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“Contemporary reflection from the Ancient Land”

It is a collection of reflection papers from participants and resource persons during the Inter-seminary Ecumenical learning: Study-trip in Israel and Palestine.

MISSION SPARKS: Academic Journal of Asia Region

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An Editorial Note

From 1st-10th 2016 of August, Asia Department facilitated a Study Trip for lecturers of theological Seminaries and Faculties of UEM Members in Asia. Twelve lectures of New Testament and Old Testament from Indonesia, Hong Kong and the Philippines were the enthusiastic participants, guided by Kristina Neubauer and Dr. Obermann.

During the tour the participants reflected on specific biblical texts This third Mission-Sparks edition is a compilation of their essays. It includes experiences they gained in the Holy-land

Additionally, Rev. Sylvia Bokowski, from Wuppertal Barmen, a well known expert on Israel on Israel, contributed her article and the prayer for the land.

New in this edition is our attempt to honor the Asian scholars who finished their studies with excellent results.

Dr. Enta Malasinta Lantigimo, an academic from Banjarmasin in Kalimantan has written a unique dissertation at STT Jakarta. She is therefore honored with the Müller-Krüger award. You can read a short description of her thesis in this edition.

We hope to be able to announce the work of other scholars also in the coming editions.

Thank you for supporting Mission Sparks.

May you gained knowledge in reading this edition, the way we gain joy sharing it with you.

Sonia C. Parera-Hummel, M.Th.
Chief Editor and
UEM Executive Secretary for Asia



Facing the Death Threats by Singing: A Reflection of the Palestinian People's Ex- perience

Rev. Alokasih Gulo

*"Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil: for thou art with me"
(Psalm 23: 4a)*

Foreword

It is very difficult to imagine this world without singing, music and the like. It may be a bit of an exaggeration if it is said that life will be more colorful because of singing/music, but the fact shows that every day and in many places where humans live, we can enjoy music and singing, sometimes we ourselves become the actors. Look, for examples: in the shops, restaurants, hotels, waiting rooms at the airport and in many other places, we can enjoy music and singing.

Basically, music and singing can communicate emotions (feelings) of the human mind that transcend beyond race, religion and culture. The form of its expression is not always the same, depends on the life experiences, environment, beliefs and preferences of each human/community. Nevertheless, it is substantial for human beings in various places and times. That is also what the Palestinians do

when they are facing very difficult situations under the Israel occupation. They chose to sing when there was no way that can be done to go through the journey in the dark valley.

The following article is my reflection on the experience of the Palestinian people under the Israel control, based on our discussions with Palestinian pastors in a study tours conducted by UEM on August 1st to 10th, 2016.

The Power of Singing

On the 5th day of our journey to Israel (August 5th, 2016), we had an opportunity to meet two Palestinian pastors, one of them is Rev. Saliba Rishmawi. He recounted the awful experiences of the Palestinian people facing the Israeli government. They often face death threats, including women and children, some of them were killed by the Israeli soldiers. They live under the shadow of death that happens in their own country.

One of our friends asked these questions: "What do you do as a pastor to help the Palestinians who live under death threats? What pastoral care do you usually do?" Shaking his head, Rev. Rishmawi answered that they could not do much, either the pastors or the Palestinians. But then, Rev. Rishmawi told us a very interesting thing that they used to do when facing the Israeli soldiers who could threaten and kill them anytime, it is singing. "We usually sing, sing, and keep singing ... because that is all we can do. By singing we feel there is a new strength and courage to confront even the terrible threat," explained Rishmawi.

The Interesting thing is that the Palestinian people who live under the Israeli occupation, are still able to sing in the midst of suffering and threats they have experienced.

In this case, singing is not a symbol of weakness or just give up with such circumstances, but precisely shows their strength and courage in struggling for their independence in their own land. It turns out that they are getting stronger and daring to face such a difficult situation by singing songs, calls, laments, worship and praise to God, the Owner of life.

The Bible itself gives us much information about the song or songs used by the people/servants of God, both in the time of the Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT). The Book of Psalms for example, is the greatest songbook in the Bible. Whatever the situation they have experienced, whether it is lack, suffering, persecution, and despair, or vice versa abundance, freedom, joy, and peace, the psalmists kept on singing. In the NT, after the severe beatings, Paul and Silas spent their first night in the prison by praying and singing (Acts 16: 22-26). Apparently, singing is a powerful way to strengthen faith in God, both in joy and sorrow.

Like music in general, singing involves human emotions. Related with this, Djohan considers that music is a medium to express feelings (singers) and can arouse the feelings of the listeners, and so can affect human behavior, and it can help reduce the feelings of distress, anxiety, fear, and pain. Just as the Palestinians have experienced, they are getting stronger and daring to face the death threat by singing. Furthermore, Elizabeth MacKinlay et al affirmed that music can penetrate to a deeper level, and can even enter the spiritual dimension of human beings. The same is also expressed by Jesse Paledofsky and Zia Frances Shapiro that music can enter the core of human faith, and can affect the human spiritual life. The point is that singing has an important role in human life either in joy and sorrow.

Hymns as a Religious instrument in Pastoral Care

Singing which is the main part of music can be used as a religious instrument in pastoral care. This religious instrument (singing/music) has been widely recognized by almost all Christians, but its use in the practice of pastoral care is still limited. Though the songs are very influential in human life. Read more Totok Wiryasaputra notes as follows:

"The singing/music of Christian community is one expression of the ups and downs life of the faithful. The Life experiences such as feelings of love, gratitude, happiness, sadness, sorrow, regret, loyalty, commitment and so forth are expressed through singing/music. Thus, the singing/music of the Christian community can be used in pastoral care and counseling to help the counselees having their experiences fully and holistically so they can change, grow, and function optimally."

However, it should also be noted that the use of singing in pastoral care should be wise, contextual, and creative, especially when it is used for those who are in very difficult situations, such as loss and grief, sickness, suffering, persecution, etc. That is, the use of singing in assisting people in difficult situations is helpful, but it is applied differently in different contexts. The important thing to be noticed is that the use should be in the purpose of helping everyone to be able to "celebrate" the joy and sorrow of their lives fully and holistically, and should not be used only to cover our helplessness in accompanying those in need.

Be Strong and Courageous Dealing with Difficulties

Back to the case or experience of the Palestinian people, during our talk with Rev. Saliba Rishmawi, I was able to capture the emotional expressions that were so tempestuous within them: anger, despair, anxiety, fear, and so forth. However, such bad experiences, that continue to this day do not make them give up, nor blame God as we always do. Instead, they realize that the source of their strength and courage in facing all these threats is God. They also express it through singing, and it greatly helps the ministers in accompanying the oppressed and persecuted Palestinians.

It is not easy to live a life like the Palestinians do, particularly because the country that oppresses them is the nation known to be the people of God in the Bible. Palestinians continue to live with the threat, and in the end they become "accustomed" to the various threats, for them death from being killed by the Israeli army is an honorable sacrifice.

From the problems faced by the Palestinian people, I imagine that they are walking in the dark valley, as David once experienced (cf. Ps 23: 1-6). As we know that besides his glory as the king of Israel, David had a myriad of "bad" experiences, before he became king and while he was the king. He confronted many enemies who threatened his life, which he referred to as "the dark valley" (in the midst of the shadows of death). When he was a shepherd tending his sheep, he often encountered wild animals in the wilderness (see 1 Sam 17: 34-36); David once confronted Goliath, a Philistine giant (see 1 Sam. 17); Before being confirmed as the king of the Great Israel he was pursued several times to be killed by King Saul; and when he served as the king of Israel, his life was also

threatened because of the "rebellion" of his own son, Absalom, so he had to flee (see 2 Sam 15:14).

However, these bitter experiences breed a confession and testimony from David that God never left him, and in his helplessness he learned to surrender fully in the "shepherding" of the LORD, for the LORD is the guarantee of his life. In another part of his confession, David said: "The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing." (Psalm 34:10).

There are many more people who live in the difficult situation because of various reasons. The problems they faced are diverse and complex, such as poverty, illness, loss and grief, injustice, and so forth. Therefore, so many people live in fear and anxiety. Some are afraid of their future, anxious about what would happen, afraid of their past and anxious about what has happened; some are afraid of the present situation, the anxiety is engulfing their souls, and they feel powerless to face the awful realities in today's life. Every day, many people wake up from their sleeps by carrying untold burdens and their days are filled by various anxieties.

According to socio-psychology, actually, there is nothing wrong with fear and anxiety. Jesus himself had experienced tremendous fear and anxiety ahead of His arrest in Gethsemane (see Mark 14: 32-34). But then it is clearly revealed that Jesus did not give up easily on the fear and the anguish that He experienced. He did not die with a terrifying fear, angst or anxiety. He made it through those difficult times because of His total surrender of His life into God's hands.

In difficult situations, church should be present to accompany its congregation, so they will find a way out of the problems they face. Although, it must be admitted that many of the life issues in the congregation cannot be solved despite the church having reached out to them. What should we do when there is no way that can be taken? In this case we should not leave them alone in their powerlessness, we should help them grow stronger and braver to face the difficult life. Sing for them, sing with them! This is not a symbol of weakness, not a symbol of surrender to the situation; it becomes an important instrument to keep new spirit and hope for the congregation in their difficult situation.

Closing Remark

I want to end this article by quoting the words of Paul in his letter to the Christians in Rome:

"What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (Romans 8:31, 35). For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 8: 38-39).

Whatever and however the circumstances are, the comfort and freshness, the certainty and abundance and the assurance of life are in the true shepherd, the LORD. It is an acknowledgment and submission to God, the Shepherd, not "giving up to what is called 'fate'. This is a struggle that does not rely on our own power, but on the guidance of GOD.

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Currently he is pursuing his continuing studies in Doctor of Theology Program in Jakarta with a scholarship from UEM.

In 2012-2013, he participated in grant research, together with 2 SWCU lecturers and the results have been published in the research book "Church, Religion, and Social Issues". Several other scientific papers were published in Sundermann Journal, among others: (1) Serving with the Paradigm of the Kingdom of God in the Nias Context; (2) Making CPEs as Tools and Methods in the Beasting; (3) Towards a Transformed Pastoral Ministry: a Reflection on BNKP Church; (4) Logotherapy and its Relevance in Pastoral Care.

Brotherhood in Christian Perspective

Rev. Dr. Jon Riahman Sipayung

Introduction

The title of the article that I write here is “Brotherhood in Christian perspectives”. My reason to write this article is based on my experience in study visit to Jerusalem last August 1-10, 2016. From many of my impressions, one is when we visited a village in the Western Galilee namely Nes Ammim.

Nes Ammim is Hebrew word that means, non Israelite people (Deut. 32:21). The word Nes Ammim is taken from Isaiah 11:10. Today, Nes Ammim is an ecumenical Christian community where volunteers, locals and guests learn about the complex of Israeli society, its religions and cultures. Nes Ammim strengthens Jewish-Christian relations and tries to develop Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogue. It wants to support its Christian Arab brothers and sisters.¹ In this place I was informed that Christians claim that the Jews and Muslim are brothers and sisters. And the core values there, they want to be open to each other, for Jews and Arabs, and other people in all religions and cultures. They strive to be open to other opinions, even if they are different than others. They like to be transparent and are willing to tell why they do what they do. So everyone who comes with peaceful intentions is welcome.² From this experience I am really impressed and it stimulates me to

write the article entitled title brotherhood in Christian Perspective. The topic is very important to practice in our global world today, especially in Indonesia, because today the churches in Indonesia are faced with various problems in society,³ one of them is intolerance towards the adherents of certain religion.

The meaning of Brotherhood in general

The word brotherhood or sisterhood is one of the most important themes in the history of human life. The philosophers and religious leaders in the past and now strongly emphasize the importance of brotherhood cared for among others. In Greek culture brotherhood is virtues and marks of a honor. Plato understands friendship as a "fellow countryman". Plotinus more commonly says that everything in this world is brother.⁴ All these show that brotherhood is essential in us as human being. Martin Luther King Jr. firmly calls brotherhood as a necessity. He therefore urges and at the same time reminds us that "we must live together as brothers or perish together as fools." This statement reminds us that every human being is committed to bringing brotherhood to fellow human beings in everyday life.

