

Jordan University College

THE REFLECTION MEDIUM

AFRICA TOMORROW

Inculturation is a difficult and delicate task, since it raises the question of the Church's fidelity to the Gospel and the Apostolic Tradition amidst the constant evolution of cultures.

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Editorial

Dear Readers,

Do you not wish to have hope? Would you not be willing to live courageously if a very beautiful, wise and persuasive Someone, a Someone deserving of all your trust, a Someone who has manifested quite openly and unabashedly that he loves you with a tender, thoughtful, faithful, forgiving love, asks you to take a risk together with him, a risk that is sure to bring eternal happiness?

We do not hesitate to ask the more cautious question: Is the Someone really who he says he is? Is the Someone's love for you authentic – is it really founded on the truth? If an avalanche of tragedy, misfortune, crisis, and disaster begins to overwhelm you so that you no longer have a foothold, what are you then going to believe about your beautiful Someone? Is not the happiness he promises you a fleeting dream that vanishes with the first moment of reality's dawn? Is not the risk he invites you to take an even deeper plunge into crisis and perhaps even a lethal impasse from which there is no escape? Where is his identity card? Where are his credentials? Why does he think he knows you so well that he can say all this to you by way of a promise and be so sure that he can keep the promise?

There is a friend of mine who as a child lost all hope. He was a perfectly healthy child but one day when he was ten years old, he suffered a nasty fall and immediately he lost his ability to see. He has not seen anything from that day to today. His classmates in the elementary school did not know how to accept him in his blindness. They were quick to trip him or give him a shove and then to say sarcastically, "Tell us, Laurent, who pushed you?"

Laurent went to his father, and said, "Papa, I am never going to that school again. It is hell for me." His father told him, "Have courage, my son. You will go to that school again."

My friend could learn only by listening. He would try to memorize everything. When he entered secondary school, he received the gift of a tape recorder so that he could tape everything his teachers taught and then listen to the tapes two or three times.

Before he entered the university he learned braille, the system of reading for the blind that, instead of handwriting, consists of orderly patterns of points raised on the page. Each word has its own pattern so that the blind can feel the patterns with his/her fingers and know what the page is saying.

Laurent graduated from the university and went on to complete an M.A. degree in education. He became a secondary school teacher for many years.

But Laurent had met the Someone who was indeed tender, loving, forgiving, trustworthy, and capable of keeping his promises. That Someone was God. Laurent perceived in the depths of his heart that God wanted him to be a Catholic priest.

With the permission of his superiors, he studied theology. Also with the permission of his superiors, in order to fulfil a Canon Law requirement, he sent a letter to the Pope in the Vatican with a request to be ordained a priest in spite of his blindness.

The Pope was very courteous in his reply: "Brother Laurent, you are a very humble, patient, and intelligent man. You are very prayerful... Because you cannot give the necessary thoughtful attention to the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist, you cannot be ordained. So you and I, we can give thanks to God who is Lord forever and ever."

Laurent was not daunted. With his superiors' permission, he prayed for a full year. Again with his superiors' permission, he sent a second letter to the Pope. The Pope responded as graciously as he had the first time: "Brother Laurent, you are very humble, patient... Because you cannot give the necessary thoughtful, delicate attention to the Lord's Body and Blood in the Eucharist, you cannot be ordained. So you and I, we can give thanks to God who is Lord forever and ever."

Laurent could perceive the gracious ways of a Someone in the way the Pope was replying. With the permission of his superiors, he prayed for another full year... and he wrote another letter to the Pope.

As you can suspect, the Pope responded just as graciously as he did before. That does not mean that he wrote the same letter. His words: "Brother Laurent, you are a very humble, patient, thoughtful and prayerful man. You are very intelligent. It is my

duty to tell you that God wants you to be a priest. I look forward to joining you as your brother in the priesthood. So, we can give thanks to God who is Lord forever and ever.” His signature: Servant of the Servants of God.

In the present issue, Father Bernard Witek thoughtfully listens to the Word of God in the Book of Proverbs, and then communicates what he has heard through a precise analysis of a very select, meaningful collage of verses. Father Witek directs our attention to the person who walks the path of the righteous. Not only is God a Fountain of Life for that righteous person: that person himself becomes a fountain of life for others (cf. Proverbs 10:11).

Father William Ngowi offers a very comprehensive and yet expertly synthesized presentation of the dramatic changes in Paul’s heart and Paul’s life when he met his special Someone, Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus brought about in Paul’s soul an axial shift of consciousness so complete that he, Paul, was no longer the radical, zealous fundamentalist obsessed with destroying Christianity by sapping Christians of their hope, so now Paul was becoming a special someone for Jesus and for the Church: he laboured with extraordinary patience to open the eyes, minds and hearts of all to Jesus and to find in Jesus the absolute truth. Rather than squeezing the hope out of the Christians – the intention of Saul on his way to Damascus – now he was himself becoming a source of hope. Paul was no longer acting by a violent impulse to coerce people; rather by the wisdom of the cross he sought zealously but with exemplary patience to invite people even of very diverse origins to meet God through Jesus.

Just as Fathers Witek and Ngowi have done, Sister Reginald encourages us to anchor ourselves in the Word of God. Sister Reginald joins all of us in our daily gratitude to God for what he has done for Africa and for the entire world through the grandeur of the African family. Yet she invites us all to have a new moral vision, a vision of the relationship between the man and the woman who intend to love each other not primarily in a sexual manner but rather primarily in a manner that is wholeheartedly faithful to God and to the responsibilities that spousal love and family love entail. Sexual love without responsibility suffocates the family; spousal

love that protects family values breathes new hope, not only into Africa but into the world.

When you, dear reader, settle within your personal and family convictions, you may notice that there is still much to learn about the present status of the human being – wherever he or she is – and the present status of the family. We wish to give God both the first and the last word. Yet we acknowledge the need to assess present realities, the environments, the policies that shape environments – and that often enough shape people – the social networks and the economic matrices that stimulate development and stabilize the momentum of progress or do not. Brother Polycarp offers a research methodology that confines itself to a rigorous application of the scientific method in the social science of education, a method that necessarily depends on the collection of primary data. To observe, systematise, analyse and conclude is to anchor oneself in the present social moment and to see what occasions hope – but also what does not.

Father Tadeusz Jarosz adopts for himself a quite similar objective: to know how the Church may act as an agent of authentic development by recognizing and assessing her impact and the impact of her message on the social, political and economic milieu. Everyone in the Church receives the divine grace to have an impact, not only individually, but also within the entire Body which is the Church. Through individual charisms, family charisms, community charisms, and the charisms that belong to authority, God lets his presence be felt in even the most tragically secularist public forums of the world.

Father John Gibson purports to reinforce the conviction that the most trustworthy Someone, the Someone who really loves with a thoughtful, forgiving, and fulfilling love, the one who therefore diffuses hope, a hope that does not disappoint, is God himself. By drawing upon philosophers who find in God a secure source for their promenades through wisdom's gardens, Father Gibson feels confident in concluding that hope and the happiness that follows in the wake of hope is for everyone.

The Editor

PHILOSOPHY & HUMAN SCIENCE

Research Methods: Special Challenges in the Domain of Education

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Introduction

Wellington (2000) admits that those striving to define ‘research’ find it much easier to recognize research than to define it. He presents one of the most widely quoted versions of the definition, that of Stenhouse (1975), who defines research as ‘systematic enquiry made public.’

Basey (1990) elaborates upon that by defining research as a systematic, critical and self-critical inquiry which aims to contribute to the advancement of knowledge. Omari (2011) suggests that literally ‘research’ means rethink, reflect, imagine, pull back, hypothesize, look again – with patience – and make intelligent guesses. He refers to *The Webster New World Dictionary* which defines research to be a ‘careful, systematic, patient study, or investigation, in some fields of knowledge undertaken to establish or discover facts or principles.’

Kombo and Tromp (2006) sum up their ideas of a definition with words that seem to cut across most of the other definitions in vogue. They conclude: (1) Research is systematic process. (2) Research involves a collection of data. (3) Research involves analysis of the collected data. (4) Research involves interpretation of data.

Research Methods

In the context of this discussion, ‘Research Methods’ refers to a course of learning in the Education Programme that some

institutions offer to their students. In Tanzania some of the universities that include the Research Methods course in their programme are Jordan University College – JUCO; Sokoine University of Agriculture – Mazimbu Campus; and Mzumbe University.

According to JUCO Prospectus (2011/2012) the course is described as follows:

This course is designed to introduce education students to the concepts, theory and research methodology as a preparatory stage for practical research undertakings in education. It provides students and teachers with an opportunity to develop the ability to conduct research on educational phenomena based on their areas of specialization (p. 28).

The ‘Course Outline’ includes the following:

Topic 1: Understanding the Nature of Educational Research

Topic 2: Understanding the Paradigms in Educational Research

Topic 3: Basic Elements of Educational Research

Topic 4: The Role of Literature Review in Research

Topic 5: Research Design and Methodology

Topic 6: Data Collection, Analysis and Interpretation Using

Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches

Topic 7: Data Analysis and Organization (p. 28-29).

Research Focused on Issues in Education

From the suggested definitions one can note that, ‘Educational Research’ refers to the systematic enquiry of educational phenomena. One may also define ‘Educational Research’ as systematic, critical and self-critical inquiry of educational phenomena which aims to contribute to the advancement of knowledge. The adjective ‘critical’ implies that the data collected and samples used in the research are closely scrutinized by the researcher (p. 13). the adjective self-critical implies the researcher’s attempts not to be swayed by his or her own anticipations of research results, biases regarding the acceptance or rejection of hypotheses, or presuppositions regarding the objectives of the research.

Giving examples of educational phenomena needing inquiry or proper for Educational Research, Omari (2010) lists the following:

- 1) Why are girls not doing as well as boys in mathematics?

- 2) Why are teachers avoiding reporting to some teaching stations?
- 3) Why are pupils in seminaries doing well?
- 4) Why are some schools doing better than others?
- 5) What organizational or management procedures are employed in better schools?
- 6) How is learning material presented in our classrooms?
- 7) To what extent does one method yield more effective results than another?
- 8) How do teachers feel about current recruitment procedures?
- 9) How do pupils and parents feel about our school? (26-27).

Indeed, these phenomena are common to all areas of specialization – Kiswahili, History, Geography, English, Economics, Mathematics, and so forth – noted by the course description of Research Methods (JUCO Prospectus, 2011/2012). For instance, the query, “Why are girls not doing as well as boys in mathematics?” can be applied to Geography, History, Kiswahili, and other course subjects. This is simply to say that the same question could have been formulated as follows: “Why are boys not doing as well as girls in English or Kiswahili or History...?”

1. The Difference Between Scientific Research in the Field of Education and Other Genres of Research

Educational Research follows a scientific approach.

At this juncture, it may be worth recalling the meaning of the term “science”. According to Nachimias (1996), the term “science” is frequently misunderstood. A variety of persons – laypersons, journalists, policy makers, politicians, scholars, and scientists themselves – use it in a variety of ways and in contexts dissimilar to each other.

Etymologically, the word science is derived from the *Latin* word *scire* meaning “to know.” However, in its general application:

- 1) Science connotes a prestigious intellectual undertaking
- 2) Science implies a body of verifiably true knowledge
- 3) Science means an objective investigation of empirical phenomena.

“Science” does not refer to any general or particular body of knowledge, but to a distinct methodology. Hence we use the term

science to mean all knowledge collected by means of the methodology recognized to be scientific. The term “science” may refer to the methodology itself – that is to say, to the Scientific Method. Investigations that adhere to the scientific method are what are called “research” or, more to the point, “scientific research”. We are referring to the methodology that many scholars recommend.

The reasons for recommending the so-called “scientific approach” include:

- 1) Science or Research is self-correcting (Lonergan, 1967, 289-291; 713-718).
- 2) Science or Research has built-in checks all along the way to arrive at a scientific knowledge that corresponds to judgments of fact.
- 3) Science or Research insists on a testing procedure.
- 4) Science or Research is subject to public scrutiny.

The nature of the phenomena that occupy scientific research and the term ‘inquiry’ featured in the suggested definitions, implies that educational research proceeds according to distinct steps. Crosswell (2005) suggests the name “Research Process Cycle.” That is:

- 1) Identifying a Research Problem
- 2) Reviewing the Literature
- 3) Specifying a Purpose for the Research and Stating Hypotheses
- 4) Collecting Data
- 5) Analysing and Interpreting Data
- 6) Reporting and Evaluating Conclusions

In other words, science or scientific research arrives at the conclusion through a scientific procedure. Kombo and Tromp (2006) synthesize their ideas about what constitutes scientific research with words that cut across all the proffered definitions. That is:

- 1) Research is a process.
- 2) Research is systematic process.
- 3) Research involves a collection of data.
- 4) Research involves analyses of the collected data.
- 5) Research involves interpretation of data.

2. Significance of a Concentrated Consideration on the Topic of Research, Research Methods and Educational Research

Discussing the general purpose of research, Peil (1995) makes the remark, 'Knowledge is like a garden: if it is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested'. Indeed, the general purpose of any research is to generate knowledge by way of new discoveries, hitherto unrecognized solutions, new abilities to predict, new theories, unforeseen conclusions, more accurate and more comprehensive explanations. Indeed, the capacity to generate knowledge dominates in the definitions offered by the scholars highlighted here. For instance, Mugenda & Mugenda (1999) lists 6 purposes, including:

- 1) To discover new knowledge
- 2) To describe phenomena
- 3) To enable prediction
- 4) To enable control
- 5) To enable the explanation of phenomena
- 6) To enable theory development

Ruane (2005) concentrating on some critical life decisions that people can make based on research illustrates the purposes listed above. He composed lists that include:

- 1) What is the most prudent diet or health regime for someone of your age, race, or gender?
- 2) Which course of medical treatment is the best for you?
- 3) Is home schooling the right choice for your family?

Ruane concludes that, "In the end, your knowledge of research methods could very well be life-enhancing, even a life-sustaining resource" (p. 14). That is very true; many people are making a living from the research they conduct or teach.

On December 5, 2011 Sylvester Domasa, one of the writers for *The Guardian* newspaper, published an article under the title: "Generating Researchers to Speed up Development." The article exemplified agriculture as one of the areas that could benefit greatly from more and more research.

Why the need for research? Regions, for example, differ from each other in terms of the physical, climactic and social conditions

typical for their areas; consequently what one region needs agriculturally may differ from what another region needs: the needs need to be researched. *The Guardian* noted that the current situation in the country calls for generating competent graduates that are well equipped with research methodologies and practical techniques to speed up development (p. 12).

Again, on July 19, 2012, in collaboration with her colleague Gertrude Mbago, SJMC, wrote an article, calling the researchers to invest in 'Fish Chain Value Analysis.' That was the complement to the call made by the Deputy Minister for Livestock and Fisheries, who urged universities and research institutions to fully invest in the industry. The Deputy Minister's words are: "Research is critical in this field; without research fishermen cannot expect to move forward" (p. 7).

On the same date, Prosper Makene, *The Guardian* correspondent based in Iringa, published an article with the title: "Institute Transforms Lives of Smallholder Farmers." He was commending the transformation observed among people growing tea in the Mbeya region. His words are: "The Tea Research Institute of Tanzania (TRIT) has come up with a variety of research projects to ensure that small-scale farmers use skills to increase production and stimulate business growth in the agricultural sector of the country" (p. 9).

Because agriculture is the mainstay of Tanzania's economy – agriculture employs 80% of the Tanzania population – it is one of the areas that needs research. On that note Rutatora *et al.* (2004), notes that on the 1st of September in the year 2000, the Tanzania Agricultural Research Project (TARP) was launched. The theme of the project was "Food Security and Household Income for Small-Holder Farmers in Tanzania." Among TARP's several recommendations was the proposal that research should be integrated into academic programmes – doing this would help both those engaged in research projects and those involved in directing or teaching the academic programmes to accomplish their particular objectives more effectively.

At this juncture the TARP study commends Jordan University College and the other learning institutions noted above for having

integrated 'Research Methods' and 'Educational Research' into their academic curricula.

Among its objectives, the TARP study aims at addressing some of the challenges subsumed under the rubrics "Research Methods" and "Educational Research." As far as JUCO is concerned, the challenges in question may be understood to be those that faced the education programme at its initial stage. Like any new programme, the education programme included some courses that were non-traditional with particular novelties: organizing these courses, determining their content, and choosing the appropriate methodology for teaching them proved to be a challenge. Because JUCO hitherto had been an institute for ecclesiastical studies, namely, philosophy and theology, for over 20 years, introducing an education programme – a programme secular in scope – was not a simple task.

Everything comprehended by the rubrics Research Methods and Educational Research, therefore, introduced a novelty into the JUCO prospectus because the programmes, philosophy and theology, that had been existing for many years do not involve data collection or the analyses, interpretations and discussions that follow in their wake. Philosophy and theology students, rather, invest their research energies into what are colloquially termed "Long Essays." Long essays do not follow the approach signified by the terms Research Methods and Educational Research. In fact, a cursory scan of the 'Curricula' as well as the 'Format of Educational Research' brings to light immediately the remarkable differences between research sponsored by the education programme and the long essays researched and composed by philosophy and theology students.¹

The curriculum for research that focuses on educational issues is tripartite in structure and so becomes a topic for study in the course of 3 academic semesters:

¹ What the author says here about the Research Project in the Education Programme coincides, too, with the format for the Research Project in the Psychology and Counselling Degree Programme and the programmes for the other social sciences at JUCO. Data collection, data analysis, data interpretation and a discussion of the findings are all essential phases in the Research Project (editor's note).

Research Methods I: Theory – Methodology, 1st Semester of 2nd Year. This provides the theoretical base for students who will write their research proposal and research projects.

Research Methods II, 2nd Semester of 2nd Year. This is the practical part that corresponds to the theory taught in Research Methods I. Practical methodology focuses on Proposal Writing. Because the long holiday follows upon this particular segment of the course, the time becomes available for data collecting from the field. The data at issue, of course, are primary data.

Research Methods III, 1st Semester of 3rd Year. A continuation of Research Methods I and II, this course also leans towards the practical dimension of research methods, specifically, Report Writing. Report writing provides the methodology for presenting the data collected from the field during the long holiday, for example, through tables and graphs. How to organize and meaningfully present data analyses, data interpretation and the ensuing discussion that weaves together the objectives of the research, the background literature, and the current findings serve to complete the written Report – this, then, is the Research Project.

When one compares what the Education Faculty presents to their students in contrast to what the Philosophy and Theology Faculties present to their students, one immediately perceives the vast difference in approach. Without data collection there is no research project for education students; philosophy and theology students, on the other hand, may write their long essays without collecting primary data.

Hence Omari (2010) writes:

Research is based on observable and verifiable experience, that is to say, empirical evidence. Research involves gathering new data or ideas from primary or first hand sources or using existing secondary data for a new purpose. Teachers frequently assign pupils a so-called research project that involves writing a paper dealing with the life of a prominent person. Students are expected to read a number of encyclopaedias, books, periodical references and to synthesize the information in a written report. This is not research, for the data are not new. Merely reorganizing or restating what is already known and

has already been written, valuable as it may be as a learning experience, is not research. It adds nothing to what is known (p. 12).²

3. The Meaning of a Research Problem (Topic) in Educational Research

Any Research Project or Thesis focuses on a specific topic. In fact, the topic is what establishes the contours, the parameters of the Research, the Thesis. It is the first step in the Research Process referred to by Cresswell (2005) as Research Journey. Kombo and Tromp (2006) use very simple and clear language: "Topic refers to a subject or an issue or an area under discussion." The good Research Topic has the following characteristics:

- 1) It has to be researchable.
- 2) It should be interesting – i.e., providing motivation – for the researcher.
- 3) It should be contributing knowledge to the society-at-large.
- 4) It should be provocative for the society.
- 5) It should be clear and focused.

² The editor notes that the author's citation of Omari is consistent with the meaning that he, the author, has chosen to emphasize in regard to the word "research." There is yet another meaning, however, that would indeed embrace philosophy and theology long essays as valid research. This other meaning is actually a more literal understanding of the word "re-search," meaning to "search again." Hence a true researcher may re-explore documents and studies that have been filed away on the library shelves; and through that re-exploration may arrive at novel insights and conclusions that former investigators had not yet discovered. This is precisely what happened, for example, when B. Lonergan revisited Galileo's research on the relationship between the sun and the earth and its application to biblical content. What Lonergan clarified – and what Galileo had failed to clarify – was the distinction between the descriptive point of view, the sun in relationship to an observer who sees that the sun rises and sets, and the explanatory point of view, the orbiting earth's relationship to the somewhat stationary sun independent of all observers. Philosophical and theological research often, if not always, demands the researcher to accept his or her primary sources as if they were new data. See Lonergan, *Insight*, 295, on the topic of common sense judgments. See the conclusion of *De Incarnatione* by St. Athanasius for the disposition needed to research sacred texts as primary data.

According to Mugenda & Mugenda (1999), some major characteristics of a good research problem are as follows:

- 1) Its findings should have a widespread implication for a particular area (it should be a concern that affects many people not simply an individual issue or an issue that touches only an insignificant number of people/beneficiaries).
- 2) It should challenge some common held truism, i.e., it should be bringing to light something new and not just repeating what is already obvious.
- 3) It should be filling a gap in the existing laws, views or policies.
- 4) It should cover a reasonably ample scope.

4. Identifying the Research Problem or Topic for Educational Research

Because research is a systematic inquiry, it ought to follow a series of steps that are systematic in their arrangement. First, the researcher should identify or formulate the Research Problem that s/he will investigate through research procedures. Mugenda & Mugenda (1999) note that one may start with identifying a broad/general area that holds his/her interest and then gradually narrow it down to a specific/particular area. Montello and Sutton (2006:29) provide a crucial insight at this level, that is, 'We don't just want to get a research idea, we want to get a good one', i.e., one that is interesting, noble, relevant and feasible. They give the following tips on how one can get a research idea that is interesting, noble, relevant and feasible:

- 1) Find a research area by focusing on what interests you.
- 2) Generate the research idea on your own, not copying from somebody or following the groupthink trend.³
- 3) Link it with other knowledge you already have – never get a research idea from a completely new area.
- 4) Link it with the existing literature.
- 5) Formulate your idea as one or more specific hypotheses.
- 6) Design research instruments to address your hypotheses.

³ For a more detailed explanation of the groupthink phenomenon see D. Myers (2010) *Social Psychology*, 290-298 (Editor)

5. The Sources of the Research Topic in Educational Research

Mugenda & Mugenda (1999) identify several broad areas from which specific Research Problems can be sought:

- 1) Existing theories
- 2) Existing literature
- 3) Discussions with experts
- 4) Previous research studies
- 5) Replications
- 6) The media
- 7) Personal experiences

To the question, "Where do scientists get their ideas (topics)?" Montello & Sutton (2006) respond: "Anywhere!" In their view, therefore, a general research area can emerge from one's intuitions, one's dreams, one's personal experiences, movies, books, one's friends, family members, neighbours, to name just a few possible sources. After getting the general idea of a research topic, Montello & Sutton (2006) recommend the following:

- 1) Specify a research area: focus on what interests you.
- 2) Generate research ideas of your own or transform ideas you have received from others into your own constellations of intuitions, interests, considerations, or original hypotheses; in other words, whatever research idea you have, make it yours.
- 3) Link whatever you are considering with other knowledge that you already have; make sure that your idea is plausibly researchable.
- 4) Check the existing literature; ask experts.
- 5) Formulate your ideas as one of more specific hypotheses/research questions/objectives.
- 6) Design the research to address your hypotheses.

6. Some Considerations in Setting the Scope of Educational Research

McMillan English Dictionary (2002) defines "scope" as an opportunity or freedom necessary to do or develop something. In our case, it refers to the time needed to accomplish a Research Project. Like studies in general, an academic Research Project is supposed to be accomplished within a definite time period (one

academic year). The factors determining the scope of the research include:

- 1) The time available to carry it out
- 2) The money available for the research
- 3) The availability of the required equipment (if the research calls for equipment).
- 4) The availability of subjects or units of study (the population sample, literature samples, and so forth).

In their attempt to provide parameters for a researchable topic in the field of education, Mugenda & Mugenda (1999) note that a research title should be short and simple, yet informative. The title gives the reader some initial information about the area of research that the report intends to cover and is therefore a pointer to the content of the report. The title should also give an indication of:

One: The major variables of the research

Two: The target population

Three: The site or geographical location of the research

Choosing a topic that is specific enough to be meaningfully researchable, a topic for which data are obtainable from a population sample that is available to the researcher, and a topic that explores an issue that is not just an idiosyncratic anomaly for one village or town but rather has relevant implications for a much larger region – this capacity to choose the topic gives the researcher the opportunity to make an authentic contribution to the country of Tanzania.

The Format for Educational Research

Scholars concerned with education research agree on the five chapters that ought to provide the format for educational research. There may be slight variations in the wording. To highlight a few:

Omari (2010) designates the chapters as follows:

Chapter One: Background and Statement of the Research Problem

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Chapter Three: Research Methods Used

Chapter Four: Analysis and Presentation of the Results

Chapter Five: Discussion of the Findings (p. 128).

For chapters one to three, Witek and Ogalo (2012) make use of the following ascriptions:

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter Three: Design and Methodology

Even though these differences are minimal, some sincere lecturers who were requested to supervise Education Students in writing their Research Proposals and the subsequent Research Projects either declined or took initiative to consult academicians who are versed with Research Methods and Educational Research. That is something commendable in academics – it is honest to oneself and to the public. Otherwise, they could mislead students.

Conclusion

Recommending Research Methods, Educational Research and the Scientific Approach, Omari (2010) notes that library research or long essays, good as they may be, are not research in the scientific sense of the term because they base themselves on secondary data that are not new.⁴ They are merely reorganization or restating what is already known and has already been written: valuable as they may be as a learning experience, they are not research. They add nothing to what is known (p. 11). Many other scholars carry the same opinion. To name a few: Cresswell (2005), Wellington (2000) and Mugenda & Mugenda (1999). Library research and long essays are good and important for Chapter Two, Review of the Literature, and for Chapter Five, Discussion of the Findings, where the alert researcher will honestly and insightfully integrate his or her findings with what other researchers have learned in the past. This is the cumulative self-corrective process of learning in the field of Educational Research.

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⁴ However, see footnote 2 above.

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Philosophy's Point of Closure: Kadiatu and Mama Princess as African Progenitors of Hope

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Jesus answered, '... I was born for this, I came into the world for this, to bear witness to the truth; and all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice.' 'Truth?' said Pilate. 'What is that?' (John 18:37-38)

How does a philosopher invigorate his or her personal wisdom with the spirit of hope? Is hope an essential component of the truth? In what kind of soil may a person, a family, a community or a nation plant its seeds of hope with the sure knowledge that it will blossom and flower forth as a beauty that lasts forever ... a beauty indeed that shines in the eyes and the hearts of all the planters and would-be harvesters?

God is; therefore, we are. We are, therefore, I am. I am, therefore, I think... with gratitude for the God who gave me the "we" of family, and intends me to be the "I" that gives the family a new identity.

Introduction: In Whom Rests my Hope?

A question I like to pose to my first-year philosophy students is this: if all the wise people – the true lovers of wisdom, genuine philosophers – who have ever spoken during the course of human history, were seated together at a single table which of them would be most capable of expressing the truth in a way that most perfectly matches the order of truth in God, the order of truth in the universe, and the order of truth in the human person? The alert student typically bypasses such renowned figures as Immanuel Kant, John Mbiti, Soren Kierkegaard, Edmund Husserl, Gautama Buddha, Karl Jaspers, Max Scheler, Martin Heidegger, Placid Tempels, Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein), Albert Camus, Jürgen Habermas, G.E. Moore, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Frederick Nietzsche, Emmanuel Levinas, Johannes Messner, Plato, Confucius, Mencius, Socrates, René Descartes, David Hume, John Locke, Aristotle, John Rawls, Averroes, Avicenna, Moses Maimonides, Thomas

Hobbes, Duns Scotus, Gottfried Leibniz, Baruch Spinoza, Georg Hegel, Jean Paul Sartre, Gabriel Marcel, Jacques Maritain, Pythagoras, Bernard Lonergan, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Richard Neuhaus and John Paul II – just to mention some – and having bypassed all of them, this same alert student says with clarity of mind and depth of conviction: the one who expresses the truth most capably is the one who reveals the truth with perfect understanding of all that is. *That would be God himself.*

Yes, God is the most eloquent philosopher to have graced the highways and byways of our/His planet earth. Those who are “on the side of truth” listen to the voice of Jesus. In the modest article that I now present to you, dear reader, I intend to accept the graced wisdom of a handful of philosophers who chose to accept the data of God’s revelation as starting points for their own personal journeys towards the truth. This does not necessarily mean that divine revelation was always their starting point; but it does mean that once they discovered the rightness of allowing God’s self-disclosures to be the criterion and determinant of their own reflective walks through wisdom’s gardens, they chose to explore new venues, formulate new insights and modify their reflections and judgments always in harmony with the divine parameters of the truth. Their horizon is God’s love and grace in their plenitude. What opens them to the amplitude of this horizon is hope.

The philosophers I have chosen are Soren Kierkegaard, Edith Stein, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Paul Ricoeur with an offering or two from Hans Urs von Balthasar and Pope St. John Paul II. The data of divine revelation include (a) passages from the Christian Scriptures to which these philosophers refer and (b) the cues of God’s proximity that come to us from people who have suffered to such an extreme that they could very well be the ones Jesus refers to when he says, as a Judge and Lord of the Truth, “In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.”¹ The least of Jesus’ sisters to whom I refer to in the present paper as media of God’s revelation are Kadiatu Kamara and Mama Princess of Sierra Leone, West Africa.² Without Kadiatu and

¹ Matthew 25:40.

² Kadiatu and I knew each other as friends for the last months of her life on earth. Princess and I knew each other through my personal friendship with

Mama Princess, the philosophers have nothing to say. Indeed Kadiatu and Mama Princess are progenitors of hope for the world.

God as the Starting Point

When one ponders the philosophers who choose to allow God to be the starting point for their reflections, systems, and solutions for life's puzzles, one can easily detect a spirit of hope. In Book III, chapter 154 of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, for example, Thomas Aquinas not only proposes hope as a possibility for the soul; but, anchoring himself in what divine revelation has to offer, he proposes hope as a reality in a human soul that God has enabled to receive what only He, God, can give: God gives grace, that is to say, God gives Spirit, and God gives life. The person disposed to receive the gift of God lives in hope. Hope issues forth, however, only from the interior of the heart that is faithful to who he or she is as a person.

A phenomenologist who in her later years before her execution became a neo-Thomist, Edith Stein, contributes the insight that "faith tells us that God wills to give the soul eternal life, i.e., an eternal participation in his life."³ This breeds hope.

The hope is unique to each individual. One listens attentively to the Psalmist who affirms that God "has formed the heart of each of them individually."⁴ One reaches the reasonable conclusion that God created every human soul with individuality and unrepeatability. One reasonably understands, too, that the words of the Lord God in the Book of Revelation, "I shall give the victor... a white stone, and on the stone will be inscribed a new name, known only to the one who receives it,"⁵ underlines the uniqueness of each and every human being. The new name, a proper name, identifies the innermost essence or nature of the recipient and

her adoptive family. The woman who saved Princess' life and accompanied her Mama during her last hours on earth is the same woman, Louisa Aminata Sankoh Hughes, who gave me the details of Mama Princess' pregnancy.

³ E. Stein (St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross), *Finite and Eternal Being: An Attempt at an Ascent to the Meaning of Being*. Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications 2002, 504.

⁴ Psalm 32:15.

⁵ Revelation 2:17.

reveals to this recipient the mystery of his or her being – his or her authentic self – that has originated with God as an extraordinarily precious gift. This new name, one might say, discloses what God had in mind when he created this person including the free choices that God would foresee this person making.⁶ This new name, then, is the individual's horizon of fullness to which hope has aspired.

But in the context of family, community, region and nation, how does one discover reasons for personal hope? May I believe that God intends to saturate my heart with the interior joy that Sacred Scripture promises when life's every moment discourages me and leaves my spirit quite dissipated and forlorn?⁷

The Challenge to Hope: Kadiatu Kamara

I introduce to you Kadiatu Kamara by recounting for you a conversation between me and Aminata, a Sierra Leonean woman, thirty-four years old, who has adopted 60 children. At the age of 21, Aminata had received the permission to be the legal mother of 21 war orphans and then continued to adopt children whose parents had died either from violence or from natural causes. She did not stop there: she has also become the legal mother of children whose mothers had chosen to abort them until Aminata convinced them to change their minds. Aminata was my next-door neighbour; and so I collaborated with her on a number of projects intended to make life liveable for the approximately 50,000 refugees that surrounded us.

What was Kadiatu Kamara's personal truth, and how did this truth engender hope in her soul?

I reminded Aminata of an experience we shared together: "Aminata, do you remember our Sierra Leonean sister, Kadiatu Kamara?"⁸

"Yes, we were the best of friends. She lived day and night with her head entirely covered with a cloth because a group of men beat her and mutilated her for many hours. She no longer has a human

⁶ *Finite and Eternal Being*, 504-505.

⁷ See, for example, Zephaniah 3:14-17.

⁸ Cf. J. Gibson – L. Sankoh-Hughes – P. Shensi Beba, *Compassion in the Heart of the World: Jesus and the Veronica Option*. New York: Xlibris, 2005, 253-254, 281-282, 288-289.

head. Her eyes are only two very small openings in her face – the eye sockets have completely disappeared. She does not have distinguishable cheeks. She has no lips: when she talks she cannot really open her mouth. It is very difficult to understand her. Her ears are much disfigured. Her head is more like the shape of a cube or a rectangular solid...

"She does not look human, but she amazes everyone because she is able to breathe in her own way, see in her own way, and talk even though she does everything somewhat differently from the normal, healthy person."

Kadiatu Kamara is a victim of terrorism. What is left of her body communicates the message that rebels, quite poisoned with the spirit of treachery, did their level best to eradicate the physical signs that she is a woman, created by God to be beautiful. What is left of her soul? All visible signs indicate that she is a painfully lonely woman, one who, feeling the shame, has sidled towards the margins because no one wants to be close to her. She hides her humiliation with a tired, dirty cloth: indeed her head is so entirely covered with the nasty-looking cloth that the one small opening – the one she uses for seeing – hardly seems to be a worthy aperture for navigating through the market crowd of very uneasy, very inhospitable people.

