

World Council of Churches  
Education and Ecumenical Formation

**July 2005/January 2006**  
*double issue*



***Welcome to***  
***Porto Alegre***



This biannual journal aims to encourage sharing and cooperation among all who are working for the renewal of the churches through programmes of ministerial formation. All correspondence regarding MINISTERIAL FORMATION should be sent to the address below. Submission of relevant articles, reports and news is welcomed. Items in this journal do not necessarily reflect the views of the WCC and its programme on Ecumenical Theological Education.

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## LETTER FROM STAFF

Dear friend and colleague,

“God in your grace, transform the world” is a prayer and the theme of the forth coming ninth general assembly of the World Council of Churches to be held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 14<sup>th</sup> -23<sup>rd</sup> February 2006. Many activities will take place at the assembly among them gatherings around several texts of the Bible to reflect and learn from one another as the Holy Spirit will guide the participants.

Certainly only a small number of people will make it to the assembly. However we would like to encourage our readers to participate in reflecting on the theme and biblical texts that have been identified for bible studies and to feel part of this global church gathering. The following are the texts that are guiding us in our prayers, study and reflection: Luke 4:16-30 & Isaiah 61:1-4; Isaiah 65:17-25 & Revelation 21:1-8; Jonah 4:1-11 & Acts 10:9-35; Philippians 2:1-11 & Mark 10:32-45; 2 Corinthians 12: 6-10 & Ezekiel 36: 26-27; John 4:1-42 & Ezekiel 47: 1-12; Psalm 130 & 2 Corinthians 3:18.

In this double issue (July 2005/January 2006) of *Ministerial Formation* we have invited a few theological educators from Latin America to reflect on the theme and to write on texts of their choice. We are grateful for their willingness to write and to share their thoughts and convictions with us. We would also like to extend our gratitude to Prof. Nelson Kilpp, *Escola Superior de Teologia, São Leopoldo, Brasil* and José Duque, WCC/Ecumenical Theological Education consultant for the Caribbean and Latin America region for soliciting for the articles and ensuring that translation from Spanish and Portuguese to English was done in time.

Please we would like all our readers to note that these are not the “authorized” bible studies for the assembly, which are available on [www.wcc-assembly.info/Bible\\_studies](http://www.wcc-assembly.info/Bible_studies) or on CD-ROM that is available from WCC assembly office in Geneva, Switzerland.

We appreciate your comments, insights and prayers as we head to Porto Alerge and beyond. Stay in touch!

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## PRESENTACIÓN

José Duque

En preparación para la Asamblea General del Consejo Mundial de Iglesias (CMI) a realizarse en Puerto Alegre, Brasil en el mes de febrero del 2006, bajo el tema enunciado en forma de oración: “Dios, en tu gracia, transforma el mundo”, el CMI ha llamado a los cristianos de todo el orbe y de todas las confesiones a reflexionar y contemplar desde cada contexto la inagotable Gracia amorosa.

Por ese motivo en ETE hemos decidido dedicar este número de Ministerial Formation a la reflexión de dicho tema desde la perspectiva de la América Latina como una contribución, aunque modesta, de tan significativo contenido espiritual y teológico para nuestro tiempo. Esperamos con la mejor de nuestras voluntades, contribuir con estas modestas reflexiones, a la preparación de la Asamblea del CMI, para que abunde la Gracia.

Para introducirnos al contenido anunciado insinuamos los siguientes pensamientos, apenas como esbozo:

### 1. El recurso de los atributos

En los orígenes de la construcción del pueblo de Israel y su espiritualidad, la gracia fue uno de los atributos asignados a la imagen que este pueblo se iba haciendo de Dios. Se trataba de atributos reconocidos a Yavéh como resultado de la experiencia de fe del pueblo de Israel, cuando este enfrentaba realidades históricas que amenazaban la convivencia humana entendida como el proyecto de Dios para la humanidad. Por ejemplo, para contrarrestar las imágenes de otros dioses, de los dioses de otros pueblos que se revelaban como sacrificiales o idólatras, Israel trataba de mostrar, por medio de los atributos, la diferencia y la distancia que había entre su Dios y los otros dioses. Israel percibía, por medio de su fe, que Yavéh no era como los demás dioses. Israel proclamaba el amor y la fidelidad como los primeros esbozos de la imagen que este pueblo percibía de Yavéh (Shemá-Deuteronomio 6). Yavéh, para Israel, no era solo un Dios amoroso y fiel, de manera abstracta o genérica, sino personal y comprometido con el pueblo, ese pueblo que le había correspondido. Aquí encontramos pues, el origen de la teología de la elección, lo mismo que la de la Alianza. Yavéh era un Dios liberador (les había liberado de la esclavitud en Egipto), santo y justo. Yavéh sí oía el clamor, los gemidos, el grito de su pueblo, del pueblo con el cual había sellado una alianza irrompible, para siempre. Esto significaba, que el Dios de Israel en su fidelidad, era un Dios que oía y acudía a rescatarlos como lo consignan en la experiencia del éxodo.

Eso si, ninguno de esos atributos se percibían en una sola dirección. Yavéh era amor, se daba (gracia) y suscita amor, era fiel para suscitar fidelidad entre su pueblo, eligió para suscitar la elección al prójimo, liberó de toda opresión para suscitar en su pueblo un compromiso liberador. Aunque desde entonces era claro que los destinatarios de la gracia, sin mermar lo universal del mensaje, eran ante todo, los insignificantes: el huérfano, la viuda, el extranjero (Deuteronomio 10:18-19).

### 2. Declaraciones de fé

Hay que destacar también que tanto los atributos asignados a Yavéh, así como las teologías de la elección y la alianza, fueron basadas en afirmaciones de fe, confesiones, visiones, oraciones. No se trataba de constataciones históricas literales, sino de evocaciones de fe, expresadas por medio de símbolos a partir de experiencias de crisis donde se amenazaba la vida del pueblo o también, como resultado de un favor recibido. Evocaciones sintetizadas que procedían de experiencias fundantes, fruto de una contemplación espiritual del pueblo de Israel; teniendo en cuenta que la espiritualidad israelita no se partió por la dicotomía, como sucedió en los tiempos posteriores de la iglesia.

Ni en el Primer Testamento, ni en el Segundo, encontramos un texto bíblico en el cual se condensa la doctrina de la gracia, como la tenemos hoy sintetizada en el magisterio. Pero como todas las teologías y doctrinas bíblicas, la gracia ha pasado por un proceso largo de desarrollo, sobre todo, a partir de San Pablo.

### 3. Algunos elementos de la antropología paulina<sup>1</sup>

Pablo es reconocido como el teólogo de la gracia; se reconocía a si mismo como “llenado de gracia”, porque siendo él un perseguidor implacable de cristianos, el Dios de los cristianos le respondió con gracia.

Parece que Pablo no supo llamar de otra manera su experiencia personal. Pues en realidad, no había hasta ese momento una teología de la gracia. La transformación del apóstol y de los cristianos de su tiempo constituía la ocasión para teologizar la nueva realidad revelada. Apeló al término *charis*, gratuito, sin mérito y sin costo, como la única explicación de lo que le había pasado él y a los demás de la comunidad. Pero la experiencia de Pablo explicada a la comunidad de los creyentes también ha traído controversia, veamos algunas puntadas al respecto:

#### 3.1 La condición humana

a) Parece que el punto de partida de la controversia tiene su origen en el discurso antropológico que se ha abstraído del mismo Pablo: en lo que Juan Luis Segundo llama “La condición humana”, cuando Pablo dice: “Porque no hago el bien que quiero, sino el mal que no quiero, eso hago” (Romanos 7: 19-25). Esto es, el ser humano tiene una motivación íntima, personal que lo impulsa al amor. Esa, según Segundo, es la gracia, el regalo divino que gratuitamente recibimos para sanar nuestra congénita tendencia al pecado (258). En ese plano íntimo, el ser humano no decide entre el bien y el mal. Pues todo el ser interior desea hacer el bien.

b) El problema se da cuando se llega a la tarea de realizar el amor; de transformarlo en vida por medio de las relaciones humanas. Allí aparece la ley del éxito, la competencia, la vía de lo fácil, del mínimo esfuerzo para realizarlo, de la máxima ganancia, todo aquello que canaliza la acción humana individualizada a través del cálculo de utilidad, es decir del *self-interest* (Assmann 1997, 117ss). Entonces no amamos plenamente, o no amamos del todo, porque nuestras relaciones humanas lo reducimos al egoísta interés de recibir, sin entrega. Es decir, en una sola vía; la vía del egoísmo, la mala fe. Por esa vía nos alienamos, quedamos completamente ajenos a nuestros prójimos y perdemos la libertad que da la gratuidad. Pues pasamos a ser inauténticos, haciendo cálculos de nuestra ganancia.

c) Siguiendo el pensamiento de Juan Luis Segundo (218ss), cuando señala que, aunque quiero desde mi intimidad hacer el bien, la realidad de la naturaleza del universo ignora ese principio de libertad y convierte al ser humano, si este no hace ejercicio de su libertad, en una pieza más de su gran mecanismo. En realidad el ser humano es parte integral de ese mecanismo que funciona con la ley de la naturaleza. Desde allí, la libertad, que viene del interior no regula las funciones biológicas. La naturaleza funciona independientemente de mis mejores y sanos deseos íntimos. La ley de la naturaleza trabaja al ser humano, aún determinando sus deseos.

d) La motivación íntima de libertad está habitada e invadida por el poder de la naturaleza; es parte del propio yo, pertenece a nosotros y condiciona nuestras realizaciones. Para que la naturaleza deje de ser extraña y pase a ser parte de nuestro todo, tenemos que lograr de ese todo un reflejo de lo que íntimamente somos, pensamos y queremos. Estamos diciendo entonces, que en cuanto logrado que ese todo refleje el bien que queremos desde nuestra intimidad, hemos superado la impersonalidad, aquella que realiza el amor sin entrega, sin gratuidad, sin lucharlo para lograrlo. Hoy diríamos que el amor se realiza hasta las últimas consecuencias por sujetos que se proponen lograrlo.

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<sup>1</sup>Según interpretamos a Juan Luis Segundo. 1983, 210ss

e) Para Pablo, la libertad no es la mera capacidad que tiene el ser humano de elegir, sino la cualidad positiva de determinar por sí mismo la propia existencia, sin que nadie ni nada se la predetermine - esto es el bien. La no libertad equivale al dejarse llevar por esa facilidad egoísta que proporciona la ley que nos rige desde el exterior de nuestro ser - ese es el mal. La carne, el mundo, es la pesadez de la condición humana para la libertad. Es decir, la in-autenticidad, el acomodamiento, la cosificación, la pasividad que inhabilita y todo aquello que nos deshumaniza y por lo tanto nos hace insensibles ante el prójimo.

f) Lo esencial es que la gracia de Dios es gratuita y hace al ser humano capaz de gratuidad, de creación, de libertad, de dignidad. La gracia sana al ser humano de lo inhumano, de ser una simple cosa más, como las demás cosas, regidas por mecanismos impersonales; lo dispone para liberarse de la alineación, lo habilita para salir de lo rutinario. Así, gracia y personalidad es sinónimo de gracia y libertad, de gracia y creación. Gracia que nos vuelve plenamente humanos. De la siguiente manera sintetiza Juan Luis Segundo su reflexión sobre la gracia:

La fuerza irreversible que nos quiere libres, que nos vuelve libres, que nos vuelve a todos los hombres (sic) libres, para cometer en común la tarea, a la vez divina y humana, de crear una historia de amor definitivo, precisamente por ser libre... La gracia no nos hace entrar en un molde previsto por Dios, ni nos informa cuál sería ese molde representativo del hombre ideal. Nos dice, nos sugiere y aún nos sacude a veces para que comprendamos, que el único molde, el del Hijo, es la libertad de los hijos de Dios. Que Dios no tiene otro plan sobre nosotros, sino es el asociarnos con su obra creadora frente al universo histórico. “La verdad os hará libres”...Y quien pregunte: libres, ¿para qué?, no ha comprendido nada y debe volver a empezar...Solo la pregunta por el cómo tiene aquí sentido.(394)

### **3.2 La teología oriental**

Esta teología, más cercana a San Juan, descifra el misterio de gracia con la categoría de la divinización. El hijo se ha humanado para que los seres humanos sean divinizados. Allí no aparece la relación antinómica entre Dios y el ser humano. Al contrario y con mucha fuerza, solo la fe en la gratuidad puede enunciar que: Gloria dei, vivens homo (Hinkelammert, 2005).

La tendencia antinómica es más occidental, la cual es la base para la controversia con Pelagio, así como el jansenismo y la crisis de la Reforma con el posterior pesimismo existencial protestante, en la mal leída sola fides, sola gratia, según JL Segundo. Sin embargo, Elsa Tamez, en su re-lectura de la justificación por la fe en San Pablo desde el contexto de la América Latina y el Caribe, deja a un lado la tradicional controversia y traslada el énfasis de la confrontación obras-fe hacia la Gracia de la justicia que encuentra su punto de partida entre los y las excluidas, quienes tienen la vida amenazada (1990).

### **3.3 La gracia y la dignidad humana**

El poeta costarricense Jorge Debravo remarca la gracia como dignidad humana, que incluso se expresa en la liturgia: “La rodilla se dobla cuando las manos están apabulladas de fracaso”. En cambio, “Cuando se reza de pie y cantando los de rodillas son los paganos”. (1979, 17-18)

Con esta indicación de libertad descrita por el poeta, sintetizamos nuestra reflexión con la afirmación siguiente: existen dos elementos cuasi indispensables al momento de releer la teología de la Gracia desde nuestro contexto hoy: uno es la libertad humana, aquella que nos hace personas, que nos hace dignos, que nos libera, que desata todas nuestras ataduras para lograr entonces, caminar erguidos hacia nuestros prójimos, para unidos, hacer el camino de la historia jalonados por el reino de Dios. Entonces conoceremos la verdad, que nos hace verdaderamente libres. Porque la globalización, manifiesta en los tratados de libre comercio, libera las mercancías, el mercado, los negocios globales. Entonces estos tendrán plena libertad de circulación mientras se restringen los



derechos humanos en franco deterioro de la libertad de los y las pequeñas, los excluidos, quienes ya ni siquiera podrán emigrar para buscar mejores condiciones de vida, privándolos no solo de su derecho a circular sino, de su derecho al trabajo, a la salud, la educación, la vivienda, es decir son desechados sin ninguna compasión.

El otro elemento indispensable en nuestra reflexión sobre la gracia en estos tiempos, según nuestra apreciación, es la crítica del cálculo de utilidad, del *self interest*, de la avaricia del éxito individual, del lucro, desde donde se miden y calculan todas las relaciones humanas en la cultura en la globalización neoliberal. Esta crítica es una crítica profética desde la Gracia, que suscita gratuidad en nosotros, sensibilidad, solidaridad, en fin, amor eficaz. Podríamos resumir estos pensamientos en la siguiente frase: la Gracia de Dios empodera al ser humano suscitando en este gratuidad.

Esperamos que en este esfuerzo de Ministerial Formation encuentren fuentes de reflexión y alguna luz para iluminar el horizonte sin gracia del mundo actual, oscurecido por las tinieblas. Nuestra oración insistente es: ¡Llénanos de tu gracia para suscitar gracia!

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## PRESENTATION

**José Duque**

In preparation for the ninth general assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), to be held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in February 2006, WCC has called Christians from around the world and from all confessions to reflect on and to carefully consider, from each of their contexts, the inexhaustible loving grace. The general theme is expressed in the form of a prayer, “God, in your grace, transform the world.”

*Pastoral Formation (PF)* shares and accepts the WCC’s invitation, with great pleasure, and dedicates this issue to a contextual reflection of this spiritual and theological theme, which is so significant for our time. For this purpose, we have asked an excellent team of researchers from various confessions and countries of Latin America and the Caribbean to contribute theological-biblical reflections for this important preparatory assignment for the WCC Assembly, in order that grace will abound.

To introduce us to the theme, we suggest the following thoughts:

### **1. The resource of the attributes**

In the beginning of the emergence of the nation of Israel and its spirituality, grace was one of the attributes ascribed to the concept that they were forming of God. This had to do with Jehovah’s recognized attributes that resulted from the experience of faith of the people of Israel when they faced historical realities that threatened their life together and God’s plan for humanity. For example, to counteract the images of other gods, the sacrificial or idolatrous gods of other peoples, Israel attempted to demonstrate through Jehovah’s attributes the difference and distance that existed between their God and other gods. By faith, Israel perceived that Jehovah was not like the other gods. The Israelites proclaimed that love and faithfulness were the first outlines of the image that they perceived God to be (*Shemá*—Deuteronomy 6). Although, for them, Jehovah was not just a loving, faithful God in an abstract or generic sense, but was personal and was committed to the daily life of the people—this nation that belonged to him.

We find here, then, the origin of the theology of election and, likewise, of the covenant. Jehovah was a liberating God (he had freed them from slavery in Egypt), holy and just. He heard their clamor, their groans, the cry of his people, the people with which he had sealed an everlasting, unbreakable covenant. In his faithfulness he was a God who heard and rescued them (Exodus).

Of course, none of these attributes were discerned in only one direction. God was love and he gave (grace) and incites love; he was faithful to evoke faithfulness in his people; he chose to cause the election of their fellowman, to free them from all oppression to bring about a liberating commitment in his people. Although, without diminishing the universality of the message, it has always been clear that those people who received this grace were, first of all, the insignificant ones: the orphan, the widow and the foreigner (Deuteronomy 10:18-19).

### **2. Declarations of faith**

It must be emphasized that both the attributes given to Jehovah and the theologies of election and the covenant were based on affirmations of faith, confessions, visions, prayers. This was not about literal, historical confirmations, but about the invocation of faith, expressed through symbols from crisis experiences in which the life of the nation was threatened, or as the result of a favor received—synthesized invocations that came from founding experiences, the fruit of the spiritual contemplation of the people of Israel. One must take into consideration that the Israelite’s spirituality did not start from a dichotomy, as happened later during the first centuries of Christianity.

As well, it should be repeated that there is no biblical text that condenses the doctrine of grace, as we have synthesized in the teaching profession. But, as true with all theologies and biblical doctrine, grace has passed through a long developmental process.

### 3. Pauline anthropology

Paul is recognized as the theologian of grace. Paul recognized himself as being “filled with grace” because, while he was an implacable persecutor of Christians, the God of the Christians responded to him with grace.

It seems that Paul did not know of any other way to talk about his personal experience. In reality, there was not a theology of grace before then. The transformation of the apostle and of the Christians during his time constituted the occasion to theologize the new reality revealed to them. He chose to use the term “*charis*” (free, without merit and without cost) as the only explanation for what had happened to him and to others in the community of faith. Here is an outline based on the thinking of Juan Luis Segundo (1983: 210 ff)

#### 3.1 The human condition

a) The starting point of the controversy seems to have its origin in the anthropological discourse taken from Paul himself, in what Juan Luis Segundo calls “The human condition,” when Paul says: “For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing” (Romans 7:19-25).

Human beings have an intimate, personal motivation that incites love. According to J. L. Segundo, this is grace, the divine gift that we freely receive to heal our congenital tendency to sin (p. 258). On this intimate level, the human being does not decide between good and bad. The inner being wants to do good.

b) The problem arises when one approaches the task of loving, of transforming that into action. Here the law of success, selfishness, of the easy, that which takes the least effort, appears—all of the things that direct human action according to the economic rationality of “profit calculation” and individualized *self-interest* (Assmann 1997: 117 ff). So, we do not fully love, or we do not love at all, because we reduce this to merely receiving, without giving. That is to say, in just one way. The way of selfishness, of bad faith. That way, we alienate ourselves and remain completely detached from our fellow humans and we lose the freedom that gratitude gives. We become false because we act only out of self-interest.

c) Following the thoughts of Segundo when he points out that even though I want to do good in my innermost self, the reality of the nature of the universe ignores this principle of freedom and converts the human being into just one more piece in its great machinery. In reality, the human being is the integral part of this mechanism that functions by natural laws. From there, freedom that comes from inside does not regulate biological functions. Nature operates independently of my best and healthiest inner desires. The laws of nature stimulate human beings, even determining their desires.

d) The inner motivation of freedom is inhabited and invaded by the power of nature; it is part of the ego itself; it belongs to us and conditions our performance. In order for nature to stop being alien and become a part of our innermost self, we have to obtain from our self an intimate reflection of what we are, think and want.

What we are saying, then, is that when this entirely reflects the good that we want in our innermost being, we have overcome impersonality, which is that which experiences love without giving, without gratitude, without fighting to obtain it. Today we would say that love is experienced to the fullest by people who deliberately propose to obtain it.

e) For Paul, freedom is not merely the ability of the human being to choose, but it is the positive quality to determine for oneself one's existence, without anyone or anything predetermining that; this is the good. Not having freedom is the same as being carried away by the selfish ease that the law that rules us from outside of our being gives; that is the evil. The flesh, the world, the weight of the human condition that limits freedom. That is to say, the falseness, convenience, reification, the passivity that disables and all that dehumanizes us and, therefore, makes us insensitive to our fellow human beings.

f) What is essential is that God's grace is free, and it makes people capable of being grateful, of creating, of freedom, of dignity. Grace cures people from being inhuman, of being just one more thing like other things, ruled by impersonal mechanisms; it prepares people for freeing themselves from alienation; it empowers them able to leave the ordinary. Thus, grace and personality are synonymous with grace and freedom, with grace and creation. Grace that makes us fully human. Here is how J. L. Segundo synthesizes his reflection about grace:

The irreversible force that wants us to be free, that makes us free, that makes all men (sic) free, to entrust the work in common, divine and human at the same time, to create a definitive story of love, precisely because of being free ... Grace does not force us into a mold planned by God, and it does not tell us what the mold that represents the ideal man will be like. It does tell us, suggests to us and even shakes us sometimes so that we understand, that the only mold is His son; it is the freedom of the sons of God. That God does not have another plan for us except to unite us with his creative work facing the historical universe. "The truth shall make you free" ... And whoever asks "free, from what?" has not understood any-thing and should begin again ... Only the question of "how" makes sense here (p. 394).

### 3.2 Eastern Orthodox theology

Closer to St. John, describes the mystery of grace in the category of deification. The son became human so that human beings could be deity. No antimony between God and human beings appears there. On the contrary, with great power, only faith in gratitude can declare: *Gloria dei vivens homo* (Hinkelammert quotes Mons. Romero en *Pasos*, p.117).

According to J. L. Segundo, the tendency to antimony is more western, which is the basis for the controversy with Pelagio, as well as Jansenism and the crisis of the Reformation with later Protestant existential pessimism, in the misread *sola fides, sola gratia*. Elsa Tamez' re-reading of justification by faith in Paul, from the Latin American and Caribbean context, puts to one side the traditional controversy and neither places emphasis on works or on faith, nor makes a half of the two as a third option, but starts from those who are excluded to whom God goes to with the grace of justice (1990).

### 3.3 Grace and human dignity

Costa Rican poet Jorge Debravo made poetry out of theology in this way: "The knee bows when the hands are crushed by failure." On the other hand, "When one stands up to pray and sing, those on their knees are pagans" (1979,17-18).

The religion of sacrifice, which degrades human beings, causes the gods to struggle, the false gods that set out to make free people kneel down, because they want them prostrate so that they can not undermine the order of the fetishes.

"Lord, in your grace, transform the world," give us freedom, fill us with your grace to minister against all sacrifice and exclusion in this world of darkness. Transform this world because it has become globalized with the economic rationality of "profit calculation" as self-interest, insensitive to the cry of the "little ones."

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## PENTECOSTALISMO Y GRACIA: ACERCAMIENTO A LA DOCTRINA EN PERSPECTIVA DIALÓGICA

Daniel Chiquete

### Introducción

La doctrina de la gracia seguramente ha sido la que más ha ocupado a la teología durante toda su historia. También ha sido la causante de las mayores y más variadas controversias, muchas de las cuales han sido hitos históricos, tanto del pensamiento teológico como de la historia de la iglesia y de la cultura occidental. Por ello el presente artículo no pretende contribuir a la profundización de esta doctrina, sino más bien, como lo anuncia el subtítulo, intenta ser sólo un acercamiento a ella en actitud dialógica, desde mi perspectiva pentecostal, para poder resaltar algunos de sus aspectos que se viven y expresan en la religiosidad pentecostal latinoamericana, de manera similar o cercana a lo expuesto por la teología, al mismo tiempo busca señalar cómo y dónde el pentecostalismo puede ser concebido como una expresión de la gracia de Dios para nuestro continente.

Vivimos en un tiempo que muchos perciben como de *anti-gracia* o *des-gracia*, donde ya casi nada es gratuito, ni siquiera las bendiciones de Dios, donde valores fundamentales del ser humano como el derecho a vivir con dignidad son ultrajados continuamente. En un mundo agredido por los 'demonios' de la guerra, múltiples fanatismos religiosos y políticos, organismos internacionales que rigen la economía y la comercialización de todos los valores, materiales y espirituales, la globalización que arrolla todo a su paso como un 'huracán' (F. Hinkelammert) y otros engendros similares, es necesario repensar la doctrina de la gracia desde perspectivas nuevas, desde una fe cristiana radical y rebelde, desde la 'lógica de la Vida', la 'lógica del Espíritu', que es la ilógica lógica de Dios.<sup>2</sup>

Considero que en la actualidad, como siempre ha intentado serlo, la doctrina de la gracia de Dios, y la versión paulina de la justificación por la fe,<sup>3</sup> han desempeñado generalmente una función crítica y querido servir tanto para expresar la gloria y bondad de Dios como para proclamar la salvación del ser humano.<sup>4</sup> Y también considero que estos dos factores se manifiestan en la religiosidad pentecostal, donde esa gloria y esa salvación son entendidas como el fundamento de la experiencia y la fe cristianas. El pentecostalismo pues, sin tener una teología de la gracia desarrollada y expresada doctrinal o dogmáticamente, sí tiene una vivencia de gratuidad que se corresponde con la descripción que de ella ha hecho la teología 'clásica' en algunos de sus exponentes más relevantes. Es más, considero el pentecostalismo mismo como una de las expresiones más enriquecedoras de la multiforme gracia de Dios para América Latina.

Mis próximos apuntes y reflexiones intentarán señalar algunos de los elementos más importantes de la doctrina 'clásica' de la gracia, poniendo especial atención a su recepción y desarrollo en la teología latinoamericana, y tratar de ponerla en diálogo con la vivencia y convicciones religiosas pentecostales, tanto en los aspectos que la constatan como en aquellos que aún son una expectativa, una posibilidad o un desafío.

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<sup>2</sup>En palabras de Tamez, Elsa. *Contra toda condena. La justificación por la fe desde los excluidos*. San José, Costa Rica: DEI, 1991, 136: "Para acabar con esa lógica mortal, Jesucristo, el rostro humano de Dios, llama dramáticamente la atención a una lógica desconocida por el presente 'siglo malo'. La lógica de la gracia, la lógica del amor infinito; la que no pide más sacrificios porque Cristo los asumió para siempre y por todos y todas."

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Tamez, *Contra toda condena*, especialmente 137-185.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Hans-Martin Barth. *Dogmatik. Evangelischer Glaube im Kontext der Weltreligionen*. Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser, Gütersloher Verlag-Haus, 2002 (2. edición), 530-532.

## 1. Espíritu Santo: ¿el nombre oculto de la gracia en la teología 'clásica'?

Para algunos pudiera ser sorprendente que la Biblia no posea ningún término que exprese plenamente lo que la teología ha llamado gracia (del latín *gratia*). Esto se debe a que la gracia de Dios es toda la actitud, conducta y propósito salvífico de Dios por su pueblo y por los seres humanos que se acogen a su sombra o reciben sus beneficios, lo cual hace imposible que existe un vocablo en cualquier idioma que si quiere se acerque a captar toda la amplitud y riqueza de la experiencia (o las experiencias) de gracia testificadas en las Escrituras. Por ello, la Biblia no define, ni argumenta ni racionaliza sobre la gracia, pero si está llena de acciones, ejemplos y señales de su manifestación. Ambos testamentos contienen muchas imágenes verbales y narrativas que ilustran aspectos del actuar de Dios hacia los seres humanos en los cuales se pueden percibir destellos de su amor y benevolencia, los que la teología intentará interpretar en sus elaboraciones posteriores y que asumirá la iglesia en la doctrina general de la gracia.<sup>5</sup> La gracia en la Biblia, pues, no es un concepto, sino la actitud, presencia y actuar de Dios en favor de los suyos. Por ello son varios los términos que requieren aportar su carga semántica para en conjunto tratar de describir el actuar bondadoso de Dios.<sup>6</sup>

Los teólogos antiguos, fascinados por ese actuar de Dios revelado en las Escrituras, siempre hicieron de la doctrina de la gracia un eje central de su pensamiento, aunque sus exposiciones al respecto siguiesen derroteros divergentes. Tertuliano (nacido alrededor del 160), a principios del siglo III, por ejemplo, afirma que la naturaleza humana ha sido debilitada por el pecado original y que sólo la gracia la puede sanar. La gracia es para él la fuerza sobrenatural de Dios que restaura lo divino en el ser humano, y esto ocurre principalmente en el bautismo. Este teólogo carismático, que llegó a ser un fervoroso montanista y, por lo tanto, uno de los primeros 'teólogos pentecostales', atribuye al Espíritu Santo esta función restauradora en la naturaleza humana.<sup>7</sup> Por ello me interesa señalar que ésta es también una convicción que comparten la mayoría de los y las creyentes pentecostales contemporáneos(as), aunque no llamarían a esta acción del Espíritu 'gracia', sino tal vez 'poder de lo alto' o 'poder restaurador'. Uno de los elementos centrales del testimonio pentecostal es el de una vida restaurada por el poder del Espíritu Santo.

El pensamiento de Agustín (354-430) sobre la gracia, como en casi todos los temas de la teología dogmática, será determinante para la historia de la teología y, para las tradiciones protestantes también definitivo por su gran influencia sobre el pensamiento de Martín Lutero y otros de los principales reformadores. Para Agustín, la gracia es algo interior en el ser humano, una fuerza liberadora que Dios le otorga para vencer las tendencias pecaminosas de la naturaleza humana caída, y así hacerlo libre y capacitarlo para el amor. Así como el ser humano, como pecador, está sometido a una especie de fuerza de gravedad que lo impulsa a lo malo, argumenta Agustín, así por medio de la gracia recibe una fuerza en el corazón, directa, inmediata, misteriosa, para que con ella pueda

<sup>5</sup>Como lo expresa Greshake, Gisbert. *Gnade – Geschenk der Freiheit. Eine Hinführung*. Mainz: Topos, 2004, 46: "Ni en el antiguo ni en el nuevo testamento hay una enseñanza específica de la gracia, a diferencia de otras enseñanzas de la fe. En cierto sentido uno puede decir: todo es gracia."

<sup>6</sup>El vocablo principal en el antiguo testamento es el sustantivo *chesed*, que se utiliza aproximadamente en 245 ocasiones. Las alternativas de traducción dependen del contexto y varían en las versiones en español entre bondad, benevolencia, bienestar, amabilidad, amor, gracia. La *chesed* expresa tanto la actitud como la esencia de Dios, quien se promete a sí mismo, que quiere estar allí para su pueblo, para los suyos. Lo que Dios regala es con frecuencia perdón de pecados, pero también simplemente amor (cf. Os 10,12; 12,6). Especialmente importante es en el Deuteronomio, donde la *chesed* es consecuencia del pacto, pero no en sentido jurídico en primera línea, sino como acto de la elección libre de Dios. La elección y el pacto son dos de los temas capitales y estructurantes del antiguo testamento, y ambos tienen que ver objetivamente con la salvación, donde la liberación es una de sus expresiones más objetivas. Dios llama por su *chesed* a los suyos a un reino de paz y a la comunión entre sí y con Dios. En el nuevo testamento la situación es similar con respecto al antiguo, aunque la palabra *ca,rij*, utilizada 156 veces en el nuevo testamento, tiene connotaciones más cercanas a las desarrolladas por la dogmática. El Jesús de los sinópticos no la utilizó pero su significado está integrado a su predicación del Reino de Dios, a través del cual se retoma y acentúa el pensamiento veterotestamentario del pacto. (Fuentes: Greshake, *Gnade*, 36-46; Wagner, *Dogmatik*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2003, 233-236; Klaus Berger. "ca, rij," en: Horst Balz y Gerhard Schneider (eds.). *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*. Band III. Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln: Kohlhammer, 1992, 2. edición, 1095-1106.]

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Wagner, *Dogmatik*, 237; H. Karpp. "Tertullian", en *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Digitale Bibliothek, Band 12. Directmedia, Berlin, 2000.

encontrar la libertad, una contrafuerza para vencer al pecado y ser salvo.<sup>8</sup> Para Agustín la gracia es casi equivalente al amor de Dios y al Espíritu Santo, idea que también tiene su equivalente en la religiosidad pentecostal, la que atribuye al Espíritu Santo el poder liberador y transformador para la persona que le recibe.<sup>9</sup> Y lo mismo que como para Agustín la gracia es una realidad experimentable, una 'vivencia', para el pentecostalismo el Espíritu no sólo se 'siente' sino que también ese sentir debe evidenciarse en una transformación concreta en la vida del creyente, sólo que Agustín a este cambio le llama 'gracia increada', en tanto que los pentecostales le llaman 'conversión' o 'nuevo nacimiento'. La tendencia hacia el mal del ser humano percibida por Agustín es percibida con la misma claridad por los y las pentecostales, y la gracia que según Agustín lo contrarresta, en el pentecostalismo es el mismo Espíritu Santo. La nomenclatura es diferente, la experiencia la misma.