In Greek, the word brother is translated from the word "*adelphos*", a combination of prefix *a* and followed by "*delphos*" becomes *adelphos* which means uterus. This meaning gives us an understanding that brother is a person who is born from the womb of the same mother, therefore is called a brother (male). And a sister is called *adelphe* (female). And in the plural form it is called *adelphoi*, meaning brothers or sisters.⁵ Therefore *adelphos* or *adelphe* appoints a person to be alive because it is born from the same mother's womb. The understanding of brotherhood in the practice of everyday life seems

to have evolved, because it is not limited to the scope of one mother and one father only or one father but different mother and vice versa. Vincent de Haas, in his article: "Brotherhood within the Scripture", in more detail explains the meaning of the word brother. It is understood in 5 categories⁶:

1. Brotherhood because of the bond of blood relations;
2. Brotherhood of family relationships in a broader context. For example a child of our uncle or our aunt;
3. Brotherhood because of one common tribe, nation, and race;
4. Brotherhood because it has the same belief.
5. Brotherhood is based on the sameness of humanity.

From this understanding it becomes clear that the sibling or brother has a wide range, and in fact that we are all brothers and sisters, just as one family, namely as a big family. We are both children of Adam and Eve. So it can be concluded that the brotherhood is not only based on blood relations, physical relationships, as well as wider relationships that have a background, the same view, for example fellow nation, one tribe, race and the same belief. From the view it turns that we are brothers, because there are certain bonds that unite us as brothers and sisters. But the great challenge for us today is that human beings tend to be no longer brothers and sisters to their fellow human beings but to be "*homo homini lupus*", human beings become wolves to their neighbors. With this situation hate will flow so fast and intolerance grows so quick.

Christian understands that brotherhood/sisterhood is not only based on the ties of blood relation, as in the Old Testament and in the Jewish family: Cain and Abel; the sons

of Jacob (Joseph and his brethren) and Simon Peter and Andrew. All the scope of this brotherhood or relationship only based on blood or body.

In the New Testament the brotherhood transcends the bonds of blood/ body or other social relations. This example of the meaning of brotherhood can be attributed to the ministry or teaching of Jesus while He is still on the earth. Once, when Jesus ministered on this earth, His mother and His brother came to meet Jesus. At that time Jesus was surrounded by people to hear and learn His teaching more closely. They told Jesus that Jesus' family came and called Him at once. They came to Jesus and said: "Look, your mother and your brothers are outside and try to meet You." But Jesus answered them in a tone: "Who is my mother and my brother?" (Mark 3:33). In this question Jesus himself answered, that the family of Jesus is the one who does the will of God. That means the family, the brother of Jesus, is not limited to blood relations and other social ties but spiritual bonds, He said: "Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother " (Mark 3:35). So the criteria of being brothers or sisters is not only because of His family, nor His tribe or His people, but the perpetrators or who does God's will towards our fellow human beings.⁷ The man who does the will of God on earth is the brothers and sisters of Jesus (Mark 3: 31-34). It means that when we do God's will, we become brothers and sisters in God's house. This teaching of Jesus opened a new horizon that everyone who implements God's will is the brothers and sisters of Jesus. To make more sense about Christian teaching about brotherhood is very important when compared with the concrete situation in the context when Jesus still lived in this world.

In Hellenistic culture, include in Judaism, social differences is very deep in society. John Stambaugh and David Balch describe that the social status of Roman Greek society is divided into three social classifications, namely: First: Upper class, for example the Emperor, central administrative officials, senators and other nobles. Second, Middle social status, such as employees and traders. For example Aquila and Priscilla, or Lydia the fancy cloth seller, and also the landlord group. And the third social status is the lowest social status, for example the slaves.⁸ These three social status show the existence of a dividing barrier in the midst of Roman Greek society. For example slaves in the early church. Greek philosophers considered slaves to be inferior to humans. They are only regarded as "goods" that can be treated as they please. To treat, includes in the sexual conduct, that everything can be done by the master. Slave owners can beat slaves, sell them and marry them.⁹ The social status of slaves is very demeaned, it seems that slaves are more like animals. But the teaching of Jesus transforms the status of slaves into brother. This transformation is also linked to the willingness of slaves to do God's commands. The Book of John emphatically calls it: "You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you " (John 15:1-15)

Jesus' treatment for all human beings, including those marginalized people in society, was a new attitude, or a radical attitude in the Roman Empire. Because this attitude is very rare in the classic world at that time. This attitude of Jesus emphasizes brotherly attitudes towards everyone without dissent of religion, ethnicity, and race. Paul in his letter implies the attitude of Jesus towards slave as a model. For example, Paul implies slavery from a positive per-

spective (cf. 1 Corinthians 7: 21-22). Although Paul called the slave still slave, but more than slave as "brother" (Philemon 15-26).¹⁰ The awareness to practice brotherly relationships with every human being, including slaves, is a very real example of Christian teaching and it is this attitude that needs to be nurtured and inherited in the plurality of our religions today.

Calls for interfaith friendship

All human beings are brothers and sisters. God never created a boundary for us humans, as Mahatma Gandhi expressed.¹¹ This view has to do with Christian teaching which also emphasizes the brotherhood value. All humans belong to God and God's creation. This view encourages us to realize again that we are brothers and sisters. We have the same father. God is my father, your father, and our father as well. This awareness will encourage us to live and to do God's will in this world in which we live today. When we associate with the identity of Abraham as Paul described in his letter, Paul mentioned that Abraham was the father of the circumcised (Romans 4:11). Abraham had the first offspring, Ishmael and Isaac. This shows that Abraham was the father of the descendants of Ishmael and Isaac as well (cf. Genesis 21:13, 25:12). And Paul also mentioned that Abraham is also the father of the uncircumcised people (Romans 4:16).¹² Uncircumcised people points to the nations as *Nes Ammim* or non Israelite. This picture reinforces our understanding that we all are called to be brothers and sisters. Therefore our calling is to have a vision that is a call to bringing brotherhood or sisterhood into a real life form, such as through a solidarity attitude towards each other. Our God the Father calls us as His children not to do violence or to wrath, and not as a slogan *homo homini lupus*, but to love each other, to receive each other, to respect and support each other. The

genuine reason is because God is our Father. Then as the children of God, even though our country, our religion, our skin colour is different, but we are brothers and sisters, and we want to live and practice as a good brother one to another.¹³ The awareness of the faith that God is our Father who unites us into a brotherhood or a big family is a real contribution in our diversity in this global World today. Koffi Anan, the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, stated: "Pluralism is a concept that not only respects differences but also values and celebrates those differences because it gives more value to society in general."¹⁴ In connection with Indonesia, President Joko Widodo acknowledges that plurality that we have is our benefit. He says further that Indonesia is a home to more than 1300 tribes and the largest Muslim population in the world (85% of the total population). Besides Islam, Indonesia is home for Christians, Catholics, Hindus, Buddha and Confucians as well. Indeed, recently there seems to be an intensified strength of radical action and a decline of the spirit of religious tolerance. And this condition increases erosion of the willingness of people to accept the difference accompanied by the growth of xenophobia.¹⁵ By this fact of life we are called again to practice the meaning of brotherhood or sisterhood that is very needed today. As I learn from the community in Nes Ammim in Jerusalem, I encourage us to talk to everyone we meet, we talk to the young, old, male and female, the rich and the poor. We are strictly forbidden to hate and to hurt each other. As the Nes Ammim is practicing how to love, to respect to all people, and as the attitude of Jesus becomes our good rule and model even though other people they are different than others, then everyone who comes with peaceful intentions is welcome.

Closing remarks

1. We are the family of God. Brothers and sisters in God. Foundation to become the family of God is not based on blood ties or social relationships, but doing the will of God for our all humans. The consciousness of being a brother throws away the attitude of exclusivity, and imply the attitude of inclusiveness in the midst of religious and social life. The differences we inherit in our society are a real blessing for us as to complement one another, perfecting one another for the glory of our Father. So let us celebrate the difference by loving, respecting and caring each other people.
2. In today's globalized world, especially in Indonesia, there are many emerging problems, for example the problem of intolerance and discrimination against certain social groups or let us say adherents of a particular religion. This situation can cause a crack in the midst of brotherhood that has been maintained before. In responding to this problem, as the family of God we need to be re-awakened, emphasizing the importance of knitting of brotherhood by giving the attitude of mutual love, respect and care to fellow human beings without favoritism.
3. As to enforce action of the brotherhood today let me quote this statement:
According to the English historian Arnold Joseph Toynbee, "the goal of all religions is more or less the same, that of suppressing human egoism as low as possible, both for God and for others. Humans are required to love their fellow human beings and are forbidden to hate their fellow human beings. Man is obliged to help his fellow human beings, not to persecute his fellow

human beings. Human is obliged to give to his fellow and is forbidden to steal from others. Man is commanded to say and testify of the truth and not to say a lie (hoax), a man is required to keep others alive and not to kill him.”¹⁶

Nelson Mandela’s words also reminds us:

“No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.”¹⁷

4. David's pilgrimage is a driving force and a good news for us to alive in the brotherhood or sisterhood. "Truly, how good and beautiful, if you keep silent together! As the good oil overhead melted into a beard, which melted into Aaron's beard and into the neck of his robe. Like the dew of Hermon, which descends upon the mountains of Zion. For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, the life forever." (Psalm 133)

Footnotes:

- ¹ <http://nesammim.org/about-us/our-vision-and-mission/>, accessed 30 April, 2017.
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Such as corruption, radicalism, gambling, crisis integrity and intolerance.
- ⁴ Hans Freiherr von Soden, “adelphos”, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. G. Kittel. Vol. I (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprinted, 1993), 146.
- ⁵ Michael J. Wilkins, “Brother, Brotherhood”, The Anchor Bible Dictionary, vol. I (A-C) (Doubleday, 1992), 782-783.
- ⁶ Vincent de Haas, “Brotherhood Within the Scripture”, Witnessing Brotherhood Mercy and Fraternity Congregation Series 1996-2002 (The Netherlands: General Board Brothers

CMM Gasthuisring 54, 2002), 25-26.

- ⁷ Ibid., 38.
- ⁸ John Stambaugh & David Balch, *Dunia Kekristenan Mula-mula*, (trans. of *The World of Early Christianity*) (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1994), 131-135.
- ⁹ Cf. John Wijngaards, *Persaudaraan Bersama Yesus (Brotherhood with Jesus)* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1993), 32. For a deeper understanding of slaves and slavery, see Jon Riahman Sipayung, "The Attitude of Paul toward Slaves and Slavery in Philemon and Theological Implications for Modern Slavery", Doctoral Dissertation (Hong Kong: Lutheran Theological Seminary, 2008).
- ¹⁰ Jon Riahman Sipayung, "The Attitude of Paul", 100-103; 293.
- ¹¹ Mahatma Gandhi, *Semua Manusia Bersaudara*, (transl.). (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia dan Gramedia, 1988), 138-144.
- ¹² Cf. Adolf Bastian Marpaung, *Jiwa Kerukunan Masyarakat (P. Siantar: Lembaga Studi Agama, Pembangunan dan Kebudayaan (L-SAPA), 2011 (207-208.*
- ¹³ Franz Magnis Suseno, *Menjadi Saksi Kristus di tengah Masyarakat Majemuk* (Jakarta: Penerbit Obor, 2004), 76-78.
- ¹⁴ Ben/Ndy, "Pluralisme Mencegah Konflik", *Kompas* (newspaper), December 9, 2016 (Jakarta: Kompas Nusantara).
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Jakob Sumardjo, "Kejahatan Orang Baik", *Kompas* (Newspaper) May 3, 2017, (Jakarta: Kompas Nusantara).
- ¹⁷ Sidharta Susila, "Pemimpin yang mendidik", *Kompas* (Newspaper) May 4, 2017 (Newspaper), (Jakarta: Kompas Nusantara).

