

Apprenticeship Lessons Before, During and After the Second World War, with Relevance to the Context of Contemporary Christianity

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ABSTRACT: In the context of the Second World War, in which atrocities were committed, Christianity had to take a stand or remain indifferent, protest or not protest, act or not act, suffer, sacrifice or compromise, save one's life at the expense of another's life or lose one's life saving another's life, be a victim or a murderer. These poles are not always taken to extremes, sometimes, there are middle paths whereby the distances are narrowed and therefore these paths are to be recommended. However, the vicious circle of the power of darkness repeats itself at certain intervals in history, revealing that human beings sometimes remain cornered in learning certain lessons. If in the human dimension life is a common good, a priority, and being a disciple of Jesus Christ implies that the life of the other is sacred and the sacredness of life is above all else, in the human-divine dimension expressed by the term conscience, to affect one's life implicitly leads to affecting the divine being itself, so that the expression *to annihilate conscience* is in fact to annihilate the very presence and participation of God in humanity.

KEYWORDS: WW II, alien theology, creative grace, discipleship, silent theology

1. Introduction

One of God's great graces to mankind is that he asks people to be disciples and not masters. To be a disciple means to be constantly around the master and closely supervised by the master. To be a disciple is to be given the opportunity by the master, and at the same time, the master's willingness for the disciple to have the chance to try again and again (Rotaru 2012b,5). The qualification obtained generally exceeds the apprentice's ability to understand his level, or rather it is impossible for the apprentice, looking from the perspective of the apprentice, to obtain the same image as the master, looking from the perspective of the master. One thing is certain: the disqualification of the apprentice arises only when he renounces the process of becoming and praxis. Being a disciple is God's invitation to the human being to transcend the limited horizon of becoming, of knowledge and

praxis, in the struggle towards excellence to grasp a horizon that recedes and rises the more intense the attempt (Rotaru 2010, 7). To be a disciple is to remain a disciple in the hour and power of darkness, when there are no answers, no solutions and no redemption, but only fidelity to the master who departs from the disciple precisely in the most difficult hour.

In the context of the Second World War, in which many atrocities were committed, Christianity had to take a certain attitude or remain indifferent, protest or not protest, act or not act, suffer, sacrifice or compromise, save its life at the expense of another's life or lose its life saving another's life, be a victim or a murderer. These poles are not always taken to extremes, sometimes there are middle paths whereby the distances are narrowed and therefore these paths are to be recommended, yet the vicious circle of the power of darkness repeats itself at certain intervals in history and all history reveals however that the human being sometimes remains cornered in learning certain lessons.

One of the greatest challenges of being human is defining one's own identity. According to the dictionary, identity implies being identical to oneself, a dictum definition hardly accepted in the field of science, yet this definition challenges man to a deeper investigation. Greek philosophy, the philosopher of the West, concluded his search with the words "Nosce te ipsum", and Avicenna, the philosopher of the East (Rotaru 2005, 276-278), concluded his philosophy with the words "How I wish I could know who I am, what it is in this world that I seek," so from sunrise to sunset mankind's concern is his own identity.

Because of my profession, I had the opportunity to meet many ethnicities, tribes, from different places, uncivilized, underprivileged people, categorized as third or even fifth world. My amazement was when, in the Kalahari desert, I came into contact with such a fifth-world tribe. When I managed to communicate with them, they told me that their main concern was to find out "who they are, where they come from, why they are on earth and where they will go after death". In the Sahara desert, another tribe tells me that their tragedy is the loss of their identity, because their identity is closely linked to the desert that is fading into the hotter sand and no longer welcomes them to live there. God's people could provide some answers but they hold so sacredly the name YHWH, the name by which they are called, that the mystery remains shrouded. Only that kenosis-theosis of Christianity reveals the mystery that the human being can now declare: *I am what Christ is in me*, and in the case of this article, the identity of the human being is to be a *disciple of Jesus Christ*, whose orthodoxy is the Gospel - the good news - and whose praxis is to be a bearer of the Gospel.

Present challenges of a political, social, economic, spiritual, religious nature and the ever-deepening human complexity call for the human being to seek answers and solutions. When theology has failed to provide humanity with the answers it seeks, other sciences and ideologies have intervened and, lacking a divine foundation, have offered concepts of life that have aggravated both the immanent dimension of

divinity and the transcendent dimension of the human being. Today, therefore, theology has a sacred duty not only with regard to the relationship between the human being and divinity but also a literal duty to correct and heal the errors of history, otherwise there is a risk that these errors will be repeated again and again.

Europe is currently facing a migrant crisis. The harsh reality is that their countries are no longer livable. At the same time, Europe's harsh reality is that these migrants do not allow themselves to be assimilated by Christian and democratic values; on the contrary, they want to promote their own values, not understanding that it is precisely these so-called values that have made their countries of origin unlivable. At the same time, the reality of Europe is that it is facing secularism caused by the relativization of authentic faith. The situation thus becomes quite tense: whether Europe considers the migrant crisis as a symptom or even considers it as the cause of social destabilization, the reality is that Europe is faced with having to make decisions and act on the crisis that lies ahead.

