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Review of the doctoral dissertation: Naanlong Bruno Yenkwó, *Jesus' Attitude Towards the Tradition of the Elders Concerning Purity and Impurity According to the Gospel of Mark 7:1-23*, Warsaw 2022, pp. 307.

In the New Testament one of the important motives of the polemic between Jesus and His adversaries (Pharisees, "Jews", Scribes) is ritual purity. It leads to the parting of the ways between Jews and Christians. If we want to understand better the originality of Jesus teaching we can not ignore this topic in our biblical research. This is the reason that Naanlong Bruno Yenkwó choose this issue as the topic of his dissertation entitled "Jesus' Attitude Towards the Tradition of the Elders Concerning Purity and Impurity According to the Gospel of Mark 7:1-23". He wrote it under the supervision of Rev. prof. dr hab. Janusz Kręcidło MS. The goal of his work is the analysis of the fragment of the Gospel of Mark 7:1-23. He expresses it on the page 10 and page 12: "Our task is to try and create a balance and to fill in the gaps by concentrating on the ritual and ethical implication of Mark 7:1-23 and to examine the community behind the text... This would help us to better to better grasp and appreciate the social and anthropological meaning of rites, which would give us also a sense of Jesus' teaching that leads to inclusiveness as against that of the Pharisees which led to exclusiveness". This task the author consequently accomplishes in his work. In order to enter deeper into the exegesis of this text and better understand its sociological and ethical dimensions the author deals first with the question about purity and impurity in the ancient Mediterranean culture, in the Hebrew Bible, in intertestamental literature and in the New Testament.

In the present dissertation Naanlong Bruno Yenkwó using a social scientific approach examines the concept of ritual purity and its ethical implication on the attitude of Jesus

towards the tradition of the elders according to Mk 7:1-23. The use of this method enables him to arrive at some positive findings regarding cultural and social characteristics of some ancient communities and connecting these to the text studied in the Gospel of Mark (Mk 7). He tries to answer on the questions: Who has the authority to define or apply purity rules, and to sanction abnormal behaviour? What was the understanding of the tradition of the elders regarding ritual purity? How do we understand the concept of honour and shame in the text of Mk 7:1-23?

This work is open by “General Introduction” (p. 8-26) where the author deals with statement, objective and scope of his studies, *status quaestionis*, research methodology, sources and outline. It is a very good introduction to the whole dissertation.

In the first chapter entitled “The anthropological understanding of ritual purity and impurity in the ancient Mediterranean culture” (p. 27-86) the author deals with the definitions of concepts such as ritual, purity, impurity, pollution, taboo and purification rite. The author discusses here also the topics connected with banquet and boundary within the purity code, the rite of passage, the collectivism of the Mediterranean culture in different periods and in different areas (Sumeria, Akkadia, Assyria, Babylonia, Hittite, Egypt, Greece and Rome), contexts of purification (body fluids, disease, corpse impurity, bloodshed, objects, buildings and grounds) and motives of purification.

Second chapter entitled “Purity and impurity in the Old Testament” (p. 87-142) contains the analysis of the notion of purity and impurity in the Hebrew Bible. The author discusses the texts which refer to unclean animals, food, childbirth, skin disease, touching of unclean things, discharge of bodily fluids and marital intercourse. The author deals also here with the effect of impurity in the Hebrew Bible, the rationale of purity laws (holiness of God, contamination of man, hygiene and health explanation, cultic explanation, ethical concerns, separation of holiness from expressions of sexuality, sociological explanation, symbolic explanation), the role of priests as the restorers of ritual purity in community and the role of atonement.

In the third chapter “The motifs of purity and impurity in the intertestamental literature” (p. 143-177) the author enters to the Jewish sources such as the Qumran writings, Mishna, Talmud, Apocrypha and the works of Philo and Josephus Flavius. His research proves the value of these sources as link between Old and New Testament with significant influence on religion, politics, culture and civil environment. In this chapter he also discusses the school of Shammai and Hillel and their attitude to the ritual of hand washing. He makes research on the Jewish texts containing the occasions for hand washing (before eating bread,

after eating bread, before eating dipped fruits or vegetables, before worship, before the priestly blessing, after sleeping).

Chapter fourth entitled “The New Testament insights to ritual purity and impurity” (p. 178-217) presents the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles about purity and impurity. The author makes the analysis of the texts of the Gospels (Matt 8:1-4; Luke 11:38-39; John 2:13-16), Acts of the Apostles (10:1-11.14-15; 11:5-9; 15:7-11) and other New Testament writings (1 Cor 3:16-17; Eph 3:1-6; Heb 9:11-22). He shows the essential difference and turnaround from the external to the internal motives of purity. Analysing the texts of the New Testament he concludes that the purity in the teaching of Jesus is moral, personal and connected with the human heart. The author expresses the important conclusion that Jesus in the New Testament does not invalidate the Jewish teaching but presents an improvement and deeper understanding of the purity.

