

Review

**Naanlong Bruno Yenkwó, M.Sc. dissertation, entitled "Jesus attitude towards the tradition of the elders concerning purity and impurity according to the Gospel of Mark 7: 1-23", written under the supervision of Fr. prof. dr hab. Janusz Kręcidło MS at the seminar on New Testament exegesis, at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Rev. card. Stefan Wyszyński in Warsaw.
Warsaw 2022, pp. 307.**

This review is the result of my appointment by the Council for the Discipline of Theological Sciences of the University of Fr. Card. Stefan Wyszyński as a reviewer in the PhD thesis of Bruno Yenkwó, Naanlong, MA. The decision was communicated to me by the Dean of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Fr. Card. Stefan Wyszyński, Rev. prof. dr hab. Piotr Tomasik of 27.06.2022.

1. The problem of the dissertation and its legitimacy

In modern exegesis, there is a greater interest in the problem of ritual purity and uncleanness. The author of the dissertation decided to examine this issue in a broad cultural context. First he deals with the issue of purity and impurity in ancient Near Eastern cultures, then in Old Testament times and in inter-testamentary literature. The next task was to examine the presence of this issue in the context of the New Testament. Finally, he undertakes a wide discussion on the pericope of Mk 7: 1-23, in which he shows the ethical implications of Jesus' attitude towards rituals concerning purity and uncleanness. Defining the goal, the author clearly poses the question: why did Jesus do this and what are the ethical and moral consequences of it? (p. 12). Such intended topic of the dissertation is absolutely justified. The broad context

allows us to look much deeper at the given problem. The chosen research path, ranging from general to particular, is perfectly justified. The author also clearly defines the methods he intends to apply in his dissertation: The Social Scientific Approach (SSA) and the narrative analysis and other forms of tradition-based approaches (the canonical approach, the Jewish tradition of interpretation, and the impact of the text on individuals and communities) (p. 21).

2. Structure of the thesis

The work consists of a title page, a table of contents, a list of abbreviations, and a very well-prepared introduction. The main part of the work consists of five chapters that correctly discuss the issue of ritual purity and uncleanness, starting from a wide range of issues to more and more detailed ones. The first one shows the anthropological understanding of purity and uncleanness in ancient Mediterranean cultures. In this chapter, the author firstly defines the key concepts for the topic under discussion. It explains what they are: ritual, cleanliness, impurity, incur impurity, taboo, cleansing, cleansing ritual. He then discusses how these concepts functioned in various ancient cultures such as Sumerian, Akkadian, Mesopotamian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Hittite, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman. The discussion of these issues in ancient cultures allowed for the creation of a cultural background in which the laws and rituals of purity and uncleanness in ancient Israel were formed.

The author devotes the second chapter to this last issue, in which he analyzes the ritualistic regulations concerning purity and uncleanness in the Old Testament. In the third chapter, he discusses the issue of ritual regulations regarding chastity and uncleanness in the inter-testamentary literature and in the Qumran writings. In the fourth chapter, the author analyzes the topic in the New Testament. In this way, it is possible to form an opinion about Jesus' attitude towards the law concerning purity and uncleanness in a wider range of issues, not just in one pericope. In the last, fifth chapter, he takes up the title issue, assessing Jesus' attitude towards the tradition of the elders regarding purity and uncleanness in Mark 7: 1-23.

The thesis ends with the final general conclusion in which the doctoral candidate summarizes all the achievements made in the dissertation. It is worth emphasizing that each chapter ends with a conclusion, which greatly facilitates reading.

The last element of the thesis is the bibliography. It is very rich (pp. 287-307), although the author himself has indicated its insufficiency regarding the detailed literature in the subject of the work, because technical literature is a bit narrower than one would expect. Unfortunately, difficulties caused by COVID-19 made it impossible to perform broader library searches.

However, I believe that the collected literature is completely sufficient for this type of dissertation.

3. Formal assessment

It is worth emphasizing that the work was written very clearly. The subtitles contained in the introduction are worth mentioning. Thanks to them, it is easy to see where the reader is at the point of the introductory issues. The purpose of the work is clearly defined, in which the doctoral candidate decides to conduct extensive research in order to exclude the view, represented by some scholars, that the ritual regulations regarding purity and uncleanness given by the council of elders were introduced by the Pharisees and were included in the oral tradition, and only after 200 CE they were recorded in the Mishnah. It would serve as an oral law, supplementing the written one (pp. 8-9).

In the introduction, the author also has included the *status quo* of his research, quoting thirteen authors and discussing their achievements in the research topic. At the same time, he not only reports the achievements of individual authors, but also critically evaluates them, showing the maturity of views on the topic. The review of the achievements of various modern researchers allowed for an original approach to the subject and a clear definition of the scope of the research, as well as setting of the goal the author wants to achieve through the use of well-chosen methods.

The author pursues this goal in five chapters, in which he analyzes the problem of ritual purity and uncleanness, showing in a precise way its essential issues. In chapter one, he outlines a broad background to the Old Testament of ancient Near Eastern cultures. In the second chapter, he presents the regulations on ritual purity and uncleanness in the Old Testament. Then, in chapter three, he discusses how rituals related to purity and uncleanness have been presented in the inter-testamentary literature and in the Qumran environment. The fourth chapter discusses the new approach to ritual found in the pages of the New Testament. Finally, the last, fifth chapter analyzes the issue contained in the title of the dissertation. The summaries at the end of each chapter are very valuable. Thanks to them, one can easily find out what are the most important issues arising from the analyzes carried out in the text of a given chapter.

