

# PREACHING THE BIBLE

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## I. Preaching and the Bible

### 1. Preaching itself

The English word 'preaching, comes from 'kerysso', which means 'heralding'. 'Herald' is a person who makes public announcements on behalf of a king or state. His announcements are often good news. This word is used in the New Testament more than 60 times.

New Testament uses also 'euangelizomai' in the same sense. 'Euangelizomai' means bringing good news. In this sense it is used more than 50 times. Hence 'preaching' is basically announcing something important for the people. It is not some abstract teaching, dry theology or a sort of moralizing. It is some news, a good news, some thing very concrete, which people look forward to with great expectation.

### 2. Preaching in Christian Tradition

Christian preaching has always been based on the Bible. The Protestant Christians give a very prominent place to the Bible in their preaching. For them preaching is more often explaining and giving exegesis of biblical texts.

Martin Luther says, "It is a wonderful thing that the mouth of every pastor is the mouth of Christ". By this statement Luther means that every pastor must say only what is in the Bible.

Karl Barth, one of the greatest theologians of the last century says, "Preachers must preach only the Bible and nothing more". He even said, "Sermon should be like the lip movements of a person reading the Bible."

The Bible was not given much prominence in preaching in the catholic tradition. The pride of place always went to the eucharist than preaching. But today the situation has changed. Catholics have begun to give much importance to the preaching of the Word, especially after the II Vatican Council. The Council says, "All preaching... must be nourished and ruled by sacred scriptures" (DV 21).

### **3. Preaching God's Word in the Bible**

We don't preach about the Bible; nor strictly speaking, we preach the Bible. Rather, we preach the Word of God in the Bible. The Bible contains the Word of God in the words of men. Whatever is in the Bible is not necessarily the word of God. As the word of God assumed human flesh in all its weaknesses, so the word of God in the Bible comes with all human weaknesses (except error and untruth). Therefore it is more proper to say that, 'the word of God is in the Bible rather than to say that the 'Bible is the Word to God'.

The Word of God is enshrined in the human words of a particular time, of in a particular socio – cultural context and of a particular philosophical background. But as the time and socio cultural context change, the expressions in which God's Word is enshrined become unintelligible and alienated. To us who are far removed from the biblical authors in time, culture and thought patterns, the biblical language is at times strange and it does not make much sense.

Unmindful of this big 'gap' between us and the biblical writers some read the text as it is and translate it literally. But this literal and word for word rendering of the biblical texts quite often make no sense. This,

in fact leads to misunderstandings and wrong understandings of the biblical message. Christians with fundamentalistic leanings are happy with this type of translations. Such rendering of the biblical passages leads to fortifications of unjust structures and unchristian practices.

But the Bible should not be translated and understood in this way. According to St. Clement of Alexandria the whole Bible is a parable. We cannot take the parable literally. Parable is a particular literary unit and its meaning must be rendered. The Bible too is a kind of parable and it should not be rendered literally.

According to Fr. L. Legrand these fundamentalists who render the Bible word for word “mistake sign for reality” Sign remains a sign. It is not the reality. The reality behind the sign should be brought out. The focus of the Fundamentalist seem to be more on the words which are the outcome of paper and ink than the message behind those words.

The biblical texts themselves are just like music notations. Notations themselves as such are just notations and not music. Only when the notations are chanted it is music! As long as they are not chanted they remain just notations. Similarly the words of the biblical texts remain just words - paper and ink - and only when they are meaningfully proclaimed they become God's Words!

## **II. Jesus Preaching the Bible**

### **Jesus Re-interpreting the Bible**

The way Jesus preached the 'Bible can be very inspiring for us. He did not just repeat the 'words' of the Bible. He knew that those words belonged to different times, persons and cultural contexts. He took the experience enshrined in those words and formulated them anew. He took the message of the age old texts and tried to communicate and proclaim it anew. He heard God speaking in and through the ancient and culturally

conditioned texts and made the voice of God audible and meaningful to people of his day.

It is precisely because of this that Jesus' preaching was very effective. People from all walks of life thronged to hear him. Huge crowds always followed him. They found his words very meaningful and relevant. His explanation of the biblical passages were very appealing. Jesus' teaching was very different from that of the pharisees and scribes. People were fed up with the authoritarian and legalistic teachings of the Rabbis. Jesus' humanistic and prophetic approach impressed them very much. That is why they "were astonished at his teaching; for he taught them as one having authority not as the scribes" (Mt 7:28-29). Even the guards who were sent to arrest Jesus said, "Never before has, any one spoken like this" (Jn 7:46).

