the woman? Mosaic law commands that, “If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death.”¹⁰ Leon Morris conjectures that, “If the whole thing was engineered, provision would have been made for the man to escape.”¹¹ The scribes and the Pharisees looked at the woman caught in adultery not as a person but as a thing, an instrument whereby they could formulate a charge against Jesus. Jesus simply ignored them. He bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.

Jesus' initial response to the woman's accusers was one of silence. Palmer describes this silence as “nerve-wracking and awesome, the first sign we have in this account of the authority of Jesus Christ.”¹² Raymond Brown explains that “the portrayal of Jesus as a serene judge has all the majesty that one would expect of John.”¹³ When the scribes and Pharisees persisted in questioning Jesus, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (v. 7). This silenced the woman's accusers. “They went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him” (v. 9). Only Jesus remained with the woman. As Saint Augustine beautifully described the scene, “Only two remained: misery and mercy.”¹⁴ Rather than asking the woman for an explanation on the accusation, he asked about her accusers, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” (v. 10).

The woman waited for the verdict, which turned out to be a proclamation of God's mercy: “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again” (v. 11). This episode confirms the synoptic tradition that Jesus came to call not the righteous, but sinners. Jesus came to seek out and save the Lost (Luke 19:10//Matthew 9:13//Mark 2:17).

The story is another illustration of Jesus' dealing with the marginalized and ostracized members of society. Jesus treats them with compassion, not condemnation, as the scribes and Pharisees do. Jesus offers forgiveness coupled with an obligation to avoid sin in the future.

John 9:1-34—The Man Born Blind

The story of the woman accused of adultery is followed by the story of a man born blind. In this story, we have several characters with varied responses to the healing of the man born blind. First, we have the disciples who asked Jesus, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents,

⁸ Most of the ancient manuscripts omit John 7:53-8:11. For an extensive explanation on the Johannine origin of this periscope, see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: Biblia-Druck, 1975) 219-22.

⁹ Barclay, *Gospel of John*, vol. 2, 5.

¹⁰ Lev 20:10 and Deut 22:22ff.

¹¹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John. The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 885.

¹² Palmer, *The Intimate Gospel*, 86.

¹³ Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John, XIII-XXI*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 71.

¹⁴ “Relicti sunt duo, misera et misericordia,” in Jo. XXXIII, 5, *Corpus Christianorum*, 309.

that he was born blind?" (v. 2). Evident in the question is the common Jewish belief that disease, like blindness, is a consequence of sin. So either the blind man or his parents were presumed to be sinners. Jesus' response must have surprised them, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him" (v. 3). His words were followed by an action and instruction: he spat on the ground, made mud with his saliva, daubed the mud on the man's eyes, and told him to wash in the pool of Siloam. Having followed Jesus' instructions, the man born blind came back able to see. Verse 8 describes the man as a "beggar." Unable to work because of blindness, he was dependent on others' alms for a living.

Commentators differ in their interpretation of the blind man's healing. Barclay finds two "great eternal principles" in this story: (1) Jesus does not try to explain the connection of sin and suffering; this man's affliction came to him to give an opportunity of showing what God can do; (2) by helping those who are in trouble or in pain, we can demonstrate to others the glory of God.¹⁵ James McPolin considers the physical healing of the blind man as a sign that the eyes of faith are opened by Jesus and to him who is the "light of the world."¹⁶ For Schnackenburg, the story reflects the Jewish-Christian dispute at the time of the evangelist.¹⁷

Second, we have the blind man's parents. Verse 22 narrates that the parents of the man born blind "were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue." The reaction of his parents was one of fear. There is no mention that they rejoiced at the healing of their son.

Third, we also have the Jews. They reviled the man healed of his blindness (v. 28) when he asked them whether they also wanted to be Jesus' disciples (v. 27). Despite the testimony of the man (vv. 30-33), the Jews remained indignant and drove him out.

Here is another illustration of different responses to the poor and marginalized during the time of the evangelist John. While the disciples of Jesus consider sin as the cause of the man's blindness, Jesus responded to the man's need by healing his blindness. For Jesus, sickness is an opportunity to manifest God's glory. The blind man's parents could not be grateful and joyful for their son's healing for fear of the Jewish authorities. For the Jews, observance of the Sabbath is more important than the healing of the blind man. For the Jews, faithful observance of the Sabbath marks a man of God.



John 12:1-8—Mary Anoints Jesus

During supper at the home of Lazarus, his sister Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume (vv. 1-3). Mary's act of homage to Jesus scandalized Judas, the disciple

¹⁵ Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, 29.

¹⁶ James McPolin, *John* (Pasay, Metro Manila: St. Paul, 1979), 135.

¹⁷ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, vol. 2 (New York: Crossroads, 1969), 246.

described by the evangelist as “the one who was about to betray him [Jesus]” (v. 4). In the synoptic gospels (Matt 26:6-13//Mark 14:3-9), there is no mention of Judas Iscariot. The Matthean version is, “But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, ‘Why this waste? For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor’” (Matt 26:8-9). Mark, however, is more general: “But some were there who said to one another in anger, ‘Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.’ And they scolded her” (Mark 14:4-5). John has a parenthetical note on verse 6: “He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.” While the evangelists Matthew and Mark mentioned no other motive except help for the poor, the evangelist John notes the selfish agendum of Judas, that is, to have the money for himself.

Jesus corrects the attitude of Judas: “Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You have always the poor with you, but you do not have always me” (vv. 7-8). Dom Bernard Orchard takes this statement as a reference to the proximity of Jesus’ death.¹⁸ According to Kevin Quast, “The time for Jesus’ burial has arrived and he is now prepared. His death, in turn, will minister to all, including the poor.”¹⁹ Okure explains that anointing is the “last act of charity done to Jesus. In Judaism, burying the dead ranked above almsgiving as one of the greatest works of charity. The anointing was done to Jesus once and for all while there will always be opportunity to give alms to the poor.”²⁰ Money could be given to the poor any time, but kindness to Jesus must be done now.

It may sound strange that here Jesus seemingly does not care about the poor. However, during the last supper, John relates that when Jesus told Judas to do quickly what he was going to do (13:27b), “Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, ‘Buy what we need for the festival;’ or, that he should give something to the poor” (13:29). Thus, care for the poor may be in the mind of Jesus.

Judas who expressed concern for the poor actually had a vested interest; he wanted the money for himself. Seemingly Judas had good intentions. But the evangelist reveals to us his hidden agenda. He hides behind the poor to achieve his hidden agenda. The poor were exploited by Judas to serve his purpose.

Summary

Our short analysis of the selected texts from the Gospel according to John gives us some insights into biblical responses to the poor and marginalized then. In the story of the paralyzed man at the Pool of Bethzatha and the man born blind, the Jews displayed an indifferent attitude before and even after their healing by Jesus. These sick people were marginalized by the Jews. When they were restored to health, the Jews had difficulty accepting them because their healing occurred on a Sabbath.

The woman accused of adultery was condemned by the Jews without a fair trial. Judas, the disciple in-charge of the common purse, criticized Mary for her display of extravagance in anointing Jesus with a costly perfume. Judas seemingly wanted the money to be given to the poor but he actually wanted the money for himself. Here is a clear example of exploitation of the poor for selfish motives.

In all the stories we analyzed, we have Jesus whose dealing with the poor and marginalized went beyond the demands of the observance of the Sabbath and the Mosaic law on adultery. Those regarded by the Jews as poor sinners and marginalized—like the Samaritan woman, the paralyzed man, the man born blind and the woman accused of adultery—were the very people

¹⁸ Bernard Orchard, ed., *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1952), 1002.

¹⁹ Kevin Quast, *Reading the Gospel of John: An Introduction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 88.

²⁰ Teresa Okure, “John,” in *The International Bible Commentary: A Catholic and Ecumenical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. William R. Farmer, et al. (Quezon City: Claretian, 1998), 1484.

who won Jesus' respect and compassion. Their encounter with Jesus brought them physical healing, as well as transformation.

John the evangelist has presented to us three kinds of responses to the poor and the marginalized. One is exemplified by Jesus, who treats the poor and the marginalized with compassion and love because they are persons who have dignity worthy of respect. Jesus sees not only what the person has been, but above all what a person can be. The person takes precedence over social status and laws. Jesus inspires the poor sinners and the marginalized to discover in themselves the potential to become good and active members of society. The second response is personified by the Jews, the Pharisees and scribes, who treated the poor and the marginalized with contempt because their main concern is the observance of the Mosaic law rather than the well-being of the person. The third response is displayed by Judas whose concern for the poor was motivated by selfish interest.

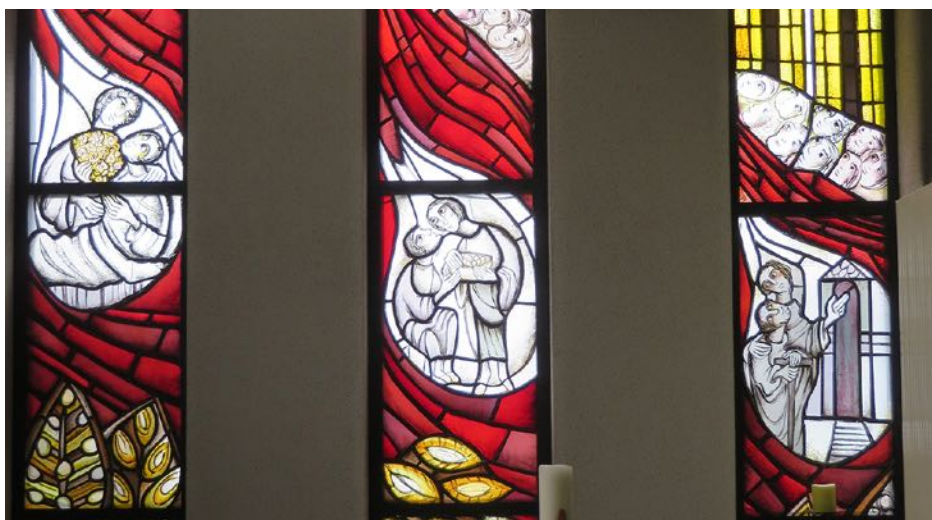
Responses Now

Having examined the biblical responses to the poor and marginalized as found in the Gospel of John and confronted with the problems described by Hoppe, we are now faced with the question on what our response should be. Our present world situation is not any better than during the biblical times. The challenge before us is even greater than before.

Our suffering world calls for more committed Christians to stand with the poor and the marginalized, to live a life of solidarity with the economically poor, the sick and the marginalized. There is a call for individuals and communities of faith to model compassion, simplicity and solidarity with the poor and the marginalized. The poor and the marginalized should be in the agenda of the community of faith. The experience of the poor and the marginalized in our society is an "apt metaphor for the universal need for salvation."²¹ We should not look for answers to these calls from the outside. If we want change for the better, it should begin in/among ourselves. As the song goes, "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me."

What should our response be? Should it be like Jesus' attitude to the Samaritan woman, the woman accused of adultery, the paralyzed man, and the man born blind? Or should it be like the response of the Jews, the scribes and the Pharisees, who treated these people with contempt and condemnation? Or should it be like Judas' false concern for the poor, which was motivated by selfish interest as seen in the story of the anointing of Jesus by Mary?

You and I have to make a choice.



²¹ Hoppe, *There Shall Be No Poor Among You*, 171.

The Letter to the Romans in the Face of a Neoliberal Economic Crisis and Intercultural Dialogue

ELSA TAMEZ *

Introduction

Romans is a letter which is commonly used as a foundation for certain doctrinal aspects of the Christian tradition. Often one forgets that it is a letter written in a particular situation for a specific community. Since the first chapters of the letter discussed central themes for Christians, such as sin, salvation, faith, grace, law, election, etc., it is easy to enter into abstract discussions with no relation to their contexts. In fact, the classic commentaries have helped to reinforce this decontextualized theological focus.

The second part of the letter contains exhortations and very important concrete situations, but it appears that the first part, because of its weight within the Christian tradition, has eclipsed this second part and has put to one side one of the principal motivations, according to recent investigations, which led Paul to write to the Christian communities of Rome: his journey to Spain.

Fortunately current academic studies are taking into consideration the specific situation of the communities in Rome. This is allowing for a rediscovery of aspects that have been passed over in the traditional reading of the above-mentioned theological ideas. Examples of significant contributions can be found in Neil Elliott,¹ Richard Horsley,² and Robert Jewett.³

In this article we are going to present in a very general form some of the contributions of the letter to the Romans which we believe apply to the context of the poor, as well as to the religious and pluricultural context as it is in Latin America where we live under a free market economic system. But first we will present some preliminary questions and at the end we will conclude with some problematic aspects of the letter. In our article which appears in *RIBLA 20*, „¿Cómo entender la carta a los Romanos?” [how to understand Romans] we focus above all on giving some pedagogical guidelines in order to look at the letter in a contextual way. We emphasized the sin of injustice and the justice of God reread from the standpoint of exclusion. In this article we again take up what is fundamental in those principles, but we dig deeper into the internal intercultural conflict in the Christian communities of Rome and take up again structural sin in light of the current economic crisis.

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¹ Neil Elliott, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994).

² Richard Horsley (ed.), *Paul and the Imperial Order* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 2004; idem (ed.), *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity International, 1997); idem (ed.), *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 2000).

³ Robert Jewett, *Romans* (Hermeneia: Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

As for the purpose of the letter to the Romans I have used the contributions of Jewett in his recent excellent and voluminous commentary on Romans.

Fundamental Preliminary Questions

There is a consensus that the letter to the Romans was written in the spring of 57, from Corinth. It is also generally accepted that the person charged with delivering the letter is Phoebe, Deaconess of Cenreas, a port of Corinth, and a benefactor of various Christians, among them Paul. Thirdly, as he himself says, it was she who wrote the letter as Paul dictated it. According to Jewett, it's very probable that he was accompanied by Phoebe in order to preach to the different communities of Rome.

The style is eminently rhetorical. It is complicated to decide to which genre of rhetoric it belongs, and so the deliberative style has been proposed because of the exhortations and the legal language as well as the forensic nature of its language. Nevertheless, we find it interesting that Jewett proposes the demonstrative style, since the discourse bears a diplomatic tone, appropriate for the tense situation in which Paul finds himself in terms of the hierarchy of the church in Jerusalem and especially because he needs the support of the Roman communities in order to carry the gospel to Spain.⁴

If we compare the authentic letters of Paul with each other, we find in Romans a certain difference, including the form in which he treats those to whom he is writing. In Galatians the theme of the law and justification by faith is discussed, but the rhetorical discourse is different. Romans is much longer and in contrast with other letters, except Galatians, dedicates extensive uninterrupted sections to theological themes.

The form in which he addresses those to whom he is writing, we insist, is different in Romans. That is because he is addressing communities with which Paul was not personally familiar since he had not founded them. His rhetorical style is significantly diplomatic. In addition he finds himself in a situation which demands careful attention to the form in which he says things.

There are various reasons which lead him to write in this form, besides the fact that he does not have apostolic authority as in other communities because he is not their founder. His upcoming trips to Jerusalem (15:25), Rome (15:24) and Spain (15:24) are on his mind. He plans to go to Jerusalem to deliver the collection he took up in Asia Minor for the poor (5:26). Nevertheless, the situation with the hierarchy is tense because of his very polemical position that the Jews welcome the Gentiles without circumcision and without following the Mosaic law. Paul knows that the communities in Rome were founded by people who came from Jerusalem and so he wants to



⁴ Jewett, *Romans*, p. 42ff, analyses the demonstrative genre and also observes its closeness to paraenetic and judicial discourse, which also are present in the letter.

win over the community by explaining clearly his position with respect to the equality of all peoples before God (see Rom 1-8).

On the other hand, he also knows that the Christian communities in Rome are guilty of reverse discrimination: the Gentile converts, who are the majority because of the expulsion of the Jews by the decree of Claudius, are discriminating against the Jewish converts because they hold on to certain customs in relation to food and feast days, which come from Judaism (14:1– 15:13). Therefore he dedicates a good part of his letter to explaining his position so that there are no misunderstandings; I am referring to his decision with respect to the inclusion of all, Jews and Gentiles, as equal peoples before God.

The situation in which Paul finds himself is delicate and, therefore, in a form which is very solemn he pleads with the audience in Rome that in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and by the love of the Holy Spirit they pray for him that the collection might be received „by the unbelieving in Jerusalem“ (15:20).

But, following Jewett, the fundamental purpose of the letter is to gain support for his missionary journey to Spain. The apostle needs contacts in Rome who might help him in turn with contacts in Spain, a place where there are no Jewish colonies, and where they do not speak Greek.⁵ In Spain Paul cannot follow the model which the book of Acts presents to us as to the process for the founding of churches. That is to say, beginning with the Jews, proselytes and those who are God-fearing,⁶ and ending with Jews and Gentiles who have converted to Christianity. Paul needs people who might help him in translation into Latin and other local languages.⁷ The Christian communities in Rome are poor, as we will see in a little bit, and so are unable to finance the journey. Jewett thinks that Phoebe, an important and wealthy woman, would be the one in charge of financing it. Nevertheless, he needs to be considered in a positive light and with the support of the Christians in Rome in order to obtain the logistical resources and the translators.⁸

Those to whom the letter is addressed, in agreement with the studies by Peter Lampe, are poor. Their location betrays them: the greater number live in the district of Trastevere and on the Via Appia/Capena. Both places, especially Trastevere, are places which are very unhealthy, where poor immigrants from everywhere arrive, merchants and artisans. There are, however, signs of Christians who came together in another area of a more comfortable social level, but who were the minority.⁹

It was in Trastevere where there was a concentration of the Jews who had arrived from Jerusalem. The people in these places come from distinct cultures and follow their cultural and religious customs. As we can see from the archaeological excavations it is here that the Christian communities held their meetings. This fact, as Jewett notes,¹⁰ changes the picture we have in other communities in Asia, founded by Paul, which count on a benefactor who economically supports the church and lends his house for liturgical meetings. Here there are no houses (*oikos* or *domus*), but rather buildings of 3 to 5 floors (*insula*), generally built of wood with apartments on different levels. They are without an interior patio, without corridors, and without drinking water nor bathrooms. The people paid the landlord. This implies that the Christians would be able to come together in one of the apartments and that together they would have to collaborate for the Eucharistic supper and for whatever community project. On the ground floor there were small businesses where 10 to 20 Christians might meet.

⁵ Ibid., p. 74ff.

⁶ Proselytes are those Gentiles who convert to Judaism, are circumcised and who follow the law of Moses; the God-fearing are those who convert to Judaism, but who are not circumcised.

