

THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF THE WORD IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

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Abstract: The Gospel of John is one of the most fascinating literary texts of humanity and one of the keys for understanding the message of the Evangelist is the transforming power of the words. Therefore all the words of Christ, which is the Logos incarnate, have a ineffable power of transforming the world, the mind and the being of the people. Some of the main assertions of Christ are interpreted in this understanding.

Keywords: word, Logos, understanding, transformation, hermeneutic

In our world, the terrestrial word is an utterance, a verbal expression of a thought. The word is a connection between persons, ideas, facts and worlds. The language transformed the human being and united him with God. The word is not only an acoustic explosion of sounds with meaning, but so much more than that.

Thousands of theologians tried to decipher the Gospel of John, emphasising some aspects of it. But there is – beyond the usual hermeneutics – an esoteric code, a *disciplina arcana*, understood only by the disciples of Christ, about the truth, full of meanings, of the life of the Saviour. Although the Christianity is a religion for all, there is something always new, fascinating and mystical, in the words of God on earth. From this perspective, the essence of hermeneutics¹ is to enter into the mind of the Evangelist, to try to feel and think the way he felt and thought, to access a set of gnoseologic, verbal and significance values that correspond to the mentality of that time and of that person. In order to obtain such an outcome, it is necessary to re-create an entire universe of mentalities, traditions², meanings and hidden connotations, some of them lost for ever. The effort of interpretation³ is a resurrection of an old world, and entrance into the constellation of the evangelical past and a contemplation of the hidden meanings of the words of John.

Usually, any hermeneutics or even exegesis assimilates automatically – and wrong – values and meanings of today, from our demographic, geographic and mental world. This is a fake, a forgery, a forced interpretation, to which neither the author, nor his receptors thought. This is the same thing like some low literary critic that confers to an author, scientific, philosophic, cultural or even mathematic values (for example, the case of the poet Dan Barbilian), that the author never wanted to emphasise. There is although a useful exercise of imagination and a cultural act, but the role of hermeneutics is to detect from a cumulus of information the deep meaning of the writing, the real intention of the author, the real connotation, the feeling of the writer.

John is the beloved disciple of Jesus Christ, and he stood close to him all the three years of his preaching. After the Resurrection, John took with him the Mother of Christ, and had access to her knowledge about the Saviour. John was present at the most important events in the life of Jesus. He is one of the three apostles that stood around Christ at the resurrection of the

¹For an extensive filosophy of the understanding, see M. Foucault, *Hermeneutica subiectului* (in rom.), Polirom, 2004.

²Dirk van der Merwe, *Theology and the Gospel of John*, HTS Theological Studies 66 (1), febr. 2010.

³Richard Bauchman and Karl Mosser, *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, Eerdmans Michigan, 2008, p. 84.

daughter of Jairus, at the Metamorphosis, during the bloody tears prayer in Gethsemane. His understanding, regarding the facts and the words of Christ, was a close and full of love one. John felt really the words that came up from the mouth of God. However, in contrast to the synoptic evangelists, he dresses his words with an alb of hidden connotations, accessible only to the Christian communities, with a unique meaning. In contrast to the other evangelists, where there is an obvious goal of the Gospel, John is “the pleroma” of the three. Mathew proves the prophetic and historical lineage of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God⁴. Marc shows through miracles and extraordinary facts the deity of Jesus. Luke accesses the moral, parabolic, social teaching of Christ. John, as the one that wrote his Gospel after the other three, wishes to demonstrate the mystical metaphysic of Christ, the embrace of meanings between his words and his life, the flow of light of the Incarnation, the Eucharistic dimension of creation.

In the Prologue of the Gospel, John constructs one of the most laborious philosophic and theological systems in the history of humanity. The beginning of his Gospel is one of the most profound and interpreted texts in history. There is so much theological essence, that thousands of books tried to denude the hidden, although so evident truth of his words. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”. The biblical foundation of the essential dogma of the Christendom, the dogma of the Holy Trinity, is present here in all its linguistic and theological extension. John speaks of the Logos as a eternal Person, united with God the Father, the unique Son of God, incarnate (*sarx egeneto* – John 1, 14). Beyond the obvious personalism of his words, the fact that John calls the Son of God “Word” confers an eternal dignity to the human words. The human utterance becomes the indissoluble connection between man and God, the common point of the unity between Creator and creature. The Word of God bestows through the words of this world the allegiance to eternity, eschatological identity⁵.

So, not only the identity between the Son of God and the Word of God is affirmed here, but also the coronation of the human word with an eternal value. Not only God is the Word, but the Word is God. In addition, the human speech is theological accessibility, spirit of unification with the increate, the “resemblance with God” in biblical terms.

From the dawn of creation, God creates saying his commandments. His Word has the creator power. He doesn't create in his thought, or in other manner, but through the utterance of his Word. This reality remains in history and fulfil itself in the Incarnation of the Son of God. The words of Christ give life, not only in mind, but in reality. His word is “spirit and life”. Everything Jesus says is not a mere vocal expression of his thoughts, but it is the theological definition of the universe. If the words of a man can have different meanings, the words of the Word, the Logos, create and define the world, bring her to the fulfilment, discover the mystical sense of the foundations of universe. More than that, the words of the Word are saving words, bring the aeon of eternity. So, every hermeneutic effort regarding the Gospels is not a simple exercise of imagination or a bookish demarche, but an effort of discovery of eternal territories in the history and in the eternity of humanity⁶. It is like an exploration and cartography of the Kingdom of God, present here and now, in the Mysteries of the Church.