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The Centurion and his “Beloved”

Dr. Revelation E. Velunta

Two empires meet (Jesus and the centurion); and curiously enough, they are pleased with one another. Fritz Kunkel¹

Never was it the case that the imperial encounter pitted an active Western intruder against a supine or inert non-Western native; there was always some form of active resistance, and in the overwhelming majority of cases, the resistance finally won out. Edward Said²

Suffering from dehumanizing poverty, Asian women-many barely into their teens-are forced to sell their bodies in order to survive. They are truly servants in the hands of their pimps or bar-owners. They get the smallest percentage of the money paid by their clients. They do not have days off, in fact, they are fined for being absent. They suffer violence, not only from their pimps but also from sadistic clients. They are sure to be infected at one time or another with sexually transmitted diseases. Many resort to feigning illness just to get a breather. Many look forward to their menses because clients hate "bloody messes." A few would rather be pregnant than be subjected to 20 to 30 rapes each day. Sadly, many have died from AIDS or induced abortions.³

A Filipino Reading

My selective literary analysis of Matthew, specifically 8:5-13-as an imperializing discourse, presupposes the structural reality of empire as central to the construction of the narrative.⁴ Many Filipinos employ a similar analysis when engaging Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, Francisco Baltazar's *Florante at Laura*, and Carlos Bulosan's *America is in the Heart*. My reading does not equate the gospel with historical facts. What it does is argue that the gospel is a rhetorical construction, a narrative discourse framed within and by a particular historical setting: in this case, the Roman Imperial occupation.

Fanon and Freire⁵ show that dynamics leading to literary production exist not only between the colonizer and the colonized, but also between various interest groups of the colonized, some of which try to gain power to define national cultural identity, as well as to compete for the attention of their collective oppressor. My analysis seeks to explore whether Matthew is rejecting the imperialism of its time or seeking its favor.

My reading also presupposes resistance, Algabre and Ileto's "little tradition."⁶ Algabre and Ileto memorialize all those resistance fighters that have been victimized by the violence of institutionalized forgetting; a fate the *pais* in Matthew 8:5-13 shares. This tradition coincides with the argument of postcolonial theorists that in the wake of imperial reality lies the inverted, deconstructing dynamic of resistance/fear, where the margins actually take the initiative, while the center is forced into a reactive position. The *pais*, in other words, resists.

If crying is the first prophetic utterance (as lifted up by Chung Hyun Kyung's statement during her controversial

opening address at the 7th Assembly of the WCC), then Phyllis Tribble's *Texts of Terror*⁷ with its poignant, gut-wrenching portraits of women as victims offer us a hearing of those "cries." Those texts of terror lead us through a journey that is both painful and intense. We are challenged to hear not just the cries within the text but also those in front of it.

But there are texts that do not look terrifying the first or the second or even the third time we read them. Actually these texts might even land in the top ten list of many Christians' favorite Bible passages. I cannot remember how many sermons, all of them the feel-good-about-yourself-kind, I have heard preached on these texts. But I can imagine that not everyone was happy about David's victory over Goliath⁸ (especially not the Philistines and not Goliath's mother). We know that not everyone believed that God spoke only to and through Moses (especially not Miriam).⁹ We definitely know that not everyone believes that salvation is through Jesus Christ alone (especially not the disenfranchised *Palanan* tribes of Isabela)!¹⁰ Good news is always relative.

There are voices, there are cries-isolated, marginal, ignored, taken for granted, faint, needing to be heard amidst the thundering noise of triumphalist, imperializing texts. Matthew 8:5-13 is one of these texts.

Matthew and its Readers

If Matthew has little to say of the disciples as individuals, then it has next to nothing to say about of the other characters that dot its pages. Most of these persons do not so much as bear a name.¹¹ Meier¹² locates the present pericope within Matthew's first trio of miracles (leper, 8:1-4; centurion's servant, 8:5-13; Peter's mother-in-law, 8:14-

17) where Jesus associates with outcasts and the mistreated (the three who were healed were lepers, the servant of a gentile, and a woman). In this situation, Meier in his commentary follows what Matthew does because like the evangelist he offers voice both to the leper and the woman, but the *pais* remains in the background. He is identified via the master. His master speaks for him. His master diagnoses his illness. Both the leper and the woman are healed by touch. The servant is healed long-distance. He starts and ends in the background. We can almost say the same thing about the Canaanite woman's daughter (15:22-28). The pericope is about her healing but we never get to hear her nor do we ever see her. Where is the daughter? The subaltern (to borrow Gayatri Spivak's term) disappears because we never hear them speak. They are simply the medium through which competing discourses represent their claims.¹³

It is not only Matthew that relegates the servant way, way back in the background. Most of his interpreters do. The text, after all, is about Jesus. But what if the text has someone that Jesus actually looks up to? The text does have one character whose faith Jesus finds exemplary. Many interpreters therefore follow what they think is Matthew's lead. They focus on the centurion and his faith. They include, among others, Fritz Kunkel who comments:¹⁴

The decisive factor is not the bodily touch or the spoken word. It is the power conveyed by the healer and received by the patient through the channel of confidence. Matthew tells of the Roman captain, visualizing his calm and warlike dignity. Face to face with him-infinity alive-stands Jesus. Two empires meet; and curiously enough, they are pleased with one another. Jesus, marveling at the captain's faith, predicts in his ex-

citement a vast spread of the teaching to 'many from east and west.'

Davies and Allison,¹⁵ in their massive commentary, remark that, "Centurions play a prominent role in the NT which is somewhat surprising given the hostility many first century Jews felt toward the invincible Roman army. What is most significant in the passage in question is that the centurion is the paradigm for the believer as far as he exhibits true faith. The man trusts implicitly in Jesus' power and authority. This is why his faith is mentioned not once but twice (8:10, 13)!"

The members of the Jesus Seminar, who designate this pericope "black" following their color-coding method and thus does not carry any authentic Jesus saying, entitle this pericope in their Scholar's Version "Unusual Trust," referring to the centurion.¹⁶

Donald Senior explains, "The intervening story about the centurion and his servant is complex. The exchange stresses Jesus' unique authority: he can heal with words. But the fact that this man is a Roman captain and Jesus' amazement at his faith leads the story into another direction: the response of Israel and the mission to the Gentiles. The faith of this Gentile outshines what Jesus has experienced from his own people." ¹⁷

The following contemporary readings from readers of diverse backgrounds continue the centurion-centered interpretation:

Daniel Patte,¹⁸ who comes from a French Huguenot tradition, focuses on the centurion's faith and suggests that, "great faith involves a trust in Jesus' authority such that one is confident that his power is effective

against evil even when he is not physically present." He continues, "thus from the centurion's perspective, no transgression of the boundaries between clean and unclean is needed. And indeed, by a word, Jesus heals the servant according to the centurion's faith."

Jewish New Testament scholar, A.J. Levine¹⁹ argues that the context of the pericope, the centurion's comments on the limitations of authority, the ambiguous, and obscure terminology of the eschatological logion, and the Matthean technique of addressing the church through Jesus' words all indicate that the major theme of Matthew 8:5-13 is not the rejection of the Jews and the eventual salvation of the Gentiles. The division expressed by this pericope as well as throughout the gospel is between the complacent elite-Jewish disciple, Gentile, procurator, church member, anyone in a position of authority-who does not have faith and act upon it, and those excluded from or marginal to the ruling religious, social, or political system-sinners, women, lepers, Gentiles-who manifest *pistis*.

Kenyan scholar Grace Imathiu,²⁰ who is an ordained United Methodist pastor, affirms the inclusion of centurions in the new community (8:5-13 and also 27:54). She reads the first pericope as an account of a powerless military officer; one who pleads not for himself but for his slave who is ill. Yet, she raises a question that challenges the almost unanimous pro-centurion bias among most Matthean interpreters: "Is this compassion on his part, or is he simply interested in getting his property repaired for use?" Still she opts for the former because the centurion was concerned about his servant's distress and not his inability to work. Imathiu believes that the account portrays an officer who, in spite of his authority, is impotent to help one who is

even more powerless than he, his servant.

Matthew and Empire

Although many New Testament scholars have examined Paul's writings and their relationship to the Roman Empire and its imperial policies and writings, they have focused little attention on ways in which the Gospels were influenced by that imperialism. Warren Carter, in *Matthew and the Margins*,²¹ and Musa Dube, in *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, have responded to the challenge. In his commentary (and in his other work, *Matthew and Empire*), Carter argues that Matthew's gospel protests Roman Imperialism by asserting God's will is carried out, not by the empire and emperor, but by Jesus and his community of disciples. Musa Dube, on the other hand, argues the opposite. For her Matthew, along with *The Aeneid*, the Hebrew Scriptures, *Heart of Darkness*, the story of Pocahontas, or Kipling's "White Man's Burden", are imperializing texts and should be subject to a thorough post-colonial feminist decolonization.

These two scholars take seriously the reality of empire in the construction of the Matthean narrative landscape and thus offer an alternative to the almost exclusive emphasis on the relationship with the synagogue that has long been a staple of Matthean criticism, especially in the West.

Carter locates Matthew's imperial context by examining Roman imperial ideology and material presence in Antioch, the traditional provenance for Matthew. He then argues that Matthew's Christology, which presents Jesus as God's agent, is shaped by claims--and protests against those claims--that the emperor and empire are agents of God. Carter pays particular attention to the Gospel's central irony, namely that in depicting God's ways and pur-

poses, the Gospel employs the very imperial framework that it resists.²² Dube does not believe that Matthew is resistance literature. She posits the following questions in order to measure whether a text is imperializing or not. Does the text have an explicit stance for or against the political imperialism of its time? Does the text encourage travel to distant and inhabited lands and how does it justify itself? How does the text construct difference: is there dialogue and liberating interdependence, or is there condemnation and replacement of all that is foreign? Is the celebration of difference authentic or mere tokenism? Does the text employ representations (gender, divine, etc.) to construct relationships of subordination and domination?

Using these questions to analyze Matthean rhetoric, Dube concludes that the implied author's stance toward the imperial powers of his/her time presents the imperial rule and its agents as holy and acceptable. Its (Matthew's) inter-textual weaving constructs a politically un-subversive Jesus and encourages travel to distant and inhabited lands. The positive presentation of empire and the decision to take the word to the nations (28:16-20) is born within and as a result of a stiff competition for power over the crowds (Israel) and the favor of the empire. In envisioning the mission to the nations, Matthew's model embodies imperialistic values and strategies. It does not seek relationships of liberating interdependence between nations, cultures, and genders. Rather, it upholds the superiority of some races and advocates the subjugation of differences by relegating other races to inferiority. Matthew's model employs gender representations to construct relationships of subordination and domination attested to by featuring the Canaanite woman and the centurion in stories foreshadowing the mission to the nations.²³

Dube and Carter present contrasting readings of Matthew 8:5-13. Dube translates Jesus' response to the centurion's plea in 8:7 as a quick and eager: "I will come and cure him." Carter opts for a resistant, hesitant, "Will I come and cure him?" Dube argues that this passage shows the implied author's accommodating stance toward the Roman Empire especially when the centurion is compared to the only other Gentile featured in the narrative, the Canaanite woman in 15:21-28. Like the Roman officer, the woman also pleads for an ailing person but she never receives the same treatment, or the same praise Jesus extends the centurion. The divergent reception accorded the centurion and the Canaanite woman--who's characterized as a dog--reflects the imperial and patriarchal currents at work in Matthew.²⁴

Carter, on his part, argues that despite the centurion representing the occupying power, being responsible for public order, and protecting the interests of the elite, he occupies the margins-vis-à-vis Israel's elite. His plea for help and dependence (discipleship features) surpasses the response of many Jews. God's empire in healing the centurion's slave accomplishes what the Roman Empire cannot do despite the propaganda claims of Aristedes and Josephus that Rome has healed a sick world.²⁵