⁷ Jewett, *Romans*, p. 79.

⁸ Ibid., p. 89f.

⁹ See Peter Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen in den ersten beiden Jahrhunderten* (Tübingen: JCB Mohr - Paul Siebeck, 1987); Elsa Tamez, *Contra toda condena: la justificación por la fe desde los excluidos* (San José: DEI, 1990), p. 109ff.

¹⁰ Jewett, *Romans*, p. 64ff.

Culturally, those to whom the letter is written are Gentiles in their majority. This is made clear in various parts. There are also Jewish converts, also surely proselytes and God-fearing converts to Christianity. The relations among these groups from different cultural backgrounds was generating tensions and discrimination among the members of the communities. Possibly many Jews, especially the leaders, had left as those expelled by the decree of Claudius in the year 49 (see Acts 18:2) and the Gentiles gained space and leadership; with their return conflicts arose.

Contributions of the Letter to the Grass-roots Latin-American Process

Paul is writing to the communities which live in the capital of the Roman Empire. They are experiencing conflicts because of relational problems owing to religious and cultural differences. In addition, in relation to social class, the majority is poor. These characteristics, proper also to the peoples of Latin America, being poor and of diverse cultures and spiritualities, subject to the neoliberal economic system which is wreaking havoc on the current crisis, leads us to focus on the following keys for reading in light of the Latin American context: emphasis on mutual respect, wariness before the structural sin which enslaves and leads to ruin, and the problem of blind obedience to a law without the intervention of conscience. The letter is an invitation to live as those who have risen and to walk in the newness of the spirit. Let us start from a concrete daily problem, that of discrimination, which will lead Paul to propose universal theological affirmations.

Getting Inside the Differences

Chapter 16, many times overlooked, is fundamental in understanding the existing diversity among the members of the different communities in Rome. By looking at the names one can deduce their cultural and economic background. We find Greek names, Jewish and Latin ones. The majority have Greek names (19 persons). This fact, in agreement with the experts, signals the status of slave or freeman, since it was the custom to give them these Greek names such as Hermans, Olympas, Persis, etc.; although we are able to say the same thing about the Latin names, such as Julia (16:15), which is also used for slaves in Roman households. Some of those who are Jewish use Greek names such as Andronicus or Herodion, or Latin ones such as Aquila, Prisca, Julia and Rufus.

Besides the 26 names of men and women, Paul sends his greetings to at least five distinct communities. In 16:5a Paul greets those who meet in the house of Priscilla and Aquila; in 16:19 the Christian community among the slaves of Aristobulus; in 16:11b the community among the slaves of Narcissus; in 16:14b the community (brothers) who are with Asyncritus; and in 16:15b the community which is with Philologus, Julia and others. This last community he calls „the Saints”, possibly because their background is Jewish.

This variety of names makes clear to us their cultural identity (Jewish/Gentile) as well as their social and economic status. Priscilla and Aquila, because they have a house in which the church meets, are presumed to have a more comfortable position in distinction to the other communities such as those of slaves who meet in the houses of typical neighbourhoods (*insula*).¹¹

The tensions between and within the communities appear clearly in chapter 14 and also in part of chapter 15. It's very probable that at this time (57 C.E.) the tension inside Judaism among those who believed that Jesus was the Messiah and those who did not had so deepened that they were on the brink of separating into two distinct religions.¹² Paul tries to avoid this, encouraging them to welcome each other without demanding that the other change his position or that one have dominion over the other. The concrete and daily problem is that some eat only certain

¹¹ The fact that he says „to those of” indicates that they are someone's slaves.

¹² See James Walters, *Ethnic Issues in Paul's Letter to the Romans: Changing Self-definitions in Earliest Roman Christianity* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1993).

foods and observe special days because of questions of religious tradition, and others do not distinguish neither between types of food nor between the days.

Possibly this deals with Jewish Christians (or proselytes or those who fear God) who still follow certain prescriptions of the Mosaic law and Gentiles who do not feel bound by these customs. These are considered strong while the others are called weak. Paul encourages the strong to embrace the weak and the weak not to judge the strong. In 15:3 he writes: „the one who eats, should not look down on the one who does not eat; and the one who does not eat, should not judge the one who eats either, because God has drawn close to him.” In the community one should not judge nor depreciate the other because of questions of tradition or appearances (14:10). These are questions which weaken the community, fragment it and cause the plan of the kingdom of God not to be seen with clarity. Therefore he affirms: „the kingdom of God is neither food nor drink, but justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (14:17).



The communities living in the capital of the Roman Empire have many problems to deal with, such as poverty, insecurity, taxes, discrimination on the part of Roman citizens, persecution for rejecting the cult of the Emperor, etc. The internal wear on the communities jeopardizes the communitarian plan of God. Therefore what needs to be encouraged in the community and among the communities is what mutually builds up and leads to peace (14:19).

The so-called „strong” who feel free to eat everything have to take the first step; these, who are probably Gentiles or Christian Jews like Paul, ought to abstain from giving scandal to those who believe that it is wrong to drink certain liquids (wine) or to eat certain foods (meat) (14:21). Persons come before personal satisfaction. But the exhortation is for everyone. Those who eat neither meat nor wine nor celebrate particular days are not to be criticized either. Therefore Paul resumes his call: „therefore, draw close to one another as Christ has drawn close to you for the glory of God” (15:7).

What do the circumstances of that time say to us in Latin America today? One of the tasks of Christians in today’s global-

ized world is to learn to live with other cultures, whether Christian or not. Christian men and women have to learn to live with Christians of other cultures and races, who share the Bible as the norm, but who have different practices of worship or styles of life in accord with their Christian tradition. The discussions which are centred on the details of the lifestyle of the rest, and in judging the other, not only waste a lot of energy uselessly, but they can cause the loss of vision of the plan of the community. The text of Romans seen here teaches this among other things.

But in addition Christians ought to learn to live side-by-side in constant dialogue with other cultures which confess another religion, and which are guided by another norm. Current globalization unites us, and the struggle for justice against violence and against the destruction of the environment is a demand which ought to lead us to overcome confessional barriers. And although the letter to the Romans contributes to a certain degree to interreligious dialogue, still it brings it to a close in the faith of Jesus Christ: all of creation continues to moan, waiting for the

revelation not only of Christians of different cultures but of all peoples of all religions of the world.

Humility, respect, openness, listening, knowing the other and the praxis for justice are fundamental for interreligious dialogue. Intercultural dialogue which starts with the belief that one's own Christian religion is superior is not a dialogue. Humility is the indispensable ingredient for any interreligious dialogue. In a dialogue genuine openness to listen, to learn and to understand the other culture is what makes the dialogue not an official ecumenical farce.

Relating this passage from Romans (14:1–15:13) with the first part of the letter which speaks about the justice of God (Rom 1-8) which we will take up again in the following point, were able to conclude the following: 1) the justice of God has been revealed to all cultures; no culture is perfect. The enslaving domination, which Paul calls sin, makes no exceptions among peoples or persons; all are called to perfection for the common good. 2) In order for this intercultural dialogue to occur, we have to always have present the vision that unites us, that is, the plan which seeks the common good. Discussions ought not to focus on critiques or depreciation of different cultural practices, thus losing the horizon. 3) And lastly, we ought to accept the challenge of living in solidarity with minority cultures and those which are excluded and against which there is discrimination.

The Avarice which Leads to the Death of All and to Structural Sin

To situate oneself in solidarity with the poor of different cultures, opinions and spiritualities is important because we live under a system which for Paul leads to the destruction of all. This system he calls sin.

Various scholars since the 90s have begun to link the letter to the Romans with the Roman Empire, and the grassroots reading from Latin America does not do so in another form. The terminology utilized, which today we consider to be deeply theological, was utilized in Mediterranean antiquity in daily language; gospel, Saviour, faith, son of God, Lord. We know these terms were used for the Emperor who was considered to be of divine lineage. Let's remember that he is considered a divine son of God, Lord and Saviour, who brought peace to the world.¹³ In addition, triumph in war, the birth of a son, the anniversary of the Emperor are considered good news. On the coins one reads *jus et fides* (law and faith).¹⁴

All these terms are used by Paul in his letter to the Romans but there applied to Jesus Christ. It's not by chance that Paul has spoken in this form to the Christians of Rome; his audience would immediately grasp the link. Paul in his thesis explains the justice of God as a justice different from the justice of the Romans, a people expert in laws, and not only the justice of God as something separate from the Mosaic law.

And so we find two important aspects in connection with the context of the first century. On the one hand the justice which God offers he offers to all peoples without distinction. Therefore there should not be discrimination of one against the other. On the other hand, the justice of God is different from the justice of the Roman Empire, manifested in its laws and in the famous *Pax Romana*. The justice of God is full of grace. It is not about merit, nor does it demand it but favours those who are excluded. That is to say it is characterized by his mercy.

In order to come to this conclusion Paul, in the first three chapters of his letter to the Romans, describes what sin is (*amartia*). The term appears in the singular and is personified (3:9). It refers to the power which enslaves and leads to death. This concept is key in order to understand the existing system in the first century in the Roman Empire and the existing system today un-

¹³ See the famous inscription of Priene which praises the emperor who ended the war and brought peace. According to this, for the world the birth of Divine Augustus was the beginning of the good news of peace.

¹⁴ About this terminology see Néstor Miguez, *No como los otros que no tienen esperanza: estudio socioeconómico de 1 Tesalonicenses* (doctoral dissertation: Buenos Aires: ISEDET, 1989); Neil Elliott, *Liberating Paul*.

der the economic globalization of neoliberal politics. We've already spoken about this in other articles.¹⁵

Here we want to take up in summary form the issue that today we are living in a profound crisis of the neoliberal system and are seeing the results of how it is leading to the ruin of the majority of persons, not only the poor. The so-called savage capitalism which opened the scandalous gap between the poor and rich now is affecting the sectors in between and everyone else in some form. Only a different kind of justice, a different economic model, can help us get out of the mire in which the unregulated system of the free market has placed us. The motto „let him save himself who can”, promoted by excessive individualism, cannot save even the one who wishes to be saved.

Before talking about sin, Paul mentions it in 1:18, alluding to the complete inversion which controls the world and which is condemned by God: „in effect, the anger of God reveals itself out of heaven against every impiety and injustice of human beings which imprisons truth in injustice”. He explains this inversion in a slow rhythm from 1:19 to 3:9 referring to the practices of injustice of human beings who, motivated by the avaricious desires (*epithumia*) of their heart, have been constructing the inversion of society „imprisoning truth in injustice”.

Wisdom literature sees this reversal in the fact that while things go very well for the impious they go badly for the just person. For Paul, following the wisdom tradition (Wis 13:1-9) and the prophetic tradition (Jer 22:13-16), this is a rejection of the knowledge of the true God or the veneration of idols (1:23). The practices reveal a false knowledge of God because these practices are directed by egotistical and greedy desires.

This is the point on which we want to focus: avarice and egotism as the starter motor which generates the construction of structural sin. Structural sin, visible in the system in which ethical values are inverted, has taken control of all in such a way that to convince isolated hearts that avarice is not something good is insufficient.

If indeed systemic chaos arises from greedy desires, the solution is not to convert hearts, but rather lies in a new creation which comes from systemic justice: the justice of God, that is the justice of the reign of God, which is revealed for all, victims as well as the victimizers. Because beneath sin (*amartia*) or a sinful system, including those who believe that, according to their own laws, they can present themselves as just before God in fact cannot. Their practices betray them, because they promulgate laws such as “do not steal” and then they steal (2:21).

Paul lays out this argument in Chapter 2 of Romans in order to make it clear that the Jews, who feel free from sin by counting on the law of Moses, are also subject to sin (2:9-29). For that reason Paul goes beyond wisdom literature to conceive of sin as a personified power who dominates all human beings, good and bad.

Uncontrollable greed today manifested principally in housing mortgages, was the match which caused the explosion of the global financial crisis which was the deepest in the last 79 years. Wanting to make money easily, speculating, without regulatory ethical rules, is having a disastrous result which is dragging everybody to ruination in one form or another.¹⁶ Today more than ever one can see with greater clarity the consequences of a structural sin which is promoted by greed. In the 90s large corporations and those people who were the richest in the world saw greed as a virtue; today they are suffering the consequences: exorbitant unemployment, eviction of families from their houses, insecurity, fear and suicides.

The economist Paul Krugman, Nobel prize winner in economics in 2008, asserts: this is one of those moments when an entire philosophy has been discredited. Those who were defending greed as good and that markets ought to be self-regulating are now suffering catastrophe.¹⁷ Speaking about the same theme, that is, of the current financial crisis, the theologian Hans Küng

¹⁵ See Elsa Tamez, „Libertad Neoliberal y libertad paulina”, *Pasos* (1997) 79; eadem, „El Dios de la gracia versus el „dios” del mercado”, *Concilium* 287 (2000) 139-48.

¹⁶ For an analysis of the current situation, see: Wim Dierckxsens, *La crisis mundial del siglo XXI: oportunidad de transición al postcapitalismo* (San José: DEI/Desde abajo, 2008).

¹⁷ Interview for *El País*, 15 March 2009, Sevilla, conducted by A. González and M.A. Noceda.

noted in an interview: „in greed human beings lose their ‘souls’, their liberty, their composure, their inner peace, and with that all that makes us human“.¹⁸

Greed in the times of the Roman Empire showed itself in many forms, especially in the creation of wars of conquest in order to extract taxes from those dominated, and in concentration of land on the part of the elite. But no type of persons was exempt, such as the investors and speculators in the popular housing of that time.

The Christian communities in Rome knew very well what greed was, since they suffered from it in daily life, for example, in the collection of taxes for the Roman empire, such as the exploitation of private investors in the construction of housing. In the study of the *insulae* where the poor lived in Rome we read often about the greed of the owners who rented the apartment. There were elegant *insulae*, in other neighbourhoods of higher social status, but the *insulae* in the poor neighbourhoods, as we've said, were, in general, buildings with very small apartments right up against each other. The investors, in order to benefit from every space, at times did not allow for an interior patio nor light nor corridors some of which were so steep that they were difficult to walk up for many, since they had to pass by various apartments before they could arrive at the one they were looking for. The owners, because of greed, used building materials of less cost, and since they wanted to get the greater return, they began to construct up to 5 or 8 floors which commonly would have been 3 to 4 floors. Of course this caused buildings to collapse. The material used was wood, the reason because of which fires were frequent, since oil lamps were used for lighting. Fires and collapses were among the more common causes of death. Since the time of the government of Julius Caesar it was necessary to make laws in order to regulate this construction with respect to height and construction materials (baked brick). Even though we find corruption and speculation on the part of investors, such that it is said that the fire in Rome which Nero blamed on the Christians, had as its background to eliminate the *insulae* which caused death in order to reconstruct the city.



No one is exempt from the evil of greed, since the good desires of the heart just as greedy desires form an intrinsic part of the human condition. And frequently Paul recognizes that what one does not want to do, one does; and what one wants to do, is not within one's grasp (7:15). Nevertheless the apostle insists that the spirit is able to orient the heart toward good desires which can be converted into good works (8:6; cf. Gal 5:22).

Paul speaks about structural sin as a kind of mire out of which there is no exit except by the intervention of the justice of God. Nowadays, in the face of the crisis, the economist Wim

¹⁸ Bahianoticias.com. Información ciudadana y solidaria, 23 February 2009.

Dierckxsens affirms with hope that the collapse of the neoliberal system offers an opportunity to develop new forms of economic relations and lifestyles.¹⁹

Grace and Law in Worlds Globalized by the Interests of Empires

Another of the vital contributions of Paul, as much in Romans as in Galatians, is his analysis of the law. We only mentioned this in passing. The theme arises from his self-critique of the law of Moses with the intention of clarifying that observance of the law, as good as it might be, does not save nor justify persons. In the way that those of Jewish culture as much as non-Jews are equal before God, they have been subjected to sin and need a different logic for the law to be able to overcome the state of things. This logic Paul calls grace, either faith or spirit.

Paul, in his analysis that goes beyond the law of Moses has in mind his own negative experience of this law as well as of Roman law, seeing in its observance acts of injustice. Chapter 7 of Romans is a very important analysis and one still valid today, which Paul makes about the logic of the law. For that review I recommend my article which appeared in *RIBLA* 51:

Basically Paul treats two points in this chapter (Romans 7) of a clarifying character with respect to the law. Verses 7:7–13 explain the disastrous relationship between sin and law, as the consequent annihilation of conscience; verses 7:14–24 lay out the disastrous relationship between sin and the human person. In both cases the fundamental problem lies not in the law nor in the person, but in structural sin (*amartia*) which converts the law and human desires into its mechanisms for effectiveness and for exhibiting its destructive and death dealing power.²⁰

This theme finds its pertinence just now as we are experiencing the crisis of an unregulated market, that is, which does not admit of interference or regulations from the state. The law of the market, as neoliberal economists have imposed it, is successful without the intervention of reason, and without taking into account either circumstances or places. Such irrationality, in order to be realized did no more than exclude many people could not compete. But the chaos was aggravated by not having regulated the market nor having placed controls on the greed of the bankers who were receiving mortgages on houses with interest which were unpayable in the long run. The owners of these houses, from one day to the next, found themselves without a house and with a gigantic debt.

Millions of people are living this, not only in the United States, but in other parts of the world, caught in the same neoliberal system. More than 50% have not been able to pay for their home and thousands are now displaced by the law. The observance of the law in dispossessing thousands of people for not being able to make their monthly payment shows in a pathetic way what Paul affirms about the disastrous relation between sin and law (7:13). In each case of eviction and unemployment a human tragedy is lived out and sin committed. Now the new President of the United States, Barack Obama, together with the Senate and the House of Representatives are intervening and demanding control. Very much too late.

Chapter 6 of the letter to the Romans is an invitation to live a new way of being human, to be guided more by discernment in favour of the life of persons and not of the law, since the life of people is always above any law. The law is good only when it serves the life of persons and peoples.

Romans 13:1-7

These seven verses have been a problem for rereading the text, since Paul asks the Christian communities to submit to the constituted authorities, in this case Imperial Rome. It would seem that he tosses aside all the contributions which he has made about the gift of freedom from the law and sin and death. Sené Vidal resolves the problem by affirming that that is an unknown

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 40ff.

²⁰ See Elsa Tamez, „El Sistema pecaminoso, la ley y los sujetos en Romanos 7,7-25”, *RIBLA* 51, 2.2005, 79-85.