The history of the Second World War shows us the conflict between Nazi and Fascist ideology on the one hand, and Communist ideology on the other, a conflict in which Christianity was also involved, willingly or unwillingly. Pure race, living space, final solution, atheism, exploitation, the bosses of darkness war against each other, forgetting even their diabolical mandate to fight only against the light. The victims were all those who opposed their ideology, but especially Christians and Jews. The Christians, because they had to swear allegiance to the evil man and thus renounce their Lord, the Master of the disciples; the Christians, because they had to make decisions against the evil ideology to the point of shedding blood; the Jews because the evil plan of hatred and extermination followed them throughout history.

In this context of WWII, I will examine the discipleship of Pope Pius XII, Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jurgen Moltmann, and Miroslav Volf. The structure of the study is as follows: in the first part, I will briefly present the lives of these personalities; in the second part, I will intend it as a spiritual litmus test; and in the third part, I will summarize their discipleship ministry. In the conclusion, I will reflect on the current crisis situation and how Christianity is addressing it, with the working hypothesis being the paradigm shift that breaks the vicious circle of history, a paradigm that emphasizes reconciliation and engages Christians in combining academic theological research with the internal ministry of the church and the *Missio Dei* into one: discipleship. The theology of reconciliation, the theology of the stranger and the theology of relationship are able to prevent atrocities, exclusions, and deviations that are done by people but in the name of God, which is totally unacceptable.

2. Historical considerations

2.1. Pope Pius XII

On 2 March 1939, on the eve of the Second World War, Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli is elected Pope as Pope Pius XII. On 9 October 1958, the Pope took his last breath. His last words were: "Pray, pray, pray, that this unhappy situation for the Church may end" (Ventresca 2013, 297). The Life editorial that day began with the headline "The world pauses on the death of a Pope", eulogizing him thus: "the most impressive living symbol of the spiritual which the world knew" (Ventresca 2013, 297). Officials from around the world sent condolences to the Vatican, including Israel's President Itzhak Ben-Zvi, Foreign Minister Golda Meir, Jerusalem's Chief Rabbi Isaac Herzog, Rome's Chief Rabbi Elia Toaf, former Israeli diplomat to Italy Pinchas Lapide. And the list goes on with prominent political, religious and religious figures, culminating with Pope Benedict XVI: "On December 19, 2009, Pope Benedict XVI signed the Decree of Heroic Virtue for Pope Pius XII. The now "venerable" Pius XII was deemed to have lived an exemplary Christian life - not a faultless one but one that was indicative of a close communion with God in his vocation as priest, bishop, and pope. Responses varied from the triumphant to the tragic" (O'Shea 2011, 1).

From the above, it is clear that there were also voices against bringing serious accusations against the Pope, so that Eugenio Pacelli became a very controversial person, not so much during his mandate (and especially during the war), but after his death. In such a situation, it becomes extremely difficult and sensitive for a Christian to "surround himself with a cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1), to take people like Eugenio Pacelli as models of discipleship in crisis situations.

Of course, superficiality, partiality, subjectivism and a critical spirit were in abundance in the approach to the person, life, mission and responsibility of the Pope, and therefore a theological analysis must penetrate and pierce through this mist or aura with which the most important figure of Christianity was surrounded during the most difficult period in history that mankind has experienced. Moreover, the claims have been quite lofty, or exalted, on the part of critics, elevating the pope as the number one man in the world, only to have him thrown down and crushed from that height. The fact is that during the war Vicarios-Dei did not even have the heroism of Churchill, who dedicated himself to England when he was elected to office by declaring: 'I have nothing to offer you but blood, tears and sweat'. The "silence of the pope" (Kornberg 2015, 235-264) exasperated those of his time and still exasperated those of today. Was it a sign of cowardice or indifference, or was it the highest and deepest quality of a disciple? Was it prudence, diplomacy, politics, or the only leverage he had left? Viewed from different angles, the answers differ and are taken to extremes, yet the truth must be somewhere, and a Christian and a theologian agree with the statement of 19 March 1964 in the publication "L'Osservatore Romano": "The silences of the Pope - when they exist - are not theirs,

but ours: that is imposed by Christians in order to seal the lips of the Father and Teacher through their filial intractability. It is not written in the Gospel: "Jesus kept silent"? The Vicar of Christ may also want and need to be silent (Kornberg 2015, 235). After the end of the war, when the destroyed, impoverished and disoriented states were looking for support, the Catholic Church came out of the war stronger, stronger and more widespread. This gave rise to more and more such questions and attitudes: "And what does it profit a man to gain the whole world if he loses his soul?" (Mark 8: 36). Surely the Pope knew this but he also knew that a Christian without the institution of the church is in danger of losing his identity.

What, though, was the Pope's basic idea? A strategist might claim that by tacitly condoning Nazism the Pope has shielded his church from the Communist danger: "The Pope? Who is he? How many divisions does he have?" These are the sarcastic words of Stalin concerning to Pius XII after the war during the Yalta. After the death of Stalin in 1953, the Pope replied: "Joseph Stalin is dead. Now he will see how many divisions we have up there" (Ventresca 2013, 253). Thus he let Nazism be a wall against communism even though he had to witness its atrocities with pain. Two powers of darkness are fighting each other, and at the same time Christians live among them. The Pope's only weapon, silence, brought a whole world against him during his lifetime and a whole world against him after his death: "During a visit to Rome in 1994, I went to kneel at the tomb of Papa Roncalli - Pope John. I can recall quite vividly the flowers and messages left by his tomb in the crypt. Nearby the tomb of Pius XII was unadorned. I visited St. Peter's again in September 2000 just after the beatification of John XXIII... Meanwhile pilgrims made their way to a sculpture of John in the nave of the basilica... After nearly forty years of people kissing the image, the bronze shines brightly. Across the nave is the statue of Pius XII... There are no pilgrims *there*" (O`Shea 2011, 223).

