

## Biblical reflection

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Words for mornings meditation 1. Corinthians 13:1-13 (*Song of Songs*)

Words for contemplation: 1. Corinthians 13:11

***"When I was a child, I talked like a child, thought like a child and reasoned like a child; now that I have become a man, I have put an end to childish ways."***

Further quotations:

Luke 18:16 – *Let the little children come to me... (also refer to Mark 10,13-16)*

Ecclesiastes 12:1 – *Remember also thy Creator in the days of thy youth, or ever the evil days come and the years draw near when thou shalt say 'I have no pleasure in them.'*

Matthew 25:40 – *"In truth I tell you that in so far as you rendered such services to one of the humblest of these my brethren, you rendered them to myself."*

### **1. Introduction:**

In this Biblical reflection I would like to share with you some ideas and conclusions, which I as an adult have about childhood. Some of these ideas have general recognition. One of the keywords, which has not been mentioned in this text, but is implicit therein, is the word **'Development'**.

Each development has its beginning, its rise, but then also its falling away and a decline into demise. These aspects affect everything in the world, all living and non-living organisms, the macro- and microcosms. Our universe came into being through the Word ("*Logos*") - most probably there was a "*big bang*" about 13.8 billion years ago - it developed over billions of years and will finally be destroyed. This development affects the whole creation, every living thing and all of us here assembled. It concerns every society, and likewise it concerns the Church and all its branches. And it affects also among other things the "*Medicine of the Person*".

### **2. Thoughts about man as an individual:**

The Apostle Paul could have added in the preceding text (1. Cor. 13:11) that when he is an old man (in case he reaches old age), he will look like an old man and will think and talk like an old man, along with everything that goes with it. If a bridegroom wants to know what his bride will look like in a few years, it is normally sufficient for him to look at her mother. (However, he hardly ever does this. Indeed even if he does, in all his love for her, he will say to himself "*My darling Mary will surely look totally different*".) Often the reverse also applies: when we look at an old person (and we see old people in our clinic every day), we can imagine what this person looked like as a child.

Old age is mostly a copy of early childhood. Often however we see that it is more a caricature than a copy, and sometimes even a misshapen caricature. Normally this does not apply in reverse, and the child is not a miniature copy of the adult or old person - neither physically nor mentally. It is a totally different being, and only its further development allows the growth of an adult and later on an old person - on the physical, mental and spiritual levels.

*"In truth I tell you that unless you turn and become like little children, you will in no case be admitted into the kingdom of Heaven"* (Mat. 18:3) and *"Let the little children come to me..."* (Luke 18:16)

Why do we read that we have to become like children in order to enter the kingdom of Heaven? What is it about them that is so remarkable and good? Nobody is more egotistical and egocentric than small children are - they see nothing and none accept themselves and their own needs. If they are not fed, they cry and throw tantrums, until their needs are satisfied.

Most probably however, Jesus wanted to clarify those characteristics that are lacking in adults. These are concerned with limitless faith and trust. This childlike trust in our parents is something we no longer have as adults. We have lost it on account of our education, experience and the development of our own ego. We have replaced that trust with a trust in ourselves and our faculties, which of course is also important.

A small child thinks, *"My father knows everything"*. When he is twenty, he announces: *"My father knows nothing"*. At 50 he sighs, *"My father was right after all."* At 60 he simply regrets, *"If only my father were here, I could ask him..."* - a nice example to demonstrate the development of our thinking.

On the other hand, children are great egoists, rather like some old people, who as a result of an inevitable degeneration and involution become likewise. For example we observe in people afflicted by severe old age dementia, or Alzheimers, a similar egoism and egocentricity as in little children. They only want to eat, drink and have their needs seen to, and they simply want to do what comes into their mind. (Can they thus enter God's kingdom of Heaven, having become in some way like little children?). With these patients we do not expect any convalescence; on the contrary, we expect a gradual breakdown of personality, a slow worsening and the total obliteration of the organism. Working in institutions with Alzheimer patients is therefore highly specialized. No hope remains.