Sadness governs her mood: she frets, she feels frantically helpless, and she feels dreadfully hopeless in her walk towards the future.

Now she is standing in front of me. Her brothers and sisters from our part of Freetown must undergo an axial shift of consciousness in order to welcome her into their neighbourhood. This axial shift is an inner transition – a dramatic change in habit in the way the heart ordinarily conducts itself – from that of an active, habitual, routine manner of day-to-day living to that of a deeply thoughtful, contemplative attitude that is always ready to make allowances, to accept novelties in thought and behaviour, and to accept God's desire to invite Kadiatu into the happiness that flowers forth when love and friendship govern relationships.

After inviting her to sit down, I make one request to Kadiatu that I suspect is going to shift the parameters for my particular

relationship with her: I ask her to remove the cloth that is covering her head.

I do not do so bluntly in a way that startles or stuns. I prepare her for my request by simply reporting to her why I wish to speak with her. The brothers have been telling me that she asks for food and medicine but that she never removes the cloth. The brothers have been telling me that she is afraid what other people will think when they see her. The brothers have been telling me that even with her head covered, everyone shuns her: no one wants to be close to her.

I say to Kadiatu: “This is what the brothers have been telling me... Kadiatu, why do you keep your face covered?”

She tries to speak very distinctly: “I am afraid people will scream when they see me.”

Having silently prayed to the Spirit of truth in my heart, I encourage her: “Kadiatu, I have been with many people who have suffered in their body, in their mind, in their heart... I promise you that I will have more compassion for you and feel closer to you if you remove the cloth.”

She does so. She looks exactly as Louisa Aminata had described her. When I saw how the rebels had pulverized her lips and her nose, I was amazed that she could eat anything... and what Aminata said about her eyes and ears was quite accurate: how Kadiatu could see and hear was a mystery just short of the miraculous.

Nevertheless Kadiatu sits with me as a woman, twenty-four years of age, struggling to live in a weary body not only fraught with pain but also twisting and turning in the throes of an oppressive anxiety.

She seems to be suffering what Kierkegaard would call a “sickness unto death.”⁹

The existentialist philosopher Soren Kierkegaard purports to be “on the side of truth” – he listens to the voice of Jesus, our Lord and God: he uses divine revelation, precisely, the Gospel of John, chapter 11, with a concentrated focus on verses 4, 25, 26, 43, and 44.

⁹ S. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press 1941, 7, 15. Kierkegaard published this book originally in 1849 under the pseudonym Anti-Climacus.

Kierkegaard takes note that a sickness unto death in the Christian understanding is not neediness, sickness, wretchedness, affliction, adversities, torments, mental sufferings, sorrow, grief, or even death itself. Even if the bitterness and anguish were so painful that one might be inclined to say that her suffering is "worse than death," the pain at issue would indeed be comparable to sickness, but not to "sickness unto death." If or when the moment of physical death arrives, even if Jesus does not call the deceased person into a new opportunity to continue his/her life on earth as he did for Lazarus, because of the fact that Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life, lives, neither a terminal illness, nor a terminal injury, nor death as a terminus is the end of life for the person. Eternal life is present in Jesus the Redeemer. "Christianly understood there is in death infinitely much more hope than merely humanly speaking there is when there not only is life but this life exhibits the fullest health and vigour."¹⁰

Yet Kadiatu is suffering the anguish of the totally paralyzed, who lies and wrestles with death but yet cannot die. The hopelessness for this person is that even the last hope – the hope to die – is not available. Kadiatu's fear of living day in and day out with all of her physical mutilations, mental chaos and emotional upheaval is more dreadful than death itself. So, according to Kierkegaard, she may suffer a great desolation because she is not able to live as the self she had intended to be, that of a gracious, respectable, and physically attractive woman; and she is not willing to live as the other self that lies embedded in her present bitterness: a self-that-wants-to-die-now. At the root of her despair is the unwillingness to accept herself in her present state as a gift from God. Her despair is a sickness unto death.

Does Despair Have the Last Word?

Yet the despair is not her terminus. Kadiatu is not doomed to die from despair. God is capable of gently opening the flower's petals, the flower that renders itself visible at the present instant as a crushed and lifeless artefact of a beauty that was mocked and ridiculed. If one were to contemplate Kadiatu through the analogue

¹⁰ *The Sickness unto Death*, 6-7.

of a flower, one could see how almost imperceptibly, God ushers her into a new frame of mind. God revives the flower's soul. Again the existentialist Kierkegaard relies on the data of divine revelation to explain the full significance of the present moment:

The decisive thing is, that for God all things are possible.¹¹ This is eternally true, and true therefore at every instant. This is commonly enough recognized in a way, and in a way it is commonly affirmed; but the decisive affirmation comes only when a man is brought to the utmost extremity, so that humanly speaking no possibility exists. Then the question is whether he will believe that for God all things are possible – that is to say, whether he will *believe*. But this is completely the formula for losing one's mind or understanding; to believe is precisely to lose one's understanding in order to win God...

So then, salvation is humanly speaking the most impossible thing of all; but for God all things are possible!¹² This is the fight of faith, which fights madly (if one would so express it) for possibility. For possibility is the only power to save. When one swoons people shout for water, Eau-de-Cologne, Hoffman's Drops; but when one is about to despair the cry is, Procure me possibility, procure possibility! Possibility is the only saving remedy; given a possibility, and with that the desperate man breathes once more, he revives again; for without possibility a man cannot, as it were, draw breath. Sometimes the inventiveness of a human imagination suffices to procure possibility, but in the last resort, that is, when the point is to believe, the only help is this, that for God all things are possible.

Thus is the fight carried on. Whether he who is engaged in this fight will be defeated, depends solely and alone upon whether he has the will to procure for himself possibility, that is to say, whether he will believe. And yet he understands that humanly speaking his destruction is the most certain thing of all. This is the dialectical character of faith... The believer perceives, and understands, humanly speaking, his destruction (in what has befallen him and in what he has ventured), but he believes. Therefore he does not succumb. He leaves it wholly to God how he is to be helped, but he believes that for God all things are possible. To believe in his own destruction is impossible. To understand that, humanly, it is his own destruction, and then nevertheless to believe in the possibility, is what is meant by faith. So then God helps him – perhaps by letting him escape the terror, perhaps by means of the terror – in the fact that here, unexpectedly,

¹¹ Mark 10:27; 14:36; Luke 1:38.

¹² Mark 10:26, 27.

miraculously, divinely, help appears. Miraculously – for it is a strange pedantry to assume that only eighteen hundred years ago it could occur that a man was helped miraculously. Whether a man has been helped by a miracle depends essentially upon the degree of intellectual passion he has employed to understand that help was impossible, and next upon how honest he is toward the Power which helped him nevertheless. But usually it is neither the one thing nor the other; men cry that there is no help, without having strained the understanding to find help, and afterwards they lie ungratefully.

The believer possesses the eternally certain antidote to despair, viz., possibility; for with God all things are possible at every instant.¹³

But Kadiatu is not believing. Possibility seems not to be an option for her. What Kadiatu really wills in the despair of the present moment, what she really wills as she closes herself off to the possible, is to tear herself away from the divine power that has constituted her. God, however, cannot be outwitted as if he were to wring his hands in frustration and ask, "What can I do now? I wasn't expecting this of Kadiatu."

On the contrary, divine power breathes a compelling encouragement into the woman's soul so that she may become the self that she does not want to be. It is this divine Power, the Resurrection and the Life, that grounds faith: "By relating itself to its own self and by willing to be itself, the self is grounded transparently in the Power which posited it." According to Kierkegaard, this formula is the definition of faith.¹⁴ It is the human being who is willing to be true to himself or herself by obeying the Creator. The Creator, after all, has given the person an inward self – and his divine wisdom and will provide a motive for that same self to appreciate what God has done and is doing in the interior of his or her being. The self is a gift. Everything Kierkegaard says on

¹³ *The Sickness unto Death*, 39-41. Kierkegaard's Biblically-based conviction that every moment exudes possibility harmonizes powerfully with the spirituality of Jean Pierre De Caussade, who emphasizes the fact that every moment is a sacrament through which God gives himself. It is worth noting that De Caussade anchored his insights in the same Gospel passage, that of the Annunciation in Luke 1:26-38, as did Kierkegaard. See J.P. De Caussade, *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, transl. by E.J. Strickland. St. Louis, MO: Herder 1921, Book I, Chapter 1, Section 2.

¹⁴ *The Sickness unto Death*, 11, 154.

this matter of the person's becoming truly and transparently the self that God intended him or her to be – everything he says harmonizes with beauty and precision to what God reveals in Ephesians 1:3-14.

Jesus answered, '... I was born for this, I came into the world for this, to bear witness to the truth; and all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice.' 'Truth?' said Pilate. 'What is that?' (John 18:37-38)

Soren Kierkegaard made the astute observation that with the question, "What is truth?" Pilate was preparing to absolve himself of all responsibility for committing a heinous crime, that of sending to a very humiliating and very painful death a man who by every standard of the truth, both human and divine, was wholly innocent. Pilate said, "Truth... what is that?" By setting up truth as an object of inquiry, he was engaging himself in a cognitive process that either with an apparently pure intention or with a *mélange* of confusing interests measures truth according to human norms. If Pilate were to pursue the inquiry, he might reach a conclusion that would satisfy his will to understand according to his own customary ways of thinking and hence the truth-for-Pilate would have been the maxim: act according to my own best interest. If he had asked the subjective question, however, "Who am I in the presence of the divine Truth?" he would have faced the decision according to his transparent self and would have acted justly.¹⁵

If Pilate had submitted himself obediently to the truth as a subject, he would have felt the truth drawing him forward with an interior momentum of soul, drawing him forward to make a choice to be passionately transparent as a human person, as a self, before the God who constitutes him as a person. He would, in a word, have acted justly to release Jesus and would have entered a state of hope.

Kadiatu's body showed me that those who violated her had fabricated for themselves a travesty of the truth that does not respect or recognize God as the author of each person's true self. Their own pursuit of self-interest fashioned for them a painful

¹⁵ S. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, ed. & trans. by A. Hannay. Cambridge: CUP 2009, 192-193. Kierkegaard wrote the *Postscript* under the pseudonym Johannes Climacus and rendered it public on 17 February 1846.

resemblance to the Pontius Pilate of the past and to all the Pilates of the present who are hell-bent on preserving their mediocrity and evaporating the last drops of the fragile hope that others struggle to preserve.

Hope Has the Last Word...

For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many... If, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ... where sin increased, grace abounded all the more ... (Rom 5:17-20)

Paul Ricoeur pondered the existence of a human family that embraces Kadiatu Kamara and gives her hope. What he noticed, however, is that the hope does not find its origin within that human family: it is not of humanistic character. The hope can only come from God – through his grace. According to the natural operations of the intellect it is a “logical absurdity.”¹⁶

¹⁶ The affirmations and insights about the hope that is anchored in the superabundant grace of God come to us from Paul Ricoeur, more specifically, from an article that Ricoeur submitted for publication in English under the title “Hope and the Structure of Philosophical Systems”, in G. McLean & F. Dougherty, eds., *Philosophy and Christian Theology*, Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, Washington, 1970, 55-69. François-Xavier Amherdt translated it into French and included it in an anthology of Ricoeur’s writings entitled *L’Herméneutique biblique: la nuit surveillée*, Paris: Cerf, 2005, 111-128. I am looking at the French version of the article. (Note: Paul Ricoeur died on 20 May 2005). Even though Paul Ricoeur and Edith Stein were never able to meet each other – Ricoeur would have been born too late for that – Paul Ricoeur’s connections to phenomenology run through the same person as Edith Stein, namely, Edmund Husserl. One amazing fact of Ricoeur’s life is what he managed to do as a prisoner-of-war under Hitler’s Nazis. Prisoners had the right to ask for one book per month from the Swiss Red Cross. Ricoeur and his friends collaborated to get Karl Jaspers’ books, but they also were able to get Husserl’s *Ideen I*. He was able to translate 78 pages of the book into French with an incredibly miniscule handwriting in the margins of the German text; and then after the war he published the complete translation with his own commentary. He soon received international acclaim as a leading advocate of

Ricoeur elaborates for us what it means to establish hope as the point of closure for philosophy – and, for that matter, for theology. Hope signifies the superabundance of meaning in opposition to the nonsense, the non-meaning, of failure and destruction. There are many ways to live according to the eschatological event of a new creation. One can live it personally and collectively, ethically and politically. It is not individualist: it is communitarian, a family enterprise. The ways of living hope are not reducible to the pure wisdom of the eternal present: the ways of hope bear the seal of the future, of a “not yet” and a “much more”.

Here Ricoeur makes reference to Kierkegaard: “In the words of Kierkegaard, hope makes of freedom the passion for the possible against the sad ponderings of the irrevocable.” This passion for the possible is hope’s response to all that one has known as a “fated love.”

The passion for the possible does not imply any illusion. This is a hope that knows that every resurrection is a resurrection from the dead, that every new creation is in spite of the fact of death. The Resurrection is hidden within its contrary, the Cross. Hope recognizes the existential moment that is death, but hope interprets in a creative manner the signs of superabundance of life in spite of the evidence of death.

Indeed the “in spite of” death gives to hope its lucidity, its seriousness, its determination. Ricoeur makes the assertion that freedom is the capacity to live according to the paradoxical law of superabundance, of the refusal to give death its due, of the affirmation of the excess of meaning over non-meaning in all situations that evoke despair.

Hope is a point of closure for philosophy: that is to say it provides philosophy with its horizon.¹⁷ Hope introduces a new law of logic, a logic of existence for which the excess of meaning over non-meaning is the norm. Such a new logic would go beyond a logic that renders equivalent sin and death, crime and

phenomenology (see C. Reagan, *Paul Ricoeur: His Life and His Work*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1996, 10).

¹⁷ Indeed Ricoeur perceives hope to be the horizon for theology, too. This would be a topic for another systematic reflection. See *L’espérance et la structure des systèmes philosophiques*, 13.

punishment. To the new logic Ricoeur gives the title: *Spero ut intellegam*. I hope that I may understand. Reason reaches an "approximation" of the philosophical meaning of hope by offering the formula that hope is that which waits for and anticipates the bonding between purity of heart and the satisfaction of one's most intimate desire. God is the author of hope: purity of heart is a grace, the mercy that brings forth forgiveness. Hope becomes the point of closure for philosophy because it situates itself precisely where God wishes us to be: at the point of our will's goal, our will's terminus, in a word, our will's horizon. Ricoeur calls it the "horizon of fullness."

Because God's Gift Has the Last Word

God is; therefore, we are. We are, therefore, I am. I am, therefore, I think... with gratitude for the God who gave me the "we" of family, and intends me to be the "I" that gives the family a new identity.

In the course of our conversations, Kadiatu begins to ground herself in prayer. She wishes to accept Jesus as a mysterious but very welcome guest in her soul. She does not find it easy to read: the Bible is not her starting point. Yet she does allow God to speak to her in another way.

God intrudes silently into Kadiatu's heart with a gentle, sweet breath of inspiration. She must go to the church: the church will offer a possibility.

Kadiatu needs to accept God's gift of faith and then to entrust herself, body and soul, to God. Entrusting herself to God, she opens her soul to hope and all the possibilities that hope engenders. She makes her first timid attempt by reaching beyond her usual pleas for food and medicine to make a special request: "Father John, may I go with you to the church of the Holy Cross on Sunday?" I respond immediately: "Yes, of course." I see the opportunity for Kadiatu to let Jesus touch her and place herself reverently in his Heart.

We enter the community vehicle to begin our trip to the church. There is an empirical datum here that I cannot, must not overlook. As Kierkegaard explained so well, entering into a church full of Christians does not necessarily mean that we are entering a church

full of believing Christians.¹⁸ I need someone to accompany us, a trustworthy Christian.

I come across two teenagers, who in fact are not Christian, but are nevertheless trustworthy. They tell me that, yes, they are on their way to Holy Cross. I invite them into our vehicle. Then I tell them overtly what is on my mind: “Aminata, Fatmata, Kadiatu, when you talk about prayer inside of the church, you can never have an attitude of ignoring or spurning the sister or the brother who is sitting and praying next to you. Do you get me?”

“Yes, Father, we get you.”

“So please make sure that the three of you, Kadiatu, Aminata, and Fatmata, stay together during the entire celebration: you are friends and you are sisters, is that not so?”

Aminata and Fatmata agree: “That is so, Father.” Kadiatu remains nervously silent.

After vesting in the sacristy, I dance up the middle aisle to the beat of the processional song as any priest would do in the Freetown Archdiocese. I arrive in the sanctuary, reverence the altar with a bow and a kiss, and then I look out at the one thousand people who have come for the celebration. Some of the brothers and sisters are squeezing each other into the walls – this church seems crowded. But then I look into the middle of the church: a vast open space. At the center of the space there are five women, Kadiatu, Aminata, Fatmata, and two others who have joined them. They stand singing in the middle of the church with no one else anywhere near them. It is a small community of suffering love embedded in the heart of a larger community that does not know how to recognize possibilities with the young woman who keeps her large, misshapen head covered with a nasty, tired cloth.

And what are they singing?

O, the love of my Lord is the essence
 Of all that I love here on earth.
 All the beauty I see, he has given to me
 And his giving is gentle as silence.
 Every day, every hour, every moment
 Have been blessed by the strength of his love
 At the turn of each tide, he is there at my side,

¹⁸ *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 188-196.

And his touch is as gentle as silence.
There've been times when I've turned from his presence,
And I've walked other paths, other ways.
But I've called on his name in the dark of my shame,
And his mercy was gentle as silence.

During the year 2001, this particular song was the entrance hymn for the Sunday celebration at about 70% of the Masses. (That is why I am able to write the words from memory). To those who do not know war, a hymn that praises silence seems quite a contrast to the loud jubilation – makofi na vigelegele – that accompanies the singers and dancers at the beginning of the Sunday celebration. War noise, however, unsteadies nerves, keeps the heart beating at an unusually rapid pace, and leaves the soul aching for whatever encourages and gives a moment's security. Just as he did for the Prophet Elijah when his enemies were besieging him with unbridled wrath, God whispered in Kadiatu's soul as a gentle breath of silence.¹⁹

Silence was the soil in which God chose to introduce into Kadiatu's soul a wellspring of faith and hope. Mother Teresa of Kolkata articulates the guidelines for the person who lives in hope: what Mother Teresa says is how Kadiatu lived from that point forward:

Silence of the eyes, by seeking always the beauty and goodness of God everywhere, closing our eyes to the faults of others and to all that is sinful and disturbing to the soul.

Silence of the ears, by listening always to the voice of God and to the cry of the poor and the needy, closing our ears to all the other voices that come from the evil one or from fallen human nature: e.g., gossip, tale-bearing, and uncharitable words.

Silence of the tongue, by praising God and speaking the life-giving Word of God that is the Truth that enlightens and inspires, brings peace, hope, and joy and by refraining from self-defence and every word that causes darkness, turmoil, pain and death.

Silence of the mind, by opening it to the truth and knowledge of God in prayer and contemplation, like Mary who pondered the marvels of the Lord in her heart, and by closing it to all untruths, distractions, destructive thoughts, rash judgment, false suspicion of others, revengeful thoughts and desires.

¹⁹ 1 Kings 19:12.

Silence of the heart, by loving God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength and one another as God loves, desiring God alone and avoiding all selfishness, hatred, envy, jealousy, and greed.

If we will only learn silence, we will learn two things: to pray and to be humble. You cannot love unless you have humility, and you cannot be humble if you do not love. From the silence of the heart God speaks. There is no silence if there are things that have got inside.²⁰

To use Kierkegaard's terminology, silence is the way of inwardness. Faith is born in silence. Faith gives birth to possibility. Possibility gives birth to hope. Kadiatu met Jesus Christ; and Jesus showed her what it means to be a Kadiatu who can live joyfully.

In the Silence of the Heart, Truth is Born

St. Thomas Aquinas explains that faith is a gauge that allows human beings, both philosophers and non-philosophers, to measure all other truths. Edith Stein provides a synthesis of Thomas' teaching in a dialogue that she composed between Thomas, the Teacher, and Edmund Husserl, the Learner. She wrote this dialogue-synthesis for a journal whose chief editor was Martin Heidegger. In the course of this dialogue, Thomas makes affirmations that coincide with his motive for writing Book Four of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*:

THOMAS: ... for the believer such is the certainty of faith that it relativizes all other certainty, and that he can but give up any supposed knowledge which contradicts his faith. The unique certitude of faith is a gift of grace. It is up to the understanding and will to draw the theoretical and practical consequences therefrom...

Philosophy aspires after truth to the greatest possible extent and with the greatest possible certainty. If faith makes accessible truths unattainable by any other means, philosophy, for one thing, cannot forego them without renouncing its universal claim to truth. Furthermore, it cannot forego these truths without risking that falsehood will creep even into the body of knowledge left to it, since, given the organic interrelationship of all truth, any partial stock, when its link to the whole is cut off, can appear in a false light. One consequence, then, is a *material dependence of philosophy on faith*.

²⁰ Mother Teresa, *Total Surrender*, (Ed., Br. A. Devananda), New York: St. Anthony Messenger Press 1990, 103-106.

Then too, if faith affords the highest certainty attainable to the human mind, and if philosophy claims to bestow the highest certainty, then philosophy must make the certainty of faith its own. It does so first by absorbing the truths of faith, and further by using them as the final criterion by which to gauge all other truths. Hence, a second consequence is a *formal dependence of philosophy on faith*.²¹

There are certain truths available to supernatural reason, to that dimension of reason that knows not because it has understood but because it has believed what God has said in spite of the inaccessibility of its content to natural reason. What supernatural reason has come to learn through God's disclosures of himself in divine revelation are salutary: to place one's faith in God and in the truths he reveals is at the same time to open one's soul to hope as a guiding dynamism both for the mind and its cognitive operations and for the heart and its orientations towards responsible love.

God visits those tempted to despair, to be "sick unto death." A favourite word that seems to issue forth from God's very own lips in the presence of desperate people is the Greek imperative *θαρσει* (plural: *θαρσειτε*), "courage" "have courage". God exercises his authority when he invigorates them with courage precisely at the moment when their courage is failing them: they are "sick unto death" because they do not perceive possibility.

In the prophet Haggai, God addresses himself to a people who feel that he, the Lord their God, has forsaken them entirely: from their point of view, God exists, but not for them. They are a forgotten remnant with no possibility for the future. To this remnant and their leaders, the prophet Haggai conveys the divine

²¹ E. Stein (Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, O.C.D.), "Husserl and Aquinas: A Comparison," *Knowledge and Faith*, translated by W. Redmond. Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications 2000, 21, 17, 18. This article appeared in 1929 in a revised version that eliminated the dialogue style and replaced it with a third-person narrative to satisfy Martin Heidegger's desire for "neutrality" in the article (i.e., he seems to have wanted to downplay the Thomistic point of view). Heidegger was editing the journal, *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und Phänomenologische Forschung*, in which the article appeared, and was publishing this particular issue as a commemorative one in honour of Husserl, who was celebrating his 70th birthday. The dialogue-style version of the article, the one I am using here, did not appear in print until 1993 in *Erkenntnis und Glaube*.

message: “Courage, Zerubbabel! Courage, Joshua! Courage, all you people of the country!” God is present; he intends to fill the Temple with glory; and in that Temple, his own house, he will give peace.²²

Possibility abounds, too, for those who see no possibility in the book of Baruch. “Take courage, my people, memorial of Israel!... Take courage, my children, call on God! he will deliver you from tyranny, from the clutches of your enemies... Take courage, my children, call on God: he who brought this on you will remember you... Take courage, Jerusalem: he who gave you your name [City of Peace] will console you.”²³

“Have courage,” says Jesus to the paralyzed man. “Have courage,” says Jesus to the woman who has been suffering from a haemorrhage for many years until she dares to touch the hem of Jesus’ garment. “Have courage,” says Jesus, to the very frightened disciples when he approaches them on the Sea of Galilee using the winds and the waves as his mode of transport. “Have courage,” says Jesus to his apostles as he enters the throes of the passion, “I have conquered the world.”²⁴

God intends to exercise his divine authority by giving courage. It is noteworthy that even though the Gospels Matthew, Mark, and Luke all recount Jesus’ healing of the paralytic, only one of those Gospels recalls that the first command that Jesus issued to the paralytic was *θάρσει* *tharsei*, “Have courage”: that was the Gospel of Matthew. It is also noteworthy that only one of those Gospels refers to Jesus’ authority as the motive for the people’s praise. That, too, was the Gospel of Matthew.²⁵ God activates his authority, he activates his intention to give courage at the very instant that he invigorates the heart with faith, hope, and love.

Almost paralyzed in her day-to-day living because of her severe mutilations, Kadiatu accepted the command to be courageous. She opened her heart to the grace God wished to give her by presenting herself for the three sacraments of baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist. Physically it was painful for her to accept the Body of

²² Haggai 2:1-9.

²³ Baruch 4:5-37.

²⁴ Matthew 9:2; 9:22; 14:27; John 16:33.

²⁵ Matthew 9:8; 9:2. See Mark 2:

Christ into her quite rigid mouth and swallow it. In fact she could only accept a very small particle and consume it as she did when eating her daily meal of rice grain by grain.

In her heart, she accepted the Jesus who was already accepting her into a fully blissful communion with him. In Jesus, she found her true self: a self that was willing to love and be loved. She died soon after. Her birth into eternal life and her communion with her – and our – ancestors reminds not only Africa but the world that the ones who seem to be silent, ignored, and shunned, the least among the daughters and sons of the global mainstream are the greatest in the eternal Family of God.

Kierkegaard captures the silence of the believer who reverently respects and adores the God who graces each of us with a self and graces us with the courage to live according to the individual identity God has given us when he recounts in detail a visit to the graveyard. It was a moment that, in his estimation, was the most meaningful episode of his life:

Contrary to my usual practice, I had gone out to that garden called the garden of the dead, ... Most people had already gone home, just an individual vanishing among the trees, not happy to meet and avoiding contact since he sought the dead and not the living. And there is always in this garden, among the visitors, a beautiful understanding that one does not come out here to see and be seen, the one visitor avoids the other. Nor does one need company, least of all that of a talkative friend, here where all is eloquence, where the dead greets one with the brief word placed on his grave, ... The dead man remains quite still while time goes by; ... he does not gesticulate, he gives no assurances, he does not flare up in momentary inwardness. Silent as the grave and still as death, he preserves his inwardness and stands by his word. Praise be to the one living who outwardly relates as a dead man to his inwardness, and just for that reason preserves it, not as in an instant's excitement and a woman's infatuation, but as the eternal which has been won through death. Such a one is a man. For it is not unlovely that a woman gushes over in momentary inwardness, nor is it unlovely for her soon to forget it again. But the one corresponds to the other and both to the feminine, and to the everyday understanding of inwardness.

Weary from walking, I sat down on a bench, an awed witness... to how the sun in its brilliant departure cast a transfiguring glow over the whole surroundings, while my eye gazed beyond the wall encircling the garden into that eternal symbol of eternity, the infinite horizon.

What sleep is for the body, such rest is for the soul, that it can breathe properly out.

That very moment I discovered to my surprise that the trees which hid me from the eyes of others had hidden others from mine, for I heard a voice right beside me. It has always stung my shame to witness another person's expression of feeling when he abandons himself to it as one does only in the belief that one is unobserved; for there is an inwardness of emotion which is befittingly hidden and only revealed to God, just as a woman's beauty would be concealed from all and revealed only to the beloved – so I decided to withdraw.

But the first words I heard gripped me strongly, and fearing the noise of my departure might be more disturbing than if I stayed quietly sitting, I chose the latter course and became witness to a situation which, however, solemn, suffered no violation from my presence. Through the leaves [of the trees] I saw there were two: an elderly man with chalk-white hair and a child, a boy of about ten. Both were in mourning and sat by a freshly dug grave, from which it was easy to conclude that it was a recent loss that occupied them. In the transfiguring glow of the evening the old man's dignified figure assumed even more solemnity, and his voice, calm yet emotional, enunciated the words distinctly, also in the inwardness they had for the speaker, who once in a while paused, his voice choked with weeping, or the mood coming to a halt in a sigh. For mood is like the Niger in Africa: no one knows its source, no one knows its outlet, only its length is known!

From the conversation I learned that the little boy was the old man's grandson, and the person whose grave they were visiting was that of the boy's father. In all probability the rest of the family was already extinct, since no one was mentioned, something which I also confirmed upon a later visit, when I read the name on the slab and the names of the many dead. The old man talked with the child about now having no father, no one to cling to except an old man who was too old for him and who himself longed to leave the world, but that there was a God in heaven after whom all fatherliness in heaven and on earth is called, and that there was one name in which there was salvation, the name of Jesus Christ... and then said to himself, half aloud, 'that he, my unhappy son, should have let himself be deceived! To what end, then, all his learning, that he could not make himself understood even to me, that I could not speak to him of his error, because for me it was too elevated!'

Then he rose and led the child to the grave, and with a voice whose effect on me I shall never forget, he said: 'Poor boy, you are only a child, and yet you will soon be alone in the world! Do you promise

me by the memory of your dead father, who if he could speak to you now would say the same, and speaks with my voice; do you promise by the sight of my old age and my grey hairs; do you promise by the solemnity of this hallowed ground, by that God whose name I trust you have learned to call upon, by the name of Jesus Christ, in whom alone there is salvation; do you promise me that you will hold fast to this faith in life and in death, that you will not let yourself be deceived by any phantasm, in whatever way the face of the world changes – do you promise me this?' Overcome by the impression, the little one threw himself on his knees, but the old man raised him up and pressed him to his breast.

I owe truth the confession that this is the most affecting scene I have ever witnessed.

Kierkegaard recognized faith as inward truth that bridges a person's soul to the eternal God. The impact of the existential moment in the graveyard left him with a serene stability in the truth of eternal life and in the activity of divine grace within the believer's soul that enables the believer to surrender oneself to the dynamism of love and will by which God governs the soul.

Kierkegaard offered painstaking, often satirical, explanations why rationalists and others who calculate and measure God and his activity according to their human – and therefore erroneous – criteria are not only failing to believe but are also misleading others to fail to believe. Indeed Kierkegaard's perception is that the son of the old man, i.e., the son who had just died, who was at the same time the father of his only grandchild, this son belonged to the category of the non-believers.

Afraid to Accept the Gift: Mama Princess

Aminata of Sierra Leone recounts for us an example of just such a non-believer. She tells us that there was a teenager who lived the existential moment as a profligate and so now found herself pregnant and was sinking fast in a swamp of uncontrollable fear. She had reason to be afraid: if either her father or her sexual partner knew that she was with child, the man in question would quite possibly kill her. She was sick unto death with despair. To find relief from the sickness she chose to abort her child.

Aminata explained to me the woman's plight. The year was 2008: I was in Musongati, Burundi, but was able to follow the

unfolding of this horrendous situation day by day. My first conversation with Aminata about the issue of the pregnant woman was in January of 2008. Aminata had just met the woman in the abortion clinic where indeed she had found four others who had made the same choice to abort their children. All five agreed to give Aminata their children – which meant Aminata would now be the mother of 34 children. The Sierra Leonean government gave her adoption rights for all of them. Aminata herself was 25 years old.²⁶

We focus on the woman who trembled with fear. She felt trapped: where could she go to hide from the men who had already proven to her a number of times that they could be aggressive? She begged Aminata to help her find a place to stay during her pregnancy. Aminata had the courage and the prudence to say, “Stay with me and the children.”²⁷

God intends human beings to be gifts for each other. This is the starting point of Pope (St.) John Paul II’s General Audiences that ranged from 5 September 1979 to 28 November 1984.

In the first chapter, the narrative of the creation of man affirms directly, right from the beginning, that man was created in the image of God as male and female.... Man [i.e., the human being] became the ‘image and likeness’ of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons which man and woman form right from the beginning. The function of the image is to reflect the one who is the model, to reproduce its own prototype. Man becomes the image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion. Right ‘from the beginning,’ he is not only an image in which the solitude of a person who rules the world is reflected, but also, and essentially, an image of an inscrutable divine communion of persons.

... The Creator is he who ‘calls to existence from nothingness,’ and who establishes the world in existence and man in the world, because he ‘is love’ (1 Jn 4:8). Actually, we do not find this word in the narrative of creation. However, this narrative often repeats: ‘God

²⁶ Aminata’s birth date is 11 December 1982.

²⁷ This detail and everything that follows are recounted and archived in the *Saviour of the World Newsletter*, La Porte, Indiana, 2010 edition. The newsletter is a bimonthly publication edited by Rosanne Kouris, a frequent visitor to Freetown and to Aminata’s children’s centre. The newsletter always includes updates from Aminata and an “insight” column that I contribute under the name Father Umuhozanimana.

saw what he had made, and behold, it was very good.' Through these words we are led to glimpse in love the divine motive of creation, the source from which it springs. Only love gives a beginning to good and delights in good (cf. 1 Cor 13). As the action of God, the creation signifies not only calling from nothingness to existence and establishing the existence of the world and man in the world. It also signifies, according to the first narrative, *beresit bara*, giving. It is a fundamental and 'radical' giving, that is, a giving in which the gift comes into being precisely from nothingness.

... There is a deep connection between the mystery of creation, as a gift springing from love, and that beatifying 'beginning' of the existence of the human being as male and female, in the whole truth of their body and their sex, which is the pure and simple truth of communion between persons. When the first man exclaimed, at the sight of the woman: "This is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Gn 2:23), he merely affirmed the human identity of both. Exclaiming in this way, he seems to say that here is a body that expresses the person.

... The body which expresses femininity manifests the reciprocity and communion of persons. It expresses it by means of the gift as the fundamental characteristic of personal existence. This is the body – a witness to creation as a fundamental gift, and so a witness to Love as the source from which this same giving springs. Masculinity and femininity – namely, sex – is the original sign of a creative donation and an awareness on the part of man, male-female, of a gift lived in an original way.