Shouting voices, only make the Pope's too heavy cross heavier. Could the pope's voice have stopped the death trains and closed the gates of Auschwitz? At this moment, an entire Africa is condemned to extermination, critics could exercise their voices for Africa. At the moment the situation of migrants in Europe is very sensitive and tense, critics could exercise their voices for the cause of migrants. I have presented two situations as difficult as the situation of the Holocaust in the Second World War. For an honest answer on Pope Pius XII, a reconstruction can be made by addressing these present situations. Pope Pius XII was a wartime pope, and only from this angle can his work be objectively analyzed.

In a diary found by chance, Pope Pius XII, notes as a footnote: "The good never do noise, and the noise will never do something good". The man Pacelli, the disciple Pacelli still has much to say to history, and at the same time, coming from the hardest mission, from the hardest war, he still has much to say to those who want to be disciples of Christ. At the same time, in this article, I will use the work of the pope as context for the other people I will address.

2.2. *Karl Barth*

"We reject the false doctrine, as though the church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God's revelation (Schneider n.d.). This is the first of the six articles of the Barmen Declaration of May 1934, largely drawn up by Barth. In January 1933, Adolph Hitler was appointed Chancellor. In a very short time, he established the Third Reich, based on Nazi ideology, in which he has also drawn the German Church, gaining the support of church leaders.

Barth, a Swiss theologian, was called to teach in Germany in 1933. Following the Declaration, he was expelled back to Switzerland. A fortunate case, because if the Barmen Declaration had been issued in 1938, it would also have constituted the theologian's death sentence. Certainly, a resistance remained in his wake, albeit a rather weak one compared to the Nazi colossus, but sufficient to motivate and mobilize Christianity; yet it remained in a state of paralysis or disorientation towards true theology. At the time of Barth's statement, the German Church was going through a situation characterized by some errors or spiritual diseases, accumulated since the birth of Protestantism (Jungel 2014, 15-16). And centuries later, on the eve of WWI, when liberal theology agreed with the new ideology, it was only a step from here that theologians and professors agreed to sign that Manifesto justifying the politics of war (Svinth-Vaerge 2023, 225). Against this background of the failure of liberal theology to be relevant in crisis situations and to address a firm position, Barth writes in 1922 *Romerbrief*, the Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, rightly regarded as a bomb dropped on the compromised theology of the time. But the state of the German nation continues to degenerate, resulting in the emergence of the Nazi ideology, which is described as a new theology (Svinth-Vaerge 2023, 222). Exploiting theological errors, the myth of the superior man, the danger of communism, the precarious economic state, this new theology has a dizzying impact on the German people.

Barth remains firm in his theology. When over the years he compiled his monumental work, *Church Dogmatics*, the motto of Chapter XVI of Volume IV, Part 3, is the same as Article 1 of the Barmen Declaration: "Jesus Christ as attested to us in Holy Scripture is the one Word of God whom we must hear and whom we must trust and obey in life and in death" (Barth 1961, 3). Yet the tension pressing down on Barth was not an easy one. As a theologian who had to remain faithful to the Word, he was so abandoned and isolated by the other theologians and intellectuals of the time that he even came to doubt himself. On the one hand, the Confessing Church in Germany, on the other the Swiss Society for Aid, which together with Emil Brunner sought to question him about the orthodoxy with which Barth claimed that "salvation comes from the Jews" (John 4:22), so that even those close to him were so opposed to him that under wartime conditions all this

could bring anyone to their knees: "Yet Barth found himself isolated from many colleagues in the Confessing Church whom he regarded as having fought only for their own academic freedom and as having neglected, by their subsequent silence, to uphold the rights of Jews.... Barth thus asked himself if he had failed to be prophetic at Barmen in not making the Jewish question a key element in his draft of the text: "Of course in 1934 no text in which I have done would have been acceptable even to the Confessing Church, given the atmosphere that there was then..."(Hunsinger 2019, 105). Not only is the theology and the writings that remain for posterity a reference and a pillar for scholars in the field, but also the pre-war, wartime and post-war attitudes have meant that it remains an unwritten law in theological academia today that you cannot be a theologian without reading Barth. In humanity's most difficult period Barth earned his name so that he has something to say to those who want to be disciples of Christ.

2.3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer

"I shall have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people..." (Bonhoeffer 1959, 16). This is part of a letter to Reinhold Niebuhr in 1939. Bonhoeffer went to America to refuse enlistment in the Nazi army, but within a very short time, he returned to Germany, believing that his coming to America had, in fact, been a mistake. In exploring Bonhoeffer's life and work, writing just a paragraph about him may lead to the mistake of omitting essential things, so I will turn to what Barth wrote about him, because I believe that as Barth saw him, it is surely the best characterization: "From 1933 on, Bonhoeffer was the first, indeed the only one, who focused so centrally and energetically on defending Jews against Hitler's injustice. While the Confessing Church concentrated on defending the Church, it did little for Jews outside. It was Bonhoeffer standing on the basis of the Sermon on the Mount as concrete guidance for life, who spoke out against the Nazi anti-Jewish policies and urged the Church to act in opposition (Gushee 2016, 88). The dilemma in which Bonhoeffer was placed (Gushee 2016, 83) exhausts human solutions, questions portions of his theology, brings the disciple and zealot face to face, confronts the command not to kill with *transforming initiatives*. To some extent this can be understood through his statement on the Jewish question, a phrase that has remained famous and which characterizes him: 'to throw oneself between the spokes of the wheel, in order to stop political oppression and to rescue people in danger' (Mawson 2019, 93).