Pauline interpolation²¹, since it contradicts all of the principles of Paul himself. Others assert that the intention of this text, among other things, and with all of its limitations, is to safeguard the fragile persecuted communities, since these do not want to pay taxes and that places them in a dangerous position in front of the greedy collectors.²² Jewett considers this section as authentically Pauline, but contradictory. It is paradoxical in the sense that the critique which Paul makes in his letter of the system of patronage and honour and shame, here he makes on the side of exhorting people to render honour to the Emperor and his authorities. According to Jewett, this is due to the fact that Paul needs all the help he can get from the system in order to be a missionary in Spain.²³ The apostle never imagined the catastrophic repercussions that this text has had in history, above all in systems of dictatorship.

Conclusion

The letter of Paul to the communities of Rome is a document not only pertinent to the communities of Rome which were persecuted, discriminated against and which had internal problems of intercultural discrimination, but is a document which is particularly valid for the current times. If in the 90s, when the world and the society of the globalized market were being reconfigured and that of neoliberal politics being imposed as the only alternative, we theologians and Biblicists were getting a glimpse of the consequences for those on the margins; today at the beginning of the first decade of the 21st century, this critique again becomes indispensable in the face of the economic catastrophe of which we are all witnesses and victims. We might say the same with regard to the intercultural tensions of the Christian communities of Rome and the unavoidable intercultural dialogue in our Latin America.



²¹ See Senén Vidal, *Las cartas originales de Pablo* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1996).

²² See Uwe Wegner, „Romanos 13,1-7: Los Cristianos y las autoridades: una lectura sociológica”, *RIBLA* 4 (1989).

²³ Jewett, *Romans*, p. 803.

Bible Translation and Reconstruction Hermeneutics

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1. Introduction

Jesse N. K. Mugambi remains one of the best-known proponents of reconstruction theology in Africa. The first goal of this paper is to appreciate Mugambi's contribution in the light of other similar writings, especially those from the Kinshasa school of theology and Charles Villa-Vicencio. Generally speaking, the reconstruction paradigm is meant to rebuild all sectors of life in Africa, including church ministries of which Bible translation constitutes to be an integral part. That is why the second goal of this study is to show whether reconstruction paradigm is able to contribute anything in the field of Bible translation and whether the latter can enhance the former. Then the paper will first expose some contents of African reconstruction hermeneutics while the second part shall deal with a brief history of Bible translation in Africa, where any contribution by reconstruction hermeneutics will be highlighted. Africa is taken in a geographical sense and refers to the land, people or culture of the continent which bears that name. The conclusion will summarise the findings.

2. Reconstruction Hermeneutics

Reconstruction Hermeneutics in Africa is most associated with the Kenyan Jesse N. K. Mugambi, the South African Villa-Vicencio, and the Congolese Kä Mana. For some scholars, it represents a new flow of thought which started in 1990 under the patronage of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC). It claims to offer an alternative thinking for mobilising resources to rebuild the Post Cold-War Africa, a topic that might not have been adequately addressed by early paradigms such as inculturation and liberation. However, it seems more constructive to consider inculturation, liberation, and reconstruction as particular efforts of articulating contextual theology in Africa. Each of them, and even all of them together, constitutes an unfinished task to the extent that none of them can claim to offer alone the exhaustive and final approach to African reality. Furthermore, all three aim at the same ultimate goal, namely, the betterment of spiritual and social life in Africa. Therefore, it is not surprising to find many aspects of their agenda and expressions overlapping. More interestingly, the Kinshasa school of theology has been wrestling with all three paradigms, even if some scholars may associate Kinshasa with inculturation only. The first section of this part will try to show how the three paradigms are articulated in the Kinshasa school of theology. The second and the third ones will explore how reconstruction theology has been developed by Charles Villa-Vicencio and Jesse N. K. Mugambi respectively.

2.1 Reconstruction Hermeneutics in the Kinshasa School of Theology

Kinshasa school of theology refers to a tradition of thought generated among Congolese and other scholars through academic training, teaching, research or pastoral involvement at Catholic Faculties of Kinshasa since its foundation in 1957. It has been focusing on contextual theology

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with a particular emphasis on inculturation. The school inherited this concept from some immediate pioneers like *La Philosophie Bantoue* by Placide Tempels (1948) and from a collective book entitled *Des Prêtres noirs s'interrogent* (1956). Inculturation generally means a process of gospel incarnation in a culture and the evangelization of the culture or a constructive dialogue between biblical, traditional, and contemporary cultures. *La philosophie Bantoue* and *Des Prêtres noirs s'interrogent* advocated the need for evangelising Africa in a way that both promotes its positive cultural values and discourages only the negative ones, instead of demoting African culture as a whole. For the Kinshasa school of theology, the theological debate that took place in 1960 between Tharcisse Tshibangu (1960:333–46) and Alfred Vanneste (1960:346–52) about the possibility of African theology marked a more academic start of inculturation theology in Africa. In 1961, the Episcopal Conference of D.R. Congo adopted and introduced inculturation as the key pastoral option for the church. This option envisioned the growth of local churches to become self-supportive in terms of staff, theology, liturgy, and funds. Unsurprisingly, such an option certainly triggered a movement of liberation from dependency on external forces in all vital sectors. Consequently, the Kinshasa school of theology has rightly been depicted as a theology of inculturation and promotion-liberation (Ngindu-Mushete 1989: 107; Bujo & Ilunga-Muya 2003/6: 67). More recently, an inculturation-liberation paradigm is being developed with newer insights from biblical exegesis through the methods of inculturation biblical hermeneutics or intercultural exegesis and mediations (Matand 1998:143–67; Cilumba 2001; Loba-Mkole 2005). Though they characterise the Kinshasa school of theology, inculturation and promotion-liberation concerns go beyond this school, as it is evidenced in the works of other African theologians (Bujo & Ilunga-Muya 2003/6).

Reconstruction hermeneutics in the Kinshasa school of theology emerged with the philosopher, theologian, and Catholic priest N. Tshiamalenga (1981:71–80), was relayed by a Pan-African Catholic Church institution, the Symposium of Episcopal Conference of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM: 1985) and was more vividly advocated by the Lutheran theologian Kä Mana (1993; 1994; 2000). Borrowing this concept from K. O. Apel and J. Habermas, Tshiamalenga defines reconstruction as a critical synthesis of various situations put into words, and of a meaningful whole of philosophical texts starting from pre-existing collections. It implies a deconstruction of the received sense and its reconstruction with an enriched sense. Tshiamalenga presents four steps of reconstruction applicable to African philosophy: (1) the choice of topics, (2) faithful and critical reproduction, (3) historical and/or systematic reconstruction, and (4) creative philosophical production. Faithful and critical reproduction refers to a genuine and rationally justified rendering of the collected traditions. Historical and/or systematic reconstruction requires finding a unifying whole, thanks to a judicious choice of one or several operational concepts. Creative philosophical production is achieved as an African philosopher



answers universal questions of humanity and its destiny, in consonance with African and global sources. Many philosophers have practiced a similar systemic reconstruction of previous philosophies or traditions. This applies to Plato with the notion of ideas, Aristotle with matter and form, Descartes with evidence, Kant with the transcendental subject, Marx and Engels with the class struggle, Tempels with life-force, and Nyerere with „Ujamaa.” Tshiamalenga himself came up with the philosophy of „bisoity,” which is a neologism coined from the Lingala word „biso,” meaning „we.” It underscores the absolute primacy of the „we” over the „I-You.” On a global scale, „bisoity” is systematically founded on the philosophy of language (Apel and Habermas), yet it strongly resonates with the African philosophy of solidarity or that of Nyerere’s Ujamaa. For Tshiamalenga, this process of semio-pragmatic reconstruction can be extended to African theology, as well. It just requires the latter to integrate the four essential moments in its research endeavour, i.e., selection of topics, faithful and critical restoration, historical and/or systematic reconstruction, and creative theological production.

Tshiamalenga’s philosophical system of bisoity values African traditional ethics, namely that of the Luba ethnic group (Central D.R. Congo). This ethic is defined in terms of „ethics before God” and „ethics before society”. Ethics before God probes the heart, but what offends God is the evil intention rather than the materiality of evil actions. People, however, are more concerned about ethics before society. This ethic is summarised in four great crimes dictated by the ancestors: killing or wounding another, seizing another’s goods or wife, eating others by sorcery, and adulterous women (1974:184).



In 1985, SECAM invited Christians to engage in the reconstruction of the continent:

The credibility and possibility of evangelisation will be to the measure of its being in accordance with the legitimate African aspiration to take their destiny into their hands, and to the measure of its being at the disposal of the search for solutions to the problems of this continent and its reconstruction (SECAM 1985: #77).

Kä Mana (1993:45) criticises the inculturation-liberation theology as inadequate for post-colonial Africa, and embraces the reconstruction model, as proposed by AACC. He does not refer either to Tshiamalenga or to SECAM. He credits Jose B. Chipenda and André Karamaga as the initiators of reconstruction theology before AACC could adopt it in 1990. For Kä Mana, this paradigm was timely, since after the failure of thirty years of independence, Africa needed to reconstruct sustainable economies, human policies, creative societies, and cultures capable of historical undertakings.

Kä Mana (1993:117–8; 1994:216–22) posits four ethical and practical tasks of reconstruction theology. These include incarnation (being immersed in the life of African societies), question time (contesting everything which alienates human dignity), liberation (freeing the imagination to overcome psychological illness, political inability, cultural dreariness, and economic anguish), and innovation (planting the seed of the Kingdom of God on the political, economic, social, spiritual, and moral sites of the continent). More interestingly, Kä Mana (1993:197) recognises that liberation, inculturation, and reconstruction are three inseparable parts of the same life experience. While overloaded by sorrowful life experiences, Africans dream about life in abundance promised by Jesus of Nazareth. The project of reconstructing Africa finds its strongest biblical

foundation in John 10:10 (Kä Mana 1994:101). Jesus of Nazareth and Christology are at the heart of reconstruction theology. Jesus is portrayed not only as the founder of Christian faith, but also the very person who constitutes the radical logic of love. Because of him, reconstruction's ethics implies a fight for, in, and by love. This is manifested by the logic of giving and sharing, creating the other in his/her very human image, making concrete solidarities based on human dignity, and allowing a new world in which all are one by love (1993: 191-3).

Even if Kä Mana does not make use of insights from Tshiamalenga, he ends up doing what the latter has recommended for African theology, namely, deconstructing and reconstructing. As Valentin Dedji (2003:141) puts it:

Not only he [Kä Mana] is prompt at deconstructing most of theological, ideological, and social theories that have hitherto characterised intellectual debates in Africa, but he also suggests alternative patterns of creative thought and reconstructive action. He exemplifies the principle according to which, in order to reconstruct, one must deconstruct.

2.2 Villa-Vicencio and Theology of Reconstruction

In 1992, Charles Villa-Vicencio published a book entitled *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-Building and Human Rights*. This book investigates the implications of transforming liberation theology into a theology of reconstruction. The role of reconstructive theology is examined within a context of nation-building, weight of dead generations, rule of law and values, human rights, politics, economy, and the right to believe.

For Villa-Vicencio, the themes of economic justice and the spiritual empowerment of the poor continue to be relevant to the period of reconstruction in South Africa, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and elsewhere. In addition to the particular demands of each context, one needs to be aware of four historical shifts that have taken place within the global context:

The failure of the economic and political structures of Eastern Europe, the collapse of a widespread belief in utopian socialist ideals in the Third World countries, the failure of Western-based capitalism to meet the needs of the poor, a new-found appreciation that even under the most adverse conditions, the poor rise in rebellion in demand of their rights (Villa-Vicencio 1999:163).

It is within this context that the empowerment of the poor becomes a key concept of Villa-Vicencio's reconstruction agenda. He requests theologians to be concerned about human rights, promoting democracy in terms of the „recognition of difference and the right of dissent,“ as well as being involved in „matters of constitutionalism, the rule of law, human rights and free elections as a basis for addressing the economic problems of the poor“ (Villa-Vicencio 1999:168).

Villa-Vicencio (1999:164-7) offers eight theological observations for the church to consider promoting as an alternative or just economy that favours the poor.

- (1) Theology as a discourse about the well-being of God's creation, which implies due respect of human dignity, solidarity and natural environment: neither a human being nor a natural order must be subjugated to unnecessary exploitation.
- (2) Commitment to a balanced budget, although one that favours the poor, in order to materialise theological ideals of the alternative economy.
- (3) The church to work with concerned economists, political activists, and exploited poor in order to redress situations that benefit the rich and impoverish the poor (transnational corporations, monopoly businesses, labour-saving technology, etc).
- (4) The church to ask anew whether the concerns of the poor are being promoted within any particular economic order.
- (5) Supporting specific models of economic growth and distribution to the benefit of the poor and disadvantaged, encouraging small business initiatives, informal trading and agricultural cooperatives, and protecting them from being swallowed up by big companies.

- (6) Addressing seriously the issues of environmental pollution by the industrial economy (Mugambi & Vähäkangas 2001; RAT 2004).
- (7) The church to discern the practical implications of theological work that supports the struggle for a just economic system within the Bible. The biblical God takes sides with the poor and the destitute (Lev 25; Exod, Amos; Matt 25:31-46; Luke 1:46-56; etc).
- (8) The church to take note of the legitimate objection of economists that „theology does not produce grain, nor does it build houses!“ However, theology has to play its role of bringing forth basic liberating biblical traditions in the struggle for a just economic system.

In Villa-Vicencio's reconstruction theology, „*ubuntu*“ and *freedom* are regarded as ethical values. Ubuntu (humaneness) is a key category of African traditions, where it is understood as the organic wholeness of humanity – a wholeness realised in and through other people. This notion, in the view of Villa-Vicencio, is enshrined in the Xhosa proverb: *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person through persons). He argues that ubuntu „involves the realisation of that for better and worse we are shaped by a host of others with whom we share our lives“. Ubuntu is a set of meaningful relationships that are cherished by traditional African culture, i.e., kinship by blood, by marriage, or even by association (Villa-Vicencio 1999:169; Mugambi & Smit 2004:83-111). Freedom is a basic human value, which is not achieved in a day, or once and for ever. It is rather an unfinished process (Villa-Vicencio 1999:171). Nelson Mandela (1994:616-7), the South African icon of freedom fighters, acknowledges that even his liberation out of jail was only a first step of a longer and more difficult journey.

2.3 Mugambi and Reconstruction Hermeneutics

Following his article published in 1991, Jesse N. K. Mugambi has elaborated on reconstruction more remarkably since 1995 and onwards (2003). This paradigm was proposed as a new paradigm for African Christian theology and agreed upon during the General Committee of AACC (1991) held in Nairobi early in 1990. For Mugambi (1995:2), this concept has a multi-disciplinary appeal, as it should be of interest to sociologists, economists, and political scientists. More interestingly, he finds that reconstruction should be of interest to African theologians of all doctrinal persuasions, given that the task of social reconstruction cannot be restricted to religious denominational confines. According to him, the concept of liberation „has been closely associated with Anglophone Protestant theologians, having been first popularised by Latin American and African-American theologians“. Inculturation „has been associated with some African Catholic theologians, having been first popularised by Catholic missionary scholars, notably Aylward Shorter“ (Mugambi 1995:2). Mugambi's reconstruction theology or, rather, Christian theology of social reconstruction targets different levels, which include personal, cultural, ecclesiastical, political, economic, aesthetic, moral, and theological (Mugambi 1995:15-7; 2003:36-60). Methodologically, Mugambi's reconstructive theology operates by treading „across four modes of intellectual activity – descriptive, prescriptive, prospective and postulative“ (Mugambi 2003:218).

For Mugambi (1995:xv) the „New World Order“ will require a new understanding of the church or a new ecumenism and a new corresponding theology that „should be reconstructive rather than destructive ... inclusive rather than competitive...“. Mugambi (1995:13)



acknowledges that the notion of construction and reconstruction is inspired by engineering and the social sciences. He nevertheless attempts to articulate it as a theological paradigm. Nehemiah in the book that bears his name and Jesus in Matthew 5–7 are viewed as exemplary figures in „reconstructive theological texts“. According to Mugambi (2003:74), the task or ethics of reconstruction requires the input of all members of the community. Professionals and unskilled members are all invited to voluntarily place their expertise or labour where it is needed in the reconstruction process, for the common good of the whole community. In other words, each one is responsible to bring his or her contribution to the edification of better church and civil communities in Africa. If he has been accused of lacking originality, Mugambi has the merit of stressing the necessity of building a solid foundation for a new ecumenism that would give priority to co-operation and amiability over the old antagonism among African Christian churches (Dedji 2003:87).

Some biblical scholars have started to embrace the reconstruction paradigm and use it as a biblical hermeneutical tool. Manus offers a reconstructive re-reading of Mark 11:15–19, which reports the story of the cleansing of the temple. His model of reconstructive reading proceeds by establishing the social-historical context of the story, analyses the Markan text, as well as the Synoptic-Johannine revision of the text. He comes up with some interpretations grounded in previous analysis. He concludes that Jesus' action challenges us to reconstruct ourselves first and foremost; and then to go out into the larger society as „salt of the earth and light of the world“. This conclusion is based on the understanding of Mark 11:11–19 which ultimately portrays Jesus as the Reconstructor: „the reconstructor of the degradation the national religious and cultic center had fallen into,“ and „the reconstructor of the spiritual wellbeing of the temple worshippers“ (Manus 2003:116). Manus (2003:106) is the first African scholar who has ever attempted to „demonstrate how Mugambi's theology of reconstruction can be further strengthened, via intercultural hermeneutics“ (i.e., biblical exegesis). It is strange that Mugambi does not refer to such an excellent and supportive move in his major subsequent publication. Mugambi (2003:150–53) has a section on „Reconstructive Biblical hermeneutics in Africa,“ but fails to mention Manus' work or any other relevant publication. Nevertheless, inspired both by Mugambi and Manus, but each in his own ways, the present work offers another possibility of enhancing reconstruction hermeneutics with a contribution of biblical study, using, namely, a Bible translation approach.

In his turn, Farisani (2004:56-82) embarks on reading Rom 12:1–2 in the light of the reconstruction paradigm. His model of reconstruction hermeneutics seems to align views of some exegetes regarding Rom 12:1–2 and different levels of reconstruction as defined by Mugambi in 1995. On a concluding note, he credits Mugambi and others for having perceived the change in the African situation and the relevance of the reconstruction paradigm to respond to issues of social transformation. Farisani seems to have correctly understood Mugambi's views about inculturation/liberation versus reconstruction. The latter emerged within the context of post-colonial social reconstruction while the former is related to the context of colonialism. As a result, the focus of inculturation theology would be to make the gospel relevant to African cultures, while the focus of liberation would be to uplift the poor out of oppression. Reconstruction theology „suggests proactive actions that would denounce poverty and „remove poverty from the society“ (Farisani 2004:78).