... It seems that the second narrative of creation has assigned to man "from the beginning" the function of the one who, above all, receives the gift (cf. especially Gn 2:23). "From the beginning" the woman is entrusted to his eyes, to his consciousness, to his sensitivity, to his heart. On the other hand, he must, in a way, ensure the same process of the exchange of the gift, the mutual interpenetration of giving and receiving as a gift. Precisely through its reciprocity, it creates a real communion of persons.²⁸

The baby that comes forth from the sexual union of the man and of the woman is a new living image of God precisely in his or her unity with the parents who love the baby as God loves them. God

²⁸ Pope (St.) John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan*. Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media 1997, 46, 59, 61-62, 71. The excerpts cited here are to be found in John Paul's General Audiences of 14 November 1979, 2 January 1980, 9 January 1980, and 6 February 1980.

gives the man and the woman to each other as a gift; now he gives the child who together with the mother and the father forms a new “we”. **The child find his/her identity in the unity of the “we” that he or she enjoys with the mother and the father.**

God Wanted Princess to Come to Birth

God is; therefore, we are. We are, therefore, I am. I am, therefore, I think... with gratitude for the God who gave me the “we” of family, and intends me to be the “I” that gives the family a new identity.

This terrified pregnant woman lived in despair because she was convinced that the men in her life, the father of her child and her own father were not cherishing her as a gift from God. Aminata perceived that the cold indifference on the part of these men, a cold indifference that could accelerate into lethal anger at any moment, might also exert an unwanted impact on the life of the baby in this young woman’s womb.

The teenager stayed with Aminata and the children, but this did not dissolve her fear. Aminata’s close friend and mentor, Rosanne Kouris, and the older children all told me what the young pregnant woman was doing: she was wearing very tight bands around her waist to conceal the pregnancy, and she was eating as little as possible. Even the younger children started asking questions about the consequences that this type of unusual behavior would have on the baby awaiting birth. Would the mother’s harsh way of treating herself leave traces that would stigmatize the baby for life?

Aminata had agreed to receive the baby as soon as she came to birth. When she received the good news that a new baby was born to the young woman, she understood the import of the message. It was the 21st of August 2008. Aminata entered the hospital room where the baby had just come to birth. The baby’s mother was too weak to open her eyes, so she asked Aminata, “Is my baby a boy or a girl?” Aminata looked at the baby with a tear in her eye: the baby’s legs looked frighteningly immobile. This, no doubt, was a consequence of the mother’s severe treatment of her own body during the pregnancy. But then Aminata had the presence of mind to say to the young mother who seemed to be quite exhausted from the ordeal of delivering the baby: “Your baby is a girl: a beautiful girl, just as beautiful as a princess.” At that very moment, the

mother breathed her last breath and died. Aminata tells me that she thanks God every day that the very last words that Mama Princess heard were: Your baby is a beautiful girl, as beautiful as a princess.

Aminata gave the child the name "Princess." I met her two months after she was born. Her legs were exactly as Aminata had told me. I could not fathom how that little girl was ever going to walk. Indeed the only way she could crawl was with her elbows: her legs seemed useless even for crawling.

No one has ever ignored Princess; it has been quite the opposite. Love has been cradling her, nourishing her and mothering her forward even if she has suffered extraordinary physical fragility. Aminata's love and the love of all her brothers and sisters have been her daily diet.²⁹ Nevertheless, she had shown no sign that she would be able to walk.

Princess' thirty-three brothers and sisters had cultivated the habit of loving her thoughtfully. She chose to be thoughtful in return. To show her gratitude to her mother, and to her brothers and sisters, she began walking. Her ability to walk did not come from trial-and-error, crawling, standing, falling, take a few steps... She walked in harmony with the stirrings of the Holy Spirit in her soul. These were very visible signs of thoughtfulness, thoughtfulness at a child's level, yes; but all the same it is thoughtfulness.

Admittedly the heavenly Father who chose to give Princess her existence as a human being, as a beautiful little girl, acted in a way that supersedes routine and custom. As one man, George Kouris, who is ordinarily a sceptic about all evidently miraculous activity, put it: "God must have allowed his angel to touch her legs one night because they certainly were different the next morning."³⁰

²⁹ Aminata's house rules helped preserve the love. If any child ever said an unkind word to another child, the punishment was no food for the next 24 hours. If any child failed to come to the daily prayer (two times per day), the punishment was no food for the next 24 hours. When I asked the children if they were afraid of these rules or the punishments inflicted for those who violated the rules, the children laughed. "Father, we are not afraid because we never say anything unkind to each other, and we always want to be there for prayer."

³⁰ George Kouris was an eyewitness to the physical transformation in Princess' life. My conversation with him about the matter was in October, 2012. The day of the transformation itself I was not with Princess; but I was

The Family: Vehicle of God's Mercy and Love

God is; therefore, we are. We are, therefore, I am. I am, therefore, I think... with gratitude for the God who gave me the "we" of family, and intends me to be the "I" that gives the family a new identity.

Princess had received a "we" as a new gift. She was to find her identity within the love of that "we," a new family. A remarkable phenomenologist who later identified herself as a Thomist realized that a human being exercises her powers of cognition, willing, choice-making, and intentional action within the network of empathy that a family or a community creates by the grace of God. She had this to say about the first stage of a human being's life:

The child is the fruit of mutual self-giving and, more than that: it is the very embodiment of the 'gift.' Each of the two spouses receives in the child an 'image' of his or her own being as well as the gift of the other spouse's being. The gift (i.e., the child) is a third person, an independent creature and, as a 'creature' in the full sense of the word, a gift of God. Is there a further possibility of knowing what this creature receives, at the moment of conception, immediately from God, and what it receives mediately from its parents? Does the new structure, which owes its corporeal existence to the common generative will of the parents, receive from them also the form of its soul, a form that corresponds to the particular individuality that is alive in the generative act and to the particular nature of the parents' oneness [*Einssein*]? Or with the soul of the child, does God *give* to the parents a gift proportionate to their nature, in the manner he gave to the first male a proportionate female companion?

... Like Mary, every human mother is called to be mother with her whole soul, so as to pour the abundant riches of her soul into the soul of her child. And the more of the nature of the spouse she has in loving self-surrender received into her own self, the more the individuality of the child through her mediatorship, will be co-determined by the individuality of the father.³¹

The mother and father of a child do not only give the "biological ingredients" for their new baby; they also give of their soul. The child's disposition readily manifests visibly the tenderness – or the lack of it – that is animating the parents' love for each other from

with her adoptive mother Aminata. All the children were excited and exuberant: they all witnessed the change that can only be called miraculous.

³¹ E. Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being*, 515-517.

day to day. In the most recent issue of *Africa Tomorrow*, mention was made of Tailay Mkuna's research, a kind of pilot study of abused children in Morogoro that provided data suggesting that if a male and a female began their sexual relationship not wanting children and therefore introduced contraceptives into their sexual expressions of love, future children from that same male and female could very well carry, even unconsciously, the feeling that they were not wanted.³² Another dimension to Mkuna's study was a small but meaningful comparison between her group of abused children from Morogoro and Aminata's children from Sierra Leone. Upon Tailay's request, Aminata chose to seek data from the children she had adopted who wore the most obvious visible signs of grave physical abuse and to pass that data on to Tailay through the email.

One important question that separated Aminata's children from those whom Tailay researched in Morogoro concerned the desire to run away from home.³³ Eighty percent of the Morogoro children had thought about running away from home four or more times. One hundred percent of the children had actually run away from home at least once. Were their mothers – and if they were present, their fathers – neglecting to give them the love of which the human heart is capable? We do not know without further research.

None of Aminata's children had ever considered running away from home. Conversations with her children unearthed an explanation for their sense of security and peace in the house: Aminata's children, even though they were adopted, were living in a milieu of a mother's love. Children find their identity within a family that breathes the love that God has given them.

We cannot help but notice that Princess wished to be doing what her brothers and sisters were doing: she was – and is – living in an atmosphere of a love that is maturing according to the contours of fundamental Christian virtues. Her physical miracle is simply a sign of a much more important spiritual miracle: a family is

³² J. Gibson, "Living the Truth... and What the World Can Learn from African Youth", *Africa Tomorrow* 16/2 (2014) 180-181.

³³ See T. Mkuna, (2015) *Assessment of the Family Climate that Occasions Repeated Child Physical Abuse in Tanzania: The Child's Point of View*, Morogoro: Jordan University College Library Resources, 31, 35.

forming in beautiful harmony with the will of this family's father. But, let's talk about their "father".

The father is God himself. This is what moved the heart of Soren Kierkegaard when he heard the wise old gentleman remind his grandson that he would never be alone: God, his heavenly Father, would be with him. The inwardness of a true self is the inwardness of one who abandons himself or herself to the will of a loving Father for whom everything is possible: this is Kierkegaard's anchoring conviction, and it is a conviction that can guide even those children whose lives have begun very painfully, sometimes in the tumult of supremely inexcusable atrocities.

Hans Urs Von Balthasar contemplated the fact that we are not living as images and likeness of God when we act as individualists striving only for our own personal happiness. We can only live as God intends us to live when we are a community, a family, a "we." To say that God is the Father of us all, is to say that we all belong to the same human family. Von Balthasar interprets the faith and hope that anchor themselves in God's gift as follows:³⁴

Just as God so loved the world that he gave for it his only Son, so is the one whom God loves unwilling to be saved unless it is together with his created brothers and sisters: this one will not refuse the part that is allotted to him/her in the expiatory suffering that benefits everyone. This will involve Christian hope, a hope understood and lived in the only manner that is allowed for the Christian: a hope for the salvation of all human beings, just as the Church is strictly invited to pray 'for all human beings' (and consequently to consider that this prayer of hers is meaningful and efficacious). Since 'this is good and agreeable to the eyes of God our Saviour who wants the salvation of *all*... Since there is only one God; since there is only one Mediator between God and human beings, Jesus Christ, himself human, who gave himself as a ransom for all'³⁵; the Christ who, lifted up on the cross, 'will draw all human beings to himself'³⁶, because he receives 'power over *all* flesh',³⁷ to be 'the Saviour of *all* human beings',³⁸ 'to

³⁴ H.U. Von Balthasar, *L'amour seul est digne de foi* [Love Alone is Worthy of Faith], Aubier: Editions Montaigne, 1966, 124-125. The translation from French into English for the citation that follows is mine.

³⁵ 1 Timothy 2:2-6.

³⁶ John 12:32.

³⁷ John 17:2.

³⁸ 1 Timothy 4:10.

take away the sins of *all*;³⁹ 'since the grace of God has been made manifest, source of salvation for *all* human beings,'⁴⁰ so also the Church herself 'cares for the interest of *all*, so that they may be saved.'⁴¹ This is why Paul was able to declare ruptured the equilibrium between sin and grace – in favour of grace – between damnation and redemption, between fear and hope, between Adam and Christ; ruptured to the extent that opposed to the fault... there is opposed a grace of redemption that is unimaginably greater...⁴²

Hope is alive for all of us who live as God intends us to live, as his children. We recognize that we are his children because he has redeemed us – we are what we are because of his grace and mercy. But what about the "unwanted leftovers of society"? What about those who suffer the consequences of what they themselves perpetrated? ... Kadiatu's assailants? Baba Princess? At this juncture, Kierkegaard suggests that hope inspires within us a gratitude that God is *not* like us. His words: "As a sinner man is separated from God by a yawning qualitative abyss. And obviously God is separated from man by the same yawning qualitative abyss when He forgives sins. In case it were possible by a converse kind of accommodation to transfer the divine attributes to a human being, in one respect man will never in all eternity come to resemble God, namely, in forgiving sins."⁴³

Hope is for Everyone

Edith Stein underlines the source of our hope: God's gratuitous gift. She sees philosophy's horizon with the same lenses as Paul Ricoeur:

By his suffering and death, Jesus Christ atones for the sins of all people and thus satisfies divine justice. Human nature lends itself to this atonement as a fitting instrument, because it contains the

³⁹ Hebrews 9:28.

⁴⁰ Titus 2:11.

⁴¹ 1 Corinthians 10:33.

⁴² Romans 5:15-21.

⁴³ S. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 141. Hence the Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1441 states that "only God can forgive sins." And when laying down the directives for the sacrament of reconciliation, the Catechism explains in no. 1448 that the absolution is "God's action through the intervention of the Church."

possibilities of suffering and of death. That the atonement is of sufficient, indeed of superabundant value, is evident from the fact that it is the work of a divine person... But how are we to understand that Christ's atonement is to be credited to us and that we are thereby freed from guilt? Is this liberation from guilt a free gift of divine mercy? This is, of course precisely what it is.⁴⁴

Indeed Edith Stein sees hope as the point of closure for the life of even the most hardened sinner. I cite word for word a passage from Stein that so touched the soul of Hans Urs von Balthasar that instead of formulating his own conclusion to his hypothesis that "the most serious thing that exists is not God's punitive justice but rather his love," he chose to rely on the words of Edith Stein:

We wish to understand what part freedom plays in the work of redemption. For this it is not adequate if one focuses on freedom alone. One must investigate as well what grace can do and whether even for it there is an absolute limit.

This we know: grace must come to the human person. By its own power, it can, at best, come up to his door but never force its way inside. And further: it can come to him without his seeking it, without his desiring it. The question is whether it can complete its work without his cooperation. It seemed to us that this question had to be answered negatively. That is a weighty thing to say. For it obviously implies that God's freedom, which we call omnipotence, meets with a limit in human freedom.

Grace is the Spirit of God, who descends to the soul of the human being. It can find no abode there if it is not freely taken in. That is a hard truth. It implies – besides the aforementioned limit to divine omnipotence – the possibility, in principle, of excluding oneself from redemption and the kingdom of grace. It does not imply a limit to divine mercy....

All-merciful love can thus descend to everyone. We believe that it does so. And now, can we assume that there are souls that remain perpetually closed to such love? As a possibility in principle, this cannot be rejected. *In reality*, it can become infinitely improbable – precisely through what preparatory grace is capable of effecting in the soul. It can do no more than knock at the door, and there are souls that already open themselves to it upon hearing this unobtrusive call. Others allow it to go unheeded. Then it can steal its way into souls and begin to spread itself out there more and more.

⁴⁴ E. Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being*, 521.

The greater the area becomes that grace thus occupies in an *illegitimate* way, the more improbable it becomes that the soul will remain closed to it. For now the soul already sees the world in the light of grace. It perceives the holy whenever it encounters this and feels itself attracted by it. Likewise, it notices the unholy and is repulsed by it; and everything else pales before these qualities.

To this corresponds a tendency within itself to behave according to its own *reason* and no longer to that of nature or the evil one. If it follows this inner prompting, then it subjects itself implicitly to the rule of grace. It is possible that it will not do this. Then it has need of an activity of its own that is directed against the influence of grace. And this engaging of freedom implies a tension that increases proportionately the more that preparatory grace has spread itself through the soul. This defensive activity is based – like all free acts – on a foundation that differs in nature from itself, such as natural impulses that are still effective in the soul alongside of grace.

The more that grace wins ground from the things that had filled the soul before it, the more it repels the effects of the acts directed against it. And to this process of displacement there are, in principle, no limits. If all the impulses opposed to the spirit of light have been expelled from the soul, then any free decision against this has become infinitely improbable. Then faith in the unboundedness of divine love and grace also justifies *hope for the universality of redemption*, although, through the possibility of resistance to grace that remains open in principle, the possibility of eternal damnation also persists.

Seen in this way what were described earlier as limits to divine omnipotence are also cancelled out again. They exist only as long as we oppose divine and human freedom to each other and fail to consider the sphere that forms the basis of human freedom. Human freedom can be neither broken nor neutralized by divine freedom, but it may well be, so to speak, outwitted. The descent of grace to the human soul is a free act of divine love. And there are *no limits* to how far it may extend. Which particular means it chooses for effecting itself, why it strives to win one soul and lets another strive to win it, whether and how and when it is also active in places where our eyes perceive no effects – those are all questions that escape rational penetration. For us, there is only knowledge of the possibilities in principle and, on the basis of those possibilities in principle, an understanding of the facts that are accessible to us.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Cited by H.U. Von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope "That All Men Be Saved? with a Short Discourse on Hell* (transl. by D. Kipp and L. Krauth). San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988, 218-221. The citation comes from E. Stein,

Edith's position coalesces with Kierkegaard's position that indeed is a humble deference to God's position: "For God all things are possible." St. Thomas, Paul Ricoeur, Kadiatu Kamara, Mama Princess, the child Princess, Hans Urs von Balthasar and Pope (St.) John Paul II would agree.

I conclude, then, with one more anecdote: it is a moment that challenges me to see the finality of philosophy not within my more or less wise musings but rather within the infinite wisdom of the Redeemer. It is his divine wisdom, a wisdom that coalesces perfectly with his love and mercy that offers me hope as philosophy's point of closure. The horizon of fullness is real: God has intended it that way.

Within that perspective, I pay attention to what is happening at the present moment.

Standing before me is a Sierra Leonean rebel – I do not remember his name. He cannot be older than sixteen. He is blunt in his manner: he comes right to the point. "Yes, Father John, I am a rebel. I have cut and mutilated, I have killed, I have committed atrocities on little children, on their mothers, and right within my own family. I am evil. Will you help me?"

The Church as an Agent of Social and Economic Development

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Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to present an objective picture of the multifaceted and intricate linkages created within the community that surrounds a church. Within the framework established by means of these many-sided relationships, there evolves a process for catalysing social and economic development, a process initiated by Church institutions. The development-forming impulses find their source in the transcendental strata of religious values and norms that are inculcated during the course of subsequent stages of the self-manifestation of the Church. These values and norms constitute the content of the religious message which, due to the changing temporal and spatial circumstances, become the subject of a special transformation, a transformation that aims at translating them into credible testimony. During this process, the abilities nurtured and cultivated by the members of the community are then passed on outwards into the wider social bloodstream, flowing through the network of social relationships that link them with members of the surrounding environment.

Key words: development, religious pro-developmental agency, sustained growth, pro-developmental values and aptitudes and virtues

Most observers of social life consider religion to exert a certain influence on various dimensions of social reality. However, this commonly shared opinion wanes when these observers focus upon the quality of this influence. Due to a number of determinants, there are people who express opinions directly contrary to each other. There are those, for example, who extol the positive role of religion within developmental processes. There are those who subscribe to more critical approaches, which attempt to produce

a balanced picture of the advantages and disadvantages that accrue according to the mediating impact that religion may exercise. Finally, there are some who regard religion to be the source of the pressures that impede or even undermine sustained progress.

A systematic review of what has been published on this topic brings to light a few important conditions for a truly reliable study. In order to provide an objective picture of the essential linkages by means of which religion seems to convey developmental influences, it is necessary first of all to avoid the extreme points of view that have too easily been taken for granted, for example, the Enlightenment view of the uselessness of the transcendental component of religion. Another important requirement is to eliminate a too rigorous narrowing of the scope of the study: this happens when one detaches several variables from their wider context in order to focus only upon them. There is no doubt that eventually it would not be helpful to remain closed to, or to exclude in advance, alternative views that may in fact complement a given disciplinary perspective.

Hence each investigation that focuses on the influence that religion exerts upon society needs to be holistic in its approach. This means that the field of investigation ought to include two types of interactions. The first type are those that are substantially religious and are contributing to the strategy that aims at putting into practice the constitutive elements of the religious and moral mission of the community. Secondly, there are those interactions that foster the desired social and economic transformations which contribute in their own way towards sustainable societal development.

There is, therefore, a necessity to develop a perspective for the study that enables the pro-developmental influences that ecclesiastical bodies exercise to remain bonded, without any artificial separation, to the purely religious component, since this component is a person's reference to the transcendent. It is this reference that conditions the modes of thinking and acting of the members of a particular religious community.

In order to reflect adequately both the supernatural and natural elements of the religious way of operating, two complementary perspectives need to be employed, both those of theology and those

of the social sciences. This procedural anchor provides an adequate departure point for the development of the present study.

When one conceptualizes the Church in this way, one takes into account that she operationalizes her nature through a range of multifaceted reciprocal linkages, created in the pattern of a network. Within the frames of this network, two important processes occur. The first has a purely religious character and relies on adapting to the current socio-cultural conditions those unchangeable values and norms which emerge from the transcendental strata. Then, by means of the everyday contacts which occur between members of the religious community and representatives of the surrounding environment, the concepts are gradually detached from their first contexts and translated into ideas, rationalizations and valuations, and eventually into social practices and behaviours. In this way, the transcendent components of religion become a part of the everyday experience of the people who make up the inner and outer environment of the ecclesiastical community.

The whole process involved in transforming the supernatural element, an element that is mediated through the interpretation of the sources that correspond to the particular tradition of each religion, constitutes a complex special structure of internal arrangements. These internal arrangements ensure, on the one hand, fidelity to the convictions and norms stemming from the transcendent tradition, and on the other hand, the clarity and credibility of a given testimony that corresponds to a particular socio-cultural environment. How this division of roles is defined has its own influence on the Church's pro-developmental agency; thus this is also included within the field of our investigation.

1. In Quest of an Adequate Perspective for the Study

A careful investigation of the history of Catholic social teaching and the official documents and studies that transmit that teaching brings to light a picture of the Church that has become more and more dynamic. Socially and culturally speaking, this dynamism expresses itself in the numerous interactions that link the various formal institutions and informal communities. This complex of

interactions form the pattern of an open network – open because new meshes may be added on to it.

The substantial task of the Church is to realize her purely religious purposes. Nevertheless, these purposes are necessarily related to those of a social and cultural nature that may not be intrinsically religious: religiously, socially and culturally motivated interactions, therefore, constitute the network. Furthermore, the process for the adequate fulfilling of the purposes that motivate the interactions necessitates the skilful inscription of the representative institutional embodiments of the Church at each point and at each moment that the social milieu shows evidence of rapid change. This serves to develop a set of appropriate social and personal, as well as formal and informal relationships and ties. Where there is a structure of reciprocal dependencies and interactions, in certain circumstances it may well become profitable for both sides: as much for the ecclesial realm as for the secular realm.¹

Similarly, in the case of the Church, her position and legitimacy within the social environment might be strengthened, and therefore her ability to act as well, by the means of adopting new tools and methods for putting into practice key elements of the Church's multifaceted religious and moral mission. Within the secular camp, on the other hand, particular institutions of political and civil society work to strengthen their social legitimacy within the public sphere: these institutions can look forward to achieving a new quality of agency, an ennobling of what they are already doing, through submitting themselves to the influence of the religious influence exercised in their direction. Consequently they act more sincerely and more effectively, marked by empathy and a more humane sense of imagination that leads to acts based on

¹ The network theory of the Church depicted as a sum of linkages ordered in two intersecting directions vertical (human being towards transcendence and God towards the human being) and horizontal (internal relationships within ecclesiastical community, exchanges between the community and representatives of political and civil society) is a topic elaborated upon by T. Jarosz, *Public relations w dyplomacji Stolicy Apostolskiej*, Warszawa Wydawnictwo Wydziału Dziennikarstwa i Nauk Politycznych UW 2013. 50-68.

considerations that are thoughtful. They transcend their own interests to ponder as well the interests of others.

Finally, the religious imagination can be broadening within the context of any social, political or cultural agency so that the agent in question becomes capable of introducing innovative ideas, new notions and unanticipated solutions.²

During the course of their reflection, the scholars and researchers who were doing their level best to describe and explain the state of reciprocal interdependencies between various manifestations of religious activity, on the one hand, and the processes of social and economic activity, on the other, adopted as their central objective a sustainable, developmental network of mutual references and linkages.

Scholars seem to have accelerated their activity on this issue as if they want to make up for lost time. For indeed there was a time when studies concerned with this issue were not a priority: the prevailing paradigm of modernization may account for the lack of interest during that period. More precisely, there was a central assumption that governed the interest level of scholars on this topic, namely, that religion is an institution that is either indifferent to development, or even counter-productive to it. Hence there seems to be a dual trajectory in the matter of research into this issue: one is that of zealous effort to research this issue, the other is the tendency to still succumb to the noticeable and persistent influence that the above-mentioned paradigm has occasioned. Some participants within the meta-theoretical debate have confirmed this dual trajectory by focusing upon the current state of the studies and research currently undertaken within the area we have been discussing.³

² Cf. G. ter Haar, "The Mbuliuli Principle: What is in a Name?", in *Development and Politics from Below. Exploring Spaces in the African State*, B. Bompani – M. Frahm-Arp, eds., Hampshire: Palgrave and Macmillan 2010, 43.

³ B. Bombani, and M. Frahm-Arp., "Development and Politics Form Below: New Conceptual Interpretations", in *Development and Politics from Below. Exploring Spaces in the African State*, B. Bompani – M. Frahm-Arp, eds., Hampshire: Palgrave and Macmillan 2010, 1-9; S. Deneulin, and M. Bano, *Religion in Development: Rewriting the Secular Script*, London Zed

Accordingly, in order adequately to make more comprehensive the range of reciprocal relationships between the interacting religious and secular agents, it is necessary to overcome the rejection, stemming perhaps from what we have inherited from the Enlightenment, of the transcendental and supernatural aspects of religion. Recognition of the fact that the impact of these supernatural factors has a crucial influence upon the processes under investigation introduces a fundamental change in the approach to the subject of our study as well as to the method which must be in tandem with a renewed understanding of how the subject of study can be redefined.

The underlying elusiveness of the elements of religion which emerge from the transcendental strata determines the specificity of the point of departure of any study on the present issue. It must be assumed that apart from the perceptible x - y cause-effect relationships, there is a space for z factors that are operating relationally behind these. Although they are emerging from the incomprehensible strata of transcendence, they actually contribute to observed changes of reality.⁴

It is also necessary to be aware that the variables which lie in the field of our interest are most frequently correlated analogically to the pattern, adapted from genetics by Mary Eberstadt, of the double helix. The first context of the double helix was that of the structure of a genetic code. However, Eberstadt explains that the double helix can also adequately illustrate the complexity of the sets of relationships interpenetrating and reciprocally determining each other within the intertwined realities of family life and religious faith.

This closely overlapping connection between both parts of the helix at first glance multiplies difficulties: as is the case in most correlational studies, distinguishing which one of the investigated variables is cause and which one is effect is not always a simple matter. However, further considerations lead to the conviction that

Books 2009, 1-11; E. de Jong, "Religious Values and Economic Growth: A Review and Assessment of Recent Studies", in *Religion and Development: Ways of Transforming the World*, G.T. Haar, ed., London: Hurst and Company 2011, 111-140.

⁴ Cf. E. de Jong, "Religious Values", 113.

both being so closely related, it is valid to say that to an equal extent they unceasingly affect each other.⁵

Consequently, there emerges the conclusion that the influence of religion upon society might be grasped profoundly only when one takes into account in a holistic manner conglomerates of broad, indirect and many-sided correlations. It helps if we exclude the excessive use of the researched influence of religion upon the social transformations that inaugurate developmental changes. The interdependencies we are considering here are often observed through a lens that is either excessively focused on the wider context of the elements of the religious message or agency or, on the contrary, excessively detached from that broader context.

Extracted from the above sets of two-directional influences, another feature presupposed to be underlying the determinants of the religious institutions that catalyze the developmental processes is that of the dual orientation that one may discern in the makeup of religious institutions. Some of them are vertically oriented, that is, they reflect the consciousness of believers derived from their strivings aimed at establishing and strengthening individual and communal linkages with the transcendent. However, the strategy for achieving this weaves its way through the horizontally oriented relationships that people and groups share with each other within the communities in which the members of a particular congregation live and work. The interrelationships on the horizontal plane serve as the means of fortifying the religious awareness of transcendence.

It is necessary, then, to employ within the field of our investigation two complementary perspectives, that of the vertical and that of the horizontal orientations. The aim of both is to facilitate the process of achieving a deepened insight into the nature and specificity of religious institutions and what characterizes their agency, especially while interacting with their secular counterparts.⁶

⁵ M. Eberstadt, *Jak Zachód utracił Boga*, transl. by M. Zaremba-Skulimowska, Kraków Wydawnictwo WAM 2014, 217-218. Originally published as *How the West Really Lost God: The New Theory of Secularisation*, Templeton Press 2013.

⁶ J. Haynes, *An Introduction to International Relations and Religion*, Harlow: Pearson 2013, 9-10.

One may adequately reflect the vertical orientation by means of a theological perspective. One places the focus here on the factors emerging from the transcendental strata that are reflected within specifically religious ways of intuitive and rational consciousness. A focus on the vertical orientation elucidates as well the manner by which individuals/groups experience and communicate the content of faith and morality. The influence that religion exercises upon the processes of development is perceived here to be indirect, that is, mediated through the axio-normative frames provided by religion. These axio-normative frames most frequently take the form of worldviews.

These frames purport to generate broad-spectrum explanations of the wholeness of the reality that is surrounding particular individuals. From these broad-spectrum explanations, one can glean the basic life orientations that develop in the aura of the ultimate purpose for human beings. Ultimate purposes have their roots within the wider tradition of a particular religion. They are the wellspring for cultivating new notions, meanings and directives. All of these serve as a seedbed for the process of the structuring of the agency that, motivated by religious faith, might be directed equally towards the strictly religious and towards the secular dimensions.

Similarly, because the theological perspective facilitates the process for capturing the genesis and general orientation of religious agency in its vertical dimension, this religious agency has its own distinctive cultural and social features. Hence it stands out from the agency typical of other societal institutions. A further consequence is that it is possible to deepen the insight that the theological approach achieves by concentrating on the sociocultural aspects of the religious agency. Such concentration broadens the scope of the inquiry and makes room for the social sciences.

Theoretical and methodological rigor characterizes the social sciences. One takes into consideration the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underlie the social sciences and then involves elements of religion and religious agency: the entire exploration may then take place within a normatively determined theological perspective. However, this time it is going to take place

within the horizontally oriented dimension which is not entering beyond the settings of what is natural and temporal.⁷ One accomplishes this inquiry by utilizing the ability to make empirical descriptions of phenomena already investigated from a theological perspective. What can be particularly profitable is the possibility of describing and explaining the complexity and dynamism of the interdependencies and interactions occurring within the local and the wider environments of religious institutions. They will be understood as acts that are either single or networked, acts that originate from the principal transcendental and supernatural values and from the norms assimilated through the process of religious socialization. Thus, there might come to light empirical data that give factual cues about the impact that religious organizations and the agency occasioned by religious organizations exercise upon social reality.

An overarching observation from what has been said up to this point is that the Catholic Church is a dynamic institution that, on account of the trajectories of various social transformations, is continuously – and rightfully – searching for the most adequate mode for realizing its mission. This task is multidimensional in scope. Unchanging elements emerging from the transcendental orientation such as diverse beliefs, moral convictions, values and norms provide contours for the task. Because the social and cultural realities of the surrounding milieu in which the Church finds herself always seems to be in a process of change, the content of the transcendental strata in its turn has to undergo intelligent processing.

The aim of this processing is to transform the constant and unchanging essence of a Church that subsists as a transcendent reality into a meaningful and persuasive message addressed to a people immersed within an ever-changing particular temporal and social milieu.

In harmony with the remarks made up to this point, one observes that the institutions that constitute the community of the

⁷ Cf. A. Królikowska, "Jakie jest miejsce laikatu w Kościele katolickim?", in *Laikat i duchowieństwo w Kościele katolickim w Polsce: Problemy Dialogu i współlistnienia*, J. Baniak, ed., Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Nauk Społecznych UAM 2010, 69-72.

Church are responding to the pressures and challenges of contemporaneity. Their representatives are working out new methods for conduct that are taking the form of missionary and pastoral strategies for achieving particular sub-goals. To adopt for a moment the language of economics, it can be said that in this way the Church enriches and expands her experience; and, consequently, there is an offer that she meaningfully addresses to the representatives of the local and regional environment.

It should be noted that the same network of official relationships and informal ties can serve as a means of transferring certain benefits in the opposite direction from the temporal and social milieu towards the Church. In this context, there arises the following question: what occasions the positive impulses generated and transmitted from the network of religious institutions towards the institutions and social groups that form the Church's social milieu? What is the nature of the concrete establishments and solutions that these impulses bring forth?

2. From a Religious Message to Concrete Abilities and Virtues

Keeping in mind the groundwork for a perspective that we have carefully delineated, we are in a position to reflect on the impact that religious institutions exert upon development in the broad sense of the term. The religious element forms an immanent part within the secular social environment while retaining its own identity. This means that religion together with the communities and individuals that represent her institutions cannot be artificially separated from the social milieu, but they also cannot be reduced to it. They can, therefore, exercise an impact upon society, influencing the formation of a variety of opinions and views, attitudes and behaviours, individual and social abilities and virtues. The way in which this impact carries momentum is the subject of this part of the study.

It should be clear by now that the substance of the interactions developed in a religious environment is not only determined by the spiritual-moral and intuitive-mystical elements emerging from the transcendental dimension. Every time these elements are shaped into a concrete, empirically understandable message, it is as the

result of a cognitive process, defined as an attempt to take hold of specific, fundamentally incomprehensible elements of the religious message and translate them into coherent and logically sound beliefs, such as the defined truths of the faith, its moral standards and symbols.

From the perspective of the present study, all of the components of the religious message and the beliefs, truths, standards and symbols that express the message bear a more or less direct relationship to the formation of specific existential attitudes, individual and collective behaviours and social practices within the milieu of human life, in particular that of the social, economic and political.

Because the religious message begins as a graced word immersed in the mysterious transcendent, ecclesial agents perceive the practical difficulty with capturing the essence of the specific content of the religious message and hence perceive, too, the need to strive continuously for an ever more precise definition. Consequently, the continuous growth of religious institutions is unique in the context of the challenges of different times and places. It can be viewed as a process of seeking ever more adequate forms in which to embody the spiritual and supernatural, while retaining its original structure and maintaining its self-identity. Maintaining the religious identity is vital to the process for defining the relationships through which the representatives of religious institutions affect the personnel located within a variety of social circles, each with their own role and status.

The primary, most internal component of the structure is its ideal dimension. From within the ideal dimension, theological and philosophical interpretations blossom forth in order to gauge the surrounding milieu according to supernatural and transcendental perspectives. Hence the cognitive horizon encompasses and explains all the important aspects of human life, its meaning and purpose, viewed against the backdrop of a broader social and material reality. This is the meta-narrative and meaning-forming function of religion. It is most fully expressed, on the natural plane, in the provision of the ontological and epistemological assumptions that form the foundation of various world-views.