The reviewer's task is to look critically at the reviewed dissertation. From the formal point of view, the reviewer noticed the following shortcomings:

Original texts of the scriptures in Hebrew or Greek are generally correct. However, on p. 105 the diacritical marks of "ω" (accent, aspiration and iota *subscriptum*) are missed. There is:

καὶ ἄνθρωπος, ω ἐὰν ἐξέλθῃ ἐξ αὐτοῦ κοίτη σπέρματος, καὶ λούσεται ὕδατι πᾶν τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ κραι ἀκάθαρτος ἕωρὰι ἀκάθαρτος ἕωρὰι ἀκάθαρτος

Should be:

Καὶ ἄνθρωπος, ὦ ἐὰν ἐξέλθῃ ἐξ αὐτοῦ κοίτη σπέρματος, καὶ λούσεται ὕδατι πᾶν τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀκάθαρτος ἔσται ἕως ἑσπέρας·

Similarly, on p. 134 in Lev. 14, 2, the pronoun ἦ lacks the breathing accent and the iota *subscriptum*.

Another of the shortcomings from the formal point of view is the numbering of footnotes. In such a large work, footnotes should be numbered from the beginning in each chapter, so that there are not too high numbers at the end of the dissertation. In the reviewed manuscript, footnotes are numbered continuously from the beginning to the end of the dissertation.

The bibliography is quite extensive and correctly divided. However, on pp. 306 and 307, the author probably added the last descriptions and forgot to include sorting, which disturbed the alphabetical order used in the bibliography. However, citations from Wikipedia should be removed from the bibliography as an unscientific and unacceptable source in doctorates.

4. Substantive assessment

In his dissertation, the doctoral student undertook an analysis of the issue of ritual purity and impurity in a wide cultural circle of the Middle East. It is very valuable to discuss in the first chapter how different cultures and religions of the Ancient Near East dealt with the issue of ritual purity and uncleanness. This approach, from the point of view of cultural anthropology, allowed the author to find a certain key by which the behavior of the ritual is aimed at approaching the divine sphere.

The source of the regulations on ritual purity and uncleanness in the Jewish religion are the cultic texts contained in the Old Testament. The doctoral candidate has correctly analyzed selected texts from the Old Testament, thus wishing to determine what the principles of ritual purity in Judaism were based on.

Wishing to present the question of the traditions of the elders, the author properly referred to the ritual rules presented in the texts from Qumran, as well as in the Talmud and Mishna.

In his dissertation, the doctoral candidate duly shows the evolution of the approach to the issue of purity and uncleanness, from ritual and external approach to regulations, to an increasingly spiritual and moral understanding of the issue of purity and uncleanness, which does not depend on external activities, but on internal acts of the heart. The presentation of this evolution is one of the essential values of this dissertation.

The main significant achievement of the dissertation is showing that Jesus in his teaching does not oppose the moral law of the Old Testament or the authentic Tradition of the Elders, but shows that the attitude of the Pharisees and the scribes is based on human views and not on the revealed doctrine of God. True purity, on the other hand, lies not in external rituals, but in a moral-ethical understanding of God's commandments. Hence, a bridge is created for pagans who are not bound by the detailed judaistic regulations regarding the external forms of rites, but who enter the Church by accepting faith in Jesus Christ. An important discovery made by the doctoral candidate was also the revealing of the truth that Jesus' discussion of ritual purity and uncleanness was the crossing of the border between Jews (God's people) and pagans. Jesus' teaching shows that all people belong to God. The author showed that the teachings of Jesus dismantled the human tradition that set barriers between Jews and other nations. Overcoming this barrier contributed to the rapid development of Christianity in the first centuries of the Christian era.

Problem for discussion: How would the author defend himself against the objection that the issue contained in the title of the dissertation was not addressed directly until chapter five? Shouldn't the subject of the work have been formulated a bit differently?

5. Final conclusion

The work of M.Sc. Naanlong Bruno Yenkwó has a great cognitive value. It is permanently inscribed in biblical theology, in which it is very useful description of a broad perspective on the issues of ritual purity and impurity and presentation of the development of thought from the understanding of the ritual as an external regulation to the spiritual understanding in the ethical and moral aspect, as the purity of the human soul. A very significant contribution to biblical theology is the demonstration that the Lord Jesus broke down the barrier between Jews and Gentiles, and thus Christianity was free to develop among the Gentiles, and

was not just one of the Jewish sects. Christian morality is not about performing rituals, but about keeping the heart clean and getting rid of the sins that pollute it. The study deserves, after some minor corrections, to be published in print. The above-mentioned reservations do not diminish the value of the study in any way, as it meets the requirements for doctoral dissertations and deserves a positive assessment.

I hereby certify that the reviewed work, both from the substantive and formal side, meets the requirements for doctoral dissertations specified in the Act of March 14, 2013 "on academic degrees and academic title as well as degrees and title in the field of art" (Journal of Laws 595, Art. 26, § 1).

Therefore, I am submitting an application to the Council for the Discipline of Theological Sciences at the Faculty of Theology of the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw for admission of M.Sc. Naanlong Bruno Yenkwó to further stages of the doctoral dissertation.

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