In a nutshell, reconstruction is a hermeneutical paradigm that has been proposed and supported not only by individuals (Tshimalanga, Kä Mana, Villa-Vicencio, and Mugambi), but also by both Catholic and Protestant communities (SECAM, AACC).

In addition to the four individual pioneers who support this new paradigm on philosophical and theological grounds, it is encouraging to notice that biblical scholars like Manus and Farisani have embarked on the same agenda. What can Bible translations in Africa benefit from this move or how can they offer to strengthen it?

3. Bible Translation in Africa

In order to get a proper picture of what Bible translation in Africa is capable of receiving from reconstruction hermeneutics or how it may enhance the latter, it is important to understand the history of Scripture versions on the continent. Furthermore, since this article is probably the first work to link reconstruction hermeneutics and Bible translation study, a historical approach seems to be the best. Before engaging in this approach, I will give a brief overview of the meaning of Bible translation.

Any translation or translated text (including Bible versions) presupposes different frames of reference: components of communication (participants, texts, and media), cognitive frames (signs, gestures, words, expressions, pictures, etc), socio-cultural frames (religious rites, social behaviours, cultural values, etc.), and organisational frames (church communities, Bible translation agencies, political powers). It seems appropriate to define translation as a complex mediated act of communication (Wilt 2003:27–80; Wendland 2004:84) or an act of intercultural mediation (Cronin 2003:124; Loba 2005:19; 2008:179–80). There are many approaches to translation, ranging from literalist, functionalist, descriptive, text-linguistic, relevance, interpretive, comparative, professional, and literary-rhetorical (Wendland 2004:47–80). For practical reasons, I stick to the definition of Bible translation as consisting of reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, in terms of meaning and style (Nida & Taber 1969:12). Nida's functionalist approach is the most-widely known in Africa and beyond. Yet, this approach still needs to be enhanced and fully applied to various African translation projects that claim to follow this method. However, examining the history of Bible translation in Africa may provide some useful insights, which can help the reader appreciate the need for quality improvement. The following section will examine this history in two sections: the period of early translations and that of modern translations.

3.1 Early Translations (Third Century BC – Sixth Century AD)

The history of Bible translation in Africa goes back to the third century BC, when the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek in Alexandria (Egypt). This famous translation is known as the Septuagint (LXX), referring to the seventy elders who were commissioned to carry it out. However, the Letter of Aristeas, followed by Josephus (Ant. 12.2.13), talks about seventy-two elders (six representing each of the twelve tribes of Israel). Some church fathers like St Augustine and St Jerome mention seventy while one Jewish source (Sopherim, c.i) indicates five elders. These numbers are all symbolically important. Seventy-two represents a great deal of each Israelite tribe, seventy refers to Israel through the elders who accompanied Moses to receive God's commandments on Mount Sinai, and five reminds one of the books of the Pentateuch or Torah at large. Though working on African soil, it is obvious that the translators of the LXX were not Africans, nor was the source language (Hebrew) neither the target language (Greek). Africans from Alexandria could nevertheless benefit from this translation, as it was placed in the Alexandrian royal library for public use, and later on was spread among early Christian communities of North Africa.

Before the end of the second century AD, people from North Africa were also interacting with Scriptures through the Old Latin translation (Vetus Itala), which was based on LXX and Greek manuscripts of the NT. In the beginning, Christian literature in Latin flourished in North Africa with Clement of Alexandria (150–216), Tertullian (155–230), Origin (185–254), Athanasius of Alexandria (293–373), Augustine of Hippo (354–430), and many more. Biblical quotations from these African church fathers and ecclesiastic writers serve as important sources not only in studying Bible translation techniques but also in reconstructing the earliest manuscripts of the NT. These quotations are part of the „reconstructed text of the New Testament“ (Petzer 1994:11) or even „absolutely vital for any reconsideration of the history of the transmission of the New Testament text“ (Ehrman 1994:134). As far as textual criticism is concerned, what the Old Latin and Patristic quotations represent for the transmission of the NT text echoes what LXX means for the OT text:

Many manuscripts of the Latin Bible are of specific importance because they often testify

to a text older than many surviving Greek manuscripts (in the case of the New Testament) or of the Masoretic or Septuagint text (for the Old Testament) (Bogaert 1996:426; see also Loba-Mkole 1999:115).

For Johan Lust, „even after the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls, the Septuagint, ... remains one of the most important though indirect witness to the Hebrew text” (Lust 2002:17-8; Cook 2005:539). Even St Jerome’s Vulgate (fourth – fifth century AD) in some few cases seems to depend on the Old Latin and LXX more than on the Hebrew Bible.

The very first African Bible translations in terms of language and personnel could be the Egyptian or Coptic versions. It is known that the use of Greek was common for the first Christians of Lower Egypt, but the natives spoke Coptic, namely, Bohairic, Sahidic, Akhmimic, Fayûmic, and other dialects. Bible translations in these dialects, if not all, date back to the third or fourth century AD. The most important Coptic Bible versions are preserved in Bohairic or Memphite (spoken at Memphis and Alexandria) and Sahidic (used in upper Thebais). Bohairic has been the standard text of the church in Egypt since the eleventh or twelfth century. Some large fragments of biblical texts have been preserved in Sahidic, as well as the manuscripts of the Gnostic library of Nag-Hammadi. Few fragments have been found in Akhmimic (e.g., John’s Gospel, dating from the fourth century) and Fayûmic (e.g., Acts 7:14–28; 9:28–39).

If biblical texts exist as translated or reconstructed texts, Africa has played a significant role in both processes. It provided a location (Alexandria) for translating the Hebrew Bible as well as scholars who through their Latin or Coptic mediations have offered tremendous contributions in the critical transmission and reconstruction of the Bible. In addition, some manuscripts of Alexandrian type (Codices Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, and Alexandrianus, all dating from the fourth century AD) are considered to be witnesses of the first order (category I) from the perspective of NT external criticism. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that the papyri, some of which represent the earliest witnesses of the NT since the period before 150 AD, are all Egyptian products.

Other early translations in Africa include Ethiopic versions (fourth—sixth century AD). The Bible was translated from the LXX into Ethiopic or Ge’ez by various hands. In terms of Bible translation, the Ethiopic version is the only one that has preserved the book of Enoch, which has some impact on Jewish traditions and NT theology, as well. Jude 14–15, for example, explicitly quotes Enoch 1:9. The book of Enoch also enjoyed high esteem among patristic writers. Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, and Augustine supposed the book to be a genuine work of the patriarch. Later on, this book lost credibility and ceased to be quoted. Nonetheless, modern exegesis has underscored its importance for the understanding of NT theology (e.g., the son of man figure, apocalyptic literature, etc) (Charles 1893; Charlesworth 1985). It is worth noting that the biblical transactions in Ethiopia did not start with the Ge’ez translations, but go way back to the OT and NT periods (see the story of the Queen of Sheba in 1 Kgs 10:10–13 and 2 Chr 9:1–12, and that of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26–40). Nonetheless, the Scripture movement that penetrated North Africa as far as the horn of Africa did not penetrate Sub-Saharan Africa. The latter had to wait for the missionary era.

In a perspective of reconstruction hermeneutics, the history of early Bible translations hap-



pens to be part of the ongoing process of collection and critical restoration of biblical source texts. Scholars still see the Alexandrian text as the best possible representative of the original text, but much more needs to be done to determine the nature of the original text and its relation to the autographs (Petzer 1994:35–6; Omanson 2006:21*). To paraphrase H. D. Betz, reconstruction is what NT (or biblical) scholarship is all about. The NT (or the Bible) itself is the result of reconstruction. The NT (or the Bible) has been reconstructed from thousands of manuscripts and fragments, a process that still continues (Betz 2001:6). Consequently, a reconstruction paradigm challenges current and future African biblical scholars together with other colleagues to engage in textual criticism and honour the long tradition of exceptional Scripture transmissions on the continent.

3.2 Translations during the Missionary Era (XV–XXI)

According to Phil Noss (1998:75), „it was the Missionary Era that brought Scripture translation to the languages south of the Sahara Desert”. The very first Scripture translation is certainly the Lord’s Prayer in Kikongo, published in the Jesuit Fathers’ *Doctrina Christiana* in San Salvador (Loanda, Angola) in 1624. The Kikongo language is spoken in Angola, Congo and D.R. Congo. It is likely that this translation was based on a Portuguese Bible. About two centuries later, the gospel of Mark became the first book of the Bible to be published in the Bullom language of Sierra Leone (Liberia) in 1816. The first complete Bible appeared in the Malagasy language in 1835, nineteen years after the Bullom gospel of Mark. Since the nineteenth century, Scripture translation has continued virtually unabated across Africa: „In terms of languages and translators, it is undoubtedly at its height today” (Noss 1998:75). However, most Bible translations in Africa represent translations of translations:

It is interesting to note that most of the existing translations in Africa were not based on the original language source texts, i.e. the Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic original source texts, but on other translations in the major languages of the colonial powers. These are so to speak translations of translations! (Mojola 2002:206–7)

What is wrong with translations of translations? This question might raise others such as: What to translate? Who is translating? For whom? Why translate? How to translate? Answers to these questions need to address respectively issues pertaining to the nature of the source text, identity of the translators, the needs and the power of the target audience, reasons for translating, as well as principles and procedures of the translations. Answering these questions will ultimately help find out whether it is right or wrong to have translations of translations. For example, a translation project sponsored by UBS (United Bible Societies) is generally expected to respond to these questions in the following ways: The source text has to be in the original source language (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), such as some few cases that include „The Gospels of Matthew and John in the Ga Language,” 1843; „Afrikaans Bible,” 1933; „Swahili Habari Njema Bible” 1995, „Malagasy Common Language Bible” 2003. Translators (male and female) are to be native speakers of the target language and well-trained in biblical exegesis. The target audience is to be the local community of native speakers, especially Christians but also non-Christians. Though a Bible translation obviously aims at taking part in the mystery of proclaiming the reign of God, it is often driven by particular goals (an easy understanding of the Scripture by the majority, literary or liturgical renderings, etc). Once the reasons and goals have been specified, then methodological issues can follow logically. Functional equivalence is recommended for a translation project that is more interested in an easy yet faithful understanding by the majority of the target audience. These requirements can be considered as a summary of Bible translation ethics in UBS, at least in light of translation principles laid down by Eugene A. Nida and Charles Taber (1969; see also Wilt 2003). Consequently, it seems that there is something wrong with many UBS Scripture translations in Africa, as they are based on other translations, contrary to UBS policy that recommends the source texts to be those of the biblical original languages. To redress this situation, translation workers will need to be at the cutting edge (Mojola 2002:212).

Given the above description, it seems that there is a need for reconstructing UBS Scripture translation practices in Africa, as far as the nature of the source text is concerned. However, be-

fore embarking on exploring how such reconstruction can be done, it is worth examining the *raison d'être* of such endeavour. Why should African translators bother to use original source texts now or invest in textual criticism? This question sounds legitimate if we know that even some early Christians on African soil used to read the Scripture not only from a translation (e.g., LXX), but also from translations of translations, e.g., some Old Latin and Coptic versions which were based on the LXX.

One of the historical reasons that these early Africans felt uncomfortable with translations was of an apologetic nature. Jewish people ridiculed Christians for arguing on the basis of translations instead of engaging with the original sources. A second reason might be heterodox or heretical interpretations of the Scripture among Christians, which in some cases were the result of translations based on biased secondary sources. To avoid both external and internal attacks and misunderstandings, the early African Christians resolved to revise or to translate Scriptures using original source texts (cf. revisions of the Old Latin and Vulgate translation and its revisions). Are today's African Christians on safer grounds in terms of external and internal misinterpretations, suspicions and attacks, in which case they may comfortably make use of their translations of translations? Suspicions come into play because many readers, rightly or wrongly, assume that any translation done on a secondary source is critically unreliable, especially when the „original“ source is available. Let us illustrate this point with a case from South Africa:

The first attempt to translate the Gospels and Psalms from the State Bible met with such adverse criticism when it appeared in 1922, that it was decided to start a completely new translation from the original languages (Hermanson 2002:8-9).

Would not the fact of insisting on African translators to master original biblical languages and exegesis appear as perpetuating a colonising ideology, since these parameters have been put in place by Westerners? (Dube 2001:152). When an „original“ source text is available, it appears more colonial and degrading to depend on secondary sources in translating Scriptures in Africa. A Lingala Bible, for example, will make a unique contribution to the post-colonial understanding of the Scriptures if it strives to mediate meanings from „original“ source texts. If that Lingala Bible is a translation of a French Bible, for example, then consciously or unconsciously it will be colonising the mind of the reader with French concepts rather than those of „original“ source texts. While communicating Scriptures through French concepts might be appropriate for French people, it may not be the case for the Bangala or for other Lingala speakers. This does not mean that a Lingala speaker should not read a French Bible. He or she can use it more critically as another secondary source, which ultimately has similar values and challenges as the Lingala one, as long as both translations are made from the same „original“ texts. Therefore, a secondary source would not stand as a mirror for allowing another secondary text to access the „original“ text. This is a way of emancipating one secondary source from the domination of another secondary source.

The majority of African Bible translations of modern time (since the fifteenth century until now) are translations of translations. This practice needs to be reconstructed in order to produce revisions and new translations that are based directly on „original“ biblical languages. In UBS circles, this policy exists but it just needs to be reinforced in Africa.



4. Conclusion

Viewed from the perspective of the Kinshasa school of theology, reconstruction hermeneutics started with the philosopher and theologian Thiamalenga in 1981. It was taken up by SECAM in 1984–1985, then by AACC in 1990–1991, and more extensively advocated by Villa-Vicencio (since 1992), Kä Mana (since 1993), Jesse N. K. Mugambi (since 1995), and others. Reconstruction is about building better societies and Christian communities in Africa with respect to politics, economy, culture, ethics, aesthetics, spirituality, and ecumenism. Since the very beginning of the history of documented Scripture presence on the continent (cf. the LXX), Africa has played a significant role in accommodating and translating the „original“ source texts. Notwithstanding this honourable tradition and that of UBS policy, which also recommends that translations be made from the „original“ sources, many modern Bible translations in Africa represent translations of translations.

In the process of linking Bible translation in Africa and reconstruction hermeneutics, this article has argued that the former can benefit from the latter in two ways, namely, a greater awareness that reconstruction is what the Bible and its translation are all about, and translations of translations need to be replaced by translations of the „originals.“ Implementing this policy of translating from the „originals“ would also count as a specific contribution from African Bible translators to strengthen the process of reconstruction hermeneutics. At the same time, the present article has shown how beneficial it would be to link Mugambi's reconstruction hermeneutics with some contributions from the Kinshasa school of theology, as well as with Villa-Vicencio's contributions. While Mugambi argues for social reconstruction from intellectual perspectives (descriptive, prescriptive, prospective and postulative activities), the Kinshasa school of theology can be credited for having provided more philosophical and theological grounds for a reconstruction paradigm (cf. Tshiamalenga and Kä Mana). In addition, Villa-Vicencio's contribution insists on nation-building by empowering the poor politically and economically through a democratic system and a just economy.

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Projects and Experiences

What Comes From the Heart The Source and the Direction of Biblical Interpretation

CARLOS MESTERS

Rio de Janeiro, January 25, 2005

My dear friend Milton,

Many thanks for the invitation to write something for the special volume of *RIBLA*. When I asked: "What is the theme?", you responded: "Something that comes from the heart and that has to do with the interpretation of the Bible in Latin America." I am going to try to revisit a theme about which I wrote a few lines in the CEBI bulletin. I think that this article of mine is going to be a little disjointed since the things of the heart don't always follow the articulation of reason.

One day I was reflecting on the psalm: "The Lord is my Shepherd." Within myself I thought: "When I say *pastor*, the idea of shepherd that comes into my head is not the same as was in the mind of the person who wrote the psalm." And when I pray *my* shepherd I am talking about me and not about the person who wrote the psalm. And very probably the experience of protection that I sense when I say: "The Lord is my pastor" is very different from the experience of divine protection which led that person to write the psalm. And when I say: *Lord*, I'm thinking about Jesus. But the person who wrote the song could not have been thinking about Jesus since he wrote it many centuries before the birth of Jesus.

The three basic words in this phrase: "Lord", "my", "shepherd", used as they are by the author of the psalm and by me are like three *identical* windows, but in two different houses. If you look through these three windows toward the interior of the house of the person who wrote the psalm you're going to see something very different from what I will see through the three identical windows in my house.

Another example is the conciliar document *Dei Verbum* which deals with biblical interpretation. In the beginning of the document, the two thousand plus bishops of the Catholic Church, gathered in the Council in the 60s of the last century, made their own the words of the first letters of John, written 2000 years before, and they said "What we have seen and heard, now we announce to you!" (1 John 1:2-3). In this phrase they are referring to what they themselves, the bishops, were able „to see and hear“ in those days of the Council and which now by means of the document they wish to communicate to the members of their dioceses. The "we" which in the original text is John, now, in the document of the Council, are the bishops. The target audience, mentioned with the word "you", which, in the original text, were the members of that small community of Asia to which John was directing his letter, now, in the text of the bishops, are the millions of Catholic Christians of the 20th century. The bishops use the same words, the same letters used by John, but on the lips of the bishops these words become the vehicle of a totally different experience. Everything has changed: the target audience, the sender, the content, the place and the date. The only thing that did not change was the letter of the Bible, the envelope, the wrapping. And to tell the truth, I believe that all of us use the Bible this way: Jesus, Peter, Paul, Luther, St. Francis, St. Teresa, the bishops, pastors, popes, communities, religious men and women, Catholics, Protestants, believers, you, me, everyone! All of us, when we have an experience of God and of life, we try to express that using the words of the Bible. We

search for words in the Bible through which we can re-clothe and express what has happened in the soul, in the heart, in my practice.

