

Editorial Note

“In the World” but not “of the World” (John 17:14-16): The Christian Calling to Embrace and Transform the World

“God speaks to human beings about human beings in human words.” This was, in a nutshell, the definition of the written Word of God by Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini (1927 - 2012)¹ in his vast experience in both academic and pastoral worlds.

The Bible is one of the bridges that overarches the chasm between the divinity and the created world. And since Christians are exhorted to shoulder the responsibility to “be doers of the word, and not merely hearers” (James 1:22), they too are called to bridge the chasm. Christians too are to be “in the world” but not “of the world”, as Jesus himself has prayed for his disciples to be.

The phrase ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου οὐκ εἰσὶν (*ek tou κόσμου ouk eisin*) in John 17:16 is literally translatable to “are not of the world.” In Johannine thought, the Christian is begotten from above and is thus of God (1:13; 3:3-6). The disciples have been

¹ Italian Jesuit, towering intellectual figure, prolific speaker and author of innumerable scientific, scholarly and pastoral books and articles, chair of Textual Criticism at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, and the only Catholic member of the ecumenical committee that prepared the new Greek edition of the New Testament, the *Novum Testamentum Graece*. Martini served as Rector of the Pontifical Biblical Institute (1969-78), and *Rector Magnificus* of the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome (1978-79). He was also appointed Cardinal Archbishop of Milan in 1980, a position he held till 2004.

chosen out of the world (15:19).² It affirms once again that the Christians being addressed are no more of the world than is Jesus. Yet, one should not take this simply as a statement of fact on the part of the Evangelist, but should perceive it as an indirect admonition of which the Johannine community stood in need. This is made amply clear in the following verse.³ The consciousness of this mission of the disciples is not annulled by the repeated mention (in v.16) of the world's hostility to Jesus and his disciples; rather, that utterance forms a bridge to a prayer for the disciples to share in a consecration by which the salvation of God might be conveyed to the world (vv.17-19).⁴

On behalf of the Department of Sacred Scripture, Hebrew and Greek of the Faculty of Theology, within the University of Malta, I am honoured to introduce this monographic issue of the peer-reviewed journal of our Faculty. We have chosen the title "*In the World*" but not "*Of the World*" (*John 17:14-16*): *The Christian Calling to Embrace and Transform the World* as we embrace this fundamental calling of every Christian.

In this monographic issue, we are pleased to welcome Rev. Prof. Johannes Beutler S.J., professor emeritus of New Testament exegesis at the Sankt Georgen Graduate School of Philosophy and Theology, Frankfurt am Main, and the Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome with a study of "Hospitality in the Johannine Letters." The Johannine Letters allow a glimpse into the life and struggles of early Christian communities. In his third letter, the author – the Elder, as he is referred to – faces a controversy with the head of a local community who refuses the acceptance of messengers of the Elder. In 2 John, however, the same Elder warns against the acceptance of missionaries of other communities if their faith is unorthodox. Thus, the question arises as to which rules and limits of hospitality obtain in early Christian communities in the perspective of these three letters. A basic social service recommended by the Hebrew Scriptures and in ancient society, hospitality has become particularly urgent in view of the high number of immigrants from Africa and Asia. Beutler asks questions and suggests answers as to what lessons we can learn from the Johannine Writings in this respect.

² Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (XIII-XXI): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, vol. 29A, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 761.

³ Ernst Haenchen, Robert Walter Funk, and Ulrich Busse, *John: A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Hermeneia - a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 154.

⁴ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, vol. 36, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1999), 300.

Also in this issue, Rev. Dr Martin Micallef OFM^{Cap} from our Department, and Editor of *Melita Theologica*, tackles the highly debated issue of “The World: A Mark on the Johannine Tradition.” In his article, Micallef analyses how the discovery of the *Dead Sea Scrolls* enabled Johannine scholars to rethink the source of the Fourth Evangelist’s vocabulary, especially his employment of dualism. While recognising differences, scholars boldly argued that the comparison between the Fourth Gospel and the Qumran Texts highlights the sectarian character of both the Qumran community and the Johannine community. The use of antithetical terms, such as *of this world* and *not of this world*, has the specific function of setting boundaries around the community. It creates an insider and outsider mentality and serves in turn to legitimise the sectarian status of the group as well as its particular beliefs and practices. *The world* is consistently characterized as a dark place that is alienated from God but nevertheless remains an object of his love (Jn 3:16). The Fourth Gospel portrays “the world” as being in bondage to sin (16:8-11); it is under judgment (3:18); it is under God’s anger (3:36); it is blind (9:39-41); it hates Jesus, his disciples, and the truth (see Jn 1:10-11). The sociological language of belonging and separation by which the Johannine community preserved its boundaries while remaining open to new converts, indicates that the Christology of the Fourth Gospel reflects a community which is alienated from the world. Thus, in his study of the social character of the Johannine distinctively dualistic language, Martin Micallef offers us a glimpse into the community behind the Fourth Gospel.