The comparison between the centurion and Jesus, according to Dube, highlights the gospel's stance toward the empire. Both men are presented as having authority that effect things simply by the power of their words (vv. 8-9). The paralleling of Jesus' authority with that of the centurion's has the effect of sanctifying imperial powers. Jesus pronounces the centurion's faith as surpassing the faith of all in Israel (v.10), a statement that compares him with the colonized and exalts his righteousness above them. The passage casts imperial officials as holier beings and pre-

dicts that they, and other groups, will have more power. Such characterization not only disguises what imperial agents represent, institutions of exploitation and oppression, but also pronounces imperialism as holy and acceptable.²⁶

Carter, like Imathiu earlier, raises a few concerns about the centurion. No reason is given for his concern over his *pais*, whether human decency or inconvenience. No cause for the slave's paralysis is given. Carter also notes that Jesus' act is limited. While he heals the slave, he does not free him from slavery.²⁷ Nevertheless, both Jesus and the centurion come out smelling like roses at the end of Carter's commentary. The healing counters the short-term damage inflicted by imperial power in anticipation of the wholeness of God's future empire. The report-that the slave was healed that very hour confirms the effective combination of Jesus' word and the centurion's faith.²⁸

I agree with Carter when he argues for assessing the relationship of early Christian movements with Roman imperial power. Dube does a similar assessment. Diverse Jewish traditions and social patterns of responding to imperial domination, such as capitulation and assimilation through compliance, disinterest, survival, and prioritized loyalties to forms of non-cooperation and resistance are all helpful in making sense of the Matthean discourse. What I find disconcerting is Carter's arguments for the centurion as model disciple. If centurions epitomized imperial might for the colonized according to many scholars, and the gospel were an anti-imperial text as Carter argues, then why does Carter not find problematic Matthew's explicit fascination with imperial officials? Why does a supposedly anti-imperial discourse create a mini-discourse that promotes THE agent of the empire as THE Christian role model?

More than this, why does a supposedly anti-imperial narrative perpetuate the continued exploitation and systemic dehumanization of others? Both the centurion and Jesus support slavery. Carter does note that Jesus healing is limited and returned the *pais* to the system that he might have been protesting against but the healing anticipates the very different world and time of God's empire established over all.²⁹ So, what is the *pais* to do--bear his suffering with dignity?

Carter also does not find problematic Matthew's domestication of Mark and Luke's demoniac named "Legion" (8:28, Mark 5:1-13 and Luke 8:26-39). Instead of offering the explicitly named demoniac, Matthew waters it down and offers two unnamed men (8: 28). Why would a supposedly anti-imperial discourse drop such a highly subversive characterization of Rome: the Empire as evil spirit?

Carter argues that the centurion is a marginal character³⁰ but marginal relative to whom or to what? The centurion does not occupy the margins of Matthew nor does he occupy the margins among a representative circle of contemporary Matthean interpreters. Carter notes that centurions protected the interests of the elite, whether as agent of Rome or of Herod Antipas, but adds they occupied the margins as far as Israel's elite was concerned. Which elite is he talking about--the ones whose interest centurions did not protect?

For the legion of Matthean interpreters who find no problems with the centurion, I offer the following observations that might stir further discussion.

Friends brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus for healing

(9:2). Why did the centurion leave his paralyzed *pais* behind? The centurion had a century (one hundred soldiers) under his command. Would a meeting between Jesus and the *pais* produced a genuine diagnosis (not the centurion's)? For the imperial officer, allowing another colonized subject (Jesus) to enter his home may have meant an intrusion into his social space, his power area. Similarly, Jesus meeting the sick slave may have produced a genuine diagnosis (not the centurion's) and ultimately a genuine healing, the health-giving with the ill, as well as a sharing of the healer's power and solidarity.³¹

From the master's perspective, a sick slave is a worthless slave.

The centurion set out to find a healer, another colonized subject, who can cure his servant back home. It is the centurion's healing that is realized, not the healing Jesus offered. Jesus offers, "I will come and heal (*therapeuo*) him" in 8:7. But the healing (*iaomai*) that the centurion asks for (8:8) is the healing (*iaomai*) he receives (8:13). Both terms are used for healing but *iaomai* deals more on restoration, while *therapeuo* focuses on taking care, being there, serving.³² The centurion thus effectively manipulates Jesus to restore things as they were before. Good news for the centurion. Bad news for the *pais* especially if her sickness, whether real or feigned, afforded her a brief respite from the system that oppressed her.

Perkinson's reading of the Canaanite Woman³³ can be applied to the centurion who, as imperial agent, occupies the position of the dominant. His request could represent, what Perkinson terms "a desperate fetishizing of the spiritual power of the weak who are otherwise despised in everyday life."³⁴ The centurion would be involved in perpetuating an oppressive structure that "accords mythic

healing potency to those positioned as the lowly or the less-than-civilized or in this case, the 'less-than-Hellenized'."³⁵ In effect, "... Jesus here would take on some of the character of the folk-healer, a kind of Jewish Shaman. And in such reading, his initial refusal ... could be grasped as an act of resistance to yet one more appropriation of the resources of the oppressed by the powerful."³⁶

We end up with Matthew's Jesus mimicking the centurion. Jesus, who initially wanted to go to the sick servant, is impressed with the imperial structure of kyriarchy offered by the centurion (where when the powers say, "Go," their servants go, where when the powers say, "Come," their servants come). He goes on to condemn his own people (who will be thrown out into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth³⁷). And at the end, Jesus, like an obedient soldier, barks out an order, "Go" to the centurion (v.13) as the empire convinced him to do and the centurion's servant is healed. At the end of the gospel, Emperor Jesus sends out his own "imperial storm troopers" to disciple the whole world (28:18-20).

And we have the *pais* who might not have wanted to get "healed" miraculously "healed of his illness" and thus back to the bottom of the pyramid, still a slave and more able to participate in his exploitation.³⁸ What we have is a Jew that has become an agent--an extension, an accomplice--of the empire in its exploitation of a slave (who may very well have been a fellow Jew). If Jesus looked bad in his encounter with the Canaanite woman, here he is worse. He gets to save face with the woman. Here he looks like a "*makapili*," a collaborator, a "comprador."

This reading fits Loomba's definition of imperialism and colonialism.³⁹ She proposes thinking of imperialism or neo

-imperialism as the phenomenon that originates in the metropolis, from the center (read: centurion as being representative of Imperial Rome), which leads to domination and control. Its result or what happens in the colonies, in the margins (read: Jesus and the *pais*), as a consequence (read: Jesus obeys, servant is "healed") of imperial domination is colonialism or neo-colonialism.

The imperial country is the metropole from which power flows, and the colony or neo-colony is the place it penetrates and controls. More importantly for my reading, whichever direction human beings, resources, and cultural exchange traveled, the profits, the net benefits always flowed back into the so-called 'mother country.'

In this pericope, everything eventually goes back to the centurion. He gets what he needs from Jesus. He gets an added bonus: Jesus' highest praise twice! He gets his 'sick' servant back. Again, we point out, who made the diagnosis of the servant's illness? Whose standard of health is used as canon?⁴⁰ The centurion gets everything he wanted and more. Imperial power-then and now-almost always does.

The Centurion and his "Beloved"

Rosario Baluyot was a 12-year old child prostitute in Olongapo City, former site of the American Naval Base at Subic. A Swiss doctor who came as a tourist to the Philippines hired her through her parents to be his "love servant." He regularly inserted a vibrator into her vagina. One day the vibrator broke in half, and one-half remained inside her. After a few weeks she began to have crippling stomach pains. The intense pain kept her from doing her duties. Her parents gave her pain-killers so she can go back to work. The doctor also

gave her pills to ease the pain. More and more drugs allowed her to go back to meeting her obligations. She eventually began to bleed profusely and was rushed to the hospital. She was operated on, but it was too late. The rusted object was removed from her. The doctor was brought to court. The latest news was that the doctor was freed because of "lack of evidence."⁴¹

There is another facet about the *pais* that needs to be raised. Her situation and her paralysis are both the centurion's fault. She is a slave because of the centurion. She is ill, also because of him.

Carter, in his commentary, talks about the possible causes of the *pais*' paralysis. Did it result from beatings or torture? The words used to describe the *pais*' condition signify intense suffering. Beating slaves and children senseless signified their marginal status in relation to adult male society.⁴² What Carter does not suggest is the possibility that the centurion beat the *pais*. Neither does Dube.

How may the word *pais* been understood by contemporaries first encountering the narrative?⁴³ The word had multiple meanings, which often must be understood from the context: it can mean "boy," "girl," "son," "daughter," "servant," or "slave." The word is used 23 times in the NT and is used with almost all of these possibilities. There is, however, an additional specific usage that one might not necessarily expect to find in the New Testament. *Pais* as "younger male lover" or "boyfriend." Jesus and the people of his time knew this meaning of *pais*, Matthew, Luke, and their source knew this meaning of *pais*, Greek writers and philosophers spoke of *pais* this way. Most historians agree that intergenerational sexual relationships were a facet of ancient culture and society. Pederasty was not a mere fashion or aberration in Antiquity. Wherever or for

whatever reasons it originated it served certain needs of the leisured or citizen classes. Its function was so important in Antiquity that it flourished all over the Hellenistic world under Roman rule.⁴⁴

A positive reading of the pericope would have Jesus affirming a homosexual relationship with the healing of the centurion's younger lover, his "beloved." Like in the work of Ted Jennings and Tat-Siong Benny Liew or in my "The Centurion and his Beloved."⁴⁵ But the opposite is equally, if not more horrifyingly, true. Jesus' "healing" might have restored someone who was trying to break free back into a cycle of exploitation, domination, dehumanization, and abuse.⁴⁶

One word. True then. True now. Pedophilia.

Pagsanjan, Laguna, south of Manila, is famous for its beautiful waterfalls. The place is also a popular haven for pedophiles, mostly from Europe or the United States, that prey on the very poor and the very young. The violence of poverty that millions face every day, throughout the world, can drive people to prostitute themselves and even their children. The number of child prostitutes in the streets of Asia's metropolitan cities is staggering. Majority of them are not much older than Rosario Baluyot. Their bodies bear the ravages of beatings, malnutrition, and AIDS. I have had the opportunity to meet with some of these children. Their names, their voices, their cries offer a name, a voice, a cry for the *pais* submerged in Matthew's text.

I have also had the chance to offer a prayer during the wake of a young Filipina overseas-contract worker (OCW) who died abroad. The death certificate read she died of pneumonia. But the nasty bruises on her face and over her

body showed otherwise. There are ten million Filipino OCWs working as domestic helpers, entertainers, or hospitality girls. Most of them live under the most inhuman conditions. Many of them eventually get home after their contracts expire, or when they get their debts paid, or when they escape from their employers. Ten of them come home in boxes every day! Some don't get home at all-like Flor Contemplacion who was hanged in Singapore (for a crime many believe she did not commit. Again, the *pais* of Matthew has a name and a story because of women like these. Like the unnamed concubine in Judges 19 who is gang-raped, killed, and chopped into pieces, we can only hear cry of the *pais*-and the other children in Matthew's "culture of silence"⁴⁷ through the voices of multitudes like them in front of the text.