Apparently the only time we don't proceed in this way is when we are doing exegesis properly named, that is to say, when with the help of scientific analysis, of Greek and of Hebrew, we work to determine what the text signified in the era in which it was written. I say apparently, because the reality is something else. Remember a German exegete, I believe his name was Spitta. He did a rigorous scientific analysis of the gospel of John and came to the conclusion that the actual text is a composition of two prior texts: one older and the other more recent. In the older text, so he concluded, there was no miracle. The miracle was only present in the more recent text. Later, we come to find out that Spitta did not believe in the miracle. And what can I say about the theories of Michael Novak, the North American exegete, who combines scientific exegesis with capitalist economy and concludes that the prophets, in order to not be too mistaken, ought to have done a little more analysis of the economic reality of their time. And the theories of M. North, N.K. Gottwald and others about the origin of the people of God in the time of the Judges? The context in which they lived in the last century influenced the scientific exegesis which they were doing on the biblical text. The most beautiful example is that of Rudolph Bultmann, one of the greatest exegetes of the last century. He came to elaborating the *History of forms* and *Demythologization* from the sad experience as a military chaplain during the First World War (1914-1918). The direct contact with the soldiers in the terrible trenches of that absurd war led him to do a radical rereading of the things of the Bible. There are many other examples.

Therefore, I believe, Milton, that for all the scientific rigor there might be, no one escapes. No one can disregard their own eyes in the analysis which they do of a biblical text. An unchangeable formulation of the truth, one that is totally objective, which travels through the centuries, immune to change does not exist. All of us, whether we want to or not, re-clothe our current experience with ancient words from the Bible. That's what exegetes and the educated, bishops and popes, pastors and missionaries do. Everything changes, except the cover, the wrapping, the text. The Bible looks like some typical clothing, which does not change with the years, but in every era, different persons use place and generation. You see someone walking in the street and, depending on the type of clothing he or she is using, you recognize the person and the job they have, the work they do, or the holiday they are celebrating. In the street we *recognize* the girlfriend, the father, the woman religious, the soldier, the police, the rabbi by the clothing they wear. And so, to dress in the clothing of the Bible brings a certain recognition. Everything is different: the sender, the target audience, date, place and content. Only the clothing is the same. It is by their clothing that we recognize the person and it is by their clothing that the person identifies and presents himself to others.

This is the question that remains for us: why do we strive to use the Bible as a wrapping for our own thoughts, research, intuitions and experiences? I am going to attempt to give an answer. Who knows, you will have another answer. I am curious to know what it might be! Well, here goes mine:

By the fact that someone uses the words of the Bible in order to transmit an experience that he lived, he is saying that his experience is situated in a river which comes from biblical times. Or better, he expresses the desire to drink from the same well from which persons of that biblical time drank. And to feel himself animated by the same Spirit which animated those persons at that time period.



This way of using the Bible is very ancient. Such was how the Bible was interpreted at the time of Jesus and in the first centuries. Curiously and happily, this same ancient tradition reappears today, without a label, in the way in which the people of the communities use the Bible. What characterizes the Christian reading of the Bible are three things: a sense of family, liberty and faithfulness.

Family: We sense the Bible as something which is ours, of our family. It expresses who we are and how we live. It expresses our identity, from which we do not want to distance ourselves but that we wish to deepen even more. Therefore, we try to dress anew our experiences with words from the Bible. Within the Bible we feel at home. It is our book! And by being *our* book, we can use it freely. It is the leading book which gives us identity. As Saint Paul says: „It was written for us who are near the end of times.



This causes me to remember Thomas, a peasant who lives near João Pessoa. He used to say this: “when I began on this road of the Bible school, I was seeing and feeling that the Bible is no joke. That it demands much from me. It demands that I live what I hear and what I am learning. There I learned that I was not capable of remaining on this road. I contemplated leaving the Bible school. I held on a little longer and then I began to notice that if one begins to leave oneself open to the word of God, one begins to be divinized. As such one becomes owner of oneself and is not able to separate what is of God and what is mine. Nor does one know very well what is the Word of God and the word of the people. The Bible made this happen in me. And so I was not able to leave Bible school” (*Por tras da Palavra* 46 [1988] 28).

This way in which Thomas uses the Bible in his life helps us remember Mary, the mother of Jesus. In order to compose her psalm, she did as Thomas does: she expresses her own experience of God and of life with words from the Bible. Her psalm, the Magnificat, is a beautiful quilt, almost every patch taken from the book of the psalms.

Liberty: We use the Bible in order to express our experiences of the 21st century. When we encounter in it affirmations which do not match human sensibility today, we take the liberty of leaving the text or of explaining it symbolically. For instance, the breviary of the Catholic Church omits Psalm 109(108) which only talks about vengeance. Jesus, Paul and the first Christians took the same liberty when citing the Old Testament: “Of old it was said, but I say...!” In the name of the Bible the doctors condemned Jesus. Jesus, using the same Bible, refuted the accusation and, in a certain way, set himself up as the new criterion of interpretation when he says: “The son of man is owner of the Sabbath!” The fidelity of the doctors to the letter of the Bible was not able to box in the freedom of the Spirit who acts in Jesus and gives him a new key in order to capture the profound sense of the letter and a criterion to condemn the strict fundamentalism of the doctors.

Jesus took this freedom, not in order to reduce the message to the size of his own thought, but in order to be faithful to the more profound intention of the message. “I did not come to end with the law, but in order to bring it to its fulfillment!” His freedom was an expression of his faithfulness. Today the sensibility of the human conscience has grown. Now it does not accept the violence which appears to be made legitimate in the name of God on many pages of the Old

Testament. If the Prophet Elijah did today what, in that time, in the name of God, he did to the 400 prophets of God, without doubt he would be condemned to eternal prison.

Fidelity: If the new conscience of humanity leads us to answer certain passages of the Bible and to explain them in a different way, we are not doing so in order to adapt the Bible to our way of thinking, but in order to be faithful to the deeper intention of the Bible and of life and in order to preserve as pure the source from which everything is born and continues to be born.

Sometimes the opposite happens. When the exegetical study shows that my interpretation forces the sense of the letter, then, fidelity obliges me to change and to be faithful to the letter. The letter is like the foundations on which the house is built. But I live in the house and not in the foundations of it. A house without foundations is like a house built on sand. On the other hand, when fidelity to the letter threatens to destroy the liberty of the Spirit, the reaction is immediate and says: "The letter kills, and only the Spirit is the one who can give life to the letter!"

This means that, at its depth, the basic criterion or the origin of everything is not the Bible nor the study of the Bible, but the experience that we have today of God and of life, and I am not alone but *I* am part of the community and part of humanity, and in communion with it, and from it I receive my identity and sensibility. Or better, the basic criterion is in the interaction of the text of the past with us who read the text today. In a certain way, we continue writing the Bible. What is important is the dialogue, the sharing, the listening without dogmatisms, as much among ourselves today as with our past and with the letter. The moment that someone, or a group imposes on others their way of seeing things, and demands obedience in the name of God, without listening to the whole, without listening to the letter and without listening to the Spirit who breathes today and without taking into account today's experience, isolates himself, no matter how much he thinks he is conquering the head or the heart.

I think we ought to continue deepening our understanding of the three areas: family, liberty and faithfulness, not as three different or parallel paths, but as three branches which are born from the same root. Not from a theoretical root, but from the root of the experience of God and of life through Jesus Christ.

Of the three paths, the most important is family. I think that we lack a sense of family, feeling at home with the Bible, as did Thomas and Mary, as did Jesus and Paul, or as Doña Angela de Aratuba, Ceará, said after a short Bible course: "I don't need to leave Ceará in order to understand the Bible! It is alive and is right here!" A sense of family keeps the Bible, the past, from turning into a museum of religion; prevents fundamentalism, be it charismatic or liberating, from appropriating fidelity and killing liberty in us. A sense of family is what generates the true liberty of the sons and daughters in the house of their fathers. I think the current practice of communities can help us.

The people of the communities when they read the Bible bring with them their own history and their own perspective of the problems which come from the harsh reality of their lives. The Bible appears as a mirror, *sym-bol* (Heb 9:9; 11:19) of what they live today, establishes a



profound union between life and Bible that, sometimes, can give the apparent impression of a superficial concordance. In reality, it is a reading of the faith very similar to the reading that the communities of first Christians did (Acts 1:16-20; 2:29-35; 4:24-31) and the reading of the Holy Fathers in the first centuries of the churches. From this union of Bible and life, the poor make a discovery, *the most important of all*: “If God was with that people in the past, then he is also with us in this struggle in which we engage to free ourselves. He also hears our cry!” (see Exod 2:24; 3:7). And so, a new experience of God and of life is being born imperceptibly which becomes the most determinant criterion of the popular reading and which appears least in its explicitations and interpretations. Well the look is not seen by itself.

I never forget a gesture which you made, Milton, in 1987, in Belo Horizonte, during the celebration of penance during the meeting of the CEBI in order to develop a project of formation. You took a dry branch, put it on top of a fire that was burning in the middle of the assembly and said: “Everything that we do with the Bible on the level of formation: research, study, courses, projects, deepening, commentaries, if it is not at the service of the base groups, where the Word of God enters into life”— at this moment you let the branch fall into the fire—“that it might be burned and forgotten!”

How do we make this sense of family, liberty and fidelity grow and begin to characterize all the work we do with the Bible? I believe that this is more difficult than one imagines. The traditional vision of the origin of the Universe, which forms the background of all biblical revelation, is changing completely because of the new information science is contributing to us. Everything will have to be rethought. Bultmann hardly touched the surface.

I think that it is worthwhile to deepen and research the tradition of the Jewish reading of the Bible which was strong at the time of Jesus and Paul, and the tradition which characterizes the reading of the Bible in the era before the separation of the churches. Not in order to do what they did. No! But beyond their interpretations, to capture the profound intuition with which they approached the word of God, intuition characterized by a familiarity which gave them a freedom which we lack today, and also characterized by a fidelity which was capable of questioning the fundamentalism which has taken hold of the letter.

Milton, this is everything that passes through my heart like a wind which doesn't stop. It is a question which questions me and enlightens me in my way of reading the Bible. Who knows whether your response is not different from mine. If it is, I would like to hear it in order to compare it and to mutually enrich each other. A *gran abrazo* for you, for Rosie, Deborah, Raquel and Priscilla.

Fray Carlos



The Word of God Becomes Charity for the Joy of the Little Ones

FR. VITO ANTONINO LIPARI RCJ

Jesus went around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and curing every disease and illness. At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest." (Mt 9, 35-38)

The experience of the Word which translates into a commitment of charity recalls the passage from Matthew's Gospel which inspired Hannibal Maria Di Francia, a diocesan priest who founded the Congregation of Rogationists, to which I belong. In him the Word studied and preached has become a concrete form of love and assistance to the poor and needy.

The Beginning of a Journey

My priestly experience was inspired by the example of Annibale Di Francia from the beginning of my ministry. After the priestly ordination (29.06.1975) I was sent as a missionary to Brazil, where I worked in the formation of seminarians, in school teaching and in family pastoral care. In this land I discovered the richness of the "basic communities" and the liveliness of reading the Bible. In my pastoral work I saw how the poorest families took strength from the Bible to live, announce and testify the word of God. The commitment to help a poor family, to visit the sick, prisoners, the disabled or to make themselves available to the parish for liturgical service or for the teaching of catechetics was the natural consequence of the reading and meditation of the Bible.



In 1987 I was sent as a formator to the seminarians in the recently begun Rogationist mission in the State of Kerala (India). I found myself in a social and religious context different from that of Brazil, but very lively. The Catholic Church of Kerala, despite being in the minority in relation to Hindus and Muslims, shows a remarkable pastoral strength and a great social commitment. Deep pastoral work, the catechetical formation of the children, the prayer in the families, the reading and meditation of the Bible has allowed a remarkable Christian maturation of the communities.

After a few years of work in the formation of seminarians, I felt the need to get involved in pastoral work. I became more aware of this need after seeing so much poverty in families, so

many children who found it difficult to attend school, even though this was free. The precarious situation of hospitals and the lack of social security created many problems of social insecurity. An accident or illness that renders a head of the family incapacitated is enough to put the entire family in crisis. Jobs are lost, land is sold, debt is created and poverty is growing... It is the beginning of despair for the whole family.

In my ministry I became anxious and could not feel at peace while proclaiming the Word of God to seminarians and talking about compassion and social commitment without actually living the social commitment in charity. With this idea in mind I started to organize a small soup kitchen. I helped those who came to knock on our door, but I did not see a radical change in the situation of the poor. I especially wanted poor children not to see just the outside of our Rogationist mission. I wanted them to be able to see it from the inside and feel like it was their home. I wanted the beginning of the school year to be a moment of joy for mothers who had to send their children to school and not a nightmare caused by not having the money to buy books or the school uniform for the children.

The Project of „Adoption at a Distance” (or “Long Distance Adoption”)

One day I was invited by a Hindu family for the wedding of one of their children. I attended the wedding with great pleasure, I made a gift to the newlyweds and a beautiful friendship was established with the new family. The couple had two children and the family lived a very peaceful and dignified life...

A few years later, on my return from a home visit to Italy, I went to visit this family, but found the house uninhabited. The neighbors told me that the father of the two children had died in an accident and that the family had been forced to sell everything and go away, but nobody knew where. Only after a couple of months and after a lot of research did I succeed in finding out where they had moved. This very poor family now lived in a paddy field in a hut on stilts. I experienced true poverty and I remembered the Word of Christ: “I was hungry and you gave me food” (Matt 25.35). I could not hold back the tears ... mom and grandmother told me that they didn’t know how to live and feed and clothe the two children or, even more difficult, to manage to send them to school.



From that day on I started to put the Word of the Gospel into practice, asking for help of Italian families in taking responsibility for meeting the financial needs of the two children. It was the beginning of the project of “Adoptions at a Distance” (“Long Distance Adoptions”).

The mother of this poor was able to send her children to school, then far-away friends helped the family buy a piece of land and build their little house there. Now the family is doing well once again, the boys have completed their studies and have entered the world of work. Helping these two orphans led to the beginning of support activities for many other children. The parish priests and many friends and collaborators search out and present the urgent needs of the poorest families of their parishes. Currently over 600 of those children adopted “at a distance” have experienced the death of at least one of their parents.

In a very short time the number of adopted children grew to more than ten, then one hundred and then one thousand children. Twenty-five years after the social commitment program started, 1,750 children have been adopted and over 1,500 have already completed university studies or technical courses. Today we work with orphaned children who have no land and no home, with the disabled, the sick, and with children who have been abandoned by their families...

Bible and Prayer for Vocations

The charitable commitment has turned into prayer for vocations. In thirty years many priestly vocations have been born and several houses for seminarians were opened.

In 2000 the first Indian priests of our Congregation were ordained. Today there are 55 priests and our seminary is thriving with vocations. The seminarians were the first collaborators in this charitable program. Some of our priests, together with many lay people, coordinate this solidarity activity in the various regions and countries where we are present.

The visit to the families of the children, the animation of the meetings at the neighborhood or village level, the construction of over 300 houses, the translation of the letters to the benefactors, etc. ... also helped our seminarians in their training. Listening to the Bible and the active experience of charitable work is an integral part of their formation plan.

The presence of Indian seminarians and first Rogationist priests in meetings with the families of those adopted was effective in sharing the prayer of Jesus: "Pray therefore the Lord of the Mass to send workers into his Mass" (Matt 9:38). The experience of solidarity commitment has gradually become inter-religious.

Social Commitment and Inter-religious Dialogue

In our meetings with the children adopted at a distance and with their families, everyone is invited to pray for "Workers in the Harvest": all of them, whatever religion they belong to, want



people of peace, like Mahatma Ghandi (of Hindu religion). Everyone wants that there be people like the former President of India Abdul Kalam (Muslim) and everyone wants God to send many people of great depth of humanity and faith, such as Mother Teresa of Calcutta. People of this type will never find it difficult to meet, to dialogue and to ensure a better future for our world. The consequence, therefore, is that everyone prays to God to send people of this type into the world. Our seminarians too are invited to open their minds and hearts to unlimited horizons. In the light of the Word of God lived in charity, we discover what Paul says in 1 Tim 2:4: "God wants all men to be saved".

Charity and the Bible Today

The recipients of this charitable project are all children who live in particular situations of hardship and therefore belong to families of various religions. The one thing that is demanded of all such families is mutual respect for everyone, school education for everyone, even for those children who, being handicapped, will only be able to attend special schools. One of the values that we want to cultivate is that of gratitude towards God and towards our benefactors. Gratitude towards God is cultivated through prayer of praise and thanksgiving while gratitude towards neighbor is expressed through correspondence with those who have adopted children at a distance and prayer to God for them and their families.

The Bible is found in all Christian homes and huts, but many non-Christians read the Bible as well and participate in Retreats and Spiritual Exercises in retreat centers. For example, in the nearby retreat house of the Vincentians, between 10,000 and 20,000 people of all religions participate weekly. The basis for these meetings is always biblical. We often invite families with particular difficulties to participate and many conversions are obtained with profound changes, if not of religion, then above all of lifestyle and commitment within their own family.

In Christian families, even of those who live in the poorest huts, there is always a corner of the house set aside for the Bible. Over 4,000 children and young people over the years have been reached by this charitable action: orphans, disabled people, poor people, the homeless and people of different religious and social backgrounds. All these families come into contact with as many families of benefactors who, with charity and their Christian witness, give positive and very powerful messages to the families of the adopted children, whether they are Christian or not.

These sentiments are very frequently expressed, especially by the young adopted people writing to their benefactors: "When I have a job, I will also support needy children in their study, as you are doing for me." Many of them have completed their studies and are already doing this and it is a reason for joy for us. The Word of God produces and will continue to bear fruit. It is not uncommon for many Hindus and Muslims to quote passages from Holy Scripture, including the Gospel, in their letters to their benefactors.



The Bible, filtering down in charity towards the little ones, becomes an instrument of sharing and inter-religious dialogue. Encountered by the Love of God which makes itself a gift and charity for all, there is less awareness of diversity and inter-religious dialogue is facilitated. On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the "Adoption at a Distance" program, during the meeting attended by about 4000 people, three children: a Hindu, a Muslim and a Christian lit a candle together. Their action was accompanied by the explanation that only from the encounter of different religions can a true Light for the world be born which leads to the culture of encounter, solidarity and Love.

Long distance adoption allows many families to get closer to their parish. In fact, the parish priests are always involved in this project, take an interest in the families of the children and guarantee the correct use of financial support. Even in the case of non-Catholics, long distance adoption always creates a climate of sympathy between families and priests. Many men, victims of alcohol or gambling, thanks to the support given to their children, are

referred to social centers for detoxification and recovery. Again, reading the Bible helps them stay true to their commitments.