Durante la edad media se sistematiza la doctrina de la gracia en el marco de la discusión sobre las virtudes humanas y su origen o motivación, especialmente desde Tomás de Aquino y bajo el influjo de Aristóteles y sus tratados éticos. Previamente, Anselmo de Canterbury (1033-1109) ve la acción de la gracia allí donde al ser humano se le concede la fuerza de la *rectitudo* para enfrentar las pruebas y tener una existencia justa delante de Dios. Abelardo (nacido en 1079) profundiza esta enseñanza y afirma que Dios, por el poder de la gracia, otorga la fe para seguir construyendo la *caritas* y otras *virtutes*.<sup>10</sup> Y aquí nuevamente me salta a la vista la cercanía con la creencia pentecostal que considera al Espíritu Santo como quien posibilita al creyente para una conducta ética diferente 'al mundo', para poder 'guardar el testimonio' y ofrecer los 'frutos del Espíritu' en la vida cotidiana. Y aún más directa me parece la convergencia entre el pentecostalismo y la perspectiva de Pedro Lombardo (1100-1160), tal vez el maestro de teología más influyente de la edad media, ya que éste interpreta la gracia en perspectiva más pneumatológica. Él ve tanto la *gratia* como la *virtus* en el desplegarse del Espíritu Santo, especialmente en su interpretación de Romanos 5:5: "El amor de Dios ha sido derramado en nuestros corazones por el Espíritu Santo que nos fue dado." Así, el amor de Dios, que nos impulsa a la *gratia* y a las *virtutes*, es la acción directa del Espíritu Santo en nosotros,<sup>11</sup> de una manera muy cercana a las convicciones pentecostales. Pedro Lombardo fue también el teólogo medieval que más identificó la gracia con el obrar del Espíritu Santo.

Otro de los brillantes teólogos medievales que estudia la gracia en perspectiva pneumatológica es Duns Scotus (1270-1308), quien hace del concepto 'aceptación' la clave de su enseñanza. Para él, Dios desea sobre todo la felicidad del ser humano y esto se logra principalmente cuando el ser humano se sabe amado y se siente 'aceptado'. Y cualquiera que en América Latina haya tenido un mínimo contacto desprejuiciado con creyentes pentecostales sabe que el sentimiento de saberse perdonado, amado y aceptado por Dios es una de las más significativas experiencias espirituales dentro de esta tradición, y también una de las razones más importantes del crecimiento de estas comunidades. Los efectos espirituales de la presencia de la gracia en la teología de Duns Scotus tiene una correspondencia sorprendente con la experiencia religiosa de los(as) pentecostales cuando dicen estar 'en su santa presencia de Dios', es decir, plenamente aceptadas(as) como hijas(os) suyas(os) y con él plenamente relacionadas(os).

Con Tomás de Aquino (1225-1274) es más difícil de mostrar aspectos fundamentales de su pensamiento que pudieran ayudarnos en el esfuerzo de hacer dialogar al pentecostalismo con la teología 'clásica', tanto por la vastedad de su obra como por el nivel de racionalización y abstracción de su pensamiento.<sup>12</sup> Pero considero importante señalar como posibilidad para futuras

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<sup>8</sup>Cf. Greshake, 59.

<sup>9</sup>Pelagio representa la posición apuesta a Agustín y cree en la capacidad humana, en su libertad y voluntad para escoger y decidir su conducta. Para él esa capacidad de la naturaleza humana es ya una forma de la gracia. Para la controversia entre Agustín y Pelagio cf. Greshake, 57-78; Wagner, . 239-241.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. Wagner, 242-243.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Ott, L. "Petrus Lombardus" en *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Digitale Bibliothek, Band 12. Directmedia, Berlin, 2000.

<sup>12</sup>Para un acercamiento al pensamiento de Tomás de Aquino: Cf. Wagner, 243-244; Greshake, *Op. cit.*, págs. 78-100; Pannenberg, W., Art. Thomas von Aquino, en *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Digitale Bibliothek, Band 12. Directmedia, Berlin 2000.



investigaciones la gran importancia que Tomás de Aquino le asigna al obrar de Dios para transformar en el ser humano su subjetividad, horizonte de comprensión y voluntad, lo que en el lenguaje pentecostal sería cercano a la 'renovación interior'. También central en la teología de Tomás de Aquino es la acción de la 'gracia santificante' mediante la cual Dios santifica la totalidad humana, lo que conlleva el perdón de pecados, que en él es idéntico a la justificación. Esa gracia santificante, entonces, justifica y genera la respuesta de fe y capacita al creyente para confesarla. Y aquí me parece evidente otra analogía con el pentecostalismo, quien conoce la experiencia de la 'gracia santificante' como el poder renovador del Espíritu y ese impulso para confesar la fe, que para los pentecostales tiene su equivalente en el 'evangelizar' y el 'dar testimonio', elementos centrales de su práctica religiosa, los cuales se pueden desarrollar plenamente, según los pentecostales, sólo después de una experiencia de santificación y renovación de toda la persona testificante. Utilizando palabras de Tomás de Aquino: después de haber recibido la 'gracia santificante'.

## 2. La gracia en América Latina: sostener la fe y la esperanza en contextos *des-graciados*

En el pensamiento teológico latinoamericano ha habido diversos acercamientos a los temas de la gracia y de la justificación por la fe, con diferentes grados de consistencia argumentativa y expositiva. Percibo una tendencia en el sector protestante a partir de la Biblia y de la teología de la Reforma hacia el presente, en tanto que en el sector católico hay mayor interés por rescatar a los 'padres' de la teología. De lo más significativo en los trabajos que abordan estos temas me parece el horizonte de fe y esperanza que plantean, sin ser escapistas ni querer ignorar la *des-graciada* realidad que se cierne sobre América Latina (y todo el mundo pobre), -¡todo lo contrario! No es el pesimismo ni la resignación la marca de estas propuestas, sino la afirmación de la vida, la protesta desde la fe, la revitalización de la esperanza, la denuncia ante los sistemas anti-vida que se ciernen sobre nuestros pueblos. Yo quiero entender también esta actitud de las teologías latinoamericanas como otro signo de la vitalizante gracia de Dios.

En su quehacer, las teologías latinoamericanas han tenido la humildad y sabiduría de beber de otras fuentes, sin descuidar 'sus propios pozos' (G. Gutiérrez). Por ello quiero ahora dibujar al menos con algunas pinceladas algunos de los trabajos y actitudes que nos ayudan a pensar la gracia en nuestros contextos latinoamericanos, que a su vez, sean la referencia para poder intentar continuar con el diálogo teológico (o al menos iniciarlo) con las tradiciones pentecostales.

Como he mencionado, las teologías latinoamericanas basan su reflexión más en las tradiciones bíblicas que en las elaboraciones de la teología 'clásica'. Por ello considero pertinente recordar que el uso más frecuente y amplio del término gracia (ca,rij) se da en Pablo, para quien es un don de Dios que puede cumplir múltiples funciones. La mayor acción de la gracia es obrar la salvación de los creyentes<sup>13</sup>, aunque también es una ayuda para resistir las pruebas, para lograr crecimiento en la fe y capacidad para cumplir las exigencias éticas del evangelio. Especialmente en 1 Corintios (12-14) el Espíritu Santo capacita a los creyentes a través de los carismas, procedentes de la ca,rij, para la edificación de la iglesia. Vemos pues que, así como en el antiguo testamento, en el nuevo se utiliza ca,rij para expresar diversas actitudes y dones de Dios, generalmente relacionados con la salvación y sus expresiones más concretas. Ha sido Pablo y su interpretación soteriológica de la muerte de Cristo quien más ha determinado el desarrollo de la doctrina de la gracia y de la interpretación protestante, especialmente de vertiente luterana, de la justificación por la fe.<sup>14</sup> También en Latinoamérica la reflexión sobre esta temática se ha acercado más a Pablo que a los evangelios.

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<sup>13</sup>Para Wagner, 235: "La ca,rij es la bondadosa voluntad salvífica de Dios, su abarcante voluntad de compasión contra todo. La justificación conduce hacia la reconciliación con Dios, lo que incluye la salvación del ser humano."

<sup>14</sup>Mathieu Beltrán Villegas. "Una visión de la gracia: la justificación en Romanos" en *Teología y Vida*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 4, 1987, 277-305, observa que la interpretación de la doctrina en Pablo, especialmente en Romanos, ha estado muy determinada por un enfoque forense debido al contexto donde Pablo desarrolla su argumentación, la cual cristalizará en la temática de la justificación. Por tanto este autor señala que el forense "es nada menos que UN enfoque (por tanto, parcial) para abordar una realidad multifacética, que es el cambio existencial que tiene lugar cuando se acoge la Gracia." (p. 301, énfasis en el original). Lo que la gracia genera en las personas que la acogen, según este autor, no es un cambio de estatus jurídico, sino una vida renovada en Cristo que las capacita a vivir una vida para Dios (Ro 6,2-11).

Un trabajo teológico capital que nos ayuda a entender el significado de la doctrina de la justificación por la fe en nuestro contexto latinoamericano es el ya citado de Elsa Tamez [ver nota 1], donde la autora realiza una relectura de la doctrina desde los excluidos. Tamez inicia su obra con la pregunta sobre si esta doctrina es relevante hoy en América Latina, para posteriormente emprender una reformulación de ella, desde un estudio contextual de Pablo y existencialmente situada en nuestro continente, donde las grandes mayorías han sido condenadas a perecer en la pobreza y la insignificancia. Una de las conclusiones de Tamez más iluminadoras para mí es que la justicia de Dios, según Pablo, es la condenación de la lógica perversa que había condenado la vida de todos, y que esto lo hizo solamente por gracia, y que “al ser por gracia y no por méritos extendió su amor a todas las criaturas, los excluidos por la exigencia de la ley, y los condenados por el pecado.”<sup>15</sup> Ahora éstos y éstas obedecen a otra lógica, la del Espíritu, que es poder para realizar la justicia y para promocionar la vida. Creo que esta conclusión encuentra una concreción muy específica en varias de las tradiciones pentecostales. La siguiente aseveración de Tamez sería afirmada y confirmada por la mayoría de los pentecostales: “Esta justicia [de Dios] tiene poder transformador. Dios, en tanto Creador, tiene el poder de transformar a víctimas y victimarios en hermanos que, orientados por la lógica del Espíritu, hacen justicia para transformar su mundo injusto.”<sup>16</sup> Los y las pentecostales, desde su propia convicción, creen vivir su fe desde una lógica diferente, alternativa, como la propuesta por Tamez, que ellos denominan ‘en el Espíritu’, ‘en santidad’ o simplemente ‘agradando a Dios’.

Otra voz inteligentemente crítica es la de Marcella María Althaus-Reid, quien señala la manipulación que hicieron de la doctrina los conquistadores, afirmando que con ella se expresó y justificó la relación de dependencia y marginalidad de los pueblos originarios. “Mediante la gracia, el *otro* nunca ha llegado a convertirse en un igual, sino que ha sido incorporado como marginal, y como tal ha desempeñado un papel útil. Por tanto, utilizada de esta manera, la gracia creó marginalidad: la marginalidad del menor de edad al que se supone demasiado joven en lo espiritual y cultural, y la marginalidad de quien es dependiente (respecto a la teología occidental y las estructuras occidentales de organizaciones espirituales como la Iglesia, por ejemplo).”<sup>17</sup> A esta voz de protesta también la acompañan voces de esperanza, de búsqueda de opciones de vida, de resistencia, las que en realidad son las más fuertes y frecuentes. Esta misma autora afirma: “La doctrina de la gracia interpreta la libertad, el *‘porque sí’* del amor de Dios, pero también de las relaciones amorosas humanas.”<sup>18</sup>

A su vez, Leonardo Boff se refiere a la gracia como fuerza de liberación, como fuerza espiritual que potencializa la vida y la abre a múltiples dimensiones positivas. “Gracia es siempre encuentro, en la extrapolación de Dios que se da y del hombre que se da. Gracia es, por naturaleza, el rompimiento de los mundos cerrados sobre sí mismos. Gracia es relación, es éxodo, es comunión, es encuentro, es diálogo, es apertura, es salida, es historia de dos libertades y encrucijada de dos amores.”<sup>19</sup> Para Boff es precisamente el Espíritu Santo quien posibilita esta apertura y capacidad de entrega. Es más, como los teólogos antiguos, equipara a la gracia con el Espíritu: “Cuando hablamos de experiencia de gracia, podríamos siempre decir experiencia del Espíritu Santo. Todo lo que es vida, proceso, experiencia, sabor, irrupción de lo nuevo y aún no experimentado, fuerza, asombro, rompimiento de los límites estancados, horizontes abiertos, trascendencia, presencia secreta, discreta pero vigorosa, todo eso y aún más tiene que ver con el Espíritu Santo y con su actuación en el mundo.”<sup>20</sup>

También en la obra conjunta producida por el CLAI sobre *Gracia, cruz y esperanza en América Latina* sobresalen las voces que afirman la fe y la esperanza en relación a la doctrina de la gracia. Y

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<sup>15</sup>Tamez, 133.

<sup>16</sup>Tamez, 113.

<sup>17</sup>Marcella María Althaus-Reid. “La gracia y el otro: Reflexión poscolonial sobre la ideología y los sistemas doctrinales” en *Concilium*, No. 287, septiembre 2000, 565-573, 570. Más adelante agrega: “En Latinoamérica desempeña también otra función más sutil e importante: ayudar a construir el cristianismo en oposición al mundo no occidental y a desarrollar un sentido de identidad basado en la negación de *otras identidades*.”, 572 (cursivas en el original).

<sup>18</sup>Althaus-Reid, 568 (cursivas en el original).

<sup>19</sup>Leonardo Boff. *A graça libertadora no mundo*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1976,15.

<sup>20</sup>Boff, *A graça libertadora*, 69.

es a esas voces polifónicas a las que considero se deben unir las pentecostales en su quehacer teológico.<sup>21</sup> En esta obra afirma la teóloga pentecostal Elizabeth Salazar: “La experiencia de la gracia es una experiencia de alivio en Dios, es una invitación al descanso”<sup>22</sup>, mientras que Violeta Rocha exclama lo que a mí me parece una especie de síntesis del mensaje de todo el libro: “¡Vivir es una gracia de Dios, y es también Esperanza humana! Esa esperanza que nos anima a conseguir, a re-imaginar, a re-inventar salidas para asegurar la vida.”<sup>23</sup>

### 3. Pentecostalismo y gracia o ... Pentecostalismo como gracia

Con estas breves anotaciones respecto a la teología 'clásica' y la referencia a algunas voces latinoamericanas creo queda expuesto con claridad meridiana que el pentecostalismo contiene en sus experiencias y convicciones religiosas muchos elementos comunes con importantes tradiciones eclesíásticas, pero que no han sido valorados, o siquiera percibidos, ni en las iglesias ni en los espacios académicos. En base a lo expuesto, considero que el pentecostalismo tiene buenas posibilidades de dialogar teológicamente con diversas tradiciones, tanto para aprender y dejarse enriquecer como para aportar parte de su significativa riqueza espiritual y posibilidades teológicas. Los puntos de encuentro con la teología 'clásica' y la 'atmósfera' de esperanza y resistencia que comparte con la teología latinoamericana le asignan el derecho y la responsabilidad de participar en el esperanzador diálogo ecuménico.

Por todos es sabido que el pentecostalismo se ha desarrollado principalmente en los sectores más pobres y marginados de nuestro continente, por tanto, sus adeptos están entre aquellos grupos de nuestras sociedades que más recientes los *des-graciados* mecanismos de explotación y marginación de los tiempos actuales. Por ello creo que su experiencia de la gracia de Dios adquiere dimensiones muy propias, pues tienen que creer en medio de situaciones donde sería más lógica la *in*-creencia, esperar donde reina la *des*-esperanza, percibir la gracia donde lo que reina es la *des*-gracia. Pero las iglesias pentecostales son generalmente *a*-graciadas, donde se expresan la alegría, la comunión, el compartir, la esperanza. Es decir, son comunidades que han recibido la experiencia del Espíritu Santo como un don, como una bendición, como una fuerza de transformación y renovación, a través de la cual dan testimonio de transformaciones de vidas *des-graciadas* en *a-graciadas*. Y creo que el pensar teológico latinoamericano debe estar consiente que sin considerar esta situación fáctica, es decir, al margen de esta expresión religiosa cristiana, que es abrumadoramente mayoritaria en el protestantismo latinoamericano, estaremos produciendo una teología también al margen de la realidad, o que sólo la toca tangencialmente. Pero soy consiente de que el diálogo no será fácil, aunque sí posible y enriquecedor. Como parte de este intento dialógico quiero compartir tres aspectos de la presencia de la gracia en el pentecostalismo, que también son tres temas que pudieran ser importantes al elaborar la agenda teológica para el diálogo deseado.

Lo más propio del pentecostalismo es la importancia que le da al Espíritu Santo y a las experiencias carismáticas en su vida y culto. Este movimiento puede ser percibido en sí mismo como una expresión de la gracia de Dios, ya que ahí han encontrado un espacio para vivir y expresar su fe millones de seres humanos en todo el mundo. Entre las argumentaciones 'clásicas' para explicar su crecimiento se encuentra la que lo definió como un 'refugio para las masas' y lo explicó como respuesta religiosa contra el efecto de la 'anomia en las grandes ciudades'. Me parece que ambas explicaciones tienen algo de verdad, pero quisiera verlas desde otra perspectiva: Sí, son un refugio, pero gracias a Dios que esas 'masas' al menos tienen ese 'refugio', esa oportunidad de sentirse protegidas, aceptadas, cuidadas, integradas. Entonces, si el sentirse hijas e hijos de Dios en esas comunidades en un mundo que los 'ningunea', entonces ese efecto 'contra-anómico' debe ser

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<sup>21</sup>Algunas muestras de ello en: Daniel Chiquete y Luis Orellana (eds.). *Voces del pentecostalismo latinoamericano. Identidad, teología e historia*. Concepción, Chile: RELEP, CETELA, ASETT, 2003.

<sup>22</sup>Elizabeth Salazar. “Gracia y reconciliación, un tema pertinente para hoy”, en Israel Batista (ed.). *Gracia, cruz y esperanza en América Latina*. Quito, Ecuador: CLAI, 2004, 69-80, 71.

<sup>23</sup>Violeta Rocha. “Gracia y esperanza: Experiencias de mujeres en los evangelios y en la cotidianidad” en Batista, Israel (ed.), *Gracia, cruz y esperanza*, 41-45, p. 43.

celebrado y no reprobado.<sup>24</sup> Es decir, muchos de los aspectos del pentecostalismo que han sido rechazados y criticados es posible verlos también desde otra óptica, desde una donde pueda percibirse el obrar gracioso de Dios hacia sus favoritos, que como enseña la teología latinoamericana, son los y las pobres.

El/la creyente pentecostal parte siempre de una experiencia de gracia para entender y comunicar su fe. Cree y siente que su vida es tomada en serio por Dios, tanto en la totalidad como en los detalles, y la percibe como relevante, valiosa, importante: agraciada. Su experiencia de la gracia es totalizante, y así la comprende, y para explicarla (o explicársela) alude al Espíritu Santo, sin hacer muchas distinciones o precisiones teológicas. Esto significa que atribuye al Espíritu Santo lo que la tradición teológica atribuye a la gracia. Y aquí apunto que descubro en el pentecostalismo un sustrato de teología católica tradicional muy significativo: el pentecostal concibe al Espíritu Santo como un don (*gratia increata*) que provoca cambios positivos en el ser humano (*gratia creata*); él aparece como fuerza de santificación (*gratia sanctificans*) y como recibida situación fundamental de la fe, la esperanza y el amor (*gratia habitualis*). Es decir, lo que la teología denomina gracia el pentecostalismo traduce simplemente como Espíritu Santo.

En el pentecostalismo es su experiencia espiritual propia, intensa y diversa, frecuentemente paradójica y controversial, de donde debe partir su reflexión teológica sobre la gracia, me atrevería a sugerir: pensar la gracia en categorías más pneumatológicas. Significa que el pentecostalismo deberá teologizar no sólo *sobre*, sino principalmente *desde* su experiencia espiritual, para hacer una teología que le ayude a seguir sintiendo y viviendo 'en el Espíritu', en la dirección que señala Gustavo Gutiérrez: "Una reflexión que no ayude a vivir según el Espíritu no es una teología cristiana. En definitiva, toda auténtica teología es una teología espiritual. Esto no debilita su carácter riguroso y científico. Lo sitúa."<sup>25</sup>

También es necesario apuntar que muchos términos del lenguaje teológico y eclesiástico ya han perdido mucho de su significado original, o se han vaciado de sentido (también en el pentecostalismo), lo que genera desconfianza o confusión con su uso y problemas de comunicación. Por ello debe cuidarse que la frescura de las experiencias espirituales no las queramos encerrar siempre en los moldes verbales o en las metáforas teológicas antiguas, y que las desaprobemos cuando no se corresponden con ellas. La obra de la gracia en el pentecostalismo está presente y se vive aún cuando los conceptos teológicos tradicionales para expresarla no se utilicen, sino otros menos tradicionales y, en ocasiones, muy plásticos y hasta pintorescos. Debido a esto pienso que una tarea inmediata consiste en evaluar si la vitalidad de la experiencia pentecostal del Espíritu y la gracia pueden encontrar expresión adecuada en el lenguaje teológico de otras épocas o tradiciones, y más aún, si la vitalidad de la experiencia pentecostal tendrá que amoldarse a las metáforas tradicionales, muchas de ellas ya secas, convertidas en términos técnicos o slogans de la 'sana doctrina'.<sup>26</sup> Con otras palabras, me parece que en muchas ocasiones el problema de comunicación entre el pentecostalismo y otras tradiciones cristianas es más lingüístico que teológico.

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<sup>24</sup>Apunta Carmelo Álvarez. "La vocación ecuménica y el compromiso misional: Perspectiva pentecostal" en *Cuadernos de Teología*, Vol. XX, 2001, 135-149, 137: "Parte del éxito del movimiento pentecostal moderno es que le dio a los 'ninguneados' de la historia (José Cárdenas Pallares) ese valor que les corresponde como criaturas creadas a imagen y semejanza de Dios: Les asiste un valor que han perdido u olvidado. Así afirman su propio suelo como ciudadanos y ciudadanas del Reinado de Dios."

<sup>25</sup>Gustavo Gutiérrez. *Beber en su propio pozo*. En el itinerario espiritual de un pueblo. Salamanca: Sígueme, 1984, 52.

<sup>26</sup>Preocupación similar comparte James D. G. Dunn "Renacidos: El bautismo y el Espíritu. Una respuesta protestante" en *Concilium*, No. 265, junio 1996, 157-164, 161-162: "Se diría que los primeros cristianos hicieron acopio de su vocabulario en un esfuerzo por expresar la riqueza y la diversidad de su experiencia de la gracia. Pero la teología tradicional ha tendido a transformar esas metáforas en términos técnicos, con lo que ha muerto la metáfora. En lugar de ofrecernos una ventana parcial a la experiencia de la gracia y un medio para expresar la vitalidad de esa experiencia, las metáforas han perdido la apertura que les confería su condición de tales y se han convertido en estancias cerradas en cuyo interior corre peligro de debilitarse y morir finalmente la experiencia en lugar de pujar y florecer, o, por decirlo con una metáfora evangélica, se vuelven como odres viejos y secos incapaces de contener la vitalidad de las experiencias renovadas de la gracia."

Otro de los importantes temas sería, creo, la revaloración de la corporalidad como otra de las manifestaciones de la gracia en el pentecostalismo. El cuerpo humano en el pentecostalismo es resignificado y elevado a categoría teológica al considerársele 'morada del Espíritu Santo', al ser cuidado de una manera especial como consecuencia de la comprensión radical de la santidad y las estrictas exigencias en la conducta ética, que generalmente parten en esta espiritualidad de una visión muy positiva del cuerpo. De igual manera, el ministerio de sanidad por oración en el pentecostalismo es una obra de gracia otorgada por Dios y vivida con una convicción contagiante en estas comunidades.<sup>27</sup> La gracia, entendida principalmente como la presencia y la acción del Espíritu Santo en los creyentes, recibe una especie de concreción al ser vivida y valorada desde esta acción en el cuerpo y, por tanto, en la comunidad.<sup>28</sup> Por ello creo que la pneumatología pentecostal pudiera ser calificada de 'gracia concretizada' o de 'gracia en busca de concreción'.

Un tercer tema que deseo resaltar es la dimensión dialógica de la religiosidad pentecostal, aún en contra de los múltiples detractores que califican a las pentecostales de comunidades cerradas (y/o sectarias). El pentecostalismo posibilita diversos espacios de intercomunicación humana, tanto en sus actividades cúllicas como a través de la construcción de diversas redes de relaciones comunitarias. Considero errónea la opinión de que la experiencia pentecostal es personalista e intimista, así como la crítica de que son comunidades desinteresadas de su entorno social. Por supuesto que hay dentro de la enorme diversidad del mundo pentecostal grupos para los que se justifican estas críticas, pero no para todos, ni siquiera para la mayoría. Mi experiencia de veinte años en el pentecostalismo contradice frontalmente estas aseveraciones. Afirmino que precisamente sus dimensiones dialógicas y comunicativas son de los factores que le dan tanta fuerza y pujanza a estas iglesias. Es por esto que, según mi opinión, la gracia encuentra diversas maneras de vivirse y expresarse en el pentecostalismo, también como espacio de convivencia y crecimiento humanos.<sup>29</sup> Y esa capacidad dialógica no se limita a lo verbal, aunque sea una religiosidad donde la oralidad juega un papel fundamental, sino dialógica en sentido amplio: comunicativa, receptiva, crítica, corporativa, comunitaria.

## Conclusión

Con las anteriores reflexiones he intentado expresar mi convicción de que la gracia de Dios está muy presente en la vivencia religiosa pentecostal, aunque los pentecostales no utilicen este término para describirla. Lo que la teología ha anunciado a través de los siglos respecto a la gracia es posible constatarlo en el pentecostalismo, aunque aquí se atribuyan sus efectos al Espíritu Santo. También la atmósfera de resistencia, fe y esperanza por la que se esfuerzan las teologías latinoamericanas encuentran correspondencia en la espiritualidad pentecostal. Es decir, concibo al pentecostalismo como una espiritualidad cristiana con muchos elementos compartidos y con muchos otros cercanos a las más importantes tradiciones teológicas vivas en nuestro continente. Así, Gracia y

<sup>27</sup>He desarrollado este tema en otro espacio: Daniel Chiquete. "Sanidad, salvación y misión: El ministerio de sanidad en el pentecostalismo latinoamericano", en: *Vida y Pensamiento*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 2004, 93-113; también en: Manuel Silva Mejía y Jorge Berdeguez Román (eds.). *Pentecostalismos y desafíos del tiempo nicaragüense. Primer Foro Nacional sobre Pentecostalismos y Justicia Social*. Managua: FEET, 2004, 134-149.

<sup>28</sup>Según la teóloga pentecostal Cheryl Bridges Johns. "Sanación y liberación: La perspectiva pentecostal" en: *Concilium*, Vol. 3, No. 265, junio 1996, 71-79, 72: "En esta nueva realidad (de una comunidad que los acepta sin reservas como miembros propios), los intocables son tocados no sólo por manos humanas sino más aún por las divinas. (...) El pentecostalismo lleva a cabo una recuperación de las primitivas formas táctiles de las expresiones religiosas, de modo que la persona en su totalidad pueda experimentar la fuerza liberadora del Evangelio."

<sup>29</sup>En esta perspectiva, Ruiz de la Peña no vacila en equiparar la gracia con el amor humano en su capacidad de generar entrega y diálogo en libertad: "El término *gracia* denota (...) no una *cosa*, sino una *relación*, en la forma del *encuentro e intercambio vital* entre dos seres personales. (...) En esa relación se establece, pues, *una forma de dependencia que confiere autonomía*. Es la enigmática dependencia implicada en toda relación amorosa, que (cuando es auténtica) *no es esclavizante, sino liberadora y personalizadora*.", en: Juan Luis Ruiz de la Peña. *Creación, gracia, salvación*. Santander: Sal Terrae, 1993 (2. edición), 89-91 (cursivas en el original). También me parece oportuna la afirmación de Eduard Schillebeeckx: "La *gracia* ha de expresarse en términos de encuentro y experiencia. No se la ha de aislar del encuentro que libera. Esto significa que toda ulterior reflexión sobre la gracia y la salvación ha de remontarse siempre hasta la fuente original de las experiencias, sin las cuales toda teología de la gracia se convierte en mitología y en ontología, en el peor sentido de la palabra.", en Herman-Emiel Mertens. "Naturaleza y gracia en la teología católica del siglo XX", en: *Selecciones de Teología*, Vol. 32, No. 126, 1993, 91-102, 101.

Pentecostalismo no son conceptos contrapuestos sino interrelacionados, referenciados y mutuamente explicativos. No creo ser ni ingénuo ni demasiado optimista al considerar el pentecostalismo como una de las más objetivas muestras de la presencia de la gracia de Dios en América Latina, pero sí lo sería si considerase que todo lo que acontece en las iglesias pentecostales es obra de la gracia de Dios. En esta dialéctica de contraposición de la gracia y la *des-gracia* y en la lucha por el discernimiento de la presencia de Dios en nuestros contextos también se encuentra el pentecostalismo. La teología pentecostal tendrá que ayudar en esta búsqueda de discernimiento y dirección al movimiento pentecostal y a la teología latinoamericana.<sup>30</sup> Esa es parte de su tarea presente y futura, pero por hoy permítaseme concluir con una sencilla y ya redundante afirmación: el pentecostalismo es una de las más concretas y felices manifestaciones de la gracia de Dios en América Latina.

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<sup>30</sup>He desarrollado este tema de manera amplia en: Daniel Chiquete. “Aportes y desafíos de la teología pentecostal al quehacer teológico en América Latina” en *Teologías de Abya-Yala y formación teológica: Interacciones y desafíos*. 7a. Jornada Teológica de CETELA. Bogotá: CETELA, 2004, 125-139.

## PENTECOSTALISM AND GRACE: APPROXIMATING THE DOCTRINE THROUGH A DIALOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Daniel Chiquete

### Introduction

Without a doubt, the doctrine of grace has engaged theology during its entire history. It has been the cause of the biggest and most varied controversies in theological thinking and in church history, as well as in western culture, many of which have been historical landmarks. This article does not endeavor to contribute to the profound study of this doctrine, but, as stated in the subtitle, it endeavors to offer a dialogue about the doctrine from my perspective as a Pentecostal, in order to emphasize some of the aspects that are lived and expressed in Latin American Pentecostal religiosity, in a similar or close manner to what has been explained theologically. At the same time, I would like to point out how and where Pentecostalism can be understood as an expression of God's grace for our continent.

We live in an age that seems to many to be a time of *anti-grace* or *dis-grace*, where almost nothing is free, not even God's blessings, where fundamental human values such as the right to live with dignity are constantly violated. In a world that is attacked by the "demons" of war, multiple religious and political fanatics, international organizations that control the economy and the trade of all that is of value, both material and spiritual, a globalization that crushes everything in its way like a "hurricane" (F. Hinkelammert) and other such monstrosities, we must rethink the doctrine of grace from new perspectives, from a radical and rebellious Christian faith, from the "logic of Life," to the "logic of the Spirit," which is the illogical logic of God.<sup>31</sup>

I believe that at present, as it has always tried to do, the doctrine of God's grace and the Pauline view of justification by faith<sup>32</sup> has generally performed a critical function and has desired to express God's glory and goodness, as well as to proclaim the salvation of human beings.<sup>33</sup> I also believe that these two factors are demonstrated in Pentecostal religiosity, in which this glory and salvation are understood as the basis of the Christian experience and faith. In Pentecostalism, without having a theology of grace that is developed and expressed doctrinally or dogmatically, there is an experience of gratitude that corresponds to the description that has made its theology "classical" in some of its most relevant examples. Moreover, I believe that Pentecostalism is one of the most enriching expressions of God's manifold grace for Latin America.

My next points and reflections will attempt to point out some of the most important elements of the "classical" doctrine of grace, placing special attention on its reception and development in Latin American theology, and trying to place it in dialogue with the Pentecostal experience and religious convictions, both in the aspects that confirm it as well as in those that are still hoped for, a possibility or a challenge.

### 1. The Holy Spirit: the hidden name of grace in "classical" theology?

It might be surprising for some to learn that there is no term in the Bible that fully expresses what theology has called grace (from the Latin *gratia*). This is because the grace of God encompasses the

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<sup>31</sup>In the words of Elsa Tamez in *Contra toda condena. La justificación por la fe desde los excluidos* (Against all condemnation. Justification by faith from those who are excluded.). San José, Costa Rica: DEI, 1991, p. 136: "To do away with this deadly logic, Jesus Christ, the human face of God, dramatically calls attention to a logic unknown by the current 'bad century.' The logic of grace, the logic of unending love, does not ask for more sacrifice because Christ took that on himself forever and for everyone."

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., Tamez, particularly pages 173-185.