The “Beloved” Resists

Suffering from dehumanizing poverty, Asian women-many barely into their teens-are forced to sell their bodies in order to survive. As I noted in the epigraph, many resort to feigning illness just to get a breather. Many look forward to their menses because clients hate "bloody messes." A few would rather be pregnant than be subjected to 20 to 30 rapes each day.⁴⁸

The Israeli Occupying Forces regularly enter the ‘Little Town of Bethlehem’ through this gate and shoot young people with rubber bullets, rubber coated steel bullets and live ammunition. They also fire vast amounts of tear gas, made in both Israel and the US, much of which is dangerously out of date. Young Palestinians throw marbles against the might of modern weapons, ruthlessly deployed.⁴⁹

The *pais*, whether I translate it son, daughter, girl, boy,

slave, or sex slave, is a child and he or she serves to remind flesh and blood readers that the reality of empire-in varying forms and degrees-is experienced by children and by those constructed as "children." Ashis Nandy draws attention to the colonial use of homology between childhood and the state of being colonized.⁵⁰

Fred Atkinson, the first American General Superintendent of Education in the Philippines inaugurated over a century of racist public education in the islands when he remarked: "The Filipino people, taken as a body, are children and childlike, do not know what is best for them ... by the very fact of our superiority of civilization and our greater capacity for industrial activity we are bound to exercise over them a profound social influence."⁵¹

The *pais* reminds flesh and blood readers that children's oppression--of varying forms and degrees--is inscribed in the text because, despite the rhetoric that God's reign is for children (19:14) no child is ever named-except Jesus-or is given a voice in the gospel-except Herodias' daughter who says what her mother tells her to say. Yet like the Canaanite woman's daughter and the *pais*, Herodias' daughter serves only as a medium through which competing discourses present their claims. The girl falls prey to manipulation by her mother and by Herod. We don't even get to hear the cries of the children who are massacred in 2:18, only their mothers'. Children are the primary victims of Matthew's "culture of silence."

Take the *pais*' basic description, "*ho pais mou*,"-that child's body is under somebody else's control-whether it's his father, his owner and/or master, his pedophile. The centurion's act on the *pais*' behalf emphasizes the latter's marginalization. As far as the text is concerned, the *pais* cannot speak or seek his/her own healing.

Yet, the *pais*, the colonial subject, because she is "paralyzed," albeit momentarily, paralyzes not just her owner—who thus seeks help from Jesus—but also the imperial expansions, the goings and the comings, in Matthew. Throughout the gospel, characters come and go, border crossings are effected: Magi from the East come seeking the king of the Jews; Joseph and his family flee into Egypt; Herod sends his death squads to Bethlehem; Joseph and his family go to Nazareth, from Egypt; Jesus goes to John the baptizer and is led by the Spirit into a the wilderness; Jesus leaves Nazareth and makes his home in Capernaum; the centurion comes to Jesus and the latter is convinced of the imperial authority that effects goings and comings, of travel to distant lands, of control-at-a-distance. The disciples are prepared systematically for their commissioning; the Canaanite woman comes to Jesus; the heavy-laden come to Jesus ... Jesus eventually sends out his disciples at the end. Everyone moves in the story, except the *pais* in Matthew 8:5-13. Yes, even for a brief moment, the *pais* revels in the "space" her "paralysis" brings. For about 8 short verses, in the very long, 28-chapter Matthean narrative, the *pais* is free of the centurion and, yes, even of Jesus.

The *Pais* is Us. And We are Legion.

Tens of millions from the Third World, majority of whom are women, are the global servants of late capitalism. Ten of millions more find themselves squatters, informal settlers, or internal refugees, militarized, displaced and dispossessed, in their own homelands as trans-nationals wreak havoc in the name of profit, globalization, and development. Many of those who have opted for "The Land of Opportunity"—the United States—find themselves treated as second-class citizens, as illegal immigrants, or, worse, as terrorists!

Hundreds of thousands of our children, many of them girls, are victims of human trafficking, prostitution rings, and cyber-sex syndicates. According to water.org, over 800 million women, most of them young girls, spend up to 20 hours each day looking for water. Tragically, there are more WIFI hotspots in the world today than toilets.

Children are the primary victims of Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine.⁵² Recent reports show that only one minor among the 853 charged with stone-throwing in the period 2005-2010 was acquitted. Sixty percent of those convicted who were aged 12-13 received prison terms of up to two months. These minors were arrested at night and were not allowed to be accompanied by parents or an adult. Most of these children were convicted for throwing stones and marbles at vehicles, tanks, and walls. UNICEF has cautioned against the excessive use of violence against Palestinian children. 25 children were killed, while 1,300 were injured in the last quarter of 2015.⁵³

Yet despite all these dehumanizing conditions and oppressive structures that prey on the powerless and the marginalized, the *pais*, today's *paides* have always resisted. This is why Bethlehem children—despite the threats of arrest, conviction, and imprisonment—continue to throw stones and marbles at Israel's Apartheid Wall.

This is why military jeeps have been transformed into public utility *jeepneys*; why mortar shells have become church bells; why M-16 and AK-47 rifle barrels have become guitars; why implements of war have become peace bells; why Israeli-made tear gas canisters have been used as Palestinian flower pots.

Occupied peoples, then and now, turn swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks.

The walls we create to privilege the normal from the abnormal, to keep secured the saved from the damned, to separate the white from the colored, to keep pure the straight from the gay, to lift up the civilized from the primitive, to glorify the chosen from the lost, to keep safe the rich from the poor, and to separate the Israeli from the Palestinian are all man-made. We put them up. We can tear them down. Brick by brick. Hand in hand. Using whatever we have in hand—including stones and marbles!

The *pais*, the “beloved” in the Gospel of Matthew serves as an excellent symbol of resistance and de-colonization. Alone, the *pais* disrupts imperial progress, even if only briefly, in the Matthean narrative. Alone, the *pais* “paralyzes” the Matthean narrative of imperial expansion. Those of us who have seen the *pais*’ plight and who are involved in the struggles—for land, for liberty, for peace based on justice, for Palestine’s liberation, for wholeness of life for all—in the name of today’s *paidés* are many.

Actually, we are legion!

Footnotes:

- ¹ Fritz Kunkel, *Creation Continues: A Psychological Interpretation of Matthew* (New Jersey: Paulist, 1989), 120-121.
- ² Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), xii.
- ³ Paraphrasing Sr. Mary John Mananzan, OSB, *Challenges to the Inner Room* (Manila: Institute of Women’s Studies, 1998), 54ff. She details other stories of child prostitution and child trafficking in the Philippines.
- ⁴ Adopted from Musa Dube’s *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2000), 127ff.
- ⁵ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, 1968), 52, and Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Myra Bergman Ramos, trans. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 48-49.
- ⁶ Reynaldo Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution* (Quezon City: Ateneo De Manila University Press, 1979).
- ⁷ Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*,

Overtures to Biblical Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

I Samuel 17:50-54

Numbers 12:2

In Northern Philippines whose ancestral lands were grabbed by rich "*Kristiyanos*" from the lowlands. The most in-depth work I've read so far about "Christian" oppression of indigenous peoples worldwide is *The Indigenous Voice: Visions and Realities*, ed. Roger Moody (London and New Jersey: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 1988).

Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew: Proclamation Commentaries*, ed. Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 5.

John Meier, *The Vision of Matthew: Christ, Church, and Morality in the First Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1979), 68-69.

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Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins* (New York: Orbis Books, 2000).

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Dube, 154-155.

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Bruce Malina, *Windows on the World of Jesus: Time Travel to Ancient Judea* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 23.

I am indebted to Prof. Monya Stubbs, Austin Presbyterian Seminary, for offer-

ing these insights on healing.

33 Jim Perkinson, "A Canaanitic Word in the Logos of Christ; or The Difference the Syro-Phoenician Woman Makes to Jesus," *Semeia* 75, eds. Donaldson and Sugirtharajah (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1996), 68.

34 Perkinson, 68.

35 Perkinson, 68.

36 Perkinson, 68.

37 Weeping and gnashing of teeth conjure images, for me, of homeless people outside in the cold with teeth chattering, of street children crying themselves to sleep hungry. Luke does a similar argument with the centurion in chapter 7. He has Jesus single out the imperial officer as the epitome of abundant faith over against own people's lack of it.

38 Anthropologists comment that "whether in the ancient or modern world, and whether between individuals or nations, the patron/client, master/servant relationship is one of exploitation at best and repression at worst" (see J. D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* [Edinburg: T&T Clark, 1991], 67-68). See also Carter, 200.

39 Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 6-7.

40 Postcolonial theory recognizes that imperial discourse typically rationalizes itself through rigid oppositions such as maturity/immaturity, civilization/barbarism, developed/developing, progressive/primitive. Critics like Ashis Nandy have especially drawn attention to the colonial use of homology between childhood and the state of being colonized (in L. Gandhi's *Postcolonial Theory*, 32).

41 Mananzan, *Challenges to the Inner Room*, 54ff.

42 Carter, 201.

43 Donald Mader, "The Entimos Pais of Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10," *Homosexuality and Religion and Philosophy*, eds. Dynes and Donaldson (New York and London: Garland, 1992), 223ff.

44 Mader quotes extensively the works of Robin Scroggs and Royston Lambert.

45 Theodore Jennings and Tat-Siong Benny Liew, "Mistaken Identities but Model Faith: Rereading the Centurion, the Chap, and the Christ in Matthew 8: 5-13," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 123 (2004), 467-494. "The Centurion and his Beloved" was presented as a biblio-theological reflection for the National Council of Churches in the Philippines' AIDS/HIV Awareness Seminar at Union Theological Seminary, April 2016.

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47 Freire, 13.

48 Mananzan, 54ff.

49 Kairos Britain—Seeking a Just Peace for Palestine, available at <https://www.facebook.com/KairosBritain/photos/pb.134748619946905.->

2207520000.1467529571./950102068411552/?type=3&theater, accessed July 20, 2016,

⁵⁰ Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 32.

⁵¹ Daniel B. Schirmer, "The Conception and Gestation of a Neocolony," *The Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol 5. No. 1, 1975, 43-44.

⁵² Israel convicts most stone throwing Palestinian children, available at <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-convicts-most-stone-throwing-palestinian-children-right-group-says-1.373807>, accessed July 20, 2016.

⁵³ Israel killed 25 Palestinian children in 3 months, available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/05/israel-killed-25-palestinian-children-months-160514140833141.html>, accessed July 20, 2016.

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The Theological Meaning of Judaism and Islam from a Christian Perspective

Dr. Rainer Stuhlmann

I. “Ächad – One”

The village “Nes Ammim” founded by European Christians is situated in Western Galilee in the state of Israel among Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Druze and mixed villages and close to a Bahaij sanctuary. It’s a place for local dialogue groups.

In the year 2005 the Jewish-Israeli artist Tova Heilprin (died 2015) from Tel Aviv has created this sculpture for Nes Ammim. It makes the difference of Jews, Christians and Muslims obviously visible through each one’s characteristic posture of praying. The differences are important. They are three very different religions. The three very different praying groups are centered to one and the same spot, to an empty space limited through three high walls with kinds of “closed doors” which you can find in synagogues, churches and mosques in front of the believers. The empty space is open just upwards. The three religions are standing each in front of a kind of locked door.

The “invisible God” is also an “inaccessible” or an “untouchable God”. Each religion doesn’t have any power

over the One. Each believer isn't able to claim the One for him- or herself or to withhold the One from believers in other religions. Nobody can presume to bring the One to anybody like an instrument of salvation or a kind of medical treatment. The One can't be monopolized nor be manipulated by anybody. We belong to the One God, but the One God doesn't belong to us.

What's visible in the center of the sculpture is the hard core of Jewish religion. It's the revelation from Sinai trenchantly expressed in the first ones of the Ten Commandments (no other Gods, no idols, holiness of God's name Ex. 20, 2-7). The empty space reminds of the Holy of Holiest in the First and Second Jewish Temple of Jerusalem. This revelation is expressed in the principle of Judaism, the Sh'ma Jisrael ("Listen Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is one!" Dtn 6,4). Therefore the artist called her sculpture "Ächad", this means "One".

The Non-Jews have to learn, that they believing in the only One God believe in Israel's God. Before the only One became our God, the only One was God for Israel. That realization makes people modest.

The Jewish artist Tova Heilprin expressed that modesty. Modestly she put the Jewish religion besides the other ones on the same level. The peculiarity of Judaism does not mean preferences, advantages or privileges to other religions. Also the Jewish religion is not able to monopolize the God of Israel, because Israel's God wants to be God for all people and for all religions and the entire creation from the very first beginning. The Jewish religion becomes one religion among other religions.

In that modesty Jewish religion shows its peculiarity. It's the attitude of a good teacher. A good teacher is always a student at the same time. Learning and teaching, listening and talking enable teachers and students for dialogue. But the dialogue comes from the only One and leads to the only One. We owe this faith to the Jewish religion.