The Word of God which is *Light, Fire* and *Love* has acted and continues to act in the transformation of environments and people. When, on the advice of the bishops or some parish priest, we are informed of an area of neglect to be restored, a good number of children in need are identified and an adoption is arranged remotely. So far, we have not had much difficulty finding benefactors for orphaned, disabled or particularly uneasy families. This type of action has been repeated in well over 50 locations in Kerala, within 300 km. The visit of various Italian benefactors to our mission and to the families of the beneficiaries has facilitated through word of mouth other aid and other projects. Even when the biblical message cannot be transmitted with words, it enters families with all its strength, through solidarity and love.



Evangelization as a Commitment to Human Promotion **The Experience in Caserta's "Good Shepherd" Parish (Southern Italy)**

"Family, Arise and Announce"

Introduction

We are in southern Italy and in particular in the diocese of Caserta, which borders on the "land of fires". For those who do not know the local reality, it is good to know that this territory of great spiritual and ecclesial tradition is also marked by the "organized crime" that produces human, social and spiritual degradation. The phenomena of social deviance are known: drugs, prostitution, criminal association, lack of the rule of law, inability to plan a future worth living. Emergencies force many young people to migrate out of Italy, looking for new environments to build their future. For years men and women of this land have been fighting to build legality. Similarly, the Christian community is engaged in the social context, which is increasingly in need of liberation and renewal.

A concrete project involving the use of the Bible in the social world of the city of Caserta has been successfully put into action in the past five years. The biblical experience is part of the "new evangelization" project that the Diocese has begun activated on an impulse of the Synod of Bishops on "The New Evangelization for the transmission of the Christian faith"



(2012). So in 2013 the “New Evangelization project” was born in the Good Shepherd parish, which began with the diocesan conference “Evangelize today in Caserta” (2013). This conference laid the foundations of the project which today involves a hundred evangelizers in about eighty listening centers.

1. The Involvement of Lay People in Listening to and Spreading the Bible

The conference marked the culmination of a process started in 2011 with the arrival of the new parish priest, Don Antonello Giannotti, who visited the 2500 families of the parish and started a training course for pastoral workers (prayer, *lectio divina* of the Gospels, rediscovery of the truths of the faith, reflections on pastoral theology), a journey centered on the rediscovery of the joy of Word of God on rediscovering the enthusiasm for communicating the faith. In fact, if the gift of faith is lived in depth, it is an experience that does not remain solitary because it creates the need, which turns into urgency, to share it with others. The word that inspires this dynamic is represented by the Pauline exclamation: “*Woe to me if I do not announce the Gospel*” (1 Cor 9:16).



In such a humiliated land, there is a need to propose the Bible as a light for discernment. Faith is born from listening to the Word of God (Rom 10:18), thus the involvement of lay people nourished by the Bible was born, they began to respond to the parish priest's appeal and to rediscover the commitment to have an impact on the social reality.

The parish has adopted the New Evangelization project, which is divided into three phases: a) The presence of the Bible among believers; b) Listening and witnessing; c) The evangelization project: „Family, Arise and Announce!”

2. The Presence of the Bible among Believers

The Word became flesh and came to dwell among us (John 1:14). In the incarnate Christ, the community has rediscovered the importance of the presence of the Bible among believers. It is a sign of God's closeness in the incarnation of the Son. The first step of the community in social commitment is to make Christ's presence felt in the Word of salvation. The Word is communicated in the mystery of the Son made flesh.

The choice of the incarnation translates for Jesus into a style of a historical presence among men and not acquiescent, critical and not flattened, dynamic and not sleepy. He himself went among people, where people live, work and suffer. The mission of Jesus of Nazareth reveals the mystery of his existence. This growth process is fueled by the recognition that Sacred Scripture speaks to all men. It cannot remain closed, but with the power of the Spirit it must become missionary. Hence the task of the parish community: to bring the Bible into the history of men with love, to reach the whole territory, the cultures and the civil choices of the neighborhood. Only through the rediscovery of the Bible can the parish build the salvation mission of Christ for man in the territory.

In the light of the Bible, the community of the Good Shepherd began to abandon the illusion of being a center of attraction and concentration of sheep, and tried to rediscover the open pastures, the reality of human people, looking around, realizing the presence of people, of all people. Groups of pastoral workers were formed around listening to the Bible and they began to take care of the popular realities of the parish. They visited entire neighborhoods with problematic

situations, numerous apartment buildings with social problems of young people, families and elderly people.

In the first place, the catechists had the task of bringing the families of the area closer together, of entering the apartment buildings, of multiplying signs, small but visible, of the presence of the Word of salvation in large building complexes. The whole community, in various ways, has placed itself in the "situation": it has committed itself to being within all the human and social situations of the area for which it is responsible.

The parish priest's annual visit to the families, the presence of pastoral workers in the area and the data of the parish census, led to photographing the current situation: age groups, presence of the sick and unemployed, level of education, number of practitioners, etc., in brief, the indispensable data for the evangelization plan.

3. Listening and Witnessing

Pastoral workers enlightened by reading the Bible made themselves available to listen to people's problems, as Jesus did in his mission. Christ listened to the women and men of his time, their needs, their insecurities: the most beautiful encounters witnessed by the Gospels were those with the "rejected" ones. Jesus listened to their voice, their need for love, health, sincere relationships, reconciliations; he tenderly caressed them with his hands and healed them with one word: God loves you. The testimony of knowledge and listening is learning to recognize "the discarded", "the poor", our brothers and sisters beloved by Jesus; to read their names, their faces, their addresses on the territory with the aim of overcoming the barriers that often divide the latter from the community of attending students.



Welcoming the „Lampedusa cross“.

Listening to or "sensing" the minimum needs, trying to understand how they can somehow solve them, inserting oneself into the need of the other: these are the actions that characterized this phase. The presence of the condominium representatives was indispensable to indicate particular situations or simply to create the right conditions for dialogue. The various needs have been highlighted: the actual testimony has begun.

4. The Evangelization Project: *"Family, Arise and Announce!"*

After the pre-evangelization phase (presence, listening and testimony), we got to the heart of the project *"Family, Arise and Announce!"*. The family becomes an active subject of the New Evangelization and family communities of evangelization are born which operate in a large part of the condominiums in the parish.

The family communities of evangelization are a "pastoral articulation" that wants to highlight the human relational network present in the territory and the sacramental subjectivity of the family. They are based on the natural dynamism for which the spouses gradually build relationship ties around them which, although varying in intensity, like concentric circles spread from children, relatives, neighbors, colleagues, friends. They are based above all on the sacramental grace of marriage which gives spouses a specific gift and task in building the Church.

The family communities of evangelization are:

- *Community based*: Because they are made up of people of different states of life (married, separated, single, consecrated, etc.), who together constitute “the church that meets in your home” (Rom 16:5) to praise the Lord, listen his Word and live relationships of fraternity and friendship.

- *Familial*: Because they have a married couple as their guide who, by the grace of the sacrament of marriage and the mandate of the parish priest, makes present and actualizes Jesus who loves his Church and because, meeting in the houses, he helps to give a familiar shape to the whole the parish community. Indeed, every family is the seed of the Church.

- *Evangelizing*: Because their purpose is to welcome and make new disciples grow in the Lord and stimulate each member to deepen the Word, to evangelize within their own living environment.



5. The Gospel is the Reason for our Being Here!

The Gospel is the reason for our being here. With this slogan, we entered the houses of the community. On a monthly basis, biblical gatherings are held based on the Gospel according to Luke. The families of the parish have become active subjects of evangelization: they open the doors of their homes and hearts to the Word, animate moments of sharing it with the families of the building or condominium.

For each building in the parish, a couple / family is identified who is the reference for the relations between the parish community and the building, participates in moments of spiritual formation with the parish priest and in the monthly *lectio divina*, invites and hosts the condominiums, every month, for a biblical sharing session which they themselves animate. Beginning this year, these couples have been entrusted with the task of accompanying the parents and residents in their condominium or neighborhood, who present their children for the sacrament of Baptism.

In addition to families, the animators of the listening centers are also engaged in street evangelization: they carry small sheets with Gospel sentences and short comments, and distribute them on the street.

The fruits produced in these years by the project are wonderful. The “Gospel sharing groups”, born from the beginning of the project in 2013, have experienced a growing attendance, and have become a living presence in the condominium. Close-knit groups have been created in which relationships which previously were only acquaintances have been transformed into

friendships and those relationships which previously were simply friendly have been strengthened. The sharing of the Bible has led to moments of gatherings and sharing that have improved the quality of life in apartment buildings: numerous testimonies of relationships reborn after years of real wars; significant and exciting situations of poverty and solitude alleviated by familiar relationships born by sharing the Word.

The “Gospel sharing groups” have become the propitious moment to involve families and make them feel part of a community that, guided by its tireless parish priest, has been working for years without sparing himself because he wants, seeks and cares for the good of others. Authentic faith always implies a profound desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave something better after one’s passage on earth. Although “the just



order of society and the state is the main task of politics”, the Church “cannot and must not remain on the margins of the struggle for justice”. Gospel sharing groups are thus increasingly an opportunity to „leave the Temple” and involve people by inviting them to experience the changes in lifestyles that the parish has been proposing for some time.

The Word of God is proposed and meditated in the key of “New Styles of Life”, i.e., aimed at the rediscovery of a new relationship with:

- *people* (recovering the wealth of human relationships that are fundamental for happiness and the meaning of life, building non-violent interpersonal relationships and respect for diversity, educating others not as a threat but as a wealth, overcoming the solitude of urban life with the beauty of meeting and conviviality);
- *things* (from a situation of servility to the utility relationship, from unbridled consumerism to critical consumption, from dependence on sober and ethical use);
- *nature* (from environmental violence to respect for creation, from the commodification of nature to the relationship with “our mother earth”, from indiscriminate use to environmental responsibility);
- *globalization* (moving from indifference to global problems, to solidarity and responsibility, from closure and fundamentalism to openness and involvement, from assistance to social justice, from nationalistic tendencies to education for global living).

And the reflection on the Word meditated in the key of “New Styles of Life” is followed by active participation in parochial initiatives, with an invitation to the participants of the cenacles to take concrete actions. There have been numerous testimonies, in this sense, especially in more populous areas of the community. Thanks to the New Evangelization project, we began to talk among other things, of differentiated garbage collection and for the first time the foundations are being laid so that it can become normal. The joyful sharing of the Word of God led us to feel as Church and to give birth to the desire for redemption through a rediscovered decorum with respect for the common good. Evangelization would not be complete if it did not take this into account, if it were not based on the mutual appeal, which are continually made, the Gospel and the concrete, personal and social life of man.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, which calls everyone to leave our inner, spiritual and pastoral security, to embrace the exit from the Temple, has given a considerable im-

pulse to the project. Not only the exhortation but the whole teaching of Pope Francis spurs us to meet the other, whoever he or she may be, the distant, the marginalized, the poor. There is a thirst for evangelical authenticity and relationship with the other that *Evangelii gaudium* proposes as a privileged way for our pastoral care. The light of the Gospel guides believers in social commitment to serve all people.

By Teresa Rossi
„Good Shepherd” parish – Caserta

[the photos are taken from the website:
www.buonpastorecaserta.it]



Testimony of Vietnamese Families

Paul Nguyễn Ngọc Tường
Theresa Trần Thị Quỳnh Nga
and
John. B Trần Minh Đức
Theresa Nguyễn Quỳnh Trâm

CBF — South East Asia

Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Reverend Fathers,
Dear religious sisters and brothers,
Brothers and sisters in Christ! and all the participants, I would like to have a short introduction about our family:

I am Paul Nguyễn Ngọc Tường (an engineer) and my wife Theresa Trần Thị Quỳnh Nga (a teacher). It has been 12 years and 2 months since our marriage in 2005. At the moment, we have three children: Joseph Nguyen Ngoc Bach (10 years old), eldest son; James Nguyen Ngoc Bao (7 years old), and Therese Nguyen Ngoc Quynh Thy (5 years old), the youngest.

Our marriage is not much different from others as it is eventful and full of trials which we can overcome only thanks to God's grace as well as the accompany, support and prayers from our Parish Catholic Family Group's sisters and brothers. I love to share our story in order to testify that God's Words empower us to overcome the great challenges our family faced.



I was shocked when knowing that I was carrying the third child. It was something terrible and unacceptable. We were not ready for the child, because our oldest son was just four years old while the younger son 15 months old. Besides, our family was needy and living with my older sister then. Four of us had to be crammed into a small room of 12 square meters. Hard memory of raising a child was still there, and it is even harder with the hyper-activeness of our second son. Both of my sons were born by Cesarean section, and the timing between the two births was quite short, which badly affected on my health and the surgical cuts. Furthermore, I would have a tough time at school where I work due to the two-children-only policy. The health problems, the financial matters, the job pressure, all of these stressed out my husband and me.

Facing this challenge, we sat back together and it seemed as if God told us “...all the hair of your head are counted, two sparrows sold for a small coin, you are worth more than that...” (cf. Matt 10: 29-31).

Though God’s words said so, when this story was shared to others, majority of them advised me to do the abortion. It was even sadder when my husband’s side told us: “You should get rid of it, for you cannot afford to bring it up.” My side is more educated and afraid of sinning and just added “You two think hard and decide, don’t ask further.” On one hand, two of us were discouraged and thinking of aborting the child to save the resources for the other two. On the other hand, being a catholic we felt guilty, conscience-stricken. We were wavering...

In those wavering moment, God is present with us via our parish Gospel Sharing Group. This group has regular meetings every week. We gather, praise and pray to God, as well as share our daily challenges so that we are supported and our faith are strengthened. My husband and I shared with the group our story and asked for their prayers. It was different from those previous opinions, the group welcomed it as a joyful news. In that meeting, a member of the group read a Gospel passage from Matt 6:25-34 in which Jesus told his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear...” I felt as if God was talking to me via the group member. He made me aware of the fact that many couples in our group want to have children but have none, while I have but think of aborting. God presenting in the Sacred Scripture consoled me not to worry about what to eat, drink or wear... *Because the pagans run after those things; but your Heavenly Father knows that you need them. Therefore, seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all those things will be given to you as well.* God’s words embrace us in grace not anxiety and give us peace. The crisis happened when the embryo was 6 weeks old. I came to terms and peacefully accepted, the fetus was 3 months old.

Thanks to God’s providence and prayers from our group, I was at peace, healthy during my pregnancy. Approaching near the due day, I even prayed that I could attend the Easter Vigil before delivering the baby. My prayer was accepted. The child was born on April 8, 2012—the Easter Sunday. It is a lovely baby girl. Quynh Thy is 5 years old now. She is intelligent and clever. Those who once advised us to abort comment that it was wise for us not to do it. God’s words empower us. The hardship of raising a child is still there. We have to do our best each day to raise, to guide them to get to know God, to pray to God. Those difficulties which once were thought to be impossible for us now seem to be manageable.

We are convinced that God’s words comfort us when we are in hardship. Our family’s ability to overcome the difficulties, challenges in life thanks to God’s words, grace via our weekly meetings, prayers, praises, gospel sharing. God’s words change our family in thoughts and acts. We are supported, our faith is fortified and strengthened and we lead a God-filled life everyday. Amen.

Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Reverend Fathers,
Dear religious sisters and brothers,
Brothers and sisters in Christ!

I would like to introduce briefly about my family. My name is Nguyễn Quỳnh Trâm, living in Hochiminh City. I am 39 years old, a parishioner of the Tan-Phu Parish. I already got married, and now having 3 kids, namely two boys (10 and 13 years old respectively) and one youngest girl (8 years old). After university graduation, I worked



as a chemical engineer, but now I'm doing a small business in order to take care of my children and to manage my family's economy as well. As a faithful of the Thanh-Da Parish, my husband, John. B Trần Minh Đức, 39 years old, works as IT engineer.

I got married to him of the same age after 6-year get-to-know and 4-year being together in the Bible Sharing Group (BSG) of the parish. Right after our wedding, we lived in a different house away from my parents'; and the first baby was born as a great joy of my family. Yet it was too difficult for us to take care of him because he was infected with *gastroesophageal reflux* (in short, i.e., GERD). He vomited over and over a day. I, therefore, decided to stay home as a housewife, doing some small business while keeping an eye on him.

Two years then, the second one was born in difficulties due to the fact that I was taking highly dosed antibiotic medicine for treatment of *tympanitis* (the inflammatory disease of the middle ear) and Rubella-virus *Roseola* or German measles while being pregnant with him. His life was at risk, and thus I was suggested by a doctor to abort, for such a reason given by him that a mother infected with *Roseola* in the first three months could affect her fetus on brain and heart afterwards. I did nothing rather than to submit to God and Blessed Virgin Mary. We prayed together earnestly, realizing that a mysterious source of consolation from reading and sharing the Word of God within our group, so I fiercely decided not to abort. Later on, definitely he was born with some disorders on heart and brain but that was not too much terrible as diagnosed by the doctor. Thanks be to God!

However, trials rushed in to us one after another. I bore a third child out of strife due to my fetal derangement, for most probably I became exhausted to take care of the first two sons, and yet I felt like to be so lost that I wondered why God let my family suffer. In such tiredness, I was gradually distant from the Bible Sharing Group, so to say, I spent just once for every two months instead of 3-4 days to meet them regularly as before. In a similar way, from twice a week, I have no time spent personally before the Blessed Sacrament. During my prayer, I cannot concentrate to meditate silently in order to listen to the Lord, instead of that, things related to family life, children, business and so on roaming around in my mind. For night prayer, we usually prayed together, yet we kept it inactively and so it eventually became private for our children sniveled and cried aloud along the prayer.

It might be a failure between us perhaps because I had tiringly to keep an eye on three kids of mine and to manage small business simultaneously. Thus, everything twisted and turned swiftly. Still, I had another trial, even worse, that my husband had an extramarital relation with another woman. By this time, there was a chasmal tension between us, but I got ready for it ahead. I did think a great deal about what family vocation was yet full of spikes and thorns, whether I accepted his viewpoints to live on harmony regardless of his unfaithfulness or responded gorgeously even rebel to let him know or not.

It is no doubt at all that God will help those who are straitened. The image of the early Church narrated in the Acts of the Apostles flashed back to my mind, „they devoted themselves to the Apostles' teachings and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the Apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common... Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.” (cf. Acts 2:42-46).

