INTRODUCTION

"No one can possibly know what is about to happen: it is happening, each time, for the first time," says James Baldwin, "for the only time."

This scriptural issue is HAPAG's first. Hopefully, it will not be the last. The articles included in this issue are a selection put together for the first and only time, summoning the readers of HAPAG to enter into the beautiful world of exegesis.

The first in this selection is the article entitled, **"From the Power of Pharaoh to the Power of God: The Journey of Israel from Egypt to Sinai"** by Ma. Anicia Co, RVM. Co applies a narrative analysis to the first chapters of the Book of Exodus, of which plot develops into God's mighty hand confronting the power of Pharaoh. Pharaoh represents the enslaving power of the Egyptians while Moses becomes the representative of God's liberating might. This confrontation finds it climax in the crossing of the sea. However, the Israelites' deliverance from the hands of the Egyptians, represented by Pharaoh, is just one aspect of their liberation.

According to Co, Israelites would continue to be under the cultural influence of Egypt despite all the wonders YHWH has done for them. They would always grumble and complain. YHWH, in his goodness and love, has listened to the grumblings of the Israelites who were still struggling with their newfound liberation. Co, in the end, concludes that YHWH has not liberated the Israelites only to become his own slaves. YHWH has sent them free to become his people.

The people exiled in Babylon experienced this same saving power of YHWH. It is the same God who takes the people away from their misery. The lives of the people in the exile had been miserable but YHWH would always take them away from their miserable conditions. Niranjan Kanmury, in his article, **"Isaiah 50:10-11 - Fire as a Double-edged Sword,"** explores this exilic

context by analyzing the rhetoric and metaphor of Isa 50:10-11. Isa 50 belongs to the Deutero-Isaiah (Second Isaiah, Isa 40–55). Aiming to contribute to the treatment of interpretational difficulties of Isa 50:10-11, Kanmury focuses on the light/fire imagery and closely examines the related metaphors in such given text.

According to Kanmury, the use of metaphors, like light and darkness, are part and parcel of the language of Deutero-Isaiah. Through his analysis of the metaphors in Isa 50:10-11, Kanmury is able to connect the imagery of darkness to hardship and extremity. The metaphor of darkness might accordingly be a symbol to represent every kind of misery. Despite the external difficult situation, symbolized by darkness, Deutero-Isaiah exhorts the suffering people to continue to trust in YHWH. The Lord becomes their internal light. The imagery of fire, which the author closely associates with the imagery of light, intensifies the salvific actions of God. It is the Lord who provides light for the people who walk in darkness. Those who kindle their own lights bring to the fore the double-edged character of the fire, symbolizing the hand of YHWH that might either save or punish. For the ungodly who kindle their own fire and refuse to accept the light coming from YHWH, as Kanmury concludes, the fire they kindle will eventually consume them.

Post-colonialists may not easily buy the idea of the author of the Isaiah of the Exile (Deutero-Isaiah), which tells of the destruction of the people who kindle their own lights. For post-colonialists even the kindling of one's own light might be celebrated and welcomed as a gift from YHWH himself. This is better exemplified in colonizer-colonized relationship, of which the colonized people are not anymore seen as passive imitators of the colonizers but as people who differentiate themselves from their colonizers. This process of self-differentiation of the colonized people from the colonizers generates "hybridity."

Chin Hei Leong, in his article **"Hybridity as Given and Gift: Macao and Samaria,"** explores the idea of "hybridity," offering an alternative and post-colonial reading of 2 Kings 17, 24-41. His discussion is presented in three parts. First, he applies Homi Bhabha's idea of the dissolution of the dichotomy between the

colonizers and colonized to the colonial status of Macao. Secondly, Leong illustrates how political "hybridity" could engender cultural and religious "hybridity" under a Catholic colonizer. Thirdly, he provides a post-colonialist reading of 2 Kings 17,24-41, showing how the Deuteronomistic historians did treat religious "hybridity."

2 Kings 17,32 is crucial in Leong's entire textual treatment. He claims that there is self-ordination to YHWH on the part of the identified "Samaritans." However, if verse 32 is taken as fulcrum, one may opt for another interpretation. Verse 32 can be a summary that separates the previous verses from the verses that follow it (v.32). Further, in the second half of verse 32, the priest who is to teach them has disappeared, and they made for themselves priests from all sorts of people. This suggests a movement that is from "being not fearful of the LORD and not following the Law" to "being fearful of the LORD and still not following the Law (by serving other gods)." This strongly supports that there was never an ordination on the part of the identified "Samaritans" in as far as 2 Kings 17,24-41 is concerned. Grammatically and syntactically, or even simply by tone, repetitive actions are very evident, conveying a back-and-forth movement between fearing the LORD and not fearing the LORD at all.

Leong has offered a post-colonial reading of 2 Kings 17,24-41 that provides a good occasion for a dialogue between post-colonial theological approach and exegetical attempt. One may not agree with the conclusion Leong arrives at but his analysis is indeed worthy of respect, opening up a space for an ongoing conversation.

After informing the readers of the condition faced by the exiled people, the following articles will guide the readers through the narratives that tell of the aspiration of the people, once exiled, to find their place again in the world. Being dispersed and without land they would be promised of having again a land of their own. The fulfillment of such promise of having again their own land would not be without any difficulty because there would be other claimants, reflecting the conflict between those who returned and other inhabitants, for example, the Samaritans.

