Quotidienneté in the Writings of Adalbert-G. Hamman (1910-2000): The Existential Concern of a Twentieth-century Patristic Scholar

Hector Scerri, University of Malta, Msida, Malta

1. Introduction: Hamman and his Contribution to Patristic Studies

One of the familiar faces at the International Patristic Conferences from the 1950s down to the 80s was that of Adalbert-Gautier Hamman (1910-2000). He was indeed a very regular participant and contributed solidly to patristic studies by his well-researched papers. Hamman was born in 1910 in Lorraine on the Franco-German border. A Franciscan friar, he lectured in various formation schools of his religious order, and later at the Universities of Montréal and Québec, and finally at the Patristic Institute of Rome. He was also a guest lecturer at the Protestant theological faculty of Neuchâtel in Switzerland and travelled very widely to deliver talks and give specialised courses. His name is identified with the mammoth task entailed in publishing the *Supplementum* to the *Patrologia Latina* of Migne, a task completed in 1974.

He was instrumental in the inauguration of various patristic collections - *Ichtyès: Lettres chrétiennes* in 1957 and *Les Pères dans la foi* in 1977 – and also in the foundation of the *Association J.-P. Migne* in 1976. He was internationally recognised as one of the leading scholars on Christian antiquity. Hamman died on 20 July 2000, and so it is highly appropriate to give a worthy mention of the scholar at the first Patristic Conference to be held following his death.

In my communication, I have chosen to speak about one particular aspect which vividly characterises the works of Hamman. This is the concept of what, in French, he calls *quotidienneté*, or what Italian translates as *quotidianità*. It is difficult to render this into a single word in English: it refers to the ‘ordinariness’ of the daily doings of life. I elaborate further. A bird’s-eye view of the many articles and books by Hamman reveals an anthropological-sociological-existential concern which permeates his thought. Indeed, ‘basing himself on the teachings and prayers of the Fathers, Hamman has contributed widely

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in associating the sacraments with the common aspects of life, what he calls "la quotidienneté de nos vies", hence exploring the area of convergence of liturgy and social action\textsuperscript{3}. In fact, rather than dwelling upon the more speculative themes of theology, he opts for the more existential ones. For instance, he affirms that in the first centuries of the Church the existential dimension of the Eucharist was highlighted: he avers that then, "l'eucharistie est un mystère plus vécu que discuté"\textsuperscript{4}. Thus, the quotidienneté one encounters in his works reveals his specific contribution to patristic studies, namely his tireless effort at the contextualisation of the teachings of the Fathers of the Church.

2. La quotidienneté de nos vies

In this short communication, I intend to present Hamman's analysis and patristic treatment of the lives of early Christians. His mastery is evident from the familiarity he shows with the social ambience in which the Fathers lived. In fact there are two works by Hamman which more than any others provide contemporary scholars and readers with an impressive body of data to ponder upon and an encouraging ideal to follow. The first is that on the daily life of the first Christians, \textit{La vie quotidienne des premiers chrétiens} (95-197), published in 1971. An anonymous reviewer affirmed that in this work Hamman sait extraire ... les témoignages vivants qui disent souvent beaucoup plus que de longs discours ... la vie quotidienne de l'individu (le rythme des jours; les étapes de la vie) en passant par l'examen des relations entre le chrétien et son entourage social et politique ... et celui de la vie des communautés chrétiennes\textsuperscript{5}.

The other work by Hamman is that on North African society at the time of Augustine of Hippo, \textit{La vie quotidienne en Afrique du Nord au temps de saint Augustin}, which appeared in 1979\textsuperscript{6}.

The value of these \textit{vies quotidiennes} – indeed models of a historiography of daily life – lies in the detailed descriptions in which Hamman expounds the sufferings and joys of the early Christians as they struggled to remain faithful to their baptismal promises in the daily routine of their lives. The eyes of Ham-


\textsuperscript{4} A.-G. Hamman, 'L'eucharistie à l'âge d'or des Pères de l'Église', \textit{Parole et Pain} 9 (1972), 285.