The reason for such enormous success of Jesus' teaching is that he never just repeated the 'words' of the Bible. As said above he went to the spirit behind them and the message in them. That is to say, he interpreted them and re-interpreted them. Thus he could throw away the elements which belonged to the different times, cultures and philosophical impacts and bring out the living message, valid for all the times; He could make the voice of God audible and his presence felt. We shall see below a few instances of Jesus' reinterpretation of biblical texts.

### ***1. Re-interpretation of the Sabbath Law***

The Jewish teachings at the time of Jesus emphasized the Sabbath Law so much that it became oppressive. Even very ordinary activities such as going for a walk beyond a certain distance, and of healing a sick person were not allowed. They preferred to be killed on a sabbath day than fight to defend themselves. They argued that a tailor carrying a needle in his pocket was a sin! They came to such ridiculous conclusion because they took the 'words' of the biblical texts very seriously. They forgot the fact that the law of Sabbath was instituted in favour of the slaves and

other exploited working classes so that they too should have at least one day of rest! The rigorous application of the Sabbath Law came later, especially at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah when several people who returned from Babylon, with utter disregard to the Sabbath Law, began doing normal business on Sabbath days! God who gave the Sabbath law would never have imagined that they would make such a caricature of it! That is why Jesus ridiculed their Sabbath observance and broke the Sabbath law by healing people precisely on Sabbath days! He knew that the Sabbath law itself was made for a human need (rest for slaves) and hence human needs take precedence over it. He asked them “Is it (Mk 3:4) lawful to do good on a Sabbath rather than to do evil, to save life rather than to destroy it? Thus Jesus far from repeating the old law on Sabbath, gives their real meaning and clearly says that the laws are for saving and promoting human life and not for destroying it.

## ***2. Re-interpretation of the Law of Love***

Love commandment was Jesus’ greatest commandment. He said categorically “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. The second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments” (Mt 22:37-39; Mk 12:30-31; Lk 10:27). Mark and Mathew make the love of God and the love of the neighbor as the first and second commandments though both are to be observed to fulfill the whole law. Luke does not categorize these laws in terms of the first and the second but makes both one law. St. Paul too in his admonitions to the Christians of his days refers to the law of love. But interestingly he leaves out the first law, namely the law of love of God and speaks only of the second law i.e. the love of the neighbor. In Gal 5:14, he states, “For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement, namely “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” He confirms his view once again in Rom 13:8-10. “... the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.. all the commandments

are summed up in this saying namely "you shall love your neighbor as yourself... love is the fulfillment of the law".

Paul could not be more categorical than this in saying that the most important love commandment is the command to love the neighbor. He seems to omit the love of God, which had been stated as the first law by Mark and Mathew. It may be that he omitted the love of God purposely because many people were boasting that they had a great love of God because of their ritual observances while they had no concern at all for the fellow human beings especially, for the poor and oppressed. Paul is mentioning just the love of the neighbor as the fulfillment of the law to impress upon the people of his days that love of the neighbour is also equally important as the love of God. In fact the love of the neighbor is love of God in as much as the neighbour is none other than God's own image. He/she too is God's child. This is a kind of Pauline re-interpretation of the love commandment of Jesus!

Jesus' re-interpretation of the love commandment consists in the understanding of the 'neighbour'. The neighbour for the Jewish people were those who were close to them on the basis of their faith and ethnicity. Thus the neighbours for them will be Jewish people themselves. Lev. 19:18, which is typical text for the love of the neighbour in the Old Testament tells them to love their neighbour. Here too neighbours are definitely their countrymen as is evident from the parallelism of the text. "Take no revenge.. on your countrymen; you shall love your neighbor as yourself".

For Jesus, however, the neighbours were not people close to them by space, time, creed or birth. For him his neighbours are very different kind of people. It is those who are in need of his care and love. It is the poor, the outcasts, the downtrodden and the sinners who had been denied respect, care, love and status. It is the people like the man who was stripped,

beaten and left half-dead by the robbers on the way to Jericho (Lk 10:30). On completing the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus asked the scribe who had asked him 'who is my neighbour', "So which of these three in your opinion, was neighbour to the robbers' victim?" He answered "the one who treated him with mercy". Jesus approved his answer and told him "go and do likewise!