<sup>33</sup>As Greshake expressed, *Gnade—Geschenk der Freiheit. Eine Hinführung*. Mainz: Topos, 2004, p. 46: "Neither in the Old nor New Testament is there specific teaching about grace, in contrast to other teaching about the faith. In one sense it can be said: everything is grace."

attitude, behavior and saving purpose of God for his people and for all who take refuge in his shadow or receive its impact, which makes it impossible for a word in any language to even get close to capturing all the fullness and richness of the experience (or experiences) of grace as testified to in the Scriptures. This is why the Bible does not define, discuss or rationalize about grace, but it is full of actions, examples and signs of the evidence of grace. There are many verbal images and narratives in both the Old and New Testaments that illustrate aspects of God's action toward human beings in which glimmers of His love and goodness can be recognized, which theologians will attempt to interpret later and which the church will accept in the general doctrine of grace.<sup>34</sup> The grace of the Bible is not a concept, it is an attitude: the presence and activity of God on behalf of His people. There are several terms that describe this and their semantical weight must be contributed so that together they can try to describe this generous action of God.<sup>35</sup>

The ancient theologians, fascinated by the action of God as revealed in Scripture, have always made the doctrine of grace a central theme in their thinking, even though their expositions regarding grace follow divergent courses. Early in the third century, Tertulian stated that human nature has been weakened by original sin and that it can only be healed by grace. For him, grace is the supernatural strength of God that restores the divine in human beings, and this mainly occurs through baptism. This charismatic theologian, who became a fervent montanist and, therefore, one of the first "Pentecostal Theologians," attributes this restorative function of human beings to the Holy Spirit.<sup>36</sup> Because of this I want to point out that this conviction is shared by the majority of contemporary Pentecostal believers, although they do not call this work of the Spirit grace, but perhaps a "power from on High" or "restoring power." One of the central elements of Pentecostal testimony is that of a life restored by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The thinking of Augustine about grace, as in nearly all themes of dogmatic theology, would be determinant for the history of theology and also definitive for Protestant traditions because of its great influence on Luther's thinking as well as for other principal reformers. For Augustine, grace is something inside of the human being, a liberating force that God bestows to overcome the sinful tendencies of fallen human nature, therefore making one free and able to love. Therefore, human beings, as sinners, are subject to a kind of gravitational force that pushes them toward doing evil, argues Augustine, but through grace they receive a direct, immediate, mysterious strengthening of the heart to find freedom, a counterforce to overcome sin and to be saved.<sup>37</sup> For Augustine, grace is nearly equivalent to the love of God and the Holy Spirit, an idea that also has an equivalent in Pentecostal religiosity, which attributes the liberating and transforming power of the Holy Spirit to the person who receives it.<sup>38</sup> And, just as for Augustine, grace is a reality that can be experimented, an "experience" for Pentecostalism; the Spirit is not only "felt" but this feeling should be evidenced

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<sup>34</sup>As Greshake, Gisbert express en *Gnade—Geschenk der Freiheit. Eine Hinführung*. Mainz: Topos, 2004, p. 46: "Neither in the Old nor New Testament is there specific teaching about grace, unlike other teachings of the faith. In a way, one could say: everything is grace."

<sup>35</sup>The principal word in the Old Testament is the noun *chesed*, which is used about 245 times. Optional translations depend on the context and vary in the Spanish versions between goodness, kindness, well-being, niceness, love and grace. *Chesed* expresses both an attitude and the essence of God, who pledges his desire to be there for his people, for his own. What he frequently gives is pardon for sin, but also simply his love (Cp. Hosea 10:12, 12:6). An especially important reference is in Deuteronomy, where *chesed* is a consequence of the Pact, but not primarily in a legal sense, but as an act of the free will of God. Election and the Pact are two of the main themes and structures of the Old Testament, and both objectively deal with salvation, in which liberation is one of the most objective expressions. Through *chesed* God calls his own to a kingdom of peace and to communion between each other and with himself. In the New Testament there is a similar situation, although the word *ca,rij*, which is used 156 times in the New Testament, has very close connotations to those developed by the dogma. Jesus did not use this word in the synoptic gospels, but its significance is a part of his preaching about the Kingdom of God, through which the Old Testament thought about the Pact is reiterated and emphasized. (Sources: Greshake, *Ibid.*, pgs. 36-46; Wagner, *Dogmatik*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2003, pgs. 233-236; Berger, Klaus, Art. *Ca,rij*, in: Balz, Horst and Schneider, Gerhard (eds.), *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Band III. Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln: Kohlhammer, 1992, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, pgs. 1095-1106).

<sup>36</sup>Cp. Wagner, *op. cit.*, p. 237; Karpp, H., Art. Tertullian en: *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Digitale Bibliothek, Band 12. Directmedia, Berlin 2000.

<sup>37</sup>Cp. Grshake, *Op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>38</sup>Pelagio represents an opposite position to Augustine's and believes in the person's ability, in his/her freedom and will to chose and determine his/her behavior.



in a concrete transformation in the life of the believer. The only difference is that Augustine called this change “non-created grace” and Pentecostals call it “conversion” or “new birth.” The human tendency toward evil that was perceived by Augustine is seen with the same clarity by Pentecostals, and, according to Augustine, the grace that counteracts this in Pentecostalism is the Holy Spirit himself.

During the Middle Ages the doctrine of grace was systematized in the framework of the discussion about human virtue and its origin or motivation, especially after Thomas of Aquinas and under the influence of Aristotle and his ethical treatise. Thus, Anselm of Canterbury sees the work of grace when a human being is given the power of *rectitudo* to face the tests and to live a righteous life before God. Abelardo deepens this teaching and declares that God, by the power of grace, gives the faith to continue building the *caritas* and other *virtutes*.<sup>39</sup> And, here again, the closeness of this teaching to the Pentecostal belief that it is the Holy Spirit who makes it possible for the believer to maintain an ethical life-style that is different than “the world’s,” in order to “preserve the testimony” and to demonstrate the “fruits of the Spirit” in daily life leaps to mind. And it seems to me that the convergence between Pentecostalism and the perspective of Peter Lombard, perhaps the most influential theology teacher in the Middle Ages, is even more direct, since he interpreted grace in a more pneumatological perspective. He saw both *grace* and *virtue* in the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, especially in his interpretation of Romans 5:5: “God’s love has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given to us.” Thus, God’s love, which promotes *grace* and *virtue*, is the direct work of the Holy Spirit in us,<sup>40</sup> in a very close way to Pentecostal convictions. Peter Lombard also was the theologian that most identified grace with the work of the Holy Spirit in the Middle Ages.

Another of the brilliant theologians of the Middle Ages who studied grace with a pneumatological perspective was Duns Scotus, who made the concept of “acceptance” the key to his teaching. He believed that God desires, more than anything, the happiness of human beings and this is primarily achieved when human beings know they are loved and feel “accepted.” Anyone in Latin America who has had even slight, unprejudiced contact with Pentecostal believers knows that the assurance of being pardoned, loved and accepted by God is one of the most significant spiritual experiences in this tradition; it is also one of the most important reasons for growth in these communities. The spiritual effects of the presence of grace in Duns Scotus’ theology has a surprising correspondence with the religious experience of Pentecostals when they say they are “in his holy presence,” “full of God’s presence,” that is to say, fully accepted as sons and daughters of God and fully related to Him.

It is more difficult to show fundamental aspects of Thomas Aquinas’ thinking that could help us in our efforts to have a Pentecostal dialogue with “classic” theology, both because of the tediousness of his work and his level of rationalization and abstract thought.<sup>41</sup> However, for future reflections, I believe it is important to call attention to the great importance that Thomas Aquinas gives to God’s work in transforming human beings—his subjectivity, horizon of understanding and volition, which in Pentecostal language would be close to “interior renewal.” Also central in Thomas Aquinas’ theology is the work of “sanctifying grace” through which God sanctifies the totality of human kind that implies the pardon of sins, which he sees as identical to justification. This sanctifying grace, then, justifies and creates a response of faith and enables the believer to confess that faith. And, here, another analogy with Pentecostalism seems evident to me. The person who has experienced “sanctifying grace” as the renewing power of the Spirit and has been stimulated to confess the faith, is for Pentecostals equivalent to “evangelizing” and “giving testimony”—central religious practices—which can be fully developed, according to Pentecostals, only after an experience of

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<sup>39</sup>Cp. Wagner, *Op. Cit.* Pgs. 242-243.

<sup>40</sup>Cp. Ott, L., Art. Petrus Lombardas, in: *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Digitale Bibliothek, Band 12. Directmedia, Berlin 2000.

<sup>41</sup>For a discussion of Thomas Aquinas’ thought compare Wagner, *op. cit.*, pgs. 243-244; Greshake, *op. cit.*, pgs. 78-100; Pannenberg, W., Art. Thomas von Aquino, en: *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Digitale Bibliothek, Band 12. Directmedia, Berlin 2000.

sanctification and renewal of the testifying person. In the words of Thomas Aquinas: these things happen after having received the “sanctifying grace.”

## 2. Grace in Latin America: hold on to faith and hope in *dis-graceful* contexts

In Latin American theological thinking there have been various approaches to the topics of grace and justification by faith, with different levels of theological and expository consistency. I note a tendency until the present within Protestantism to start with the Bible and Reformed Theology, while in the Catholic sector there is greater interest to rescue the “fathers” of theology. It seems to me that one of the most significant things in the works that discuss these topics is the horizon of faith and hope that they pose without being escapists or trying to ignore the *dis-graceful* reality that threatens Latin America (and all the poor world). Completely to the contrary, the mark of these proposals is not pessimism or resignation, but the affirmation of life—a protest that comes from faith, a revitalization of hope, a condemnation of the anti-life systems that threaten our peoples. I also want to understand the attitude of Latin American theologies as another sign of the revitalizing grace of God.

In their work, Latin American theologies have shown the humility and wisdom to drink from other fountains, without neglecting “their own wells” (G. Gutiérrez). Because of this I would like to sketch, at least with a few strokes, some of the works and attitudes that help us think about grace in our Latin American context, and which at the same time will be a reference for continuing a theological dialogue (or at least begin one) with traditional Pentecostals.

As I mentioned, Latin American theologians base their reflection more on biblical tradition than on the writings of “classical” theology. That is why I believe it is pertinent to remember that the most frequent and widest use of the term grace (*ca,rij*) is by Paul, for whom grace is a gift of God that can accomplish many functions. The most important work of grace is the salvation of believers,<sup>42</sup> although it also helps to resist temptation, to grow in faith and to fulfill the ethical demands of the gospel. In I Corinthians, particularly, we see that the Holy Spirit enables believers through the gifts of the Spirit, which come from *ca,rij*, to build the church (chapters 12-14). We see, then, that as in the Old Testament, the New Testament uses *ca,rij* to express various attitudes and gifts of God that are generally related to salvation and its most concrete expressions. It was Paul and his soteriological interpretation of Christ’s death who determined, more than any other, the development of the doctrine of grace and the Protestant interpretation, particularly in the Lutheran tradition, of justification by faith.<sup>43</sup> In Latin America, the reflection on this topic has been closer to Paul than to the gospels.

A principal theological work that helps us understand the significance of the doctrine of justification by faith in our Latin American context is that of Elsa Tamez, which was already cited above, in which the author carries out a re-reading of the doctrine from the viewpoint of those who are excluded. Tamez begins her work with a question about whether this doctrine is relevant in Latin America today, and later undertakes its reformulation from a contextual study of Paul that is existentially situated in our continent, where the large majority of people have been condemned to die in poverty and insignificance. For me, one of Tamez’ most illuminating conclusions is that, according to Paul, God’s justice is the condemnation of a perverse logic that had condemned everyone’s lives, and that this was done only by grace, and that “because it was by grace and not by merit he extended his love to all creatures, those excluded because of legal demands and those

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<sup>42</sup>For Watern, *p. Cit.*, p. 235: “*ca,rij* is God’s generous saving will, his inclusive volition to compassion in the face of everything. Justification leads to reconciliation with God, which includes the salvation of human beings.”

<sup>43</sup>Beltrán Villegas, Mathieu, in “A view of grace: justification in Romans,” in: *Theology and Life*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 4, 1987, pgs. 277-305, observes that the interpretation of the doctrine in Paul’s writings, especially in Romans, has been determined by a legal focus due to the context in which Paul develops his argument, which will be crystallized in the topic of justification. Therefore, this author points out that this view “is nothing more than ONE focus (and therefore, partial) to approach a multifaceted reality, which is the existential change that takes place when Grace is received” (p. 301, emphasis in the original). According to this author, what grace creates in the people who receive it is not a change of legal status, but a renewed life in Christ that enables them to live a life for God (Rom. 6:2-11).

condemned by sin.”<sup>44</sup> Now, these men and women obey another logic, that of the Spirit, which is the power to do justice and promote life. I believe that this conclusion finds a very specific solidification in several Pentecostal traditions. Tamez’ following contention would be affirmed and confirmed by the majority of Pentecostals: “This justice [of God] has transforming power. God, as creator, has the power to transform victims and the victimized into brothers who, directed by the logic of the Spirit, do justice to transform their unjust world.”<sup>45</sup> Pentecostals, because of their own conviction, believe that they live their faith from a different, alternative logic, like that proposed by Tamez, which they call “in the Spirit,” “in holiness” or simply, “pleasing God.”

Another intelligent, critical voice is that of Marcella María Althaus-Reid, who calls attention to the manipulation by the conquistadors of the doctrine, stating that in this way they expressed and justified the relationship of dependence and marginalization of the native peoples. “By grace, the *other* never has been changed into an equal, but has been incorporated as a marginal person and as such has carried out a useful role. Therefore, being used in this way, grace created marginalization: the marginalization of minors who are supposed to be too young, spiritually and culturally, and the marginalization of those who are dependent (in regard to western theology and western structures or spiritual organizations such as the church, for example).”<sup>46</sup> Voices of hope, a search for options for life, of resistance, accompany this voice of protest, and, in reality, are stronger. The same author states: “The doctrine of grace interprets freedom, the “*just because*” of the love of God, but also as loving human relationships.”<sup>47</sup>

Leonard Boff, in turn, refers to grace as the power of liberation, as a spiritual power that enables life and opens multiple positive dimensions to it. “Grace is always an encounter, an extrapolation of God that is given and that is given of man (sic). By its nature, grace is the breaking down of closed worlds on themselves. Grace is relationship; it is exodus, communion, encounter, dialogue, openness, closing; it is the history of two freedoms and a crossroads of two loves.”<sup>48</sup> For Boff, it is precisely the Holy Spirit who makes this openness and ability to surrender possible. Further, as the ancient theologians put grace and the Spirit on the same level, “When we talk of the experience of grace, we can always say, the experience of the Holy Spirit. All that is life, process, experience, flavor, irruption of the new and inexperienced, secret presence, discrete but vigorous, all of this and even more, has to do with the Holy Spirit and with his activity in the world.”<sup>49</sup>

In addition, in the related work produced by CLAI (Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias - Latin American Council of Churches), about *Grace, the Cross and Hope in Latin America* the voices that affirm faith and hope in relation to the doctrine of grace stand out. And, it is to these polyphonic voices to which I believe Pentecostals must unite in the work of Latin American theology and Christian experience.<sup>50</sup> Pentecostal theologian Elizabeth Salazar states in this work: “The experience of grace is an experience of alleviation in God; it is an invitation to rest,”<sup>51</sup> while Violeta Rocha exclaims, what appears to me to be a kind of synthesis of the message of the whole book: “To live is God’s grace, and it is also the human hope! A hope that encourages us to obtain, to reimagine, to reinvent a way out in order to insure life.”<sup>52</sup>

<sup>44</sup>Tamez, *op. cit.*, pg. 133.

<sup>45</sup>Tamez, *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>46</sup>Althaus-Reid, Marcella María, p. 570. “Grace and the other: Post-colonial reflection on ideology and doctrinal systems” in *Concilium*, No. 287, September 2000, pgs. 565-573. Further on she adds: “In Latin America another more subtle and important function is performed: to help construct Christianity in opposition to the non-western world and to develop a sense of identity based on the negation of *other identities*,” p. 572 (italics in the original).

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 568 (italics in the original).

<sup>48</sup>Boff, Leonard. *A graça libertadora no mundo*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1976, p. 15.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>50</sup>Some signs of this in: Chiquete, Daniel and Orellana, Luis (eds.), *Voices of Latin American Pentecostalism. Identity, Theology and History*. Concepción, Chile: RELEP, CETELA, ASETT, 2003.

<sup>51</sup>Salazar, Elizabeth, “Grace and Reconciliation, a Pertinent Topic for Today,” p. 71 in Bataista, Israel (ed.), *Grace, the Cross and Hope in Latin America*. Quito, Ecuador: CLAI, 2004. pgs. 69-80.

<sup>52</sup>Rocha, Violeta, “Grace and Hope: Experiences of Women in the Gospels and in Daily Life,” p. 43 in Batista, Israel (ed.), *Ibid.*, pgs. 41-45.

### 3. Pentecostalism and Grace or ... Pentecostalism as Grace

With these brief explanations regarding “classical” theology and the reference to some Latin American voices, I believe it has been shown, with complete clarity, that in its experiences and religious convictions Pentecostalism contains many common theological elements with important theological traditions, but these have not been valued or even perceived, neither in churches nor in academic institutions. Based on these explanations, I believe that Pentecostalism has good possibilities for theological dialogue with different Christian traditions, both to learn and to be enriched, and to contribute part of its significant spiritual richness and theological possibilities. The point of encounter with “classical” theology and the “atmosphere” of hope and resistance shared by Latin American theology gives it the right and responsibility to participate in the ecumenical theological dialogue.

It is well known that Pentecostalism has been primarily developed in the poorest and most marginal sectors of our continent and, therefore, its members are among those groups in our society that most resent the *dis*-graceful mechanisms of exploitation and marginalization of today. Because of this, I believe that their experience of God’s grace takes on its own dimensions. They have to grow in the midst of situations where *un*-belief would be more logical, hope where a lack of hope reigns, and receive grace in a situation of *dis*-grace. But, Pentecostal churches are usually full of grace, where joy, communion, sharing and hope is expressed. In other words, they are communities that have experienced the Holy Spirit as a gift, as grace, as a transforming and renewing power, through which they give testimony of lives being transformed from *dis*-graced to graced. I believe that Latin American theological thought should be conscious that, without considering this real situation, which is to say, outside of this Christian religious expression that overwhelmingly represents the majority in Latin American Protestantism, we are producing a theology that is also outside of reality, or that only touches it tangentially. However, I am aware that dialogue will not be easy, although it is possible and enriching. As part of this attempt to dialogue, I want to share three aspects of the presence of grace in Pentecostalism, which are also three themes that could be important in designing a theological agenda for the desired dialogue.

The most distinguishing feature of Pentecostalism is the importance it gives to the Holy Spirit and to the charismatic experiences in its life and worship. This movement could be understood in and of itself as an expression of God’s grace, since a space has been found to live and express the faith of millions of people around the world. Among the “classic” lines of argument to explain its growth is what has been defined as the “refuge of the masses,” which is explained as a religious response to the “anomie in large cities.” It seems to me that both explanations contain something of the truth, but I would like to look at this from another perspective: Yes, they are a refuge, but thanks to God these “masses” at least have this “refuge,” this opportunity to feel protected, accepted, cared for, a part of something. Therefore, if these communities feel that they are daughters and sons of God, in a world that “scorns” them, then this counter-anomie effect should be celebrated and not reproached.<sup>53</sup> That is to say, many of the aspects of Pentecostalism that have been rejected and criticized can be seen from another point of view as that which sees God’s work of grace towards his favorites, the poor, as taught by Latin American theology.

The Pentecostal believer always begins with an experience of grace to understand and communicate his or her faith. He or she believes and feels that God takes his/her life seriously, both in its totality and in the details, and perceives that life to be relevant, valuable, important: graceful. Their experience of grace is all-encompassing, and it is understood thus; to explain grace they refer to the Holy Spirit without making many distinctions or theological clarifications. This means that they attribute to the Holy Spirit that which theological tradition attributes to grace. And here I note that I

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<sup>53</sup>Alvarez, Carmelo, “The ecumenical vocation and the Missionary Commitment: A Pentecostal Perspective,” p. 137 in *Cuadernos de Teología*, Vol. XX, 2001, pgs. 135-149. “Part of the success of the modern Pentecostal movement is that it gave a value to the “scorned” of history (José Cárdenas Pallares) that they deserve as creatures who were created in the image and likeness of God: It gives them a value that they have lost or forgotten. Thus, they affirm their own land as citizens, and as citizens of God’s Kingdom.”

discovered in Pentecostalism a very significant substratum of traditional Catholic theology: the Pentecostal conceives of the Holy Spirit as a gift (*gratia increata*) that brings about positives changes in human beings (*gratia create*); he appears as the sanctifying power (*gratia habitualis*). That is to say, that which theology calls grace, Pentecostalism simply translates as Holy Spirit.

In Pentecostalism, in its own intense and diverse spiritual experience, which is frequently paradoxical and controversial, from which theological reflections about grace should start, I would dare to suggest: think about grace in pneumatological categories. This means that Pentecostalism should theologize not only *about*, but mainly *from*, its spiritual experience to do theology that helps it continue to feel and live “in the Spirit,” in the direction that Gustavo Gutiérrez points out: “A reflection that does not help life according to the Spirit is not a Christian theology. Definitely, all authentic theology is a spiritual theology. This does not weaken its rigorous and scientific character. It establishes it.”<sup>54</sup>

It is also necessary to make note of many terms in theological and ecclesiastical language that have lost much of their original meaning, or that no longer make sense (also true in Pentecostalism); their use creates a lack of confidence or confusion. Because of this, we must be careful not to enclose the freshness of spiritual experiences in verbal molds or in out-dated theological metaphors, or to show disapproval when these terms are not used. The work of grace in Pentecostalism is present and alive, even when traditional theological concepts are not used to express this, but other less traditional and, on occasion, very trendy or even picturesque language is used. Because of this, I think that there is an immediate need to evaluate whether the vitality of the Pentecostal experience of the Spirit and of grace can find an adequate expression in theological language of other times and traditions, and, even more, whether the vitality of the Pentecostal experience will have to adapt to traditional metaphors, many of which are now invalid, and have become technical terms or slogans of “correct doctrine.”<sup>55</sup> In other words, it seems to me that the problem of communication between Pentecostalism and other Christian traditions is often more linguistic than theological.

Another important topic would be, I believe, the reevaluation of the use of body language as another of the manifestations of grace in Pentecostalism. The human body in Pentecostalism is given a new significance and raised to a theological category, because it is considered to be the “dwelling place of the Holy Spirit,” to be cared for in a special way because of the radical understanding of holiness and the strict demands on ethical conduct that generally come from a very positive view of the human body in Pentecostalism. Likewise, the ministry of holiness through prayer is a work of grace in Pentecostalism, given by God and lived with a contagious conviction in other communities.<sup>56</sup> Grace, mainly understood as the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in believers, receives a kind of solidification when lived and valued through this action in the body and, therefore, in the community.<sup>57</sup> Because of this, I believe that Pentecostal pneumatology could be qualified as “solidified grace.”

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<sup>54</sup>Gutiérrez, Gustavo, “Drink from your own well” in *The Spiritual Itinerary of a People*. Salamanca: Sígueme, 1984, p. 52.

<sup>55</sup>A similar concern is shared by Dunn, James D.B., “The Reborn”: Baptism and the Spirit. A Protestant Response,” pgs. 161-162 in *Concilium*, No. 265, June 1996, pgs. 157-164: “It could be said that the first Christians made a collection of their vocabulary in an effort to express the richness and diversity of their experience of grace. But, traditional theology has tended to transform these metaphors into technical terms, which has killed the metaphor. Instead of offering us a partial window into the experience of grace and a way to express the vitality of this experience, the metaphors have lost the openness that made this the condition and they have become closed rooms in which the interior is in danger of weakening and the experience finally dying instead of struggling and flowering, or, to use an evangelical metaphor, they become as old, dry wineskins, unable to contain the vitality of the new experiences of grace.”

<sup>56</sup>I have developed this theme in another article: Chiquete, Daniel, “Holiness, Salvation and Misión: The Ministry of Holiness in Latin American Pentecostalism” in *Vida y Pensamiento*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 2004, pgs. 93-113; also in: Silva Mejía, Manuel y Berdeguez Román, Jorge (eds.), *Pentecostalismos y desafíos del tiempo nicaragüense. Primer Foro Nacional sobre Pentecostalismo y Justicia Social*. Managua: FEET, 2004, pgs.

<sup>57</sup>According to Pentecostal theologian Bridges Johns, Cheryl, “Healing and Liberation: The Pentecostal Perspective,” p. 72 in *Concilium*, Vol. 3, No. 265, June 1996, pgs. 71-79. “In this new reality (in a community where they are accepted without reservation as members), the untouchables are touched not only by human hands but by divine hands. (...) Pentecostalism fulfills the recovery of primitive tactile forms of religious expression, so that the person can totally experience the liberation power of the Gospels.”

A third topic that I want to emphasize is the dialogical dimension of Pentecostal religiosity, even against the many detractors that characterize Pentecostals as closed communities (and/or sectarian). Pentecostalism facilitates diverse opportunities for human inter-communication, both in worship activities and through the construction of different networks of community relations. I believe the opinion that Pentecostal experience is individualistic and personal is erroneous, as is the criticism that they are communities with no interest in social surroundings. Of course, there are groups that deserve these criticisms within the enormous diversity of the Pentecostal world, but it is not true of all, not even of the majority. My 20-year experience in Pentecostalism contradicts these claims head-on. I affirm that precisely the dialogical and communicative dimensions are factors that give strength and vigor to these communities. In my opinion, it is because of this that grace finds different ways of being lived out and expressed in Pentecostalism, and is also a space for living together and human growth.<sup>58</sup> And this capacity is not limited to spoken language, although it is a religiosity in which verbalization plays a fundamental part, but is dialogical in the broadest sense: communicative, receptive, critical, corporative, communal.

### Conclusion

In the previous reflections I have tried to express my conviction that God's grace is very present in the Pentecostal religious experience, although Pentecostals do not use this term to describe it. What theology has announced throughout the centuries in regard to grace can be observed in Pentecostalism, although it is attributed to the effect of the Holy Spirit. The atmosphere of resistance, faith and hope, which Latin American theologies struggle for, is found in Pentecostal spirituality. In other words, I understand Pentecostalism to be a Christian spirituality with many shared elements and with many others near to the most important theological traditions alive in our continent. Thus, grace and Pentecostalism are not counter-proposals but are interrelated, referential and mutually explanatory. I do not believe I am naïve or extremely optimistic when I consider Pentecostalism to be one of the most objective signs of the presence of God's grace in Latin America, but I would be if I believed that all that happens in Pentecostal churches is the work of God's grace. Pentecostalism is also found in this dialectic of counter-proposals of grace and *dis*-grace and in the struggle to discern the presence of God in our contexts. Pentecostal theology will have to help in the search for discernment and direction of the Pentecostal movement and Latin American theology.<sup>59</sup> This is part of the current and future task, but, for today, let me conclude with a simple and redundant declaration: Pentecostalism is one of the most concrete and happy manifestations of the grace of God in Latin America.

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<sup>58</sup>About this perspective, Ruiz de la Peña does not hesitate to compare grace with human love in its ability to generate surrender and dialogue in freedom: "The term *grace* does not denote (...) a *thing*, but a *relationship*, in the form of an *encounter and vital exchange* between two people (...) There is established in this relation a *kind of dependence that grants autonomy*. It is the enigmatic dependence involved in all loving relations that (when it is genuine) *is not enslaving, but liberating and personalizing*," in Ruiz de la Peña, Juan Luis, *Creación, gracia, salvación*. Santander: Sal Terrae, 1993 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), pgs. 89-91 (italics in the original). The declaration of Eduard Schillebeeckx also seems to me to be opportune: "*Grace* must be expressed in terms of encounter and experience. It should not be isolated from the liberating encounter. This means that all subsequent reflection about grace and salvation should always go back to the original source of the experiences, without which all theology of grace becomes mythology and ontology in the worst sense of the word." In Mertens, Herman-Emiel, "Nature and grace in Catholic theology of the XX Century," p. 101 in *Selecciones de Teología*, Vol. 32, No. 126, 1993, pgs. 91-102.

<sup>59</sup>I have developed this topic in a broader manner in: Chiquete, Daniel, "Contributions and Challenges of Pentecostal Theology to the Theological Task in Latin America" in *Teologías de Abya-Yala y formación teológica: Interacciones y desafíos*. 7<sup>th</sup> Jornada Teológica of CETELA. Bogotá. CETELA, 2004, pgs. 125-139.

**SALMO 130**  
**NUEVAS PRÁCTICAS QUE ANUNCIAN GRACIA, ANIMAN A RESISTIR**  
**Y A VIVIR LA REDENCIÓN A TRAVÉS DEL PERDÓN**

**María Cristina Ventura**

1 Canto de las subidas.  
Desde las profundidades clamo a ti, Yavé.  
2 Señor, escucha mi voz.  
Estén tus oídos atentos en dirección al ruido de mi súplica.  
3 Si iniquidades guardas, Yavé, Señor, quién permanecerá.  
4 Es que junto a ti el perdón para que seas temido.

5 Esperei Yavé.  
Esperó mi garganta.  
Y para su palabra me hice esperar.  
6 Mi garganta en dirección al Señor.  
Más que los que guardan en dirección a mañana.  
Los que guardan en dirección a mañana.

7 Espera Israel a Yavé.  
Es que con Yavé la solidaridad y abundancia,  
en su compañía redención.  
8 Y él redimirá a Israel desde todas sus iniquidades.

(Salmo 130)<sup>60</sup>

En una realidad de opresión desvelar la gracia divina es esperanza de libertad. Se trata de una experiencia histórica, muchas veces manifestada en una espera activa, que se define al levantar la voz. Se identifica en la resistencia.

Nuevas prácticas se hacen necesarias para que la gratuidad divina pueda ser real y efectiva en medio de grupos e individuos marcados por experiencias de marginación y opresión. Para que llegue el mañana son necesarias nuevas prácticas: el perdón traerá redención. Y es esa combinación de perdón y redención la mayor muestra de gracia en la relación humano-divina; y al mismo tiempo reflejo de interrelaciones humanas de justicia.

El Salmo 130 parece invitarnos a reflexionar sobre la gracia divina en esta dirección de resistencia histórica de los grupos, a través de la relación perdón-redención. De esa manera, es una invitación a vivir la gracia divina desde las experiencias particulares y grupales, expresadas en mi actitud hacia los otros, y no por la actitud de los otros. Como afirma Leonardo Boff “amo no porque el otro es bello y bueno. Sino que es bello y bueno porque le amo”<sup>61</sup>.

La presencia divina frecuentemente es reconocida a través de normas que son definidas y establecidas a partir de ideas preconcebidas por un grupo determinado de personas. Estas personas se sienten con la autoridad de definir ésta presencia. Una presencia que es entendida de forma contractual, no por obra y gracia de la propia divinidad. Esta realidad nos lleva a preguntarnos, cómo puede ser sentida y vivida la gracia divina en un mundo marcado por opresiones y marginaciones?

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<sup>60</sup>Traducción literal desde el hebreo. *Biblia Hebraea Stuttgartensia*, Kart Elliger y Wilhelm Rudolph (editores), Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1967/77.

<sup>61</sup>Leonardo Boff, *A graça libertadora no mundo*, Petrópolis: Edotora Vozes, 1976, p.63.

La gracia como experiencia de denuncia de opresiones y como relaciones constructoras de dignidad ha estado ausente en las experiencias de muchos grupos humanos. Generalmente, la gracia divina ha sido secuestrada y puesta a la orden de pensamientos monolíticos que, por un lado, la desvinculan de su relación con el pecado, entendido desde su polisemia de sentidos y manifestaciones. Y por otro, la intentan separar de las estructuras que impiden la participación tanto en el orden divino como en la justicia social a grupos previamente y preconceptuosamente desaprobados.

El tema de la gracia siempre me pareció muy abstracto, algo que sólo podía ser explicado desde palabras y conceptos doctrinales, muy distantes de las vidas cotidianas de las personas. Con frecuencia, me llamaba a la atención como en muchas de nuestras iglesias, referencia a la gracia sólo era en la relación Dios y ser humano. Pero no se hacía referencia a lo que sucede entre los humanos para que la gracia exista y sea experimentada. Desde mi propia experiencia, el ser parte de un grupo sexual, social y racialmente definido como inferior, periférico y discriminado: mujer, negra, empobrecida; de gracia, sólo la desgracia de no poder ser!

Por eso, en este ensayo proponemos reflexionar sobre el tema gracia, en primer lugar, partiendo de la concepción de la presencia divina en todos los grupos humanos. En segundo lugar, sentir la gracia divina no sólo en la aceptación de las diferencias entre los distintos grupos humanos, sino también en la manera justa de vivir las diferencias. Es una invitación a descubrir en las relaciones históricas humanas de pecado y gracia, la presencia divina gratuita. En este sentido, la gracia divina entre grupos humanos, que viven experiencias de opresión manifestadas de muchas maneras, sólo puede ser real si la resistencia se hace realidad y si por medio de ésta se ponen en prácticas relaciones justas entre todas las personas.

### **En contacto con el Salmo 130**

El Salmo 130 pertenece al conjunto conocido como Salmos de Subida o de Peregrinación (120-134). Este conjunto está formado por tres partes. El Salmo 130 inicia la tercera parte, la cual es la conclusión de todo el conjunto. Por ser conclusiva esta parte retoma las anteriores, pero hay aquí un fuerte énfasis en la presencia y acción de Yavé.

Por hacer parte de un conjunto, este salmo trae la marca del contexto en el que el conjunto es ubicado. Este contexto está marcado por realidades de opresión y resistencia, expresadas de diferentes maneras. Aunque es difícil determinar el origen del salmo, por su contenido, se puede afirmar que hace referencia a una realidad en la que abundan las iniquidades. Sin embargo, se trata de una situación en la que la resistencia es también una marca, manifestada en la denuncia, en la espera y confianza en Yavé.

Al igual que los Salmos 120 y 123, el Salmo 130 combina invocación y súplica, lo que permite caracterizarlo como un salmo de lamento. Puede ser considerado tanto individual como colectivo,<sup>62</sup> pues sabemos que sentimientos de haber cometido iniquidades acosan a individuos en su comunidades (Nehemías 9; Daniel 9). El contexto post exílico parece ser el escenario desde donde se están cantando estos salmos; un escenario marcado por las experiencias de opresión, pero también experiencias de resistencias animadas por grupos de mujeres y hombres que se animan a caminar, hablar, en fin, animados y animando el movimiento de sus cuerpos.

Es por la particularidad que tienen estos textos, inmersos en realidades no sólo socio-políticas, pero también religiosas, y particularmente el salmo 130, que se hace necesario detenernos para conocer las novedades que nos trae.

### **Un acercamiento cuidadoso a la estructura**

El texto, después del título, puede ser dividido en dos estrofas: v.1b-4 y v.5-8. Existe relación semántica y sintáctica entre las dos estrofas y al interior de ellas.