Another aspect that reflects Bonhoeffer's character is the situation where, having been imprisoned following the failed assassination attempt on Hitler, and being engaged, he is asked to cooperate with Nazism in exchange for his life. "The last temptation," Bonhoeffer replies, after which he climbs the scaffold. When the disciple is asked to pay with his very life for his faith and convictions, life is indeed a

last temptation, and, in fact, the strongest, against which he has only one weapon at his disposal, to die, for otherwise, life itself would become the cruelest death.

2.4. *Jurgen Moltmann*

"But strictly speaking we can no longer get beyond Auschwitz by ourselves, but only together with the victims... Auschwitz was not the physical end of Judaism – but was it perhaps the spiritual end of Christendom, an end which we have not yet noticed." (Moltmann 1997, 181).

The Second World War left a deep impression on the teenager Jurgen (born 1926), particularly the 1943 British Air Force operation Gomora on Hamburg, where he was given a glimpse of the horrors of war. In 1945, the young soldier, who had just enlisted, was taken prisoner and taken to Britain, from where he was not released until 1948. In 1954 he received his doctorate, after which Moltmann spent a lifetime dedicated to theology, in which he addressed to Christianity a theology called "theology after Auschwitz", which, however, was not assimilated by the churches because of the realities and depths revealed and because of the history that Christianity was invited to assume; at the same time he addressed to humanity themes of general interest, of real use in achieving an attitude of reconciliation and therefore the preservation of the future by addressing ethics of hope.

Quoting Adorno in his writings, Moltmann acknowledges with academic honesty that theology and implicitly Christianity have lost their fragrance: 'After Auschwitz, there is no more poetry' (Moltmann 1997, 181). At the same time, he is aware in his theology of the horrors committed by Christianity, adopting in his writings a remedial and healing attitude to history: 'The SS hanged two Jewish men and a youth in front of the whole camp. The men died quickly, but the death throes of the youth lasted for half an hour. 'Where is God? Where is he?' someone asked behind me. As the youth still hung in torment in the noose after a long time, I heard the man call again, 'Where is God now?' And I heard a voice in myself answer: 'Where is he? He is here. He is hanging there on the gallows . . .' (Moltmann 2015, 331). This testimony of Elie Wiesel, this reality marked the entire life of the Holocaust survivor: 'I shall never forget the moments which murdered my God and my soul. I shall never forget the flames which consumed my faith forever' (Moltmann 1997, 179).

These realities of war have left their mark on Moltmann's theology, so he has earned the right to have something to say to Christianity and not only to Christianity, but to all mankind. Addressing realities unbearable to human beings, Moltmann has something to say about being a disciple in conditions that God himself cannot bear, adopting that *hester panim* - "While God tolerates the sinner he must abandon the victim...God is mighty in the renunciation of his might, in order to bear with man" (Moltmann 1997, 178) - hiding his face from the horrors of pain.

2.5. Miroslav Volf

"After I finished my lecture Professor Jurgen Moltmann stood up and asked one of his typical questions, both concrete and penetrating: "But can you embrace a *cetnik*?" ...No, I can not – but as a follower of Christ I think I should be able to." (Volf 1996, 3). Indeed he is able, because we found him there, merged with those anathematized, excluded, marginalized and even killed in the name of faith, in the Name of God. I have heard his voice from beyond, from those who grope for God in other religions. I have seen his *theology of open arms* in embracing those who will continue to strike out but in my dissertation I named Volf as a prophet of reconciliation because that is what I understood from reading his books. The communist context, and then the painful war in the former Yugoslavia, can affect a person's life to the extent that he becomes a saint or a monster. I did not find Volf here, I had to search some more, and so I found him one step ahead, and the main theme he tackles in his theology touches on the whole history of Christianity in the area where it failed to be relevant. Is Volf's theology a continuation of Moltman's echo, addressing only the painful situation in his homeland? Or is it the cry of the whole of history? Or is it the cry of God?

An overwhelming weight accompanies his words, namely those who can no longer speak, those who have passed from life unreconciled, then all those whose blood has reddened history. The echo of their voice from eternity Volf wants to resound in his writings (Stop...). An even more overwhelming weight accompanies every word he writes, namely the cries of those present, muffled by the grief of lost loved ones, the tears of the persecuted, the broken hearts and broken hands that were lifted up to God, with the pain all the more heartbreaking in the belief that God himself broke them. (Pause...) When at a World Council, someone put the question accusingly to God: "Where is God when the world is struggling between life and death, through wars, poverty, injustice?" a rabbi replied, "God is where you left him when you left him". Yet God does not break, but has broken Himself...and all who follow Him in this mandate of reconciliation to save humanity.