The typical axio-normative and paradigmatic patterns and directives, such as the conviction of the essential goodness of the material reality created by God, the equality of all human beings, and their responsibility for each other and for the natural environment can also be gleaned from world-views whose authors refer directly to religious roots. Axioms, norms, paradigms, patterns, and directives also arise from the constellations of world views that are not explicitly religious: they may be primarily secular and influenced by conservative, liberal or even socialist thought.⁸

However, despite the fact that these particular authors do not refer to religious inspirations, a thorough analysis of their content brings to light coherent analogies between the religious and secular methods of describing the complexity of human life and its explanation.⁹

Apart from the inspirational function of religion in the formulation of concepts that give foundations to various world-views, the basic ideas, thoughts, values and norms that come to light by means of a systematic analysis of religion also can serve as controls and means of verification in order to do a meaningful assessment of the alternative secular concepts.

A good example is the definition of ‘development’ itself. There seems to have been a general perception – perhaps as a consequence of the theory of modernization – that development is synonymous with financial welfare. Accordingly, the driving force of development has been the frenetic pursuit of economic growth, with an almost all-exclusive focus on the accumulation of material resources. The notion in vogue was that this wealth would then be shared according to the socio-cultural conditions of the particular societies.

Yet several programs inaugurated according to this narrow definition of development failed in the second half of the last century. The scientific community reacted by questioning the

⁸ Cf. B.J. Carroll, *A Dialogue of Civilizations: Gülen’s Islamic Ideals and Humanistic Discourse*, New York :Tughra Books 2011, 3-5.

⁹ Cf. S. Ellis, “Development and invisible Worlds”, in *Development and Politics from Below. Exploring Spaces in the African State*, B. Bompani – M. Frahm-Arp, eds., Hampshire: Palgrave and Macmillan 2010, 23-24.

validity and social utility of the definition. A heated debate ensued, leading to the recognition of the need to expand the meaning of development. What had been simply a political and economic dimension was eventually extended to include the social and cultural, even the moral and spiritual elements of human growth and progress. This change obviously came about because of the inspiration that religion gives.

Hence individuals, groups and societies come to recognize that welfare embraces both the spiritual and the material. The authors of the so-called theory of modernization had divorced these two dimensions of human/social reality, but today they enjoy recognition as intertwined and mutually complementary.¹⁰

Another dimension inherent in this new perception of development is that of the legal and organisational. The struggles of a particular religious community to provide the conditions necessary to allow the unrestrained and continuous communication and development of those truths of the faith which were considered undeniable at a certain stage in the historical development of the community is what brought to the forefront the need for the legal and organisational dimension. When the blueprint for action, focused on the propagation and socialisation of the contents of religious faith, is embedded in an institutional legal and organisational framework, the next step is the development of the particular community.

This step is the process of applying external forms to the specific contents of the faith. Matrices of actions can assume the form of specific behaviours and practices, both individual and collective. They can be strictly religious acts, such as religious rituals; or they can take the form of non-religious activities. Faith inspires all acts whether they are explicitly religious or not. A specific dogmatic truth or a moral principle, for example, forms a content that motivates religious acts within a broadly defined theological or philosophical perspective. This perspective suits the mindset characteristic of the specific religion or denomination.

¹⁰ Cf. J. Haynes, *Religion and Development: Conflict or Cooperation?*, Palgrave and Macmillan 2007, 1-4, 57-58; cf. S. Ellis, "Development and Invisible", 25.

A multi-dimensional constellation of practices, anchored in religion, defines the character of the historical development of each religious community. Its members create their own, unique way of choosing among those practices in order to give testimony to their faith. The need to create standards and regulations that harmonise with the ebb and flow of the community's life becomes paramount. These standards and regulations are dogmatic, legal and customary; and they include (a) the division of roles and functions within and outside the community, (b) the rules for education and socialisation within the faith, (c) the appropriate models for communication, (d) the rules for collaboration that need to be followed when seeking to acquire the material resources indispensable to the development of the religious activity, and finally (e) the methods for creating the desired relationships with the representatives of the institutional and social environment in order to acquire and maintain social legitimacy.

The network of inter-dependencies and linkages that arises when members of the religious community act according to their faith and practice, always in adherence to the norms and regulations with the intention of giving testimony to their faith is closely related to the way in which the members of the religious community develop their lives in the secular sphere, including all their social and economic activities. Individual behaviours or repeated sequences of behaviours, and even the same style of carrying out specific activities, are more or less consciously transferred to secular domains.

The influence of the element of transcendence is the most pronounced in the case of the innermost dimension in the structure of the self-manifestation of a religious community. In the stratum that we are now discussing, on the other hand, the interaction of the social and cultural factors becomes more visible. Within this layer, those concerned must first develop the most adequate strategy for the realisation of the religious mission in the social milieu. Then those concerned engage in the process of defining the tactics for achieving operational goals. This process of defining strategies must never neglect the constant improvement of evangelisation and the pastoral tools and methods. Lastly, those concerned critically

review these developmental processes and revise them as necessary within the community.

So that the supernatural content of the religious message may become more and more transparent as the community passes through these stages of development and assessment the community makes sure that at every juncture there is coming undeniably into existence a milieu in which the correct thought and evaluation patterns, the appropriate everyday practices and the pertinent social behaviours together with the optimal methods for achieving set goals are all coming to blossom in a way that protects goals and methods from confusion.

The first area of their application is the strictly religious sphere, where the collective effort of all believers reinforces the growth dynamic of the religious community. It is abundantly clear, on the other hand, that this growth dynamic extends beyond the religious community: the network of interactive connections forming a given Church community and cultivating its development reaches outwards from its borders. As the result of these connections, the pro-development values and norms together with the collective behaviour that these values and norms motivate enrich the general social blood-flow.

The Church, therefore, is now perceptibly influencing the social milieu: the influence extends to models and patterns for engaging in and maintaining social interactions, communication and conflict solving, and the methods of creating and improving institutional and organisational solutions. Let us not overlook the formation of abilities and values, both individual and social, that flowers forth as a result of this Church impact.

The analysis of the conceptual dimension for the process of embedding the Church into the reality of a specific social environment establishes the importance of anchoring human life, both in the individual and social sense, in the values that help to interpret and explain its ultimate purpose and meaning, existence *per se* and the surrounding material context. Religious axio-normative, ontological and epistemological paradigms and suppositions serve as constant reference points and as an ethical compass for the alternative secular concepts. In this way, religion

developed within a Church community provides non-material, spiritual and moral components for the development of culture.

Meanwhile this process of “networking – i.e., interconnecting with the socio-cultural milieu – serves a further process by forming new shades of values and norms for community life. This process can be described as both inspirational and verification-controlling.

An analytical focus on the legal and organisational facets gives even more emphasis to the importance of religion in providing models for the development of institutional solutions which, in turn, enable the implementation of particular values in a rapidly changing social environment. The determined effort on the part of the members of the Church community to express faithfully the content of the deposit of faith and morality in the language of the particular culture within which it finds itself, and to communicate this content to future generations, sparks creativity in the search for solutions which bring into being an indispensable structure of connections, protections and regulations that all aim for the optimisation of the process of fulfilling every task within the mission of the Church. The inspirational character of the Church actualizes the search for the most adequate institutional and organisational solutions so that Church members may implement particular social, cultural and economic values.

An analogous way of proceeding may be found in the sphere of Church activity oriented towards the continuous improvement of evangelisation and pastoral methods. This domain of ecclesial activity gives backbone – an authentic attitude of readiness – to seek the most adequate solutions in tandem with the new changes. This attitude of readiness is always creative, innovative and alert to the long-term implications of the changes at issue.

3. The Pro-Developmental Agency of the Church as a Result of the Engagement of the Members of the Whole Community

Many authors claim that responsibility for the institutionalization of a Church community belongs only to her ministerial leaders. In fact, however, this responsibility pertains to

all members of the community.¹¹ It is oriented towards the need to remain prepared to introduce timely changes both in the philosophical-axiological sphere and in the legal-organisational sphere. Consider the Catholic Church: the Catholic Church maintains a *modus operandi* that distinguishes ecclesiastical institutions from other social institutions, especially political ones. The Church follows a constellation of action that proceeds thus: first, she constantly monitors the dynamics of social and cultural changes, and then initiates an in-depth and multi-faceted reflection aimed at deciphering patterns in the observed transformations. Then the Church arrives at an explanation of how these transformations bring forth consequences for the ongoing self-manifestation of the Church. Lastly, the Church defines the methods and channels appropriate for inculcating the faith in the social milieu. These methods and channels typically give a place of privilege to conscience formation and religious and social communication.

A given local Church community develops according to the parameters just indicated: optimally, members enjoy unity and share a common awareness so that harmony may prevail during the process of establishing norms and regulations.

The institutional Church expresses her essence in the constant search for a method to integrate the natural, temporal areas of contemporary human life with the influx of divine grace and the concomitant transcendental and supernatural qualities. How individuals located in the various sectors of the ecclesiastical structure contribute to the processes we have discussed ought to be subject to its own special analysis. The care invested in this process not only affects the life of the community and its missionary zeal, but also carries its own special impact on other segments of the socio-cultural and economic-political milieu.

Contrary to the assertions prevalent in the literature that narrow the process of the interpretation of the religious message to the competence of individuals with spiritual and administrative authority, this process is in fact the result of a long-term cooperation among all members of the community, paradoxically

¹¹ Cf. S. Deneulin, - M. Bano, *Religion in Development*, 135, 141.

even those who formerly may have found themselves on its borders due to a lack of engagement in its life or to extreme views and attitudes. One question that emerges is this – how does the religious community collectively express the content of the comprehensively defined tradition in order to preserve the connotations in notions and concepts that have flowered forth from the relationships established with the specific socio-cultural conditions of a given historical period?

In the case of the Catholic Church, this recognition is a dynamic and complex process. Its individual elements may be construed as acts of mutual inspiration and the verification of the experience of transcendence shared within the community. The reliability and authenticity of the emerging content of the faith and its moral convictions are confirmed by procedures developed over the ages. They form a complex network of multipartite connections within which the individual members of the Church community make their unique contributions in the shaping of the particular elements of the religious message in such a way that it becomes adequately responsive to contemporary challenges.

The source and point of reference that God has given to all members of this network are the testimonies of the comprehensively defined tradition. The Holy Scriptures and the Apostolic Tradition occupy the central place. The persons directly engaged in the interpretation of the traditional sources are the Magisterium of the Church, that is to say, the Pope and the Bishops in union with the Pope. The Magisterium is the prime, God-given means of finding the truth (cf. Luke 10:16). The Church also enlists the theologians who submit their findings to that same Magisterium. Theologians always find security in their conclusions when their thinking harmonises with what the Magisterium has been teaching through the centuries. The Magisterium, therefore, provides the norms that guide the work of the theologians towards the horizon of the overall faith experience of the members of the Church. At the same time, the more descriptive aspects of the intellectual strivings of the theologians serve constantly to deepen and broaden the understanding of the basic theological truths in the context of an ever-changing reality. This is how they contribute to

the enrichment of the perspective laid out by the spiritual leaders of the Magisterium.¹²

The collaboration between theologians and the Magisterium that provides theologians with the fulcrum of the truth also finds resonance in how God addresses believers. This source of inspiration and verification is the so-called *sensus fidei* – the sense of faith. This sense is derived from everyday experience during which believers, graced in their particular charisms just as the Magisterium is graced, come to understand more deeply and more accurately the truths of the faith and the moral standards and do their utmost to live in fidelity to those truths. Hence their faith unites them to the Magisterium and to the theologians who are faithful to that Magisterium. Since the first two groups – the Magisterium and the theologians – are also believers, they constitute particular voices among the *sensus fidei*.¹³

Each of these institutions possesses a unique system for acquiring and transmitting information as well as for communicating with the other institutions. For example, in the exchange between the theologians and the Magisterium, there are official documents of the Holy See and the conferences of the national and local episcopates, the studies and publications of the theologians approved by local ecclesial authority, the symposiums, conferences, debates, polemics, discourses, as well as the official

¹² Editor's Note: One considers as an extraordinary example of how a theologian has contributed to understanding the content of faith, the seven-volume contribution of Cardinal-elect Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, Edinburgh, 1982-1991. The author laboured with the conviction that "whatever is beautiful ought to be described beautifully." To understand how his theology contributes to increasing the inspirational intensity of the message that begins with the transcendental, descends vertically into the minds and hearts of the believers, and then extends horizontally through the believers' own lived transmission of the message, see also two other books by Von Balthasar: *Truth is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press 1987; and *Heart of the World*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press 1979.

¹³ International Theological Commission, *Sensus fidei in the Life of the Church* (2014), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html#2. The *sensus fidei* and the *magisterium*, accessed 26.03. 2014, 74, 81.

correspondence between the offices, commissions or individual theologians and their direct contacts. Certain individuals among the faithful receive special appointments from ecclesial authority to explore the mysteries of the faith and their interpretations. They represent larger groups from among the Church communities.

There are official documents that may carry more authoritative weight according to the special vocation of the author(s) writing the document and the level of significance that the author is giving the document. Particularly remarkable are expressions from the magisterium that invoke the authority not only of Jesus and the apostles but several centuries of Church tradition and practice. These documents, usually encyclicals, show the extraordinary consensus – the vitality of communion – that exists between Jesus and the Church.

There are accessible theological, philosophical and Canon-Law interpretations, the pastoral and catechetical teachings, the campaigns underlining specific values and norms, the local synods and the opinion polls, surveys, consultations, direct contacts and pastoral discussions, feedback from such contacts, and so forth. Finally, on the scale of the whole Church, there are the ecumenical councils which form the institution which takes into account the state of awareness of all the members of the Church community, without exception, together with the representatives of the religious, social and cultural milieus.

To sum up, the analyses undertaken reflect the process for seeking the most adequate method of keeping transparently alive the values and norms emerging from the transcendent sphere of religion. This process is determined by the influence of the direct and indirect socio-cultural milieu. Within it, all members of the Church community are included. They are interconnected by a network-like, multi-faceted structure of relations and connections.

This structure is asymmetrical in nature. This is the consequence of a precisely appointed scope of responsibility – originating in the divine – for those who have various degrees of authority to interpret the sources of revelation and to draw forth the implications of these interpretations. The purpose of such a division of roles, depending on their location within the

hierarchical Church structure, is to direct each participant towards a perspective beyond the temporality of life with the assurance that they are not going to be misled or deceived. If one invokes the language of religion, one would say that this is a turning to the God who has already turned to us.

The subordination to this particular transcendental purpose determines all the remaining mechanisms within the described structure. They are devised primarily to serve the freedom of reflection focused on the ultimate goal of human life according to the perspective of the supernatural. The possibility of mutual inspiration and verification of each religious experience, both its cognitive-rational component and its emotional-volitional component, undergirds the search for institutional and organisational forms of expressing the religious faith and the sense of morality in a way that corresponds to changing reality and at the same time to unchanging truth.

Depending on how a single church community and the Church as a whole come close to realizing the model outlined above, i.e., depending on how successfully the members of the local Church and the universal Church collaborate with each other in a collective search for the most authentic way of interpreting the basic principles of the creed received through tradition, it will become possible to intensify their pro-developmental influence on their milieus. This possibility emerges out of a deepened sense of participation, which, in turn, motivates believers to accept more responsibility for their own religious life. This renewed sense of responsibility compels the believers to bring their own personal faith into their socio-cultural milieu: in this manner, religion influences social life.

Conclusion

The analysis presented here suggests that there is a strong and necessary correlation between two processes: the institutionalization of the ecclesiastical communities within their socio-cultural milieu and the formation of the modes of thinking, valuing and acting that foster social and economic development. The core of this process is determined by what is most important from the point of view of the development of the ecclesiastical

communities, namely, a range of acts aimed at revitalizing the transmission/communication of the unchangeable elements of the transcendental strata towards a changing milieu. The result of this revitalizing takes the form of a persuasive religious message communicated within a particular socio-cultural environment. In turn, the socio-cultural milieu sets the parameters for the strategies needed to realize the mission of the ecclesiastical congregations.

Eventually, as the Church initiates and puts into practice subsistent elements of her mission, members of the ecclesiastical community establish relationships with representatives of the surrounding milieu. Within the network of exchanges created by a growing number of these relationships, there occurs the process of transmitting what has been developed within the Church communities to the surrounding segments of society. Thus there comes about a range of rationales and evaluations that, in their turn, underpin a matrix of activities, practices and social virtues. All the consequent networks and their operations may be perceived as an outcome of the Church's dynamism towards self-manifestation.

Hence in a gradual manner, the Church community's internal processes for developing its modes of operating are extrapolated into the external domains of the adjacent sectors of society. These external operations gradually become detached from their original religious context. In this way, they seem to evolve into a manner of subsisting that qualifies them as secularized concepts and views, abilities and skills. With this, we conclude our analysis.

THEOLOGY & CULTURE

He Who Walks in Integrity Walks Securely (Prov 10:6-12)

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By disguising our appearance we want to mask who we really are. In fact, we want to appear better than we are. We want others to see our admirable image so we disguise ourselves by trying to hide our dark side: our sins, our mistakes, our shortcomings, our imperfections – we want to conceal the fact that we are simply human. The author proposes a contextual analysis of a group of proverbs (10:6-12) that correspond to such an attitude.

The Text

⁶ Blessings [of the Lord]¹ on the head of the righteous,
but the mouth of the wicked conceals² violence.³

¹ The Septuagint reads εὐλογία κυρίου “blessings of the Lord”, while the MT reads בְּרָכָה “blessings” only.

² M. Dahood was proposing that the verb כָּסָה “cover, conceal, hide” in some proverbs (10:6, 11, 18; 26:26) could have a meaning of “revealing” (*Psalms I: 1-50*, AncB 16, Garden City 1966, 18-19), but it was not accepted (cf. W. BÜHLMANN, *Vom rechtem Reden und Schweigen: Studien zu Proverbien 10–31*, OBO 12, Göttingen 1976, 273; W. MCKANE, *Proverbs: A New Approach*, OTL, London 1970, 419; H. RINGGREN, “כָּסָה”, *ThWAT* IV, 272-277).

³ V. 6b is repeated in v. 11b, therefore many prefer to read v. 6b in the light of v. 11 understanding that the word “mouth” is a subject (e.g., L. ALONSO SCHÖKEL – J. VILCHEZ LINDEZ, *Proverbios*, Nueva Biblia Española, Madrid 1984, 261; D.J.A. CLINES, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, IV, Sheffield 1998, 441; J. HAUSMANN, *Studien zum Menschenbild der älteren Weisheit (Spr 10ff.)*, FAT 7, Tübingen 1995, 194-195; A. MEINHOLD,

⁷ The memory of the righteous is a blessing⁴,
but the name of the wicked decays.

⁸ The wise of heart receives commandments⁵,
but a fool of lips will be ruined.

⁹ He who walks in integrity⁶ walks securely,
but he who perverts⁷ his ways will be known.

¹⁰ He who winks the eye gives sorrow⁸
and the fool of lips will be ruined.⁹

Die Sprüche. I. *Sprüche Kapitel 1–15*, ZBK.AT 16, Zürich 1991, 169; D.C. SNELL, *Twice-Told Proverbs and the Composition of the Book of Proverbs*, Winona Lake 1993, 41). Some in v. 6b prefer the word “violence” as a subject rendering it as “violence covers the mouth of the wicked”, while in v. 11b they take the word “violence” as an object (NIV, F. DELITZSCH, “Proverbs”, in C.F. KEIL – F. DELITZSCH, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, VI. *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, Peabody 1966, 157; J. GOLDINGAY, “The Arrangement of Sayings n Proverbs 10–15”, *JSOT* 61 (1994) 79-80. KJV takes “violence” as a subject in both instances.

⁴ The expression לְבִרְכָה לִכְרַתָּה literally “for blessing” could be understood as a finality that “ends in blessing”: linking this expression to the preceding one, “Blessing of the Lord on the head of the righteous” (6a), permits a rendering of 7a as “blessed memory of the righteous| (cf. L. ALONSO SCHÖKEL – J. VILCHEZ LINDEZ, *Proverbios*, 260-261).

⁵ The expression זָקָה מְצִוֹת could be translated as “heeds commandments” (W.D. REYBURN – E.M. FRY, *A Handbook on Proverbs*, UBS.HS, New York 2000, 223), but the literal meaning is preferred because of the parallelism with v. 10.

⁶ The expression translated here as “he who walks in integrity” is composed of the verb הלך “to walk” and the word חָזָה “completeness, integrity.” This expression occurs 10 times in the Old Testament: half of these occurrences are found in the Book of Proverbs. The expression indicates “living in a right way”, “doing justice”.

⁷ The expression יִשְׁרֹף אֶת דְּרָגָיו – literally “he who makes his ways crooked” – indicates deceitful behaviour (W.D. REYBURN – E.M. FRY, *A Handbook*, 224).

⁸ The expression יָרָה עֵינָיו means “causes sorrow” (cf. F. BROWN – S.R. DRIVER – C.A. BRIGGS, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, Boston 1906; Peabody 2000, 781), but the literal meaning, “gives sorrow,” is preferred because of its antithetic relation with the expression “receives commandments” in v. 8a.

⁹ In the Masoretic Text v. 10b is the same as v. 8b. For the sake of the antithetic parallelism, the Septuagint reads ὁ δὲ ἄστεργος χεῖλεσιν σκολιάζων ὑποσκελισθήσεται “but he that reproves boldly is a peacemaker” (cf. J. COOK,

¹¹ The mouth of the righteous [is] a fountain of life,
but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

¹² Hatred stirs up strife¹⁰,
but love conceals all offences.

Composition

The passage contains three parts: 6-7, 8-10 and 11-12 in a concentric disposition: ABA'.¹¹ In the initial part (6-7) and in the concluding part (11-12), the second line of the opening proverb is the same (6b = 11b, *but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence*)¹².

In the opening section (6-7) both proverbs are in a parallel antithetical relation beginning with *the righteous* (6a, 7a) and

"Contrasting as a Translation Technique in the LXX of Proverbs", in C.A. Evans – S. Talmon, eds., *The Quest for Context and Meaning: Studies in Biblical Intertextuality*, Fs. J.A. Sanders, Biblical Interpretation 28, Leiden 1997, 403-414; G. GERLEMAN, "The Septuagint Proverbs as a Hellenistic Document", *OTS* 8 [1950] 16). Some follow the Septuagint (e.g., R.B.Y. SCOTT, *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes*, AncB 18, Doubleday 1965, 81; W. BÜHLMANN, *Vom rechtem Reden*, 109), but many retain the Masoretic Text (e.g., G. BERNINI, *Proverbi*, NVB 19, 3rd ed., Cinisello Balsamo 1993, 201; J. GOLDINGAY, "The Arrangement", 80; K.M. HEIM, *Like Grapes of God Set in Silver: An Interpretation of Proverbial Clusters in Proverbs 10:1 – 22:16*, BZAW 273, Berlin New York 2001, 116)

¹⁰ In the Masoretic Text the word rendered as "strife" is in the plural form (מַחֲרָקִים). The plural is an intensive rather than a numerical plural (P.A. STEVESON, *A Commentary on Proverbs*, Greenville 2001, 137).

¹¹ This delimitation concerning the respective parts was proposed by G. Gjorgjevski, *Enigma degli enigma: Un contributo allo studio della composizione della raccolta salomonica (Pr 10,1–22,16)*, TG.T 72, Roma 2001, 39-43. Some scholars recognize vv. 6-12 as a literal unit (e.g., H.F. FUHS, *Das Buch der Sprichwörter. Ein Kommentar*, FzB 95, Würzburg 2001, 180-182; R. SCORALICK, *Enzelspruch und Sammlung: Komposition im Buch der Sprichwörter Kapitel 10–15*, BZAW 232, Berlin – New York 1995, 176.

¹² Some consider this repetition as an inclusion delimitating the text in vv. 6-11 (e.g., D.A. GARRETT, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC 14, Nashville 1993, 118; K.M. HEIM, *Like Grapes*, 114; T. KRÜGER, "Komposition und Diskussion in Proverbia 10", *ZThK* 92 (1995) 422-424; A. MEINHOLD, *Die Sprüche*, 169.

concluding with *the wicked* (6b, 7b). Both proverbs repeat the word “blessing” attributed to “the righteous” (6a, 7a).

In the concluding section (11-12) the proverbs form a chiasm (ABB'A'): the first proverb (11) starts with a positive statement (11a) followed by a negative one (11b) and the corresponding proverb (12) starts with a negative statement (12a) followed by a positive one (12b). The word “conceal” is repeated in both proverbs: on the first occasion it conveys a negative sense [*the mouth of the wicked*] *conceals violence* (11b), but on the second occasion the word communicates a positive sense [*love*] *conceals offences* (12b). The internal composition of both proverbs is chiasmic, too:

- A ¹¹ **A fountain of life**
 B *the mouth of the righteous*
 B *but the mouth of the wicked*
 A **conceals violence.**

In the first proverb (11) at the centre there is an antithesis between *mouth of the righteous* and *mouth of the wicked*. The stress is on the outcome of the kind of utterances that the righteous and the wicked are prone to: on the one hand, utterance is *a fountain of life*, on the other hand utterance *conceals violence*.

- A ¹² **Hatred**
 B stirs up
 C *strife,*
 C *offences.*
 B Conceals
 A **love.**

In the second proverb the antithesis is between *hatred* and *love* and singles out what hatred causes, *strife*, and what love conceals, *offences*.

The opening section (6-7) and the concluding section (11-12) are linked by the use of the same words *the righteous* (6a, 7a, 11a) and *the wicked* (6b, 7b, 11b). The expression *the head of the righteous* (6a) links to *the mouth of the righteous* (11a).

In the central section (8-10), the second line of the opening and closing proverbs is the same (8b = 10b, *but/and a fool of lips will be ruined*).

+ ⁶ A <i>Blessings</i> [of the Lord] - BUT THE MOUTH OF THE WICKED	on the head of the righteous, CONCEALS VIOLENCE.
+ ⁷ The memory of the righteous - but the name of the wicked	is a <i>blessing</i> , decays.
+ ⁸ The wise of HEART - <i>but a fool of lips</i>	receives commandments, <i>will be ruined</i> .
+ ⁹ He who walks in integrity - but he who perverts his ways	walks securely, will be known.
- ¹⁰ He who winks the EYE - <i>and a fool of lips</i>	gives sorrow <i>will be ruined</i> .
+ ¹¹ The mouth of the righteous - BUT THE MOUTH OF THE WICKED - ¹² Hatred stirs up + but loves CONCEALS	[is] a fountain of life, CONCEALS VIOLENCE. strife, all offences.

Apart from this repetition, there are also related expressions that include words referring to the parts of the human body: *the wise of heart* (8a) is opposed to *the mouth of the wicked* (8b, 10b) and he who winks the eye (10a). The "heart" as an internal organ is used in a positive context while "the lips" and "the eye," both external organs, are positioned within a negative context – in other words: interiority radiating the positive is opposed to exteriority radiating the negative.

Seeing a strong connection between vv. 8 and 10 we can conclude that they form an inclusion around v. 9 which then becomes a centrally positioned proverb in spite of the fact that it seems to be an isolated one, because it does not share the same vocabulary with the surrounding proverbs. However, the expression *he who walks in integrity* (9a) corresponds to "living in a right way" and therefore it relates in our text to *the righteous* (6a, 7a, 11a), to the positive disposition of *the wise of heart* (8a) and to the affirmation that *love conceals all offences* (12b). In a similar vein, we can identify the one *who perverts his ways* (9b) with the wicked (6b, 7b, 11b), with *a fool of lips* (8b, 10b) and with *hatred itself* (12a).

The following pattern also puts into relief the distinctiveness of the central section (8-10): the first stich has a verb in the imperfect tense, qal (8a, 9a, 10a), while the second stich has another verb in

the imperfect tense, niph'al (8b, 9b, 10b)¹³. Such a pattern is absent in the other sections as the following chart shows:

6a -----		6b יִכְסֶה	piel imperfect
7a -----		7b יִרְקֹב	qal imperfect
8a יִקַּח	qal imperfect	8b יִלְבֹּט	niph'al imperfect
9a יִלְוֶה	qal imperfect	9b יִנְדַע	niph'al imperfect
10a יִתֵּן	qal imperfect	10b יִלְבֹּט	niph'al imperfect
11a -----		11b יִכְסֶה	piel imperfect
12a תִּעוֹרֶר	polel imperfect	12b תִּכְסֶה	piel imperfect

It has been noted that in the passage there is a use of words that refer to parts of the human body. In the second stich (6b, 8b, 10b, 11b) where those words appear all of them belong to a semantic camp of “speech” and are always used in a negative sense¹⁴.

6a head of the righteous	6b mouth of the wicked
8a wise of heart	8b fool of lips
10a He who winks the eye	10b fool of lips
11a mouth of the righteous	11b mouth of the wicked

There is not such regularity in the first stich of the respective proverbs: in 6a, 8a and 11a words for body parts are used in a positive sense, while in 10a the use of “eye” carries a negative implication.

V. 10 is only a synthetic proverb while all the other proverbs in our passage are antithetic. The probable reason for the pattern change may be because vv. 8 and 10 form an inclusion around v. 9; and since the second stich of both proverbs is the same, the antithesis requires that 10a should be antithetic to 8a. In fact, the verbs in these two clauses are antithetic: “receives” (8a) and “gives” (10a).

¹³ Cf. G. Gjorgjevski, *Enigma*, 41. Niph'al could imply *passivum divinum*.

¹⁴ I noted this in my dissertation (B. WITEK, *Dio e i suoi figli*, TG.T 117, Roma 2005, 21).

Biblical Context

Walking in Integrity

The expression "walking in integrity", apart from its use in the central proverb of our passage (v. 9), occurs on four other occasions in the Proverbs. In 19:1 a person of integrity is opposed to a perverse and foolish one (*better a poor who walks in integrity than a perverse in his lips who is a fool*); in 28:8 the antithesis is with a perverse person who is also rich (*better a poor who walks in integrity than a perverse in his lips who is a rich*). The first line of 20:7 identifies a person of integrity with the righteous one, and in the second line he becomes a source of blessing for his descendants (*He who walks in integrity is righteous – blessed his children after him*). In 2:7 God is promised as *a shield to those who walk in integrity*.

Blessing and Its Importance

The first two proverbs of our passage talk about "blessing" (6a, 7a). We read about "blessing" already in the first pages of the Bible in the Creation Story: God's blessing after the creation of the animals (Gen 1:22) and again after the creation of the human beings (v. 28). Similarly God gives his blessing to Noah and his sons: *Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth* (9:1)

A blessing for a person in the time of the Old Testament, and in particular a blessing from God, was one of the most important gifts. Therefore, people were making efforts to receive it.¹⁵ We find some examples in the story of Jacob. While wrestling with the angel Jacob says: *I will not let you go, unless you bless me* (32:27). We know how he cheated his father Isaac in order to receive his blessing, a blessing that Isaac was supposed to give to his brother Esau (chap. 27).

People in biblical times believed strongly in one who confirmed a pronounced word and so in the fulfilment of blessings. Numerous family and property were some of the visible signs of fulfilment of

¹⁵ M.L. BROWN, "bārāk", in W.A. VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, [CD-ROM], Grand Rapids 2001.

blessings as the psalmist says: *By his blessings they multiply greatly, and he does not let their cattle decrease* (Ps 107:38). One of Abraham's servants makes a similar affirmation: *The Lord has greatly blessed my master, and he has become great; he has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, menservants and maidservants, camels and asses* (Gen 24:35). The same idea is present in the Proverbs: *The blessing of the Lord makes rich* (Prov 10:22).

Blessing and Curse

The word "blessing" in our passage is used only in reference to the "righteous" (6a, 7a); the antithetic parallelism implies a "curse" as a fate of the wicked (6b, 7b). At Sinai, after the proclamation of the Law to the people of Israel, the Israelites hear the following divine promise:

Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day, and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods which have not known (Dt 11:26-28, cf. 28:1-46).

The concept of "two ways" coincides with the expression of a choice between "blessing" and "curse": one way leads to life and the other to death (30:15-20). This is the concept found in Ps 1:

¹ Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
² but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
⁶ for the Lord know the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

When announcing the exile, Jeremiah makes the following declaration: *Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his arm, whose heart turns away from the Lord... Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord* (17:5, 7). In Luke 6:20-26 four beatitudes are followed by four woes and they are in parallel antithetic relation to each other:

²⁰ Blessed are you poor...

²⁴ Woe to you that are rich...

²¹ Blessed are you that hunger now...

²⁵ Woe to you that are full now...

^{21b} Blessed are you that weep now...

^{25b} Woe to you that laugh now...

²² Blessed are you when men hate you...

²⁶ Woe to you when men speak well of you...

Interpretation

He Who Walks in Integrity Walks Securely

The characteristics of the "blessed man" in Ps 1 are demonstrated in our passage in the person of the "righteous" (6a, 7a, 11a). He is considered "wise" because he accepts the divine commandment (8a). Paraphrasing Ps 119:105, we can say that the Law of the Lord upon which he is meditating becomes for him as a lamp for his feet and a light for his path; therefore his way is secure (Prov 10:9a). His integrity is recognized by his conduct (cf. 9b). He is exercising his gift of speech with prudence and wisdom knowing that he can either speak in order to build up or to destroy. Metaphorically his mouth is like "a fountain of life" (11a) because he speaks in a positive sense for building others up. He is not only exercising his reason: he loves, too.

In some situations where he could react, speak out, reveal the truth, he prefers to keep silence (12b) for the good of others (11a). Not by chance is he called "wise of heart" (8a). Where there is love, there is the possibility to forgive offences that others have inflicted (12b). Such conduct receives compensation in the form of divine blessing (6a), as we read in Ps 24: *He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false, and does not swear deceitfully. He will receive blessing from the Lord* (vv. 4-5).