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<sup>62</sup>Ver, Erhard S. Gersteberger, *Psalms Part II and Lamentations*, p.357;



La primera estrofa, v.1b-4, trae una invocación (v.1b), seguida de una súplica (v.2). En la invocación destacamos los términos “profundidades”, así como “clamar”, “llamar”, en paralelo con la frase imperativa “escucha mi voz!” (v.2a), y “estén tus oídos atentos a la voz de mi súplica” (v.2b).

En los v.3-4 encontramos la expresión de la súplica. El v.3 con la partícula “si”, indicando que se trata de una frase condicional. Aquí el tema central gira en torno a las “iniquidades”. Aparecen también las raíces, “guardar”, “proteger” y “permanecer” en relación de contraste. El v.4 es la explicación de la condición del v.3. En él se destaca la expresión “para que seas temido” (v.4). Este término “temer” tiene relación con “tributar reverencia”.

El llamado a Yavé con el que abre esta primera estrofa, al indicar que se hace desde las “profundidades”, ya alude a alguna situación<sup>63</sup>, por eso quien está en esa situación pide de Yavé “escuchar la voz” (v.2a) y “tener sus oídos atentos” (v.2b). Después del pedido viene la explicación o, más bien, la presentación de la denuncia, la que es hecha por medio de la frase condicional, “si iniquidades guardas Yavé, Señor, quien permanecerá” (v.3)? Con esta pregunta condicional se explica lo que no es real<sup>64</sup>, pero se intenta imaginar lo que habría resultado si estuviera sucediendo.

Lo que realmente sucede es que las iniquidades no están siendo “guardadas”. Por eso, alguien “permanecerá. Si las iniquidades no están siendo “guardadas”, esto es, no están siendo obstáculo para que Yavé se manifieste, es porque en la presencia divina existe “perdón”, ya que es la manera por la que el “temor” puede hacerse efectivo (v.4).

Observamos con esto, la relación de correspondencia entre “permanecer”, “perdonar” y “temer”, las que están en contraste con las “iniquidades”. Y son esas “iniquidades” las causantes de las “profundidades” (v.1b). El “temor” debe ser entendido como “reverencia” en el sentido de respetar, venerar, de relacionarse con Yavé.

La segunda estrofa, v.5-8, está construida a base de repeticiones. El tema central parece girar en torno a la “espera”. El v.5 lo forman tres frases que se corresponden. En ellas se destacan los verbos “esperar” y “guardar”. Y también tenemos los sustantivos “garganta”, “vida”, “palabra”, “habla”.

El v.6 está formado por tres frases en paralelo. La segunda y la tercera son las mismas. En este versículo se vuelve a hablar de “garganta”, y además se repite el verbo “guardar” del v.3.

El v.7 está formado también por tres frases. Retoma el verbo “esperar” del v.5; esta vez de forma imperativa. Se destaca en seguida la expresión “es que” y los sustantivos “solidaridad”, “amistad”, “favor” y “redención”, “liberación”. Finalmente el v.8 cierra la estrofa. Retoma los términos “redención” e “iniquidades” de los vv.7 y 3 respectivamente.

En esta segunda estrofa, se habla de la actitud de quien se siente, o toma consciencia de estar en las “profundidades, quien pidió la atención de Yavé. Así, se dice que esa actitud es de espera. Existe una espera por la “palabra”, lo que significa la acción de Yavé, en beneficio de la “garganta”, parte del cuerpo que representa toda la vida. Eso mismo es reafirmado en el v.6, destacándose que la espera es en dirección al Señor, el otro nombre que recibe la divinidad dentro del texto.

El tipo de “espera” es explicada diciendo que es mayor a la de quienes aguardan la llegada de la mañana. Se trata de una espera activa. Quienes vigilan, por ejemplo, pasan la noche y están a la espera del nuevo día con gran atención. La espera tiene sentido, según el poeta, porque con Yavé

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<sup>63</sup>“Profundidad” puede estar relacionada a la confrontación de la vida humana con destrucción, con frecuencia simbolizada con agua. Un contexto parecido se puede observar en los Salmos 69,2 y 124,4-5.

<sup>64</sup>Lo real lo entendemos como el elemento dramático que resiste a ser integrado simbólicamente en la vida social. La pasión por lo real es alimentada por las formas del imaginario. (Ver mi artículo: “Desconstruyendo Imaginarios una propuesta para la re-construcción de un mundo sin discriminación racial” en *Debarim – Revista Bíblica Cubana*, La Habana: Red Bíblica Cubana, año 3, no.1/2004, 4-8).

hay “favor”, esto es, hay solidaridad y abundancia; sobre todo, hay “redención”, liberación, rescate, salvación. Cada una de estas acciones está en contraste con las “iniquidades”. En la parte final del Salmo (vv.7-8) se habla de Israel, lo que significa que la redención no es algo individual. Ella es, precisamente, la ayuda, actuación, presencia que es esperada de lo divino para la comunidad.

Después de estas observaciones podemos afirmar que la estructura del texto funciona de forma bien compacta.<sup>65</sup> Cada estrofa está internamente bien relacionada. Los paralelos y las repeticiones son comunes. El v.3 es enlace entre las dos estrofas. Dos términos de este versículo se repiten en el v.6. y el v.8 cierra con la misma palabra que abre el v.3.

El hecho de esperar, en medio de situaciones de opresión, es señal de que no todo está perdido. Es revelador de que la opresión no tiene la última palabra. La resistencia es una espera activa, provocadora de nuevas maneras de entrar en relación. Es la gracia divina manifestándose!

### **La novedad de la Gracia revelada por la redención liberadora**

El Salmo 130, al igual que en los demás del conjunto, advertimos la existencia de grupos que parecen resistir a situaciones de opresión practicadas por otros grupos conocidos sólo a través de los primeros. En ese sentido, podemos decir que los grupos están mediados por la opresión de unos y la resistencia de los otros. No lo podemos imaginar sin pensar en esas relaciones. Sin embargo, estas relaciones deben ser vistas de forma interconectadas, entrelazadas en el tiempo y en el espacio.

El tiempo en nuestro texto está identificado por la espera del mañana. Un mañana que anuncia un nuevo momento. En cuanto el espacio es la “profundidad”: “desde las profundidades clamo a ti Yavé” (v.1). Está relacionado a *xeol*, tiene un componente mítico a través del cual se expresa el caos, la destrucción, generalmente, a través de las aguas. Este caos es causante de aflicción tanto física como mental (Isaías 51,10; Ezequiel 27,34; Salmos 69,2; 124,3).

El clamar o llamar a Yavé desde las profundidades, implica que este lugar está en oposición al lugar donde este habita, siempre relacionado con lugar alto. Sin embargo, también desde ese lugar opuesto, Yavé puede entrar en relación con el otro, y puede escuchar: “estén tus oídos atentos a mi súplica” (v.2b). Según el salmista, la presencia de Yavé va más allá de la geografía. Así como su autoridad trasciende lo espacial, también trasciende lo humano y dentro de lo humano mismo, no importando sus características. Por eso, tiene autoridad para hacer lo inesperado.

En la teología institucional del post exilio, se entiende que la actuación de Yavé depende significativamente de la actuación humana. La intervención de Yavé en la historia es más bien para reconocer errores y castigar, o buenas actuaciones y premiarlas. Así si se actúa mal te irá mal. La imagen de Dios es la de un pagador según las actuaciones humanas, manipulada según los intereses de grupos determinados. Lo que impresiona en este salmo es la nueva propuesta que critica a la teología “oficial”, la teología de la retribución.

Sin embargo, en situaciones de muerte, donde no hay espacio para la esperanza y el sueño, donde las aspiraciones son disminuidas, el salmista afirma que en Yavé hay perdón, favor, abundancia, en su compañía hay redención (v.7c). Generalmente, en los textos bíblicos, redención está en relación con la sangre que ha sido derramada, una persona esclavizada o una nación en el exilio. Ambas son definidas como situaciones de crisis. Por eso, es preciso una acción redentora o salvadora. Quien ejecuta esa acción es *go'el*.<sup>66</sup>

El contexto que envuelve el conjunto de salmos de subida está marcado por: esclavitud, existe una clara referencia a experiencias y sentimientos de exilio, las espaldas están siendo labradas (Salmo 129). Significa que se trata de una situación de crisis. Se puede afirmar que se trata de una situación

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<sup>65</sup>Sin embargo, Loren D. Crow entiende que no existe relación entre las partes de este salmo. Y él divide de la siguiente forma: v.1-6 e v.7-8 (*The Songs of Ascents*, p.90).

<sup>66</sup>Ver Edgar Jones, *The Greatest Old Testament Words*, London: SCM Press, 1964, p.117.

en la que está de manifiesto la racionalidad violenta, que amenaza destruir toda forma de racionalidad alternativa. Y estos actos de violencia son fuente de dolor y sufrimiento que no puede ser entendido como redentor. Por eso, Yavé se declara como el propio *go'el*. Es el redentor que restaura la dignidad de las personas, para que no exista más desprecio (Salmo 123). Una redención para toda la comunidad junta (Salmos 131,1; 130,8).

Anunciar el restablecimiento de la dignidad de las personas es decir no al dolor provocado por la opresión. Es una manera de afirmar la presencia divina, la presencia de Yavé con quien se puede entrar en relación, quien perdona para ser respetado.

De esta manera, desenmascarar los falsos relatos que afirman a un Dios castigador, que encajonan lo divino en patrones predeterminados, machistas, racistas, sexistas, provoca el surgimiento de una manera diferente y nueva de entender la presencia divina, de reconstruir la esperanza. Y con esto, una nueva manera de entender redención, como la búsqueda de empoderamiento económico, político y religioso, así como la restauración del *status civil*.<sup>67</sup> Es la Gracia misma manifestándose desde las realidades concretas de sufrimiento, pero también de liberación. En definitiva, el poder clamar a Yavé es Gracia!

### **En un mundo marcado por racismo - Intentando explicar la relación perdón y gracia.**

El estudio del Salmo 130, nos provocó descubrirnos poseedores y poseedoras de gracia. Por medio de esta gracia podemos entrar en relación no sólo con lo divino, sino también con otras personas y grupos. Esa gracia en el salmo se desvela por la resistencia, pero también por la práctica de perdón que se impone en contextos cargados de opresiones.

Esa reflexión nos provoca, entonces, estar atentas a cómo vivimos, a nuestros sueños y a la situación de bienestar o no en que nos encontramos. Por eso, al hablar de gracia, no podemos dejar de lado las realidades concretas en las que vivimos muchos grupos en América Latina. El racismo en la mayoría de nuestros países sigue fuerte desde la época colonial. Hasta la fecha, se alimenta y perpetúa un sistemas de prejuicios y valores que, desde lo individual hasta lo colectivo, consolida la exclusión política, social, económica y cultural de afrodescendientes y pueblos originarios que habitan nuestro territorio.

La gracia no está desprendida de las situaciones concretas en las que nos encontramos. Y más, no está desprendida de los cuerpos y sus experiencias. Cuerpo no solo de las personas; pero también, como afirma Charlene Spretnak<sup>68</sup>, “el cuerpo de la Tierra - como manifestaciones de creatividad divina en el cosmos”.

Por eso, en una realidad marcada por la desgracia de la mayoría, pensando en América Latina y otras partes del mundo, donde la gracia parece ser privilegio de unos cuantos, tenemos que preguntarnos, ¿cómo hablar de la relación perdón y gracia en un mundo marcado por la falta de justicia, el irrespeto a la diversidad, y las relaciones asimétricas a todos los niveles? Desde el texto fue más o menos tranquilo poder descubrir la importancia de la presencia de Yavé con propuestas de relacionamientos diferentes a los que en ese momento se estaban planteando por las instituciones responsables de mantener el sistema religioso.

Poniendo los pies en nuestros contextos tenemos que analizar con mucha tranquilidad, cómo dialogar desde nuestras realidades actuales la propuesta que nos trae el salmista. Pues no se trata de hablar de una realidad distante, sino de una manera de vivir en la actualidad, de la cual somos parte? Entonces, cómo entender la presencia de Dios, una presencia sin preferencias grupales o culturales,

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<sup>67</sup>Emilie Townsend Gilkes, “Mother to the Motherless”, en *Semeia*, Atlanta: The Society of Biblical Literature, vol. 47, 1989, p.65.

<sup>68</sup>Charlene Spretnak, “Lo sagrado en el cuerpo de la tierra y en el cuerpo personal”, en *Del cielo a la tierra*, Santiago: Sello Azul, 1994, p.494.

pero Dios que puede hacerse Dios también con los otros? ¿Cómo descubrir la gracia divina a través de diferentes maneras de pensar y sentir lo divino?

La relación perdón y gracia nos envuelve en una situación no sólo de relación con lo divino sino también de relaciones entre los humanos. Por muchos aspectos hemos sido, negros, mujeres y otros grupos marginalizados, considerados ausentes de la propia gracia divina, y por lo tanto desprotegidos y no amados/os por Dios.

Si llevamos en serio nuestra experiencia al hablar de y vivir la gracia, las personas negras tenemos la tarea de no sólo recordar los papales que nos han sido asignados por la sociedad racista, sino también ver de que manera la presencia de Dios en nuestras vidas nos ha permitido denunciar situaciones de marginalización a las que hemos sido sometidas. Sin negar la dependencia de comunión, hoy día queremos afirmar la gracia divina a través de nuestra propia valoración y en la construcción de nuevos imaginarios que nos permitan la confianza y autoestima para poder ser humanas y humanos en el sentido pleno.

La insistencia constante en la deconstrucción de imaginarios, que nos construyen como personas de segunda categoría, puede permitirnos sobreponernos del sufrimiento y marginalización originados por el racismo. En este sentido, la gracia no sólo implica don de Dios, sino también ética generalmente apuntando a la acción comunitaria con consecuencias sociopolíticas. Ambas participaciones encaminando acciones por la justicia son divinas.

Para que exista perdón debe haber una superación de las opresiones y marginalizaciones. Para eso, ambos grupos tanto los sometidos al racismo, como quienes los practican, precisan realizar una nueva interrelación, que anule los antagonismos. El camino para esa interrelación debe ocurrir de modo distinto para racistas y quienes lo sufren. Entendemos que estas prácticas si han llegado hasta donde están, y cada día especializándose, ha sido no sólo la práctica de unos, sino en muchos casos también la complicidad y sumisión de los otros.

Si los racistas tienen que participar de modo más intenso en el trabajo de construir nuevas relaciones, quienes han sido y son discriminados, o se han comportado como cómplices, sumisos/as, tienen que recuperar el amor-propio, progresar en dirección al ser con auto-estima y autoridad. Caminar a ser sujeto. Para eso hace falta el desenmascarar los falsos relatos, o como decíamos anteriormente, las falsas imágenes que se han construido y que han invadido el interior de nuestra consciencia, individual y colectiva, sirviéndose de nuestros miedos. Sólo el descubrimiento y la aceptación de relatos e imágenes liberadoras podrá redimirnos del poder seductor y embaucador de la mentira que nos piensa y nos ha hecho pensarnos inferiores.

Es en ese momento, cuando hayamos recuperado una cierta esperanza, que cabe comenzar a pensar en el perdón como una posibilidad real para que la gracia divina se manifieste. Si la opresión exige la colaboración del sacrificio, entonces, las personas negras tienen que aprender a tomar en serio sus propias preocupaciones sacrificantes y sacrificiales, y entender que su liberación es la contribución más importante para la liberación universal.

Se trata de una experiencia de descubrir nuestros rostros, para sentir la gloria de Dios (2 Corintios 3,18). Es ese descubrir el rostro que posibilita relaciones e interrelaciones nuevas. Estas relaciones, a la vez que posibilitan el desvelo de las realidades de opresión al mismo tiempo permiten la construcción del perdón y, con esto, la posibilidad de desvelar la gracia.

Dios se manifiesta al escuchar el clamor de quienes están en las profundidades. De nuevo la gracia divina viene de la manifestación de Dios y también de la resistencia a no continuar invisibles o invisibilizadas. Como afirma Robert J. Schreier “el silencio refuerza la opresión; en cambio, el alzar la voz pone nombre a quienes están haciendo uso de la violencia contra nosotros”<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>69</sup>Robert J. Schreier, *Violencia y reconciliación – Misión y ministerio en un orden social en cambio*, Santander: Editora Sal Térra, 1992, p.59.

Gracia no es una realidad existente fuera de la vida. De gracia no se sabe sólo porque hablemos de ella. Hay que practicarla, experimentarla. Sólo podemos hablar de lo divino, si se da dentro de la experiencia cotidiana de la vida misma. Esa experiencia se define en la manera y medida que nos relacionamos con las demás personas. Si la forma de relacionarnos es de sumisión, entonces la gracia divina, desvelada por la resistencia, nos debe provocar a la liberación. Experimentar esa gracia se da en la espera constante que como indicamos en la primera parte de este ensayo, nada tiene que ver con una espera pasiva, acomodada. Se da en la transformación misma.

Finalmente, el estudio de este salmo nos desafía a no olvidar las experiencias que machucan, que provocan el dolor, que generan miedo. Somos desafiadas a dejar la gracia manifestarse y practicar o exigir prácticas nuevas. Tenemos que enseñar el perdón en el reconocimiento de los gestos de acogida y cariño. Transformar la aridez que la violencia provoca en los cuerpos. Cuerpos de muchos hombres y mujeres, niños y niñas negras sin brillo, resecaos, adoloridos, velados por las situaciones de sufrimiento; por la falta no sólo de comida, techo, educación, pero todo eso expresado por medio de palabras y gestos violentos. Estos cuerpos, anhelan por toques, manos que acogen, que dan cariño, que abrazan.

Por eso, hablar de perdón no significa aceptar resignadamente las experiencias de opresión, de violencia. Con esto, no se pretende estimular ni la ceguera o mudez irresponsable, ni el inmovilismo o la corrupción de la complicidad, todo lo contrario. Perdón no es sumisión, es una respuesta alternativa surgida de la resistencia misma en contra de la violencia. Como afirma Robert J. Schreiter, “el perdón que las víctimas, movidas por la gracia reconciliadora de Dios, ofrecen a sus torturadores es el que hace que éstos se decidan a arrepentirse de los agravios cometidos y a iniciar la reconstrucción de su propia humanidad”<sup>70</sup>. Yo afirmaré más, la práctica del perdón resultado de la resistencia no es sólo la evidencia de la gracia divina, pero, principalmente, es la muestra de la propia divinidad de la víctima. Es la muestra de la semejanza con Dios “perdonar las deudas” como también lo hace Dios. El propio texto de Pablo a los corintios, nos recuerda que al descubrimos el rostro, así como explicamos anteriormente, se hace realidad la gloria del Señor, y al mismo tiempo pasamos a hacer parte de esta misma imagen, “con una gloria siempre mayor” (2 Corintios 3,18c).

Por medio de esto, recordamos también el evangelio de Mateo con su preocupación en mostrar que en comunidad no hay maestros, son todos hermanos y hermanas en una asamblea con derechos iguales. Para evitar sectarismos, Mateo introduce el tema del perdón dentro de la ética comunitaria por eso, “no deberías tú también compadecerte de tu compañero, del mismo modo que yo me compadecí de ti? (Mateo 18,33).

Continuamos soñando con relaciones en las que podamos sentir al otro, como la misma gracia divina. Queremos contribuir al fortalecimiento o la construcción del sueño de comunidad de muchos de nuestros pueblos negros e indígenas, donde las diferencias sea el abono para la construcción de la igualdad. Soñamos con la manifestación y el reconocimiento de la Gracia originada en el bien vivir de todas las personas!

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<sup>70</sup>Robert J. Schreiter, p.62.

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## PSALM 130

### NEW PRACTICES THAT ANNOUNCE GRACE, ENCOURAGE US TO RESIST AND TO EXPERIENCE REDEMPTION THROUGH FORGIVENESS

María Cristina Ventura

#### A song of ascents

1 Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord;  
2 O Lord, hear my voice.  
Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.  
3 If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?  
4 But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.

5 I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,  
and in his word I put my hope.  
6 My soul waits for the Lord  
more than watchmen wait for the morning,  
more than watchmen wait for the morning.

7 O Israel, put your hope in the Lord,  
for with the Lord is unfailing love (solidarity and abundance),  
and with him is full redemption.  
8 He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.

(Psalm 130<sup>71</sup>)

To reveal divine grace within the reality of oppression is hope of freedom. It is an historical experience, which is often manifested in an active hope that is expressed by speaking out. It is identified in resistance.

New practices are necessary so that free divine grace will become real and effective in the midst of groups and individuals who are marked by experiences of exclusion and oppression. New practices are needed to bring about a new tomorrow: pardon will bring redemption. And this combination of pardon and redemption is the greatest demonstration of grace in the human-divine relationship, and at the same time reflects human interrelationships of justice.

Psalm 130 seems to invite us to reflect on divine grace by looking at the historical resistance of groups through the pardon-redemption relationship. In this way, it is an invitation to live divine grace from individual and group experiences, expressed in my attitude toward others and not by the attitude of others. As Leonardo Boff states, “I love not because the other is beautiful and good. But she is beautiful and good because I love her.”<sup>72</sup>

The divine presence is often recognized through norms that are defined and based on the preconceived ideas of a determined group of people who believe they have the authority to define that presence—a presence that is understood in a contractual manner, not by the grace and work of divinity itself. This reality leads us to ask, how can divine grace be felt and lived in a world marked by experiences of oppression and exclusion?

Grace, as an experience of denouncing oppression and as constructive relationships of dignity, has been absent in the experience of many groups of people. Generally, divine grace has been abducted and placed at the order of monolithic thinking that, on one hand, detaches its relationship to sin as

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<sup>71</sup>Translation by the author from the Hebrew Bible (Hebrew-Spanish-English).

<sup>72</sup>Leonardo Boff, *A graça libertadora no mundo*, Petrópolis: Edotora Vozes, 1976, p. 63.

understood from the polysemy (semantics) of feelings and manifestations. On the other hand, there is an attempt to separate groups that are disapproved of previously and conceptually, from structures that impede participation in the divine order as well as in social justice.

The theme of grace has always seemed to me to be very abstract, something that could only be explained by doctrinal language and concepts, very removed from the daily lives of people. I was often struck by the fact that in many of our churches references to grace only apply to the relationship between God and human beings. But there is no reference to what happens between humans in order for grace to exist and be experienced. From my own experience, as part of a sexual, social and racial group that is defined as inferior, marginal and discriminated—woman, black, poor; of grace, there is only the disgrace of not existing.

Because of this, in this essay we propose, firstly, to reflect on grace from the concept that the divine presence is present in all human groups. In second place, to feel divine grace, not only through acceptance of the differences between human groups, but also to live the differences in a just manner. This is an invitation to discover the free divine presence in the historical human relationships of sin and grace. In this sense, divine grace between groups of people that experience oppression, which is manifested in many ways, can only be real if resistance becomes reality and if, by this means, equitable relations are put into practice between all people.

### **In contact with Psalm 130**

Psalm 130 belongs to a group of Psalms known as Songs of Ascents or Pilgrimage (120-134). This group is composed of three parts. Psalm 130 begins the third part, which is the conclusion of the entire group. Because it is the conclusion, this part reiterates the previous parts, but here there is a strong emphasis on the presence and action of Jehovah.

As part of a group, this Psalm carries the mark of the context in which the group is located, which is characterized by realities of oppression and resistance, expressed in various ways. Although it is difficult to determine the origin of the Psalm by its content, it can be affirmed that it makes reference to a reality in which there is an enormous amount of iniquity. However, it deals with a situation in which resistance is a characteristic that is manifested in great distress, with hope and confidence in Jehovah.

Just as in Psalms 120 and 123, Psalm 130 combines invocation and supplication, which characterizes it as a Psalm of Lament. It can be considered both individual and collective,<sup>73</sup> because we know that the feeling of having committed iniquities affects individuals in their communities (Nehemiah 9; Daniel 9).

The post-exile context seems to be the scenario from which these Psalms are sung. It is a scenario marked by experiences of oppression, but also experiences of resistance that are promoted by groups of women and men that are encouraged to walk and talk; in short, to be encouraged and to encourage corporal movement.

Because of the particularity of these texts that are immersed in realities that were not only socio-political but religious, and particularly Psalm 130, we must take a minute to understand the new ideas that it brings us.

### **A careful approach to the structure**

After the title, the text can be divided into two stanzas: verses 1-4 and verses 5-8. There is both a semantic and syntactical relationship between and within the two stanzas.

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<sup>73</sup>See, Erhard S. Gerstberger, *Psalms Part II and Lamentations*, p. 357.



The first stanza, verses 1-4, includes an invocation (v. 1b), followed by a supplication (v. 2). We emphasize the terms “depths” in the invocation as well as “cry,” which are parallel to the imperative phrase “hear my voice” (v. 2a) and “let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy” (v. 2b).

In verses 3-4 we find an expression of supplication. The participle “if” in verse 3, indicates a conditional phrase. Here, the central theme revolves around the “iniquities.” The roots “to keep,” “to protect” and “to remain” also appear as a contrast. Verse 4 explains the condition of verse 3. The expression “therefore you are feared” (v. 4) stands out. The term “fear” is related to “pay reverence.”

The first stanza opens with a call to Jehovah and indicates that this comes from the “depths,” alluding to a specific situation<sup>74</sup>; therefore, whoever is in this situation asks Jehovah to “hear my voice” (v. 2a) and “be attentive to my cry” (v. 2b). After the request comes the explanation or, rather, the denunciation, which is made through a conditional phrase, “if you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?” (v. 3)? With this conditional question that which is not real is explained<sup>75</sup>, but there is an attempt to imagine what would have occurred if it had happened.

What is really happening is that the iniquities are not being “remembered” and, because of this, someone “will stand.” If the iniquities are not being “remembered,” that is, are not an obstacle to Jehovah manifesting himself, it is because there is “pardon” in the divine presence, because that is the way that “fear” can become effective (v. 4).

We observe in this the relational agreement between “remember,” “pardon” and “fear,” which are in contrast with the “iniquities.” And, these “iniquities” are the cause of the “depths” (v. 1). The “fear” should be understood as “reverence” in the sense of respect, veneration, of a relationship with Jehovah.

The construction of the second stanza, verses 5-8, is based on repetitions. The central theme seems to revolve around “hope.” Verse 5 forms three phrases that go together, in which the verbs “wait” and “hope” are emphasized. We also have the nouns “throat,” “life,” “word,” “speak” in the Hebrew text.

Verse 6 is formed by three parallel phrases; the second and third being the same. This verse again speaks of “throat,” and also repeats the verb “remember” from verse 3.

Verse 7 is also formed by three phrases. The verb “to hope” from verse 5 is repeated; this time in the imperative form. The expression “for with” and the verbs “solidarity,” “friendship,” “favor,” “redemption” and “liberation” are emphasized. Lastly, verse 8 closes the stanza. It repeats the terms “redemption” and “iniquities” of v. 7 and v. 3, respectively.

The second stanza speaks about the attitude of the one who is feeling, or is aware of being in the “depths,” who cries to the Lord. Thus, we say that this is an attitude of hope. There is hope for the “word,” which signifies the action of Jehovah, in benefit of the “soul” (throat), a part of the body that represents all of life. This is reaffirmed in verse 6, pointing out that hope is in the Lord, the other name that receives divinity in the text.

The kind of “hope” is explained by saying that it is greater than that of those who wait for tomorrow. It is an active hope. Those who wait, for example, spend the night and are waiting for the new day with great anticipation. Hope makes sense, according to the poet, because there is “mercy” in

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<sup>74</sup>“Depth” can be related to the confrontation between human life and destruction, which is often symbolized by water. A similar context can be seen in Psalms 69:2 and 124:4-5.

<sup>75</sup>We understand what is real to be the dramatic element that resists being symbolically integrated in the social life. The passion for the real is nourished by imaginary forms. (See my article: “Deconstructing Imagery, a proposal for the reconstruction of a world without racial discrimination” in *Debarim—Revista Bíblica Cubana*, La Habana: Red Bíblica Cubana, Year 3, No. 1, 2004:4-8).

Jehovah, that is, there is solidarity and abundance; above all, there is “redemption,” liberation, rescue, salvation. Each one of these actions is in contrast to “iniquities.” In the final part of the Psalm (verses 7-8) he speaks of Israel, which signifies that redemption is not just for individuals. It is, precisely, this help, action and presence that is expected from the divine for the community.

After these observations we can affirm that the text’s structure functions in a compact form.<sup>76</sup> Each stanza is related internally; the parallels and the repetitions are common. Verse 3 is the connection between the two stanzas. Two terms in this verse are repeated in verse 6, and verse 8 closes with the same word that opened verse 3.

The fact of hoping in the midst of oppressive situations is a sign that not all is lost. It is revealing that oppression does not have the last word. Resistance is an active hope that provokes new ways of relating. It is the manifestation of divine grace!

### **The innovation of grace revealed by liberating redemption**

Psalm 130, as in the rest of the group Ascent Psalms, draws attention to the existence of groups that seem to resist oppressive situations that are practiced by other groups known only by means of the first group. In this sense, we can say that the groups are half completed (“*están mediados*”)\*\*, by the oppression of some and the resistance of others. We are not able to imagine this without thinking about these relationships. However, these relationships must be seen as interconnected, intertwined in time and space.

In our text, time is defined by the wait for tomorrow; a tomorrow that will announce a new day. Regarding space, there is “depth”: “from the depths I cry to Jehovah” (v. 1). This is related to *xeol*, and has a mythical component through which chaos is expressed—destruction—that is usually by means of water. This chaos causes physical and mental affliction (Isaiah 51, 10; Ezekiel 27, 34; Psalm 69.2; 124.3).

Crying or calling to Jehovah from the depths implies that this place is in opposition to the place where Jehovah lives, which is always related to a high place. However, it is also from this opposite place that Jehovah can relate to the one calling and can listen: “let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy” (v. 2b). According to the psalmist, the presence of Jehovah goes beyond geographic boundaries. Thus, because his authority transcends space, it also transcends that which is human and within humankind itself, regardless of its characteristics. Because of this, he has authority to do the unexpected.

In post-exile institutional theology, it is understood that the activity of Jehovah is significantly dependent on human conduct. Jehovah’s intervention in history is rather for recognizing mistakes and punishing them, or for recognizing and rewarding good conduct. Therefore, if you behave badly it would go badly for you. The image of God is that of a paymaster who gives recompense according to human conduct, manipulated according to the interests of determined groups. What is impressive in this psalm is the new proposal that criticizes the “official” theology: the theology of retribution.

However, in situations of death, where there is no opportunity for hope and dreams, where aspirations are diminished, the psalmist states that in Jehovah there is pardon, mercy and abundance; in his presence there is redemption (v. 7c). Generally, in biblical texts, redemption is related to blood that has been spilled, a person enslaved or a nation in exile. Both are defined as crisis situations. Therefore, a redeeming or salvific action is necessary. The one who performs this action is *go’el*.<sup>77</sup> The context that surrounds this group of Psalms of Ascents is marked by slavery; there is a clear reference to experiences and feelings of exile—their backs are being beaten (Psalm 129).

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<sup>76</sup>However, Loren D. Crow understands that there is no relationship between the parts of this Psalm. He divides it in the following way: verses 1-6 and verses 7-8 (*The Songs of Ascents*, p. 90).

<sup>77</sup>See Edgar Jones, *The Greatest Old Testament Words*, London: SCM Press, 1964, p. 117.

This indicates that there is a crisis situation. It can be stated that this is dealing with a situation in which there is an obvious violent rationality that threatens to destroy all kinds of alternative rationality. These acts of violence are a source of pain and suffering that cannot be understood as redeeming. Therefore, Jehovah declares himself to be *go'el*. He is the redeemer that restores dignity to people, so that there will be no contempt (Psalm 123)—redemption for the entire community (Psalms 131.1 & 130.8).

To announce the reestablishment of human dignity is to say “no” to the pain caused by oppression. It is a way to affirm the divine presence, the presence of Jehovah, with whom we can enter into a relationship, who pardons in order to be respected.

In this way, to unmask the false reports that affirm a punishing God, that put the divine in a box of predetermined patterns that are machista, racist, sexist; and to bring about a different and new way to understand the Divine presence, to reconstruct hope. And with this, to bring a new way to understand redemption as the search for economic, political and religious empowerment, as well as for the restoration of the civil *status*.<sup>78</sup> It is grace that is manifested in the concrete realities of suffering, but also of liberation. Without a doubt, the power to cry to Jehovah is grace!

### **In a world marked by racism—trying to explain the relationship between pardon and grace.**

The study of Psalm 130 prompted us to discover that we possess grace. By means of this grace we can enter into a relationship not only with the divine, but also with other people and groups. The grace in this psalm is shown by resistance, but also by the practice of pardon that is required by contexts that are weighed down in oppression.

This reflection urges us to be watchful of how we live, of our dreams and of the comfort or difficulty in which we are living. Therefore, when speaking of grace, we must not fail to consider the concrete realities in which many groups of people are living in Latin America. In most of our countries, there has been strong racism since the colonial period. From then until now, prejudicial systems and values have been nourished and perpetuated, both individually and collectively, that are consolidated in the political, social, economic and social exclusion of Afro-descendants and of native peoples that live in our land.

Grace is not disconnected from the concrete situation in which we live. Moreover, it is not disconnected from our bodies and their experiences—bodies not only of people, but also, as Charlene Spretnak states,<sup>79</sup> “the body of the Earth—as manifestations of divine creativity in the cosmos.”

Therefore, in a reality marked by disgrace for the majority of people in Latin America and other areas of the world, where grace seems to be the privilege of a few, we must ask ourselves how we can speak about the relationship of pardon and grace in a world marked by a lack of justice, a lack of respect for diversity and asymmetrical relationships at all levels? From the text, it was more or less easy to discover the importance of the presence of Jehovah in proposals for different ways of relating than those that were being proposed by the institutions responsible for maintaining the religious system.