The sculpture makes the interfaith conception of Nes Ammim visible. It differs from the conception of "general pluralism of religions", which is celebrated in the Post-Christian societies of Europe and North-America. The interfaith conception of Nes Ammim is bible-orientated. It discovers what's meaningful for all in the peculiarity of Israel, in the peculiarity of its experience, its faith and its message for the Non-Jewish people.

That means for us: at first we have to learn, at first we are students, at first we have to listen. This process of listening to Judaism has restarted among Christians in Europe about ninety years ago. The result of this listening process is the realization that we have to stop teaching Jews and that we have to start learning from Jews. The majority of Christian doctrines are Jewish; we share the hard core of religion with Jews.

The origin of our own religion was learning from another religion. That makes modest. Modesty teaches respect to the strange one. And respect to the strange one makes modest. It enables us to participate in dialogues, to listen and to understand, to speak and to make be understood.

The faith in Ächad, the One Only, connects the three religions. But the connection of Christianity and Judaism is different to the connection with Islam. Jesus and the writ-

ers of the New Testament were Jews. At the beginning the church was a part of Judaism. Up till now we share the Jewish Bible. So the items of dialogue with Judaism are different to these of the dialogue with Islam. And so they have different meanings in a Christian perspective. Nevertheless at first we ask:

II. What's the meaning of both (Judaism and Islam) for the Christian faith?

Judaism and Islam reproach Christianity with idolatry. Their protest against the Christian confession of Jesus the Son of God and the confession of the Triune God urges Christians to clarify their confession and explain that Jesus isn't a second God and the Triune God aren't three Gods. Also the Christian theology is responsible for misunderstanding the confession of the Triune God. It has to be clarified that the Christian confession is conform to the First Commandment. We have to make this understandable. It is useful to do this also regarding our witness to people of the western post-Christian world. Both religions urge the Christian church to reread the New Testament and to rethink the Christian tradition listening to the Holy Scripture in order to avoid misunderstandings.

1. Christology under the First Commandment

1.1 Incarnation and transformation into human nature

In the New Testament "incarnation" doesn't mean the incarnation of God, but the incarnation of the Word of God (John 1,14). In the Word of God we receive God, but God is more than we receive in God's word. The New Testament

(and the Symbola of the Ancient Church) don't teach us that God has been transformed into human, but the Messiah who is with God since the beginning - like God's wisdom, spirit, word - has been transformed into a human being in Jesus (Phil 2,5-8; 1John 4,2; 2John 7)). Receiving Jesus we receive God, but God is more than we receive in Jesus. Incarnation of God's word and the transformation of the pre-existent Messiah are kinds of self-humiliation of the Only One. Jews and Muslim believe in God being capable to humiliate him- or herself. But there are limits of God's self-humiliation. And incarnation and transformation are definitely off their limits. Therefore Jews and Muslims don't agree with Christian confession. But this rethought confession avoids misunderstandings in the dialogue with Jews and Muslims and it clarifies the difference of Christian faith to Jewish and Muslim faith.

1.2. Claim of absolute truth

When Jesus says "I am the truth... nobody comes to the father but through me" (John 14,6) we are listening to the living voice of the Lord Jesus Christ. His truth isn't identified with the truth of his believers, the truth of Church, its christology and theology. There is a difference between the truth of Christ and the truth of Christians. His truth isn't in the hands of those who believe in him. His truth is wider and larger than Christians can believe and confess.

It's written in the New Testament "There is no name under the sky in which you can find salvation than in the name of the Messiah Jesus" (Acts 4,12). It teaches the same: The name of the Messiah Jesus isn't in our hands. His name is his own name, the name of the sovereign Lord. And we belong to the Lord, but the Lord doesn't belong to us.

And the Lord has countless possibilities to save, at least more than we can imagine.

Jews and Muslims are advocating the sovereignty of the Lord who is inaccessible and untouchable. They warn us to make the sovereign Lord an exclusive instrument of salvation. We can't bring him like a medical treatment to other people. We can't bring other people to him like guides who know the ways of the Lord. We can't convert people or proselytize them to Christians. The sovereignty of the Lord forces us to do nothing else but to witness him we belong to. And let the Lord do his own work!

2. Believe in the Triune God under the First Commandment

Of course, our witness is shaped differently to Jews and differently to Muslims. Therefore our tasks are different in a dialogue with Judaism and different in a dialogue with Muslims. But we have a common task. I learnt it from a Jew; she told me: "In spite of so heavy anti-Semitic attacks of Christians (mostly in the past) and Muslims (mostly in the present) I am so happy and thankful that Christianity and Islam spread out the faith in the One God all over the whole world".

Jews and Muslims urge us to explain that the Christians believing in the Triune God don't believe in three Gods. We should replace the term "Trinity". The Triune God is the Only One. We believe that the Only One is multiple in his- or herself and multiple in his or her revelation. This is the bridge of understanding in dialogues with Jews and Muslims. The Muslim doctrine about the ninety nine known and the one unknown name of the One God can be

the bridge for understanding the Christian faith in the Triune God. And the Jewish doctrine of the multiplicity of the One God, announced by the plurals (elohim, adonaij) and expressed through experienced contradictions (dwelling in heaven and on earth, creating and suffering) helps to understand in a better way the Christian faith in the Triune God.

These explanations for Jews and Muslims support our trials to witness our faith in the post-Christian World of Western secularism as well. So far Judaism and Islam are not just meaningful; they are relevant and important for our Christian faith.

III. What's the meaning of Judaism for the Christian faith?

1. Dialogue about different interpretations of the same Bible

In difference to Muslims Jews and Christians read the same Holy Book (called "Tenach" or "Old Testament"). Christians interpret it in the perspective of the New Testament, Jews interpret the same in a different perspective, the perspective of Jewish rabbis. Their interpretation is collected in Mishna, Talmudim and Midrashim. Knowing that and respecting this difference Jews and Christians can become teachers for each other and helpers to understand the Holy Scripture better.

For example if for a limited time we put away the interpretation of Is 53 that the prophet speaks about Jesus, we can recover the richness of the biblical text. The assumption the prophet speaks about himself or about an un-

known person of his time or about the suffering people of Israel, opens the way for surprising new perspectives, which let us hear the living voice of the Lord.

Listening to contemporary Jewish interpreters of the Scripture helps to recognize the glasses of Christian tradition we read the Scripture through. Our interest is to differentiate between the text we read and the glasses we reading the text through. Contemporary Jewish interpreters of the Scripture teach us Christians to listen to the living voice of God in human words. This living voice often speaks differently with the same human words. With Judaism we have gotten a special gift of God: the opportunity for a special dialogue, the Biblical Dialogue. It is different to an ecumenical dialogue (with other Christians) on the one side and the interfaith dialogue (with other religions) on the other side. Judaism supports us to understand the Holy Scripture.

2. Correcting anti-Jewish theological issues

One result of this restarted biblical dialogue with Judaism is the recognition of many prejudices and stereotypes of the Christian tradition regarding the Old Testament and Judaism. We learnt in this biblical dialogue there is no difference of God in the Old and the New Testament. The doctrine that God is a God of revenge in the Old Testament and a God of love in the New Testament is heretic. Israel's God is merciful, gracious and full of patience and love (Ex 34,6; Jona4,2; Ps 36,6; 103,8-13). God loves right and justice and acts like a judge in the NT too (Mt 25). There isn't violence just in the Old Testament; in the center of the New Testament you find the violence against Jesus and his followers. God gives the commandments as

helpers for faith and life. The Ten Commandments, the commandment to love the neighbors (Lev 19,18) and the enemies (Prov 25,21-22) are written in the Old Testament. We participate in Jewish ethic. Even the expectation of renewing the creation and the coming Messiah is topic in both parts of our Bible.

From Judaism we learnt to correct our false and dangerous traditions. Who was responsible for the death of Jesus? Rereading the story of Jesus suffering and being crucified we learnt: Jewish is the victim (Jesus) not the perpetrators (the Romans). Some Jews from Jerusalem were involved. But it's a bias to say "The Jews are responsible for the death of Jesus". And it's a crime when Christians do that blaming contemporary Jews for "murdering God".

In dialogue with Judaism we learnt to correct the so called "replacement theology". God's promises are faithful. God didn't break off his covenant with the people of Israel (Rom 11,2). The church is not the replacement of Israel. The place of the church is besides not instead of Israel (Rom 15,10).

3. Universalism and particularism

Israel is God's chosen people. The chosen people does not have any preference, advantage or privilege to other people or other religions. "Chosen" means "been loved", and the reason for this love is just in the one who loves and not in those who be loved (Dtn 7,7-8). God's love for Israel is inclusive, not exclusive. There is no doubt that Israel's God loves all people and the entire creation. Israel is a model. It shows that God loves the weak and small ones, the oppressed and threatened one, the poor and ug-

ly ones. The love of Israel's God is partial and universal. The Hebrew Bible tells a lot of stories about God's love to the people who don't belong to Israel: Jethro, Rahab, Gibeonites, Ruth, Queen of Shaba, Naeman, the Ninivites, the non-Jewish sailors in Jona's boat... Universalism isn't an invention of the New Testament. Universal is the Hebrew Bible from the very first beginning. Universal is Judaism from the very first beginning up till now. Universalism and particularism – it's not a contradiction, neither in the New nor in the Old Testament. Universalism includes particularism and vice versa.

To be chosen means to be peculiar. God's universal love preserves Israel's peculiarity. And Israel has the task to keep its peculiarity, to develop a culture of being different, observing the commandments of the Tora. It's a difficult task of balancing communication and self-separation. God's universal love for the entire creation doesn't destroy the peculiarity of Israel. It's a permanent task to learn inclusiveness.

4. Israel's peculiarity in the New Testament

And the peculiarity of Israel is neither destroyed in the New Testament. Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ (Gal 3,28). Yes, but the unity in Christ doesn't destroy the peculiarity of Jews and Gentiles – as less the unity in Christ destroys the peculiarity of men and women. In Christ there isn't any privilege or advantage or preference; but the peculiarities have to be kept and maintained (1Cor 7,20). Baptized Jews stay Jews and have to live Jewish. They have to observe circumcision and food rules, for example. And baptized gentiles don't need to become Jewish. They don't need to get circumcised. The one body of

Christ is inclusive, a community of very peculiar people. The difference between Jews and non-Jews is important even inside the church.

Sometimes the small but relevant words are overlooked. The meaning of the “first (the Jews)” (Rom 1,16; 2,9.10) and the “together with (the Jews)”, the “co-” (Rom 15,10; Eph 2,19; 3,6: fellow-citizens, co-members, co-heirs, co-inhabitants) is very important. Also Jesus differentiates. His message for Israel (Mt 10) is different to the message for the nations (Mt 28).

5. Confirmation (not fulfillment) of God’s promises

Traditionally Christians read the Bible with the hermeneutical key “promise and fulfillment”: what’s promised in the Hebrew Bible is fulfilled in Christ. But in difference to modern languages “fulfilled” doesn’t mean “finished” in the biblical languages Hebrew and Greek. Fulfillment in both parts of the Bible means a never ending process of fulfilling. Each event of fulfillment includes a new promise. For example: The birth of Isaac fulfilled the promise to Abraham to get a countless crowd of people. But the birth of Isaac includes a new promise: the birth of Jacob and the birth of his twelve sons and so on. Buying Sara’s grave place in Hebron is the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham to get the Promised Land. But the purchase includes new promises and so on. So the birth of Jesus is understood as the fulfillment of promises of the Jewish prophets. But the birth of Jesus and his life and death and resurrection include new promises. Jesus is a link in a chain of unfulfilled promises, a station on an unfinished way. Confirmation is the more precise and understandable translation. Paul said: “In Christ all promises are Yes and

Amen” (2Cor 1, 20). Judaism advocates for the unfulfilled promises. It urges us to expect more than happened in the past and happens today. Judaism invites us to enter the community of people waiting for, seeking for and longing for the kingdom of God, the renewed creation.