He Who Perverts His Ways Will Be Known

The "wicked" (6b, 7b, 11b) causes harm to others (10a) and yet tries to hide his evil doing: he seeks to conceal the "violence" (6b, 11b) and "hatred" (12a) that he perpetrates. He does this, however, in vain because, as the central proverb affirms, his true identity and his actions "will be known" (9b). In this context one applies the evangelical saying about a tree that is recognized by its fruits: *every sound tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit...*

Thus you will know them by their fruits (Matt 7:17-18, 19). While the righteous chooses the way of life (9a), the wicked chooses the way that leads to destruction (8b, 10b). In such a context, the words of Ps 109 are fulfilled: *For he did not remember to show kindness, but pursued the poor and needy and the broken hearted to their death. He loved to curse; let a curse come on him! He did not like blessing, may it be far from him!* (vv. 16-17). For the evil that he was doing to others (Prov 10:6b, 9b, 10a, 11b, 12a), he cannot expect other recompense than the following: *His mischief returns upon his own head, and on his own pate his violence descends* (Ps 7:17).

Saul's Conversion as Heuristic Model: From Jewish Fundamentalist to Tolerant Evangelist

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Re-Casting Paul's Story in Acts and His Letters Introduction

Today the world is facing two kinds of socio-religious phenomena: on the one hand, radical pluralism with its correlate of absolute relativism; and, on the other, unmitigated fundamentalism. The Church ought to respond to these extremisms.

The one who manifests in his life the most renowned heuristic model is Paul who underwent a transformation: he who was a violent persecutor became a fervent yet tolerant evangelist.

What Saul¹ the fiery Jew became after his encounter with the Risen Jesus of Nazareth (cf. Acts 9:1-31; 22:1-21; 26:4-23) is

¹ It is important to note that the great apostle's name Saul, a common Hebrew name (Shā'ūl – שאול) which means "asked for", is only used in Acts (29 times), and not in his own writings. His other name Paul (small) was the Roman cognomen Paulus, which is used side by side with Saul in Acts (165 times), and in his letters (28 times) and only once in other NT writings (2Pet 3:15). After his encounter with the risen Jesus, the name Saul is used only once side by side with Paul (Acts 13:9), otherwise only the name Paul is used. In fact Luke uses the name Saul mostly in relation to the apostle's former stand against the followers of Jesus Christ or the Church, his encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus, and the immediate aftermath. Cf. R.D. WITHERUP, *101 Questions & Answers on Paul*, Mumbai: St. Paul 2008, 33-34; F.E. BRUCE, "Paul in Acts and Letters", in G.F. Hawthorne – R.P. Martin, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, Downers Grove – Leicester: InterVarsity 1993, 681-682. Some exegetes have suggested that the name Paul was adopted in honour of the conversion of Sergius Paulus. Others contend that the name Saul was a reminder of Paul's former life who persecuted the Church in a manner similar to King Saul's persecution of David, an ancestor of Jesus Christ. Now the name Paul, which means "small" or "little" in Latin, reminds the reader of David who was the "smallest" among

summarised in the words of the persecuted followers of Christ in Syria and Cilicia, “He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy” (Gal 1:23).

Questions that come to mind are: What really happened to Saul? Did he abandon his former rigid Jewish religious convictions?

Did he simply open his mind and heart to the ways of God in order to accommodate others? There are two reasons why the last question may provide us with the insight about what really happened: first, he abandoned his jihadic violence against people who differed from him in his convictions and faith and left those who opposed him to God’s requital (2Tim 4:14-18). Second, he redirected his former zeal to tireless missionary journeys, to unremitting proclamation of the Gospel, and to writing invaluable pastoral letters to the churches (cf. 1Tim 4:6-8). The reformed Paul could tolerate people of other beliefs, including his fellow Jews. His exhortation to the believers of Corinth who were married to unbelievers (1Cor 7:12-16) bears witness to this.²

his brothers (cf. 1Sam 16:11; Ps 151:1 LXX). And St. Augustine in his *De Spiritu et Littera*, 12, pointed out that Paul adopted this name to show that he considered himself little, the least of the apostles (1Cor 15:9). In short, Luke regarded Saul’s change of name to be connected with his conversion experience. Cf. S.M. McDONOUGH, “Small Change: Saul to Paul, Again”, *JBL* 121/2 (2006) 390-391; T.J. LEARY, “Paul’s Improper Name”, *NTS* 38 (1992) 467-469.

² This exhortation in 1Cor 7:12-16 is the so-called Pauline Privilege. The unbeliever (ἄπιστος) could be a Jew (cf. Acts 26:8) or a Gentile (cf. 1Cor 7:12, 13), a distinction which is not based on ethnicity. Paul overlooked the Jewish principle that Jews could not intermarry with the uncircumcised or unbelievers as long as the Jews in question had already been proselytized (cf. Gen 34:14ff). Cf. K.E. SOUTHWOOD, *Ethnicity and the Mixed Marriage Crisis in Ezra 9-10: An Anthropological Approach*, Oxford Theological Monographs, Oxford, New York: OUP 2012; A. LANGE, ““Your Daughters Do Not Give to Their Sons and Their Daughters Do Not Take for Your Sons” (Ezra 9, 12): Intermarriages in Ezra 9-10 and in the Pre-Maccabean Dead Sea Scrolls, Teil 2”, *BN* 139 (2008) 79-98. However, there are numerous examples in the OT where Jewish men took foreign women for wives without explicitly saying that they were proselytized: Abraham took Hagar, the Egyptian slave (Gen 16:3); Moses married Zipporah, a Midianite (Ex 2:21), and he also took an unnamed Cushite woman to be his wife (Numb 12:1). [From here on, English translations will follow the *New International Version* (NIV).]

Of all figures in the NT story of Christianity, there is no one who was more humanly well prepared for the missionary task than Saul. Born around 8-10 AD in Tarsus of Cilicia of devout diaspora Jewish parents, he was raised in strict Jewish traditions. There is no information about the names of his parents and relatives except the mention of his nephew (his sister's son) who cautioned him concerning the Jews' plot to ambush and kill him in Jerusalem (Acts 23:16). St. Jerome (340-420 AD) had recourse to the tradition that Saul's parents migrated from Giscalla in Galilee. It seems his parents were well-to-do: they could buy their Roman citizenship for 500 drachmae and afford to sponsor their son's formal Hellenistic education at Tarsus, a city that was famous for its Greek and Roman literature and philosophy. Paul himself frequently claimed to be a Roman citizen by birth (Acts 21:39; cf. 16:37, 38; 22:25-29; 23:27), probably because Tarsus was a Greco-Roman city since 70 BC.³ His parents were also able to send him to Jerusalem to study the Torah under the famous Rabbi Gamaliel I (the Elder) in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 22:3; cf. 5:34). Saul's formation gave him advantage over all others, for his versatility enabled him to relate to both Jews and Hellenists or Gentiles. Therefore Saul was a multilingual and multicultural person who could speak, read and write Hebrew, Greek and probably Latin (cf. Acts 21:37-40; 22:2; Phil 3:5).⁴

The Purpose of the Investigation

This brief paper seeks to understand the process that took place in Saul's mind and heart and learn from his experience in the face

³ Cf. F.E. BRUCE, "Paul, 681-682, says that probably Saul's father was a prominent public functionary, perhaps a military officer for the Roman empire, and he could have registered his son Saul as a Roman citizen with the name of Paulus. Though Paul was from an upper social class he earned his living by working as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3; cf. 1Cor 4:12 and 1Thess 2:9), which was considered as slavish and demeaning manual labour, in order to be free for the Gospel of Christ (1Cor 9:19 and 2Cor 11:7). Cf. R.F. HOCK, "Paul's Tent-making and the Problem of His Social Class", *JBL* 97 (1978) 560-564; K. HAACKER, "Paul's Life", in J.D.G. Dunn, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul*, Cambridge: CUP, 2003, 19-24.

⁴ For a detailed study of Paul's multicultural upbringing see K. EHRENSPERGER, *Paul at the Crossroads of Cultures, Theologizing in the Space-Between*, LNTS 456, London – New York: Bloomsbury, 2013.

of modern radicalism: the radical accommodation of one's beliefs to all religious or non-religious people, i.e., radical pluralism; and violence against those of contrasting religious convictions, i.e., fundamentalism. Saul's story offers a wonderful lesson for modern extreme religious fundamentalists who seek to violently destroy other faiths because they lack the courage to confront their own systems of belief with foreign ones.⁵

As a pure monotheist Saul would not have confused God with what is not God.⁶ He poses a contrast to the phenomenon of extreme religious fundamentalism that has been on the rise in recent times among major religions: some Christian sects, for example, have rejected the mainstream interpretation of Sacred Scripture and have even violently attacked those who do not share their principles and ideas.⁷ Muslims, too, have witnessed the rise of extremely violent adherents to the Quranic creed who cling zealously to their own interpretation of the Qur'an,⁸ for example:

⁵ The author is maintaining the distinction between "faith" and "belief" elucidated in the Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, n. 7, published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in the year 2000 (Ed.)

⁶ Cf. D.E. OAKMAN, "The Perennial Relevance of Saint Paul: Paul's Understanding of Christ and a Time of Radical Pluralism", *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 39/1 (2009) 6.

⁷ Christian fundamentalism is rooted in improper and illegitimate interpretation of the Scriptures. V. PIZZUTO, "Religious Terror and the Prophetic Voice of Reason: Unmasking Our Myths of Righteousness", *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 37 (2007) 49, rightly pointed out that although Islam refers to both Jews and Christians as "People of the Book," among the three great monotheistic faiths there remains a significant distinction within Christianity, namely, that the core and center of Christianity is not a holy "Book." Nor is it a symbol, a ritual or any particular form of religious practice. Rather, standing at the center of Christianity is the divine person with a human nature – specifically, the historical person, Jesus of Nazareth. Quite apart from the Christian predication of Jesus as the "Christ," which in itself can be demonstrated as a subjective faith response to divine revelation, and the objective testimony (witness) presented in John's Gospel, the theological implications of this claim are nevertheless undeniable: God has been revealed par excellence in a divine person with a human nature, nota sacred text. The Bible thus can never be mistaken to supplant that revelation, but must always remain a testament to that more central "embodied" truth.

⁸ The *Sunni* is one of the two great Muslim traditions who regard the four first Caliphs as legitimate successors of Muhammad and emphasize

the Sunnis and the Shi'ites in Iraq; Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan; the Al Shabab in Somalia; and the Boko Haram in Nigeria. And even India has seen the rise of Hindu fundamentalism and intolerance to other faiths.

An inquiry into Paul's mindset before he encountered the risen Christ on the way to Damascus could shed light on the reasons behind the modern intolerance of people towards those who believe differently than they do. As a strict observer of the Law, Saul believed in the teaching of Lev 24:10-23, especially v. 16, which says, "If anyone curses his God, he will be held responsible; anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD must be put to death. The entire assembly must stone him. Whether an alien or native-born, when he blasphemes the Name, he must be put to death." This was known as apostasy (ἁρῆσις). The public authorities prosecuted those accused of apostasy (Deut 13:15-16; cf. Lev 20:2) and, after gathering evidence from informants (Deut 13:9), they sentenced the offender to death by stoning. The reason why apostates and blasphemers suffered execution or exile was the belief that their offense brought down divine wrath on the whole society in the form of tragedies such as drought, plague, or military defeat. Even individuals like Phinehas could take the initiative and enforce the law in order to appease the wrath that the community was afraid God might unleash (Numb 25:1-8; cf. Ps 106:27-30).⁹

the importance of Sunna as the basis of the law. Their counterpart, the *Shi'ites*, on the other hand, regard Ali, the son-in-law of Muhammad, as the legitimate successor of Muhammad, and disregard the three Caliphs who succeeded him. Most Islamic radical fundamentalism is promoted by the non-practice of *ijtihad* or independent investigation that has allowed Moslems to draw conclusions based not only on continuity with past teachings and legal precedents, but also on novel insights gleaned from their own study of the sacred texts. For example, the interpretation of Sura 2:216ff that calls for Jihad against infidels and apostates. Cf. V. PIZZUTO, "Religious Terror", 50. As I. MANJI, *The Trouble with Islam: A Muslim's Call for Reform in Her Faith*, New York, NY: St. Martin's Press 2003, 30, observed, "The trouble with Islam is that while most Christians and Jews are aware of, and even celebrate intellectual and exegetical diversity within their traditions, by contrast Muslims treat the Koran as a document to imitate rather than interpret, thus suffocating our capacity to think for ourselves".

⁹ D.N. FREEDMAN, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, V, New York: Doubleday 1999, 199, c1992, 548; cf. J.J. COLLINS, "The Zeal of Phinehas: Bible and the Legitimation of Violence", *JBL* 122 (2003) 3-21.

Similarly Saul considered the followers of Jesus of Nazareth who believed in his Name as the Son of God (cf. Mk 14:61-66 par.; Acts 2:38) to be blasphemers who were to be put to death (cf. Acts 26:11). His expression, “I made them blaspheme” could mean that he made them declare that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God, which was tantamount to admitting a god other than YHWH (cf. Ex 20:3; 23:13; Deut 5:7-9). This was accordingly a blasphemy that was punishable by death (cf. Deut 18:20).¹⁰ Admittedly the mystery of the Sacred Trinity was incomprehensible to any fervent Jew (cf. Mk 14:61-64 par; Jn 10:30-39). Consequently, strict monotheists would consider Christians as blasphemers. And if they were not open to God’s mysterious ways, they became violent opponents like Saul.

Judeo-Christians were subsequently known as *minim*, heretics who interpolated Jewish faith and tradition with foreign, unacceptable beliefs.¹¹ A heretic is distinguished from an apostate in that, although one holds beliefs which are contrary to orthodox

¹⁰ L.T. JOHNSON, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina 5, Collegetville: Liturgical Press 1992, 434, reads Acts 26:11 differently, and thus twists the meaning. He understands that it was the punishing of the disciples of Christ that led them to blaspheme. But if this was the case, whom were they blaspheming? Was it Jesus Christ or YHWH? If Paul is narrating the story as a Christian (and hence expressing the Messianist point of view), then they were blaspheming Christ by being forced to denounce their faith in him as the Messiah. In contrast, one can read the two actions as independent: thus Saul was using various means to get the believers to declare that Jesus Christ is divine, i.e., the Son of God, and thus incurring charges of blasphemy on account of the Jewish belief in only one God, YHWH (cf. Mk 12:32 par.; Lk 5:21 par.; Mt 26:63-66 par.; Jn 10:33, 36).

¹¹ The Hebrew word “מִנִּים - *minim*” derived from the preposition particle “מִן, apart from, away from, out of, separate from”, which means those who separated from the Jewish faith and traditions. Christians were therefore regarded as a religious sect (αἵρεσις) or party of the Nazoreans (ναζωραίων αἰρέσεως) separated from Judaism (Acts 24:5, 14; cf. 28:22; cf. 5:17; 26:5; 1Cor 11:19; Gal 5:20; 2Pet 2:1). In fact, this is behind Paul’s ironic phrase “Gentile sinners - ἔθνων ἁμαρτωλοί” when he was defending himself before the pillars in Jerusalem (Gal 2:15). The antagonism between early Christians and Jews became tense enough that the Jewish religious leaders who met at Jamnia (ca. 85 AD) inserted a 12th petition in their daily prayer (Amidah) condemning Christians (*birkat haminin*). Cf. H. SCHLIER, “αἵρεσις”, *TDNT* I, 181-182.

doctrines, he/she does not renounce his/her religion and often believes that he/she represents the true tradition. Therefore, a heretic still considered himself/herself as a Jew, although he/she did not adhere to all that was officially taught by the religious authorities. But once they were investigated and proved to be apostates, they were banned (*haram* - חרם) from the orthodox assembly (Ex 22:19). Thus Paul would have been considered as a heretic and not an apostate since he still believed in some tenets of the Jewish faith (cf. Acts 23:6; Rom 9:3).

According to the Talmud and Rabbinic literature there were already up to 24 groups of *minim* before the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. The most renowned among them were those who denied the unity of God, believed in the existence of an independent divinity of evil, envisioned a cruel or jester God, denied the uniqueness of Israel as a chosen people, denied physical resurrection, and failed to believe in the coming of the Messiah.¹² For this reason Gunther Bornkamm regarded Luke's report as anachronistic that Paul went to the Sanhedrin (the chief priests) of Jerusalem to ask for letters that legally authorized him to go and hunt Christians in Damascus and bring them to Jerusalem in chains (Acts 9:1-2, 21; 26:10-12). There is no historical evidence that the Jewish religious authorities had such power outside of what is said in the Scriptures.¹³

¹² *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Volume 8, Encyclopaedia Judaica Jerusalem, Israel: Keter Publishing House Jerusalem Ltd 1996, 358-359.

¹³ Cf. G. BORNKAMM, *Paul*, New York: Harper & Row 1971, 15-16; L.T. JOHNSON, *The Acts*, 162. J. MURPHY-O'CONNOR, *Paul: His Story*, Oxford – New York: OUP 2004, 19, says that Paul acted on his own initiative without authorization from the official Jewish authorities. This position is certainly based on an interpretation of Paul's silence whereby he does not mention the letters from the high priest (and the whole council of elders) as is reported by Luke in Acts 9:1-2 and 22:5. Perhaps Luke's indication that Paul did seek such authorization was one of Luke's polemical strategies in Acts to highlight the intensity of the opposition and persecution that faced the primitive Church (cf. Acts 8:1). Moreover, J. Murphy thinks that Paul was on his way back from Tarsus in the midst of a caravan, and not that he was going to Damascus to imprison Christians. This is again contrary to Luke's account in Acts 9:1-2 par., especially 26:12 where he explicitly reports that he was on his way to Damascus. Moreover, Acts 9:8 does not say that his companions led him back to Damascus after the incident.

On the contrary F.E. Bruce thinks that Paul may have indeed received letters from the Jewish religious authorities since there was an old imperial permission from Ptolemy and confirmed by Julius Caesar to hunt down all runaway religious dissenters from other provinces and bring them to the high priest in Jerusalem for prosecution (cf. 1Macc 15:16-24).¹⁴ Although Saul was probably sent particularly to arrest Jewish believers who fled from Judea as the persecutions flared up, the Gentiles who followed Jesus suffered as well.

Methodology

The *status questionis* of the theme of Paul's conversion shows that quite a good number of writers have investigated the life of Saul the Jew and Paul the Christian; and they have done so from a variety of perspectives.¹⁵ This article revisits the topic and seeks to understand how Paul's experience could offer an example for

¹⁴ F.E. BRUCE, *The Book of the Acts*, NICNT, rev. ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1988, 180-181; cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.192-95; J.A. FITZMYER, *The Acts of the Apostles*, AB 31, New York, NY: Doubleday 1998, 423.

¹⁵ Some of the recent studies about Paul's life can be put into three categories:

- (1) *His Jewish life*: C. FOCANT, "Paul, le judaïsme et la Torah. Discussion sur une nouvelle perspective," *RevTheolLouv* 42 (I, 2011) 35-52; G. TURNER, "Paul and the Old Testament – His Legacy and Ours," *NewBlackfr* 91 (2010) 128-141; P. DEBANNE, "Paul face au Judaïsme de son temps et de son passé. L'émergence d'une nouvelle circoncision," *ScEs* 60 (2008) 258-72; T.G. CASEY – T. JUSTIN, eds., *Paul's Jewish Matrix*, Roma: PIB, 2011.
- (2) *Revelation of Christ to him or His Conversion*: J. AWWAD, "From Saul to Paul: The Conversion of Paul the Apostle", *NESTTheolRev* 32 (I, 2011) 3-14; P.-M. BEAUDE, *Saint Paul. L'œuvre de métamorphose*, Paris: Cerf 2011.
- (3) *His life as a Christian*: B. SCHMISEK, "Paul's Vision of the Risen Lord," *BibTheolBull* 41 (2011) 76-83; D.A. CAMPBELL, "Galatians 5:11; Evidence of an Early Law-observant Mission by Paul?", *NTS* 57 (2011) 325-347; D.C. ORTLUND, "Zeal without Knowledge: For What Did Paul Criticize His Fellow Jews in Romans 10:2-3," *WestTheolJourn* 73 (2011) 23-37; G. MASSINELLI, "Christ and the Law in Romans 10:4", *CBQ* 77 (2015) 707-726; L. LEGRAND, "Paul's Theology in the Context of Early Christian Pluralism," *Jnanadeepa* 12 (2009) 52-65; R.D. WITHERUP, "Ministry in a Multicultural Context: What Can St. Paul Teach Us?" *PastRev* 6 (2010) 16-21.

Christians who are confronted with the modern phenomenon of religious intolerance and radicalism.

The first part of the investigation will analyse those texts that contain Saul's life of faith as a Jew; then the focus turns to Paul's life as a Christian. The investigation concludes with a contrast between the two configurations of his life experiences. This part is contained in the biography that Luke offers in Acts 9:1-31; 22:1-21; 26:4-23; and in Paul's own autobiographical account in Gal 1:11-2:21 and Phil 3:4-11.

The second part deals with Paul's spiritual journey by looking into the inner spiritual and psychological processes at work in his life, processes that are traceable in his letters and in Acts.

The third part, anchored in the explication to be found in Eph 2:11-22, discusses Paul the tolerant evangelist as an example for Christians in a religiously intolerant world.

The study will conclude with an overview.

Semantic Analysis

For convenience' sake, it is important to define some key terms and expressions which are used in this study.

The first term is "fundamentalism," which is a strict adherence to a set of basic ideas or principles at the exclusion of anything that may seem at variance with them. The second term is "conservative" which, while ordinarily referring to a mindset that adheres to traditional principles with unambiguous fidelity without really generating an antagonistic view towards other mindsets and systems, will be used in this essay interchangeably with the term fundamentalist to mean adherence to the basics, that is to say, to the traditional tenets or values of a philosophy or belief that command their allegiance.¹⁶

Both positions are essentially positive, but they become negative when they are taken to the extreme. Conservatives

¹⁶ Hence conservatives who have had an impact on the dynamism of history through the centuries such as Francis of Assisi, Bernard of Clairvaux, Catherine of Siena, John Bosco and Mother Teresa of Kolkata remained tenaciously faithful to Gospel principles in a truly conservative fashion but yet manifested radical openness – and a radical gentleness – towards people who lived by different belief systems than theirs. (Ed.)

become extremists when they protect their positions by physical and/or oral violence. Liberals become extremists when they protect their positions by physical and/or oral violence.¹⁷ In most cases extreme fundamentalists are single-minded and do not seek to learn alternative or diverse ideas or principles. They flatly reject them without rational objective reasons. The rejection may take the form of violence or ostracism when they fail to understand and compromise with the other. Toleration, accommodation, or absorption¹⁸ are not in their vocabulary.

Saul became extremist when he began to attack the followers of Jesus Christ verbally by violent language (cf. Acts 26:11) and physically by violent acts (cf. Gal 2:13; Phil 3:6; Acts 26:9-10).¹⁹ Extremists do not only protect their beliefs and values but they attack those who adhere to diverse values and beliefs. Saul was a violent extremist against Christians, but after encountering the risen Christ on the road to Damascus he became a moderate fundamentalist, that is to say, a conservative, for he used strong language to fend off those itinerant preachers, that is to say, the false apostles who were scoffing at his apostolic authority and teaching and therefore misleading the believers of his churches (cf. 2Cor 11:1-15; Gal 1:6-9; Phil 3:2-3, 18-19). He even had a word or two of criticism for Peter who seemed to be misleading believers

¹⁷ A liberal who adopts a pluralistic position towards other mindsets, systems and ideologies may still manifest a fundamentalist intolerance towards those who are conservative. One can simply recall the behaviour of pro-abortion activists who participated in gatherings sponsored by the United Nations. When Mother Teresa, for example, targeted abortion as a destroyer of world peace, the public reaction of the pro-abortion liberals reflected that haughtiness, intolerance, and tendency to ridicule that marks those who refuse to accept others who are at variance with their beliefs. The target of the radical liberal's violence is, often enough, the conservative who, like Mother Teresa, gently clarifies the parameters of truth in all its objectivity. (Ed.)

¹⁸ The word "absorption" was used by V. PIZZUTO, "Religious Terror", 53 denoting the capacity to understand and accept the other after the example of Jesus Christ who willingly died on the cross in order to reconcile all, including his enemies.

¹⁹ See G. JOHN – F.L. GIBSON, "Violent Acts and Violent Language in the Apostle Paul", in S. Matthews – F.L. Gibson, eds., *Violence in the New Testament*, London: Clark 2005, 13-21.

by his words and conduct at the Council of Jerusalem (cf. Gal 2:11-14).²⁰

Paul exhorted his faithful not to mingle with unbelievers. To this end, he took recourse in Lev 26:11 and Isa 52:11, but only to protect the faithful from the worldly corruption that might typify unbelievers (cf. 2Cor 6:14-18). However, he never taught the followers of Christ to use violence against those who held different beliefs or values (cf. 1Cor 10:27, 32; Phil 2:12-16); rather he exhorted them to consider themselves as ambassadors of reconciliation (cf. 2Cor 5:19-20).

Part One: Saul’s Earlier Life

The inquiry about Paul’s life who before his conversion was known as Saul requires the study of two types of texts: texts that inform us of his earlier life before his conversion; and those that speak about his former way of life after his decision to believe in Jesus Christ. The most reliable information about Paul’s early life as a Jew is found in his autobiographical accounts in 2Cor 11:22, Gal 1:11–2:21, and Phil 3:4-11. A secondary source of information is from Luke in the Acts of the Apostles 7:58; 8:3; 9:1-31; 11:25-30; 22:1-21; and 26:4-23.²¹ These two clusters of texts are the main

²⁰ These itinerant false apostles or preachers were identified with Jewish Christians (Judaizers) who came from Jerusalem claiming to had been sent by the pillars, like James (Gal 2:12). Cf. J. MURPHY-O’CONNOR, *Paul: His Story*, 109-114, 132-136, 146-147, 169-170, 188-190; W. NGOWI, *Paulo na Nyaraka Zake*, Morogoro: Salvatorianum 1999, 83; J.D.G. DUNN, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary, Peabody: Hendrickson 1993, 11.

²¹ Most scholars of Pauline literature agree that Paul’s own story of his early life in his letters, which he wrote between 50-62 AD is more reliable than Luke’s theological history in Acts which presumably he wrote later around 80-85 AD but perhaps earlier, since several verses in Acts indicate that the Temple was still standing at the time of writing, and since the abrupt ending of the book at the time Paul had completed two years in Rome would indicate a date of composition of 64 AD. Cf. J. MURPHY-O’CONNOR, *Paul: A Critical Life*, Oxford – N.Y: OUP 1996, 6, 53; P.A. CUNNINGHAM, *Jewish Apostle to the Gentiles*, Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications 1986, 16; D. MARGUERAT, ed., *Reception of Paulinism in Acts: Réception du paulinisme dans les Actes des apôtres*, BETL 229, Leuven – Paris: Peeters 2009. Canonically the book of Acts is understood as belonging to ancient

sources of information about his conversion from a zealous Jew to a zealous Christian: Luke's three versions of his conversion which contain the historical facts of the event on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-31; 22:1-21; 26:4-23); and two autobiographical excerpts which contain Saul's inner feelings and understanding of the event (Gal 1:11–2:21 and Phil 3:4-11).

Saul the Jew

Luke indicates the importance of Saul's conversion to his readers by repeating the narrative three times (Acts 9:1-31; 22:1-21 and 26:4-23). The texts are more often in accord with each other than they are at variance with each other about the essential information. Probably the variations could be due to Luke's theological perspectives, or perhaps were already present in the original sources he used, one of which could have been Paul himself. The three accounts can be divided into three parts: (a) Paul's former life; (b) the Christophany on the road to Damascus; and (c) the consequences of that Christophany on his life.

Acts 9:1-31 is Luke's account; Acts 22:1-21 is Saul's account which he includes within his defence before the tribune and the people of Jerusalem; and Acts 26:4-23, his defence before the

historiography, therefore more historically reliable, though hypothetically it does not exclude fiction. Cf. R.I. PERVO, "Israel's Heritage and Claims Upon the Genre(s) of Luke and Acts", in Moessner, ed., *Jesus and the Heritage of Israel*, Philadelphia: Trinity Press 1999, 127-143; D.E. AUNE, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press 1997, 139-140. But there are other contemporary students of Scripture who have proposed other genres such as ancient Novel, Drama, Epic or other sub-genres. Not to be discounted are those who have regarded the book of Acts as *sui generis*, and thus reject the arbitrary identification of the book with any specific genre. cf. D. MARGUERAT, *The First Christian Historian: Writing the 'Acts of the Apostles'*, SNTSMS 121, Cambridge: CUP 2002. For a comprehensive study of the question, see T. PENNER, "Madness in the Method? The Acts of the Apostles in Current Study", *Currents in Biblical Research* 2/2 (2004) 233-241; T. PENNER – C.V. STICHELE, eds., *Contextualizing Acts: Lucan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse*, SLB SymS 20, Atlanta: SBL; Leiden: Brill 2003; T.E. PHILLIPS, "The Genre of Acts: Moving Toward a Consensus?", *Currents in Biblical Research* 4/3 (2006) 365-396.

crowds in the presence of King Agrippa, which is an account that includes his personal narration of what happened.

a) Acts 22:1-5 and 26:4-11 contain information concerning Saul's former life which is partly found in his autobiographical allusions in Phil 3:4-6 and Gal 1:13-14, but not in Acts 9. He was a diaspora Jew, born at Tarsus in Cilicia and brought to Jerusalem to study under Gamaliel I, the most renowned rabbi of the time. He was formed according to the strictest manner of his ancestors, as a Pharisee and as a believer zealous for God. He persecuted the Way (the Name of Jesus of Nazareth) to death, binding and delivering both men and women for imprisonment.

b) Common historical facts about the Christophany on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-9; 22:6-11; 26:12-18): He was commissioned with letters by Jerusalem's high priest – *and by the whole council of elders*, Acts 22:5a – to arrest disciples of Jesus Christ who were to be found in the synagogues at Damascus and then to bring them to Jerusalem (Acts 9:1-2; 22:5-6a; 26:12). Ananias' words indicate that Saul was coming to Damascus for the first time (Acts 9:13-14). As he approached Damascus – *at noon* (Acts 22:6; 26:13) – a light from heaven flashed about him, and he fell to the ground (Acts 9:3; 26:13-14). Saul heard the voice calling him *in Hebrew* (Acts 26:14b) and asking him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Even though he heard his name uttered and the question that issued forth, he did not see the Lord (Acts 9:4; 22:7; 26:14). Immersed within the overwhelming power of the light, he asked his question, "Who are you, Lord?"

Taken at face value, this question indicates that he did not immediately associate the voice with the Risen Lord. Probably "Lord" here had the common sense of "Master", i.e. one who is powerful and superior (Acts 9:5a; 22:8a). The Lord identified himself as Jesus whom he was persecuting (Acts 9:5b; 22:8b). The name Jesus in Hebrew/Aramaic (*Yehôshua'* - יהושע) means "the Lord saves" (cf. Mt 1:21) and indeed was very common. But the additional qualification "whom you are persecuting" brought Saul to the realization that it was *Jesus of Nazareth* as clarified in Acts 22:8 who was now believed to be the Messiah or the Christ (cf. Acts 26:9) and indeed was the one who was speaking to him.

Saul was accompanied by collaborators (Acts 9:7; 22:9), but they are mentioned only in passing. This would seem to indicate that they are not so important in the story. Even Luke seems not to have considered them to be eye witnesses because their role seems to be ambiguous: in Acts 9:7 they heard the voice but could see no one, whereas in Acts 22:9 they saw the light but did not hear the voice. And interestingly enough, nothing is said about their response to the event except that they were stupefied. They led Saul by hand to Damascus (Acts 9:8c; 22:11b), and then they are no longer mentioned.

The effect of the light on Saul was extraordinary. He fell to the ground (Acts 9:4a; 22:7a) and was rendered blind (Acts 9:8b) *for three days* – this is mentioned exclusively in 9:9a; and only in 22:11a does Saul explain that *it was because of the brightness of the light*. Again only the narrative in Acts 9:9b says he *could not eat and drink for three days*. Here Paul is portrayed as going through a transitional period of fasting which is understood as preparation for receiving a new revelation (cf. Ex 34:28; Deut 9:9; 10:2-3) or as repentance which is a sign of turning away from evil ways (cf. Jer 14:12; Neh 1:4; Joel 1:14; Jonah 3:8). However, the “three days” in which Saul was blind and could not drink and eat may remind the reader of the three days the risen Lord stayed in the tomb to be followed by his resurrection.²²

The encounter with the risen Lord was a kind of death for Saul and all that he stood for. He would rise to a new life in Christ after receiving baptism from Ananias. And it is only the word of Saul in Acts 22:10 that indicates that *Saul asked the Lord what to do*; Paul’s request before the Lord is not found in Acts 9:6.

²² Cf. L.T. JOHNSON, *The Acts*, 164, 218-219. Nonetheless, it seems difficult to interpret the three days during which Saul could not eat as “fasting” since it is not clear whether it was voluntary or not as it immediately followed the loss of sight (Acts 9:9). Rather, it is more attractive to see it as “death” in imitation of Jesus’ three days in the tomb before he rose, which tallies with Luke’s inclination to portray his main protagonists after the image of Christ (cf. Lk 22:16, 30) similar to the parallelism between Jesus’ Passion and the death of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60) and Peter’s arrest, imprisonment and escape from prison (Acts 12:1ff). See footnote 45 below.

The Lord did not disclose his mission to Paul but to Ananias who, presumably, relayed it to Paul (Acts 9:15-16). In Acts 22, the Lord disclosed his mission to him in a vision in the temple after he returned to Jerusalem, whereas in Acts 26:15-19, the Lord disclosed his mission to him during his call. Then Jesus told him to rise from the ground and continue his journey and enter Damascus (Acts 9:6a; 22:10a); and there he would be told what was reserved for him (Acts 9:6b; 22:10b).

c) The aftermath of the event and the meeting with Ananias (Acts 9:10-19; 22:12-16): Ananias is mentioned for the first time as a disciple who lived in Damascus.²³ Paul described him as a respected pious Jew who lived according to the Law (Acts 22:12). The Lord appeared to him in a vision and sent him to Straight Street to the house of Judas²⁴ where Saul stayed and was praying and had a vision about the encounter with Ananias and about what he was to do (Acts 9:10-11). Ananias objects to the divine mission because of the community’s fear of Saul; but the Lord informs Ananias that Saul is his chosen instrument who will carry his name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; and that he will suffer for the sake of the name he tried to erase (Acts 9:12-16).