Placing ourselves in our contexts, we have to calmly analyze how to dialogue from our current reality the proposal that the psalmist brings us. It has nothing to do with talking about a distant reality, but with the way we live now, of the reality of which we are a part. Therefore, how do we understand the presence of God, a presence without group or cultural preferences, but God that can

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<sup>78</sup>Emilie Townsend Gilkes, “Mother to the Motherless,” in *Semeia*, Atlanta: The Society of Biblical Literature, Vol. 47, 1989, p. 65.

<sup>79</sup>Charlene Spretnak, “The sacred in the body of earth and in the personal body” in *Del cielo a la tierra*, Santiago: Sello Azul, 1994, p. 494.

also become God with others? How can we discover divine grace through different ways of thinking and feeling about the divine?

The relationship of pardon and grace wraps us in a situation not only of relation with the divine, but also of relations between people. In many ways we have been blacks, women and other marginalized groups, considered to be absent from divine grace and, therefore, unprotected and unloved by God.

If we are serious about our experience of speaking and living in grace, as black people we will have the job of not only remembering the roles that we have been assigned by a racist society, but to see how the presence of God in our lives has permitted us to denounce those situations of marginalization to which we have been subjected. Without denying a dependence on communion, today we want to affirm divine grace through a valuation of ourselves and in the construction of new images that give us confidence and self-esteem, in order to be women and men in the fullest sense.

The continual insistence on deconstructing images that we construct as second-place citizens could allow us to overcome the suffering and marginalization originated by racism. In this sense, grace not only implies a gift of God, but also an ethic that generally points to communal action with socio-political consequences. Both of these participations, which guide actions for justice, are divine.

In order for there to be pardon, oppression and marginalization must be overcome. This will require that both groups—both those who suffer racism as well as those who practice it—must experience a new interrelationship without antagonism. The journey toward this interrelation must take place in a different way for racists than for those who suffer racism. We understand that these practices have gotten to where they are, and have become more specialized, not only because of the practices of some, but in many cases because there has been complicity and submission on the part of the victims.

If racists have to participate more intensely to construct new relations, those who have been and are discriminated against, or have behaved as accomplices or have been submissive, must recuperate their self-love and progress in becoming a person with self-esteem and authority. Move to become an individual. This will require exposing untrue accounts or, as we said previously, to expose the false images that have been constructed and have invaded our individual and collective consciousness, and have taken advantage of our fears. Only by discovering and accepting accounts of liberating images can we buy our freedom from the seductive and deceitful power of the lie that has made others think and that has made us think we are inferior.

At this time, when we have recovered some hope, we begin to think about pardon as a real possibility in order for divine grace to be shown. If oppression demands a collaboration of sacrifice, then black people have to learn to take seriously their own sacrifice and sacrificial concerns, and understand that their freedom is the most important contribution for universal liberation. This has to do with an experience of unveiling our faces, to feel the glory of God (2 Corinthians 3.18). It is this unveiling of our face that makes relationships and new interrelations possible. At the same time, these relationships make it possible to unveil the realities of oppression while at the same time permitting the construction of pardon and, with this, the possibility of revealing grace.

God is revealed when listening to the cry of those who are in the depths. Once again, divine grace comes when God is revealed, and also in resistance, by not remaining invisible or unseeable. As Robert J. Schreiter states, “silence reinforces oppression; while speaking out puts a name to those who are showing violence against us.”<sup>80</sup>

Grace is not something that exists outside of life. We do not know about grace just through speaking about it; it must be practiced and experienced. We can only speak of the divine if that is

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<sup>80</sup>Robert J. Schreiter, *Violence and Reconciliation—Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order*, Santaner: Editora Sal T erea, 1992, p. 59.

present in the daily experience of our life. This experience is described in the way and to the degree that we relate with other people. If our relationship with others is a form of submission, then divine grace, revealed through resistance, will bring about liberation. This grace is experienced in the continual expectation that has nothing to do with a passive, comfortable wait, as we indicated in the first part of this essay. This comes about during the transformation process itself.

In closing, the study of this psalm challenges us to remember the experiences that they emphasize, those that cause pain and generate fear. We are challenged to let grace manifest itself and to practice or demand new practices. We have to teach pardon in the recognition of gestures of acceptance and affection; to transform the bareness that violence has brought to our bodies. The bodies of many black men and women, boys and girls, are not radiant, but are parched, in pain, blurred by their suffering—not only due to the lack of food, shelter and education, but by all of these things, expressed through violent words and gestures. These bodies that yearn to be touched, for hands to hold, that give affection, and that embrace.

Therefore, to speak about pardon does not mean to passively accept experiences of oppression or violence with resignation. This does not intend to encourage either irresponsible blindness or muteness, or immobility or complicity with corruption, but exactly the opposite. Pardon is not submission; it is an alternative answer that emerges from resistance to violence. As Robert J. Schrieter states, “the pardon that victims, moved by the reconciling grace of God, offer to those who torture them is what makes them decide to repent of the offences they committed and to begin to reconstruct their own humanity.”<sup>81</sup> I would further state that the practice of pardon that results from resistance is not only evidence of divine grace, but it is primarily a demonstration of the actual divinity of the victim. It is a sign of likeness to God “to pardon debts” as God does. Paul writes in Corinthians, reminding us that when we unveil our faces, as we explained previously, the glory of the Lord is made real, and at the same time we become transformed into his likeness, “with an ever-increasing glory” (2 Corinthians 3:18c).

Through this we also remember the concern expressed in the gospel of Matthew to show that in a community there are no teachers, only brothers and sisters in an assembly with equal rights. To avoid sectarianism, Matthew introduces the topic of pardon within the communal ethic: “Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you” (Matthew 18:33).

We continue to dream about relationships in which we can feel the other person, as well as divine grace. We want to contribute to strengthening or to building the dream of community in many of our black and indigenous communities, where the differences would be a guarantee for the construction of equality. We dream about the manifestation and recognition of grace that originates in all people living well!

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid. p. 62.

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## **! DEUS, EM TUA GRAÇA, TRANSFORMA O MUNDO !**

**Sônia Gomes Mota**

Este é o lema que irá nortear toda a discussão da 9ª Assembléia do Conselho Mundial de Igrejas (CMI). Deste lema queremos destacar as palavras “graça” e “transformação”. Teologicamente, entendemos por graça algo que é dom de Deus e que nos é dado sem que tenhamos qualquer merecimento. É uma decisão divina em favor dos seres humanos, ainda que estes não sejam merecedores. Transformação, de acordo com os dicionários, significa tomar nova forma, feição ou caráter; alterar-se, modificar-se ou passar de um estado ou condição a outro. A partir daí pode-se perguntar: o que necessita ser transformado? Quais as relações que devem tomar nova feição, que devem ser modificadas? Como Deus vai agir para que isto aconteça? É possível a graça divina atuar em circunstâncias adversas? Neste artigo, dois textos sobre a atuação do profeta Eliseu nos ajudarão a desenhar o processo de transformação dos personagens envolvidos nos episódios. A intenção é perscrutar como Deus usa pessoas, muitas vezes de forma inesperada, para transformá-las em agentes de transformação, mesmo em situações, por vezes, bastante adversas.

### **1. Saboreando os textos**

Para falar sobre a atuação do profeta Eliseu é preciso entrar em mundos diferentes. Algumas vezes, vamos encontrá-lo em palácios, junto a reis, oficiais e militares. Mas, na maior parte do tempo, vamos encontrá-lo entre óleos, panelas, pães, cevada, farinha e machados, buscando resolver os problemas que dizem respeito às necessidades imediatas do povo. Neste ambiente um tanto doméstico, ele atua junto a viúvas, a mulheres com dificuldades de ter filhos, a crianças doentes, a pessoas que estão passando fome e a trabalhadores braçais. O ponto forte de Eliseu é a sabedoria popular, sua companheira constante. Mais do que palavras, ele faz uso de gestos e movimentos. Assim ele se evidencia como o homem de Deus, chamado para resolver os problemas do cotidiano.

A atuação do profeta Eliseu passa ao largo das disputas religiosas institucionais, que procuram estabelecer a hegemonia entre Javé e Baal. O que interessa ao profeta, no entanto, não são as grandes discussões teológicas e as disputas das religiões oficiais por espaço e poder. Pelo contrário, ele está interessado em apresentar soluções para os grupos ou as pessoas necessitadas e carentes dos sinais da graça de Deus.

O leitor e a leitora são convidados a saborear dois textos que tratam da atuação do profeta Eliseu. Os textos se encontram em 2 Reis 5,1-27 e 2 Reis 6,8-23. Porém, como fazem as pessoas que apreciam uma boa comida, vamos saboreá-los separadamente. Assim perceberemos melhor cada detalhe, poderemos identificar cada ingrediente, tempero e especiaria que compõe tão saborosa narrativa.

### **2. Vamos, em primeiro lugar, saborear o texto de 2 Reis 5,1-27**

**Os personagens:** o oficial sírio Naamã, a menina escrava israelita, a esposa de Naamã, o rei da Síria, o rei de Israel, o homem de Deus Eliseu, os servos de Naamã e Geazi, o companheiro de Eliseu.

**Os cenários:** a casa de Naamã, o território de Israel, o palácio do rei de Israel, a casa de Eliseu, o rio Jordão.

**A trama:** Naamã, chefe do exército do rei da Síria, inimigo de Israel, homem de grande prestígio, sofre de uma doença de pele, identificada tradicionalmente como lepra. Através da informação de uma escrava israelita que trabalhava em sua casa, a esposa de Naamã fica sabendo que ele poderia ser curado por um profeta que vive em Samaria, no território de Israel. A partir desta informação, Naamã solicita a seu rei que interceda por ele junto ao rei de Israel para que consiga a cura, no que é prontamente atendido. Naamã vai com uma comitiva até a terra de Israel, levando consigo, além da carta de apresentação, alguns bens para pagar os serviços a serem prestados a ele. O rei de Israel, ao

ler a carta do rei da Síria, se desespera, pois não se vê em condições de curar alguém com lepra. Neste contexto, surge o profeta Eliseu, que avisa o rei que está disposto a realizar a cura. O homem de Deus envia a seguinte instrução a Naamã: ele deve mergulhar sete vezes no rio Jordão. Este procedimento causa indignação no oficial sírio, que não pode acreditar que alguém o trate com tal descaso. Porém, persuadido pelos serviçais, resolve, mesmo a contragosto, seguir as instruções do profeta; e é curado. Assim, reconhece o poder do Deus de Eliseu e, agradecido, retorna à casa do profeta para presenteá-lo, mas este se recusa a aceitar qualquer tipo de presente ou pagamento. Naamã professa, então, a sua fé no Deus de Eliseu e pede permissão para levar a Damasco um pouco da terra de Israel, sobre a qual poderá oferecer sacrifícios ao Deus Javé. Ao mesmo tempo, pede perdão por ter que acompanhar seu rei nos rituais de sacrifício realizados no templo de Rimom, divindade principal de Damasco, uma vez que isto fazia parte do cargo que ocupava. Eliseu despede-o em paz. Geazi, o servo de Eliseu, no entanto, pretende tirar vantagem de Naamã. Arranja um jeito de ficar com os presentes desprezados por seu senhor e mestre. Inicialmente tem êxito neste empreendimento, mas é logo desmascarado por Eliseu, que, indignado com o procedimento do seu servo, o pune com a mesma lepra da qual o oficial sírio havia sido curado.

## 2.1 Acompanhando o processo de crescimento

Como numa boa iguaria a ser preparada, é preciso que todos os ingredientes, temperos e especiarias sejam devidamente dosados, misturados e trabalhados para que se alcance um bom resultado. Assim, também neste texto é preciso analisar, observar, destacar o contexto, a ação e reação de cada personagem. Não podemos esquecer que o que parece um simples detalhe pode fazer uma grande diferença no resultado final.

A menina cativa que estava a serviço na casa de Naamã era uma criada cujo nome nem aparece no texto; era alguém que estava numa posição subalterna na casa do grande chefe do exército; era, além disso, uma estrangeira. Mas é ela quem dá a dica da cura. A sua interferência desencadeia todo um processo que vai transformar a vida do grande general.

*A esposa de Naamã, que também não tem nome no texto bíblico, passa para o marido a informação que recebeu da serviçal e o convence a buscar a cura. Certamente a sua fala foi bastante convincente, pois colocou em movimento os reis da Síria e de Samaria e foi responsável pela marcha de Naamã a Israel.*

*Naamã é vítima de uma terrível doença de pele, comumente identificada como lepra; ele está disposto a fazer tudo para ser curado. Acostumado a circular no âmbito das autoridades, está convicto de que é preciso ter a interferência do seu rei. Acredita que o seu caso é assunto de ordem política internacional, que precisa ser tratado entre as autoridades máximas de dois países. Além do mais, está acostumado a pagar pelo que recebe; por isso, leva junto consigo prata e ouro para comprar a sua cura.*

*O rei da Síria não pode negar este favor ao seu grande general. Seguindo a prática comum de solicitar auxílio médico a outro rei, o rei sírio envia uma carta exigindo que o rei de Israel cure o seu general da lepra. Está acostumado a mandar e a ser obedecido.*

*Ao receber a carta de seu soberano com a ordem expressa de providenciar cura a Naamã, o rei de Israel entra em desespero, pois sabe que não possui poderes para fazer o que lhe está sendo solicitado. Acha, até, que podia ser uma desculpa do rei da Síria para tentar incriminá-lo e, assim, ter uma justificativa para invadir seu território. O pedido por cura se transforma, assim, em um sério incidente diplomático. A burocracia e a desconfiança existentes no âmbito do poder real não ajuda, pelo contrário, só atrapalha o processo de cura. O rei de Israel rasga as vestes e se entrega ao desespero; não tem mais o que fazer. Mesmo sendo rei, reconhece que seus poderes são limitados.*



*Eliseu estranha que o rei tenha entrado em tamanho desespero. Afinal, embora não circule no ambiente da corte, ele é conhecido, entre o povo simples, como homem de Deus que pode realizar curas. Também o rei deveria reconhecer a legitimidade profética de Eliseu. Mesmo que não se alinhe com o poder, Eliseu cumpre com a sua missão profética e de curandeiro junto aos que o necessitam. Eliseu não estabelece preço ou condições; nem mesmo sai de dentro de sua casa para ir ao encontro do ilustre general, que entretimes já está parado à sua porta, com seus presentes e sua comitiva. Eliseu manda um simples recado para Naamã, indicando como ele deve proceder para ficar curado: banhar-se sete vezes no rio Jordão. Esta atitude do profeta causa indignação e frustração em Naamã, que não está acostumado a ser tratado com tanto descaso. Será que Eliseu sabe com quem está tratando? Afinal, ele é um alto oficial do exército sírio, vem trazendo uma carta de apresentação real e um pagamento em ouro e prata. Como pode ser tratado daquele jeito e, ainda por cima, ser ordenado a lavar-se no pequeno e insignificante rio Jordão, quando em sua própria terra existem rios maiores e, quem sabe, mais limpos? A simplicidade da exigência de Eliseu é considerada uma afronta para quem está acostumado a grandes realizações. Esperava que o próprio profeta viesse ter com ele, que o levasse a um local sagrado, invocasse Javé, o Deus dos israelitas, e realizasse todo um ritual de purificação. Se nada disso seria feito, então o profeta não deveria merecer crédito. O melhor e mais sábio seria retornar para casa com sua comitiva, o ouro, a prata e os presentes que havia trazido.*

*Mas os servos de Naamã argumentam com o seu chefe para que siga as instruções recebidas. Se o profeta tivesse pedido algo grandioso, não seria feito? No entanto, ele pediu uma coisa bem simples. Lavar-se sete vezes no rio. O que custava obedecer? São os servos que, através de sua argumentação, conseguem persuadir Naamã a realizar o ritual proposto por Eliseu. Mais uma vez, são as pessoas simples e subalternas que compreendem, aceitam e acreditam neste tipo de prática religiosa. Sabem que, muitas vezes, é na simplicidade do tratamento que reside a cura.*

## **2.2 Graça e transformação**

Naamã, convencido pelos argumentos de seus serviçais, resolve seguir as instruções. Mergulha no rio Jordão sete vezes. Número perfeito e sagrado! É mais do que lavar-se; Naamã passa por um verdadeiro ritual de purificação. A cada mergulho dado acontece a transformação: a pele, antes tomada pela enfermidade, recebe uma nova textura, volta a ser como a de uma criança. No início da história, Naamã nos é apresentado como “grande homem” (*ish gadol*); após a cura e a transformação ele surge como se fora uma “criança pequena” (*na'ar qaton*). Assim também ocorre com o interior de Naamã: ele experimenta um novo renascer. É um novo homem por fora e por dentro. Já não é o arrogante chefe do exército que veio plenipotenciário a Samaria. Naamã se curvou para banhar-se no insignificante rio Jordão e, através do singelo gesto exigido por Eliseu, surge uma nova pessoa que experimentou a graça de Deus. Como no parto ou no Batismo, Naamã sai das águas do Jordão para uma nova vida. O general reconhece que foi agraciado e quer, por isso, agradecer a Eliseu pelo que fizera por ele. Além disso, quer adorar o Deus Javé, embora ainda tenha, devido a seu cargo, a obrigação de acompanhar o rei sírio nos rituais em honra ao deus cananeu Rimom. Quem antes desprezou as águas do Jordão, agora quer levar alguns sacos da terra de Israel para nela poder oferecer sacrifícios ao Deus desta terra, Javé. Eliseu não se incomoda com a ambigüidade da fé do general. Não se ouve uma só palavra de repreensão ou mesmo de alerta. Eliseu passa por cima das disputas religiosas entre o purismo javista e as expressões religiosas cananéias. Naquele momento, o que interessa é que uma pessoa tenha sido curada e teve sua dignidade restabelecida.

Numa espécie de recaída ideológica, Naamã julga poder pagar pelo que recebeu. Mas logo aprende que, com Deus, as regras são diferentes. Não são as regras do toma-lá dá-cá, ditadas pelo mercado. Mas são as regras da solidariedade e do resgate da dignidade humana. É a maneira com a qual atua a graça divina. Esta graça não se paga com ouro ou prata, mas com transformação de vida.

### 2.3 As regras do mundo

O texto bíblico mostra também o inverso da transformação. Naamã transformou-se. Mas ainda há aquelas pessoas que pensam poder tirar vantagem de cada situação. Geazi, embora convivendo com Eliseu e sendo, portanto, testemunha de sua prática profética, parece não ter aprendido o suficiente com o seu mestre. Geazi não concorda com o procedimento do seu mestre; ou, então, não o entende. Imagine recusar todos aqueles presentes! O texto bíblico nos apresenta Geazi, aqui, ao contrário de Eliseu, como uma pessoa oportunista e gananciosa, que não tem nenhum escrúpulo em mentir para tirar proveito da situação. Ele vai atrás de Naamã e, utilizando-se arditamente do nome de Eliseu, solicita do general alguns objetos que seriam uma grande ajuda não para si, mas para pessoas necessitadas. A mentira funciona, Geazi recebe os presentes e retorna feliz pelo sucesso alcançado. De volta, no entanto, é desmascarado e punido pelo homem de Deus. Assim como herdou os presentes de Naamã, vai herdar também a sua doença, mostrando, assim, que também ele precisa passar por um processo de purificação e transformação. Este episódio mostra como alguém que ainda vive de acordo com as regras do mundo e que ainda não consegue enxergar senão pelos óculos destas regras, pode estragar todo o sabor do texto.

A narrativa de 2 Reis 5,1-27 faz parte das histórias que circulam nos meios populares e que têm a intenção de transmitir valores morais. Ao enfatizar situações e personagens contrastantes, a narrativa procura tornar perceptíveis a necessidade e a possibilidade de transformação na vida das pessoas. A narrativa misturou, portanto, diversos ingredientes que, separados, não teriam o mínimo impacto, mas que, combinados, deram um sabor especial à trama: a empregada anônima, que fez toda diferença na vida do patrão famoso; a mulher sem nome do general, que dá início a todo um movimento em busca de cura; os reis poderosos, que, com sua complexa burocracia, não conseguem ajudar pessoas necessitadas; o profeta popular, que com atitudes e fórmulas simples consegue alcançar resultados surpreendentes, provocando transformação de vida; o “grande” homem, orgulhoso, vaidoso e prepotente, que se transforma em uma “criança”; e o “esperto” que busca tirar vantagem da ocasião. Todas estas personagens contribuem para transformar desprezo e arrogância em humildade e generosidade de quem se sabe curado e transformado pela graça de Deus. Mas a narrativa não é ingênua; ela sabe que ainda existe a ganância e que o processo de transformação é um processo contínuo.

### 3. Ao saborearmos o segundo texto, que se encontra em 2 Reis 6,8-23, vamos encontrar um novo ambiente, novos personagens e uma nova situação

**Personagens:** o rei da Síria, o profeta Eliseu, o servo de Eliseu, o rei de Israel, os oficiais do rei da Síria

**Cenário:** território de Israel, a cidade de Dotã, território da Síria

**A trama:** O rei da Síria estava em guerra contra Israel. O profeta Eliseu, sabedor dos lugares onde o rei da Síria iria atacar, avisava o rei de Israel com antecedência para que este evitasse o confronto. Irritado, o rei da Síria acha que entre seus oficiais existe um traidor, mas é advertido de que, na verdade, é um profeta de Israel quem sempre avisa o seu povo do perigo iminente. O rei sírio decide, então, prender o profeta e envia um destacamento militar para o lugar onde o profeta costuma estar. Ao ver todo o exército sírio, o servo de Eliseu entra em pânico; mas o profeta mostra a ele que estão protegidos por um batalhão bem maior do que o dos sírios. Em oração Eliseu pede a Javé que fira os olhos dos soldados sírios para que não enxerguem que estão sendo atraídos para uma armadilha. Isto acontece e, quando os sírios se dão conta da situação, estão cercados no centro de Samaria, a cidade inimiga. Imediatamente o rei de Israel quer vingança e pergunta ao profeta se deve matar os inimigos. Eliseu não o permite; pede que os soldados sírios sejam alimentados e depois libertados para retornem para casa. Assim se faz: após banquete os soldados sírios retornam para o seu território; depois disso, nunca mais fizeram incursões contra o povo de Israel.

### 3.1 Acompanhando os acontecimentos

As guerras entre Israel e os reis arameus ou sírios eram frequentes no século IX. Os acontecimentos narrados têm, como pano de fundo, o contexto destas guerras. Saímos do ambiente doméstico, onde tantas vezes se encontra o profeta Eliseu, para achá-lo no centro de um conflito armado entre dois países.

Ao lado de Israel está o profeta Eliseu, que busca proteger o seu povo, avisando com antecedência ao seu rei onde estarão as tropas inimigas, para que pudesse evitar o confronto. Sabe que, num enfrentamento certamente desigual, pode morrer muita gente e que, portanto, é bem melhor evitar a batalha, seguindo por caminhos menos perigosos.

O rei da Síria, sem entender o que está acontecendo, pensa imediatamente que, entre seus oficiais, há um traidor. Afinal, como seria possível que seu inimigo soubesse dos seus planos antes mesmo de realizá-los? Isto só poderia ser coisa de traidores! Sabe-se que, em uma guerra, não se pode confiar em ninguém, pois diante da morte até um bom soldado pode, para salvar a própria vida, tornar-se informante do inimigo. Desconfiança é um dos princípios que orientam os estrategos militares.

Mas o rei sírio é informado, por um de seus servos, que não existe traidor, mas que se trata de um homem de Deus que avisa ao rei de Israel o que vai acontecer. Um “homem de Deus”, não um profeta, como tantos que existiam e que buscavam apenas receber pelo que faziam. Imediatamente o rei sírio toma providências para tirar Eliseu de circulação; precisa prendê-lo porque é alguém muito perigoso. Para isto, envia grande aparato militar para cercar Dotã, a cidade de Eliseu, para **ver** onde ele se encontra. Até este momento, os israelitas haviam conseguido evitar o confronto, mas agora estão sendo cercados dentro do seu próprio território.

O servo de Eliseu vê todo o aparato militar que cerca a cidade, e reage de forma bastante compreensível: entra em desespero! Agora estão perdidos! Mas Eliseu não perde a calma, sabe que estão bem protegidos. Ora para que seu servo abra os olhos e **veja**. Daqui em diante, uma série de eventos acontece em torno do verbo “**ver**”; busca-se, dessa forma, explicitar como cada personagem envolvido na história percebe a realidade. Até aquele momento, o servo não havia enxergado o quanto estavam protegidos. Seus olhos estavam acostumados a ver o usual, o corriqueiro; agora eles vão ver além do costumeiro; vão tirar as vendas e ver com profundidade e perceber com precisão. Os olhos da fé vêem o que o olho comum não consegue enxergar; por isto, não há o que temer!

O contrário vai acontecer com as tropas sírias. O que Deus revelou ao servo de Eliseu, ele vai ocultar aos olhos dos inimigos de Israel. Eles ficam cegos. Estão tão determinados a lutar contra os israelitas que não enxergam mais nada. Encontrar um caminho por onde atacar Israel é tudo que interessa, não importa quem vai guiá-los nem por onde nem como vai acontecer. Derrotar o inimigo é seu único objetivo. Por estarem tão “cegos”, não perceberam que caíram em uma armadilha. Só se dão conta quando já é tarde demais, quando se encontram no centro do território inimigo e à mercê deste. Quando abriram os olhos e passaram a ver, deram-se conta de que a situação havia mudado; não mais eram eles que estavam no comando. Agora a situação está invertida, quem era para ser subjogado, agora dá as cartas. Como será que os israelitas vão agir agora que estão no comando?

### 3.2 As regras do mundo

É costume que os inimigos derrotados sejam humilhados, despojados de qualquer resquício de humanidade e mortos. O rei de Israel pensa que é assim que deve agir em relação às tropas sírias que estão sob o seu poder. Não pode perder a oportunidade de puni-los exemplarmente; afinal, o povo de Israel saiu vencedor neste conflito e precisa demonstrar isso.

### **3.3 Graça e transformação**

Eliseu não concorda com o desfecho do conflito imaginado pelo rei de Israel. Contrariando as regras da guerra, ele não permite que matem os sírios. Pelo contrário, pede que lhes sejam ofertados pão e água para que refaçam suas forças e depois retornem ao seu senhor. Isto parece inacreditável! Mas é assim que vai ser! O sentimento de vingança pode levar a uma guerra interminável. A misericórdia e o perdão fogem à normas usuais, mas podem pôr fim a um conflito. O ato de generosidade para com o inimigo permite quebrar o ciclo de violência tão comum naquele território e em todos outros. O rei israelita cumpre as ordens de Eliseu e o que se tornaria um verdadeiro massacre, transforma-se em festa.. O rei não ofereceu apenas pão e água, mas um banquete! Naquele momento, deve ter atentado para um “detalhe”: Não foi o povo de Israel que venceu a batalha; aliás, o exército não precisou fazer nada. A batalha foi vencida por Deus, e quando ele vence, as regras são outras; e estas novas regras ele quer ensinar ao seu povo. Contra toda a prática generalizada, o povo de Israel deve estabelecer com os vencidos uma nova política: não haverá derramamento de uma só gota de sangue. O Deus de Israel não mais deve ser considerado um Deus da vingança, mas um Deus da misericórdia, do respeito à vida do semelhante e do inimigo. É uma nova forma de ver a realidade. Há forças muito mais importantes e poderosas que não precisam do apoio de um nenhum aparato militar. Quem vence um conflito não se torna automaticamente senhor das pessoas vencidas. O verdadeiro vitorioso é aquele que sabe manter a paz através de atos de generosidade.

### **4. Digerindo os textos**

Como aconselhou o apóstolo Paulo em Romanos 12,2: “E não vos conformeis com este século, mas transformai-vos pela renovação da vossa mente, para que experimenteis qual seja a boa, agradável e perfeita vontade de Deus”. Pelos textos saboreados dá para perceber que a “boa, agradável e perfeita vontade de Deus” abre possibilidades para uma nova perspectiva. É uma proposta de vida e de comportamento que foge ao usual e convencional. Ela nos mostra a possibilidade de um novo mundo, alicerçado em novas relações, novos comportamentos e novas posturas de vida. Um mundo verdadeiramente transformado, vivendo pela graça misericordiosa e maravilhosa de Deus, que chama a todos e todas para ver e agir de um modo diferente do que se ensina no mundo. Ele nos chama a tornar-nos como crianças, a purificar o nosso olhar, a nossa pele e o nosso interior, ele nos desafia a acreditar na graça libertadora e transformadora e nos convida, como nas brincadeiras de criança, a acabar com as guerras e disputas, transformando-as em festa e alegria. Ele nos convida para o banquete da vida!

## **GOD, IN YOUR GRACE, TRANSFORM THE WORLD !**

**Sônia Gomes Mota**

This is the theme that will guide all the discussions of the ninth assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC). From this theme we wish to highlight the words “grace” and “transformation.” Theologically, we understand grace to be something that is a gift of God and that is given to us without our deserving it. It is a divine decision in favor of human beings, even if they do not merit it. Transformation, according to the dictionaries, means to take on a new form, new features or character; change oneself, modify oneself or to pass from one state or condition to another. From this one can ask: What needs to be transformed? What relations need to take on new features, which relations need to be modified? How will God act to make this happen? Is it possible for the grace of God to act under adverse circumstances? In this article, two texts about the actions of the prophet Elisha will help us to outline the process of transformation of the characters involved in the episodes. The intention is to inquire into how God uses people, many times in unexpected ways, to transform them into agents of transformation, sometimes even in very adverse situations.

### **1. Savoring the texts**

To talk of the prophet Elisha’s actions it is necessary to penetrate different worlds. Sometimes we will find him in palaces together with kings, officials and military people. However, most of the time, we will find him among oils, pans, breads, rye, wheat flour and axes, seeking to solve the problems that have to do with the immediate needs of the people. In this somewhat domestic environment he acts with widows, with women who are having difficulty bearing children, with sick children, with people who are going hungry and with manual laborers. Elisha’s strong point is popular wisdom, which is his constant companion. More than words he uses gestures and movements. Thus he shows himself to be a man of God, called to resolve problems of daily living.

The prophet Elisha’s situation runs parallel to the religious institutional disputes that seek to establish the hegemony between Yahweh and Baal. What interests the prophet, however, are not the big theological discussions and the disputes of the official religions for space and power. On the contrary, he is interested in presenting solutions to groups or persons lacking and in need of signs of God’s grace.

The reader is invited to savor two texts that deal with Elisha’s work. The texts are found in 2 Kings 5:10-27 and 2 Kings 6:8-23. However, just as people who appreciate good food bit by bit, let us savor these texts separately. In this way we can better perceive each detail, identify each ingredient, seasoning and spice that makes up this savory narrative.

### **2. Let us first savor the text of 2 Kings 5:1-27**

**The characters:** the Syrian commander Naaman, the Israelite slave girl, Naaman’s wife, the king of Syria, the king of Israel, the man of God Elisha, the servants of Naaman and Gehazi, Elisha’s companion.

**The scenarios:** Naaman’s house, the territory of Israel, the palace of the king of Israel, the house of Elisha, the river Jordan.

**The plot:** Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, enemy of Israel, a man of great repute, suffered from a skin disease, traditionally identified as leprosy. Through the information offered by the Israelite slave girl who worked in his house, Naaman’s wife learns that he could be healed by a prophet who lives in Samaria, in the territory of Israel. Based on this information Naaman requests his king to intercede for him to the king of Israel so that he could be cured. His request is immediately attended. Naaman goes with his entourage to the land of Israel, taking with

him besides the letter of presentation, some goods to pay for the services that will be rendered to him. The king of Israel, upon reading the letter from the king of Syria, despairs as he does not see himself capable of curing someone of leprosy. In this context the prophet Elisha comes forth telling the king that he is willing to do the healing. The man of God sends the following instructions to Naaman: he should bathe in the river Jordan seven times. This procedure irritates the Syrian commander, who cannot believe that someone would treat him with indifference. However, persuaded by his servants he resolves, against his will, to follow the instructions of the prophet; and he is cured. Thus, he recognizes the power of the God of Elisha, and grateful, returns to the house of the prophet to give him the gifts, but the prophet refuses any type of gift or payment. Naaman, then, professes his faith in the God of Elisha and asks permission to take some earth from the land of Israel to Damascus upon which he may offer sacrifices to the God Yahweh. At the same time, he asks forgiveness for having to accompany his king in the sacrificial rituals carried out in the temple of Rimom, the main divinity of Damascus, as this was part of his job. Elisha sends him off in peace. Gehazi, Elisha's servant, however, intends to take advantage of Naaman. He finds a way to keep the presents rejected by his lord and master. Initially he is successful, but he is soon found out by Elisha who, angered by his servant's behavior, punishes him with the same leprosy from which he had healed the Syrian commander.

## 2.1 Accompanying the growth process

Just as when one prepares a special food, one needs to carefully measure out all the ingredients, seasonings and spices, mix them and work them together to get a good result, so too, in this text, it is necessary to analyze, observe, highlight the context, the action and reaction of each of the characters. We cannot forget that what seems like a simple, small, detail could make a big difference in the final result.

