

## Faith as Historical Challenge

### Text: Galatians 3.10-29

Over the last thirty years the dominant theology elaboration in Latin America is organically articulated in search emerged from the ecclesiastical community involving pastoral or missionary projects from different sources. Theologians recognize themselves in service of believing communities taking on as raw material their theological process, the inquiries and perplexity which emerge from historical processes from these active communities in the complex continent society. We are referring to a traditional ecclesiastical pursuit with tradition on theological production since the majority of the amazing pentecostal groups that work based on the transcendental experience of faith, (ruled by salvation prejudice such as, war in opposition to satan or as consumer goods appropriation, God blessing signal) and tend to reduce their theological production to legitimate ideology of the believers community truths. The theology elaboration mentioned which is also in methodist community, is the theological meditation in the context of the distinguished missionary community association.

Among biblists, the main hermeneutic question from which happens the "Holy text" interpretation, is the "social place of the missionary community". This "social ~~place~~ location" is less a private space of a group which is isolated from the whole society, and would consequently have restricted interests than the large space of those who recognize themselves in mission "to serve people". In this context "people" is not limited by an abstract concept, but consists in a horizon that includes everyone; and for this reason it allows a perception, in first sight, of the "people" excluded from this condition and, can in consequence elect a particular and concrete segment of this people to interact with it. Being this segment a poor neighborhood, abandoned children, or young people addicted to drugs. These "community social ~~places~~ locations" seem to open the community and also the theologians eyes, who find themselves in similar situations of the bible period communities. Prophets and apostles were equally integrated into an active community, which projects stimulated the dialog between the new questions that came from their contemporaries and "normative tradition", referred as "God's word". The bible text does not convert itself into its own bearer of a message, but it becomes reference noticed in a new way from the vital questions which emerge from the contemporary community, in its project to "serve people". The "community social ~~places~~ locations", from which the bible text is open, allows rather a perceptions of a contemporary missionary direction than a condensed message in shape of "truly aphorism".

This fundamental hermeneutic question gives priority to concrete questions, those which have an operative rule in its own community at the people service. The bible interpretation based on that procedure, takes care of the historical question, with all its materiality dimension.

### 1. The text and its context

The Galatian community is probably formed by churches whose members are from pagan sources. The main problem of the letter originates among the presence of christian preachers of jewish origin, that puts in doubt the nature of the gospel preached

by Paul. In fact, the Galatians are invited to practice the circumcision (5.2 - 4, 7-12; 6.12 and 13).

In these circumstances even Paul's apostolic authority is put in question (1.11-2.21; 4.17-19).

The latent conflict is smaller among two different doctrines than two historic ways of behavior while christian. The practice of circumcision and submission to the Hebraic's law point to a concrete manner of organizing daily life. In opposition to this concrete way of life, Paul opposes other way that he terms of "world of faith" (3.23, 25). The "faith way" is historically demonstrated to the Galatians as "the Spirit reception" (3.2) that excused favors, known by the community (3.4), and "wonders processed among you" (3.5). The life of faith in opposition to the life of law operates in history by love (5.6). This concrete life of faith that explains the freedom of love, the possibility of solidarity, in opposition to conflict and destruction of community life. In this context, not even faith is seen through as interior freedom. It is not a matter of "spiritual life" meaning the transcendental experience of salvation.

It is needed to avoid the possibility of interpreting this letter considering as background the conflict between the gospel preached by Paul and the one announced by his opponents. There is no doubt that this conflict is essential in the letter. However, we will notice the conflict in deeper levels of meaning if we hold ourselves over the effects of this conflict, in the historic and concrete life of the Galatian community.

## **2. The structure of Galatians 3.10-19**

From the "social place from which the community stands", the text interpretation is not controlled by the hunt of theological truth that the tradition enhances, but by the theological strain that seems to illuminate the historical conflict of the Galatians community. With the eyes lighted by this conflict we see in this passage, four antithetical movements:

a) Curse x Salvation: curse of law and salvation is possible by the abolition of law (3.10-14);

b) Promise x Law: the descendant's (Christ) promise and his previously and prevalence regarding to law (3.15-18);

c) Law x Faith: the function of law regarding to faith (3.19-22);

d) Faith x Law: the period of faith regarding the law (3.23-29).