6. The benefit of the Jewish NO to the Messiah Jesus

Paul teaches that the Jewish NO is for the benefit of us, the Christians (Rom 11,11-12). It protects us from arrogance and teaches us humbleness (V. 25). The Jew with his NO is the advocate of God’s unfulfilled promises and the advocate of reality. His NO protect us to confess our faith in the Messiah Jesus too grandiosely and too wholeheartedly. The Jewish NO protects us from considering our present experience of faith to be the fulfillment of God’s promises. It saves us from accepting the world how it is. It preserves us from giving our agreement to that; it protects us from being content. We have to learn to live in fragments. We are on the way like the Jews and not at the aim. There is still too much what lets us waiting for, looking for, longing for.

7. The strict NO to missionizing Jews

God is the originator of Israel’s NO to the Messiah Jesus, Paul says. God himself had plugged the Jewish ears and had hardened Israel’s heart (Rom 11, 25). Therefore the hardening is just a stage of God’s way with his people. The end must be the universal salvation: “The entire Israel will be saved” (V.26).

Therefore, Jews don't need our missionary work. When at last the entire Israel will be saved, it will happen without the church! Israel's salvation is "the matter of the boss". Probably Paul imagines that as he experienced it at Damascus. No Christian missionaries turned Saulus to Paulus, the Lord himself did it. So Paul learned the basics of the Tora again: the rejected are chosen. The godless people are justified and accepted. Israel's salvation will happen without the church. That's an insult for the church. Regarding Israel the church is redundant.

If Israel's salvation is the matter of the boss, missionizing Jews by Christians is just not commanded, but rather it is not allowed. The entire enterprise "missionizing Jews" is a presumption and a kind of religious arrogance.

This daring and brave perspective is justified through words of the Jewish prophets and scriptures. Because God himself did the hardening of Israel, at last God will finish it, "he will turn godlessness away from Jacob... and their sins... and renew the covenant with him." (Rom 11,26-27; Is 59,20; Jer 31,33) "The deliverer from Zion" will do that (V.26). That is an expression of Israel's God (Is 59,20). Paul doesn't speak about Jesus nor Messiah. That's true faith: he doesn't stick his nose in God's affairs. He respects: God is inaccessible. The believer lets the Lord freedom, how he will act. The whole pride is broken down. That is the end of the entire Christian triumphalism. Also at the end Christians won't have advantage of anything over Jews. "God has bound both over to disobedience, so that he may have mercy on both." (V. 32) That's true humbleness. And that leads to great calmness and coolness.

8. The coming Christ – Christology with eschatological reservation

“Judaism keeps the question for the Messiah open”. This quote of Dietrich Bonhoeffer provokes the whole traditional Christology. In the theological struggle about the question “Who is the Messiah?” Christians always claimed: “The crucified and resurrected Jesus is the Messiah”. Jews always claimed: “The question is open till the Messiah will have come.” Christians have to admit that they confessing the Messiah Jesus are dependent on the Messiah’s own confirmation. Christians confessing the crucified and resurrected Christ are waiting for the coming Christ. The Christian confession is open for the answer of the Messiah himself. That is the change from a triumphalist Christology to a Christology of the triumphing Christ. 1933 in Stuttgart Martin Buber, the Jewish philosopher, even topped and added: “When the messiah will come, I want to stay very close to him. Before he will start speaking I want to whisper into his ear: “Don’t tell it!” Also at the end no religion has to triumph over another. The only one who has to triumph is the Messiah himself. For him we are waiting together with the Jews.

IV. What’s the meaning of Islam for the Christian faith?

1. Dialogue about different interpretations of the same traditions

In difference to other religions Muslims shared the same traditions with Jews and Christians written in their different Holy Books (Bible and Quran). First of all they share the Abraham/Ibrahim-Tradition. I’m not sure, if this is reason enough to call the three religions “Abrahamic Reli-

gions". Regarding the meaning of Abraham for the Christian religion I would like to refuse to call Christianity an Abrahamic Religion. Maybe Abraham/Ibrahim is more in the center of Judaism and Islam, but are they "Abrahamic Religions"? More important is the faith in the One Only.

We don't share the same texts with Islam as Jews and Christians do, but it is useful, too, to listen to the different interpretations of the same traditions. Muslims teach us, for example, a different perspective of the role of Hagar and Ishmael. Besides Abraham/Ibrahim there are many important persons who are mentioned in Bible and Quran. It shows that Islam sees itself in continuity to the Jewish-Christian tradition.

In difference to Judaism Islam estimates Jesus/Isa as prophet and his virgin mother in a special way. In many aspects Islam criticizes the biblical view. So the Quran brings a lot of alternative perspectives which open a wide range of interfaith dialogues. Therefore also Islam is a helper for understanding biblical stories in a better way. Besides the Abraham/Ibrahim-tradition Islam offers an alternative perspective of the Jesus/Isa-tradition.

2. The problem of connecting God and suffering

In the Quran Isa is a relevant prophet and one of the important predecessors of the prophet Muhammed. But the Islamic tradition totally denies the suffering of Jesus and his crucifixion. The argumentation is: if Jesus is a special human being and chosen by God to be an important prophet, God doesn't let him suffer. Suffering is a sign of distance to God. People being close to God don't suffer. In

the meaning of suffering is a core contradiction between Islam and Christianity.

In the background of this theological item you can recognize principle thoughts of the philosophy of Aristotle. For Aristotle God is the “unmoved mover (akineton kinoon)”. That leads to the theological “Apathy-Axiom”, that means: God is unable to suffer. The Aristotelian philosophy was very important for developing Islamic theology in the mediaeval period – much more than for the Christian theology. But I learned from Muslim teachers that there is a theological debate among Muslim scholars about the role of the Aristotelian philosophy for the “real” Islam. Maybe modern Muslim scholars are more open for the suffering Jesus. The Quran itself speaks about the merciful God full of love and compassion. This is different to the Aristotelian perspective.

The Muslim criticism of the suffering Jesus challenges the Christian theology to clarify the Christian doctrine about the meaning of Jesus’ suffering and death. Traditionally the Western Christian theology was focused on the meaning of Jesus’ death for the perpetrators (sinners and forgiveness of sins). The dialogue with Muslims opens the way to stress the meaning of Jesus’ death for the victims, for the people who suffer like Jesus, the victims of violence, oppression and injustice. We have to clarify that the suffering Jesus doesn’t teach us to accept pain and torments and to glorify suffering. We have to explain that the suffering Jesus teaches us to resist against injustice and to struggle against pain and to overcome suffering.

3. Quran and Jesus – the Word of God

In interfaith dialogue it is very important to look for the right and suitable analogies, if you want to compare two different religions. Traditionally Jesus and Muhammed are compared – and Bible and Quran are compared. The more fruitful challenge is to compare Jesus and Quran. Both are understood in their own contexts as “God’s Word”. Comparing Jesus and Quran comes to a triple result. We improve our knowledge about Jesus, the Quran and the Bible.

At first glance we compare two totally different issues, a human being and a book. But the difference excites to ask, to discover and to get to know and to find new paths of encounter and dialogue. What Muslims believe regarding the Holy book of Quran is suitable to explain what Christians believe regarding Jesus. In the Quran the Word of God is transformed into human words. God humiliates himself giving his living word which no human being is able to give or to take into human words. The heavenly angel Gabriel transformed the divine word in human words and dictates it into prophet Muhammed’s ear. That enables him to write it with ink and feather on animal’s skin or paper. That makes possible to read it, to keep it, to learn it by heart, to copy it, to print it und to translate it in different languages. Whenever people read it or listen to it, they receive the word of God. Provocatively Christian can say: That is incarnation of God’s word. That is the transformation of God’s word into the nature of human life. The Quran is God’s word and human words at the same time. It is a kind of contradiction and paradox like Jesus is divine and human at the same time. I know it is not totally correct. But it helps to improve our mutual understanding of Jesus and the Quran. Also Christians don’t

believe in the incarnation of God, but in the incarnation of the word of God.

And in the same way we avoid the classical misunderstanding of our Holy book, the Bible. The identification of Bible and God's word is not correct. Because Christians believe that Jesus is the incarnation of the word of God, the Bible can't be more (or less) than the collection of the multiple testimonies of human experience with the living word of the living God. The Muslim understanding of their Holy Book the Quran is different to the Christian understanding of their Holy Book the Bible.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr. Rainer Stuhlmann, born 1945, retired pastor, served in Wuppertal, Sankt Augustin and Köln as parish pastor, religious teacher and as a trainor for teachers. From 2011 to 2016 he organized in Nes Ammim, an international ecumenical village in Israel, a study program for volunteers from several European countries.



Go and Learn! (Learning in Judaism)

Rev. Sylvia Bukowski

Go and learn! As a child, I would have considered this challenge rather threatening. Learning was connected to a lot of fear. Those who disobeyed got a ruler to the back of the hand, had to stand in the corner, or were named and shamed in front of the whole class. Learning was a bitter duty and had nothing to do with the sweetness that eastern Jewish children must have experienced as they licked their honey-dipped letters clean. (How sweet their lessons were after that is anyone's guess).

Nevertheless, and despite all the pessimistic pedagogy, I learned to learn. As a result – and also because of the student movement – I have been able to bid farewell to the educational methodology I suffered and to some of its learning content. I have acquired a passion for discovering new things in a different way and for obtaining a new understanding of the familiar. This also applies to Judaism and to the Jewish people I have encountered. And I am grateful that I am participating in a learning process that is still far from complete, just as learning as a whole never ceases.

Go and learn! I no longer view this challenge as a threat of any kind. Instead, it points to a path that surely many of you have been travelling for a long time now and continue

to travel with respect to Judaism especially, and perhaps also in the case of Islam: a path that leads to other people, people who teach us to open ourselves up to them, to learn from them and with them about what connects us and what differentiates but hopefully does not separate us. A path of understanding that is desperately necessary for the solidarity of our society.

Go and learn! Learning also plays a key role in the Bible verse I have chosen for my sermon. We read in Deuteronomy 5:1, “Moses summoned all Israel and said: Hear, Israel, the decrees and laws I declare in your hearing today. Learn them and be sure to follow them.”

Hear, learn, follow, and act out the word of God: this challenge perfectly encapsulates what constitutes Judaism. On this occasion, however, I would like to concentrate on learning, and to share some of what I have found about its meaning in Judaism. Only as an aside would I like to also point out that learning God’s Word is also a formulation that expressly appears in the Qur’an. It is there in Surah 103 and serves as a fundamental characterization of Christian worship, for there I should foremost learn God’s Word.

Now many of you have certainly had your own experiences with Jewish scholars, whether at school or in other encounters. And perhaps you have also experienced that in Jewish interpretive practice one looks very closely at every detail of a text, while at the same time often construing it in a very imaginative way (that for us is sometimes quite surprising). Interpretation that is meticulous and imaginative: a combination that is highly exciting and stimulating exegetically, one which some Christian theologians have

since also come to appreciate. Jewish scholars have thus asked why learning – called *lamad* in Hebrew – begins with an L, which in Hebrew is the letter lamed. This cannot be ascribed to coincidence, especially since the kinship between *lamad* and lamed is immediately audible even to non-Hebrew-speakers.