*The captive girl who works in Naaman's house is a servant whose name does not even appear in the text; she was someone in a subordinate position in the house of the great commander of the army; besides this, she was a foreigner. But she is the one who gives the suggestion for the cure. Her interference unleashes a whole process of transformation in the life of the great general.*

*Naaman's wife, who also is not named in the biblical text, passes the information she received from the servant to her husband and convinces him to seek the cure. Certainly her talk was quite convincing, as it put into motion the kings of Syria and Samaria and was responsible for Naaman's march to Israel.*

*Naaman is a victim of a terrible skin disease, commonly identified as leprosy; he is willing to do anything to be cured. Accustomed to circulating among authorities he is convinced that he needs the interference of his king. He believes his case to be on the level of international politics, which needs to be handled between the highest authorities of the two nations. Besides this, he is accustomed to pay for what he receives; that is why he takes with him silver and gold to buy his cure.*

*The king of Syria cannot negate this favor for his great general. Following the common practice of requesting medical help from another king, the Syrian king sends a letter demanding that the king of Israel cure his general of leprosy. He is accustomed to ordering and being obeyed.*

*Upon receiving the letter from his sovereignty with the express order to provide for Naaman's healing, the king of Israel despairs, because he knows that he does not have the powers to do what is being demanded of him. He even possibly believes that it could be an excuse of the king of Syria to incriminate him and thus have justification for invading his territory. Thus the request for healing becomes a serious diplomatic incident. The bureaucracy and the lack of trust that exists in the environment of royal power does not*

*help, but on the contrary, hinders the healing process. The king of Israel tears his clothes and gives in to despair; there is nothing more for him to do. Even being a king, he recognizes that his powers are limited.*

*Elisha finds it strange that the king should be so desperate. After all, although he does not circulate in the court areas, he is known among the simple people as a man of God who heals. The king should also recognize the prophetic legitimacy of Elisha. Even though he does not align himself with the power, Elisha carries out his mission as prophet and healer among those who need him. Elisha does not establish prices or conditions; he does not even leave his house to meet the famous general who is standing at his door with his gifts and his entourage. Elisha sends a simple message to Naaman indicating how he should proceed in order to be cured: bathe himself seven times in the river Jordan. This attitude of the prophet causes indignation and frustration within Naaman who is not accustomed to being treated with such indifference. Does Elisha know with whom he is dealing? After all he is a high official of the Syrian army, he comes with a letter of royal presentation and a payment in gold and silver. How can he be treated thus and, on top of this, be ordered to bathe himself in the small and insignificant river Jordan, when in his own land there are larger rivers and, who knows, maybe even cleaner? The simplicity of Elisha's demand is considered an insult for someone who is accustomed to great feats. He hoped the prophet himself would come out and meet him and take him to a sacred place, invoke Yahweh, the God of the Israelites, and carry out a whole rite of purification. If nothing of this was going to happen then the prophet was not worthy of credit. The best and wisest choice would be to return home with his entourage, gold, silver and the presents he had brought.*

*But Naaman's servants argued with their commander to carry out the instructions he received. If the prophet had asked him to do something grandiose, wouldn't he do it? However, he demanded something simple. Wash himself seven times in the river. What would it cost to obey? It is the servants, who through their argumentation, manage to convince Naaman to carry out the ritual process suggested by Elisha. Once more, it is simple and subordinate people that understand, accept and believe in this type of religious practice. They know that, many times, healing resides in the simplicity of the treatment.*

## **2.2 Grace and transformation**

Naaman, convinced by the arguments of his servants, resolves to follow the instructions. He dips in the river Jordan seven times. Perfect and sacred number! It is more than just washing oneself: Naaman passes through a true purification ritual. With each dip transformation happens: the skin, before taken over by the illness, receives a new texture, goes back to being like the skin of a child. In the beginning of the story, Naaman is presented to us as a "great man" (*'ish gadol*); after the cure and transformation he comes forth as being a "young boy" (*na'ar qaton*). This also happens inside Naaman: he experiences a new rebirth. He is a new man inside and out. He is no longer the arrogant commander of the army who came full of power to Samaria. Naaman bows to bathe himself in the insignificant river Jordan and through this simple gesture demanded by Elisha, a new person is brought forth who has experimented God's grace. As in birth or in Baptism, Naaman comes out of the waters of the Jordan to a new life. The general recognizes that he was graced and therefore wants to thank Elisha for what he did for him. Besides this, he wants to worship the God Yahweh, even though, because of his role, he needs to accompany the Syrian king in rituals in honor of the Canaanite God Rimom. The person who before belittled the waters of the Jordan, now wants to take some bags of earth from Israel to be able to offer sacrifices to the God of this land, Yahweh. Elisha is not disturbed by the ambiguity of the general's faith. One does not hear one word of reprehension or even of warning. Elisha passes over the religious disputes between the Jahvist purism and Canaanite religious expressions. At that moment, what matters is that a person has been cured and his dignity has been restored.

In a type of ideological relapse, Naaman believes he can pay for what he receives. But he soon learns that, with God, the rules are different. They are not the rules of give and take dictated by the market. But they are the rules of solidarity and the restoration of human dignity. This is the way divine grace works. This grace cannot be paid for by gold and silver, but with transformation of life.

### **2.3 The rules of the world**

The biblical text also shows us the opposite side of transformation. Naaman was transformed. But there are still those people who think they can take advantage of the situation. Gehazi, although living with Elisha and therefore being a witness to his prophetic practice, seems to not have learned enough from his master. Gehazi does not agree with his master's procedure; or, maybe, does not understand it. Imagine rejecting those presents! The biblical text presents Gehazi, here contrary to Elisha, as someone who is opportunistic and greedy, who does not have any scruples about lying to take advantage of the situation. He goes after Naaman and, fraudulently using Elisha's name, requests some objects from the general that would be of great help, not for himself but for the needy. The lie worked, Gehazi receives the presents and returns happy with the success. Upon his return, however, he is found out and punished by the man of God. Thus, just as he inherited Naaman's gifts, he will also inherit his illness, demonstrating in this way, that he also needs to go through a purification and transformation process. This episode shows how someone who still lives by the rules of the world and who still cannot see in any way other than through these rules, can ruin the whole flavor of the text.

The narrative of 2 Kings 5:1-27 is part of the stories that circulate among the people and have the intention of transmitting moral values. By emphasizing contrasting situations and characters, the narrative seeks to make the need and the possibility for the transformation of the life of the people perceptible. Therefore the narrative mixed various ingredients, that separately would not have a minimal impact, but combined, give a special flavor to the plot: the anonymous slave girl that made the whole difference in the life of the famous master; the nameless wife of the general who initiates the whole movement for seeking the cure; the powerful kings, who with their complex bureaucracies are not able to help needy people; the popular prophet, who with simple attitudes and formulas is able to reach surprising results causing life transformation; the "great" man, proud, vain and prepotent, who is transformed into a "child"; and the "wily" one who tries to take advantage of the occasion. All of these characters contributed to transform contempt and arrogance into humility and generosity of that person who knows himself cured and transformed by the grace of God. But the narrative is not naïve; it knows that greed exists and the process of transformation is a continuous process.

### **3. As we savor the second text, which we find in 2 Kings 6:8-23, we will find a new environment, new characters and a new situation**

**Characters:** The king of Syria, the prophet Elisha, Elisha's servant, the king of Israel, the officers of the king of Syria

**Scenario:** the territory of Israel, the city of Dothan, the territory of Syria

**The plot:** The king of Syria was at war with Israel. The prophet Elisha, who knew the places where the king of Syria would attack, warned the king of Israel in advance so that he could avoid the conflict. Irritated, the king of Syria believes that there is a traitor among his officers, but he is warned, that in truth, it is a prophet of Israel that is always warning his people of the imminent danger. The king of Syria then decides to capture the prophet, and he sends out a military detachment to the place where the prophet normally is. When he sees the Syrian army, Elisha's servant panics; but the prophet shows him that they are protected by a much larger battalion than that of the Syrians. In prayer Elisha asks Yahweh to blind the Syrian soldiers' eyes so that they do not see that they are being pulled into a trap. This happens and when the Syrians realize what has happened they are surrounded in the center of Samaria, the enemy city. The king of Israel



immediately wants revenge and asks the prophet if they should kill the enemies. Elisha does not permit this. He asks that the Syrian soldiers be fed and then freed to return to their homes. So it happens: after the banquet the Syrian soldiers return to their territory; after that they no longer raided the people of Israel.

### **3.1 Accompanying the happenings**

The wars between Israel and the Aramaen or Syrian kings were frequent in 9th century (B.C.) The happenings narrated here have as their backdrop the context of these wars. We have left the domestic environment, where one often finds Elisha, and find him now in the center of an armed conflict between two nations.

On the side of Israel is Elisha who seeks to protect his people by forewarning the king where the enemy troops would be, so that they could avoid the conflict. He knows that in a most certainly unequal confrontation many people would be killed and that therefore it is better to avoid the battle, following a less dangerous path.

The king of Syria, without understanding what is happening, immediately thinks there is a traitor among his officers. After all, how could it be possible that their enemy would know of their plans even before they were carried out? This could only be the work of traitors! It is known that in a war, one can trust no one, because faced with death even a good soldier can become an informant of the enemy to save his own life. Mistrust is one of the principles that guide the military strategists.

But the king is informed by one of his servants that there is no traitor, but that it is the man of God that warns the king of Israel about what is to happen. A “man of God”, not a prophet, like so many that existed and that sought only to receive something for what they did. The Syrian king immediately takes measures to get Elisha out of circulation; he needs to capture him for he is very dangerous. To do this he sends a great military detachment to surround Dothan, the city of Elisha, to see where he is. Up until this moment the Israelites had been able to avoid confrontation, but now they were surrounded within their own territory.

Elisha’s servant sees the whole military apparatus surrounding the city and reacts in a very understandable way: he panics! Now they are lost! But Elisha remains calm, he knows they are well protected. He prays that his servant’s eyes may be opened so that he may **see**. From then a series of events occur around the verb “**to see**”; an attempt is made in this way to explain how each character involved in the story perceives reality. Up until that moment the servant had not seen how well they were protected. His eyes were accustomed to see the usual, the commonplace; now they will see beyond the customary; the blinds will be removed and he will see deeply and with precision. The eyes of faith see what the common eye is not able to see; that is why there is nothing to fear!

The contrary will happen with the Syrian troops. What God reveals to Elisha’s servant, he will keep hidden from the eyes of the enemies of Israel. They become blind. They are so determined to fight against the Israelites that they see nothing else. To find a way to attack Israel is all that they are interested in, it does not matter who will guide them, nor where they will go nor what will happen. Their only goal is to vanquish the enemy. Because they are so “blind,” they do not notice that they have fallen into a trap. They only become aware of it when it is too late, when they are in the center of enemy territory and at the mercy of the enemy. When they open their eyes and are able to see, they become aware that the situation has changed; they are no longer in charge. Now the situation is inverted, those who were to be subdued, now can play the cards. How will the Israelites act now that they are in command?

### **3.2 The rules of the world**

It is the custom that the subjugated enemies be humiliated, stripped of any vestige of humanity and killed. The king of Israel believes that this is the way they should act in relation to the Syrian troops

that are in his power. He can not lose the opportunity to punish them exemplarily; after all, the people of Israel are the winners in this conflict and he needs to show that.

### **3.3 Grace and transformation**

Elisha does not agree with the outcome of the conflict imagined by the king of Israel. Against the rules of the war, he does not permit that the Syrians be killed. On the contrary, he asks that they be offered bread and water to renew their strength and then that they return to their lord. This seems unbelievable! But that is the way it is going to be! The wish for vengeance can lead to an interminable war. Mercy and pardon are not part of the usual norms, but they can put an end to conflict. The act of generosity toward the enemy permits the cycle of violence so common in that territory, and in all the others, to be broken. The Israelite king obeys Elisha's orders and what would have become a true massacre transforms itself into a feast. The king not only offers bread and water, but a banquet! At that moment he must have paid attention to one "detail": It was not the people of Israel that had won the battle; in fact, the army did not need to do anything. The battle was won by God, and when he wins, the rules are others; and God wants to teach these new rules to his people. Against all the generalized practice, the people of Israel must establish a new policy with the conquered: there is to be no shedding of even a drop of blood. The God of Israel must no longer be considered a God of vengeance, but a God of mercy, of respect for the life of one's equal and of one's enemy. It is a new way to see reality. There are much more important and powerful forces that do not need the support of any military apparatus. Whoever wins in a conflict does not automatically become lord over the conquered. The true winner is the one who knows how to maintain the peace through acts of generosity.

### **4. Digesting the texts**

As the apostle Paul counseled in Romans 12:2: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God-what is good and acceptable and perfect." By the texts just savored we can perceive that the "good, acceptable and perfect will of God" opens possibilities for a new perspective. It is a proposal for life and behavior that escapes the usual and conventional. It shows us the possibility of a new world, based on new relationships, new behaviors and new life postures. A truly transformed world, living by the merciful and marvelous grace of God, that calls all to see and act in a different way than what the world teaches. It calls us to become like children, to purify our looking, our skin and our interior, it challenges us to believe in the liberating and transforming grace and it invites us, like in children's games, to end wars and disputes, transforming them into feasting and joy. He invites us to the banquet of life!

## A LIBERTAÇÃO DO MUNDO : DOM GRATUITO DE DEUS E COMPROMISSO PROFÉTICO NOSSO

Lúcia Weiler

O tema invocativo da 9ª Assembléia do Conselho Mundial de Igrejas: “Deus em tua graça, transforma o mundo!” situa-nos diante de dois grandes eixos temáticos: A graça de Deus e a transformação do mundo. Já ouvi muitas vozes afirmando que um não tem nada a ver com o outro, ou até que podem ser considerados como temas opostos. Graça é dom e transformação é luta e conquista; Deus é Deus e mundo é mundo. A teologia se ocupa com a graça de Deus e a economia se preocupa com a transformação do mundo.

A tentação de manter esta separação, vendo “graça de Deus” e “transformação do mundo” não apenas como dois pólos opostos, mas também excludentes, é muitas vezes jogo de interesses ideológicos. Os relatos bíblicos, desde o Primeiro Testamento, sobretudo na literatura profética, nos alertam freqüentemente para esta tentação.

A partir destas considerações, a pergunta de fundo que dinamiza nossa reflexão é muito simples: como articular a graça de Deus com a transformação do mundo? Ou, perguntando inversamente: como articular a transformação do mundo com a graça de Deus? Levantamos ainda uma provocação que pode parecer secundária, mas que nos parece fundamental, sobre a terminologia: “transformação” ou “libertação” do mundo?

Nossa contribuição terá um enfoque bíblico – teológico a partir de Lucas 4, 16 - 30 como releitura de Isaías 61, 1- 4. Encontramos aí uma reserva de sentido que alcança a realidade de nossos dias e nos chama a colaborarmos com o Espírito atuante de Deus que nos unge para sermos parceiras e parceiros no seu projeto de libertação do mundo.

Desde o título optamos pelo termo “libertação” porque nos parece mais adequado à linguagem bíblica. Porém é importante manter também o termo “transformação” pelo seu significado econômico. A reflexão semântica pode ajudar-nos a desconstruir alguns termos e, ao mesmo tempo, compreender em maior profundidade a tensão criativa que dinamiza todo o processo de libertação e transformação, na ótica da graça de Deus, presente a atuante no mundo. O subtítulo quer colocar, desde o início, diante de nós esta perspectiva do dom e da graça que queremos acolher numa atitude receptiva e do compromisso profético que nos convida a uma atitude ativa.

### 1. Deus, em tua “graça”...

Começamos pela busca do significado bíblico do termo “graça”. Se partimos da origem hebraica *hèsed* (em grego geralmente *cháris* ou *éleos*), deparamos com uma fonte polissêmica que carrega em si uma “reserva de sentido” muito enriquecedora para compreender a força atualizadora do tema proposto.

*Hèsed* pode ser traduzido por *bondade, benevolência, favor, graça, dom, gratuidade, misericórdia, amizade, amor*. Com pouca freqüência, porém em sentido decisivo, a graça está relacionada com *berit*, lembrando a *solidariedade como atitude prática da aliança* (cf. Êxodo 34, 5-6). A graça é dada gratuitamente, não em virtude de alguma obrigação. Ela exprime a iniciativa livre e benevolente de quem a oferece. Porém, apesar de ser gratuita, ela é exigente como todo vínculo, toda amizade, toda relação que pretende ser duradoura. Por isso, em vários textos bíblicos encontramos *hèsed* ligado e complementado pelo termo *èmet* (em grego *aletheia*), que podemos traduzir por *fidelidade, firmeza, lealdade, verdade, veracidade*. Realça, assim, a permanência duradoura e a veracidade dessa atitude de aliança.

Através da ligação de *hèsed* com *rahamim* (a misericórdia de amor entranhado, ternura maternal), encontramos mais uma vertente muito rica para compreender a graça de Deus. Não se trata de uma misericórdia unilateral, no sentido de uma relação de dependência, na qual um ser forte e poderoso, se inclina sobre o mais fraco. Trata-se de uma atitude gratuita, na relação de mutualidade e reciprocidade. Esta relação gratuita pode ter como sujeito Deus ou uma pessoa.<sup>82</sup> Em outras palavras, se é verdade, por um lado, que Deus toma a iniciativa e é sempre o sujeito da graça, por outro lado, ele também capacita a pessoa humana, agraciada com seu amor, a entrar na mesma dinâmica da graça, do amor benevolente (cf., por exemplo, 1 João 4, 7-21; Jó 15, 1-17).

## 2. “...transforma” o mundo !

Aqui vale a pergunta sobre o que entendemos quando falamos em “transformação do mundo”. A linguagem tem a força de simplesmente nomear a realidade já existente, mas também tem a força de criar uma nova realidade, de certo modo, presente no sonho, na utopia.

No termo “transformar” está inerente a idéia de dar uma nova forma ao mundo no qual vivemos aqui e agora. Vem ao encontro do lema do Fórum Social Mundial: “um outro mundo é possível”, um mundo alternativo ao do capital globalizado, hegemônico e excludente, que tomou conta de nosso planeta.

Ora, sem uma libertação mais profunda, que toque a raiz das estruturas da sociedade e o coração do ser humano, na busca de uma conversão ética, teremos poucas chances de alcançar a utopia do mundo transformado, do “outro mundo possível”. Na linguagem bíblica, a transformação sempre tem este sentido de mudança radical. Assim, por exemplo, os profetas compreendem a transformação do coração: como nova possibilidade de solidariedade (cf. Jeremias 31, 31-34; Ezequiel 36, 26-32), como libertação para um novo relacionamento.

No tempo do exílio babilônico, o povo sonha com uma mudança radical, porque já não confia numa transformação periférica. Compreende que esse “novo” só será possível a partir da volta ao Deus Criador da vida, presente na sua biodiversidade em todo o cosmo. Os profetas, em sintonia com a nova esperança do povo, anunciam que Javé vai fazer acontecer algo totalmente novo, nunca visto antes ( cf. Isaías 42,9; 43,19; 48,6). Na época pós-exílica, Sião será chamada com um “nome novo” (cf. Isaías 62,2) e Javé criará “novos céus e nova terra” (cf. Isaías 65,17; 66,22).

É dentro deste contexto político – religioso que situamos o nosso texto, Isaías 61, 1 – 4, relido por Jesus de Nazaré (Lucas 4, 16 – 30). A pergunta que ocorre, então, é sobre o chão comum, ou seja o contexto e a realidade que possibilita uma afinidade entre um e outro texto, a ponto de proclamar com a autoridade de Jesus de Nazaré: “*Hoje se cumpriu esta passagem da Escritura que vocês acabaram de ouvir*” ( Lucas 4, 21)

## 3. Releitura profética messiânica: Lucas 4, 16-30 e Isaías 61, 1-4 – uma fusão de horizontes

Estamos diante de uma das releituras centrais de toda a tradição bíblica. A comunidade de Lucas inaugura o programa de Jesus de Nazaré, apresentando-o como um profeta ungido pelo Espírito de Deus.

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<sup>82</sup>H.J.STOEBE. *Hesed Güte*. In: E. JENNI e C. WESTERMANN. *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*. Band I, München: Kaiser Verlag, 1984, col. 600 – 621.

**Lucas 4, 18-19**

(v.18) “O Espírito do Senhor  
está sobre mim  
porque ele me ungiu  
para evangelizar os pobres;  
enviou-me para proclamar  
a remissão aos presos  
e aos cegos a recuperação da vista,  
para restituir a liberdade aos oprimidos,  
(v.19) e para proclamar um ano  
de graça do Senhor”.

**Isaías 61, 1-2**

(v.1) “O Espírito do Senhor Javé  
está sobre mim,  
porque o Senhor me ungiu;  
para anunciar boas notícias (alegrias)  
aos pobres ele me enviou,  
para curar os corações feridos  
e proclamar a liberdade aos escravos,  
a libertação aos que estão presos,  
(v. 2) e proclamar um ano agradável  
ao Senhor  
e um dia de vingança de nosso Deus,  
a fim de consolar todas as pessoas  
enlutadas...”

Comparando os eixos centrais e as palavras-chave dos dois textos, percebemos que há lacunas, silêncios e mudanças. Jesus de Nazaré, na força do Espírito Santo, faz uma nova proclamação, uma manifestação pública de seu messianismo profético. Ele opta pelo messianismo do Servo, que vem para libertar e anunciar a instauração de um tempo qualitativamente novo: tempo de graça e verdade, porque carrega em si o gérmen fecundo de esperança e libertação. Não podemos entender este manifesto de Jesus, segundo a comunidade de Lucas, como uma simples confirmação da profecia de Isaías. No texto de Lucas ( 4, 18-19), mais que uma simples releitura, encontramos uma nova produção de sentido da profecia de Isaías.

Com a proclamação de Jesus, estamos diante de uma fusão de horizontes, dados o entrelaçamento e a integração de outros textos da mesma época (exílica e pós-exílica) como, por exemplo, Isaías 58, 5-6, que conecta a prática do jejum com o dia agradável a Javé: “*romper os grilhões da iniquidade, soltar as ataduras do jugo e pôr em liberdade os oprimidos*”. Esta “fusão de horizontes” se completa quando Jesus, depois de enrolar o livro, entregá-lo ao servente e voltar a sentar-se, atrai para si todos os olhares das pessoas que se encontram na sinagoga (cf. Lucas 4, 20). Inicia *agora* um novo tempo: “*Então começou a dizer-lhes: “HOJE se cumpriu aos vossos ouvidos essa passagem da Escritura*” (Lucas 4, 21).

O contexto do qual emerge o texto de Lucas não mais é o exílio babilônico, mas um exílio ainda pior, que faz o povo sofrer sob a dependência de um cativo duplo: o cativo da religião oficial, mantida pelas autoridades religiosas, e o cativo da política de Herodes, incentivada pelo Império Romano e sustentada por um sistema bem organizado de exploração econômica e controle repressivo das relações sociais. Este sistema produzia um crescente empobrecimento além de inúmeras exclusões sociais e religiosas. O texto faz referência a vários rostos de excluídos: pobres, escravos, presos, cegos e oprimidos. Já não se cumpria a lei da solidariedade, da partilha e da fraternidade, assumida como compromisso de aliança com o Deus da vida (cf. Deuteronômio 15, 1-18).

Jesus, o Messias enviado de Deus e ungido pelo Espírito, não pode ficar neutro diante desta realidade. Sente compaixão do povo e começa seu agir messiânico profundamente comprometido com a causa dos pobres e excluídos. “HOJE” é mais que um tempo cronológico, é um tempo de graça (*kairós*), que permanece sempre e traz a eternidade do sonho de Deus para dentro da história humana e de sua cotidianidade.

A atitude profética – messiânica de Jesus, que opta pelos pobres e excluídos, provocou o conflito e uma forte reação de descrédito e menosprezo entre seus próprios conterrâneos de Nazaré: “*Este não é o filho de José?*” E a admiração inicial (cf. Lucas 4, 22) que estes tinham pelas palavras de Jesus, “cheias de sabedoria”, acabou. Queriam manter a dicotomia entre o cotidiano e o extraordinário da graça de Deus, da qual se sentiam participantes. A fúria aumentou quando perceberam que, através

da releitura de Elias e Eliseu, Jesus queria apontar para o engano no qual se encontravam, apoiados até mesmo em seus preceitos religiosos (cf. Lucas 4, 23-27). O jeito de Deus é contrário às limitações do clã religioso e das pretensões nacionalistas. O profeta escolhe os de fora, os excluídos, os estrangeiros. Na mesma linha de Eliseu e Elias, Jesus não se subordina aos critérios estreitos e utilitaristas de seus conterrâneos; vê sua missão profética num horizonte mais amplo, que coincide com a vontade de Deus, que oferece sua graça aos de fora<sup>83</sup>.

Jesus enfrenta o conflito extremado que resulta em sua expulsão da cidade e culmina numa armadilha para eliminá-lo. Mas ele é livre e segue seu caminho, que também é sua opção política – religiosa (cf. Lucas 9,51). Seu ponto de chegada é Jerusalém, que, na interpretação da comunidade de Lucas, tem um sentido teológico, muito além do geográfico. Faz parte do projeto decisivo de Jesus, que chega da periferia de Nazaré para desmascarar o centro do poder: Jerusalém é o lugar do confronto e do discernimento entre a morte e a vida, é o lugar da morte dos profetas (cf. Lucas 13,33) – e Jesus é o profeta ungido pelo Espírito (Lucas 4, 18-19). O caminho para Jerusalém é opção livre e decidida de Jesus, na força do Espírito (cf. Lucas 9,51); é o caminho para o lugar da realização do Reino de Deus, da promessa do Pai e da recepção do Espírito Santo, cuja força transforma as discípulas e os discípulos em testemunhas (Atos 1,3-8).

#### 4. A grande luz da releitura de Lucas para o “HOJE” de todos os tempos.

No “hoje” frágil e provisório da história humana esconde-se toda a potencialidade do “HOJE” salvífico de Deus. Na força da união do Espírito tornamo-nos contemporâneos, parceiros e parceiros de Jesus e recebemos a convocação e o envio de colaborar com sua graça para a libertação do mundo.

O manifesto de Jesus de Nazaré inaugura um programa messiânico, alicerçado nos critérios da “graça de Deus”. A partir daí, a graça (*hèsed*) de Deus passa, necessariamente, pelo compromisso com todas as pessoas, sobretudo com aquelas que sofrem exclusões dos mais diversos tipos e nomes; com aquelas que, ainda hoje, através das mais variadas formas maquiavélicas, não têm acesso aos bens deste mundo e são privadas do direito a uma vida digna.

*Voltemos à questão de fundo que colocamos no início desta reflexão: a eterna tentação de manter a dicotomia e o dualismo entre o que faz parte do universo de Deus e da sua graça e o que faz parte do mundo e de seus dinamismos naturais, dados e prontos – em suma, a dicotomia entre o discurso da teologia e o da economia.*

*Depois do caminho percorrido, tendo como fio condutor principalmente Lucas e Isaías, como representantes de toda a tradição bíblica, não resta dúvida de que a tão desejada transformação ou, como preferimos, libertação do mundo se dará na unidade fecunda da graça de Deus com os pequenos e, por vezes, frágeis gestos de mudança, na fidelidade cotidiana ao projeto maior, que quer vida em abundância para toda a criação (Jó 10,10).*

*O profeta Isaías lembra que precisamos valorizar os pequenos projetos de mudança, porque neles está atuante o Espírito criador, a graça de Deus: “Veja, eu estou fazendo uma coisa nova: ela está brotando agora...e você não percebe?” (Isaías 43,19).*

*A comunidade de Lucas valoriza cada momento e cada sinal de libertação como kairós da manifestação salvífica de Deus, como vemos no encontro com Zaqueu. Porém, só depois de Zaqueu acolher Jesus em sua casa e assumir uma atitude prática de solidariedade e partilha de bens com os pobres e de devolução de tudo que adquiriu, injustamente, em conseqüência de roubo e exploração, é que Jesus proclama: “Hoje a salvação entrou nesta casa, porque também este homem é filho de Abraão” (Lucas 19,9, cf. também Lucas 2, 11; 4, 21;)*

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<sup>83</sup>R. FABRIS e B. MAGGIONI. *Evangelhos (II)*. São Paulo: Loyola, 1992, p. 59-60.

A Boa Notícia de Jesus pode ser lida, em diversos textos do Segundo Testamento, nesta perspectiva da vigilância para não criar dicotomias e separações entre o que é de Deus e o que é do mundo. Mesmo na mensagem central dos escritos joaninos, muitas vezes responsabilizados por fomentarem esta ideologia, lemos: *“Se alguém possui os bens deste mundo e, vendo o seu irmão em necessidade, fecha-lhe o coração, como pode o amor de Deus permanecer nele?”* ( 1 João 3,17).

Por acreditarmos na possibilidade generosa e fiel do amor gratuito de Deus, que se encarna na história humana e nos envolve, tornando-nos suas associadas e seus parceiros de aliança, podemos clamar: *“Deus, em tua graça, transforma/ liberta o mundo”!* Implicada está sempre a dialética criativa do dom gratuito de Deus e do compromisso ético e profético nosso.

## THE LIBERATION OF THE WORLD : FREE GIFT OF GOD AND OUR PROPHETIC COMMITMENT

Lúcia Weiler

The invocational theme of the ninth assembly of the World Council of Churches: “God in your grace, transform the world!” confronts us with two great thematic issues: The grace of God and the transformation of the world. I have already heard many voices affirm that one has nothing to do with the other, or that they could even be considered opposing themes. Grace is a gift and transformation is struggle and conquest: God is God and world is world. Theology occupies itself with the grace of God and the economy preoccupies itself with the transformation of the world.

The temptation to maintain this separation, seeing “the grace of God” and “the transformation of the world” not only as two opposing poles but also excluding poles is, often, a game of ideological interests. The biblical narratives, from the First Testament on, especially in the prophetic literature, frequently alert us to this temptation.

Based on these considerations, the foundational question that activates our reflection is very simple: how to articulate the grace of God with the transformation of the world? Or asked inversely: how to articulate the transformation of the world with the grace of God? We raise yet another provocation that may seem secondary, but to us seems quite fundamental, about the terminology: is it “transformation” or “liberation” of the world?

Our contribution will have a biblical-theological focus based on Luke 4: 16-30 as a rereading of Isaiah 61: 1-4. We find there a reserve of meaning that reaches out to our days and calls us to collaborate with the active Spirit of God who anoints us to be partners in the project of liberating the world.

From the title on we have chosen to use the term “liberation” as this seems to conform better to the biblical language. However it is also important to maintain the term “transformation” because of its economic meaning. The semantic reflection may help us to deconstruct some terms and, at the same time, more deeply understand the creative tension that makes the whole process of liberation and transformation dynamic from the perspective of the grace of God, present and active in the world. The subtitle seeks to place before us, from the beginning, this perspective of the gift and of grace that we wish to accept with a receptive attitude and of the prophetic commitment that invites us to take on an active attitude.

### 1. God, in your “grace”...

Let us start with seeking out the biblical meaning of the term “grace.” If we start from the original Hebrew *hèsed* ( in Greek generally *chàris* or *éleos*), we encounter a source of multiple meanings that carries within it a very enriching “reserve of meaning” to comprehend the actualizing power of the proposed theme.

*Hèsed* can be translated as *goodness, benevolence, favor, grace, gift, gratuity, mercy, friendship, love*. Not too frequently, but with decisive meaning, grace is related with *berit*, reminding one of *solidarity with a practical attitude of covenant* (cf. Exodus 34:5-6). Grace is given freely, and not because of some obligation. It expresses the free and benevolent initiative of the person who offers it. However, in spite of it being free, it is demanding just as all bonds, all friendships, every relationship that intends to be lasting. That is why, in many biblical texts we find *hèsed* connected with and complemented by the term *èmet* (in Greek *aletheia*), which we can translate as *fidelity, firmness, loyalty, truth, veracity*. In this way it highlights the lasting permanence and the veracity of this attitude of covenant.



Through the connection of *hèsed* with *rahamim* (the *mercy of gut level love, maternal tenderness*) we encounter yet another very rich source from which to understand the grace of God. We are not dealing with a unilateral mercy, in the sense of a relationship of dependence in which one strong and powerful being bends over the weaker one. This is a gratuitous attitude in a relationship of mutuality and reciprocity. This gratuitous relationship can have God as the subject or a person.<sup>84</sup> In other words, if it is true on the one hand, that God takes the initiative and is always the protagonist of grace, on the other hand he also empowers the human person, braced by his love, to enter into the same dynamic of grace, of benevolent love (cf. for example, 1 John 4:7-21; Job 15:1-17).

## 2. “... transform” the world !

Here the question about what we believe when we talk about “transformation of the world” becomes important. Language has the strength to simply name the already existing reality, but it also has the strength to create a new reality, in a certain way, present in the dream, in the utopia.

Inherent in the term “transform” is the idea of giving a new shape to the world in which we live here and now. It goes together with the theme of the World Social Forum: “another world is possible,” an alternative world to the world of globalized, hegemonic and excluding capital which has taken over our planet.

Well, without a deeper liberation, that touches the root of the structures of society and the heart of the human being, in the quest for an ethical conversion, we will have few chances of reaching the utopia of the transformed world, of the “other possible world.” In biblical language, transformation has this sense of radical change. Thus, for example, the prophets understood the transformation of the heart as a new possibility for solidarity (cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:26-32), as liberation to a new relationship.

In the time of the Babylonian exile, the people dreamed of a radical change, because they no longer believed in a peripheral transformation. They understood that this “new” would only be possible upon returning to God, the Creator of life, present in his biodiversity in all the cosmos. The prophets, attuned to the new hope of the people, announced that Yahweh would be making something totally new happen, something never seen before (cf. Isaiah 42:9; 43:19; 48:6). In the post-exilic period, Zion would be given a “new name” (cf. Isaiah 62:2) and Yahweh would create “new heavens and a new earth” (cf. Isaiah 65:17; 66:22).

It is within this political-religious context that we situate our text, Isaiah 61:1-4, reread by Jesus of Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30). The question that occurs, then, is about the common ground, that is, the context and the reality that makes it possible for there to be an affinity between one text and the other, to the point of proclaiming with the authority of Jesus of Nazareth: “*Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing*” (Luke 4:21).

## 3. Messianic prophetic rereading: Luke 4:16-30 and Isaiah 61: 1-4 – a fusion of horizons

We are faced with one of the central rereadings of the whole biblical tradition. The community of Luke inaugurates Jesus of Nazareth’s program, presenting him as a prophet anointed by the Spirit of God.

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<sup>84</sup>H.J. STOEBE. *Hesed Güte*. In: E. JENNI and C. WESTERMANN. *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*. Band I, München: Kaiser Verlag, 1984, col. 600-621.

**Luke 4:18-19**

(v. 18) “ The spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release  
to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
(v. 19) to proclaim the year of the  
Lord’s favor.”