As adults we manage (sometimes) to suppress our egocentricity through upbringing, social pressure and so on. Even God changes our hearts and thinking through Jesus Christ. As we have not yet developed this self-control, and therefore we behave exactly the way we really are. When we become old, our frontal brain, the frontal cortex (*the Lobulus frontalis and other structures*) no longer functions as a brake; we no longer suppress anything, and hence we become a caricature of our childhood - you can also add on all the good and bad events and experiences of our life, everything that has formed and shaped us. How difficult it must be for God to deal with us!

Incidentally - what will I actually look like in heaven? Will I live there like the little children, as they are always given to us as a role model in the Bible? Or do I go there as a young, educated man, bristling full of energy (*"Will it suit me and will I look handsome?"*), or only

as a feeble dying old man? Will I walk there crippled with age, using sticks, will I have bad eyesight and be hard of hearing? What of my Alzheimer and Parkinson's illness? And will I even still have my own teeth and all my fingers...?! (See Ecclesiastes 12). Luckily it will not be anything like that. The Bible full of wisdom tells us that a person need not speculate on this, as in any case it *"has not come into anybody's heart"*. (*"Which eye has not seen, nor ear heard and what has not come into anybody's heart: all that God has in readiness for them that love Him"* - 1. Corinthians 2:9, confer Isaiah 64:3...").

Will we develop any further in God's Heaven? Will time and other physical laws also be valid there? Or will there be no further development in the kingdom of Heaven, and time cease to be our great enemy (*"one day is as a thousand years"* 2. Peter 3:8) and everything will be eternally the same and changeless? God's kingdom of Heaven surpasses by far our capacity for understanding and powers of imagination. Our mind and brain are limited. Our brain has approximately 100 Mia neurones and synapses (dendrites and axons), which, apparently according to some scientists is as many atoms as there are in the universe. And yet, even that does not suffice to comprehend God, Eternity and God's kingdom of Heaven. Perhaps for that reason also we have to be like children.

### **3. Thoughts about the development of the Church:**

The history of this world, the history of God's people, the history of the Church - all of this presents a remarkable development. From the simple to the complex, from childhood to adulthood... and ultimately the inevitable end and destruction, the end of the world overall, a fact we have to consider (*"... since it is reserved for all mankind once to die and afterwards to be judged"* - Heb. 9:27).

Each system, each organism has its birth and its beginning, its development and childhood, its adulthood and demise. Out of the old is borne the new.

The Christian Church presents a special development. Luke, the author of the Acts of the Apostles, describes very vividly the formation and development of the Christian Church. It is unique and will never repeat itself in this way. It is the *"childhood"* of the Church. Indeed its further development is not linear and step-by-step, but similarly follows its own laws, which have been strange, muddled, full of turns, branchings-off, dead-ends, false-steps and mistakes. It is the story of unending love and mercy, but also of jealousy, hatred, violence and bloodshed. The Christian Church experienced its Refomation and Counter-Reformation and that in most European countries (France, the Czech Republic, Switzerland, Germany, Great Britain...).

The question therefore pends: where does the Christian community stand nowadays? Many people think that the Church in the traditionally Christian countries is no longer alive (a Church without a future). It has experienced a great revival and diffusion worldwide. It gave its utmost to the world and now it has no further future in Europe and America. It only hangs on through sluggishness. Possibly it still has some chance in the *"Third World"*, in Asia or Africa. It is quite remarkable, if we take a look at some of these countries - e.g. in South Korea: 25% of the population are Christians. There we see a development that resembles the *"childhood"* of the Christian community in Europe. But today's world is being accelerated and thrust forwards by Information Technology. How then will Christianity and the Christian Church look like in 50 or 100 years? Will it still even exist?

During the last decades we were able to observe in the traditionally Christian countries a decline of church members, even an exodus out of the Church. Not only from the Catholic Church ("*away from Rome*"), but also from the Protestant Church and other denominations. Today the Czech Republic is seen as one of the most atheistic countries. And that despite it being the homeland of the Reformer Jan Hus - 1372, of the Brotherhood (*the Unitas fratrum*) - 1457 and the Bohemian Confession - 1585. On the Internet not so long ago you could read in which countries Christianity is increasingly struggling for survival and will vanish. In first place comes the Czech Republic, closely followed by Switzerland, Germany and other former strongholds of Christianity. It is said that the original Christianity is becoming increasingly unattractive and useless for the people (it simply isn't worthwhile) and therefore is gradually dying out. The dear old Darwin?