Thus Jesus made a very meaningful re-interpretation of the law! The 'neighbour' of a Christian is no more a member of her or his religion or clan or colour but it is any person in need, any person who has been deprived of the love, care and concern of others and any person whom Jesus called the 'poor of the Lord'.

### *3. Re-interpretation of the Law on Marriage*

Laws on marriage were in favour of men. Women were not often regarded as persons. A woman could be divorced with or without her will. Dt. 24:1 says, "When a man after marrying a woman and having relations with her is later displeased with her because he finds in her something indecent and therefore writes out a bill of divorce and hands it to her, thus dismissing her from his house". This passage is the centre of discussion in Mk 10:1-12 and Mt 19:1-12.

The reason for the bill of divorce is said to be "something indecent" in the woman. This "something indecent" was interpreted as adultery by the school of Shammai. But the school of Hillel said that the man could write a bill of divorce on any flimsy ground, such as bad cooking, talking to a stranger, disrespect to the husband etc. Thus by the time of Jesus women were divorced for silly reasons. Jesus who valued the original purpose of marriage so much, is very unhappy with this practice. He insisted that the union between man and woman is sacred and permanent, disapproving the practice of divorcing wives for petty reason. Jesus says, "What God has joined together no human being must separate" (Mk 10:9).

Such a separation would lead to adultery when the person concerned remarries. Hence Jesus calls for unity and dissolubility of marriage.

In this passage Jesus clearly re-interprets Dt. 24:1. He sees Dt. 24:1 as a later law. In fact this law should be belonging to 6<sup>th</sup> century BC or even later. The prevailing circumstance at that time could have been the occasion for such a law which does not reflect the original purpose of God in uniting man and woman in a indissoluble bond. The interpretation of Jesus' time made things much worse. Hence Jesus calls for a return to the original intention of God in founding marriage. Thus Jesus, instead of repeating the law in Dt 24:1 word by word, reinterprets it going to the original purpose of God!

#### ***4. Re-interpretation of the Law on Obligation to Parents***

Obligation to parents is very sacred. It is based on the fourth commandment of the decalogue: "Honour your farther and your mother" (Ex 20:12). This is such a fundamental law that no subsequent law can set it aside.

However in the course of time laws and practices appeared among the Israelites which became questionable. One such is the practice of 'Qorban' is a gift dedicated to the temple; As a gift dedicated to the temple it can not be set to profane uses. Such a practice seems to have been in vogue. Josephus also refers to this practice (Ant 4:73). The Mishnah and the Talmud too refer to Qorban.

In Mk 7:11-12, Jesus speaks of this practice: ".... If a person says to father or mother, 'Any support you might have had from me is Qorban (meaning dedicated to God) you allow him to do nothing more for his father or mother'!" Jesus is very angry at this practice, because it contradicts the sprit of the fourth commandment. That is why he fumes at them and says, "You nullify the word of God in favour of your tradition that you have handed on..." (Mk 7:13; cfr. Mt 15:4-6).

Yes, Jesus knows that such practices are merely human traditions. He is well aware that this tradition of Qorban originated in the context of the temple cult. It put the temple and its needs before one's sacred obligation toward one's parents. But this development cannot be allowed to continue. The obligation to maintain one's parents remains always most important and the practices in favour of the cult and the temple remain secondary. Thus the re-interpretative approach of Jesus does not just repeat whatever has been handed on, but sets obligations and practices in proper perspective.

### ***5. Re-interpretation of the Mission of the Messiah***

Messiah was thought of mainly in terms of a king who will deliver Israel from all bondages, especially from the domination of the Romans and restore the glory of the Davidic era. Though Messiah was seen as a prophet, servant of Yahweh, son of man, teacher of righteousness etc., the expectation of the royal Messiah was widespread.

But Jesus gives entirely a different picture of the mission of the Messiah. He cites Is. 61:1-2 and sees the mission of the Messiah in terms of the missions of the servant of Yahweh. Once again Jesus does not just repeat Is 61:1-2 as his mission. He interprets the mission of the Messiah by omitting what is not apt and by adding what can bring out the specific characteristics of his mission. He drops 61c (to heal the broken – hearted) and adds Is 58:6d (to set at liberty those oppressed). What is more important is that he omits the function of 'announcing a day of vindication by our God' (Is 61:2b). This obviously could not be the main function of the Messiah who comes to give life and not to destroy it. He adds two gracious deeds of God both done to the Gentiles namely to the widow to Zaraptath and to Naaman the leper of Syria. The omission and the addition enraged the Jews. They were very happy at the thought that the Gentiles would be damned and destroyed. But here Jesus omits the statement on their condemnation. On the contrary he focuses on the good deeds in their favour, which too irritated them. That is why they are so enraged that they attempted to kill him.