In the historic context of Galatians crisis, the apostle closes up the submission temptation to the law, by the pagan period of ignorance concerning God, or the liability worthless "Gods". Through this way they would cancel out their present and, actually, make unfeasible the new possibility of solidary fruitful human life. As for Paul, the christian life does not concentrate itself in adhesion to abstract doctrines, but in adhesion to a way of faith that can be operated by historical experience of love. It is by the window of the community ethic that we can get closer to the doctrinary truths of faith. This experience elevated to a hermeneutic category, takes us to an approximation to

Paul, the theologian, by the doors of ethic recommendation, a movement contrary to the exegetics tradition.

In this perspective, the opening door to the sense of the letter to the Galatians is Gl 5.6: "since in Jesus Christ not even circumcision, nor the uncircumcision have any value, but faith that acts (shows its power) through love". The doctrinal exposition is in service of the historic life of the Galatian community, that is, the theology preached by the apostle is pastoral and as it has to be differentiated. His theology is paradigm to the spirituality of the community .

### **3. Curse x Salvation - Gl 3.10-14**

"For all who rely on works of the law are under curse". Life which sources for its concreteness from the legal realization has no way out. The radical opposition to this way, is the possible life starting from the "World of faith". There is no possible justice in the acts of law, because the domain of sin over humans does not allow people to participate of the effects available in faith. What are these effects to the apostle, such as he identifies them in Galatians own history? The gift of the Spirit (3.2) and the wonderful concreteness that created (3.5), the filial adoption (4.5), the life of freedom (5.1) and the practice of love (5.6). For this reason, "just" is the one who "will live for faith" (existews), or better "from the world of faith".

The submission to the law obligates a person to live by it (3.12). If this Levitic 18.5 quotation is positive, moved by anthitesis caused by the severance which tempts the Galatians, Paul relates this concept to curse, in opposition to the blessing offered to Abraham.

Gl 3.13-14 is paralel to 4.4-6. The subject of these two kerygmatics summaries are Christ and God. Here, Christ is presented as if he were acting in favor of the Jewish. In the text of Gl.4.4, God acts in Gentiles favor. In orther that Abraham's blessing reached Gentiles and the Spirit would be granted to everyone, or in other that Gentiles were offered adoption of sons and everyone would be equally granted by the Spirit (4.6).

The way through which God operates the Jewish liberation from curse of law is the historical act of Jesus cross (3.13). The curse of law is not an anthologic-transcendental phenomenon, but historic, in consequence of human sin (3.22 cf. Rm 1.18; 2.5; 2.12-13; 5.12-20. In Roman, God's anger is demonstrated against human life injustice. Sin entered the world by Adam's own freely decision). Therefore , the impossibility of human accomplishment of the law<sup>45</sup> due to infermity of human sin. Jesus is not accursed in the presence of God. On the cross, Jesus takes over the curse of human situation (cf . Fp. 2.7-8 and Rm 8.3).

In this Galatians' pericope 3.6-14 the promise was adresssed to Abraham. It is through him, but is through his descendent that it will reach the nations (3.8-9). The barrier to the promise to be realized is "the curse of law" under which are Abraham's historic descendents. Starting from "curse redeem", the promise reaches the Gentiles , through the new period of faith (3.14). Bultmann, in "Theological Dictionary of the N.T.", when comenting on this text, claims that, here faith is a space of salvation and life God opens in our history, a way of life in which one entrenches himself. This interpretation certainly includes the concept of faith "acceptance of Christ and the merit

of his good works for us", (cf. Gl 1.3-4, 6; 2.16) or the life communion with him (cf. Gl 2.19-21; 4.19; 5.6, etc) or the acquiescence to preaching (cf. Gl 3.2).

This perception to the movement found in this Galatians' text turns improper the traditional forensic interpretation of "justification through faith", see as a metaphysic decision of God in favor of the believers. The justification through faith, is certainly established on God's grace, materialize in this new "period of faith" or "space of faith" which God becomes available inside our concrete history. That is, faith opens the door to the Spirit action which allows faith to operate through love (Gl 5.5-6).

Paul seems touched by the logic from which Galatian's community was built: "Have you received the Spirit through the works of law or the preaching of faith?" (Gl 3.2). Faith is prior over the law in the Galatians' history. This precedence is confirmed in the scriptures, for the promise to Abraham is prior, relating to Moses law; as it will be mentioned. Galatians' faith is not metaphysic, as salvation occurred in front of a celestial court of God; but which opened the "miracle operation among you" (Gl 3.5). This pathway to salvation is directly related to the life of freedom and community love experience (Gl 5.13, 16, 18, 22 and 25). Salvation does not decide in the abstract space of an adhesive to "Justice of God". "The <sup>just</sup> will live by faith" (Gl 3.11), as historic process; this text has its parallel which cannot be interpreted eschatologically: "the law does not rest on faith, for he who does them shall live by them" (Gl 3.12). The future of the verb *live*, in this text, is basically historic, fact that evidently does not exclude the eschatologic horizon.