The founder and the first President of Czechoslovakia, Tomas Garrigue Masaryk wrote: "*Peoples live by ideas they grew up with.*" If this corresponds to the truth, what kind of future do the peoples and national states have in today's global world? Could something similar also be valid for the Christian Church? If so, in what way and how should the answer to the question of the Church's future be?

#### **4. Thoughts about the development of the 'Medicine of the Person':**

I am not sure, whether I have the right to ponder on a further development of the "*Medicine of the Person*" (MoP). I am no founding member, rather a late beginner. We have come to the MoP about twenty years ago. At that time, the MoP congress took place for the first time in Prague. It took place in the House of Doctors. The lecture-room and, during the workshops also the classrooms, were fully booked. There were more than 100 participants. After the Fall of the Berlin Wall in Germany and the gentler Revolution in Czechoslovakia, there began a new era in Europe and former Czechoslovakia was an attractive and interesting country. Then our children began travelling with us to MoP congresses and became friends with other children. They had their own programme, with a performance at the end of the congress. But a development took place and our congresses changed. Our children and their children only seldom and on special occasions take part in the congresses. Our average age has risen markedly. That is the way of life. A natural development.

This development has meanwhile also changed the whole field of medicine. Paul Tournier's teaching more than 100 years ago gradually became a generally recognized principle, almost indeed a norm. Fantastic discoveries in the sciences, which at the beginning of the 20th century represented a breakthrough in medicine, slowly brought the realisation that one cannot simply reduce a person to "*the sum of some elements and minerals with a little water added*", but that the person also has a mind and a soul, which have a greater influence on his bodily ailments than we could have guessed at that time. Each of us has bodily, mental and spiritual needs. In today's medicine this is already integrated. Also thanks to Paul Tournier.

Thus in the field of "*integrated medicine*", in the field of holistic medicine or psychosomatics, one can also observe a remarkable diffusion and great progress. It was Paul Tournier alone who took responsibility at the outset of this development, though he gradually succeeded in influencing the whole field of medicine. Today this branch of medicine (and also Paul Tournier himself) has its students, followers and different branches all over the world. One not only sees differences in the understanding of modern psychiatry and

psychology, but also in clinical medicine overall. Even what we call "*Medicine of the Person*" today has many followers.

How will be the further development of MoP? This year sees our 63rd congress. Will the 100th congress take place in 37 years, in the year 2048? If so, what will it look like? How many participants will be there? Which of us will still be around to take part in it?

## 5. Conclusion:

*"In so far as you withheld such services from one of the humblest of these..."* This quotation about the Last Judgement, which we read in Matthew (25:31-46), is one of the most earnest statements and most important messages of the Bible. It concerns itself quite fundamentally with the orientation of our lives. It does not deal explicitly with "*children*", but generally with all who are helpless and in need - with "*one of the humblest of these*". Among these are surely also the children, who are in need of help from us adults. Without this, they could not develop, they would not grow, would not become adults. Looking after children and grandchildren, looking after our weak and helpless is totally fundamental for Christianity, belongs to the cycle of the world, as a relay message, which hands this duty on from one generation to the next. This is well and wisely arranged, otherwise we as humans would already have ceased to exist and our species (*Homo sapiens*) would have become extinct.

It is a very spiteful and treacherous fact that nowhere previously in the New Testament do we read that we should look after the weak and the helpless. There is nowhere previously a warning that we will be judged if we do not look after the hungry and sick. And yet in the end we are judged if we do not do so. How is this possible? Why? Very simple: If we do not behave this way, it is simply because we do not love our neighbour. And if we do not love people, we lack the most fundamental principle of Christianity. In other words: If we do not behave this way, we are no Christians, i.e. Jesus' children, and have never been!

In conclusion then we return to the quotation that we mentioned at the beginning and read at the morning service: "*And so there remain faith, hope, love, but of these the greatest is love.*" (1. Cor. 13:13).