The theme of "man-land-God," as claimed by Rex Fortes, CM in his article, **"'Listen! Your Brother's Blood Cries Out to Me from the Ground.' Understanding Gen 4:10b,"** is crucial

to the understanding of the first chapters of the Book of Genesis. The moral teaching accordingly, which is being put forward, includes the challenge of restoring human relationship should human beings intend to restore their relationship with the land, and with God. To restore the primeval order that would bring back land's fertility, the cry of a brother's blood from the ground needs to be heard.

Fortes tries to analyze the phrase said by YHWH in Gen 4:10b: "Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground." He aims to offer better understanding of the pre-setting that surrounds the narrative of Cain murdering his brother Abel. He is able to establish the centrality of Gen 4:10b in the murder account. He is able to show how the "shouting-silence" motif intensifies the emotional loudness of the act of murder. The author also highlights the fact that for the people of Israel, life is held as sacred, and even their sense of revenge would be generated from their deep desire to protect the life of their brothers. Consequently, bloodguilt needs to be removed should the land yield its fruits in abundance. With the first murder, the land was cursed because of Cain, but as the narrative unfolds, the reader ends up with the land, being the recipient of the curse, turns out to be the one cursing the murderer.

The conditional Sinai Covenant failed on the part of the people of Israel. Their experience of being exiled was a consequence of their failure to live up to the demands of the Sinai Covenant. Could those coming from the exile still expect to have a future given that the covenant made in Sinai was already broken? They found a positive answer to this question in the unconditional covenant made by YHWH with Abraham and with the rest of the patriarchs. This is best articulated in the first verses that begin the entire patriarchal narratives, serving to be the narrative program, when YHWH promises to bless Abraham so that he himself will become a blessing, which could lead to a situation wherein all the families of the earth will bless themselves (cf. Gen 12,1-4).

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are known to be the patriarchs. The narratives that tell of their stories are important to understand their descendants' claim of the land, especially during the period when they were returning from the exile. There has been a need to legitimize the returnees' claim of the land. The narratives surrounding the stories of Abraham and Jacob have developed into

full cycles (Gen 12–25 as Abraham Cycle and Gen 25–35 as Jacob Cycle) respectively in this regard.

Cristino Pine, OFM, in his article, **"Understanding Isaac's Authoritative Character as Patriarch (A Narrative Reading of Genesis 26,1-33),"** points out that Gen 26,1-33 is the only sustained narrative unit dedicated to Isaac as a Patriarch. Following the tedious process of applying narrative analysis to Gen 26,1-33, Pine is able to show that even if Gen 26,1-33 is the only unit allotted to Isaac, this unit strongly supports Isaac's authoritative character as Patriarch nonetheless.

Isaac is accordingly the only Patriarch who has never left the land. At the beginning of the narrative, Isaac's condition appears to be very unstable while at the end he was able to pitch his tent at Beersheba. There were conflicts as the narrative unfolds but at the end, Isaac was able to send Abimelech's group in peace. Pine agrees with Jean-Louis Ska on the latter's claim that Isaac's function in Genesis is to authenticate Isaac's descendants' rights to land. Pine further claims, however, that Isaac's authoritative character as patriarch is put forward by the example he has set for his descendants to follow, that is, becoming a blessing to others, as YHWH has blessed him. This is concretely shown when Isaac has sent Abimelech's group in peace when he has the power to do otherwise.

Truly, without conflict, there would be no story to tell. Conflict can always be spotted in biblical narratives and in the discourses within narratives. There are also conflicts in the gospel narratives and discourses. It is however of value to detect not only the resolutions to conflicts found in the narratives and discourses but also to truly understand the nuances with regard to the notion of conflict as found in a narrative unit or in a discourse.

Joan Infante, OSA, in her article **"Nuancing the Notion of Conflict in the Gospel of John (John 3:16-21 as a Test Case),"** highlights the importance of understanding the nuance of the notion of conflict so as to avoid hasty generalizations in biblical interpretations. Infante applies a synchronic analysis to Jn 3:16-21. Taking Jn 3:16-21 as a test case, Infante clearly shows how, in a particular discourse of only several verses, the complexity of the language of conflict might occur. In the text at hand, conflict

relationship, accordingly, does not exist between the Father and the "world." The interest of the Father, in as far as the "world" is concerned, is always benevolent. This benevolent interest has not been reciprocated by the "world." When the Father sent his Son, the Father then becomes "the agitator" of the intrapersonal conflict within the "world." The Son came to save and not to judge the "world." In this, the Son has shared the Father's benevolent interest. Upon the coming of the Son as light, both truthful and evil deeds are exposed. The Son then becomes "the agitator," putting before those in the world the choice either to come to the light or to remain in darkness. It is the "world," therefore, that has an intrapersonal conflict wherein Jesus the light becomes "the agitator." And this same Jesus the light becomes one of the parties in an interpersonal conflict between Jesus who is the light and those who do not want to believe Jesus and who want to remain in darkness. Infante calls our attention to the fact that Jesus' salvific interest is the same with that of the Father. However, this salvific interest requires a believing response in order that one might benefit from it. With her analysis, Infante concludes that the Fourth Gospel's apparently conflict-related vocabulary needs to be read in the light of the Johannine Gospel's Christological and soteriological proclamation.

With this selection for the scriptural issue of HAPAG, what we can say is that, no one truly knows how beautiful the world of the Bible is, together with the exegetical approach as regards its interpretation, unless one experiences grappling with it – maybe not for the first time, but surely, for the only time.

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