\textsuperscript{5} Anon., '[Review of] \textit{La vie quotidienne des premiers chrétiens} (95-197)', \textit{Esprit et vie} 82/40 (1972), 554.

\textsuperscript{6} In a book review, the volume is described as 'scintillante nella forma e limpido nell'esposizione ... offre un quadro delle condizioni di vita in cui sant'Agostino operò come vescovo ... L'Africa in quell'epoca era un crogiolo di razze agitate da grandi passioni ... ' (G. Cremascoli, '[Review of] \textit{La vita quotidiana nell'Africa di sant'Agostino}', \textit{La Civiltà Cattolica} 141/3 (1990), 310).
man are alert and wide open to the details which may pass unnoticed to others. In these works, he presents a whole spectrum of illustrations regarding the way Christians expressed their faith amid the ordinary happenings of life7.

Charles Martin, in a review of *La vie quotidienne en Afrique du Nord*, comments on the attractive and instructive style used by Hamman in his presentation. The reader encounters various aspects and contexts of daily life: the Christian’s relationship with his pagan neighbours, the city, dwellings, daily activities, nutritional habits, clothing, schooling, streets, the port area, professions and occupations, recreation, and social classes. In another section of the book, one finds the congregation waiting impatiently to listen to Augustine, and then Christians celebrating the Eucharist. One encounters the needy crying out for help. These colourful aspects which Hamman manages to glean through his familiarity with and knowledge of Augustine and other Fathers reveal many striking dimensions of daily life in North Africa in the first decades of the fifth century8.

Like the Fathers whom he studies, he applies the ethical implications of the sacraments to daily life. The captivating texts of *les vies quotidiennes* are also very instructive because in them one encounters a detailed background which assists the reader in contextualising the social thought of the Fathers, while bearing in mind ‘el semblante humano de cada autor’9. Hamman’s own wide-ranging research stimulated him to consider ‘the philosophical, economical and political problems which confronted the Fathers, most of whom were pastors of local Churches, and … the solutions they proposed in the light of faith’10. He explores the social dimension of the sacraments, an objective he admirably achieves in many articles, but especially in one of his more important works, *Vie liturgique et vie sociale* which was published in 1968.

3. The Application of the Findings of Hamman to Sacramental Theology

Thus, an attentive study of the research accomplished by Hamman reveals his wide-ranging grasp of patristic thought on the sacraments and on their

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7 Scerri, *Koinonia, Diakonia and Martyria*, p. 304. The works in question were described by Ottorino Pasquato as ‘particolarmente espressive della sua sensibilità culturale, attenta al quotidiano e al popolo cristiano [... e come] modelli di storiografia della vita quotidiana’ (‘[Review of] La preghiera nella Chiesa antica’, *Salesianum* 58 (1996), 792).


orthopractical dimension. In other words, the *quotidienneté* we are talking about reveals a number of patristic insights concerning the sacraments as (a) graced sources of social cohesion within the Christian community; (b) moral actions urging the individual members of the community to gratuitous service; (c) pastoral stimuli driving them to bear witness in society to the person and to the values of Jesus Christ. For instance, Hamman delves deeply into the study of table-fellowship in his presentation of *koinonia* in the early Christian assembly. He rightly concludes that a life based on a commitment to justice, service, and love becomes an extension of the participation of individual believers in the liturgy.

The ethical concern shown by Hamman in the light of his interest in *quotidienneté* led him to investigate the relationship between *leitourgia* and *diakonia*. Having, for example, received the sacramental Body of Christ in the Eucharist, individual Christians have the obligation to take notice of the social form of his presence in their neighbours. The framework of the liturgy is to encompass their daily life in its various aspects. The inextricable relationship between Eucharist and social justice is distinctly highlighted by Hamman through several key texts by Augustine (354-430) and John Chrysostom (c.345-407). Opening one’s whole being to the all-transforming effect of the sacraments means opting for daily practical solicitude vis-à-vis others. Since assisting the poor is considered by the Fathers as an extension of the celebration of the liturgy, Hamman demonstrates how this daily favourable disposition towards the suffering is also an integral part of it. John Chrysostom consistently exhorts his flock to recall that the celebration of the Eucharist entails a lifelong process of doing away with egoism, in order to embrace altruism. This is an endeavour which Hamman has appropriately described in his autobiography as ‘comment concilier la foi et la tâche temporelle, faire non seulement cohabiter mais coopérer culte et souci social’.