The righteous, the one who will live in faith, lives in hope of eternal life (Gl 6.8), it is precisely the one who through the work of Christ, finds freedom in history, related to the "circle of law", and servitude of this world. Because it is possible, through this faith, the experience of liberty, we can realized in history the "law of love" (5.6), and by "agape" becomes the others "doulos" (5.13-14). "Just" is the one to whom God turns possible a historical life of justice. It is not a meritorious love, since this love can be confused with the own process of faith.

#### 4. Promise ~~and~~ x Law (Gl 3.15-18)

The alliance sealed between God and Abraham, since it is prior to Moses law is definite, that is, Moses law can not cancel out the promise. In fact, if Moses law had same value as this alliance, the promise to Abraham would have been abolished. It does not mean alternative ways. Paul insists: either Abraham promise and the alliance which is established by it or Moses law. If the inheritance derives from the law, than there will not be a promise anymore. In this surprisnly exegesis, funded, as we have seen on Galatians evangelization history, grace was, in fact, granted to Abraham. It is as if Paul insisted: What was promised by pure grace, can only be granted by this same grace.

The inheritance of live does not concentrate on eternal life. It is related to a new life which derives from faith while historical phenomenon. The heirs are effectively these men and women who listen to the reading of this letter. If the inheritance of the grace owns eschatology horizon, this same one is a good available today; in the concrete history of human existance. The way in which this grace is available is the historic cross which was able to suspende the curse that sorrowed over the law. More than that: the inheritance becomes historic in the Galatian community and in the believers life, by the

Spirit's gift and also, the consequent life of love in the human community. The historic door to this inheritance is the faith and not the legal work.

### **5. Law x Faith: the function of law regarding to faith - Gl 3.19-22**

The great pastoral question to the Galatians is the historical legitimacy of the Hebrew nation. Actually, if the alliance is unique and refers to the pact with Abraham: What is the role of Hebrews' history relating to Moses?

The law had been added to the promise. This addition was temporary because its limit, in the future, would be the promise achievement, meaning the descendant's arrival. What is the reason to add this law to the promise? The offences, the human sin. From the Romans text (5.13 and 4.15), following the Galatians text, the apostle could explain himself better: without confronting to law, there is no offence. Evidently, it is not the law that raises the sin, as we have seen. The role of law, in this context, is not related either to justice, nor to life.

Then, does the law oppose itself, to God's promises? Only as a way of life. The law owns a specific, limited and subordinated role. "But the Scripture consigned all things to sin". Romanos 11.32 substitutes the subject "Scripture" by God. The scriptures do not summarize themselves to law. In this meaning, they constitute themselves, in God's instrument to claim the world's sin. Because God's first purpose is to confirm his promise, established in faith, realized in Jesus Christ and available, historically, by faith. In this context, the pericope of Gl 2.17-21 is extremely bright. "But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we ourselves were found to be sinners, is Christ then an agent of sin? Certainly not. (...) For I through the law died to the law, that I might live to God. (...) it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the son of God". Here resides one fundament of communal spirituality: the Christians that received the Spirit by faith, crucified the human body (while ground for sin), behaving themselves as the Spirit, and living a life opposite to the human flesh (cf. Gl 5.16, 18, 22, 24-26). If Paul's historical realism does not imagine a period without sin, the text seems to point to its expectative for a new eligible life, that express itself from the gift of the Spirit and all marked by the experience of community love. In this meaning, "sin", in our text, does not drain itself in its ontological dimension, it means the sin, it does not define our situation in front of God. The sin demonstrates itself in a not solidary ethic, clearly expressed in Galatians 5.19-21. Faith, in antithesis, opens itself to an ethic associated to the Spirit, and essentially solidary, communal. The apostle offers himself, as an example of this new life, now possible in human history. It is never too much underline that here, in verse 21, life and justice are synonyms.