Thus once again we see Jesus giving a re-interpretation to the functions of the Messiah. He goes to the very purpose of God who sent the Messiah not to destroy, but to save and not to kill but to make people live. Taking vengeance does not fit with the function of the Messiah and hence it is dropped. Similarly the Messiah is not sent only to save the Jewish people. He is a Messiah for all people especially the poor and the marginalized. Therefore Jesus focuses on God's work in favour of the Gentiles and that too the marginalized persons such as a widow and a leper, so that the functions of the Messiah are seen in proper perspective.

### ***6. Re-interpretation of various laws***

Some of the important laws concern murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, retaliation and attitude towards enemies. These laws were very important for the Jewish people. No one will ever dare to question any of these. Philo said "Only Moses decrees are' ever lasting, unchangeable and unshakable". Moses decrees are the biblical laws!

But Jesus dares to question the Jewish laws. He says that the laws of the Bible (you have heard that it was said to your ancestors!) need to be completed and deepened! The biblical laws often say only the minimum and so much more has to be said. The biblical laws prohibit often the 'completed action'. They do not deal with the origin and process of the action. What is wrong is not wrong just at the completion of the action; it is wrong from the very inception. Thus Jesus goes to the very root of the evil action and tells the people to stop it at that level.

Anger can result in murder. Anger is the beginning stage and murder is the end-stage. The biblical Law prohibits the end stage. "You have heard that it was said to the ancestors. "You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgement" (Mk 5:21). Jesus says that it is just the minimum. It is the last stage of a process of evil. So he continues, "But I say to you. Who ever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgement" (Mt 5:22).

So too is with the law on adultery. The biblical law only prohibited adultery. But Jesus says that the sinful action began already by looking at a woman with lust. Hence according to Jesus looking with lust itself has to be prohibited (Mt 5:27-28).

The law on divorce also, as we have seen earlier, is reinterpreted by Jesus. Jesus insists on the indissoluble bond of marriage (Mt 5:31-32). Similarly the law forbade only false oaths; but Jesus forbids the very act of taking oath in the name of heaven, earth Jerusalem or one's head. Human words themselves should be truthful and honest (Mt 5:33-37).

In the matter of taking retaliation Jesus' position is very noble and godly! The biblical laws allowed retaliation. They followed the laws of Hammu-Robbi and allowed 'eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' (Mt 5:38). But Jesus totally forbids retaliation. He advises the people to offer no resistance! "When some one strikes on (your) right cheek, turn the other one to him as well". (Mt 5:38). Here it is not only not retaliating but positively allowing him to hurt or do harm again! Of course one must realize that Jesus' statement here is to be understood in the context of struggle for justice and not an act of simple submission to any kind of injustice. Any unwarranted act of violence will be met with resistance as Jesus himself protested against the guard who struck him in front of the High Priest (Jn 18:23)!

Finally Jesus comes to the law regulating one's attitude towards enemies. Here Jesus' teaching reaches to a new height and shows, so to say, the real 'Christianity in action'. In the earlier teaching he exhorted his followers not to resist an attack, especially in the context of the struggle for justice. Here he goes a step forward and tells his followers to wish them well, to bless them and pray for them. This is the consequence of their being God's children who loves all and causes "his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust (Mt 5:45).

It is to be noted here that no text in the Bible commands to hate the enemies! What this text here means is that evil persons or enemies of God's designs and purposes should be avoided and kept at a distance. Here again Jesus does not just repeat an old law which categorized people as good and bad - friends and enemies – and accordingly formulated norms of conduct. For Jesus even the so called 'enemies' have to be seen in a new light. They are not to be avoided or kept at a distance, much less hated. They too, as God's (misguided) children, have to be understood and accepted. The followers of Jesus wish that they too change their ways and live according to God's will for them. For this they need our prayers, good wishes, acceptance and above all, love! If the followers of Jesus do these, they will not remain any more 'enemies'! They will become friends. Thus Jesus' teaching on human relations is very noble and unique. His reinterpretation of the Old Testament law brings out the 'uniquely Christian' law governing relations among human beings.