Volf also echoes all these cries in his words, with which he wants to pierce all those who cause so much pain, because the skies are too soaked with tears and blood, put in Shakespeare's lines, of a disturbing depth: "And now I ask you enemies of life/ Poor victims of cruel fate/ Montecchio and Capoletto! you,/ Those of you who were always in a cruel war,/ See the doom of your enmity:/ They rose to the blue skies (Romeo and Juliet),/ And that's not all. The frenzy that you have stirred up, the entire Citadel has overwhelmed it.../ The statue of Juliet...remind everyone forever of a faithful and loving soul/ Romeo's statue, also, will show/ how the terrible enmity love kills forever! A dark peace is left now.../ until in despair we cross the bridge" (Shakespeare, 2016, 315-317). "Till, my God...? cries the people there in pain. I wish that the only ones left to be sacrificed "until the full number is fulfilled", (Rev. 6:10-11), were only the messengers of reconciliation. And one of them is Volf.

3. Definitions of the notion of apprenticeship in the light of reconciliation

A definition of discipleship and discipleship emerges from the Councils of early Christianity, but which nevertheless had consequences in that they anathematized, excluded and exiled those who failed to relate correctly to biblical doctrines. Thus the space bounded by what constituted true faith and the defense of faith unfortunately became a forbidden space for those in need of spiritual healing. History then proves the tragic end of those who were "left to perish" (Jenkins 2008, 30,105), while the disciples, who were supposed to reach out a hand, were especially concerned not to perish themselves, because in defining the identity of the disciple, the other, the neighbour, the stranger was not given a place.

Although the identity and mandate of discipleship is clearly defined in the Bible, the story nevertheless presents a distorted reality of this notion. Among those who have noticed that something is amiss is Buber, through his emphasis on the identity of "I and Thou" (Buber 1937, 11), who seeks to correct this distorted picture. However, even a cursory glance at biblical truths points to God's reconciliation of the human being to then continue the work of art of the Reconciling Creator through discipleship. Thus the Heidelberg Catechism (Bierma 2013, HC Q 1,2,86) the very first article, sends the reader towards the truth of a human identity dependent on God, an open and relational identity and not an identity closed in on itself; and article 86 exemplifies that the praxis of a life of gratitude offered to God consists in a dedication to one's *neighbour* that he too may be won for Christ.

As a result of these situations, I have sought to add to the definition of the disciple, given by the doctrines elaborated by the Holy Fathers, another way of definition, which completes and integrates the identity, so that what has been exiled can be reconciled. Reconciliation is the character and praxis of divinity. Only within this framework can a relevant Christianity and discipleship be defined. If any other framework is adopted, Christianity is in danger of giving humanity a distorted image of divinity. In this section, I will capture the attitudes and warnings issued by some prominent theologians who have sought to preserve and perpetuate an authentic image of divinity.

Thus **McGrath** draws attention to the fact that theology must be shaped and contained by divinity and not the other way around. Then the task of theology is to detect the human tendency to have monopoly and control in defining transcendent realities, the result being the shaping of a limited framework devoid of divine immanence and at the same time devoid of the primordial quality of human being to manifest itself in the spiritual dimensions of freedom: "But God cannot be imprisoned and we ought not to be surprised if the theoretical rationalist cage we have constructed in our minds suddenly breaks into pieces, unable to contain the majesty and glory of a living God! In the end, it is God who must be allowed to shape

our thinking. The contours of our thought need to be adapted to God, not the other way round!" (McGrath 2013, 107).

Vanhoozer emphasizes the Church's responsibility to provide humanity with an authentic image of a reconciling divinity, so that Christian identity and Christianity are defined exclusively in relation to the divinity. Therefore the mandate of a Christian, of a disciple, is to carry out the "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18), and only in this way can he be identified and defined, through dynamic action of relationship and reconciliation: "What the church has to offer to the world is not only the message but also a practical demonstration of salvation: the transformed identity of those who not only bear the image of Christ but also stand in right relationship to him; the promise of reconciled community; the reality of being - toward - resurrection" (Vanhoozer 2014, 62).

Of course, the danger of relativism - Karkkainen warns us - is not to be expected in a pluralistic world, with consequences for identity, definitions of concepts and values. An opening of Christianity towards relationality must be carefully supervised by a theology that crystallizes and clearly outlines its forms and does not fail by losing its meaning. The paradox of relationship lies precisely in defining and defining identity, in contrast to the natural and logical-human consequence that sees in dialogue, in communion precisely the opposite - a fusion and a loss of identity, specific to Asian, Hindu, Buddhist, pantheistic religions: "The remedy to pluralisms, however, is not exclusivism but rather an attitude that takes delight in the potential of an encounter with the other without denying either party's distinctive features. The aim is to make room for a critical, reverent and open engagement with otherness, without any predictable outcome. That kind of engagement does not water down real differences in the way of modernism. Too easily, pluralism tends to deny the self-definitions of particular religions" (Karkkainen 2019, 509).

Brueggemann develops the notion of apprenticeship and apprenticeship with an emphasis on dynamism, freeing it from any fixed, rigid, static definition, devoid of life and creative act. In fact, all of Brueggemann's theology is a redefinition of what was omitted by Chalcedon, namely reconciliation. Thus the disciple, in Brueggemann's view, is a sacred mandate to carry out on earth the act of reconciliation offered by God to the human being: 'Christian discipleship is understood as a pursuit of "the way". The way, as a metaphor, is not precisely characterized, but it is in a different way, the way of Jesus, the way of the cross, the way of suffering, the way to Jerusalem. The term marks Christians as those who live on a path that contrasts with any fixed and settled way of life. The way has clearly brought the early Church into conflict with all false paths of self-assurance" (Brueggemann 1982, 122).