Living by the Word of God, I started over to participate in the Bible Sharing Group as well as to attend the Eucharist more and more in order to relieve from stress, then to change atmosphere of my family. At home, I did not sit still doing nothing rather than gathered my kids to pray before the Lord. I, at first, taught them how to make a sign of cross, say “good night” to God, asking Blessed Virgin Mary and the Lord to grant us a peaceful night. Then, I came to teach them to say the Lord's prayer, Hail Mary, and Glory be. Time kept flying; as a habit, they knew how to offer to God prayers that were so lovely touching and simple. They could really feel the family atmosphere and prayed earnestly for their daddy (my husband) like ‘Lord, help my dad to quit drinking beer,’ ‘help him to get rid of smoking,’ ‘make him love us, not to angry at us and go

home earlier,' etc. Hence, in such a prayer, I felt like hearing God whisper to me, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt 11:28-30).

From that time on, I took any chance to invite him to attend the regular prayer sessions of the group; and informed him about its group's meetings or retreats though received refusals more than nods to agree. For myself, I had not attended regularly gatherings of the group, but my struggle in family life was known more or less by its members. Though they did not know exactly the issue, they kept praying for my family in silence.

A couple of years had gone by, our conflict became extremely worse that we came to decide to live separate; he moved out from home, and I stayed caring for 3 kids of ours. We reluctantly told a lie to them that their dad went far away for a sort of business trip, and would return home only on weekends. Certainly our conflict could not be resolved, it was on the verge of being broken. I did believe that, by God's grace alone, I felt loving him still though I was broken-hearted as thought of his manner. However, I was willingly to forgive him for God has wanted me not to forgive seven times but seventy-seven times (cf. Matt 18:22).

It was thanks to the Word of God that transforms. The Lord himself has written straight on the crooked ways along the ups and downs of the history. Right at this time, God has worked marvelously to touch him from a so-called funny incident as it went like this: every Tuesday all members of the group would meet. All of a sudden, out of missing our kids, he came home to have dinner with us, and left right after it in order not to face people. However, by chance, members of the group came to my house without any notice ahead of time. Upon seeing him, my husband could not leave and remained for a while to join the prayer session. After all, he uncovered that he felt like to be relieved despite so many struggles in his spiritual life; and eventually, something was changed incredibly in such a way that his lady herself finished this kind of relationship by saying goodbye to him.

Bible and Art Forms

The Regina-Pacis Chapel in Heisdorf and the Works of Mercy

Among the artistic creations that witness to social commitment in the Bible, those that reflect the six works of mercy in the Parable of the Last Judgment in Matt 25:31-46 occupy a significant position.

I was hungry and you gave me food,
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,
I was a stranger and you welcomed me,
I was naked and you gave me clothing,
I was sick and you took care of me,
I was in prison and you visited me.

The sensitivity to persons in distress and the commitment to them is a sign of adherence in faith to the Son of Man: „Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are my family, you did it to me.”

The Regina-Pacis Chapel of the home for the elderly run by the Sisters of Christian Doctrine in Heisdorf in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg took this text as its inspiration for the central theme of the stained glass windows that were designed by the Benedictine Sister Erentrud Trost of the Abbey of Our Lady of Varensele near Rietberg in Germany and produced in the workshop of the master glassmaker Bernhard Jostmann in Paderborn in 1993.



Behind the altar „the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations” (Rev 22:1-2) springs forth in warm colors. The view in perspective makes of the crucified Jesus the source of the red-colored river of his blood and of the blue-colored river of the water which gives life to the trees. Between the red river and the blue river appear the trees of life and their representation in the works of mercy. They are in

this way the fruit of the trees, the leaves of which heal the misery of the world. In the background, behind this ensemble, the towers of the new Jerusalem rise as a sort of watermark. In this way the artist realizes a superposition characterized by great spiritual density of the scene of the death of Jesus, as blood and water spring from his side (John 19:34), the vision of the new Jerusalem (Rev 22) and the parable of the last judgment (Matt 25).



On either side of these six stained glass windows loom eight depictions in black, white and sky blue colors. From left to right, the observer perceives images of narratives from the Old Testament. On the left side: Adam and Eve embrace above the serpent in the garden of Eden; Noah lifts his arms toward the dove with an olive branch in his beak; the nomad Abraham with his staff raises his eyes towards the heavens toward the promise of a multitude of descendants; Jacob sleeps under the ladder and dreams of angels climbing and descending between heaven and earth. On the right side: Moses prostrates himself before the burning bush; with his staff in his hand, he leads the sons of Israel through the waters of the Red Sea; the Hebrews receive manna from heaven; Moses receives the tables of the law from God's hands, while the community gathered in solidarity await him at the bottom of the mountain.

In this luminous fashion, making use of the „Cistercian grisailles“, „this glass with opal reflections“, the artists have succeeded in creating a „pearlescent light in which all the colors of the solar spectrum merge“. At the same time, they have made possible an evocative dialog between the eight scenes of divine solicitude in the Old Testament and the six works of mercy of chapter 25 of Saint Matthew's Gospel.

Text and photos: Thomas P. Osborne

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Federation News

January 2017

General Secretary's Trip to Rome

The General Secretary of the Catholic Biblical Federation inaugurated the New Year on a work trip to Rome (January 4–11, 2017). The main reason for this trip was working meetings with several officials of the Vatican administration in the preparation of the *CBF International Biblical Congress* in 2019. The General Secretary met

- with Card. Kurt Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity;
- with Card. Gianfranco Ravasi, President of the Pontifical Council for Culture;
- with Bishop Rino Fisichella, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization.



Congress in the Middle East Region

Despite the difficult situation in the Region, the result of political problems, wars and religious conflicts, CBF members in the Middle East are developing significant biblical activities at all levels: academic, pastoral and editorial. From January 27th to February 5th this year, the *Bible Congress of the Middle East* organized by the Biblical Federation of the Middle East was held in Lebanon. The event was attended by the President of the Catholic Biblical Federation, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, and the General Secretary, Fr. Jan J. Stefanów SVD.



Within the framework of this Congress, the Regional Meeting of the CBF Region of the Middle East also took place and the President and the General Secretary of the Federation held a working meeting in Beirut with the Patriarch of the Middle East, Cardinal Bechara Rahi.



March 2017

Biblical Symposium in Luxembourg



The second edition of the Biblical Symposium related to the Master's Program in the Biblical Animation of Pastoral Ministry was held in Luxembourg from March 3–6. This time the theme was: „Animatio biblica totius actionis pastoralis“.

Africa — BICAM Assembly

The BICAM Plenary Assembly took place in Congo Brazzaville from March 29–31. Unfortunately, due to deficiencies in the invitation process, the number of participants was very low. The quorum needed for decision-making was not achieved, nor were significant agreements reached.

In the light of this meeting, the need for the revision of the structure of the CBF Region of Africa and the leading role of BICAM within it became more evident.



April 2017**Manila**

From April 3-13, the Secretary-General made a brief working visit to Manila, Philippines. The agenda of the trip consisted of:

- a working meeting with the President of CBF, Card. Luis Antonio Tagle;
- a visit to affiliated institutions;
- a working meeting with Radio Veritas, in relation to the project LectioYouth.Net and its possible extension to Asia;
- a working meeting at EAPI and Divine Word Institute of Mission Studies in relation to the Master's project in the Biblical Animation of Pastoral Ministry.

**June 2017*****Africa — New BICAM Director***

On June 23 of this year, Fr. Albert Ngengi Mundele was officially appointed as the new Executive Director of BICAM by SECAM President Gabriel Mbilingi, Archbishop of Lubango in Angola. Since 1991 each Director of BICAM was ex-officio Regional Coordinator of FEBIC Africa. But Prof. Mundele decided not to take on this responsibility. This decision makes it necessary to initiate a common process, between SECAM and the CBF, of reviewing the structure of the CBF in Africa and its relationship with SECAM.

July 2017***South-East Asia Symposium and Assembly***

The Subregion of South-East Asia is, along with Latin America, one of the most dynamic regions of CBF. July 17-23 of this year, the *Biblical-Pastoral Symposium* for the entire South-East Asia



Subregion was organized in Nha Trang, Vietnam with the theme: “Transforming the family through the power of the Word”, which involved 70 delegates from across the region, including 14 bishops. The meeting was also attended by the President of the Catholic Biblical Federation, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, and the General Secretary, Fr Jan J. Stefanów SVD.



Parallel to the Bible-Pastoral Symposium, the *Regional Gathering of the CBF South-East Asia Sub-region* was held. Reports of CBF members' activities in all countries of the Subregion were submitted and, following the report of the General Secretary, discussed the issue of annual membership quotas and contributions to the Secretariat-General was discussed and the corresponding decisions were made.

At the end of the *Meeting*, the new Subregional Coordinator was elected, in the person of Dr. Natividad Pagadut of Manila, Executive Director of the Episcopal Commission for Biblical Apostolate (ECBA) of the Episcopal Conference of the Philippines, and of the Coordinating Committee of the subregion.



Regional Assembly of North-East Asia

The meeting of the *North-East Asia Subregion* of the Catholic Biblical Federation took place from July 27–29 of this year in Taipei. It was the first Subregional Meeting after eleven years of inactivity in the subregion due to the internal crisis of the Federation.

During the meeting, the Subregional Committee was elected to coordinate activities in the Subregion as was the new Subregional Coordinator in the person of Fr Pak Wing Peter Lo. Priorities for the next triennium were also identified and the agenda for common activities within the Subregion was planned.



General Secretary in Taiwan

The General Secretary of the Federation, who participated in the Subregional Meeting in Taipei, Taiwan, used the opportunity to make a working visit to the China Section of Radio Veritas Asia. The implementation possibilities of the LectioYouth.Net Project in the Chinese language were explored.



Fr. Stefanów also made a courtesy visit to the Archbishop of Taipei, Archbishop John Hung, SVD.

September 2017

General Secretary in India

This year there was no common activity in the South Asia Subregion. But in September the Secretary-General visited India responding to the invitation of the SVD ASPAC Zonal Coordination to participate in the meeting of the Coordinators of the “SVD Characteristics Dimensions” (the way to carry out the mission of the Society of the Divine Word) organized in Mumbai.

This trip facilitated several meetings that served to continue the training work of the Organizing Committee of the Master’s Program in Biblical Animation of Pastoral Ministry, which is in the preparation phase for all regions:

- a meeting with the academic authorities and teachers of the SVD seminary in Pune;
- a meeting with the President and academic authorities of JDV University in Pune, India.



Meeting of the Subregion of South Europe in London

The CBF Southern & Western Europe Subregional Meeting of took place from September 28 to October 1 in London, England.

October 2017

Meeting of the Central European Subregion

The *Regional Meeting* of the Central European Subregion took place in Neustift, Italy, October 15-18. One of the topics discussed, following the report of the General Secretary of the Federation, was the increase in the membership fees and the sometimes tense relationship of the Central European Subregion with the General Secretariat of the Federation.



November 2017

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee of the Catholic Biblical Federation held several online consultations and votes as well as its annual meeting in Warsaw November 10-12, 2017.

Most of the meeting dealt with matters related to the administration and finances of the Federation. Given the decrease in the contributions of aid agencies, as a result of the change in their financial policy, the General Secretariat of the Federation is going through a period of scarcity of resources for its proper functioning. For this reason, and responding to the need to change the financial structure of the Federation, the Executive Committee at this session took a series of administrative-structural decisions, which will improve and strengthen the financial structure of the Federation:

1. The process of reviewing membership fees was concluded and

- it was decided to increase proportionately the contributions of full members and associates of Europe and North America in all categories of members;
- the decision made in 2006 to leave the members' fees collected in the other regions in them was maintained in order to create an "economic fund of the region";
- it was decided to introduce in the regions which since 2006 have not contributed any fees to the General Secretariat a "share of solidarity" in addition to the annual fee paid to the Region: 100 USD full members and USD 50 associate members;
- knowing that this additional payment will mean an effort for some members, the understanding of the members is appreciated as is their contribution to the maintenance of the administrative structure of the Federation;
- detailed information on the details of this new fee system was sent by the General Secretary to each Region of the Catholic Biblical Federation.



2. The Executive Committee also approved the General Secretary's project to establish a network of associations of "Friends of the Catholic Biblical Federation" with the aim of promoting the Federation and raising funds for the projects undertaken by it. The creation of the first association—"Friends of the Catholic Biblical Federation"—was authorized in the United States of North America. The other associations will be approved as they appear. Federation members are called upon to cooperate and take initiatives in the promotion and development of this new financial structure for the Federation.

In the same section of administrative matters, the Executive Committee studied and approved the new “Code of Ethics” which is signed by the new Regional and Subregional Coordinators of the Federation. The revision of this document was necessary as a result of changes to the Constitution of the Catholic Biblical Federation prior to its approval by the Plenary Assembly in Nemi in 2015.

Closing the chapter on administrative matters, the Executive Committee of the Federation considered the proposal of the President and the General Secretary of the Federation to relocate the headquarters of the General Secretariat from Germany to Vatican City. This change is necessary and beneficial in order to:

- strengthen the presence of the Catholic Biblical Federation within the structures of the Church for the better fulfillment of our mission;
- facilitate the contact of the General Secretariat with the bishops of the Catholic Church;
- establish contact with students of the biblical and theological faculties of the pontifical universities of Rome;
- simplify the administrative-legal structure of the Federation.

After studying all the positive and negative aspects of this relocation, the Executive Committee of the Catholic Biblical Federation decided to take the administrative-legal steps for the transfer of the headquarters of the General Secretariat of the Federation from Germany to Vatican City. This decision, like all the above, was made unanimously.

An important moment in the meeting was the discussion of issues related to the members of the Federation. First, after careful consideration of the documentation submitted and the opinions of the experts in Canon Law, it was decided to grant the status of full member of the Catholic Biblical Federation to the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India.

Then followed the review, voting and subsequent approval of the applications of the new members:

1. Diocese of Guntur (India);
2. Diocese of Catamarca (Argentina);
3. Ilizwi Biblical Centre - SVD Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe);
4. Pedro Arrupe Formation Centre for Educational Leaders (Poland);
5. Society of Jesus Mary and Joseph (India);
6. Biblical Association of Argentina (Argentina);
7. Archdiocese of Havana (Cuba);
8. Charismatic Movement in Madagascar (Madagascar).

Including these new additions, the Catholic Biblical Federation has 346 members—103 Full Members and 243 Associate Members—in 126 countries around the world. The map with the full list of members of the Catholic Biblical Federation is accessible on the Federation’s renovated website: www.c-b-f.org

The last part of the meeting served to review the preparations for the two events related to the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Catholic Biblical Federation: the Congress in Rome and the request addressed to Pope Francis to proclaim the year of the Bible. As



congressional preparations progress smoothly (soon the corresponding information will be sent out), the issue of the Year of the Bible follows the tortuous path through the various offices of the Roman Curia. At the end of this review, the determination to celebrate the Year of the Bible within the scope of the Catholic Biblical Federation was confirmed in the event that it was not officially proclaimed by the Holy See.

Bible Conference in Warsaw

Coinciding with the CBF Executive Committee meeting in Warsaw (10–12 November), the CBF General Secretariat organized together with the Catholic University of Warsaw an International *Biblical-Missiological Conference* under the title: “Bible and Cultures”.



The members of the CBF Executive Committee and the organizers of the Conference were invited by the Archbishop of Warsaw, Cardinal Kazimierz Nycz, for a meeting at the Archbishop's Palace. The Nuncio of the Holy See in Poland also participated in the meetings.

December 2017

Africa – Lectioyouth.net Committee Meeting

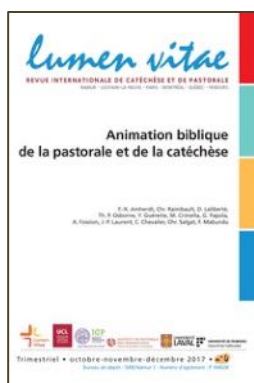
The annual meeting of the Coordinating Committee of LectioYouth.Net, under the auspices of the General Secretariat of the Catholic Biblical Federation, took place in Lomé, Togo, December 13–17, 2017. In the words of the Project Coordinator, Fr Wojciech Szypuca, SVD: “Perhaps the most significant outcome of the meeting was optimism about the prospects for the expansion of the program and the intensification of its impact”.



Biblical Pastoral Publications

***Lumen Vitae* 2017/4**

The thematic issue of the review *Lumen Vitae* 2017/4 has the title: „*Biblical animation of pastoral care and catechesis*“. This is a very topical issue which is reinterpreted in the light of the theological-pastoral importance of the affirmation of Benedict XVI in the post-synodal exhortation *Verbum Domini*:



Domini: “The Synod invited a particular pastoral commitment to bring out the central place of the Word of God in ecclesial life, recommending to increase ‘biblical pastoral care’ not in juxtaposition with other forms of pastoral care, but as

biblical animation of the entire pastoral ministry [biblica animatio totius actionis pastoralis]“ (n. 73).

In his *Editorial* F. X. Amherdt (pp. 367-370) underlines the urgency of verifying the effective role that Sacred Scripture plays today in the Catholic Church, five hundred years after the Lutheran reformation. Amherdt highlights the progress made in the various ecclesial realities and at the same time reaffirms the urgency of making the Bible become the “hermeneutic reference” at the basis of all the pastoral and catechetical action of believers.

The study by C. Rimbault (pp. 371-382), recalling the document of the French Episcopate on the Bible in catechesis (*Texte National pour orientation de la catéchèse en France*, [TNOC] 2006) focuses on the rediscovery of the “Word of God” within the Bible itself, providing useful reading tracks in which the novelty of the effective communication of God to man is experienced. In the interesting contribution of D. Laliberté (pp. 383-394) the reader is helped to understand the theological and pastoral significance of the statement of *Verbum Domini*, n. 73 (bib-

lical animation of the entire pastoral ministry). It has its roots in *Dei Verbum* n. 24 and develops what the Second Vatican Council had hoped for in favor of spreading the Bible in the life of the Church. An important stage of the conceptual journey is represented by the pronouncement of the Bishops of CELAM (Latin American and Caribbean Episcopal Conference) in the final document of the meeting in Aparecida—Brazil (2007), which declares the urgency of the biblical animation in pastoral care (cf. Final document, n. 248).