This theme was investigated by Hamman as far back as 1953, when he published an article called ‘Liturgie et action sociale’ in the liturgical review La Maison-Dieu. Fifteen years later he published *Vie liturgique et vie sociale*, the fruit of his more mature reflection. In this latter work, and in several articles which appeared later, the notion of *quotidienneté* is very conspicuous. In fact, one observes the profound relationship between the celebration of the sacraments and the responsibility of daily life, ‘entre la charité célébrée et la charité vécue et réalisée’. One encounters several interesting expressions coined

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by Hamman with the intention of stressing this connection. He writes about the mystery of the Eucharist in daily life (‘faire passer le mystère eucharistique dans le quotidien’\textsuperscript{16}), and about living one’s baptism in daily circumstances (‘vivre le baptême dans le quotidien’\textsuperscript{17}). In fact, a careful reading of the extensive writings of Hamman shows that he ‘strives to dissolve the apparent opposition between the liturgy and the apostolate, prayer and action’\textsuperscript{18}. For instance, ‘for him, the Eucharistic anaphora … becomes an integral part of the daily life of the early Christians, especially those who were prepared to shed their blood as martyrs’\textsuperscript{19}.

In his many articles on the theme of martyrria, Hamman studies the connection between the sacraments and Christian witness. He perceives a strict continuity between the commitment made at the baptismal profession of faith and the public confession made in the context of martyrdom. He had investigated this connection while studying the notion of sphragis in an important contribution at the Third International Conference on Patristic Studies held at Oxford in 1959\textsuperscript{20}. The readiness for martyrria, whether the shedding of blood or the carrying out of daily responsibilities\textsuperscript{21}, confirms the truth of the adage by Prosper of Aquitaine (390-463), lex orandi, lex credendi, which Hamman extends to encompass the lex vivendi. While contextualising the teachings of the Fathers, Hamman shows that their sermons, epistles, and commentaries possess a striking applicability to contemporary society.

4. The Influence of Franciscan Spirituality on Hamman

Far from seeking the trappings of academic success, Hamman, throughout his career, opted instead for radical simplicity and selfless availability. The practice of disinterested solidarity and human promotion, ubiquitous in his writings, can be implicitly traced to his experience as a Franciscan religious inflamed with love for the incarnate Son. For Hamman, Franciscan spirituality is not defined by an activity, but by a way of being, a fraternal lifestyle which seeks to put into practice the Gospel message in the daily situations of life\textsuperscript{22}.

In the Canticle of St Francis, believers pray to be \textit{instruments of the peace of God}. The presentation of the Fathers as expounded by Adalbert Hamman

\textsuperscript{18} L. E., ‘[Review of] Liturgia y Apostolado’, \textit{Lumen Vitae} 23 (1968), 373.
\textsuperscript{22} Cfr Hamman, \textit{La vie}, p. 370.
seeks to concentrate upon the transformation accomplished by sacramental grace in the lives of the baptised: it unites them together, illumines their intellect, and fortifies their will when faced with the daily realities encountered in contemporary society. Thus, an analysis of the complete works of Hamman reveals that this contemporary scholar underlines the concept of *quotidienneté* in the ethical, socio-practical concern, that is, the orthopraxis shown by the Fathers: *leitourgia* and *koinonia* challenge Christians to foster an ecclesial spirit marked by *diakonia* and *martyria*, hence inviting them to be *instruments of grace* for their brothers and sisters. This is what makes the contribution of Adalbert Hamman to theology so enriching and so relevant. The bridge between theology and daily life mirrors Hamman’s firm conviction that ‘la foi devienne expérience de vie, à l’école des Pères’\(^2\).