### **6. Faith x Law: the period of faith regarding to the law - Gl 3.23-29.**

This text opens itself with one expression that confirms the hermeneutic criterion adopted in Latin America: "Now, before faith came ... but now that faith has come". The best interpretation seems to be the one that points to a new reality possible in the historic world of men and women and by God's actions and the creative presence of its Spirit. It is possible the approach of these news, that come from those regarded to God's Kingdom in Jesus preaching. It has to be, with the new space of life, in which you get in, a new spirituality lived in human "polis".

Paul retakes his analysis about the role of the law. By that period of law, Jewish, including Paul, were confined to a life of restrictions, lack of freedom. To the Galatians, apparently fascinated by the "new gospel"(restrictive) that was announced to them, the apostle describes the historical situation of the Jewish people under the guardianship of the law, and which could be the future of the Galatians situation, if they accepted that way.

The law had the pedagogic function of leading greek children when they were out of home, until they reached adulthood. As Bonnard says, this law is time limited, it does not educate and it is oriented to a superior stage, maturity.

A kerymatic summary is possible from Paul's preaching to the Galatians: Faith in way of life, since it turns the gift of God available: the Spirit, Abraham's blessing which may mean a filial adoption, freedom from law and sin, all in direction to the life of love (cf. Gl 3.13 and 14 and 4.4-6). The way of faith (similar to "entering the kingdom of God) it summarizes "the operation through love"(Gl 5.6).

The period of law might be over for the Jewish, but for sure the Galatians are beyond this period. "For in Jesus Christ you are all sons of God, through faith"(3.26). You are all heirs of the promises made to Abraham; above all of you, rests the gift of the promised life to the nations. Paul reminds the Galatian that the historical mark of the alliance with God, does not have to be the circumcision. They can resort to the community history, since they have all been baptized in Christ, "for all as many of you were baptized in Christ, have put on Christ"(3.27; cf. 2.20).

The fabulous conclusion to our text still brings up numberless consequences around our understanding about the life of faith. "There is neither Jewish nor Greek, there is neither slave, nor free, there is neither male or female; for you are all one in Jesus Christ" (3.28). It is clear that a concrete situation in social, cultural, economic or anthropologic level of the Galatians would not change. The main idea here is that those men and women, since they adjust to the believers community, should concretely manifest the reality of their faith. They should live as brothers and sisters, the entire life of love, the complete community. If we are under a fundament that allows a political comprehension of faith, the apostle did not pierce this barrier. He limited himself to consequences to the community of faith.

From his pastoral perspective, Paul puts the jewish preachers, that are present in the Galatian community, in the opposite way: it is not the circumcision that turns us into heirs of the abrahamic's promise, but the Christian baptism.

## Conclusions

Our text may be set relating to theme of this Institute. In the first place, the subject of Trinity. It is clear that the introduction of the Spirit theme opens the question on spirituality of the christian community, since the gift of the Spirit, from the experience of faith, introduces the social ethical subject; or the community life radicalized by the historic experience of love. The perception of God's work and His project to humanity and the awareness of Jesus Christ work, can reduce the faith operation to a theological speech of anthropologic nature. It is the Trinity thematic introduction that means the inter-relationship of God, which opens the community's question and the ethic

behavior, in the existential context of a peculiar spirituality that can be related with "world vision" and "political action".

The matter of power is not explained in our text. Although, it is perceptive when the political implications of the radicality of love as communitary experience can be seen. "There is neither Jewish nor Greek, there is neither slave, nor free, there is neither male, nor female; for you are all one in Jesus Christ". The radicality of the ethic of love confirms the wesleyan view that there is no gospel that is not social. In the context of the radicality of this new way of faith, as it is proposed by the apostle Paul, there might not be rich nor poor, neither citizen, nor excluded. The missionary project of the faith community does not extinguish itself in the theological or catechetical speech, even less in its liturgic celebration. This project requests the radicality of love experience that equalises men and women facing the trinitarian reference of salvation. It is for this reason., equally, that salvation and justice are sinonims in our text. If we spiritualize the concept of justice, by approaching it to the concept of righteousness, we take the risk of reducing any missionary project to a speech, or dilute it in false conception of gracefulness. Mission as realization of historic justice, while experience that realize salvation, does not exhaust in its political dimension, nor even summarize itself to some historic materialistic experience. It is there the radical experience of power of the believer community, that on~~y~~e relates, in only one movement, transcendence and immanence, eternal salvation and historical practice of justice. This power experience, is possible when it recognizes the radical possibility of the salvation update in human history, as part of the Holy Spirit operation. "For in Jesus Christ, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love".

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