From the above considerations it becomes amply clear that Jesus' preaching the Bible was very different from that of the scribes of his day. As said above, scribes repeated every word in the Bible. They explained word for word and often missed what God really wanted to tell His people. On the contrary Jesus, instead of just repeating the biblical words, interpreted and re-interpreted them and gave God's living and loving message to the people. That is why they found it very relevant meaningful and moving. Naturally the people saw him, unlike the scribes, speaking with authority (Mt 7:28-29) and exclaimed that no one has spoken like him (Jn 7:46).

### **III. Preaching the Bible Today**

The preaching of the Bible today surely is not an easy task! The temptation is either to repeat the biblical texts word by word and interpret them literally. This is what the scribes of Jesus' day did and the same is done today by the Pentacostal ecclesial communities and Christians with

fundamentalistic views. Others tend to ignore the biblical texts quite often because they are not at ease with some of the biblical texts and their (literal) meaning. They do this partly, because of their 'unpreparedness' to interpret and re-interpret the biblical texts. But Jesus' way of preaching the Bible, which we have seen above, is certainly very different from both the above approaches. The biblical passages can become meaningful and relevant only if we follow Jesus' way. Only in this way we can show the words in the Bible as 'living and loving message of God the Father to His children!

There are some areas in the Bible which are very difficult for preaching today! The approach of Jesus is very much needed to preach on these passages meaningfully. I give below three such areas.

### **1. The clean and unclean**

The Jews had meticulous laws about cleanliness. Lev 11-15 and Num 19 have long lists of the clean and the unclean. Uncleanliness is related to death, disease, sex and the cult. Many passages in the Old Testament, especially those belonging to the Priestly Tradition deal elaborately about the distinction between the clean and unclean and their consequences.

In fact the question of the clean and unclean belong to the social sphere. Avoiding the unclean is very important for healthy living. But this should have little to do with the religious realm! Yet in all major religions this distinction is kept and has caused disastrous consequences. Humans being are categorized as clean and unclean on the basis of some practices, habits, food etc. Those in the upper realm of the society seem to have used the 'clean and unclean divide' in the religious realm and discriminated against those who belonged to the lower social strata. Religious education, functions and leadership roles have been denied to some groups of people on this basis. Particularly women, on account of some normal, natural, physical discharges, have been traditionally regarded unclean and denied functions and positions due to them as human beings.

The Christian tradition which proclaimed the abolition of all distinction between race, sex and religion (Gal 2:28) too succumbed to this clean – unclean divide. A lot of soul-searching needs to be done particularly on the functions and positions woman has been traditionally denied and bold new thinking and actions are needed. Thus while preaching on biblical texts dealing with the clean and unclean one has to be extremely careful. Whatever belongs to the cultural-conditioning of these texts have to be identified and the liberating spirit of the biblical texts have to be brought out. We need to follow Jesus who declared “Are you without understanding? So you do not realize that everything that goes into a person from outside cannot defile... thus he declared all food clean” (Mk 7:18-19). Can we sufficiently admire this revolutionary statement of Jesus which, in one stroke, made the clean and unclean laws irrelevant?

## **2. The only true God**

The biblical texts categorically affirm that the biblical God is the only true God. Our intention here is not in any way to question this belief. But the way in which this truth has to be understood and proclaimed needs a lot of special attention and prudence. We all know that God is one and all religions see, understand and speak of that God from their own socio-cultural context, historical experiences and philosophical backgrounds. This means that every religion will have several beautiful things to say about God. There could also be things in every religious tradition which are the outcome of their historical experiences and which may not be befitting the image of God shared by others. As the second Vatican council unwaveringly states, “The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in those religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrine which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless, often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men” (NA 2).

The biblical formulation of the ‘one and only true God’ comes from Israel’s historical experiences. The foundational experience of being

saved from the Egyptian tyranny sometime in the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC made them realize that their God, Yahweh, is a powerful God and they would never need to think of any other God. He is the one and only God, all powerful, all loveable and all sufficient. Having experienced Him and being saved by Him gave them this strong assurance which is formulated as "Yahweh is the one and only God for us".