The parallel text of 22:12-15 contains unique details, for example, that Ananias was a popular Jew who lived according to the Law. This text, however, does not contain a report of his vision of the Lord and the subsequent dialogue. Instead this text highlights the fact that Ananias informed Saul that the God of their fathers appointed him to know the divine will and to see the Just One. This particular text, coming as it does after the Acts 9 passage, does not report that Saul already saw the risen Lord. Ananias says that God has chosen Saul to see Jesus Christ “the *Just One*” – this overhauls

²³ The name Ananias - Ἀνανίας (Acts 5:1; 23:2; 24:1) was a common Hebrew name *Hananyah* - חַנַּנְיָהּ in 1Chron 3:19; Jer 28:1; etc.; and probably Ananiah of Neh 3:23 and 11:32 as well.

²⁴ It is not known whether this Judas was the one who was also called Barsabbas and who together with Silas were known as prophets in Acts 15:22, 27, 32, and were chosen by the Apostles and elders during the Council of Jerusalem to accompany Paul to take the letter to the Christian communities in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia.

Saul's former image that Jesus is an impostor – to hear his voice and to serve in future ministry for all people as a witness.

Ananias obeyed God's will – he *laid his hands on him* (Acts 9:17; not in 22:13) – and informed him that the Lord had sent him in order to restore his sight and *be filled with the Holy Spirit*, something that was new to Saul. Saul regained his sight *after something like scales fell off from his eyes* (not in 22:13) and then received baptism and regained his physical strength after taking food (Acts 9:18-19).

Saul the Zealous Jew

The vivid description of Saul's encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (Gal 1:13-2:21; cf. Acts 9:1-31 par.) is packed with symbolic details that not only refer to his past life, but also demonstrate the significance he perceived in the event: He had believed that the Jewish faith or the Law was the only means of salvation, and the Christian faith was an abomination that had to be purged (Acts 8:1, 3). The Jews believed that the Law was the way and purpose of salvation, it was the path of righteousness (cf. Phil 3:6); therefore, it was an unspeakable offence for Christians to proclaim Jesus to be the Saviour, the Light, the Truth, and the Way of salvation (cf. Acts 5:31). This robbing of the Law's role was a blasphemy that deserved to be utterly rejected, even violently. Paul had thought that a choice must be made: Jesus or the Law. There could be no compromise. It was a question of knowing whether salvation came to men by Christ or by the Law.²⁵

Saul strictly followed the traditions of his fathers (cf. Gal 1:14), traditions which Jesus severely criticised in the Gospels. Such traditions included:

- ritual ablutions (cf. Acts 21:24); *koshrut* or special food laws (Lev 11; 2Macc 7; cf. Mk 7:5 par.;²⁶ Acts 10:12-15; 11:8-9; Gal 2:12; Rom 14:14-15, 20);²⁷

²⁵ See the discussion of the meaning of Way (דרך) below.

²⁶ The abbreviation par. is henceforth used as an abbreviation for parallel synoptic text(s).

²⁷ It is understood that even diaspora Jews kept the food laws (cf. Judith 10:5; 12:2, 9f, 19; 13:8; Tobit 1:10f; Esther 4:17; 14:17). Cf. P.E. SANDERS, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*, Philadelphia 1983, 23-28, 272-73.

- the corban rules, i.e., dedication of things to God (cf. Mt 15:1-9 par.; Jn 2:6; 13:1-13);²⁸
- circumcision on the eighth day as sign of being part of Israel's covenantal relationship with God and the accompanying rite of purification (Phil 3:5; cf. Lk 1:59; cf. Gen 17:11-27; 21:4; Josh 5; cf. Lk 2:21-22);
- the strict keeping of the Sabbath commandment regardless of other urgent charitable demands (cf. Mt 12:1-14);
- their multiplication of the commandments and divine decrees (cf. Mt 23:1-4, 23-24);
- swearing and taking of oaths;
- sense of holiness and cleanliness (cf. Mt 5:33-37; 23:16-22, 25-26);
- maintaining the *lex talionis* (Mt 5:38-42; cf. Ex 21:23-25; Lev 24:20);
- the tradition of loving their fellow Jews and hating their enemies (Mt 5:43-47; cf. Deut 15:2-3);
- the practice of divorce (Mt 5:31-32; 19:3-9; cf. Deut 24:1, 3);
- separation between men and women in public (cf. Jn 4:9);
- the stoning of people caught in adultery (Lev 20:10; Jn 8:3-5; cf. Mt 1:18-19);
- an ostentatious manner of praying and doing charitable works or other acts of righteousness (cf. Mt 5:1-8, 16-18; 23:5-7, 27-28).

Not only Jesus' teaching but also his actions provoked opposition, for example, the cleansing of the Temple (cf. Mk 11:15-18 par.). It was probably because of the radicalism of his actions and teaching (cf. Mt 5-7) together with his vehement criticism of the Jewish interpretation of the Law, the so-called traditions (cf. Mk 7:1-15 par; Mt 15:1-14; 23:1-39), that led the Jewish religious authorities and Saul to regard Jesus as a Jewish heretic who had to be stopped at all costs (cf. Mk 11:18; 14:1; Mt 12:14; Lk 19:47; Jn 5:18; 7:19, 20, 25; 8:37, 40).

²⁸ The word Corban is a Hebrew word (*Qorban* - קָרְבָּן) which means an offering or oblation to God (cf. Lev 1:2, 3, 10, 14; 2:1; etc.). It was forbidden to use a thing that was *qorban* for secular purposes. Cf. P.E. SANDERS, *Paul, the Law*, 54-57.

Saul boasted to have excelled in Judaism as a Pharisee, as one who was a fervent student of the law under the famous Gamaliel I (Acts 22:3; cf. 5:34).²⁹ In his letter to the Galatians, Paul reminded his readers of his known earlier Jewish zeal for the traditions of his fathers that led him to oppose the Church of God and to persecute it with the intention to destroy it (Gal 1:13-14). To the Philippians he bragged about himself as a tenacious Jew, “of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the Law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless” (Phil 3:5-6). For the Jew a devout study of the scriptures was indicative of one’s spiritual growth and maturity that gained him respect and qualification as a rabbi.³⁰

As a Pharisee, Paul believed in the existence of the afterlife, angels and in the resurrection of the dead; the Sadducees, on the other hand, did not (cf. Acts 23:6). For this reason, he was perhaps in a better position to believe that the person that spoke to him on the road to Damascus, the person who identified himself as the risen Christ, was not a deception or an illusion.³¹

²⁹ Some academicians like Joachim Jeremias, “Paulus als Hillelit,” 88-94, have doubted that Paul was Gamaliel’s disciple because he constantly used the Greek OT (LXX) in his teachings, instead of the Hebrew text. Cf. H.D. BETZ, “Paul”, *ABD* V, 193. It is also difficult to understand how a student of the moderate school of Gamaliel (cf. Acts 5:34-39) could end up becoming a fierce fundamentalist against Christians.

³⁰ Cf. Mt 23:2-7; Acts 23:2-5. The Lukan expression “υἱὸς Φαρισαίων – “son of Pharisees” in the plural (Acts 23:6) – is probably a Hebraism (ben/bar Pharisees), which simply means an adherent or member of the Pharisaic guild, since there is no evidence that Saul’s father was a Pharisee since Pharisees did not live outside Jerusalem, except for the purpose of some short official errand. Other examples: sons of Israel, which means belonging to the covenanted people of God (cf. Mt 12:27); Boanerges - sons of Thunder (Mk 3:17); Barnabas – son of Encouragement (Acts 4:36); sons of Prophets – students of Prophets. The RSV translation demonstrates this literary phenomenon: “a son of Pharisees” *contra* NKJ and NIV. Cf. D.W. DAVIES, *Jewish and Pauline Studies*, Philadelphia; J. MURPHY-O’CONNOR, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 56, 59; *IBID.*, *Paul: His Story*, 11-12; H.F. WEISS, “Φαρισαῖος”, *TDNT* VIII, 346; IX, 46; J. BERGMAN – H. RINGGREN, “רַבִּי”, *TDOT* II, 147, 152.

³¹ Cf. J. MURPHY-O’CONNOR, *Paul: His Story*, 23.

His zeal (ζήλος) for the Law and the traditions of the fathers (πατρικῶν μου παραδόσεων) was rooted in the pride and certainty he had in the salvific power of the Law.³² This led Paul to become a violent opponent of the new Way, i.e., of Christianity. His zeal was probably inspired by the religious audacity of his predecessors such as that of Phinehas who was quite known to the people of his time (Num 25:1-18), and that of Mattathias in 1Macc 2:23-28, who, as one ready to stand against the imperial Antiochus Epiphanes, rallied the devout Jews against his policies. Similar examples of zealots for the Law and the covenant are found in the OT: Simeon and Levi (Gen 34); Elijah, who killed the priests of Baal on Mount Horeb (1Kgs 18:40; 19:10, 14); and King Jehu, who slaughtered the ungodly family of Ahab and the priests of Baal (2Kgs 10:16-28).

Several cases of violent zeal against individuals without formal trial are also reported elsewhere in the NT: the frenzy of mobs of Jews who wanted to stone or kill Jesus because of his statements which they considered blasphemous (Lk 4:28-30; John 5:18; 7:19, 25; 8:59; 10:31-33); the attempt to stone the woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-11); the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:57-60); and the unbridled crowds who wanted to kill Paul himself (Acts 9:23-24; 14:5; 21:27-36). These reported incidents of violent attacks by zealots indicate that these people, including Saul, were not necessarily enrolled in formally organized groups. Rather, they simply took their own initiative to become vigilantes of the Law and the traditions of the fathers (cf. Acts 8:1, 3; 9:1-2). Organized zealot groups would not appear until just before the great War in 66-70 AD.³³

³² T.L. DONALDSON, "Zealot and Convert: The Origin of Paul's Christ-Torah Antithesis", *CBQ* 51 (1989), 673, described this kind of zeal as "a willingness to use violence against any – Jew, Gentiles, or the wicked in general – who were contravening, opposing, or subverting the Torah. Further, a zealot was willing to suffer and die for the sake of the Torah, even to die at one's own hands." Cf. T. SELAND, "Saul of Tarsus and Early Zealotism: Reading Gal 1:13-14 in Light of Philo's Writings", *Biblica* 83 (2002) 454.

³³ It is disputed whether Saul belonged to a formal group of zealots of his time or not. Some scholars have maintained that he was a member of a group of zealots who defended the Torah and Jewish Traditions. Among them were freedom fighters and extreme nationalists like the Sicarii: J. TAYLOR, "Why did Paul Persecute the Church?", in G.N. Stanton – G.G. Stroumsa, eds.,

Encounter with the Risen Christ: A Revelatory Prophetic Call

Paul's autobiography indicates that the incident on the road to Damascus had an indelible impact on his life and was the foundation of his mission to the Gentiles. He affirmed that the risen Lord appeared to him, and enlisted himself among those who saw him (1Cor 15:8). In Gal 1:13-17 he says, "...But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles..." (vv. 15-16). Commenting on this text, Krister Stendhal noted that the apostle describes his experience along the contours of prophetic vocation genre after the model of Isaiah 49:1, 5 and Jeremiah 1:5. In the same line Josef Blank explained the text Gal 1:15f within the category of "prophetic vocation." He considered it to be problematic to speak of the 'conversion' of Paul and to place this aspect unilaterally in the forefront. Paul did not convert from a lack of faith; he was not an unbeliever. Nor did he convert from an immoral way of life to a moral way of life: Paul was not a bad, immoral human being. It is not even possible to say that he converted from Judaism to Christianity, because at that time,

Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity, Cambridge: CUP 1998; M. HENGEL, *The Zealots: Investigation into the Jewish Freedom Movement in the Period from Herod I until 70 A.D.*, Edinburgh: University Press 1989; M.R. FAIRCHILD, "Paul's Pre-Christian Zealot Associations: A Re-examination of Gal 1:14 and Acts 22:3", *NTS* (1999) 514-532. In contrast, others maintain that he did not belong to any group; rather, he was driven by personal piety and zeal that was common in late Judaism to defend the Torah and the Jewish Traditions: T.L. DONALDSON, "Zealot", 658-659; C. MEZANGE, "Simon le Zélote était-il un révolutionnaire?", *Biblica* 81 (2000) 489-506; T. SELAND, *Establishment Violence in Philo & Luke: A Study of Non-Conformity to the Torah & Jewish Vigilante Reactions*, Leiden: BIS 1995, 15; R.A. HORSLEY, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine*, San Francisco 1987. The fact that no such group has been identified up until the time of Paul renders it most likely that Saul was simply animated by the common religious zeal that allowed any devout Jew to act with impunity against any individual or group that grossly transgressed the Law and the traditions of the fathers. A study of contemporary literature, in particular Philo's writings, brings to light that Saul was not a member of any radical or nationalistic group. He was acting as was deemed right for any devout Jew by taking the law into his own hand to defend the Law and the traditions. Cf. T. SELAND, "Saul of Tarsus", 449-471.

Christianity did not yet exist as an independent reality separate from Judaism.³⁴

On many occasions and in various expressions Paul in his letters introduced himself to the readers as one who was called (ἐκλήθη) by God from his mother's womb (predestined) to the prophetic apostolate (Rom 1:1; 1Cor 1:1; Phil 3:14). Moreover, he applies this to all believers as well (Rom 1:6-7; 8:28-30; 9:24; 1Cor 1:2, 9, 24, 26; 7:17-24; Gal 1:6; 5:8, 13; 1Thes 1:11; 2:12; 4:7; 2Thes 2:14; 5:24; Eph 1:18; 4:1, 4; Col 3:15). Such an auto-introduction demonstrates that Paul realized that it was not his own intellectual prowess or research that led him to Jesus Christ. Rather, it was a gift from the Blessed Trinity: it was a call from the Heavenly Father of Jesus Christ, through his Son and by the power of the Holy Spirit that he came to understand the mystery of the divine salvific plan as well as his part to play as missionary to the Gentiles (Rom 11:33-36; 1Cor 2:10-16; 2Cor 4:6; cf. Mt 11:25-30; 13:11). Paul aligned himself to the prophetic tradition within which God called the prophets to go to the nations in order to reconcile them with Him, the God of Israel, as a necessary part of the Chosen People's restoration (cf. Rom 11:25-26). He understood his

³⁴ K. STENDAHL, *Der Jude Paulus und wir Heiden. Anfragen an das abendländische Christentum*, München: Kaiser 1978, 18; J. BLANK, "Paulus – Jude und Völkerapostel. Als Frage und christliche Antworten", in M. Barth – al., *Paulus – Apostat oder Apostel? Jüdische und christliche Antworten*, Regensburg: Pustet 1977, 147-172, 152; K. HAACKER, "Paul's Life", 24; J.D.G. DUNN, "Paul: Apostate or Apostle of Israel?" *ZNW* 89 (1998) 259. It is to be noted that J.T. LAMOREAUX, "Social Identity, Boundary Breaking, and Ritual: Saul's Recruitment on the Road to Damascus", *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 38 (2008) 130 using anthropological analysis regarded Saul's experience in Acts 9:1-19a as "recruitment," and not "conversion" which he considered as anachronistic. Cf. H.H. HENRIX, "Paul at the Intersection Between Continuity and Discontinuity: On Paul's Place in Early Judaism and Christianity as well as in Christian-Jewish Dialogue Today", in R. Bieringer – D. Pollefeyt, eds., *Paul and Judaism. Crosscurrents in Pauline Exegesis and the Study of Jewish-Christian Relations*, LNTS 463, London – N.Y.: Clark 2012, 196-197.

mission to the Gentiles as decisive within the grand divine plan for Israel whom God chose for the nations (cf. Gen 17:4; Isa 60:1-3).³⁵

It has already been mentioned that only in Paul's defense before the crowds in the presence of King Agrippa when Paul narrates his encounter with the risen Lord (Acts 26:15-19) is there mention made of the fact that Saul's mission to the Gentiles is revealed to him; it is not explicitly revealed to him in the first (Acts 9) and second (Acts 22) narrations of the event. It seems possible that the interpretation of Paul's experience as a call to the Gentiles came to Luke's attention only after Paul's writings were known to many communities. The scenario of this dramatic encounter on the way to Damascus reminds the reader of a metaphorical rendering of a style of life: in Jewish tradition, the Torah as divine instruction was understood to be the Way (*derek* - דֶּרֶךְ) of righteousness, that is to say, the revealed divine will (cf. Deut 5:33; 9:16; 11:28; 13:5; Ps 1:1, 6; 119:29; and so forth).

Saul thought that he was on the right way, serving YHWH. For him there were not two ways, that is, the Law and Jesus Christ.³⁶ But Jesus met him on this way and changed his understanding of the Way (cf. Isa 30:21). Whereas Saul thought he could see clearly the road on which he had been walking, Jesus' light revealed to him that he was actually blind spiritually.³⁷

³⁵ C.J. HODGE, "Apostle to the Gentiles: Constructions of Paul's Identity", *Biblical Interpretation* 13 (2005) 276.

³⁶ Cf. J. MURPHY-O'CONNOR, *Paul: His Story*, 18, describes Paul's former Jewish theology: "Jews did not need two saviours. They were either saved through the Law or they were saved by the Messiah. Those who opted for Jesus the Messiah in fact rejected the Law. Equally, those who were committed to the Law had to reject the identification of Jesus as the Messiah."

³⁷ The word "Way" reminds us of Gen 3:24 when after their sin, God expelled Adam and Eve from Eden and blocked the Way (דֶּרֶךְ) to the tree of life by placing a cherubim and a flaming sword on it. This means that only by the obedience of Jesus Christ, the New Adam, is the way opened again for those who believe in him (cf. Col 1:19-22). Basing themselves on Wisdom literature, the Rabbis regarded the Torah, which is divine instruction to his chosen people, as the Way that leads the heart to righteousness. (cf. Wis 6:20, 23; 4:10ff; 28:6-10; 7:1-5). Metaphorically, it is the Lord's high way of holiness (שְׂבִילֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ) on which he will lead his people from the Babylonian slavery to freedom in Jerusalem (cf. Isa 35:8). It is different from a wisdom

The Gospel of John presents Jesus as the absolute Way: "I am the Way": He is the Way that leads to life (cf. 14:6). This means that any way other than Jesus does not lead to life (cf. Mt 7:13-14).³⁸ The event on the road to Damascus was subsequently interpreted by Paul as revelation or manifestation (ἀποκάλυψις) of God's mystery – of God's way (cf. Lk 7:29; 20:21) – rather than conversion *per se* (Eph 3:1-6).

Paul was understanding that God did not abandon Israel (cf. Rom 9-11); rather, in a mysterious way through the Gospel, Gentiles were made co-heirs together with Israel of the promise in Jesus Christ. Since Paul's experience on the road to Damascus was not a change or turning away from Judaism to Christianity, it was not a "conversion". Paul continued to serve the same God in a new light: he was called to abandon his narrow understanding of God's plan and serve God by taking the Good News to the nations, as the apostle to the Gentiles.³⁹

In his former life as a fiery zealot for Jewish Law and traditions, Saul believed that it was his duty to stop those whom he thought were heretics (*minim*) wherever they were, including Damascus. Christ altered Paul's mission by redirecting his road to the whole world to proclaim the faith as good news. Jesus mastered not only Paul, but also his superiors (the Sanhedrin) in Jerusalem who sent him. The narrative details of the encounter as Luke reports them in Acts and Paul's own testimony are embedded in images impregnated with revelatory and spiritual significance:

and a philosophy confined to the natural parameters of the human person (cf. Isa 55:8-9; Gen 18:19; Ex 18:20). The articulated "Way" (ἡ ὁδός) was commonly used for Christian teaching in the primitive Church (cf. Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22; 1Cor 4:17; 2Pet 2:2). However, the new Way does not abrogate the old Way but fulfils it as Jesus explicitly taught in Mt 5:17-20; cf. Mt 22:36-40; Jn 13:34-35. Cf. C.K. BARRETT, *The Acts of the Apostles*, ICC, Vol. 1, 448; K. KOCH, "דרך", *TDOT* III, 287; W. MICHAELIS, "ὁδός", *TDNT* V, 57.

³⁸ The OT concept of two opposite ways: one that leads to life and the other to death (Jer 21:8; cf. Deut 5:33; 30:19) was taken up by early Christians in the *Didache* 1-6 and the Letter of Barnabas 18-21.

³⁹ H.H. HENRIX, "Paul", 196-97.

a) The fall to the ground (Acts 9:4; 26:14)

Saul who was journeying with confidence, probably with the protection of his companions, fell to the ground because of the unexpected powerful light that engulfed him. It is not said whether he was walking on foot or was riding a horse or a donkey, though he was presumably walking on foot since Luke says he was led by hand by those who were with him to Damascus (cf. Acts 9:8; 22:11). The scenario reminds the reader of the soldiers who went to arrest Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane as “they drew back and fell on the ground” when Jesus told them “I am He” (cf. Jn 18:6). Such reactions are indicative of Jesus’ divine power. Similar to the armed soldiers who thought of themselves as men in complete control, Saul regarded himself as powerful and well protected. But human protection could do nothing before the divine power of Jesus of Nazareth, the name with which the risen Lord identified himself to Saul (cf. Act 22:8) and was written by Pilate on the placard attached to the Cross, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews” (cf. Jn 19:19).

The broken Saul realized that he was nothing before Jesus of Nazareth, just as the voice told him, “It is hard for you to kick against the goad” (Acts 26:14).⁴⁰ This was exactly what his former master Gamaliel told the Sanhedrin as they tried to stop Jesus’ disciples from following the Way, “If it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God” (Acts 5:39).

b) The blinding light (Acts 9:3, 8; 22:6, 11; 26:13)

On account of his Jewish background, Paul knew that heavenly light is one of the many manifestations of divine presence or intervention (cf. 2Sam 22:29; Ps 89:15; 1Tim 15-16; 1Jn 1:5; Rev 4:5; 11:19). That Jesus of Nazareth spoke to him from within this blinding light signified to him that the risen Christ dwelt in divine glory, and therefore was equal to God (cf. 2Tim 1:10). Luke had already presented Zachariah singing forth in the *Benedictus* the coming of Christ into the world as a great light that gives light to

⁴⁰ The Matthean saying in 21:44 which is found in some manuscripts applies well here, “He who falls on this stone (*Christ*) will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed”.

those who abide in darkness, in the land of the shadow of death (Lk 1:79; cf. Mt 4:16 par.; Ezra 9:8; Job 12:22; Ps 118:27); and in the *Nunc Dimitis*, Simeon hailed Jesus as "a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to [God's] people Israel" (Lk 2:32). It is this heavenly light that in Acts Paul states as possessing the intensity to blind him on the road to Damascus (Acts 22:9,11). Eventually Paul would realize what really had happened: that in the moments before he encountered the risen Lord, God's overwhelming greatness and glory blinded him.

At times human beings confine God to their finite perspective, which blinds them and/or leaves them speechless (cf. 2Cor 4:4-6; Jn 1:4-5).⁴¹ Luke gives an account of Zachariah's speechlessness when his mouth was shut because he did not believe in the divine capacity to answer prayer. The angel Gabriel told him that God was about to answer his prayer by granting his hitherto barren wife Elizabeth the miraculous grace of a conception and birth of the Messiah's precursor even in spite of her advanced age. Zachariah's disbelief prevented him from speaking for more than nine months until his child was born (cf. Lk 1:19-20, 64).

Perhaps when Saul was confronted with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, he remembered the advice of his master Gamaliel I to the Sanhedrin, "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men... Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God" (Acts 5:38-39). This is certainly what Paul meant by relating to his audience what the voice from heaven said in proverbial fashion, "It hurts you to kick against the goad" (Acts 26:14b).

Paul realized that the wisdom of the cross contained in the gospel was a stumbling block for both the pagans and the Jews, "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be

⁴¹ Those who pervert God's ways like Elymas are blinded by the light of Christ (Acts 13:10-11). It is in the gospel of John where the theology of light is highly developed (cf. Jn 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9-10; 12:35-36, 46). Cf. C.K. BARRETT, *The Acts*, 449; J. BEKER, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought*; L.T. JOHNSON, *The Acts*, 162-163.

emptied of its power” (1Cor 1:17). Just as the pagans relied on their human wisdom or philosophy for their happiness (cf. Rom 1:20-23; 2:14-15), the Jews relied on the Law (Torah and its traditions) to attain salvation or righteousness (cf. Rom 2:11-17).

It was revealed in Christ to Paul that both the Jews and Gentiles entertained systems of belief and practice that were inadequate (cf. Rom 2:18-3:9): “... for the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1Cor 1:18; Gal 5:11). For this reason Paul extolled the gospel of the cross, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal 6:14; cf. Rom 1:16). Through the cross of Christ the old barrier of hostility that separated the pagans from the Jews was eliminated, thus creating both into a single, new people of God (cf. Eph 2:11-22). Paul became a light for others after baptism in Christ removed his blindness: “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth” (cf. Acts 13:47; 26:16-18; Tit 1:3).

It is known that if a powerful flood of light hits the eyes directly, it blinds the person. Equally, the light of Jesus Christ that sent forth its rays through his life and teaching was too powerful for people like Saul: hence it blinded them. The unbelievers regarded the gospel as scandalous and even stupidity (cf. 1Cor 1:18-25). In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul himself would declare:

“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God... For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ (cf. Gen. 1:3) made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2Cor 4:4, 6).

God had caused light to shine in Paul’s heart in order that he might see and then spread abroad the knowledge of God’s glory which shone in the face of Christ, the perfect image of God (cf. Gal 1:16), for indeed Christ himself is God. The inner illumination is connected with a manifestation of the glory of God beaming from the person of Christ (cf. Mt 4:16; Jn 12:46). It is an eschatological sign to Jews for the Messiah would come in just this fashion on the

Day of salvation (cf. Ps 27:1; Isa 49:6);⁴² for the Christians this glorious coming would be precisely the Parousia (cf. Lk 17:24; Mt 24:27).

The dim light of the Jewish Torah has dissolved within the floodlight of Christ (cf. Acts 26:23). A new light has dawned that enlightens the Torah and the prophets themselves (cf. Mt 5:17-20). This is what Luke implied in Jesus' command to the fragile Paul on the road to Damascus in Acts 26:16-18. It is important to note that Paul experienced revelations when the risen Lord appeared (ὤφθη) to him; and the same Lord would appear (ὀφθήσομαι) to him again in the future.⁴³ In other words, Paul was not receiving instruction at that moment in words (cf. Gal 1:12, 16) nor would he do so in the future; rather, he would serve and bear witness to what he had experienced at the moment of the Lord's appearance and to what he would experience (see) again at future moments.⁴⁴ Luke reports that Paul saw (in vision) the Lord on three other occasions (Acts 18:9-10; 22:18-21; 23:11; cf. 2Cor 12:11-14).

c) The Voice from heaven (Acts 9:4; 22:7, 9; 26:14)

The risen Jesus spoke in the Hebrew language (Acts 26:14), a language that Paul seemed to know (Phil 3:5; cf. Acts 21:40; 22:2). This indicates that he knew who Saul was, and would eventually lead him to recognize and identify the speaker as one who shares some of his traditions. Luke speaks of a divine voice (φωνή) in Acts 10:13, 15 and in 11:7, 9 where the heavenly voice speaks to Peter concerning the obsolescence of the Jewish food laws. The reference to a voice from heaven is found several times

⁴² The Day of the Lord (the Day of Judgment) is different from the Day of Salvation: there would be darkness instead of light (cf. Amos 5:18-20; Joel 2:2; 3:14-15; Zeph 1:15; and so forth).

⁴³ The Greek future passive phrase "ὀφθήσομαί σου" is translated by the Vulgate, NKJ and NIV transitively as "I will show you" or "I will reveal to you", whereas the RSV has the intransitive "I will appear to you". According to M. ZERWICK – M. GROSVENOR, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, Rome: PIB 1993, 445 both translations are acceptable.

⁴⁴ J. DUPONT, "The Conversion of Paul, and Its Influence on His Understanding of Salvation by Faith", in W.W. Gasque – R.P. Martin, eds., *Apostolic History and the Gospel, Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F.E. Bruce*, Exeter: The Paternoster Press 1970, 194.

in the NT: during John's baptism of Jesus at the Jordan River where a heavenly voice introduces Jesus as the Father's beloved Son in whom he is well pleased (Mt 3:17 par.) and during the Transfiguration where again the Father's voice introduces Jesus as his Son in whom he is well pleased, and recommends that they should listen to him (Mt 17:5 par.).

The presence of Moses and Elijah reminds the reader of Moses' promise in Deut 18:15 where he told the people that God would raise a prophet like him to whom they must listen. Another text comes from John where Jesus asks his Father to glorify his name. The voice from heaven says, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again" (Jn 12:28). Here the voice is explicitly understood as that of God whom Jesus exclusively called "my Father *in heaven*"⁴⁵ (cf. Mt 7:21; 10:32, 33; 11:26-27; 12:50; 15:13; 16:17; 18:10, 19, 35; 20:23; 25:34; 26:39, 42; 26:53). Since the phenomenon of the divine heavenly voice speaking to humans in biblical tradition was quite common, Saul, the Jew would have identified the voice to be that of YHWH.⁴⁶

However, that voice on the road to Damascus was not that of the heavenly Father; rather, it was the voice of the risen Jesus who introduced himself saying: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:5; 26:15). The expression "from heaven" may not be so obvious, for the risen Christ is down on earth with his followers who are being persecuted.⁴⁷ And in a vision he spoke to Ananias

⁴⁵ Jesus calls God his Father (πατήρ μου) explicitly more frequently in the Gospels of John (24 times) and Matthew (15 times); whereas it appears only three times in Luke and not found in Mark at all.

⁴⁶ In the OT the word "voice" (Greek - φωνή and Hebrew - קוֹל) is sometimes explicitly identified with that of YHWH, and at times it is implicit (cf. Ex 15:26; 19:19; Num 7:89; Deut 4:12, 33, 36; 5:23-26; 18:16; 30:20; 1Sam 15:22; 2Sam 22:14; 1Kgs 19:13; Pss 18:13; 19:3-9; 29:3-9; 46:6; 95:7; Isa 6:8; 28:23; 30:21, 30, 31; 33:3; Ezek 1:28. In the NT the voice is associated with the glorified risen Christ in Rev 1:10ff; 3:20; or with an Angel: to Zachariah (Lk 1:11f); to Mary (Lk 1:28f); to John (Rev. 4:1ff; 5:2; and so forth).

⁴⁷ It is to be noted that because it is the risen Lord who is in question, he may be locating himself on earth and remain in heaven at the same time. For the "new" laws of science that operate for one who has risen from the dead

(Acts 9:10-16). Probably Luke used this traditional expression to denote the divine nature of the voice. The voice of Jesus and his self identification with his followers reminds the reader of Jn 10:3 where using the metaphor of the Good Shepherd he said his sheep would hear his voice. His voice would be heard by the living and the dead (cf. Jn 5:25, 28). Again the risen Jesus confirms his promise to his disciples in Mt 18:20 and 28:20.

On several occasions Luke reports of the voice emanating from the Holy Spirit addressed to Barnabas and Saul and other individuals in Acts 13:2, 4; 16:6. Above all this subtle vocal self-identification of the risen Jesus of Nazareth with his persecuted disciples could be the key foundation of Paul's theological phrase "in Christ",⁴⁸ that Christ is in the lives of his disciples and they in him. The risen Christ is not simply "with (μετά) the disciples" (cf. Mt 1:23; 18:20; 28:20) or "dwelling (σκηνώω) among them" (cf. Jn 1:14; Rev 21:3), but "in (ἐν) the disciples". He cannot be separated from them. When they pray, rejoice, or suffer, it is Christ who is praying, rejoicing, suffering in them (cf. Gal 2:20).

As already mentioned above, Paul always introduced himself in his letters as one who was called or set apart to be the apostle or servant of Jesus Christ by the will of God. In other words, the glorious voice of the risen Christ is the same as that of God himself (cf. Rom 1:1; 1Cor 1:1; 2Cor 1:1; Gal 1:15; 2:8; Phil 3:14; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 1Tim 1:1; 2Tim 1:1). According to biblical tradition, the hearing of a heavenly voice had a variety of implications: First, it

see Ratzinger, J. (Benedict XVI), *Jesus of Nazareth*, II, San Francisco, Ignatius Press 2011, 272-277.

⁴⁸ Strikingly, the phrase "in Christ" in its various forms appears 140 times in Pauline corpus, whereas only 6 times in the rest of the NT: more than any other writer of the New Testament Paul uses the phrase "in Christ [Jesus] - ἐν Χριστῷ [Ἰησοῦ]" (Rom 14x; 1Cor 14x; 2Cor 7x; Gal 7x; Eph 9x; Phil 10x; Col 3x; 1Thess 4x; 2Thess 1x; 1Tim 2x; 2Tim 7x; Phm 1x; and only 1Pet 3x; 1Jn 2x) or "in the Christ - ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ" (1Cor 1x; 2Cor 1x; Eph 4x) or "in the Lord [Jesus] - ἐν κυρίῳ [Ἰησοῦ]" (Rom 8x; 1Cor 10x; 2Cor 2x; Gal 1x; Eph 8x; Phil 9x; Col 4x; 1Thess 3x; 2Thess 1x; Phm 2x; Rev 1x) or "the Lord Jesus Christ - ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ" (1Thess 1x; 2Thess 2x) or "in Christ Jesus our Lord - ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν" (Rom 2x; 1Cor 1x; Eph 1x).

was an unexpected divine favour to the privileged recipient, like Zechariah in Lk 1:11ff and Mary in Lk 1:28ff. This is also demonstrated on the road to Damascus, for Saul's companions heard the voice but could not see anyone (Acts 9:7). It is not known what happened to these companions, for only Saul recognized that the voice was the Lord's. For this reason, in his letters Paul frequently considered himself as favoured by God, who set him apart for a special mission to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 13:2; 1Cor 15:9-10).