The transforming power of the word of Jesus can be seen firstly in his speeches that change the grounds of the world. The word of Jesus rises the dead, breaks the powers of darkness in the possessed people, empowers the paralysed members, opens the ears of the deaf and the eyes of the blind, penetrate through the heart of the natural elements and soothe the storm of the sea, dry the unworthy figs of creation.

⁴John F. O'Grady, *The Human Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, in *Biblical Theology Bulletin. Journal of Bible and Culture*, 14 (2), 1984, pp. 63-66.

⁵Peter C. Phan, *Culture and Eschatology*, American University Studies, Peter Lang Publishing, New York, 1985, p.90.

⁶Cf. Philip Comfort and Wendell Howley, *Opening John's Gospel and Epistles*, Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois, 2007, p. 87.

The word of Jesus is also a fundamental prophecy about the absolute future of humankind. Everything that Jesus utters is a blessing of creation, a recreation of the world in the human persons, a healing of humanity fallen into death, a resurrection of the universe.

We see how the prayer of Jesus to the Father has the power to multiply the breads. His commandments to the Apostles bring through a wonderful force the fishes from the corners of the sea, into the nets of the apostles. The word of Jesus pervades the earth and the heaven, pierces the gates of the death, turns back Lazarus from the kingdom of darkness, creates life in the dead, almost putrid man, restores the tissues of human organs and fills them with life.

The assertion of Christ: "I am the Light of the world" (John 12, 8) is not only a theological metaphor of the Incarnation, but the fundamental scientific discovery in the history of humanity. The transforming power of humanity united with God is the power that holds the world, in order not to sink into nothingness. The gigantic effort of man to escape the curse of death created the human culture. The human creation is the escape plan from death. The eternity is the ideal of the whole humankind. All the culture and civilisation is a supreme NO to death and its absurd existence, a huge ontological refuse to accept oblivion. All the human ideals are for an eternity. All human feelings are meant through the spiritual DNA to last for ever. There are no people on earth that dream to die, or think life through death. Everywhere, the humanity cries from the bottom of its heart that it cannot die. This "light of the world" of escaping death is the divine and human Person of the Word incarnate. All the efforts of man to shirk from death find an answer in the Resurrection from the dead with the body of Christ. The risen Jesus is the definite answer to the pain of the man in history.

Another assertion of Jesus is: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14, 6). Beyond the fact that nobody in the world didn't dare to speak these words, we observe the transforming power of this assertion. It is indeed the eternal model of leadership through the Spirit⁷. Jesus show us that the absolute future of humanity is in Him, the Way to this future, the key of understanding the Kingdom of God and the Life itself of the universe are in Himself. He is the answer for all the questions of the world, the way of access to eternity through the unity with Him, the absolute reality of being, beyond all illusions and ontological fallacies of the man. These illusions are constructed by the human reason as temporary remedy for eternal death.

Therefore the humanity was created in order to unite itself with the godhead of the Son, its final goal, the understanding of its sense.

It is interesting to notice that in the assertion: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" is clearly affirmed the unity between the Son and the Holy Spirit, "the two hands of the Father" (as Saint Irineus of Lugdunum stated). We cannot reach Christ but through the Spirit. He is the key toward the union with Christ. So, Christ is "the Way", and the Spirit is the Guide ("He will guide you to all the truth". Christ is "the Truth", and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth (John 16, 13). The Spirit is the Witness of Truth, which is the Son. Christ is "the Life", and the Spirit is the Spirit of Life ("When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground (psalm 104)⁸.

We notice another word of Jesus expressing an eternal reality of the world: "I am the Bread of life". In this word, it lies down the meaning of the entire history. The feeding is the supreme act of maintaining the mortal life, after the fall into sin. Through the killing of other life, the human being keeps his life. Through the death of otherness he maintains his life. The act of killing and the consumption of life brings not only life, but death, so the human eating the dead body of animals and plants, eats his own death. Christ comes and affirms that He is the Bread of Life, and His Body in Eucharist, gives eternal life⁹. Eating the living God in the

⁷ Cornelis Benema, *Jesus' Authority and Influence in the Gospel of John. Towards a Johannine Model of Leadership*, in *Scriptura* 115, (2016 - 1), pp. 1-10.

⁸ <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+104&version=NIV>

⁹ John D. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church, The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop during the first three Centuries*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, Massachusetts, 2001, p. 60.

Eucharist, the human being doesn't die for ever but becomes the same body with Christ, the Head of the Church. The communion of blood with God, the saving transfusion of divine blood is the foundation of eternity for humanity. The Church is therefore not only "the people of God", but also the "Body of Christ", the human synaxis that become one with Christ. He is the Head of the Church and He feeds with his life all the cells of this ecclesial organism, the Church.

Every statement of the Gospel of John proves this transforming power of the word of God. This creator power of the Logos, preserved in the Gospels, is transmitted to the Church through the Holy Mysteries. The words that pulled Lazarus away from the depths of the grave can resurrect today the people from the death of their sins. The grace of God present in the Church is a healing, comforting, living grace.

The theological essence of the Church is her transforming power, from a heard of people into a evangelical assembly of saints. The holiness of humanity is the extension of the words of Christ in the world and the fulfilling of Incarnation. The goal of life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit.

An evangelical hermeneutics that will try to discover this transforming power of the word of Christ is a necessity today. Theology needs to come out from the golden cage of the bookish self sufficiency, and to prove the Eucharistic power of Christ into the world.

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