Fifth chapter entitled “Jesus’ understanding of purity and impurity in Mark 7:1-23” (p. 218-278) is the climax of the dissertation. The author investigates the place of Mark 7:1-23 in the structure of the Gospel and its function within the context of the Gospel of Mark. He also discusses structure of Mark 7:1-23 with some textual analysis. In his research he puts attention on the perspective of honour and shame, the image of Jesus as broker who rejects the tradition of the elders and the importance of the purity of the heart in Jesus’ teaching. It leads him to the conclusion that for Jesus the greatest danger for impurity lies within the human heart. Jesus clearly reveals the evil acts (evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness) which originate from the human heart and make one impure. In the text of Mark Jesus invites his disciples to understand that purity and impurity do not depend on external rituals but come from within the heart of a person. This obviously differs from the attitudes of the Scribes and Pharisees who attempt to construct a fence to protect purity from external pollution.

The is ended by general conclusion (p. 279-286) and bibliography (287-307).

The doctoral dissertation of Naanlong Bruno Yenkwu deserve to acknowledgement. The author consistently wanted to fulfil the goal of his research and he did it. Using the social scientific approach, the narrative analysis and the canonical analysis in his research he came to the creative conclusions. His dissertation is the important contribution for contemporary research on the Gospel of Mark and the issue of purity and impurity in the teaching of Jesus in the context of tradition of the elders. The work has clear and logical style. After each of the chapter there are the concise and clear conclusions which show authors’ sense of the synthesis. The research based on previous carefully done literary, historical and sociological

analysis. Dealing with the definitions and interpreting the biblical texts he uses Hebrew and Greek language.

There are also weak points of this dissertation. The author humbly confesses it on the page 23: “There is the need to go out and make investigation and research on different scholarly archives near and far regarding ritual purity. We must confess that time and the situation that the world is presently faced with regarding the global pandemic (COVID 19), would not permit us to do so. Thus, books, articles, and publications available regarding this dissertation will be used here. We hope to develop this work to an appreciable level in the future”. Below there are couple of suggestions which can help in preparation of this work to publication:

- In the dissertation there is no reference to the baptism of John the Baptist in the Jordan river and the meaning of his activity in the polemic on purity and impurity between Jesus and his adversaries.
- The lack of textual criticism in the analysis of Mark 7:1-23 causes the shortages in the interpretation of this text.
- Mishna and Talmud do not belong to the intertestamental literature. These Jewish writing were written later than New Testament.
- The text of Mark 7:1-23 has its parallels in the Gospel of Matthew 15:1-20 and the Gospel of Luke 11:37-54. The detailed comparison of these texts could reveal interesting points of view of the Synoptic Gospels concerning the issue of purity and impurity and the motives of polemic between Jesus and Scribes and Pharisees.
- In status questions there are the presentation of 13 publications but it is limited only to describing of their content. There is the lack of showing the main points of the polemic on purity and impurity in Mark 7:1-23 and different argumentation.
- In the corpus of the dissertation and in the footnotes there are doublets and repetitions (compare texts on p. 110 and 137; p. 179 and 181 see the doublet on the p. 154; and also compare footnotes 102 and 120;
- Some publications are quoted from the second hand (see e.g. footnotes 47; 890; 987 etc.)
- In the corpus of dissertation there are the names of many authors but without any references to their works in the footnotes (see p. 9-10; 23; 219; 267 etc.). In footnotes there are also references which are not coherent with the names in the corpus of the work (see e.g. footnote 6; 10, 12,13, 35, 68, 659 etc.) or there is the lack of pages (see e.g. 67). The reference to the Gospel of Matthew on p. 188 is very strange.

Despite of these weak points I estimate positive as the whole the doctoral dissertation of Naanlong Bruno Yenkwó. He shows very good exegetical, sociological and theological skills. The work contains many interesting and inspiring ideas. He shows very good exegetical, sociological and theological skills. The work after some corrections and improvements should be publish for large audience. I postulate to the Faculty of Theology of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw to the further procedures connecting with the obtaining of grade of doctor for Naanlong Bruno Yenkwó.

I would like to ask two questions:

1. How we can estimate the baptism of John the Baptist in Jordan river in the context of polemic on purity and impurity between Jesus teaching and the tradition of the Elders of Israel?
2. What is the impact of discussion about purity and impurity in Judaism, Christianity and Islam of XXI century?

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