This statement is also the outcome of the covenant formula. In those days when they concluded a covenant, the first and most important obligation is that the king or people who require protection and patronage from a more mighty king or people should state in no uncertain terms that they would not go to any other king or people for help. For them the only one they accept, recognize, respect and pay obeysance is the king to whom they have turned for protection and patronage. For them, for all practical purposes, others don't exist. In the contract or covenant formulas of 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C. we find this condition as the first and most important. Only if this condition is accepted would the king from whom protection and patronage is sought will help. The biblical covenant uses this very language; "I, the Lord, am your God.. you shall not have other gods beside me. You shall not carve idols... you shall not bow down before them or worship them" (Ex 20:2-5)

Thus the biblical texts don't bother about the existence of other names and forms of God. They are more concerned that for the Israelites Yahweh is the one and only God and no other needs to be taken into account. He is all-sufficient, almighty and all loving. Hence, the Israelites don't need to go to any other. Going to other deities is always regarded as infidelity and harlotry.

This being the understanding of the biblical texts on the 'one and only God' we have to be extremely respectful of other religious beliefs and practices. The texts affirming Yahweh as the one and only God have

to be understood from the historical experiences of the people of Israel and should not lead to statements undermining other religious beliefs and practices. The interpretation and re-interpretation of such biblical texts in our teaching and preaching should lead to mutual respect, enrichment and collaboration between believers of various religions.

### **3. A God who is at ease with Violence**

God and violence can not go together. God is the source of salvation and life and violence is the source of death and destruction. They are opposed to each other!

Yet they both seem to go together in the Bible. It speaks of so many wars. Many are shocked by the killings and brutality found in the Bible. Many are scandalized by the fact that God himself orders and leads those wars which result in death, destruction and devastation. Passages such as Dt. 20:10-14;16,17 are really shocking. God ordering people “to put all males to the sword.. you must not let anything that breathes alive. You shall annihilate them – the Hittites and the Amorites, the Cananites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites – just as the Lord your God has commanded.” Josh 10:26-40 too is a war-horror filled passage! In all the towns Joshua conquered he “utterly destroyed every person” (v.28) and “left no one remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the Lord, God of Israel commanded” (v.40). There are many more passages which are horrible such as Josh 11:10-14; 1 Sam 27:9; 2 Sam 15,16 (Menahem ripped open all the pregnant women in Tiphseh); Hos 10:14 (Mothers were dashed in pieces with their children).

The above horror – accounts are just a few examples. There are many more of such violent, brutal and heartless acts. What is worse is that they are after approved by God, at times even ordered by Him!

Well, such biblical accounts are very difficult to be understood by the people of today. Yet they are part and parcel of the Holy Bible! We

need to take special care to draw the life-giving message from these death filled passages. Wars anywhere, especially in the Middle East, were always brutal. Other writings of those days are no less brutal. It was the accepted way of warfare those days.

Of course, we have to be aware that several accounts of wars in the Bible are later formulations. They are more often victories and brutal destructions from the Deuteronomic Historian's point of view than what actually happened. Some of the war-accounts are later additions. A careful reading of the Deuteronomic history would reveal that earlier laws on war were more lenient and the later ones more harsh. Some of these harsh laws and war accounts should have been added by the second Deuteronomic editor out of concern to do away with idolatry in Israel.

But there is another way of looking at these wars accounts. The biblical God is a 'fighter God', fighting on behalf of His oppressed and enslaved people. The Egyptian tyranny was not going to be abolished by requests, exhortations or persuasions. This necessitated a struggle – a battle. This was what the God of the Bible did in favour of His oppressed and enslaved people. The subsequent wars too can be seen in this perspective. Israelites, the original inhabitants of Canaan, who lost their land to the foreign invaders, are now fighting to get back their rightful place. In this fight God is naturally with His oppressed and enslaved people. Seen in this perspective the biblical wars and violence may not be a scandal.

But, of course, not all wars in the Bible can be understood this way. Several of the later wars were part of a strategy of aggression and expansion. Yet we have to realize that wars and violence could become at times the only option to eliminate an evil power.

All said, war and violence still remain horrible realities and they can be hardly justified. Wars and violence must be condemned and that

must become an occasion to insist on the reduction of the gap between the rich and the poor which can reduce the risk of war and violence. We must emphasize mutual faith and trust among human beings than faith and trust in arms and ammunitions. We should never fail to remember the words of Jesus... "all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Mt 26:52).