**Isaiah 61:1-2**

(v. 1) The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me;  
he has sent me to bring good news to the  
oppressed,  
to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to  
the prisoners;  
(v. 2) to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor,  
and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort  
all who mourn;

Comparing the central themes and the key words of the two texts, we perceive there are lacunas, silences and changes. Jesus of Nazareth, in the strength of the Holy Spirit, makes a new proclamation, a public manifestation of his prophetic messianism. He chooses the messianism of the Servant, who comes to liberate and announce the installment of a qualitatively new time: a time of grace and truth, because he carries within himself the fertile seed of hope and liberation. We can not understand this manifestation of Jesus, according to the community of Luke, as a simple confirmation of Isaiah’s prophecy. In the text of Luke (Luke 4:18-19), more than a simple rereading, we find a new production of meaning of Isaiah’s prophecy.

With the proclamation of Jesus, we find ourselves before a fusion of visions, given the intertwining and the integration of other texts of the same period (exilic and post-exilic) such as, for example, Isaiah 58: 5-6, which links the practice of fasting with the acceptable day of the Lord: “*to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free*”. This “fusion of visions” becomes complete when Jesus, after rolling up the scroll, handing it back to the attendant and sitting down attracts the eyes of all in the synagogue to him (cf. Luke 4:20). *Now begins a new time: “Then he began to say to them, ‘TODAY this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing’*” (Luke 4: 21).

The context from which Luke’s text emerges is no longer the Babylonian exile, but an even worse exile, that makes the people suffer under the dependence of a double captivity: the captivity of the official religion, maintained by the religious authorities, and the political captivity of Herod, encouraged by the Roman Empire and sustained by a well organized system of economic exploitation and a repressive control of the social relations. This system produced a growing impoverishment aside from the innumerable social and religious exclusions. The text refers to the various faces of the excluded: poor, slaves, imprisoned, blind and oppressed. The law of solidarity, sharing and fraternity assumed as the commitment of the covenant with the God of life was no longer being carried out (cf. Deuteronomy 15:1-18).

Faced with this reality, Jesus, the messiah sent by God and anointed by the Spirit, cannot remain neutral. He feels compassion for the people and begins his messianic action deeply committed to the cause of the poor and the excluded. “TODAY” is more than a chronological time, it is a time of grace (*kairós*), that remains always and brings the eternity of God’s dream into human history and into human daily living.

The messianic-prophetic attitude of Jesus, that opted for the poor and the excluded, provoked conflict and a strong reaction of discredit and contempt among his own fellow citizens of Nazareth: “*Is this not the son of Joseph?*” And the initial admiration (cf. Luke 4:22) that they had for the words of Jesus, “full of wisdom,” ended. They wanted to maintain the dichotomy between the quotidian and the extraordinariness of the grace of God, of which they felt themselves participants. The fury increased when they perceived that, through the rereading of Elijah and Elisha, Jesus wanted to point to the delusion in which they found themselves, supported even in their own religious concepts (cf. Luke 4: 23-27). God’s way is contrary to the limitations of the religious clan

and the nationalist pretensions. The prophet chooses those from outside, the excluded, the foreigners. On the same line as Elisha and Elijah, Jesus does not submit himself to the narrow and utilitarian criteria of his fellow citizens; he sees his prophetic mission on a wider horizon that coincides with the will of God who offers his grace to those on the outside.<sup>85</sup>

Jesus confronts the extreme conflict that results in his expulsion from the city and culminates in a trap to eliminate him. But he is free and follows his path, which also is his political-religious option (cf. Luke 9:51). His destination point is Jerusalem which, in the interpretation of Luke's community, has a theological meaning much beyond the geographical meaning. It is part of the decisive project of Jesus who comes from the periphery of Nazareth to unmask the center of power: Jerusalem is the place of confrontation and discernment between death and life, it is the place of the death of the prophets (cf. Luke 13:33) – and Jesus is the prophet anointed by the Spirit (Luke 4:18-19). The path to Jerusalem is Jesus' free and decided option, in the strength of the Spirit (cf. Luke 9:51); it is the path to the place where the Kingdom of God, the promise of the Father and receiving of the Holy Spirit, whose strength transforms the disciples into witnesses, will be carried out. (Acts 1:3-8).

#### 4. The great light of the rereading of Luke for the “TODAY” of all times

In the fragile and temporary “today” of human history is hidden all of the potentiality of the salvific “TODAY” of God. In the strength of the anointment of the Spirit we become contemporary partners of Jesus and receive the convocation and the sending out to collaborate with his grace to liberate the world.

The manifestation of Jesus of Nazareth inaugurates a messianic program, founded on the criteria of the “grace of God”. From there, the grace (*hèsed*) of God necessarily passes through the commitment to all people, especially to those who suffer exclusions of various types and names; to those who, yet today, through the most varied machiavelic ways, do not have access to the goods of this world and are denied the right to a dignified life.

*Let us return to the foundational issue that we put forward at the beginning of this reflection: the eternal temptation to maintain the dichotomy and the dualism between what is part of God's universe and his grace and what is part of the world and its natural, given and ready dynamics – in sum, the dichotomy between the discourse of theology and that of economy.*

*After following this path, principally having Luke and Isaiah as a conductor thread, as representatives of the whole biblical tradition, there remains no doubt that the much desired transformation, or if preferred, liberation of the world will take place in the fertile unity of the grace of God with the small and sometimes fragile gestures of change, in the daily fidelity to the greater project, which wants life in abundance for the whole creation (John 10:10).*

*The prophet Isaiah reminds us that we need to value the small projects of change, because the creative Spirit, the grace of God works within them: “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:19).*

*The community of Luke values each moment and each sign of liberation as the *kairós* of the salvific manifestation of God, as we see in the encounter with Zaccheus. However, it is only after Zaccheus welcomes Jesus into his house and assumes a practical attitude of solidarity and sharing of goods with the poor and returning all that he acquired unjustly through robbing and exploitation, that Jesus proclaims: “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham.” (Luke 19:9, cf. also Luke 2:11; 4:21)*

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<sup>85</sup>R. FABRIS and B. MAGGIONI. *Evangelhos (II)* São Paulo: Loyola, 1992, p. 59-60.

The Good News of Jesus can be read in various texts of the Second Testament in this perspective of vigilance that does not create dichotomies and separations between what is God's and what is the world's. Even in the central message of the Johannine writings, which is often blamed for fomenting this ideology, we read: "*How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?*" (1 John 3:17).

For believing in the generous and faithful possibility of the gratuitous love of God who incarnates himself in human history and involves us, making us his associates and his partners in the covenant, we can cry out: "God, in your grace, transform/liberate the world!" The creative dialectic of the free gift of God and our ethical and prophetic commitment are always implicated.

## VIVER OS SONHOS E SONHAR A VIDA : UM ESTUDO A PARTIR DE ISAÍAS 65,17-25 E AP 21,1-8

Humberto Maiztegui Gonçalves

### 1. O sonho divino da vida contra o caos

A vida é um valor essencial na revelação bíblica. Nos textos sobre a criação, a vida é apresentada como a organização que supera o caos. Conforme Gênesis 1,1, no início “a terra era confusa e vazia”. A este caos se contrapõe a ação criadora e organizadora de Deus: “Deus viu tudo o que tinha feito e achou que estava muito bom” (Gênesis 1,31a). “Bom”, em hebraico *tov*, expressa também felicidade, harmonia, graça e paz. “Bom” é a superação do caos, da “não-vida”, e o pleno estabelecimento de toda a vida (Gênesis 1,4.10.12.18.21.25.31).

É bastante significativo que tanto Isaías 65,17-24 quanto Apocalipse 21,1-8 são construídos sobre o alicerce da teologia da criação. A criação como sentido original e utópico da vida é um excelente lugar teológico para redescobrir a ação graciosa, libertadora e pacificadora de Deus, mesmo quando a realidade histórica aponta na direção oposta.

#### 1.1 Criação como utopia e programa em Isaías 65,17-25

Isaías 56-66 (Trito-Isaías) foi escrito por um grupo de exilados que retornou da Babilônia logo após 538 a.C. com o sonho de construir uma nova Jerusalém, um novo Israel e, a partir destes, uma nova humanidade. Conceberam uma nova humanidade a partir da sua cidade (cf. Isaías 60). No entanto, o sonho de uma nova Jerusalém, de uma nova sociedade e de uma nova criação, já havia começado antes. Dêutero-Isaías (Isaías 40-55) vislumbrava, ainda durante o exílio, a vitória persa contra o Império Babilônico (cf. Isaías 45,1) e anunciava algo “novo” em contraposição ao “antigo” ou “passado” (Isaías 41,22s; 42,9; 43,9.18s; 46,9 e 48,3.6). Também Dêutero-Isaías já anunciava uma nova Jerusalém (54,11-17) e a vitória do SENHOR contra o caos (Isaías 51,9s; 43,16s)<sup>86</sup>.

Portanto, Trito Isaías não começa o sonho do nada. A diferença entre Dêutero-Isaías e Trito-Isaías é que este último sente-se apto a concretizar o sonho. Em Trito-Isaías, o sonho, mais do que desejo, é programa. Quando D. Ferguson se refere ao texto de Isaías 65,17-25 (cf. 66,22), compara-o com o programa do Conselho Mundial de Igrejas (CMI) chamado “Justiça, Paz e Integridade da Criação” (JPIC)<sup>87</sup>. Ele vê no texto mais que uma utopia, ele vislumbra um esboço de programa.

Para G. von Rad, há uma relação entre origem, utopia e projeto no Antigo Testamento: a “criação é uma ação histórica de YHWH”<sup>88</sup>. Também para W. H. Schmidt, a nova criação é, ao mesmo tempo, “memória” e “espera”. Segundo este autor, “o futuro irá devolver a paz perdida da criação”; o futuro divino, assim como a criação, é “muito bom”, pois ele representa a superação da violência e da dor como se fora uma “volta à origem” ou uma *restitutio in integrum*.

Para entender o programa que Trito-Isaías expõe em 65,17-25 deve-se compreender qual “caos” se pretende superar e qual “integridade” se quer alcançar.

#### 1.2 A novidade e caos em Isaías 65,17-25

A menção de “céus e terra”, em Isaías 65,17a, certamente provém de Gênesis 1,1: “No princípio criou Deus os céus e a terra”<sup>89</sup>. Dizer que Deus criara “a terra” teria sido uma afirmação incompleta

<sup>86</sup>Werner H. SCHMIDT. *A fé do Antigo Testamento*, p.153, 255-256.

<sup>87</sup>David A. S. FERGUSON. *The Cosmos and the Creator: an introduction to the theology of creation*, p.2.

<sup>88</sup>Gerhard VON RAD. *Teologia Del Antiguo Testamento*, Vol. I, p.188.

<sup>89</sup>Werner H. SCHMIDT. *A fé do Antigo Testamento*, p.267.

na cosmologia antiga, certamente o seria também na cosmologia moderna. Cada vez resulta mais difícil entender o planeta terra e suas criaturas independentemente do universo que o circunda. Mesmo havendo profundas diferenças entre a cosmologia da antiguidade e a atual, existe a mesma necessidade de considerar a existência como integração de todas as forças que se relacionam dentro de nós, próximo de nós ou mesmo longe de nós.

O uso do termo “novos e nova” junto a “céus e terra”, em Isaías 65,17a, dá a idéia de totalidade e integridade da criação: “Pois eis que (estou) criando céus *novos* e uma terra *nova*”<sup>90</sup>. Esta repetição “novos/nova” pode ser interpretada como ênfase programática.

No entanto, logo após anunciar a novidade da criação original, se menciona aquilo de que “*não* mais se lembrará” (*welo’ tizákarenáh*, Isaías 65,17b) e as coisas que “*não* virão sobre o coração”. A memória da criação é, por sua vez, a contra-memória daquilo que não mais deve ser lembrado ou sentido. O que se busca superar pela memória da criação é o “passado” (*hari’shonôt*). Portanto, o primeiro versículo convida a uma interpretação dialética de cada realidade de vida: cada proposta de uma nova realidade carrega em si a superação de uma outra realidade caótica a ser superada.

Nos versículos 18 a 23, a ação re-criadora é descrita através de alguns elementos programáticos exemplares:

- a. O júbilo e a alegria do povo de Jerusalém, que o SENHOR “está criando”<sup>91</sup> (v.18-19a), farão com que não mais se ouça a voz do pranto e do grito (19b).
- b. Viver uma vida longa sem morte repentina e sem retribuição pelo pecado é não mais ver nenês e crianças morrerem com poucos dias de vida, nem pessoas idosas morrerem por outra causa que não a de já ter vivido muito (v.20).
- c. A felicidade das pessoas que constróem a cidade e as que plantam os campos consiste em usufruir dos frutos do seu trabalho e não mais ver pessoas exploradas e escravizadas construindo sem ter onde morar e plantando sem ter o que comer (v.21).
- d. O esforço ou o trabalho, assim como a ação criadora de Deus, só gerará alegria e felicidade e não mais será inútil (não criadora/transformadora) nem atrairá a desgraça para o que se esforça ou para outras pessoas (v.23).

Alguns comentários sobre Trito-Isaías levantam dúvidas sobre o grau de entusiasmo em torno da proposta de um novo projeto histórico. A profecia parece ter acontecido em meio a tensões entre grupos diferentes: o grupo dos que tinham permanecido em Judá, durante o exílio, o grupo dos sacerdotes sadoquitas que trabalhavam em prol da reconstrução do Templo (entre 520 e 515 a.C.) e um grupo profético com características apocalípticas, que era portador do sonho de uma nova criação<sup>92</sup>. Portanto, este não seria um programa geral e nem sequer majoritário.

Mesmo que a proclamação profética em Trito-Isaías tenha sido expressão de uma minoria, est grupo quis superar barreiras e potencializar a contribuição de todas as pessoas. Estas características aproximam Isaías 65,17-25 do que chamaríamos de um programa ecumênico<sup>93</sup>.

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<sup>90</sup>Tradução própria: *kiy-hineniy bôré’ shámaiym hadashiym vá’árêtz hadasháh* (cf. Bíblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, p.776).

<sup>91</sup>Repete-se aqui o mesmo verbo e tempo verbal que em 17a.

<sup>92</sup>José L. SICRE. *A justiça social nos profetas*, p. 555s. Sicre apresenta a polêmica estabelecida sobre o sentido geral de Trito-Isaías, citando diversos autores: P. E. Bonnard (*Le second Isaïe, son disciple et leur éditeurs. Isaie 40-66*. Paris, 1972), para quem Trito-Isaías pretende unir os grupos conflitantes na construção de uma comunidade de justos; D. Hanson (*The dawn of Apocalyptic*. Philadelphia, 1975; p.32-208), para quem a proposta de Trito-Isaías é totalmente escatológica. Finalmente, o próprio autor entende que, embora se fale em “construir casas e plantar vinhas” (65,21), tem-se a impressão de que estas seriam “criadas pela ação exclusiva de Deus”.

<sup>93</sup>J. Severino CROATTO. *Isaías: a palavra profética e sua releitura hermenêutica*, p.16,21s e 309. Este autor diz que Trito-Isaías contém um “programa de Javé”, presente já no “oráculo programático” de abertura (Is 56,1-8). No paralelismo estrutural do livro apresentado por J. S. Croatto, os capítulos 56-58 aparecem relacionados com os capítulos 65-66.

Os últimos versículos expressam o compromisso de Deus para com seu povo e do povo para com Deus. No versículo 24, Deus se apresenta com um grau tal de compromisso com seu povo que responderá as súplicas ainda antes de serem proferidas! O exemplo da reconciliação entre o lobo e o cordeiro (v.25) não é apenas um bela imagem do futuro, mas é uma retomada do anúncio messiânico de Isaías 11,6. Esta imagem lança o desafio às partes em conflito de encontrarem o caminho da paz. O sonho de Trito-Isaías não é apenas um sonho a ser sonhado, mas um sonho que exige ser concretizado na reconciliação.

A serpente, em Trito-Isaías (65,25b), simboliza a injustiça, o próprio caos a ser superado. Esta serpente lembra o Leviatã, o principal monstro do caos (cf. Isaías 27,1). A unidade proposta é reconciliadora sem deixar de ser comprometida com a paz verdadeira, a paz da criação, a paz da justiça, a paz do gracioso dom da vida.

Finalmente, o texto culmina, no versículo 25b, com mais uma citação da antiga profecia que anuncia a paz local-global no monte santo (cf. Isaías 11,9a). A paz é o “não-caos” representado no binômio “não-maldade” e “não-destruição”. Enfim, o programa da nova criação em Isaías 65,17-25 é um programa ecumênico de graça e paz global, que tem como centro a experiência local.

## 2. “Novos céus e nova terra” na revelação de João

Os novos céus e a nova terra são citados novamente no livro do Apocalipse. Será que neste novo contexto permanecem sendo lema de um programa de transformação? Se assim for, qual seria o caos a ser superado e em que consistiria o “novo”? Para responder esta questão será necessário fazer um levantamento do contexto do surgimento do livro e do papel que a linguagem apocalíptica exerceu neste contexto.

### 2.1 Caos e utopia: perseguição e resistência no fim do século I

O livro de Apocalipse não esconde o seu contexto. Logo no começo do livro, sabe-se que o autor é “irmão e companheiro na tribulação”, prisioneiro ou exilado, “na ilha de Patmos, por causa da Palavra de Deus e do testemunho de Jesus”(Apocalipse 1,9)<sup>94</sup>. João enfrentava as agruras da perseguição romana; mas ele não era o único. A palavra grega *sukoinônos* indica que João habita ou convive com o sofrimento de suas irmãs e irmãos, que também são perseguidas/os.

Jesus é chamado de “primogênito entre os mortos” (1,5a). Este título de Jesus é referência para as pessoas sujeitas a serem vítimas da perseguição e da repressão injusta<sup>95</sup>. Para o prisioneiro ou exilado João, Jesus é a prova de que a morte jamais poderá destruir o projeto de vida. Pelo contrário, a morte, que é a forma mais perversa do caos, também é superada em Jesus Cristo (cf. 20,14a)!

A utopia dos “novos céus” e da “nova terra” refere-se a uma situação histórica vivida por cada comunidade da Ásia Menor que é citada por João, nos capítulos 2 e 3 do livro. De novo: da experiência local emerge a utopia global.

Mesmo que João, no começo da sua profecia, tenha sido elevado ao céu para ganhar uma perspectiva mais ampla da história e da realidade, ele jamais perdeu sua raiz na experiência histórica e concreta das pessoas perseguidas pelo império (cf. Apocalipse 4,1-5). A visão de João não se limita a assegurar a superação do sofrimento apenas nestas sete comunidades perseguidas, mas vislumbra uma superação do caos global. Deus não se limita a castigar os perseguidores das pessoas cristãs, mas a justiça divina quer superar todas as forças globais que promovem a injustiça e a morte.

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<sup>94</sup>Bíblia Sagrada. Ed. Vozes, p.1453.

<sup>95</sup>J.P.M. SWEET. *Revelation*, 24. Para este comentarista, o livro de Apocalipse apresenta um fundo psicológico que indica que os cristãos sofriam nas mãos das autoridades imperiais (cf. Ap 6,9-11; 17,6; 18,20.24; 19,2; 20,4).

## 2.2 O programa de superação do caos da morte em Apocalipse 21,1-8

J.P.M Sweet começa seu comentário sobre este texto perguntando: “Por que um novo céu?”<sup>96</sup>. Esta pergunta é mais pertinente em relação a Apocalipse 21,1-8 do que em relação a Isaías<sup>97</sup>. O texto original faz referência aos “céus” (sempre plural) como parte da totalidade universal (cf. Genesis 1,1). Para a mente oriental antiga, era impossível imaginar uma nova terra sem novos céus. Mas, no caso de Apocalipse, a palavra “céu” é usada com outra conotação.

Em Apocalipse 21,1-8, a palavra céu é usada em três formas diferentes:

- a. 21a: “Eis que faço céu novo” (*Kai eidon ouranon kainon*).
- b. 21b: “O primeiro céu” (*prôtos ouranos*).
- c. 22a: “Jerusalém nova faço descer do céu, de junto de Deus” (*Ierusalem kainen eidon katabionousan ek tou ouranou apo tou Teou*).

Portanto, o texto confronta o “novo céu” com o “primeiro céu”; aquele, por sua vez, apresenta o céu como o lugar onde se encontra Deus e a nova Jerusalém. Seria o céu divino o mesmo que o novo céu? O que seria, então, o primeiro céu?

Segundo A. Pohl, a afirmativa da superação do primeiro ou antigo céu, em 1b, deve ser entendida à luz de 21,4b-5: “nunca mais haverá morte, nem luto, nem clamor, e nem dor haverá mais. Sim! As coisas antigas se foram! (...) Eis que faço novas todas as coisas”<sup>98</sup>.

Para João, a injustiça da terra também tinha sua versão celestial. Esse tipo de céu antigo deve, portanto, ser superado!<sup>99</sup>. Este céu antigo era preenchido pelos opressores e com falsas utopias destinadas a enganar a humanidade. Neste “primeiro céu” habitavam as falsas idéias da guerra, do mercado, da sobrevivência do mais forte, que aparecem representadas nos quatro cavaleiros (Apocalipse 6,1-8).

O meio ambiente foi muitas vezes destruído em nome dos ideais do “progresso”. Como haverá um novo céu se ainda há mentes e corações que sucumbem aos ideais da dominação e da guerra?

A nova terra tem como ponto de partida uma nova encarnação. A vinda de Jesus não é vista como a de um rei poderoso mas como a de um companheiro acampado no meio do seu povo (Apocalipse 21,3b).

A nova aliança é expressa de duas formas:

- a. “Ele morará com eles, eles serão seu povo”.
- b. “Eu serei seu deus e ele será meu filho”.

A ternura solidária da aliança é desenhada em gestos concretos como enxugar as lágrimas e dar a água da vida (Apocalipse 21,6b). A atitude carinhosa de Deus para com o seu povo perseguido contrasta com a dureza do julgamento contra covardes (*deilois*), descrentes (*apístois*), corruptos (*ebdelumenois*), assassinos (*foneusin*), imorais (*pornoi*), magos (*farmakois*), idólatras (*eidolatrais*) e todos os mentirosos (*pseudesin*) (Apocalipse 21,8).

A lista descreve a ação repressiva do Império Romano. A. Pohl traduz “covardes” como “traidores”, o que mostra a estratégia da repressão, que, antes do extermínio, buscava provocar a traição e a apostasia<sup>100</sup>.

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<sup>96</sup>J.P.M. SWEET. *Revelation*, 296.

<sup>97</sup>Adolf POHL. *Apocalipse de João II*, p.253.

<sup>98</sup>Bíblia de Jerusalém, p.2326.

<sup>99</sup>J.P.M. SWEET. *Revelation*, 16. Este autor afirma que “heaven represents not a different world (...) heaven contains the spiritual powers behind all things in our world, both evil and good”.

<sup>100</sup>J.P.M. SWEET. *Revelation*, 29. Segundo este autor, esta foi a estratégia de Plínio e Domiciano.



Os descrentes não são o que hoje chamaríamos de “ateus”. Os próprios cristãos eram acusados de “ateísmo” por não seguirem a “religião do estado”. Este “ateísmo” cristão foi considerado um perigo para a sociedade romana, motivando a repressão contra o projeto de vida representado por estas pessoas (cf. Atos 19,34-40)<sup>101</sup>. No texto de Apocalipse 21.8, os *apístois*, literalmente “não crentes”, eram as pessoas que, dominadas pela crença na PAX romana ou por defenderem interesses egoístas, não consideravam possível a concretização do projeto divino do “novo céu e da nova terra”. Portanto, a questão não pode ser resumida a “crer em Deus” ou “não crer em Deus”, mas trata-se de “participar” ou “não participar” do projeto divino de vida para toda a humanidade.

A corrupção é um método tradicional e milenar usado pelo poder econômico. Este método deve ter sido freqüentemente utilizado contra o programa do novo céu e da nova terra. Quem corrompe é quem tem a possibilidade de trocar favores pessoais em detrimento do bem-estar geral. Quem se deixa corromper, não mais é verdadeiramente humano, tornando-se mais uma mercadoria do sistema dominante.

O assassinio é a pior forma de covardia. O assassinio era uma política de estado, tornando-se intencional e sistemático. É um ato militante contra a vida.

As últimas três categorias – “imorais” ou “hediondos”, “magos” ou “feiticeiros” e idólatras – completam o quadro da perseguição imperial. As pessoas assim qualificadas constituem o braço ideológico que promove a inversão de valores.

O “novo céu e a nova terra”, mais do que mera utopia, tornam-se um critério de discernimento. Todas as pessoas podem participar deste programa de transformação global, mas devem identificar e denunciar localmente os mecanismos anti-vida. João parece ter compreendido que sua missão, em tempos de perseguição, era a de fortalecer o processo de consciência transformadora, através da fé em Jesus Cristo, como inaugurador de um novo céu e uma nova terra.

### **3. “Novo céu e nova terra”: um programa possível**

O livro de Trito Isaías e o Apocalipse de João propõem uma atitude criativa para superar do caos. O caos anti-vida não se nos apresenta como uma idéia, mas como uma experiência de exílio, de prisão, de repressão, de morte, de destruição. O caos não se encontra distante de nós, pois pode ser visto e sentido no local onde vivemos.

A fé, em ambos casos, serviu de amplificador das práticas locais de superação do caos anti-vida, impedindo que o sofrimento abafasse a esperança. É na militância transformadora, em nível local, que se enraíza o sonho global. É a partir da experiência local que se pode ver e acreditar na ação divina, promotora da empatia solidária, e na nova aliança que cria uma realidade totalmente nova e perfeitamente harmônica. No novo tempo, a vida reinará soberana para a felicidade de todas as criaturas no céu e na terra e para a glória de Deus companheiro e consolador do seu povo sofredor.

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<sup>101</sup>Idem, p. 31.

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## LIVING THE DREAMS AND DREAMING A LIFE : A STUDY BASED ON ISAIAH 65:17-25 AND REVELATION 21:1-8

Humberto Maiztegui Gonçalves

### 1. The divine dream of life against chaos

Life is an essential value in biblical revelation. In the texts on creation, life is presented as the organization that overcomes chaos. According to Genesis 1:1, in the beginning “the earth was confused and empty”. Counteracting this chaos is God’s creative and organizational action. “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31a). “Good”, in Hebrew *tov*, expresses also joy, harmony, grace and peace. “Good” is the overcoming of chaos, of the “no-life”, and the full establishment of all of life (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31).

It is quite significant that both Isaiah 65:17-24 and Revelation 21:1-8 are constructed on the foundation of creation theology. Creation as the original and utopic meaning of life is an excellent theological place to rediscover the gracious, liberating and peacemaking action of God, even when the historical reality points toward the opposite direction.

#### 1.1 Creation as utopia and a program in Isaiah 65:17-25

Isaiah 56-66 (Trito-Isaiah) was written by a group of exiled people who had returned from Babylon soon after 538 B.C. with the dream of building a new Jerusalem, a new Israel and founded on these, a new humanity. They conceived of a new humanity based on their city (cf. Isaiah 60). However, the dream of a new Jerusalem, of a new society and of a new creation had already begun before. Deutero-Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55) visualized, even during the exile, the Persian victory over the Babylonian empire (cf. Isaiah 45:1) and announced something “new” counteracting the “old” or “what was past” (Isaiah 41: 22 ff; 42:9; 43:9, 18 ff; 46:9 and 48:3, 6). Deutero-Isaiah also announced a new Jerusalem (54:11-17) and the victory of the LORD against the chaos (Isaiah 51: 9 ff; 43:16 ff).<sup>102</sup>

Therefore, Trito-Isaiah does not begin the dream from nothing. The difference between Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah is that the latter feels able to make the dream come true. In Trito-Isaiah, the dream, more than a wish, is a program. When D. Ferguson refers to the text of Isaiah 65:17-25 (cf. 66:22), he compares it to the program of the World Council of Churches (WCC) called “Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation” (JPIC).<sup>103</sup> He sees in the text more than a utopia, he visualizes an outline for a program.

For G. von Rad, there is a relation between origin, utopia and project in the Old Testament: “creation is a historical action of YHWH”.<sup>104</sup> For W. H. Schmidt, the new creation is at the same time, “memory” and “waiting.” According to this author, “the future will give back the lost peace of the creation”; the divine future, like the creation, is “very good,” because it represents the overcoming of violence and pain as if it were “the return to the origins” or a *restitutio in integrum*.

To understand the program that Trito-Isaiah presents in 65:17-25 one needs to understand which “chaos” is to be overcome and which “wholeness” is to be reached.

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<sup>102</sup>Werner H. SCHMIDT. *A fé do Antigo Testamento*, p. 153, 255-256.

<sup>103</sup>David A. S. FERGUSON. *The Cosmos and the Creator: an introduction to the theology of creation*, p.2.

<sup>104</sup>Gerhard VON RAD, *Teologia del Antigo Testamento*, Vol. I, p. 188.

## 1.2 The novelty and chaos in Isaiah 65:17-25

The mention of “heavens and earth” in Isaiah 65:17a, certainly comes from Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”<sup>105</sup> To say that God had created “the earth” would have been an incomplete affirmation in the ancient cosmology, it certainly would also be in modern cosmology. It is ever more difficult to understand the planet earth and its creatures independent of the universe that surrounds it. Even though there are profound differences between the ancient and the current cosmology, there exists the same need to consider existence as the integration of all the forces that relate with each other, be they within us, close to us or even distant from us.

The use of the term “new” together with “heavens and earth,” in Isaiah 65: 17a gives an idea of the totality and integrity of creation: “For behold, I am creating *new* heavens and a *new* earth.”<sup>106</sup> This repetition “new/new” can be interpreted as a programmatic emphasis.

However, soon after announcing the newness of the original creation, that which “will *no longer* be remembered” (*welo’ tizákarenáh*, Isaiah 65:17b), the things which “will *no longer* come to the heart” are mentioned. The memory of creation, therefore, is the counter-memory of that which must no longer be remembered or felt. One seeks to overcome the “past” (*hari’shonôl*) through the memory of the creation. Therefore, the first verse calls for a dialectical interpretation of each reality of life: each proposal of a new reality carries within it the overcoming of another chaotic reality that must be overcome.

In the verses 18 and 23, the re-creating action is described through some exemplary programmatic elements:

- a. The rejoicing and joy of the people of Jerusalem, which the LORD “is creating”<sup>107</sup> (v. 18-19a), will cause the voice of weeping and crying out (19b) to no longer be heard.
- b. Live a long life without a sudden death and without retribution for sin is to no longer see babies and children dying with only a few days of life, nor aged people dying for any other reason than that they’ve already lived a lot (v. 20).
- c. The joy of the people who build the city and those who plant the fields consists in being able to enjoy the fruits of their labor and no longer see people exploited and enslaved building without having a place to live or planting without having anything to eat (v. 21).
- d. The effort or the work, just as the creative action of God, will only generate joy and happiness and will no longer be useless (non-creating/transforming), nor will it attract disgrace to the person who is making the effort or to other persons (v. 23).

Some commentaries on Trito-Isaiah raise doubts as to the level of enthusiasm that existed about the proposal of a new historical project. The prophecy seemed to have happened in the midst of tensions among different groups: the group that had remained in Judah during the exile, the group of Saducee priests who worked for the reconstruction of the Temple (between 520 and 515 B.C.) and a prophetic group with apocalyptic characteristics, which was the bearer of the dream of a new creation.<sup>108</sup> Therefore this would not be a general program nor even a program of the majority.

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<sup>105</sup>Werner H. SCHMIDT. *A fé do Antigo Testamento*, p. 267.

<sup>106</sup>Translation done by author: *kiy-hineniy bôré’ shámaiym hadashiym vá’árêtz hadasháh* (cf. Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, p.776).

<sup>107</sup>Here the same verb and verbal time that appears in 17a is repeated.

<sup>108</sup>José L. SICRE. *A justiça social nos profetas*, p. 555 f. Sicre presents the established polemic about the general meaning of Trito-Isaiah, citing various authors: P.E. Bonnard (*le second Isaïe, son disciple et leur éditeurs. Isaïe 40-66*. Paris, 1972), to whom Trito-Isaiah intends to unite the conflicting groups in the construction of a community of just people; D. Hanson (*Dawn of Apocalyptic*. Philadelphia, 1975; p. 32-208), to whom the proposal of Trito-Isaiah seems

Even if the prophetic proclamation in Trito-Isaiah had been an expression of a minority, this group wished to overcome barriers and potentialize the contribution of all the people. These characteristics would approximate Isaiah 65:17-25 to what we would call an ecumenical program.<sup>109</sup>

The last verses express God's commitment to his people and of the people toward God. In verse 24, God presents such a level of commitment to his people that he will answer the petitions before they are even proffered! The example of the reconciliation between the wolf and the lamb (v.25) is not only a beautiful image of the future, but a retake on the messianic announcement of Is 11:6. This image places the challenge to the parts in conflict to find the path to peace. The dream of Trito-Isaiah is not only a dream to be dreamed, but a dream that demands fulfillment through reconciliation.

The serpent in Trito-Isaiah (65:25b) symbolizes injustice, chaos itself which must be overcome. This serpent reminds us of the Leviathan, the main monster of chaos (cf. Isaiah 27:1). The proposed unit is reconciliatory without giving up being committed to true peace, the peace of the creation, the peace of justice, the peace of the gracious gift of life.

Finally, the text culminates, in verse 25b, with one more citation of the ancient prophecy that announces the local-global peace on the holy mountain (cf. Isaiah 11:9a). Peace is "non-chaos" represented by the binomial "no-evil" and "no destruction". In the end, the program of the new creation in Isaiah 65:17-25 is an ecumenical program of grace and global peace, that has as its center the local experience.

## 2. "New heaven and new earth" in the revelation of John

The new heaven and the new earth are once again cited in the book of Revelation. Could it be that in this new context they continue to be the motto of a program of transformation? If that were the case, what would be the chaos to be overcome and what would constitute the "new"? To answer this question it will be necessary to search into the context of when this book came forth and what role the apocalyptic language played in this context.