The answer to this question is linked to the observation that the letter L has a special status in the Hebrew alphabet. It is the twelfth letter and therefore exactly in the middle of the 22 Hebrew letters. It forms the word *melech* – king – with the letters to the right and left of it. The scholars have already pointed this out as a reference to the elevated position learning occupies in Judaism. But when you look at the Hebrew alphabet on the page, you see another distinction: the letter lamed is the only letter that juts out of the box that encloses the other letters – a bit like the periscope of a submarine. An important element of Jewish learning philosophy is based on this observation. We could say that's what learning is: going a little outside the prescribed boxes. In order to be able to do so and, even more importantly, to notice that we are doing it, we must know what is in the boxes. In reference to faith, one might say that we need what is prescribed to us by the Word of God. We need scripture and tradition as the basis for understanding our faith. And this basis is diverse, just like the letters of the alphabet. We have much to learn. But our efforts to understand the Word of God ought not be limited to what is prescribed to us, lest our faith degenerate into a timeless truth that has little to do with what motivates people today. The letter lamed, which juts out of the prescribed boxes, reminds us that the understanding of faith must always go beyond the framework of scripture and tradition: that it is always a matter of asking what is "of the moment" today. In his story of Yentl – some of you are surely familiar with the film adap-

tation starring Barbara Streisand – Isaac Bashevis Singer describes a scene where the yeshiva students are waxing lyrical about their distinguished teachers. One speaks of a teacher who could settle ten questions with one answer; Yentl replies proudly that her father had ten questions for every answer. I believe that this is what vibrant learning is all about: not just to find answers for all questions, but even more to find questions for all answers. Only in this way can we successfully look to scripture and tradition to produce new, current links to contemporary topics, using a strategy that takes into account the vibrancy of God's Word and that you experience in every good sermon. But learning God's Word in these terms is not just a cause for experts, by which I mean theologians. Moses instructed all of Israel to do this, and our reformers have similarly emphasized how the whole Christian community is responsible for interpreting the Bible. In addition, you as a congregation have the task of seeking out how scripture and tradition can be connected to the issues of our time. Learning always has a community aspect as well. This is why the bet midrash, the Jewish hall of study, will always have at least two students sitting together and vociferously discussing a text – resulting in a noise level that would significantly reduce my own learning level, in any case.

We have arrived at the second teaching from the Jewish reflections on the letter *lamed*'s relevance to learning.

Rabbi Akiva formed a sentence out of the three consonants that comprise the word *lamed* – that is, L, M, and D: *lev meivin da'at* – the heart that understands.

Rabbi Akiva's concern is evidently not that learning becomes exhausted as we stuff our heads with as much

knowledge as possible, but rather that our hearts must always be involved. This can mean “learning by heart”, a kind of memorization that deeply incorporates what has been learned and, as life experience grows, becomes a great treasury of wisdom. However, this can also indicate that knowledge ought never to comprise the kind of cold facts that disregard humanity. With this in mind, another Jewish interpretive scholar can say that learning always requires the heart of Eve: that is, a woman’s heart. I understand this as his pointing to mercy, *racham*, which in Hebrew is contained within the maternal body.

In this sense, then, learning never becomes an elitist knowledge in service of power or control, learning that is flaunted by one person alone and used to exploit, embarrass, or hold back others. This kind of learning is complemented by other knowledge that does not tower over the weak, but rather is prepared to learn from anyone, even those who may not have so much academic training but possess very educated hearts. This kind of humane learning that values others is what creates a community of solidarity – something we urgently need in our church and our society!

Here is a third thought on the link between the letter lamed and the word *lamad*, which means learning but also teaching. For this one, we also need to know that in Hebrew, each letter has a numerical value as well. Without getting into the details of their calculation, some Jewish scholars believe that the numerical value of the letter lamed corresponds exactly to the numerical value of the four letters of the name of God, which in Judaism is never uttered. What does this mean? Learning and teaching reflects something of God. Naturally God is a great teacher, but in the Jewish tradition God is sometimes also por-

trayed as a learner. One of the books of the Talmud (a name that also contains *lamad*) has a description of God's daily activity: God begins the day with three hours of Torah study, meaning that God himself is learning Torah. But because what follows this account is so wonderful, I would like to retell it here in full: after studying Torah, God judges the world for three hours, and when God ascertains that it deserves destruction, God rises from his throne of righteousness and sits upon his throne of mercy. Then God spends three hours maintaining the world, from the horns of the bulls to the eggs of the lice, and finally spends three hours more sporting with Leviathan, the sea monster. To repeat, however: even God begins his day with the study of the Torah, a text which, like others, holds that God created the world.

As beautiful as this description is, it is easier for us to understand God's learning in the biblical passages where God gains new insights from his own works, such as after the Flood, or where he allows himself to be changed by human prayer, or says something about humanity and then acts. This happens several times in conversation with Moses and also with Joshua; it becomes visible in God's reaction to the penance of Nineveh, and in the New Testament Jesus learns very clearly from the stubborn Canaanite woman that he has not been sent only to the children of the house of Israel. It becomes clear in all these passages that whenever the Bible speaks of a "learning process of God", such a process is connected with God's heart, with God's mercy.

One last thought for now: the Hebrew letter lamed is simultaneously a preposition that indicates a direction. So

learning God's word is more than just an end in itself; it must also lead to something, must aim for action. Deuteronomy 5:1 says to hear, to learn, to follow, to act. In the Jewish tradition, the aim of learning is the active love of God and one's fellow human beings, as the twofold law of love commands, that law which Jesus cites from scripture, i.e., the Old Testament. The synopsis of Judaism that Torah scholar Rabbi Hillel gives to a gentile while standing on one foot is also aimed at action: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That's the whole Torah," he says, "all the rest is commentary". But then Hillel dismisses the man with the words: "Now go and learn..."

This could close the circle. You have seen how the meticulousness of Judaism, concentrated on a single letter, unleashes a whole plethora of creative and at the same time profound associations with the topic of learning. But learning does not happen in a vacuum. In many parts of the world at present, we are experiencing a resurgence of populism and religious fundamentalism – often very closely connected – that is extremely hostile to learning. With sophisticated, sometimes piously charged propaganda, fear is sown, critical thinking comes under suspicion, and society becomes divided. It is deeply disturbing to track these developments, including those occurring in Israel. In the times we live in, the letter *lamed*, which as you have seen stands for open and humanitarian learning, must also represent a clear "no" to the dangerous dumbing down of nations and the associated incitements to hate and violence.

Go and learn: the motto of this year's week of fraternity is very relevant to our time. We need a willingness to ap-

proach other people and learn from them, to learn with them instead of persisting in our own prejudices. We need critical thinking, which unmask dangerous ideas even in their guise of good citizenship. We need learning that is not satisfied with simple answers. We need teachers who encourage questions.

We must stay on the path and keep learning!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



Rev. Sylvia Bukowski served 35 years as a pastor in Wuppertal. She received the ecumenical award for best preaching in 2005, and is honored with the Golden Menorah by the Jewish Community. Presently she works as pastoral counselor in the children's hospice. She has also been a short term lecturer for homiletics in partner churches of the UEM.

Prayer for Israel/Palestine

Rev. Sylvia Bukowski

God of peace:
We all depend on you
not rewarding our wickedness
with evil, and on you
replacing our desire for revenge
with your merciful justice.
You are the advocate of the weak,
you show the strong their limits,
you grant reconciliation.

We turn to you,
perplexed and outraged
by the new wave of violence
in the Middle East.

We can understand the grief of all Israel
at the murder of three students.
We share the rage of the Palestinians
at the cruel revenge killing.
But the hateful speech on both sides,
the readiness for violence
and the call for further retaliation
arouse concern for the future
of the whole region.

As far as we can tell,
there are still scarcely any possibilities
for reconciliation,
and we fear the consequences of a conflagration
for ourselves as well.

God, protect us
from being drawn into the conflict,
from assigning one-sided blame,
and from not acknowledging
the injuries and fears
on the other side.
We have no suitable prescriptions.
So we entreat you:
grant peace to Israel and Palestine,
and to the neighboring countries.
Heal the wounds
that hatred and violence have wrought
and lead the people to come together
in respect for one another
and in the spirit of reconciliation.

Müller-Krüger-Award 2016

Dr. Uwe Hummel

Every two years, the United Evangelical Mission (UEM), in close coordination with Eukumindo (European Working Group for Ecumenical Relations with Indonesia; in which UEM is a member), and Theological College (STT) Jakarta, choose one or two Indonesians who wrote the best academic research paper for the Müller-Krüger-Award. It is given in commemoration of Prof. Dr. Theodor Müller-Krüger, a church historian and former missionary of UEM, and also the first President of STT Jakarta.

This award is a “Fund for theological research in Indonesia” aiming at the encouragement of Indonesian Theologians by granting prizes for excellent treatises (Master’s thesis, dissertations, monograms)

Müller-Krüger Award 2016

The award for 2016 has been granted to Dr. Enta Malasinta Lantigimo, who is an ordained pastor of the Gereja Kalimantan Evangelis (GKE) and a lecturer in Theology at STT GKE in Banjarmasin. Dr. Malasinta wrote a dissertation on *Menemukan Posisi Antara – Sebuah Studi Komparatif Kekuasaan Mutlak Tuhan dan Kehendak Bebas Manusia dalam Takdir dan Predestinasi* (In Search of an In-Between Position – A Comparative Study on God’s Absolute Power and Man’s Free Will in Takdir and Predestination) at STT Jakarta.

The Dissertation

Dr. Malasinta begins by clarifying the concept of *Takdir* in Islam (the decision, stipulation and determination of God), and points out that since the beginnings (7th-8th centuries CE) there have been different schools of interpretation, especially the *Qadariah* (human has a free will; God does not determine everything in advance) and the *Jabariah* (human has no freedom of will and action; God determines everything in advance).

The author explains the etymology and underlying concepts in the Arabic. She then continues to explain the Christian concept of *Predestination* as it was developed mainly by Jean Calvin (1509-1564), taken over from St. Augustine of Hippo (a Biblical, Pauline concept).

Chapter 1 contains an overview of Prophet Muhammad and the origins of Islam, the concepts of social justice and tolerance, the development of the caliphate and the schisms in Islam. The question of who is a true Muslim and who not, ultimately – during the period of the Umayyads (661-750 CE) – led to the discussion on the sovereignty of God and the free will of humans.

The author makes an analysis of *Takdir* according to the *al-Qur'an* and the *Hadith* (a report of words and actions of Muhammed), following its interpretation and political use from pre-Islamic times until the Umayyad caliphate.

Chapter 2: leaning quite heavily on the work of David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, the author discusses the concept of *Predestination*, the different traditions dealing with the question of God's al-might and sovereignty, as well as the free will (and its limitations) of humans.

Chapter 3 deals with debates in both Christianity and Islam concerning the issue of God's absolute power and human freedom. The author compares the teachings of *Mu'tazilah* and *Arminianism*, and finds similarities.

Chapter 4: in this chapter, the author deliberates further on the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of humans. She points out some of the current arguments for and against it, as well as the relevance of *Takdir* and *Predestination* in Kalimantan. The author reaches the conclusion that whereas there are many similarities between Islam, Christianity and even Kaharingan (the primal reli-

gion), the differences remain and should not be denied. Each religion has its respective, unique “religious languages” (*bahasa agama*). Nevertheless, there are common denominators (bridges / *jembatan*) between them.

Reflection: In this concluding chapter, the author places this discourse in her cultural-religious context: the religious system of the Dayak Ma'anyan people. While the Dayak Ma'anyan believe in the sovereignty and absolute power of God, they also stress the importance that humans actively build and maintain a good relationship with God. This in no way contradicts the sovereignty of God.

The Müller-Krüger-Award for 2016 was handed over to Dr. Enta Malasinta Lantigimo by Eukumindo-President, Rev. Sonia Parera-Hummel, during the semester-opening ceremony of STT GKE on the 11th of August 2017 in Banjarmasin.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



Dr. Uwe Hummel had the privilege of participating in some of the changes from a German into an international missionary organization. He is a Lutheran pastor and lecturer in Theology. At present, he is working as an Ecumenical Co-worker of mission21/Basel at the Theological Church-College of the Protestant Church of Kalimantan, Indonesia (STT-GKE). During his active service in UEM (1994-2001; 2004-2010), he served for about seven years (1994-2001) together with his wife Sonia as a missionary lecturer in the BNKP, on the island of Nias and later in Wuppertal as Coordinator of West-Papua-Netzwerk (2004-2009) and Executive Secretary for Asia (2007-2010) in job-sharing with Sonia Parera-Hummel.

Mission Sparks

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Pilgrimage: A Spiritual Journey

Different religious practices and traditions making their journey
towards spirituality.