A two-part article, “Contemporary Political Engagement – Prophetic and Pauline Perspectives”, by two other members of the Department – Rev. Dr Stefan Attard (Head of Department) and Rev. Dr Paul Sciberras (Former Head) – leads us into the prophetic perspective of the theme. Within the ‘prophetic’ perspective, the authors treat ‘prophetic voices’ such as the Apostle Paul’s, and not exclusively those of the Old Testament prophets. Attard engages the readers in Part 1 of the article on the issue of “the Old Testament Prophetic Charism in the Contemporary World,” while Sciberras analyses “The political realism of the Gospel of Jesus according to Paul.”

Discourse on prophetism and politics necessarily must take into account the different forms of prophetism in the Bible, naturally including the New Testament, as well as the diverse forms of governments in the political world. The latter has a direct bearing on the way political activity is conducted, given the existent wide spectrum that ranges from tyranny to liberalism. Not far south from the shores of European Malta, which embraces a democratic form of government, is a significantly different political dynamic that is still emerging

from a despotic setup that keeps rearing its ugly head in the form of inter-tribal conflict. Regardless of the social and political milieu of a country, be it European or non-European, an effective spirit of prophetism is always a *sine qua non*, if engagement in the polis is to be steered more securely in the direction of true human development. The despotic setting of Nero in Rome, and zealot activity, or the social setting of Cassiodorus in the 6th century are cases in point.

In this study the authors propose to firstly delve into prophetic activity as exhibited in the Old Testament, focusing specifically on the relation it had with the political structures of the day as well as the way it impacted them or was impacted by them. Secondly, being cognizant of the whopping differences between the Biblical and contemporary socio-political and religious contexts, they seek to propose some relevant points of contact and ways in which these prophets, including Paul, political visionaries dressed in religious garb, can contribute to our engagement in and commitment to our own political world.

Rev. Dr Nicholas Doublet and Rev. Dr Jonathan Farrugia, from the Department of Church History, Patrology and Paleochristian Archaeology, discuss the theme from the perspective of the “*fuga mundi* in the Fathers of the Church and throughout the History of the Church in the Light of Scripture.”

The *fuga mundi* was one of the ways through which early Christians tried to preserve and persevere in holiness and life-long witness as the era of martyrdom drew to a close. Finding its roots in the books of Maccabees, when faithful Jews left their cities for a more austere life in the mountains in order to keep themselves free from pagan contamination, early Christian monasticism developed in different forms according to the charism of a number of founders. The present study analyses this development from the historical and textual points of view. The various historical reasons that necessitated the evolvment of this form of life-long witness, together with the various pursuant paths are analysed *in primis*. An analysis of several texts hailing from different traditions buttress the historical perspective. Such a study elucidates how Christians in the age of the Fathers perceived this form of life, and which answers they sought through it.

From the Department of Moral Theology, the perspective of Spiritual Theology is represented by Rev. Dr Charlò Camilleri O.Carm. and Rev. Dr Glenn Attard O.Carm: ““Above all things let God be loved the most”: Françoise d’Amboise, Duchess, Carmelite Nun, and Witness of the Devout Life.”

As Duchess of Brittany and, later in life, cloistered Carmelite nun, Françoise d’Amboise (1427-85) enshrines Jesus’ prayer for his disciples to be *in* the world but not *of* the world. Married off to the Duke of Brittany at the age of fifteen, through her determined spirit d’Amboise influenced life at court mediating

between power-hungry princes and dukes to bring about peace during a time in which France was bereft with wars and great civil unrest. But her true spirit was to be found in her dedication to the poor and most needy. Having then come into contact with the Carmelite reformer Jean Soreth (1394-1471), they embarked on the foundation of new female Carmelite monasteries in France which were to embody a more rigorous and a more interior spiritual life. The model for these new foundations was the spiritual life-programme that had been proposed a few decades earlier by the *devotio moderna* movement in the Low Lands. In 1468, having desired to join the religious life since she was a girl, d'Amboise joined the Carmelite Order in Bon-Don (Vannes), leaving all the riches of her world behind, and gave herself to a life of prayer, humility, and obedience. As a Carmelite nun and later prioress, she led her sisters in the way of the spirit by exhorting them to convert, to grow in the virtue of interior silence, to know themselves well, to be peace-makers with one another, and, above, all, to meditate and imitate the life of Jesus Christ.

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Rev. Dr Paul Sciberras
Co-Editor of this issue