### 2.1 Chaos and utopia: persecution and resistance at the end of the first century

The book of Revelation does not hide its context. Right in the beginning of the book, one knows that the author is "brother and companion in the tribulation," prisoner or exiled, "on the island of Patmos, because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (Revelation 1:9).<sup>110</sup> John was confronting the harshness of the Roman persecution; but he was not the only one. The Greek word *sukoinônos* indicates that John lives with the suffering of his sisters and brothers who are also being persecuted.

Jesus is called the "firstborn of the dead" (1:5a). This title of Jesus is a reference for the people who are subject to be victims of persecution and of unjust repression.<sup>111</sup> For the imprisoned or exiled John, Jesus is the proof that death will never be able to destroy the project of life. On the contrary, death, which is the most perverse form of chaos, is also overcome by Jesus Christ (cf. 20:14a)!

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totally eschatological. Finally, the author himself understands that, although there is talk of "building houses and planting vineyards" (65:21), the impression one has is that these would be "created by the exclusive action of God."

<sup>109</sup>J. Severino CROATTO. *Isaiás: a palavra profética e sua releitura hermenêutica*, p. 16, 21f. and 309. This author says that Trito-Isaiah contains "Iahweh's program" already present in the "programmatic oracle" at the opening (Is 56:1-8). In the structural parallelism of the book presented by J. S. Croatto, chapters 56-58 seem related to chapters 65-66.

<sup>110</sup>The Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version. Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1989. p. 995.

<sup>111</sup>J. P. M. SWEET. *Revelation*, 24. For this commentator, the book of Revelation presents a psychological background that indicates that the Christians suffered in the hands of the imperial authorities (cf. Rev 6:9-11; 17:6; 18:20, 24; 19:2; 20:4)

The utopia of the “new heaven” and the “new earth” refers to a historical situation experienced by each community of Asia Minor that is cited by John in chapters 2 and 3 of the book. Once again: from the local experience emerges the global utopia.

Even if John, in the beginning of his prophecy, was lifted to heaven to gain a wider perspective of history and reality, he never lost his roots in the historical and concrete experience of the people who were persecuted by the empire (cf. Revelation 4:1-5). John’s vision is not limited to assuring that the suffering of these seven persecuted communities will be overcome, but visualizes overcoming global chaos. God does not limit himself to punishing the persecutors of Christian people; divine justice aims at overcoming all the global forces that promote injustice and death.

## 2.2 The program of overcoming chaos of death in Revelation 21:1-8

J.P.M. Sweet begins his commentary on this text asking: “Why a new heaven?”<sup>112</sup> This question is more pertinent in relation to Revelation 21:1-8 than to Isaiah.<sup>113</sup> The original text refers to the “heavens” (always plural) as part of the universal totality (cf. Genesis 1:1). It was impossible for the ancient oriental mind to imagine a new earth without new heavens. But, in the case of Revelation, the word “heaven” is used with a different connotation.

In Revelation 21:1-8, the word heaven is used in three different ways:

- a. 21 a: “Then I saw a new heaven” (*Kai eidon ouranon kainon*).
- b. 21 b: “The first heaven” (*prôtos ouranos*).
- c. 22 a: “And I saw ... the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God” (*Ierusalemkainen eidon katabionusan ek tou ouranou apo tou Teou*).

Therefore the text confronts the “new heaven” with the “first heaven,” which, in its turn, presents heaven as the place where one finds God and the new Jerusalem. Could the divine heaven be the same as the new heaven? What then, would be the first heaven?

According to A. Pohl, the affirmation of overcoming the first or old heaven in 1b must be understood in the light of 21:4b-5: “death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away. (...) See, I am making all things new.”<sup>114</sup>

For John, the injustice of the earth also had its celestial version. This type of old heaven must, therefore, be overcome!<sup>115</sup> This old heaven was filled with oppressors and with false utopias aimed at tricking humanity. This “first heaven” was inhabited by false ideas about war, about the market, about the survival of the fittest, which appeared represented by the four horsemen (Revelation 6:1-8).

The environment was often destroyed in the name of the ideals of “progress.” How will there be a new heaven if there are still minds and hearts that succumb to the ideals of domination and war?

The new earth has as its starting point a new incarnation. The coming of Jesus is not seen as one of a powerful king but one of a companion camping among his people (Revelation 21:3b). The new covenant is expressed in two ways:

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<sup>112</sup>J.P.M. SWEET. *Revelation*, p. 296.

<sup>113</sup>Adolf POHL. *Apocalipse de João II*, p. 253.

<sup>114</sup>The Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version. p. 1008.

<sup>115</sup>J.P.M. SWEET. *Revelation*, 16. This author affirms that “heaven represents not a different world (...) heaven contains the spiritual powers behind all things in our world, both evil and good”.

- a. “He will dwell with them, they will be his people.”
- b. “I will be their God and they will be my children.”

The solidary tenderness of the covenant is drawn out in concrete gestures such as wiping the tears and giving the water of life (Revelation 21:6b). God’s kind attitude with his persecuted people contrasts with the harshness of the judgment against the cowards (*deilois*), the unbelieving (*apístois*), the corrupt (*ebdelumenois*), the murderers (*foneusin*), the fornicators (*pornoí*), the sorcerers (*farmakois*), the idolaters (*eidolatrais*) and all the liars (*pseudessin*) (Revelation 21:8).

The list describes the repressive action of the Roman Empire. A. Pohl translates “cowards” as “traitors,” which points out the strategy of the repression, which, before exterminating, sought to provoke betrayal and apostasy.<sup>116</sup>

The unbelievers were not what we would call today the “atheists.” The Christians themselves were accused of “atheism” for not following the “state religion.” This Christian “atheism” was considered a danger for the Roman society, motivating the repression against the life project represented by these people (cf. Acts 19:34-40).<sup>117</sup> In the text of Revelation 21:8, the *apístois*, literally “unbelievers,” were those people who, dominated by the belief in the Roman PAX or in defense of selfish interests, did not consider the realization of the divine project of “new heaven and new earth” to be a possibility. Therefore the issue can not be summarized in “believing in God” or “not believing in God” but it deals with “participating” or “not participating” in the divine project of life for all humanity.

Corruption is a traditional and millenary method used by the economic power. This method must have been often used against the program of the new heaven and new earth. The person who corrupts is that person who has the possibility of exchanging personal favors in detriment of the general well-being. The person who lets him/herself be corrupted is no longer truly human, becoming one more piece of merchandise in the dominant system.

Murder is the worst form of cowardice. Murder was a state policy, becoming intentional and systematic. It is a militant act against life.

The last three categories - “fornicators” or “perverted,” “magi” or “sorcerers” and “idolaters” - complete the scene of imperial persecution. The persons thus qualified constitute the ideological force that promotes the inversion of values.

The “new heaven and the new earth,” more than a mere utopia, become a criterion for discernment. All people may participate in this program of global transformation, but they must identify and denounce locally the anti-life mechanisms. John seems to have understood that his mission, in times of persecution, was to strengthen the process of transforming conscience, through the faith in Jesus Christ as the inaugurator of a new heaven and a new earth.

### **3. “New heaven and new earth”: a possible program**

The book of Trito-Isaiah and the Revelation of John propose a creative attitude to overcome chaos. The anti-life chaos does not present itself to us as an idea, but as an experience of exile, of prison, or repression, of death, of destruction. Chaos is not found far from us because it can be seen and felt in the place where we live.

The faith in both cases, served to amplify the local practices of overcoming the anti-life chaos, preventing suffering from suffocating hope. It is in the transforming militancy, on a local level, that the global dream takes root. It is from the local experience that one can see and believe in the divine

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<sup>116</sup>J.P.M. SWEET. *Revelation*, 29. According to this author, this was the strategy used by Plinius and Domician.

<sup>117</sup>Idem, p. 31.

action, promoter of solidary empathy and a new alliance that creates a totally new and perfectly harmonious reality. In the new time, life will reign sovereign to the joy of all the creatures in the heavens and on earth and to the glory of God, the companion and consoler of his suffering people.

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**A VIDA CRISTÃ SEGUNDO A GRAÇA E A COMUNIDADE  
COMO CARTA VIVA  
DESAFIOS ECLESIOLOGICOS A PARTIR DE 2 CORÍNTIOS**

**Marga Janete Ströher**

*Venha teu reino, Senhor!  
A festa da vida recria.*

*A nossa espera e ardor*

*Transforma em plena alegria  
A nossa espera e ardor  
Transforma em plena alegria!<sup>118</sup>*

Paulo usa muitas imagens e simbologias nessa carta.<sup>119</sup> Fala do perfume do conhecimento de Deus, do bom perfume de Cristo, de cheiros e de aromas – cheiro de morte para a morte, aroma da vida para a vida; do conhecimento de Deus que está em vasos de barro, dos crentes como santuário do Deus vivente, de espelhos, de cartas, de pedras; da sementeira e da semente, do pão. Ele expressa seus sentimentos, escreve sobre suas angústias, perseguições, insegurança, saudade, perseverança, alegria. E usa de muita franqueza ou de ousadia com os membros da comunidade (7,4). Admite a dureza de suas palavras, por vezes expressas em cartas anteriores, mas mostra-se afetuoso e humilde, abrindo seu coração e falando de seus sentimentos mais íntimos, admitindo as próprias lágrimas em virtude dos sofrimentos de seu apostolado. “Pois, no meio de muita aflição e angústia de coração, vos escrevi, com muitas lágrimas, não para que ficásseis entristecidos, mas para que conhecésseis o amor que abundantemente tenho por vós” (2,4). Ao lado de uma linguagem poética, também faz uso freqüente de termos forenses ou oficiais, como embaixador, justiça, audiência, triunfo<sup>120</sup> (2,4; também em 1 Coríntios 4,9), indicando, assim, aspectos do contexto sócio-político em que vive.

Nesse ensaio proponho-me a trabalhar três aspectos relevantes dessa carta: a *vida cristã segundo a graça*, a *comunidade como carta viva* e os respectivos *desafios para a Igreja*.

### **1. A vida cristã segundo a graça**

A carta apresenta os temas da graça, da reconciliação, do serviço aos pobres e do apostolado como centrais. A graça é colocada como eixo de toda a carta.<sup>121</sup>

**A graça como convocação para nova vida** : A graça oferecida por Deus torna-se um desafio para uma nova vida (3,18; 5,17). Uma nova realidade se faz presente aos cristãos e cristãs, que são desafiados a uma transformação, uma metamorfose, como é mencionado em 3,18: “Mas todos nós,

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<sup>118</sup>Da canção brasileira “Jesus Cristo, esperança do mundo”, de Silvio Meincke, Edmundo Reinhardt e João Gottinari.

<sup>119</sup>Há um grande debate na pesquisa bíblica sobre a composição da Segunda Carta aos Coríntios, se representa uma unidade ou se são mais cartas que compõem esse escrito paulino. Há autores, como Ben Whiterington III, que consideram o texto uma unidade literária, inclusive com base em análise retórica. Não pretendo fazer aqui uma discussão sobre as diversas teses sobre a composição da carta.

<sup>120</sup>Referência ao Triunfo Romano, procissão de entrada solene em Roma, que, além da homenagem ao exército vitorioso e da exibição pública das armas e do espólio de guerra, inclusive os prisioneiros de guerra, incluía um ato cultural com sacrifício dedicado normalmente a Júpiter pela vitória alcançada. Confirma Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates Romanae*, 2.3; 8.67,9f e Plutarch, *Romulus*, 25.4. Confirma também Ben Whiterington III, *Conflict & Community in Corinth*. A Socio-rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians. Grand Rapids/ Carlisle : Eerdmans/Paternoster Press, 1995.

<sup>121</sup>Depois de Romanos, 2 Coríntios é o texto paulino em que mais se menciona a palavra graça.

com o rosto desvendados, refletindo a glória do Senhor, somos transformados de glória em glória, na mesma imagem, como pelo Espírito do Senhor.”

*A graça como desafio para a diaconia da reconciliação: A reconciliação é colocada como um serviço, um ministério (5,18-20). Deus reconciliou as pessoas consigo mesmo através de Jesus Cristo e concedeu a diaconia da reconciliação (5,18) e a palavra da reconciliação (5,19). Percebe-se que a reconciliação está no plano das funções comunitárias mais importantes das primeiras comunidades cristãs: a diaconia e a palavra. Essa reconciliação refere-se a Deus, mas também às pessoas próximas, às relações pessoais e comunitárias.*

**A graça é motivação para a coleta e partilha com os mais pobres:** A preocupação de Paulo com os pobres da Judéia o faz empenhar-se numa coleta.<sup>122</sup> Essa coleta, pelo menos em Corinto, é organizada e administrada por Tito. Paulo lembra que os irmãos e as irmãs da Macedônia já fizeram uma oferta generosa e desafiam a comunidade de Corinto ao mesmo: “pedindo-nos com muita insistência a graça e a comunhão dessa diaconia (serviço), que se fazia para com os santos” (8,4). Ao propor a coleta, levanta argumentos em favor do desprendimento dos membros da comunidade. A abundância da fé e da palavra, do saber, do cuidado e do amor tem como consequência a abundância na graça (8,7), que inclui a graça da partilha: “E Deus é poderoso para tornar abundante em vós toda graça, a fim de que, tendo sempre, em tudo, toda suficiência, superabundeis em toda boa obra, como está escrito, distribuiu, deu aos pobres, sua justiça permanece para sempre” (9,8; cf 8,7.9).

**A graça como fundamento para o apostolado:** A graça é motivação e fundamento para o apostolado e o testemunho (1,12). O argumento mais relevante é o da graça que sustenta espiritualmente o apóstolo. No texto de 12,6-10, Paulo faz uma confissão sobre o poder. Sua perspectiva é a da simultaneidade da força e da fraqueza, da graça e do poder, do prazer e do sofrimento que faz parte do apostolado. “E disse-me: A minha graça te basta, porque o poder se aperfeiçoa na fraqueza. De boa vontade, pois, me gloriarei nas minhas fraquezas, para que em mim habite o poder de Cristo” (2 Coríntios 12,9)

## 2. A comunidade como carta viva

Dentro da Segunda Carta aos Coríntios há um trecho que pode ser visto como uma carta dentro da carta : 2 Coríntios 3,1-6. Paulo questiona a comunidade sobre a necessidade de cartas de recomendação.

A emissão de cartas de recomendação era prática comum, no mundo greco-romano, entre pessoas de maior influência. Por ocasião de viagens, era comum pessoas terem em mãos cartas de recomendação ou salvo conduto para assegurar segurança e hospedagem. Segurança e hospitalidade em viagens e deslocamentos eram privilégio de poucos, daqueles que dispunham de uma rede de patrocínio e amizade, que era assegurada, com frequência, através de cartas de recomendação. Autoridades ou pessoas de influência econômica e política, filósofos reconhecidos, que tinham uma rede de parentesco e amigos ou reconhecimento público, emitiam tais cartas para seus conhecidos, amigos e protegidos.

Pessoas cristãs que tinham reconhecimento nas comunidades, pelo seu trabalho missionário, também adotavam a prática da recomendação através de cartas. “As cartas de recomendação revelam o fato de que essas vantagens domésticas agora se estendiam a toda a família de fé, cujos membros são aceitos na base de confiança, apesar de completamente estranhos.”<sup>123</sup> Assim, Apolo recebe uma carta de Priscila e Áquila para que os irmãos e irmãs da Acaia possam recebê-lo para o trabalho

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<sup>122</sup>A coleta foi realizada na Macedônia, Galácia, Ásia e Acaia.

<sup>123</sup>Cf. Edwin JUDGE, *The conversion of Rome: Ancient Sources of modern social tensions: Die Sozialstruktur christlicher Gruppen im ersten Jahrhundert*. Traduzido por Hilde Nordsieck. Wuppertal: Brockhaus Verlag, 1964, p. 7, apud Wayne A. MEEKS, *Os primeiros cristãos urbanos*. São Paulo: Paulus, 1996, p. 170.

missionário. E Paulo recomenda Febe para a comunidade de Roma. É possível que ela esteja viajando a Roma como portadora da Carta aos Romanos (Romanos 16,1). Tal prática, no entanto, não era comum entre os cristãos. Nem todas as pessoas possuíam tais cartas. A hospitalidade não dependia do instrumento legal da carta de recomendação. A acolhida e a hospitalidade dependiam da confiança mútua entre a missionária e a comunidade de fé a ser visitada.

A partir disso, podemos dizer que a missão cresce pela hospitalidade. A casa, como local do nascimento da Igreja Cristã, era fundamental tanto para consolidar um núcleo de fé num determinado lugar quanto para a expansão do movimento cristão. O trabalho missionário e o crescimento das primeiras comunidades cristãs dependiam da acolhida, da hospitalidade e do apoio das comunidades centradas nas famílias, que constituíam as *igrejas na casa*. Essas comunidades tinham suas redes de relações – como o parentesco, a amizade ou outros laços sociais –, não a partir de instrumentos legais. A confiança mútua é a garantia de hospitalidade.

Paulo escreve para pessoas que eventualmente gostariam de obter uma carta de recomendação: “Precisamos, como alguns, de cartas de recomendação para vocês ou de vocês?” (2 Coríntios 3,1). Paulo afirma que não é necessária tal carta: “Vocês são a nossa carta escrita em nossos corações, conhecida e lida por todas as pessoas” (2 Coríntios 3,2). A comunidade é carta viva. É carta de Cristo, não escrita com tinta, mas com o espírito de Deus, não em tábuas de pedra, mas nos corações (3,3). A confiança mútua vem daí, da presença de Cristo na comunidade e na pessoa da missionária ou do missionário.

A letra das cartas de recomendação está assegurada pela influência econômica de pessoas ricas, com poder político, ou seja, pessoas que prosperavam com injustiça e pela escravidão de muita gente por todo o Império Romano. Para esse segmento social, cartas de recomendação desempenhavam a função de pacto social. Ricos e poderosos estavam sempre protegidos, pois a hospitalidade lhes estava assegurada.

Paulo rejeita esta prerrogativa. O Espírito faz brotar a vida, traz nova vida para pessoas, busca a vida de toda a criação; é “aroma de vida para a vida” (2 Coríntios 2,16). A confiança, a amizade, a acolhida, a hospitalidade acontecem e são proporcionadas com base na fé em Cristo, não na suficiência ou na prerrogativa humana. Desloca-se o eixo de condições e de proteção legal para a segurança com base na confiança produzida pelo próprio Espírito. A força do Espírito sustenta a Igreja. Mais do que isso, sustenta o compromisso ético e a solidariedade das igrejas para com os irmãos e irmãs menos favorecidos.

Na seqüência dessa reflexão, é plausível e elucidativo o texto sobre o apostolado, no capítulo 12, a partir de 2 3 Coríntios, 1-6: o apóstolo não pode ter prerrogativas do poder socioeconômico e político, mas confiar na graça oferecida por Cristo e na hospitalidade comunitária.

### 3. Desafios para a igreja

A Igreja Cristã, em seu início, fora concebida como soma de diversos dons, carismas, potencialidades e lideranças, e foi enriquecida pela diversidade de etnias, categorias sociais, mulheres e homens e, além disso, organizada localmente e ancorada teologicamente no acompanhamento e na presença apostólica. A Igreja nasce plural e inclusiva. Isso não evita conflitos nem a existência de diferentes compreensões de vivência da fé. Comunidades, como a de Corinto, passavam por conflitos gerados pela diversidade cultural e pelas desigualdades sociais. Visões diferenciadas do saber e modos distintos do exercício do poder podiam colocar em risco a vida comunitária ou o seu crescimento. Com frequência, a autoridade e o poder na Igreja foram e são compreendidos como *poder sobre* outras pessoas, carecendo da experiência de saberes partilhados e poderes compartilhados.

A igreja, ao longo da história, não raramente assumiu as prerrogativas de poder e status; é investida e se investe de arrogância, auto-suficiência, preocupada com a manutenção institucional e das hierarquias, tornando-se omissa diante das necessidades do povo e no cuidado aos pobres. O

apóstolo nos desafia, fazendo uma inversão teológica e epistemológica: o poder se manifesta na fraqueza, a legitimidade do apostolado está nos fracos e a prerrogativa reside na graça. Essa graça é graça transformadora, que transforma pessoas e relações, que transforma o mundo.

Se a Igreja se tornou uma das principais forças de repressão e de controle, violando os direitos humanos, justificando sexismo, escravidão, racismo, colonialismo e o belicismo, também no interior da própria Igreja, ou ao lado dela, inúmeras pessoas mantiveram a tradição de Igreja libertadora. Mulheres e homens, ao longo da história, individualmente ou em movimentos coletivos de resistência, se colocaram e se colocam a favor de reformas e mudanças, resgatando constantemente os princípios libertadores que orientaram a fé e a experiência das primeiras comunidades cristãs. Antes de procurar *status* e poder, através da criação e manutenção de cargos eclesiais, a Igreja é desafiada a procurar o serviço a todas as pessoas e a cidadania teológico-religiosa destas.

Jesus chamou mulheres e homens da margem e das fronteiras da sociedade, de dentro das casas e da beira de caminhos, não para comporem uma classe de serventes religiosos; antes, potencializou todas essas pessoas a serem crentes ativas e auto-determinadas. E convidou quem estava no topo da pirâmide social a descer, deslocar-se e colocar-se a serviço das pessoas nas fronteiras sociais. A diaconia, exercida de diversas formas, é o *proprium* da Igreja de Jesus Cristo. A diaconia relativiza as concepções de dominação e as prerrogativas da compreensão do poder como poder sobre outras pessoas.

*A diaconia é quenótica ou auto-esvaziadora do poder como dominação. O ministério transforma a liderança: ao invés de exercer poder sobre as outras pessoas, passa a dar-lhes poder e capacitá-las. Abdicar do poder como dominação não tem nada a ver com servilismo. (...) O ministério significa exercer o poder de maneira nova, como meio de libertação mútua. O serviço às outras não exaure a pessoa que exerce o ministério, mas, antes, faz com que ela fique mais libertada. O ministério supera relacionamentos competitivos em que uma pessoa está por cima e a outra por baixo e gera relações de capacitação mútua.*<sup>124</sup>

Somos convocadas a resgatar uma Igreja tecida com os fios da sabedoria e dos *bons poderes*, na perspectiva de mutualidade, reciprocidade e cuidado, de poderes partilhados e de saberes compartilhados; e, nessa tessitura, podemos potencializar a Igreja como corpo de Cristo, como corpos libertados de mulheres e homens, a transformar o mundo.

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<sup>124</sup>Rosemary R. RUETHER, *Sexismo e religião: rumo a uma teologia feminista*. São Leopoldo: Sinodal / IEPG, 1993, p. 172.

**CHRISTIAN LIFE ACCORDING TO GRACE  
AND THE COMMUNITY AS A LIVE LETTER  
ECCLESIOLOGICAL CHALLENGES BASED ON 2 CORINTHIANS**

**Marga Janete Ströher**

*Venha teu reino, Senhor!  
A festa da vida recria.*

***A nossa espera e ardor***

*Transforma em plena alegria  
A nossa espera e ardor  
Transforma em plena alegria!*<sup>125</sup>

*(Thy kingdom come, Lord!  
Recreate the feast of life.*

***Our hope and passion***

*transform into full joy  
Our hope and passion  
transform into full joy!)*

Paul uses many images and symbologies in this letter.<sup>126</sup> He talks of the perfume of the knowledge of God, of the good perfume of Christ, of smells and aromas - the smell of death to death, the aroma of life to life, of the knowledge of God that is in vessels of clay, of believers as being the sanctuary of the living God, of mirrors, of letters, of stones; of the seed bed and the seed, of bread. He expresses his feelings, he writes about his anxieties, persecutions, insecurity, longings, perseverance, joy. And he is quite frank or even audacious with the members of the community (7,4). He admits the hardness of his words, sometimes expressed in prior letters, but he shows himself to be affectionate and humble, opening his heart and speaking of his most intimate feelings, owning up to his own tears due to the sufferings of his apostolate. "For I wrote you out of much distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain, but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you." (2:4). Alongside poetic language, he also frequently uses forensic or official terms such as ambassador, justice, hearings, triumph<sup>127</sup> (2:4; also in 1 Corinthians 4:9), thus indicating aspects of the social-political context in which he lives.

In this essay I propose to work with three relevant aspects of this letter: the *Christian life according to grace*, the *community as a living letter* and the respective *challenges for the church*.

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<sup>125</sup>From the Brazilian song "Jesus Cristo, esperança do mundo" (Jesus Christ, hope of the world) by Sílvio Meincke, Edmundo Reinhardt and João Gottinari.

<sup>126</sup>There is a great debate in biblical research on the composition of the Second Letter to the Corinthians, whether it represents a unit or whether it is made up of various letters. There are authors, such as Ben Whiterington III, who consider the text a literary unit, based even on rhetorical analysis. I do not intend here to discuss the various theses about the composition of this letter.

<sup>127</sup>Reference to the Roman Triumphal, a solemn entrance procession in Rome, where, beyond honoring the victorious army and publicly exhibiting the weapons and the spoil of war, including the prisoners of war, a cultic act with a sacrifice dedicated normally to Jupiter, for victory was included. See Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates Romanae*, 2.3; 8.67,9f and Plutarch, *Romulus*, 25.4. See also Ben Whiterington III, *Conflict & Community in Corinth*. A Socio-rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians. Grand Rapids/ Carlisle : Eerdmans/Paternoster Press, 1995.

## 1. The Christian life according to grace

The letters present the themes of grace, of reconciliation, of service to the poor and the apostolate as being central. Grace is presented as the guiding line of the whole letter.<sup>128</sup>

**Grace as a calling to a new life** : The grace offered by God becomes a challenge for a new life (3:18; 5:17). A new reality is made present to the Christians who are challenged to a transformation, a metamorphosis, as is mentioned in 3:18: “And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.”

*Grace as a challenge for the diaconia of reconciliation: Reconciliation is presented as a service, a ministry (5:18-20). God reconciles people to himself through Jesus Christ and granted the diaconia of reconciliation (5;18) and the word of reconciliation (5:19). One perceives that reconciliation is at the level of the most important community functions of the first Christian communities: diaconia and the word. This reconciliation refers to God but also to the people close by, to personal and community relations.*

**Grace is the motivation for the collection and for sharing with the poor:** Paul’s concern with the poor of Judea causes him to take up a collection.<sup>129</sup> This collection, at least in Corinth, is organized and administered by Titus. Paul brings to memory that the brothers and sisters of Macedonia have already made a generous offering and challenge the community of Corinth to do the same: “begging us earnestly for the privilege (grace) of sharing in this ministry (service) to the saints” (8:4). When he proposes the collection, he raises arguments in favor of the unselfishness of the members of the community. The abundance of faith and of the word, of knowledge, of care and of love has, as a consequence, the abundance in grace (8:7) which includes the grace of sharing: “And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written ‘He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.’” (9,8; cf. 8,7,9).

**Grace as the foundation for the apostolate:** Grace is the motivation and the foundation for the apostolate and for witnessing. (1:12) The most relevant argument is that of grace spiritually sustaining the apostle. In the text of 12: 6-10, Paul makes a confession about power. His perspective is that of the simultaneity of strength and weakness, of grace and power, of pleasure and suffering that is part of the apostolate. “but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’” (2 Corinthians 12:9)

## 2. The community as a living letter

Within the second letter to the Corinthians there is a part that can be viewed as a letter within a letter: 2 Corinthians: 1-6. Paul questions the community on the necessity of letters of recommendation.

Emitting letters of recommendation was a common practice in the Greek-Roman world, especially among people of great influence. When traveling, it was common for people to have at hand letters of recommendation or safe passage to ensure safety and housing. Safety and housing on trips and displacements were the privilege of a few, of those who had access to a network of sponsorship and friendship, which was frequently assured through letters of recommendation. Authorities or people of economic or political influence, recognized philosophers, who had a network of parentage and friendships or public recognition, emitted such letters for those people they knew, for friends and protégés.

Christian people who had the recognition of the communities through their missionary work, also adopted the practice of recommendation through letters. “The letters of recommendation revealed the fact that these domestic advantages now were extended to the whole family of faith, whose

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<sup>128</sup>After Romans, 2 Corinthians is the pauline text in which the word grace is most mentioned.

<sup>129</sup>The collection was carried out in Macedonia, Galatia, Asia and Achaia.

members are accepted on the basis of trust, in spite of being complete strangers.”<sup>130</sup> Thus, Apollo receives a letter from Prisca and Aquila so that the brothers and sisters of Achaia may receive him to do missionary work. And Paul recommends Phoebe to the community of Rome. It is possible that she could be traveling to Rome as the bearer of the Letter to the Romans (Romans 16:1). Such a practice, however, was not common among the Christians. Not all people possessed such letters. Hospitality did not depend on the legal instrument of the letter of recommendation. Welcome and hospitality depended on mutual trust between the missionary and community of faith that was to be visited.

Based on this we can say that the mission grows through hospitality. The home, as the birth place of the Christian Church was fundamental in consolidating a nucleus of faith in a certain place as well as in the expansion of the Christian movement. The missionary work and the growth of the first Christian communities depended on the welcome, the hospitality and the support of the communities that were centered in the families, which constituted the *churches in the homes*. These communities had their networks of relations - such as parentage, friendship or other social ties - not based on legal instruments. Mutual trust is the guarantee of hospitality.

Paul writes to people who, perhaps, would like to receive a letter of recommendation: “Surely we do not need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you, do we?” (2 Corinthians 3: 1). Paul affirms that such a letter is not necessary: “You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all” (2 Corinthians 3:2). The community is a living letter. It is a letter from Christ, not written with ink, but with the spirit of God, not on tablets of stone but on the hearts (3:3). Mutual trust comes from this, the presence of Christ in the community and in the person of the missionary.

The text of the letters of recommendation was guaranteed by the economic influence of rich people, who had political power, that is, people who prospered with injustice and through the slavery of many people throughout the whole Roman Empire. For this social segment, letters of recommendation played the role of a social contract. The rich and powerful were always protected for hospitality was always assured them.

Paul rejects this prerogative. The Spirit makes life sprout forth, brings new life to people, seeks the life of all of creation; it is the “fragrance from life to life” (2 Corinthians 2:16). Trust, friendship, welcome, hospitality happen and are provided based on faith in Christ, not on human sufficiency or prerogative. The axis of legal conditions and protection is shifted to security based on trust produced by the Spirit itself. The strength of the Spirit sustains the Church. More than this, it sustains the ethical commitment and the solidarity of the churches toward the less fortunate brothers and sisters.

Following this reflection, the text on the apostolate in Chapter 12, based on 2 Corinthians 3:1-6 is plausible and elucidating: the apostle must not have prerogatives from the social-economic and political power, but must trust in the grace offered by Christ and in the hospitality of the community.

### 3. Challenges for the church

The Christian Church, in its beginning, was conceived as the sum of diverse gifts, charismas, potentialities and leaderships, and was enriched by the diversity of ethnicities, social categories, women and men and, aside from this, was organized locally and anchored theologically in the apostolic accompaniment and presence. The Church is born plural and inclusive. This does not avoid conflicts nor the existence of different comprehensions of living out one’s faith. Communities, such as the one in Corinth, had conflicts generated by the cultural diversity and social inequalities. Differentiated views of knowledge and distinct ways of exercising power could put at risk

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<sup>130</sup>Cf. Edwin JUDGE, *The conversion of Rome: Ancient Sources of modern social tensions: Die Sozialstruktur christlicher Gruppen im ersten Jahrhundert*. Translated by Hilde Nordsieck. Wuppertal: Brockhaus Verlag, 1964, p. 7, apud Wayne A. MEEKS, *Os primeiros cristãos urbanos*. São Paulo: Paulus, 1996, p. 170.

community life or its growth. Frequently, the authority and the power of the church were and are understood as *power over* other persons, lacking the experience of the shared knowledge and power.

The church, throughout history and not rarely, has taken on the prerogatives of power and status; is invested and invests itself with arrogance, self-sufficiency, concerned with maintaining the institution and the hierarchies, omitting oneself when confronted with the needs of the people and caring for the poor. The apostle challenges us by making a theological and epistemological inversion: power manifests itself in weakness, the legitimacy of the apostolate is with the weak and the prerogative resides in grace. The grace is transforming grace, that transforms people and relations, that transforms the world.

If the Church has become one of the main repressive and controlling forces, violating human rights, justifying sexism, slavery, racism, colonialism and bellicosity, there is also within the Church itself, or at its side, an innumerable number of persons who have maintained the tradition of a liberating Church. Women and men, throughout history, individually or in collective resistance movements, have placed and place themselves in favor of reforms and changes, constantly recapturing the liberating principles that oriented the faith and the experience of the first Christian communities. Before seeking status and power, through the creation and maintenance of ecclesiastical positions, the Church is challenged to seek to serve all people and seek their theological-religious citizenship.

Jesus called women and men from the margins and boundaries of society, from within homes and from the sides of the roads, not to make up a class of religious laborers; instead, he empowered all these people to be active and self-determined believers. And he invited those on the top of the social pyramid to come down, displace themselves and put themselves at the service of people at the edge of society. Diaconia, carried out in various ways, is the *proprium* of the Church of Jesus Christ. Diaconia relativizes the concepts of domination and the prerogatives of the comprehension of power as power over other people.

*Diaconia is the kenotic or self-emptying of power as domination. Ministry transforms leadership from power over others to empowerment of others. The abdication of power as domination has nothing to do with servility. (...) Rather, ministry means exercising power in a new way, as a means of liberation of one another. Service to others does not deplete the person who ministers, but rather causes her (or him) to become more liberated. Ministry overcomes competitive one-up, one-down relationships and generates relations of mutual empowerment.<sup>131</sup>*

We are called upon to restore a Church that is woven with the threads of wisdom and of *good powers*, in the perspective of mutuality, reciprocity and care, of shared powers and knowledge; and, in this weaving, we can empower the Church as the body of Christ, as liberated bodies of women and men, to transform the world.

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<sup>131</sup>Rosemary R. RUETHER, *Sexism and God-talk*. London: SCM Press, 1983, p. 207.