In the same spirit are Gavin D'Costa, who captures the action of the Holy Spirit in engaging relationship in the context of a modern Europe in which the Christian pulse is growing weaker (D'Costa 2000, 109-132), and Amos Yong, who

invites Christianity to seek and identify the imprint of the Holy Spirit in other religions (Yong 2020, 243). Thus, the picture takes shape, offering the image of a dynamic, relational, reconciling disciple, who has at his disposal not human boundaries but spiritual horizons in fulfilling his mandate.

Darrell Fasching, reflects on the story of the Tower of Babel, of man's inability to transcend by his own forces and fixed methods, noting that this is not man's destiny, and then turns his gaze to the human condition of being *alien and alienated*. People like him risk being anathematized by the disciples of the centred and fixed theology in which they know all too well who they are and what they are to do. The history of Christianity, however, proves the opposite of this kind of *Babel theology*, in which man fails permanently, the consequence being too many bloody rows. Fasching, therefore, proposes the *alienated theology*. In the context of this theology, being a disciple implies an orientation towards the alien: "To be an alien is to be a stranger. To be alienated is to be a stranger to oneself. Alienated theology understands doubt and the questions that arise from it as our most fundamental experience of the infinite. For our unending questions keep us open to the infinite, continually inviting us to transcend our present horizon of understanding. In a like manner, the presence of the stranger continuously calls us into question and invites us to transcend the present horizon of the egocentric and ethnocentric answers that structure our personal and cultural identities. An alienated theology understands that only a faith which requires one to welcome the alien or stranger is truly a utopian faith capable of transforming us into new beings who are capable of creating a new world of pluralistic human interdependence" (Fasching 1993, 6-7).

The term *syneidesis* from Greek, or *constientia* from Latin (Rotaru 2017a, 545-550), means consciousness, that is, a knowing together. Therefore the definition of identity and implicitly of the notion of disciple, does not consist in a rigid formula, encapsulated in itself, but in a relational and creative openness towards the Creator and towards the other that defines certain aspects of identity, without which it would be incomplete and therefore unable to fulfil the mandate of being a disciple. Consciousness, therefore, encompasses within itself both one's own identity and the aspect of relating to the other, as well as the immanent imprint of divine identity. Thus, to be a disciple implies a definition in relation to the other as well as to the divinity, and not to be a disciple implies one's own affectation of both the other and the divinity.

Have human beings continued to build towers of Babel, now using not bricks and tar but culture, civilization (Rotaru 2023, 62-79) and even theology? Brueggemann is sounding the alarm in this direction, and a re-evaluation of theology does not mean a renunciation of what the Holy Fathers have handed down to us, and then generation after generation, it does not mean an act of rebellion against Christian dogma, it does not mean committing heresy, but an act of tearing down every human initiative to transcend, through all that is best, an act of tearing down that tower of Babel, identified by Brueggemann as "fortress mentality" and other

kinds of towers: "This text (of the *Tower of Babel*) suggests a different kind of unity sought by a fearful humanity organized against God's purposes. This unity seeks to establish a cultural, human unity without reference to God's threats, promises or mandates. This is a self-inflicted unity in which humanity has a "fortress mentality". It seeks to survive by its own resources. It seeks to build a world free from holy danger and immune to God's terror in history. It is a unity founded on fear and characterized by compulsion. A human unity without the vision of God's will risks being ordered into oppressive conformity. And in the end it will be in vain" (Brueggemann 1982, 100).

In this part, it is precisely to this definition that I refer - to be a disciple in relation to human diversity - a definition by which I do not intend to enter into opposition to established dogmas, but to dare to affirm that Chalcedon teaches us who God is and who we are but fails to teach us who our neighbor is. It is unacceptable for Christianity to witness the extermination of the neighbor, to agree to the exclusion of the neighbor from divine communion and from the hope of eternity, for which it has nevertheless received a sacred mandate. The dignity (Rotaru 2016, 29-43) of authentic Christianity will also include a patriotism for the neighbor, and a relational vision. Applying the reflections of these leading thinkers, as a litmus test solution, to the lives of the personalities in the first part, we will obtain a contextual, relevant theology able to address the challenges of today.

4. The theology of the disciple

In this part, I will capture some glimpses of the theological content of the characters analyzed in the first part of this article, seen through the prism of the definition of discipleship (from which I have tried to emphasize the aspect of reconciliation and relationship) in the second part. From the outset, this part seems difficult because I would be in danger of committing a breach of honesty by analyzing the life and work of people in peacetime during wartime or other conflicts. I have chosen this theme, however, to highlight the discipleship of these people, because as one whose profession was war I could honestly answer Ricoeur's question, "d'ou parlez-vous"? The motivation behind analyzing the lives and work of these men is because too painfully superficial theological stones are thrown at people whose life's dilemma was not their life against the life of the other but, rising above their life (already stepping into the transcendent), their action has been to save as many human beings as possible from inhuman situations, often having only a "hester panim," a God who hides his face from pain, a God who hides in the greatest pains of humanity, especially in those strangers, anathematized, excluded and exiled, whom he is eager to save.