The analysis of T. Osborne (pp. 395-405) focuses on the “novelty” of *Verbum Domini*’s statement (pp. 395-405), which frames the theological problem of the theme, explaining its definition and above all indicating three main contributions: a) the question of authority and interpretative responsibility of Sacred Scripture; b) reflection on the “sacramentality” of the Word proclaimed and shared; c) the transversal question of the competences and formation of those responsible for ecclesial pastoral care. Y. Guérette (pp. 407-417) considers in his study the formation of pastoral workers and the means of mediation between Scripture and pastoral activity. This is a crucial aspect of the process of selecting ecclesial priorities and biblical animation of the entire pastoral care of believers. The author points out some main tracks to guide the personal and community training of biblical animators. The interesting experience reported by M. Crimella (pp. 419-428) regards the biblical-pastoral initiative of Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini in the archdiocese of Milan in the years of his long ministry (1979-2002). The article focuses on three experiences that have left their mark on the journey of the Ambrosian Church: a) the “school of the Word”; b) the “listening groups of the Word of God”; c) the “roadmap for biblical reading”. The deepening of the expression “According to Scripture” proposed in the contribution of G. Papola (pp. 429-438) concerns the very essence of biblical texts and their intrinsic relationship with catechesis.

The article highlights the varied richness of the texts, characterized in their historical dimension, centered on the kerygmatic message, open to the encounter with the reader and rich in current events but also in complexity. Therefore the approach to Sacred Scripture implies an integral reading and a unitary understanding of the text in view of its authentic pastoral narration.

The contribution of A. Fossion and J.-P. Laurent (pp. 439-451) is of great hermeneutical interest. The two authors study the relationship between the act of reading and the believer's practice, proposing an in-depth hermeneutic methodology (structural, narrative and rhetoric) of the relationship between the reader and the biblical text.

Three narratives of concrete experiences of biblical pastoral animation follow. The first signed by C. Chevalier (pp. 453-457) describes the project "Reading the Bible" started in 2003 in the Vicariate of "Brabant Wallon". This is an experience that has grown over the years and has been characterized by a progressive maturing of numerous groups of people, who have acquired a solid reading method and have been able to interact by welcoming different biblical proposals.

A second experience narrated by C. Salgat (pp. 459-464), concerns the initiative to "circulate the Word" among Christians in the diocese of Basel, located in the French-speaking region of Switzerland.

Having as an indication the volume of B. Huebsch, *La catéchèse de toute la communauté*, believers have agreed to "put the Word at the center" by making it reach all areas of pastoral action. Experience has made it possible to "open" the wealth of the Bible even to those who are far away and do not normally attend ecclesial meetings.

A third experience reported by F. Mabundu (pp. 465-471) regards the African context and the vital role of grassroots communities, where biblical promotion and animation takes place. Starting from the presence of these communities, the popular reading of the Bible is activated, coordinated by some leaders (animators).

The author describes the method and stages of biblical pedagogy, highlighting the

importance of reading, interiorizing, praying and practicing the Word of God (cf. the biblical reading of the Lumko Center). African communities find in the popular reading of the Bible a source of ecclesial life and fruitful spiritual communion.

Finally, we wish to highlight three aspects emerging from the *Lumen Vitae* file 4/2017. The first concerns the necessary deepening of theological reflection on the Bible as "Word of God" (the debate on "sacramentality") which reveals a growing development of ecclesial sensitivity and awareness of its primary role in the animation of all pastoral care.

A second aspect concerns the methodological question of the approach to biblical texts in view of their pastoral usability. Several contributions underline the richness of the methods of deepening the text for an ever-greater integration between the biblical message and the concreteness of the life of believers.

A third element concerns the "popular and inclusive" dimension of biblical pedagogy, which marks the style of those who approach Scripture, welcome it in faith and value it in spiritual life and evangelical praxis.

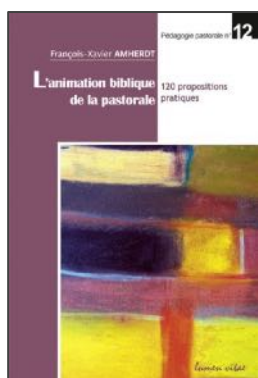
Sacred Scripture must become more and more the soul of the entire evangelized community and, at the same time, the source that opens up to the universal mission.

Giuseppe De Virgilio

François-Xavier Amherdt, *L'animation biblique de la pastorale. 120 propositions pratiques*, Pédagogie pastorale 12, Namur, Lumen Vitae, 2017, 183 p.

How do we help Christian communities to "practise the Scriptures", to make the Word of God, soul of theology and of pastoral, the principal inspiration in the actual life of believers and of all ecclesial activity? The author has recourse to different sectors: exegesis, pastoral, catechesis, spirituality,

liturgy, missiology, in order to connect the diversity of ecclesial realities, of potential actors and potential listeners to the Word. The Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (2010) of Pope Benedict XVI provides the guiding thread for the three chapters of the book: *the voice and the face of the Word* (cf. VD 6-49: the Revelation in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh); *the house of the Word* (cf. VD 50-89: the ecclesial character of the Word of God), a more developed chapter; *the paths and the way of the Word* (cf. VD 90-120: the Word in mission in the world).



One of the greatest assets of the book is to present some tools which have already been tested in different contexts. It is hardly possible to account for all 120 propositions! Some of them are easily put into practice (for example proposition 48: “Look for information and answers to questions on a website or in a biblical work.”), while other propositions require more effort (for example proposition 41: “Set up a biblical centre or centre of formation, regional, diocesan, inter-diocesan, national”).

The book can be studied alone or better still in the various groups which could then evaluate their relationship with the Word and explore new initiatives. It is not a question of adding propositions concerning Scripture alongside the different activities already existing but of searching how to promote the inculturation and incarnation of the Word of God in the ecclesial realities, and in the lives of the different actors and in the world. Just one of the propositions can be sufficient for such a process if it permits the inspiration of pastoral activity in depth. Beginning *lectio divina* meetings, for example, according to one method or another can allow people to experience the active presence of God in all that is lived in God’s name in a particular group.

Well informed on pastoral applications of the Bible the work is also nourished by the texts of the magisterium on believers’ read-

ing of the Bible and by distinguished theologians so that the result is a work of biblical pastoral of quality, which is both accessible and stimulating. Information on the Catholic Biblical Federation (p. 7, note 8) can be found at: <https://c-b-f.org/en/Who-we-are/Mission>.

The author is a priest of the diocese of Sion (Switzerland) and professor at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Fribourg. He holds the chair of pastoral Theology, religious pedagogy and homiletics since 2007. He has been for more than thirty years animator and then president of the Association Biblique Catholique de Suisse romande, which inspires the pages of this book.

Marie-Hélène Robert

Professeur de théologie,
Université catholique de Lyon

Giuseppe De Virgilio, *Il sogno di Dio: Giustizia e pace si baceranno*, Milano, Paoline Editoriale Libri, 2017, ISBN 978-88-315-4893-9. 18 €.

Giuseppe De Virgilio, priest of the diocese of Tremoli-Larino and professor of New Testament and of biblical theology at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome, offers a survey of biblical texts on justice and peace with a title that allows us to dream: *The dream of God: justice and peace shall embrace*. This work attempts to support a personal reading of texts of the Old and New Testaments which underline the relationship between “justice” and “peace”. While justice is a permanent process of seeking to reestablish relational equilibrium in the heart of people hurt by some form of injustice, peace is con-



ceived as fulness and integrity of life, the fruit of divine blessing.

The author gives us first of all a spiritually rich reading of six Old Testament sections: fratricide [Gen 4:1-16]; the justice of Abraham between faith and intercession [Gen 12-25]; Joseph, the just man and the mercy of God [Gen 37-50]; the gift of the Law or of the Torah the observance of which leads to integrity and peace [in the deuteronomistic literature]; the preaching of the prophets against injustice and in favor of peace, but also in view of the messianic and eschatological dimension of justice and peace; justice and peace in the Psalter, the prayer of Israel; and the theological reflection on God, history and the human condition in the wisdom literature.

The survey of the New Testament offers a consideration of Jesus of Nazareth, the just one who brings peace, especially in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, of the work of justice and peace according to Saint Paul, of the witness to justice and peace in the post-pauline community (in the letter to the Hebrews, and the letters of James and 1 Peter), and finally of the justice of this world and the gift of peace in the johannine reflections.

The volume concludes with a bibliography of publications in Italian (p. 173-176) and indexes of names of authors cited (p. 177-179), Hebrew, Greek and Latin terms (p. 180-182), and biblical references (p. 183-194).

This publication of Giuseppe De Virgilio, supporter and participant for many years in the work of the Catholic Biblical Federation, reveals both the richness and relevance of biblical teaching on justice and its fruit, peace, the dream of God for humanity. That Christian communities should share this dream and engage in a responsible manner in society as “instruments of peace” as disciples of the one who announced “the gospel of peace”, such is the wish with which professor De Virgilio concludes his reflection, making his own the appeal of Pope Francis in *Evangelii gaudium* 239.

Thomas P. Osborne

La Palabra de Dios para el Mundo: La Federación Bíblica Católica [The Word of God for the World: The Catholic Biblical Federation], Jan J. Stefanów SVD (coord.), *Reseña bíblica* n° 97, 2018.1, Estella: Verbo Divino, 72 p., ISSN 1134-5233

This is the first issue of 2018 of the journal of the Spanish Biblical Association whose objective is to bring results of biblical science closer to a wider interested audience. This issue revolves around the “biblical animation of the life and pastoral care of the Church”, proposed by *Verbum Domini* 73. The CBF is also engaged in this task, which is why its Secretary-General, Jan J. Stefanów SVD, was in charge of coordinating this issue. It contains five articles in the monographic section, two articles from other sections and a basic bibliography on the subject (p. 70).



In the first article (p. 7-18), T. Osborne approaches the theme of pastoral animation from the Bible (*Verbum Domini*, 73). It explains that this consists not of isolated activities around the Bible within a plural universe of pastoral care, but that the Word of God must cut across and encompass all pastoral activity.

Theological education on the basis of *lectio divina* is another proposal (S. O'Connell, p. 19-26). This author explains what *Lectio Divina* is and its implications for language and theological discourse.

The articles that follow are based on experience in Canada (F. Daoust) in the specific cultural context with two dominant languages and cultures, as well as on biblical pastoral care in Africa and Madagascar (M. Madega Lebouakehan). Translations and the prominent role of the Word of God and the Bible for evangelization and mission in basic communities are also emphasized for Africa and Madagascar. Archbishop David Walker refers to the post-Christian situation in Australia that calls for an approach to the Bible in pastoral care.

The *open section* begins with a study on the Bible and martyrdom in 2 Maccabees by Yara Matta. Unfortunately, this contribution suffered a mishap in the presentation. The correct title should read “The Bible and the Culture of Martyrdom in the Middle East: a Theological Reading of 2 Macc 6-7” (p. 53-65). It has nothing to do with the New Evangelization of America directly, although aspects such as martyrdom, social change, persecution and politics are also important in Latin America (see *Reseña Bíblica* in www.verbodivino.es). But Y. Matta discusses the context of 2 Maccabees and the culture of martyrdom starting with Maccabees through Ignatius of Antioch to the present day, where certain forms of extremism seek martyrdom, but not on the basis of love but on other dimensions [see Matta’s contribution in this issue].

It is true that, so far, an animation of *all pastoral activity* from the Bible is an unfinished project. There is a long way yet to go. But as these reflections and contributions show, there are already practices and examples of such animation and interest in the Word of God continues to grow. The CBF is at the service of this animation and may present some results from this effort.

Christian Tauchner SVD
St Augustin

Associazione biblica della Svizzera Italiana, ***Di' soltanto una parola. Per leggere la Bibbia nella cultura di oggi***, a cura di E. Borghi, Effatà Editrice, Cantalupa (TO) 2018, 346, p.

The volume edited by E. Borghi, president of the *Biblical Association of Italian Switzerland (ABSI)*, with the contributions of EL Bartolini De Angeli, S. De Vito and R. Petraglio, aims to “provide some essential technical and cultural tools for to approach with scientific rigor and humanistic passion to themes and texts that have deeply affected the history of western and universal culture” (p. 8). In the *Introduction* (pp. 7-12) prof. Borghi stresses the need to offer a

“global approach with an explicit historical-critical approach” (p. 8). The work, revised and expanded compared to the first edition of 2010, makes use of the historical-philological approach, which “constitutes the initial platform for all those who wish to read seriously the First and New Testaments and then perhaps move towards further insights” (p. 8). Oriented to the biblical formation of ecclesial communities, the book represents a “journey in the Bible”, characterized by a simple, fluent, pastoral language. The volume offers historical-chronological indications, linguistic clarifications, hermeneutic orientations, summary cards, general information and specific reflections on some texts of the First and New Testaments.



The itinerary consists of six chapters. In *Chapter I: “Reading a biblical text”* (pp. 13-24) some basic notions are offered concerning the exegetical reading and the correct interpretation of Sacred Scripture. The reader is invited to take a balanced hermeneutic attitude to read and understand the inspired text and place it in its vital environment. Bearing in mind the historical-critical approach and its methodology, the ecclesial interpretation of Sacred Scripture must constitute “a completely privileged moment, also because it is particularly close to the original formative circumstances of many biblical texts, especially the New Testament” (p. 22). Following the model of the wise scribe (cf. Sir 39:1-11), the believer is called to carry out with respect and freedom the task of welcoming the richness of the biblical message respecting its profound truth.

Chapter II: “The First Testament: general notes” (pp. 25-80) outlines an overall picture of the Hebrew Bible divided into three sections: *Torah*, *Nebî’îm* and *Ketûbîm*. With the aim of presenting the formation of these sections in a simple and concrete way, the author summarizes the most important aspects of the literary composition of the texts, postponing the bibliographical details in a

note. For the first collection (*Torah*), the significance of *Yhwh*'s teaching to his people and the divine and human nature of the text are highlighted. The *Torah* is the center of divine detection, a sure reference for the faith and practice of every believer. It follows in didactic form the essential profile of the individual books. A similar procedure is also applied to the presentation of the prophetic (*Nebîm* correct with *Nebî'im*, p. 31) and sapiential (*Ketûbîm*) collection. After presenting the contents of the books of the "Hebrew Bible", some indications are given about the Greek translation of the Septuagint (pp. 64-68) and the canon of the Jewish Scriptures (pp. 69-79). Probably it would have been better to present the theme of the canon in a unitary form, avoiding a separation of the treatment of the Hebrew Bible (pp. 26-31), its relationship with the Old Testament and the canon of the Jewish Scriptures (pp. 69-74).

Chapter III: "The First Testament: Reading Examples" (pp. 81-192) proposes six reading examples drawing on the three collections presented above. The first concerns the call of Abraham in Gen 12:1-4 (pp. 81-99). The second analyzes the gift of the "ten words" of *Yhwh* in Exod 20:1-17 (pp. 100-129). The third rereads Isa 7-9 in an essential form and studies the pericope of Isa 11:1-9 (pp. 130-145). The fourth addresses the analysis of Jer 40; the fifth analyzes Ps 139 and the sixth offers a global consideration of the message of the book of Job (pp. 131-188).

Chapter IV: "The New Testament: General Notes" (pp. 193-238) introduces the New Testament by presenting four "literary genres": a) the letter; b) the gospel; c) historical monograph; d) Apocalypse. Within each literary genre there are news of different types: chronology of Paul of Tarsus (pp. 196-210), notes on epistolary literature (pp. 210-213), formation of the evangelical material (pp. 213-218), synoptic question (pp. 219-229), historical monograph (cf. Acts of

the Apostles) and a look at the Apocalypse (pp. 229-235). Considering the necessary selection of the literary questions to deal with, the effort to offer the reader a "unitary" and "ecumenical" view of the New Testament problems must be appreciated.

In *Chapter V: "The New Testament: Reading Examples"* (pp. 239-298) further details are proposed regarding the Pauline correspondence (pp. 239-258) and Catholic letters (pp. 258-265). This is followed by the study of the Gospel pages of Mark 9:4-29 and Matt 5:13-16 (pp. 266-285), the analysis of Acts 10:1-43 and a brief summary of Rev 1:1-3 (pp. 295-297).

In *Chapter VI: "Concluding Remarks"* (pp. 299-334) the author proposes to complete the introduction to the reading of the biblical pages "by reading three other particularly significant ones, i.e. the first composition of the book of Psalms, the pericope of Luke 13:10-17 and the morning version of the Our Father, and proposing some considerations of global synthesis" (p. 299). The chapter supplements the volume with the analysis of three other texts of different kinds and contexts (cf. Ps 1; Luke 13:19-17; Matt 6:9b-13). Unfortunately, the absence of textual insights concerning the Fourth Gospel should be noted. Furthermore, the final summary—in our opinion—would have deserved a properly *kerygmatic* reflection. In fact, it is the paschal event of Christ who died and rose (cf. 1 Cor 15:3-5) that founds the peculiarity of the entire New Testament biblical-theological path. The volume ends with a short *Glossary* (pp 335-338) and a *bibliographical Appendix* (pp. 339-346).

Giuseppe De Virgilio
Roma



Catholic Biblical Federation
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174. Not only the homily has to be nourished by the word of God. All evangelization is based on that word, listened to, meditated upon, lived, celebrated and witnessed to. The sacred Scriptures are the very source of evangelization. Consequently, we need to be constantly trained in hearing the word. The Church does not evangelize unless she constantly lets herself be evangelized. It is indispensable that the word of God "be ever more fully at the heart of every ecclesial activity" [*Verbum Domini* 1]. God's word, listened to and celebrated, above all in the Eucharist, nourishes and inwardly strengthens Christians, enabling them to offer an authentic witness to the Gospel in daily life. We have long since moved beyond that old contraposition between word and sacrament. The preaching of the word, living and effective, prepares for the reception of the sacrament, and in the sacrament that word attains its maximum efficacy.

175. The study of the sacred Scriptures must be a door opened to every believer. It is essential that the revealed word radically enrich our catechesis and all our efforts to pass on the faith [cf. *Dei Verbum* 21s.]. Evangelization demands familiarity with God's word, which calls for dioceses, parishes and Catholic associations to provide for a serious, ongoing study of the Bible, while encouraging its prayerful individual and communal reading [*Verbum Domini* 86s]. We do not blindly seek God, or wait for him to speak to us first, for "God has already spoken, and there is nothing further that we need to know, which has not been revealed to us" [Benedict XVI, *Discourse, Bishops' Synod 2012*]. Let us receive the sublime treasure of the revealed word.

176. To evangelize is to make the kingdom of God present in our world. Yet "any partial or fragmentary definition which attempts to render the reality of evangelization in all its richness, complexity and dynamism does so only at the risk of impoverishing it and even of distorting it" [*Evangelii nuntiandi* 17]. I would now like to share my concerns about the social dimension of evangelization, precisely because if this dimension is not properly brought out, there is a constant risk of distorting the authentic and integral meaning of the mission of evangelization.

Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium* 174-176