Second, similar to the calling of OT prophets the heavenly voice contained a serious message and commissioning from God (cf. Is 6:1-13; Jer 1:5; Obad 1:1; Jonah 1:1-2). It was in this vein that Saul understood the vision as a divine call and commissioning to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 16:10; Rom 1:5).⁴⁹ Therefore, the apostles including Saul, Barnabas and other assistants were regarded as "prophets" (cf. Acts 13:1-2; 1Cor 13:9), i.e., emissaries of God.

d) Saul's Journey to Damascus to meet Ananias (Acts 9:10-19)

The risen Lord commanded the distraught Saul to go on his way to Damascus and there to meet one of his disciples named Ananias; from Ananias he would receive further instruction. Saul was not told to return to Jerusalem; rather, to continue on the road he had traversed up to that point (Act 9:6).

Superficially speaking, the three days of waiting for the Lord's instructions – a period of time during which Paul could neither eat nor drink – was probably a period of intensive reflection. But on a more profound level, the three days would remind the reader of the three days of Jesus' stay in the tomb (cf. Mk 8:31; 9:31; 10:34 par.), a period of the reign of death. For Saul it was the period of the experience of the death of his former life and of his patient wait for the new life in Christ.⁵⁰ Sometimes the Lord gives his privileged

⁴⁹ J.T. LAMOREAUX, "Social Identity", 131, notes that the repetition of Saul's name reminds the reader of the OT theophanies (Gen 46:23-34; Exod 3:2-6; 1 Sam 3:2-10, 10:2; Isa 6:1-3; Esdr 14:1).

⁵⁰ Cf. J.-F. LANDOLT, "'Be Imitators of Me, Brothers and Sisters' (Philippians 3:17): Paul as an Exemplary Figure in the Pauline Corpus and the Acts of the Apostles", in D.P. Moessner – *al.*, eds., *Paul and the Heritage*

chosen persons a grace period of decision making (cf. Mt 19:21; Jn 1:39). Probably during the course of these days Saul reflected much about his life and his faith in the Law vis-a-vis the mystery of the Christ event. All in all he was now a changed man, blinded by the powerful light of Christ. He became aware that he could never win the battle against the Christians for he was actually fighting against the risen Christ himself who had instantly blinded him (cf. Acts 5:39).

Ananias was a disciple of Jesus who lived in Damascus, and therefore was one of the victims of Saul's persecutions. He was instructed by the Lord himself in a vision not to fear Saul; rather, he should accept Saul, restore his sight and baptize him, for he would be the Lord's instrument for the Gentiles (Acts 9:12-19).

At times the Lord calls his disciples for a dangerous mission through which his name is glorified (cf. Mt 5:11-12). The Lord used Ananias as his instrument to bring the true light to the blind Saul.⁵¹

Part Two: Saul's Spiritual Journey

After the investigation of texts that deal with Saul the Jew and Paul the Christian, it is important to look now into the spiritual process that took place in his life. How extensively had the former Saul changed? Did he abandon his former Jewish traditions or did he continue to hold on to them and so manage to build a new faith in the risen Christ with these traditions as a basis? Some authors have maintained that he did not abandon his Jewish convictions even as he embraced the new faith.⁵² In fact he used the word

of Israel: Paul's Claim upon Israel's Legacy in Luke and Acts in the Light of the Pauline Letters, LNTS 452, London: Clark 2012, 301. Commenting on the baptism of Saul by Ananias, J.T. LAMOREAUX, "Social Identity", 132, says that although there is no mention of death or rising in this context, the concept of death and resurrection is either implied in the ritual generally, or is already an established idea within the theology of the church.

⁵¹ Matthew 5:13-16.

⁵² Cf. R. BIERINGER – D. POLLEFEYT, "Prologue: Wrestling with the Jewish Paul," in IDEM. eds., *Paul and Judaism. Crosscurrents in Pauline Exegesis and the Study of Jewish-Christian Relations*, LNTS 463, London – N.Y.: Clark 2012, 1-10; T. BLANTON, "Paul's Covenantal Theology in 2Cor 2:14-7:4", 61-71, argues that the particularity of the covenant of Israel with

“ἄνοχη” – “tolerance or forbearance” – in his references to the relationship between Jews and Gentiles who were to seek to imitate God in Jesus Christ (Rom 2:10; 3:25/6). And when Paul declared in 1Cor 9:19-23, “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law...” he shows that he regarded himself as one set free from the yoke of the Law by Christ in order to call all people to that freedom. This means that Paul did not abandon the Law (cf. Rom 3:31; 7:7, 12; 1Tim 1:8; cf. Mt 5:17-20; 19:17); rather, he was now above the Law since he understood that its *telos* was to lead Jews and all people to Christ (cf. Mk 2:27-28). This freedom is what C.H. Hodge called “adaptability” and “prioritization”. Paul adapted himself to all in order to gain all, but to his faith in Christ (his being in Christ) he gave first priority. The Law and traditions of the fathers were relegated to second place.⁵³

Some argue that the post-Christophanic Paul maintained a historical continuity with Judaism and soteriological inclusivism. He did not set out to start a new religion called Christianity. Rather, Paul was reforming and extending the Mosaic covenant in new

God does not stand in contradiction with Paul’s teaching on a universal new creation in Christ (2Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; cf. Rom 8:19-22). E.P. SANDERS, in his book *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, London: SCM Press, 1998, expresses disagreement. He argues that Palestinian Judaism could not be reconciled with Pauline Christianity. This position could also be implied in the article of J.T. LAMOREAUX, “Social Identity”, 122-134 where Paul is regarded as totally abandoning his former status as a fervent Jew to a completely new life as a follower of Jesus Christ. Such a rigid dichotomy cannot be sustained today, for many sociologists and ethnologists would argue that identity is multifaceted and fluid; and Paul could still identify himself as a Jew as well as a follower of Christ (cf. 1Cor 9:19-22). For detailed arguments see C.J. HODGE, “Apostle”, 270-288.

⁵³ C.J. HODGE, “Apostle”, 283 is convinced that Paul was applying the Epicurean tradition of psychology or “guidance of the soul” that encouraged a notion of a type of adaptability that was intended to bring about moral reformation and a new concept of the self and the world. The process demanded that the teacher (or psychagogue) would adapt himself to the dispositions, characters, identities, and so forth, of various types of students. Cf. G. MASSINELLI, “Christ”, 707-726.

ways based on what Christ had revealed to him. He was also soteriologically inclusive of non-Christian Jews, seeing that ethnic Israel would eventually accept Christ at some point in the future.

From James Dunn's point of view, the risen Christ's gift of the Holy Spirit occasions the dismantling of the national borders of Israel and opens her to the nations.⁵⁴ Indeed, Paul demonstrates this mindset in passionate arguments where he firmly asserts that on account of God's unfathomable mercy, the Jews will at the end of time rejoin those who believe in Christ and take their own predestined privileged seat as the original covenanted People of God (cf. Rom 11:1-36, especially v. 25-26).

It is within the context of his theological understanding that salvation emanates from Jerusalem to the whole of Judea and Samaria, and then to the whole world (Acts 1:8; cf. Lk 24:47)⁵⁵ that Luke presents Paul preaching to the Jews in their synagogues in Antioch of Pisidia. Gregory E. Sterling suggests that Luke understood Christianity in terms of a succession that began with Jesus, continued through the twelve apostles, and reached an apex in Paul.⁵⁶ In his preaching Paul surveyed the Jewish history of

⁵⁴ J.D.G. DUNN, "The New Perspective on Paul," *BJRL* 65 (1993) 95-122; *Ibid.*, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1998, 338.

⁵⁵ It is well established among scholars that Luke conceived salvation as coming from Jerusalem and spreading to the whole world. In Acts he presents two phases of the growth of Christianity: development in Jerusalem (1:3-8:3) and the expansion of Christianity to the ends of the earth (13:1-28:31). Cf. M. WOLTER, "The Development of Pauline Christianity from a 'Religion of Conversion to a 'Religion of Tradition'," in D.P. Moessner – *al.*, eds., *Paul and the Heritage of Israel: Paul's Claim upon Israel's Legacy in Luke and Acts in the Light of the Pauline Letters*, LNTS 452, London: Clark 2012, 49-69; and D.N. FREEDMAN, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, IV, New York: Doubleday, 1996, c1992, 403 notes that Luke's theology conceived of the universality of salvation whereby Gentiles have a specific place among the People of God. For him the coming of the Messiah and also the proclamation of salvation to the Gentiles are constituent parts of God's plan revealed in prophecy. The Gentiles are "saved" by faith, just like the Jews, and therefore they are not required to be circumcised or to keep the law, even though believing Jews may continue to observe the law.

⁵⁶ G.E. STERLING, "From the 'Last of All the Saints' to the 'Apostle of Jesus Christ': The Transformation of Paul in the First Century", in D.P. Moessner – *al.*, eds., *Paul and the Heritage of Israel: Paul's Claim upon*

salvation demonstrating how God's plan for the Jews had been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 13:14-25). He made a vehement appeal to them to take the opportunity to repent and believe in Jesus Christ and through him receive forgiveness and salvation (Acts 13:26-41). But the Jews rejected this message. The Gentiles, on the other hand, joyfully accepted it (Acts 13:48-52). Reacting to those who refused their message, Paul and Barnabas "shook the dust off their feet" as a testimony against them (Acts 13:51; cf. Mt 10:14; Mk 6:11; Lk 9:5; 10:11).

The Jewish custom of shaking off the dust from their feet against someone symbolized the cessation of a relationship, an act of estranging oneself from the other, of having nothing to do with the other. It was the practice of the Pharisees when passing from Gentile to Jewish soil, since it was a rabbinical doctrine that the dust of a heathen land defiled the one who set foot on it.⁵⁷ In other words, Paul and Barnabas no longer had anything in common with those Jews at Antioch of Pisidia. Paul would again perform the same symbolic gesture against the Jews at Corinth in quite a harsh manner by saying "Your blood is upon your heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles" (Acts 18:6).

The expression, "Your blood is upon your heads!" indicates that Paul felt that it was his responsibility to bring the Good News to his fellow Jews, as the covenanted people of God and heirs of the patriarchal promises. But since they had refused, they were responsible for the breakup and their fate during the universal judgment would revolve on their own heads. Closely related was

Israel's Legacy in Luke and Acts in the Light of the Pauline Letters, LNTS 452, London: Clark 2012, 239-240. He adds that in Luke's scheme, Paul is the final figure in the succession. The apostles served as a bridge between Jesus, the founder of Christianity, and Paul, the architect and contractor who built the church.

⁵⁷ Following the Pharisaic understanding of the practice, it logically follows that when Jews shook off dust from the feet against fellow Jews it was tantamount to regarding the latter as pagan Gentiles. Therefore, Christians were demonstrating in a particularly vigorous manner that Jews who rejected the gospel and drove out the missionaries were no longer truly part of Israel and were no better than unbelievers (cf. Acts Lk 5:9; 10:11; Acts 18:6; 22:22f). Cf. I.H. MARSHALL, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary*, 2nd ed., Leicester: InterVarsity 2000, 231.

the symbolic action of the Jews of Jerusalem who "threw dust into the air" to express their rejection – that is to say, their claim to be utterly free from, their claim not to be bound by – Paul's message (Acts 22:23; cf. Isa 52:2; Neh 5:13).

Here, too, Luke presents Paul as one who does not see any contradiction between becoming a Christian and remaining a Jew. In his two defences (Acts 22 and 26), Paul based his apologia on the Jewish faith, especially the Pharisaic belief in the resurrection, which the Sadducees did not accept (Acts 23:6, 8). He claimed that he was in chains because of the hope of his fathers (Acts 26:6). In these texts the reader understands that Paul did not abandon his Jewish faith and hope completely, for he found no contradiction between the two. In Acts 22:17 he is reported to pray in the Temple of Jerusalem, an event which attests to the continuation of his Jewish piety after encountering the risen Lord and receiving baptism from Ananias (Acts 22:16).

In contrast, other scholars like Paul Sanders argue that Paul abandoned his old Jewish traditions completely and became a totally new person. Their argument is based on Eph 2:14-15, a text which is regarded as Deutero-Pauline that says, "For he himself (*Christ*) is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing (καταργήσας)⁵⁸ in his flesh the Law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace".⁵⁹

These contrasting views call for a deeper understanding of Paul's position. Luke reports that Paul did not cease to engage himself with Jews, even in Rome (cf. Acts 28:17-31). Deep down

⁵⁸ Of all the 28 occurrences of the Greek active verb καταργέω in the NT, 25 occur in Paul's letters and only once in Lk 13:7 and twice in Heb 2:14. Paul mostly uses it in relation to the Law with an unequivocal sense of abolishing, nullifying, cancelling, ceasing, fading or passing away, abandoning, giving up, rendering ineffective, and so forth.

⁵⁹ E.P. SANDERS, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 513-14 maintained that Paul rejected the Judaism of his time as a religion that taught works, i.e., acts of righteousness, and replaced it with an exclusive christonimism. Cf. R.H. GUNDRY, *The Old is Better: New Testament Essays in Support of Traditional Interpretations*, WUNT 178, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2005, 195-224.

in his heart, he believed that the Jews were the elect of God and their position in the economy of salvation remained intact though they failed to recognize their Messiah (cf. Rom 9-11). The symbolic gesture of shaking off dust from the feet did not signify that Paul was affirming a definitive break with them; rather, the gesture should be interpreted within its literary context: only that particular group of Jews at that particular location were separated from the good news, and not all Jewish people.

Michael Cranford sees Paul's use of the name "Israel" in Rom 9:1-13 as a deliberate rhetorical attempt to demonstrate that "Israel" is not merely an ethnic group; rather, a divinely covenanted people. However, underneath this large denomination is a sub-group that has believed in Christ, and who are the true Israel and the new covenanted people of God.⁶⁰ Recent studies about the issue have tried to demonstrate that Paul's life, preaching and writings do not denigrate Judaism *per se*; rather he upheld the value of Judaism in its covenantal monistic form while pointing to something even greater that arises out of it.⁶¹

Consequences of Paul's Encounter with the Risen Christ

The immediate consequences of Paul's encounter with the risen Christ are narrated in Acts 9:20-31; 22:17-21; 26:20-23. After regaining his physical sight and having been baptized by Ananias, Saul henceforth embarked on another long journey that gave him the opportunity to decipher the spiritual significance of his encounter with the risen Lord. The actual journey to Damascus commissioned by the Jerusalem Sanhedrin (Acts 9:1-3a) underwent a transformation into a spiritual journey commissioned by the Holy Spirit of the risen Christ (Acts 9:20-31). It was during this long journey that Christ promised to reveal to him what he would have to testify before the people (Acts 26:16; cf. 9:16).

The impact of the vision on Saul was so powerful that Luke reports that after Ananias baptized him, he immediately began to preach that the Christ is the Son of God (Acts 9:20-22, 27; cf.

⁶⁰ Cf. M. CRANFORD, "Election and Ethnicity: Paul's View of Israel in Romans 9:1-13", *JSNT* 50 (1993) 27-41.

⁶¹ R. BIERINGER – D. POLLEFEYT, eds., "Prologue: Wrestling with the Jewish Paul", 5-6.

22:20). It seems Luke's report of such an abrupt reversal of Saul's belief indicates that he was persecuting the Christians because they were committing a blasphemy by calling Jesus of Nazareth the Son of God. The adverb "immediately" is an exaggeration of what Paul himself seems to say in Gal 1:16, namely, that he began to preach without waiting for approval or instructions from any person (cf. Gal 1:16). He whom he had regarded as an impostor he now was calling 'the Righteous/Just One'⁶² (cf. Acts 22:14-15), and thus admitting his claim to be the Son of God.

Saul's transformation as a person was noticeable enough that his former Jewish collaborators now targeted him for persecution (cf. Acts 9:23, 29; 21:28ff). What the risen Christ had told Ananias concerning Saul was coming to fulfilment, "he must suffer for my name" (Acts 9:16). Indeed, Saul's journey would be long and tedious, for he had to learn the deeper meaning of suffering for the sake of Christ's name, that is to say, the wisdom of the Cross (cf. 1Cor 1:17ff).

The first response to Paul's preaching in Damascus was similar to his own former reaction to those who followed the Way. His fellow Jews sought to kill him in Damascus (cf. Acts 9:23, 29) as well as in Jerusalem (Acts 22:31). Probably Paul was now able to bear with his adversaries by understanding that their negative reaction was rooted in their ignorance of God's ways, of his will (cf. Acts 20:17; 22:14) just as the Lord had warned him (cf. Acts 22:18).

Paul's Retreat in the Arabian Desert (Gal 1:17)

Paul himself reports that he did not consult any person right after the encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus; rather, he went into Arabia and later returned to Damascus (Gal 1:17). The choice Paul made reminds the readers about Jesus who, led by the Spirit, chose to enter into the desert to be tempted by the devil (immediately) after John baptized him (cf. Mk 1:12; Mt 4:1; Lk 4:1). There is a problem of reconciling Luke's story and Paul's own story: did Paul immediately (εὐθέως) preach first in Damascus

⁶² The title Righteous/Just One (ὁ δίκαιος) is used for God in the OT (Job 34:17; Prov 21:12; Isa 24:16; 26:7), and for Jesus Christ in the NT (Act 3:14; 7:52; 1John 2:1).

(cf. Acts 9:20, 27) and then go into Arabia or did he go into Arabia and afterwards return to Damascus to preach (Gal 1:17)? It is striking to note that Luke does not report that Paul went into Arabia! Is it possible that Luke did not know anything about the three years that Paul spent in Arabia (Gal 1:18)? The possible explanation of this lacuna in his biography could be found in the use of the adverb “immediately”.⁶³ It seems Luke deliberately skipped the Arabian story in order to underscore the immediate impact that the encounter with Christ had on Paul’s physical and spiritual life.

Part Three: The Zealous and Open-minded Paul

Saul’s experience of encountering the risen Christ on the road to Damascus left an indelible mark on his religious life. First, the kenotic hymn in Phil 2:6-11 indicates that he realized that God’s ways were incomprehensible and unpredictable. He realized that his former zeal for God was blind, “For I can testify about them (the Jews) that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness” (Rom 10:2-3). The expected Messiah was not to come in a manner that would harmonize with mere human understanding. He came as the Son of God in human form, not in glorious or victorious garbs, but rather in the guise of

⁶³ Luke uses the adverb “εὐθέως” (immediately, soon) twice in the story (Acts 9:18, 20): the first instance (v. 18) makes sense, for the scales would have fallen immediately from Paul’s eyes after Ananias placed his hands on him. But the second instance (v. 20) may cast some doubt and lead the reader to consider it as rhetoric for it is difficult to comprehend how Saul, the fierce opponent of the Way could immediately preach that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God. Were the three days in Damascus sufficient enough for the blind and hungry Saul to accept and understand the mystery of Christ’s event? Luke demonstrates a cautious use of the adverb εὐθέως in Acts 9:34; 12:10; 16:10; 17:10; 17:14; 21:30; 22:29. The use of the adverb in 16:10 is probably rhetorical, and it is quite close to 9:20. It is more natural that Paul would have gone into Arabia to reflect on the significance of the event and then come back to Damascus to preach. In fact in his own speech Saul simply said that he “first” preached to those in Damascus, but that could be after some time, perhaps after returning from Arabia (cf. Gal 1:17).

a sublime humility, obedient to God the Father unto ignominious death on the cross. And God the Father raised him from the dead as endorsement and vindication of his death as a vicarious expiatory death for all people (cf. Mk 10:45), both Jews and Gentiles.

Paul's First Letter to Timothy, 1:12-17, is probably the earliest interpretation of what Paul thought of himself before his mysterious encounter with the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus, "Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief..." (v.13). Paul realized that Jesus Christ did not judge and punish people immediately (cf. Rom 2:1-5; Jn 8:1-11). Rather, the Word preached to them moved them to repentance and conversion, similar to his own experience on the road to Damascus (cf. Col 3:13). Judgement would be executed at the end of time for those who refused to repent and believe (cf. Mt 13:24-30, 36-43).

Being the first to render explicit the vicarious nature of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in 1Cor 10:16-17, Paul reminded the Corinthians to be united as one body because Jesus offered his life for the salvation of all who believe in Him, both Jews and Gentiles as evidenced by his words on the Cup at the Last Supper, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out *for many* (περὶ πολλῶν) for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; cf. Mt 24:28 par; Rom 3:22; 5:18). The phrase "for many" is all inclusive, for no one is left out if he/she believes in Christ (cf. Mt 22:14; 1Cor 10:33).⁶⁴ Paul demonstrates his understanding of the universality of salvation in Jesus Christ by consistently using the all-inclusive adjective *all* (πᾶς) with reference to salvation, whether positively or negatively (cf. Rom 2:12; 3:9, 23; 5:12; 10:11-13; 11:32; also Gal 3:22). Paul embraced pluralism under an inclusive symbol of salvation that could underwrite respect for difference and at the same time articulate a community within a common humanity.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Literally the phrase περὶ πολλῶν without an article is understood as "for many", without excluding totality; and in the Semitic sense (רַב־רַב) it means "all", especially in the context of community of the elect (cf. Isa 53:12; Rom 5:15, 19). Cf. F.W. DANKER, eds., "πολύς", *BDAG*, 3rd ed., 848; D.A. HAGNER, *Matthew 14-28*, WBC 33B, Dallas: Word 1995, 585, 775.

⁶⁵ D.E. OAKMAN, "The Perennial Relevance of Saint Paul", 9.

Here one would agree with those exegetes who maintain that whenever Paul wrote about Jewish issues, especially those of the Torah, he was mainly addressing believers of Greco-Roman origin. He did so for the benefit of Gentiles and with their concerns chiefly in mind. And any anti-Jewish sounding polemic in his letters principally targeted fellow Christian missionaries (the Judaizers) who would seek to impose upon Gentile converts practices that were never intended for them (cf. Rom 2:17-29; Gal 2:11-21). And when he spoke to Gentile believers about the majority of Israel, who had not yet believed in Jesus as the Messiah (cf. Rom 9–11), he intended to evoke sympathy, understanding, and respect and to counter any suggestion that God has abandoned or ceased to regard as special the people called by God's name.⁶⁶

Saul's Psychological Paradigm Shift

The encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus brought a deep psychological paradigm shift in Paul's life. A paradigm is a model, theory, perception, assumption, or frame of reference for placing an individual or a group within an intellectually comprehensible context. One type of paradigm may shift towards another type in a way that may be evaluated positively or negatively. Saul the Jew lived according to his Pharisaic paradigm which formed the basis for his personal ethic: the way he thought things should be, his manner of conceiving reality, and the values he cherished and promoted (cf. Gal 1:14).⁶⁷

⁶⁶ One of the main proponents of this trend is M. NANOS, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter*, Philadelphia: Fortress 1996; "The Jewish Context of the Gentile Audience Addressed in Paul's Letter to the Romans", *CBQ* 61 (1999) 283-304. However, caution should be taken since this position does not account for all occasions because there are times when Paul was obviously issuing a direct attack towards the Judaizers (cf. Rom 2:17-3:20; 2Cor 11, see esp. v. 22), including Peter (Gal 2:11-14).

⁶⁷ Cf. S.R. COVEY, *7 Habits of Highly Effective People: A Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*, 2nd ed., London: Pocket Books 2004, 23-44. The apostle Peter experienced a similar paradigm shift: from his former perception of dietary laws (kosher) in Acts 11:8 and after the experience in a trance at Joppa when he saw all sorts of animals and was told to kill and eat (cf. Acts 11:1-10). He began to eat with Gentiles though not consistently (cf. Gal 2:11-14). These controversial issues were discussed and deliberated in the first

His zeal for the Torah and for the traditions transmitted from the elders led individuals like him to become vigilantes who took the law in their own hands whenever they spotted cases of gross transgressions of the Law.

It is undisputed that the way a person sees things – his or her point of view – is the source of the way he/she engages in the cognitive process and the way he/she acts. Saul's encounter with the risen Lord on the way to Damascus brought a paradigm shift within him. The paradigm shift could be compared to religious conversion. Paul demonstrated this shift in his various testimonies: before King Agrippa, Governor Festus and his Jewish accusers in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 26); in his letter to the Galatians 1:11-24, especially in the words of the believers of Syria and Cilicia: "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy" (v. 23). Again in his letter to the Philippians he wrote: "Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ my Lord" (3:8a, 10; cf. 2Pet 2:20).

He defines what he meant by "knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (γνώσεως Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ κυρίου μου) in his letter to the Philippians, chapter 3, verse 10: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead." It is not an intellectual accent or abstract dogmatic concept; rather, it is a participation in the totality of the person of Christ bodily and spiritually. Accordingly, J.-N. Aletti wrote, "'to know' denotes, connotes, and implies for the Christian: not primarily truths or values but a person, Jesus Christ. In addition, the knowledge of a believer does not remain external to its object (and vice versa, its object is not external to it), because knowing happens through conforming to the journey of Christ and implies a being with and a becoming like (him), and a progressive transformation of one's being."⁶⁸

Apostolic Council in Jerusalem, though the Christians of Jewish origin who were present could not detach themselves totally from their Jewish customs (cf. Acts 15:1-30).

⁶⁸ J.-N. ALETTI, *Saint Paul: Epître aux Philippiens*, EtB 55, Paris: Gabalda 2005, 262.

Paul felt totally identified with Jesus Christ in his passion, death, and resurrection, thus physically experiencing what Jesus told him on the road to Damascus, “I am Jesus (of Nazareth) whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:5; 22:8; 26:26). As one writer remarked, “Paul lives in a complete renunciation of his past prerogatives, in an austerity, and in a crucifixion of his pharisaic personality, by communing with the judgment apportioned by God in the cross of Christ.”⁶⁹ Paul no longer regarded Jesus as blasphemous and his Church as a heretic sect (cf. Acts 24:5, 14). He realised that Jesus was the true Son of God: “At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit” (Gal 4:29; cf. 2:20; 4:4, 6; Rom 1:6; 2Cor 1:19); and he seems to have regretted committing the crime of persecuting the followers of Jesus, “For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (1Cor 15:9; cf. Gal 1:13; Acts 22:4, 19-20).

He realized that the confidence he had in the observance of the Law had been rendered bankrupt by the gospel of Christ. He had discovered a new way of knowing himself and God; and he now realized where to put his confidence, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.⁷⁰ According to J. C. Lentz, the portrayal of Paul that Luke depicted in Acts was intended to demonstrate the impact of his conversion: that Paul, before his conversion was not a man of ‘good knowledge or sobriety’ (σωφροσύνη); on the contrary, he was a man who raged not only against Christians but also against God (cf. Acts 26:25). The pre-conversion Paul lacked moral virtue, for he resisted God. But after his conversion he had self-control and enjoyed sobriety and therefore had become virtuous.⁷¹

Paul the Tolerant Preacher

The Deutero-Pauline letter to the Ephesians, chapter 2:11-22, contains what seems to be a summary of Paul’s own life experience

⁶⁹ P. NICOLET, “Le concept d’imitation de l’apôtre dans la correspondance paulinienne,” in A. Dettwiler – J.-D. Kaestli – D. Marguerat, eds., *Paul, une théologie en construction*, MdB 51, Geneva: Labor et Fides 2004, 410.

⁷⁰ J.-F. LANDOLT, “Be Imitators”, 294.

⁷¹ J.C. LENTZ, *Luke’s Portrait of Paul*, SNTSMS 77, Cambridge: CUP 1993, 87; cf. J.-F. LANDOLT, “Be Imitators”, 309.

before and after he encountered the risen Jesus Christ en route to Damascus (cf. Acts 9:1-31; 22:1-21 and 26:4-23). It is within the context of an exhortation to heal the rift that was threatening the community of believers at Ephesus. It is similar to his testimony to the Galatians in Gal 1:11-2:21 who were also suffering division on account of the Jewish food laws. Eph 2:11-22 speaks of three important facts: first, Jews rightfully considered themselves privileged and separated from the rest of humanity, the Gentiles, because of their physical and spiritual descendancy from Abraham and because of their status as heirs of the Abrahamic covenant: they physically symbolized their privilege and status by the rite of circumcision (Gen 17:10-14, 23-27; cf. Jn 7:22; Acts 7:8; Rom 4:11). Gentiles, on the other hand, were regarded as people without God, separated from Christ (vv. 11-12) and sinners (Gal 1:15).⁷²

Second, in the blood of Christ (ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ) the rift or the wall of hostility that separated Jews from Gentiles was nullified and demolished (v. 13-16). In the OT blood was ritually used to bind or seal a relationship or a covenant between two parties (cf. Ex 24:6-8; Zech 9:11).⁷³

The expression "the blood of Christ" (αἷματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ) brings to mind Paul's exhortation in 1Cor 10:16 when he was reminding the community of the faithful at Corinth who frequently assembled to celebrate the Lord's Supper that partaking of the Cup

⁷²The word "Gentile" is the translation of the Hebrew word "gôy – גוי" which meant non-Jews or nations who did not believe in YHWH, i.e., uncircumcised, pagans, heathen. Paul uses its Greek translation "ethnos – ἔθνος" 45 times always in plural (ἔθνη): Rom (24), Gal (10), Eph (5), 1-2Cor (2), Col (1), 1Thes (1) and 1-2Tim (2). Cf. C.E. RONALD – J.G. BOTTERWECK, "גוי", *TDOT* II, 426; K.L. SCHMIDT, "ἔθνος, ἔθνικός", *TDNT* II, 364-372.

⁷³In biblical and Jewish tradition, blood was used in the ratification and sealing of covenants, as seen in the Sinaitic Covenant whereby Moses sprinkled sacrificial blood of a bull on the people saying, "This is the blood of the covenant (*dam habberit* - דַּם הַבְּרִית) that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words." (Ex 24:8; cf. Zech 9:11). These words were later used by Jesus during the Last Supper in ratifying the new covenant in his blood (cf. Mk 14:24 par.; 1Cor 11:25; Heb 9:20; 10:29; 12:24; 13:20). Cf. M. WEINFELD, "בְּרִית", *TDOT* II, 263; B. JOHANNES, "αἷμα, αἷματεκχυσία", *TDNT* II, 172-177, especially 174.

and the Bread was a sharing in the Body and Blood of Christ who died for all (1Cor 10:16). Consequently, discrimination and division of any type among those who believe in Jesus Christ would be unacceptable. But in the context of Ephesians, Paul extends it to all human beings who believe in Christ: Jews and Gentiles are no longer divided along ethnic lines since they are united in him. Ordinances and decrees that had separated people were hitherto abolished in his flesh on the cross, so that such things would no longer be the cause of division and hostility among people (v. 15).

Third, not only did Jesus Christ remove that hostile separation, but also brought reconciliation and peace. It is not that the old way of life continued without hostility; rather, the blood of Christ brought something new: he created a new man in place of two (v. 16). In different words from Col 2:11, the new man is circumcised by Christ and in Rom 2:29 he calls this “a circumcision of the heart by the Spirit”.⁷⁴ Jesus united the old humanity to himself in his body on the cross; and in the resurrection, he brought forth a new humanity capable of giving the one obedience of faith to the One God in heaven. James called this new relationship “the perfect law and the law of liberty” that receives the implanted word which is able to save souls (cf. Jas 1:19-25).

For Paul the real Gentiles, that is to say, the uncircumcised, are those who do not believe in Jesus Christ at all. “Therefore, remember that formerly you who were Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who called themselves ‘the circumcision’ (that done in the body by the hands of men)...” (Eph 2:11). In Christ, Gentiles are made participants in the privileged status of the ethnic Israel and share in the covenantal promises.

⁷⁴ In his recent treatment of the theme S.F. TURKER “‘Sealed’ with the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13-14) and Circumcision”, *Biblica* 93 (2012) 557-579 argues that Circumcision and Sealing are synonymous in the Pauline corpus. One of the most persistent concepts is unity between Jews and Gentiles who are brought together in the common experience of the Spirit. Ferda concludes by stating that it is highly probable that “sealed with the promised Holy Spirit” takes on the role of circumcision in order to mark out God’s “possession” and assure the followers of Christ of God’s promised incorruptible inheritance (579).

They are spiritually circumcised in the heart by the Holy Spirit⁷⁵ and not in the flesh by human hands (Eph 2:12-14). The non-observant circumcised Jew, who does not keep the law, is the same as the physically uncircumcised Gentile for they are both under the same divine judgment (cf. Rom 2:25-29; 1Cor 7:19; Gal 5:6; Col 3:11). For this reason the Jewish scholar Lapidé thought that Paul was only wrenched from his Jewish tradition. However, he did not believe in the abolition of the Torah, for the Law does not merely consist of rigorous commands but is full of promise, full of grace, and full of the gospel. Paul only discouraged Gentiles from keeping the Law. Also Lapidé did not find Paul chiding his fellow Jews for cold legalism or merit-earning attempts at salvation. This is a flawed Lutheran portrait of Paul.⁷⁶ Lapidé subsequently remarks:

That Jesus became the Saviour of the Gentiles without being the Messiah of Israel is in no way a contradiction... Certainly Pauline Christology is one of the ways to God. Israel's way is another. Has the time not come that we give God credit for more imagination than the exclusivity of a single one-way street leading to salvation?⁷⁷

In Rom 3:29-30 Paul presents a kind of diatribe: "Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith" indicating the universality of salvation in Christ.

A Shift from Violence against Non-believers to Peaceful Co-existence

The Christian Paul shows his change of attitude towards those who do not share his beliefs. In his letters Paul demonstrates that he has no longer physically attacked those who opposed the gospel;

⁷⁵ Bodily circumcision (Hebrew: *mūlah* - מילה, Greek: *peritome* – περιτομή) was the sealing sign of belonging to the covenant between God and Israel, the descendants of Abraham (cf. Gen 17:10-14, 23-27). The concept of spiritual circumcision or circumcision of the heart is a biblical tradition (cf. Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4; 9:26; Ezek 44:7, 9).

⁷⁶ Cf. P. LAPIDÉ, *Paul: Rabbi and Apostle*, Minneapolis: Augsburg 1984, 36-42.

⁷⁷ P. LAPIDÉ, *Paul: Rabbi and Apostle*, 51.

rather, he taught his faithful to co-exist peacefully with them. From his experience of the risen Lord's victory over his former violence against Christians, Paul realized that real victory is found in making the enemy repent and be saved in Christ, as he instructed Timothy in 2Tim 2:24-26. Therefore, instead of using physical violence to force others to follow the Way, Christians should use spiritual weapons that convince others that the Way deserves to be followed (2Cor 10:3-5; cf. Eph 6:12-17). And when they are persecuted, Christians should not seek revenge, "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' {Deut. 32:35} says the Lord" (Rom 12:19; cf. Rom 12:14, 17; Phil 1:27-28; 2Tim 4:14-15).