All those who knew Pacelli closely, unanimously agreed that he was a special man, in whose presence you feel that transcendent state towards divinity. As pontiff, Pius XII, knew that the hour of darkness cannot be approached by any method or

form in which human powers, actions, initiatives, however encouraging, are involved, and he knew that in that hour of darkness it would be a defeat to appeal to those legions of angels (or divisions of which Stalin spoke). In the hour of darkness, a disciple, a noble character defined by God himself, will know that it is the hour in which the lamb, in order to receive the grace of being chosen to be slaughtered as a burnt offering, must not open his mouth.

The theology of the silent pope cannot be put into words because it would detract from its aura, but theology must be prepared in every generation to address the hour of darkness through the theology of silence, so as to realize the conditions of the burning of all, the essence of which is communion with God for the salvation of the excluded. The actions of protest, of disapproval of Nazi and fascist ideology and policy, initiated by the pontiff, had no effect before the war, then during the war the pontiff encouraged and gave freedom to all Christians to undertake actions of salvation, so that after the war the pontiff undertook actions to save the Nazi criminals themselves. In all situations, the pontiff remained constant in saving lives and tried to remain constant in his silence. The proof is that when he did open his mouth, even then he failed miserably.

Silence is the noblest of the qualities of a disciple of Christ, understood as not accusing criminals by protesting silence but, on the contrary, not accusing criminals. Thus, a disciple distinguishes himself from other men, however moral and upright they may be, not only by refusing to accuse, and not only by knowing that the hour of judgment belongs to the Master alone and not to the disciple, but by bearing within himself, through silence, the sorrow around him (both of the victims and of the criminals), he tries to be like the Master, being the bearer of atonement. But to be a bearer of atonement in the case of the disciple, this refers to the sacred mandate to be salt and light, to direct the gaze of all towards the Master Bearer of Atonement.

As mentioned in the first part of this article, Barth was born in a period of political crisis, characterized by two world wars. On top of this crisis is superimposed another, the theological crisis, which fails to address the political and social crisis of the time in terms of Christian values and eternal and immutable truth. It can rightly be said that Barth's theology is a theology of crisis, but a deeper look reveals that the crisis Barth addresses is not a crisis of a particular time period, or of a category of people or a category of sciences: "God is in heaven and you are on earth. The relation between such a God and such a man, and the relation between such a man and such a God, is for me the theme of the Bible and the essence of philosophy. Philosophers name this crisis of human perception – the Prime Cause: the Bible beholds at the same cross-roads – the figure of Jesus Christ... Paul did speak of Jesus Christ...the permanent crisis between time and eternity...the whole is placed under the crisis of the Spirit of Christ" (Barth 1968 10,17). Barth is, therefore, relevant both to particular situations and to the definition of discipleship, as he is able to answer Ricoeur's question, "D'ou parlez-vous?" (Kearney 2010, xi), and also to prove to Hunsinger that he is able to address the dehumanized post-Holocaust reality

with a relevant theology: As it is known the Gulag is the big brother of Auschwitz, and the author exposes the testimony of Varlam Shalamov, a survivor of Gulag: "nothing human was left to a human being - only mistrust, rage and lies. The ethical norm which applies in this situation is: "worse deeds exist than eating human flesh." Perhaps the most terrifying lesson of testimonies of extreme dehumanization is that it involves anyone, regardless of background, social, educational or any other conditions" (Hunsinger 2019, 218).

Bonhoeffer can only be understood through the prism of Aeneas' experiences at the fall of Troy, expressed by Vergilius in the words, "Animus meminisse horret!" (Thornhill 1886, Book II Verse 10-14) Then the context of war brings to the fore situations requiring major decisions, of life and death, of action or inaction, of fidelity or betrayal, such that the quality of being a disciple of Christ cannot be fitted into templates and still less can it be classified and cataloged by the human being, but only by God (Rotaru 2012a, 5).

Bonhoeffer's merit is that he offers Christianity and humanity two works that are special precisely because they are born in the midst of the most devastating war. Thus, "The Cost of Discipleship" and "Ethics" remain reference works, that provide answers to the present article. From the outset the author treats the notion of discipleship with a categorical attitude, making a clear distinction between cheap and costly grace. (Bonhoeffer 1959, 45). It is an acknowledged fact that an authentic theology traverses history, addresses contexts of a broad spectrum, confronts ideologies and concepts of life from different religions and cultures, brings the small and the great, the rich and the poor, the learned and the unlearned, to a single crucial point, where the human being is brought face to face with the Creator and Master of eternal destiny and given the freedom to determine his or her own path to eternal destiny (Rotaru 2019, 214-215).

This is precisely what Bonhoeffer's theology does, a theology born and forged in the context of war proves to be valid in the context of Christianity today, confronting a cheap morality, culture and religiosity in which costly grace is exiled by a cheap grace of selfish self-indulgence, of comfort and luxury, of carelessness and indifference to the other, of the consumerism of grace and at the same time of the exclusion of the stranger from the *ivory tower*: "If our Christianity has ceased to be serious about discipleship, if we have watered down the Gospel into emotional uplift which makes no costly demands and which fails to distinguish between natural and Christian existence, then we cannot help regarding the cross as an ordinary everyday calamity, as one of the trials and tribulations of life. We have then forgotten that the cross means rejection and shame as well as suffering...The cross means sharing the suffering of Christ to the last and to the fullest. Only a man thus totally committed in discipleship can experience the meaning of the cross" (Bonhoeffer 1959, 98).