Even Jews who oppose the Way should not be hated; rather, Christians should pray for their peace (cf. Rom 2:10; Gal 6:16; Mt 5:44).⁷⁸ Christians should always preach peace, which indeed is the core of the good news, and therefore should offer God's mercy even to the unrepentant and the pagans. It is not the preacher who saves people; rather, it is the Holy Spirit who moves the people to believe in the gospel of Christ (cf. Rom 15:16; 1Cor 12:3; 1Thes 1:5-6).

Conclusion

The various accounts with minor differences of Saul's encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus (three in Acts and his personal testimony in his letters) indicate that the event actually took place and is not a myth. It also shows how important the event was for Saul and the primitive Church. The present study has demonstrated that the former Saul, utterly zealous in his attitude and behaviour, experienced a profound paradigm shift after his encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus. Saul's fall to the ground and the blinding light of the risen Christ and his gospel opened his eyes so that he might see his former Jewish values in a completely new light. Jesus' admonitions to his disciples resonated with clarity and truth in the life of Saul

⁷⁸ Cf. J. BABRIELSON, *Paul's Non-Violent Gospel. The Theological Politics of Peace in Paul's Life and Letters*, Eugene: Pickwick 2013.

who thought that he was offering service to God by persecuting and killing Jesus' followers (cf. Jn 16:2-4).

The reborn Paul found himself anchored in five new convictions: first, the Jesus of Nazareth whom he fiercely opposed was alive in the persons of his disciples; he was not an impersonal power or spirit, but rather a distinct person, divine but also human, who could speak on his own. Therefore, he was truly risen as his disciples claimed. He understood that Christians were physical representatives or – better – extension of the risen Jesus of Nazareth. Their lives were in Christ (ἐν Χριστῷ), whether in suffering or in joy. His whole theology of living in Christ took its root in this incident (cf. Gal 2:20).

Second, this Jesus of Nazareth was truly the Son of God as he claimed. Therefore, it was futile and self-defeating to try to fight against him and his teaching.

Third, God's plan of salvation was not explicitly known to him as he earlier thought; rather, the divine plan was mysterious and was also offered to the Gentiles. Therefore, there was to be no ethnic discrimination in God.

Fourth, the Torah was not an end in itself; rather, it was at the service of God's plan to save all peoples through Christ Jesus (cf. Eph 2:15; Mk 2:27par.; Acts 17:30). The Law itself could not save; rather, one is saved through faith in Christ (cf. Gal 2:21).

Fifth, Paul held on to the pillars of Judaism: monotheism, i.e., that God is one (Rom 3:30; cf. Mk 12:29); the Jewish Law; the election; the covenant; and the promises. Paul understood that these pillars should fortify Jews in their gradual discovery of Christ and that these pillars should find fulfilment in Christ who indeed is the spiritual law of God for all who believe in Him, Jews and Gentiles alike (Rom 8:2; cf. 1:16; 3:31; Gal 3:20ff; 6:2; 1Cor 9:20f; Eph 2:14ff).

Saul's zeal for the Torah and for the Jewish traditions of the fathers that had compelled him to become a violent opponent of the Way was now a new zeal directed vigorously but with new patience to preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ. The enlightened Paul no longer did this with a violent impulse to coerce; rather, he freely invited all people not by human philosophical conviction – that failed at the Areopagus (Acts 17:19-33) – but by the wisdom of the

cross, i.e., by the Spirit of Christ who is the wisdom of God (cf. 1Cor 1:17-31). When one accents the patience, one can call this process Pauline sublimation. In fact, following Jesus' teaching Paul advocated for nonviolence and nonretaliation, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse" (Rom 12:14; cf. Mt 5:44; Lk 6:27, 35).

Within the context of our present day and age, Paul would be appalled by the way some of the followers of Jesus Christ are fighting each other to the brink of breaking up the Church of God. Using furious words he vehemently defended the unity of the Church against those Judaizers who were scoffing his apostolic authority and his teaching. He would certainly see the image of the former uncompromising Saul who was persecuting the followers of Christ in those who are today violently attacking the Church. Both conservative and liberal fundamentalisms display ignorance of God's ways and of his universal plan in Christ.

Paul would consider the modern scourge of religious fundamentalism as reducing God's universal plan to human finiteness and an affront to God's true greatness. He would strongly respond by enlightening fundamentalists of God's ways and exhorting the Church to pray for them so that they may ultimately see the light and find the absolute truth in Christ. He would never advocate for violent retaliation; rather, he would use Jesus' prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:24) and that of Stephen the martyr, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:60).

In his article about the modern danger of our myths of righteousness Vincent Pizzuto wrote, "The most central gospel proclamation of "Christ crucified" challenges us to confront evil not by retaliation or even resistance, but as did Christ – by absorption. For Jesus, this resulted in his own death, which victoriously rendered impotent the evil that was railing against him."⁷⁹ This is not passivism; rather, it is absorption which the world needs to learn and adopt in confronting modern fundamentalism.

⁷⁹ V. PIZZUTO, "Religious Terror", 53.

The Practice of *hesed* in the Book of Ruth: A Challenge and Invitation to Young People to Form Stable Families in Africa

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Introduction

In this postmodern world, we live in a milieu where researchers face a dilemma when it comes to finding an appropriate definition for the term *family*. This may especially be the case if the milieu in question is that of the developed countries that are prone to materialism and secularism. But Africa is a blessed continent where people cherish the oneness, the harmony, and the formation that families have given to each of their own members. It is valid, nevertheless, to ask: Do African families continue to accept and abide by this blessing even today?

Part I: Features of the African Family

A Difficulties in Defining the Term Family: Conceptual Issues

Let us begin with the question “What is family?” Webster’s dictionary defines family as “a group of individuals living under one roof, and usually under one head”.¹ Microsoft Encarta World English Dictionary asserts that a family is a group of relatives; a group or number of groups of people who are closely related by birth, marriage or adoption; a group of people living together and functioning as a single household usually consisting of parents and

¹ *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster Inc. 1991, 448.

their children.² In the *Dictionary of Sociology*, Hogan suggests that “family is a basic kinship unit, in its minimal form, consisting of a husband, wife and children. In its widest sense, it refers to all relatives living together or recognized as a social unit, including adopted persons. This excludes family members who live in different locations and yet share the same family origin.”³

The complexity of defining the family does not end with the determination of family membership but it may also be linked to ideological differences. For instance, in their effort to broaden the definition of the family, Scanzoni and his colleagues recognized that the traditional family, one that consists of two parents and their immediate children, represents the prevailing pattern of the family. To them, “all other family forms or sequencing tend to be labelled as deviant...”

Yet Scanzoni and his partners opposed the view held by many early writers that it is the traditional family that is the ideal family, the family type by which the moral health, stability and unity of other families may be evaluated. This doubt about the nature of the ideal family depicts how the conception of family is not only concerned with family structure but also oriented to the ideology and mindset that occupies the ones doing the defining. In her

² *Microsoft Encarta World English Dictionary*, 673

³ M.O. Hogan, *Academic's Dictionary of Sociology*. New Delhi: Academic Publishers 2006, 157.

There are a variety of definitions. Mitchell and his cowriters in their book *A New Dictionary of Sociology*, quoting Burgess and Locke, say that the “family is a group of persons, united by the ties of marriage, blood, adoption, consisting of a single household, interacting and inter-communicating with each other in their respective social roles of husband and wife, mother and father, brother and sister, creating a common culture”. This description again leaves out multiple household families. In addition, it makes no reference to single-parent families, same-sex friendships and “empty-shell” families without offspring, which can be a battlefield for some couples. Thus, the cited definitions are not perfect. However, they are useful for our purpose here. It is said that we should be talking about families rather than a single family since there are several variants in the notion and structure of families across the globe. Family is thus a multi-dimensional concept. Cf. G.D. Mitchell, ed., *A New Dictionary of Sociology*, London: Routledge 1979, 80.

studies, Allen comments on this ideology and mindset when she states,

Our assumptions, values, feelings, and histories shape the scholarship we propose, the findings we generate, and the conclusions we draw. Our insights about family processes and structures are affected by our membership in particular families, by the lives of those we study, and by what we care about knowing and explaining.

If one is to depend on the opinion of these researchers, therefore, one comes to understand that yes, there are inescapable ideological differences that may result in a definition of the family that is driven by theory, history, culture, and situation.⁴

Sociology scholars have noted that the definition of family will fluctuate according to situational factors. Most experts in the field seemed to reach the consensus that “there is no single correct definition of what a family is... rather, the approaches that individuals have taken in attempting to define the family have ranged in meaning from very specific to very broad, from theoretical to practical, and from culturally specific to culturally diverse.”⁵

B. An Overview of Traditional Family Traits in Africa

The rich cultural heritage and tradition of the African continent manifests the fact that the strength of Africa is in her families. The famous journalist Richard Dowden opines that family is fundamental to life in Africa. In his view, the self-made man does

⁴ K.R. Allen, “Becoming More Inclusive of Diversity in Family Studies”, *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62 (January, 2000), 4-12. The editor recommends for those who wish to explore in scholarly fashion the issue of ideological bias, and those who formulate definitions, theories, hypotheses and conclusions according to the parameters of bias, B. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*. New York: Philosophical Library 1967, 218-244.

⁵ Scanzoni et al., *The Sexual Bond: Rethinking Families and Close Relationships*. New York: Sage 1989, 27. Scholars have made many efforts to define family based on theories or concepts that go beyond the family itself. See for further information: F.A. Badru, “Towards Rebuilding a Stable Family System in Africa”, <http://www.scribd.com/rebuildafrica> 18/2 (2009) retrieved on 3rd Jan 2014.

not exist in Africa. If the slogan of European rationalism is individualistic, i.e., that which asserts with Rene Descartes that 'I think therefore I am,' Africa's would be that of communalism: 'We are, therefore I am... I relate, therefore, I am.' Africans know who family is and a person without a family is a 'nobody.'

E. D. Clark notices that at least twenty-eight African constitutions expressly recognize the central role of the family. They describe the family as the fundamental element of society; the basic or natural and fundamental unit of society; the basic cell of society; the basic nucleus of social organization; the basis of society; the natural and moral basis of the human community; the foundation of society, or the natural and moral foundation of the human community... Africa leads the way in supporting strongly these universal truths about the family.⁶ In no other region on earth do so many countries constitutionally declare the unique position of the family. And in nearly all of these African constitutions, there is also a promise to protect and assist the family.

The core importance of the African family assumed the spotlight in the Plan of Action on the Family in Africa, issued in July 2004 in Benin by the Regional Conference of the Family in Africa. The Regional Conference emphasized that in Africa, due to its multiple roles and functions, the centrality, uniqueness and indispensability of the family in society is unquestionable. For generations, the family has been a source of strength for guidance and support, thus providing members with a wide circle of relatives on whom they can fall back. In times of crisis, unemployment, sickness, poverty, old age, and bereavement, most people rely on the family as a wellspring of material, social and emotional security.

Therefore, the African family network is the prime mechanism for coping with social, economic and political adversity on the continent. It is the principal focus for the socialization and the education of children and is central to the process of human rights

⁶ It is important to note that Korea, the Philippines, and other Asian countries also have understood the family in this manner for thousands of years. While these are countries that traditionally were not operating with constitutions, their experience of the family is fundamental for their national *raison d'être* and suits their own cultural perspectives (Ed.)

education. In all societies, the family is the setting for demographic reproduction and the milieu for the first integration of individuals into social life. As a result, the family is at the centre of the dynamics which affect the well-being of each society.

Traditionally, Africa's development has been a result of the strength of the family. Large families have been a source of labour and an indication of prosperity. The extended family system has ensured that the poor families be generally supported by the rich. The unity within the family has ensured its survival at moments of internal conflicts, crises and adversity. Recognition that the family is the most fundamental unit of society, a dynamic unit engaged in an intertwined process of individual and group development, justifies the conviction inherent in the positioning of the African family at the core of society. To accept the African family for what it is strengthens Africa's developmental process.⁷

Sociologists have catalogued many functions that the African families perform. In many traditional African cultures, parents – especially mothers – have had the primary responsibility for teaching their children certain moral standards of behaviour as the children grow and become more incorporated into African society.

Parents also teach their children socialization through which parents transmit mores, folkways, norms and values including appropriate social language to the younger family members.

A principal duty is to teach regulation of sexual behaviour: whom to marry, whom to have coital activity with and not, incest taboos, and others. For example, among the Luo of western Kenya, young girls used to be taught by their grandmothers and aunts how to sit down in a proper and decent manner (with their legs together) to avoid possible temptation on the part of boys. They also would receive advice on how to relate to men. Their mothers educated them about the moral dimension of sexuality, including the fact that sexual relationships are to be restricted to marriage partners. Adolescence girls were advised to uphold sexual morality until they got married and were ready to raise a family.

⁷ Cf. E.D. Clark, “The Family in Africa”, <http://www.familypolicycenter.org/id55.html>, retrieved on 3rd Jan 2014.

Such advice was based on the moral premise that sexual morality in general and pre-marital virginity in particular were to be highly valued. Single motherhood was viewed as immoral and brought disgrace not only on the girl but on her family and community as a whole. Having a child out of wedlock was stigmatized and it lowered the dignity not only of the girl, who was perceived to be ‘morally loose’, but also of the mother, who was blamed for not having taught her daughter good conduct.⁸

C. The Present Situation of the Family in Africa

The Encyclopaedia of African History and Culture, Vol. V, seems to offer an accurate assessment of the African family’s current situation: “The sense of family in Africa remains strong, as does the value placed on children and respect for age and seniority. Yet, as in so many other parts of the world, the family in Africa is under great pressure. Some of this pressure comes from economic forces, such as wages and migrant labour that had their origin in the colonial era.”⁹

Article no. 3 of the Plan of Action on the family in Africa issued in 3rd July, 2004 in Addis Ababa, by the Executive Council of the African Union, identifies some of the contemporary issues threatening the stability of family in Africa. According to this document, in Africa the family is an important institution of society but it is undergoing tremendous changes and facing many formidable challenges. Hence the family suffers tensions that arise from an undeniably increasing poverty; from civil strife and conflict; and from an unmistakably volatile vulnerability. Other constraints that the African family faces are the burden of debt, poor governance, a high unemployment rate, inadequate social security mechanisms, a rural to urban migration, gender inequality, and the displacement and consequent disintegration of the family. The intensifying impact of HIV/AIDS and other pandemics on the socio-economic sector of the population, especially on young

⁸ F.A. Badru, “Towards Rebuilding a Stable Family System”, 15-18.

⁹ R.H., Davis Jr., ed., *Encyclopaedia of African History and Culture, Vol. 5*, New York: Facts on File 2005, 156-157.

women, is putting what one can say is an unprecedented strain on the family.

In his article, Badru identifies the strains that face African families especially in purview of a prevailing moral decadence in many sectors of the world:

Today, the moral standards are being swept away or distorted by the modernization process, resulting in a moral vacuum and the breakdown of family life. Pre-marital pregnancies and divorce are rampant in contemporary Africa and public perceptions of these phenomena have changed drastically. There has been a proliferation of single mothers. At the same time, most modern African families, including poor single-parent families, are becoming increasingly unable to provide adequate care and support for their members. The result has been premarital pregnancies, child abuse and neglect, increased numbers of street children, prostitution, and a tendency towards marital infidelity.¹⁰

At this point I advert to my own personal experience: As I visit families, I perceive no reason to deny the truth of what Badru is saying. Premarital teenage pregnancies are so common that no family is exempted from this curse in our locality. At the present time, there is a very urgent need in Tanzanian society and for that matter in all of Africa to initiate a systematic programme of consciousness-raising on the issue of moral decadence and the grave consequences that follow in the wake of moral decadence. Moral evils directly threaten the stability of the family; and hence grave moral lapses can unsettle the entire society, the nation and the whole world in general.

D. What the Catholic Church Teaches about Family Life

What does the Church teach about the family and the moral issues that confront it? Pope Paul VI's encyclical letter *Humane Vitae* interprets the divine will regarding the responsibility of the spouses to beget children. It is in no way an imposition, but rather a serious choice that mature grownup individuals make with personal freedom in the awareness that they participate in the very creating act of God.

¹⁰ F.A. Badru, “Towards Rebuilding a Stable Family System”, 19-20.

Men rightly observe that a conjugal act imposed on one's partner without regard to his or her condition or personal and reasonable wishes in the matter, is no true act of love, and therefore offends the moral order in its particular application to the intimate relationship of husband and wife. If they further reflect, they must also recognize that an act of mutual love which impairs the capacity to transmit life which God the Creator, through specific laws, has built into it, frustrates His design which constitutes the norm of marriage, and contradicts the will of the Author of life. Hence to use this divine gift while depriving it, even if only partially, of its meaning and purpose, is equally repugnant to the nature of man and of woman, and is consequently in opposition to the plan of God and His holy will. But to experience the gift of married love while respecting the laws of conception is to acknowledge that one is not the master of the sources of life but rather the minister of the design established by the Creator. Just as man does not have unlimited dominion over his body in general, so also, and with more particular reason, he has no such dominion over his specifically sexual faculties, for these are concerned by their very nature with the generation of life, of which God is the source. "Human life is sacred—all men must recognize that fact," Our predecessor Pope John XXIII recalled. "From its very inception it reveals the creating hand of God." (*Humanae Vitae*, 13)

About the stability of family life the encyclical teaches:

Married love is faithful and exclusive of all other, and this until death. This is how husband and wife understand it on the day on which fully aware of what they are doing, they are freely vowed themselves to one another in marriage. Though this fidelity of husband and wife sometimes present difficulties no one can assert that it is impossible, for it is always honorable and worthy of the highest esteem. The example of so many married persons down through the centuries shows not only that fidelity is connatural to marriage but also that it is the source of profound and enduring happiness (*Humanae vitae*, 9).

The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium Et Spes* teaches about the stability of family which is a gift of God, bestowed on those who are faithful and respectful to each other.

The intimate partnership of married life and love has been established by the Creator and qualified by His laws, and is rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent. Hence by that human act whereby spouses mutually bestow and accept each other a relationship arises which by divine will and in the eyes of society too is a lasting one. For the good of the spouses and their off-springs

as well as of society, the existence of the sacred bond no longer depends on human decisions alone. For, God Himself is the author of matrimony, endowed as it is with various benefits and purposes. All of these have a very decisive bearing on the continuation of the human race, on the personal development and eternal destiny of the individual members of a family, and on the dignity, stability, peace and prosperity of the family itself and of human society as a whole... Authentic married love is caught up into divine love and is governed and enriched by Christ's redeeming power and the saving activity of the Church, so that this love may lead the spouses to God with powerful effect and may aid and strengthen them in sublime office of being a father or a mother (*Gaudium et Spes*, 48).

Part II: Message from Biblical Ruth to Families in Africa

A. The Summary of the Book of Ruth

In a simple and attractive form of historical narrative, the book of Ruth presents us with an account of how Ruth the Moabitess, a daughter-in-law of the Bethlehemite Elimelech of the family of Judah, takes refuge under the wings of the God of Israel, and how her fidelity (רַחֵם - *hesed*) to her nuptial family earns its true reward. Elimelech had immigrated with his wife and his two sons into the land of Moab on account of famine. Naomi, the wife of Elimelech, lost her husband and two sons in this foreign land. Among the two daughters-in-law, Ruth went with Naomi to Judea out of childlike affection for her Israelite mother-in-law. When they were there, as Ruth, feeling the sting of poverty, was gleaning some ears of corn in the fields, she came by accident to the field of Boaz, a close relation of Elimelech; Ruth made her acquaintance with this honourable and benevolent man. In the course of time, in harmony with the her mother-in-law's wishes, Ruth entered into marriage with Boaz, according to all the ordinary legal forms; and, coupled now with her husband Boaz, she bore a son in this marriage, named Obed. This Obed was the grandfather of David, with whose genealogy the book closes.

B. An Appealing Story

The Book of Ruth is the only book in the Old Testament canon named after a non-Israelite. “Ruth the Moabitess” is the identification mark given by the narrator to Ruth in five places in the story.¹¹ The stress on the foreign name itself captures the attention of the readers, much like the group identity of the Good Samaritan whom Luke portrays as a model of compassionate love for the Israelites (Cf. Lk 10:29-37). When Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan to his Jewish audience he knew the implications involved in making the hero of the story a Samaritan. The parable would not have made its point if most of the people had not considered themselves morally superior to Samaritans.

In the same way, the Book of Ruth portrays an alien woman who causes the Jewish audience of the past and the Christian audience of the present to identify themselves with this heroine especially when there occur critical moments that require fidelity in the life of the family. The parabolic nature of the book of Ruth encourages us to see our own lives reflected in the story.¹²

The name Ruth appears elsewhere in the Bible apart from the Book of Ruth only in Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus in Matt 1:5. There is scarcely any chapter in all the sacred history that stoops so low as this to take cognizance of a person such as Ruth, a poor Moabite widow, whose poverty reduces her to gleaning corn in a neighbour’s field, and the concomitant circumstances thereof. But all this was the boulevard she travelled to be grafted into the line of Christ and counted among his ancestors, that she might be a figure of the espousal of the Gentile church to Christ. This makes her story all the more remarkable: many of its details indeed can be instructive for family life and can help to raise the consciousness about the essential need for the spouses and all family members to be faithful to the requirements of spousal and family love.

Ruth is quite a charming little book in the Bible. It has profoundly human features with which one can easily identify. Indeed, we, the readers, immediately see ourselves in the story. We empathize readily with poor Naomi, battered by life’s tragic blows

¹¹ 1:22; 2:2, 21; 4:5, 10; D.I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 587-589.

¹² K.A.R. Farmer, *The Book of Ruth*, Nashville: Abingdon 1998, 6.

– famine, exile, grief, loneliness – and recall our own bitter bruises. We quickly esteem beautiful Ruth, her commitment, courage, and cleverness. This easily yields to emulation, for we readers know how much better off this tragic world would be if there were more ‘Ruths’ among us. We welcome with warmth Boaz, that gracious tower of gentle manliness and munificence, whose uprightness challenges us to reflect on our willingness to be magnanimous. In short they are ordinary people, people like us, who portray an extraordinary alternative to the way that life is commonly lived. They make manifest for us, in a word, the life of *hesed* (compassionate loyalty), with amazing sincerity and simplicity.¹³

This is a historical account that articulates the ways of God for us within the human sphere of existence. The narrative brings healing to readers when we recognize the mysterious hiddenness of God, who nevertheless exists with divine exuberance in the daily lives of these ordinary persons. Yes, the narrative depicts clearly God’s involvement in life’s ordinary affairs. Indeed they are the field in which He chooses to operate. Paradoxically, the account manifests that even in silence God speaks loudly as He works with indelible effectiveness through the everyday faithfulness of His people.

C. The Central Theme of the Book of Ruth: *Hesed*

The KJV translates the word *hesed* to mean kindness, loving kindness, mercy and words of similar vein. The RSV usually translates it to mean steadfast love, occasionally loyalty; the NASB translates it as loving kindness, kindness, love, and so forth. Nelson Glueck and his companions held that *hesed* was not basically mercy but loyalty to God’s covenant obligations, a loyalty which the Israelites should also show.¹⁴

¹³The scholars recognize it as a love story between Ruth and Boaz, which easily ensnares the readers’ attention. Naomi’s plight – she is bereft of any heir – conceals any joy that may have imbued the romance. Finally Naomi has a son: love and fidelity have brought forth little Obed, the heir (4:14-15), that God has provided. The happy reader revels in the triumph of joy over tragedy. See: R.L. Hubbard Jr., *The Book of Ruth*, 1-18.

¹⁴N. Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, Hebrew Union College Press 1967.

Hesed (חֶסֶד) is a Hebrew term which brings to light one of Yahweh's most treasured characteristics whose meaning cannot be captured in one English word. This term wraps up in itself all the positive attributes of God – love, mercy, grace, compassion, kindness, benevolence, loyalty, covenant faithfulness, patience, goodness, purity, and shared joy. It is that quality that moves a person to act for the benefit of another without respect to the advantage it might bring to the one who expresses it.¹⁵

a) ***Hesed* of Yahweh as Identified by the Characters of the Story**

Naomi's first speech (1:8) introduces the key theological term in the book: *hesed*. Naomi's use of the word *hesed*, as the direct object of the verb, חָשָׂה – 'āsâ – to do/ act/ demonstrate, reflects the fact that the quality is expressed fundamentally in action rather than word or emotion. This is confirmed in v. 7 where she requests that Yahweh might grant rest, that is, security in the house of her husband. This active sense is reinforced in Naomi's second use of the word, in 2:20, when she recognizes Yahweh's *hesed* in Ruth's return from Boaz with an abundant supply of food. Naomi also recognizes Yahweh's freedom to act in judgment against a person. In 1:13 she expresses this notion generally as "the Lord's hand has gone out against me."

In her opening speech (1:16-17), Ruth explicitly expresses an awareness of God's presence; and her declarations represent one of the most significant statements in the entire book: "...Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God... May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!" (1:16-17). Being a foreigner, Ruth the Moabitess, declares her faith in Yahweh, an act which is truly noteworthy. In keeping with prevailing ancient near Eastern perceptions she recognizes that when one transfers ethnic and national allegiance one subjects oneself to the authority of the god of the adopted people.

Boaz's references to God appear in blessings (2:4, 12a, 12b; 3:10) which reflect his recognition of Yahweh as a gracious God who dwells with his people (note his greeting, "The Lord be with

¹⁵ D.A. Baer – R.P. Gordon, "חסד", *NIDOTTE*, 211-218.

you" – 2:4) and rewards people for their acts of devotion and kindness (2:11-12). The ascription "the God of Israel" in 2:12 is significant, particularly since Boaz is talking to a Moabite. With the final clause "under whose wings you have come to take refuge," he identifies an important characteristic of Yahweh, that is to say, that as patron of the nation, Yahweh offers protection to all who will identify with his people. Like Naomi in chapter 2 verse 20, in the tenth verse of the third chapter, Boaz perceives Yahweh as the source of all blessing.

Recognizing God's *hesed* is the first step towards imitating the same quality in the lives of the people. As we have seen in the expressions of these persons who figure in the narrative, they were identifying and praising God's *hesed*.

b) *Hesed* of Yahweh Recognized by the Narrator

God's hand is present in natural events. The book opens on a gloomy note of famine in the land. It continues in this serious temper by advertng to the death of the head of the family, Elimelech and his two sons Chilion and Mahlon. In all these events Naomi, the one who lost the most, recognizes the hand of God: "...the Lord has dealt harshly with me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me" (1:21).

God's hand is also present in seemingly chance events. In 2:3 we read, וַיִּקֶּר מִקְרָהָ – *wayyiqer miqrehā* – she met by chance, or she happened to come upon. Through this expression the narrator compels the reader to question how was it that Ruth happened to land in a field of a man who was not only gracious but a potential גֹּאֵל – *gā'al* – redeemer? Ruth's arrival at Boaz's field was clear evidence of the providential hand of God, who directs the personal affairs of each person in the narrative towards the goal announced at the end of the book, in 4:17c: King David has a progenitor.

God's hand is present in the delicate and daring schemes of human beings. The scheme that Naomi invents in order to provide security for her daughter-in-law Ruth, a scheme that Ruth implements, seems to be worthy of suspicion from the standpoint of custom and morality. The scheme, in fact, seems fraught with danger. Ruth's preparations and the choice of location for the encounter suggest the actions of a prostitute.

Under normal circumstances, if a self-respecting and morally noble man like Boaz sleeping on the threshing floor should wake up in the middle of the night and discover a woman beside him he would surely shoo off her, protesting that he had nothing to do with women like her. Ruth's demand that Boaz marry her is highly irregular from the perspective of custom: a foreigner propositioning an Israelite; a woman propositioning a man; a young person propositioning an older person; a destitute field worker propositioning the landowner. But instead of taking offense at Ruth's forwardness, Boaz blesses her, praises her, for her *hesed*, calls her my daughter and reassures her by telling her not to fear, promises to do whatever she asks and declares her to be a noble woman. This extraordinary response is best attributed to the hand of God, who by the power of his Spirit, directs the heart and tongue of Boaz when he awakes.

As the narrative develops, God's hand is also evidently present in the legal process. By Ruth's request, Boaz arranges for the legal resolution of the issue (4:1-12). The reader who has kept pace with the movement of the story recognizes the hand of God in the fact that the nearest kin passes by the city gate where Boaz had sat down. The change of mind of the kin is doubtlessly the work of God, who has determined the outcome from the beginning.¹⁶

c) The Life of *hesed* Expounded in the Book of Ruth

The book of Ruth holds out the practice of *hesed* as the ideal lifestyle for Israel. The book identifies duty to maintain survival of the family as a specific arena for realizing *hesed*. In any case all the blessings that Ruth and Boaz enjoy at the story's end derive from their firm loyalty and God's divine correspondence to that loyalty. The narrator holds them up as role models of living *hesed*. Through them we all learn the noble demands of *hesed*.

The life style of *hesed* requires extraordinary commitment. The author stresses this idea through two pairs of contrasting characters. First he juxtaposes the two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth (1:8-17). Without criticism he reports Orpah's return to Moab in obedience to Naomi's commands. She represents the one who does

¹⁶ D.I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 604-610.

the ordinary, the expected. There is no wrong in her conduct. Nevertheless, it is not *hesed*. By contrast Ruth represents one who does the extraordinary, the unexpected. She was not content to rejoin her Moabite family, remarry, and live as her contemporaries would. Her commitment was to Naomi's people and to Naomi's God, even in the afterlife (1:17).

This explains why in Bethlehem, she refused to seek a husband for her own advantage (3:10). Instead she sought a marriage for Naomi's benefit. In such compassionate devotion she stands out from her equals as one who lives the virtue of *hesed*.

The author contrasts Boaz over against the unnamed kinsman (4:1-8). The kinsman turns out to be average in character, one who gladly passes his duty on to someone else when no economic advantage accrues to him. There is no wrong in this, for Israelite custom permitted it. But it is not the custom of the one who adheres to the virtue of *hesed*. By willing to sacrifice his own life for two impoverished widows, Boaz far exceeded his fellow and stood out as an extraordinary example for the demands of *hesed*.

Such devotion requires the taking of amazing risks. Ruth and Boaz exemplify this dimension of the *hesed* ideal. Ruth displays surprising courage in venturing out to glean in Bethlehem's fields. The ultimate risk is expressed in her night time visit to the threshing floor. She could not foresee Boaz's reaction to such feminine forwardness. He could have given in to anger or to embarrassment or to awkwardness or to acceptance.

She may not have been anticipating the loss of reputation and new accusations that could have resulted were she and Boaz discovered. Indeed she was not the only one taking risks: Boaz also rendered himself vulnerable in bringing her case before the public assembly (ch. 4). He too was unable to foresee how the proceedings at the gate would go. Nor could he determine beforehand how the public would interpret his taking the initiative in the matter.

In the final analysis, what resolved the entire situation in all its complexity was that both did what *hesed* demanded. The narrative stressed the reality that *hesed* requires that things be done in a way that preserves the parameters of justice, loving kindness, and loyalty. With her quality of courage, Ruth could have violated the custom of wandering among the field for gleaning and instead she

could have approached the piled grain. Yet she maintained the virtue of *hesed* by asking permission for access to the grain piles.

Similarly she and Boaz could have shared sexual pleasure on the dark, isolated threshing floor. Through sexually evocative language, the narrator certainly implied that (3:4) this was a possibility. But in reality, they came out that morning morally intact. *Hesed* required self-denial and self-control; preserving *hesed* meant maintaining a chaste disposition towards marriage and the appropriate process that marriage entails. Boaz agreed to accept the prior rights enjoyed by Ruth's other relative: Boaz did not in any way withhold his consent (3:12-13). Ruth avoided any manoeuvres to circumvent them. In fact, by simply obeying her mother-in-law and by readying herself to marry Boaz for Naomi's sake, Ruth was sacrificing her marital preference for Boaz on the altar of pure fidelity: in other words, *hesed* guided her.

Such a heroic practice of loyal, compassionate devotion, i.e., such a heroic adherence to *hesed* pleases God so much that one may reasonably expect grace in abundance from him. These are the generous gift of a sovereign God, who honours the human being who is faithful, who graciously lives by *hesed*. Those who practice it receive the recompense.¹⁷

Conclusion

We have been explicating African traditional family values, the Church teachings on the family and the lessons from the biblical Ruth with a particular concentration on *hesed*. As many sociologists have pointed out, it is high time in Tanzania and in Africa at large, to go back to the richness of our traditional family practices which can once again render precious and reinvigorate our family structures. I would like to propose with heartfelt conviction the Biblical characters Ruth and Boaz as great models to be imitated by young people in Africa who aspire to a stable family life. When I consider *hesed* from every perspective, I declare my heartfelt conviction that *hesed* is an intrinsic traditional value in African culture especially when we understand

¹⁷ Cf. R.L. Hubbard Jr., *The Book of Ruth*, NICOT, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1998, 72-74.

its meaning in terms of loyalty and covenant fidelity. The lifelong practice of *hesed* will surely motivate people to be faithful in their vocation as marriage partners and parents.

Young people should understand the moral danger that ensues if there is no commitment to faithfulness and respect in the matters of relationship with the other sex.¹⁸ The number of teenage mothers even at the age of 13 and 14 is increasing day by day. Who will answer for their emotional wounds and other desperate conditions generated from being mothers at such young ages? Girls/women learn from Ruth, to be patient and faithful. Boys/men learn from Boaz to be upright and generous. Parents/mothers learn from Naomi to have a discerning mind and practical counselling skills to lead their children on the right path. Let us be a part of rebuilding Africa with stable families.

¹⁸ In order to grasp this relationship between a young African woman and a young African man, and therefore to recognize the sacredness of the human person – she or he should never be reduced to an object for sexual gratification – to understand the sacredness of the communion of love expressed in sexual intercourse, and to give the highest regard to the sacredness of the child that may be conceived through the sexual relationship, see Pope St. John Paul II, *Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan*. New York: Pauline Books and Media 1997. (Ed.)

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