Thus, Bonhoeffer's theology remains for all time a prophetic theology, a voice calling the disciple to be like his Master. Moreover, Bonhoeffer frees himself from human constraints and religiosities and lifts his spirit to those heights of a creative

relationship with his Creator, of a discipleship desired by his Master: "Freedom dares to act. Obedience has tied hands, freedom is creative. Obedience observes God's decalogue, freedom creates new decalogues" (Bonhoeffer 2005, 288).

Before moving on to the next apprentice I need to take a trip. When I chose Pacelli and Bonhoeffer the intention was not to set them in antithesis, but to distinguish from this wide spectrum of attitudes (from the "silence of the pope" to Bonhoeffer's sacrifice preceded by the words "silence in the face of evil is an evil in itself"), not the failure of one or the bravery of the other, but the theological content that addresses the tragedies of humanity, a theology that is able to speak through its bearers and messengers and that has something to say: a message of reconciliation.

It is unanimously known, recognized, and accepted by Christians everywhere that orthodox consensus delimits and defines the biblical doctrines: "*Ubique, Semper, Ab Omnibus*. Fundamental to the Orthodox consensus was an affirmation of the authority of tradition as that which had been believed "everywhere, always, by all". The criteria for what constituted the orthodox tradition were "universality, antiquity, and consensus." The immediate purpose of this definition... have been to attack...the innovation and deviation from the tradition of orthodoxy." (Pelikan 1971, 333). Moltmann's theology falls within the biblical limits expressed in Matthew 13:38: "The field is the world" and not within the limits expressed by Cyprian of Carthage: "Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus". Therefore, the field of activity of Christianity and implicitly of the disciple is the world and theology must address the world, precisely what Moltmann does: "The cruciality of this ministry is not that the church may prosper. It is that the world may live and not die..." (Brueggemann 2007, 203) Then Moltmann's theology is also called "Theology after Auschwitz". (Moltmann 2015, 11). By this Moltmann tells us that the history of Christianity is ours and that we have to take it on; moreover, an attitude "as if nothing had happened" is not compatible with being a Christian, on the contrary Christian ethics and discipleship must lead to healing, reconciliation and a new re-evaluation of theology so that the horrors of history are not repeated.

Is there currently any ecclesial authority that also adds Moltmann's words to the Apostles' Creed? What would the history of Christianity have looked like if these words had been in the basic documents from the beginning, where they actually belonged? "The intention is not to alter the words of tradition; but one must know what has to be added in thought. After "born of the Virgin Mary" ...we should add something along the following lines: Baptized by John the Baptist, filled with the Holy Spirit: to preach the kingdom of God to the poor, to heal the sick, to receive those who have been cast out, to revive Israel for the salvation of the nations, and to have mercy upon all people." (Moltmann 1990, 150).

Moltmann's theology addresses a question to the whole of Christian theology, which springs from the third world - from that *surplus of people* who are a nuisance to the first world - from the world of the excluded, from the world of those who experience only pain: "So Christian theology cannot simply ask: who is Christ for us

today? It has to ask: Who really is Christ for the poor of the Third World? and: Who is Christ for us when we make use of their poverty, for our own purposes?" (Moltmann 1990, 65). A theology that cannot give a pertinent answer, a theology that does not have an orthodoxy followed by an orthopraxy and an orthopraxy, in a word, discipleship, that addresses the pains of the world, is only a distorted image of the master, which it offers to humanity and the failure of the disciple to be like the master. Moltmann's protest in theology also touches on the aspect of mysticism, of that higher knowledge that only the initiated have, and emphasizes knowing and addressing the other person, from whom true freedom is achieved: "I become truly free when I open my life for other people...Then the other person is no longer the limitation of my freedom; he is an expansion of it." (Moltmann 1993, 216). The Moltmann disciple has something to say to Christianity and humanity through the depth of his relationship with his Master: "I began to see things with the eyes of the Christ dying on the cross" (Moltmann 2015, 10).

Volf, Moltmann's disciple, went a step further than his master, approaching the *Master-creator amoris* and *Master-creator of reconciliation*. To what extent he is indebted to Moltmann, to what extent Volf's context, in the light of Moltmann's context, gives rise to such a theology, only he can say, but what is certain is that we are offered a theology of reconciliation that is profound, realistic, relevant and contextualising. Here I will quote the late Corneliu Constantineanu, from his introductory word in the book *Exclusion and Embrace*: "No one has made it clearer than Volf that in order to reflect adequately on Christian involvement in society, we cannot avoid addressing vital notions such as social agency, identity, otherness, exclusion, hostility, sin, forgiveness, memory, reconciliation, truth, justice" (Volf 2017, 29). Coming from Africa, from a Muslim background, troubled and with many unanswered questions, at my first contact with the academic field (because I found that I needed education in order to address the outsiders effectively), Professor Măcelaru, in his first lecture, told us that we must become doctors for our churches, heal the churches (Rotaru 2017b, 57-76), heal theology, and only then address the world. And Professor Oprean echoes Volf's theology: "Reconciliation is God's initiative towards humankind. As such it is not only for the church but for the entire world. To reduce reconciliation to one's relationship with God or with his community of so-called "saved ones" actually means to deny God's eternal plan of reconciliation, powerfully displayed and revealed in the Christ event" (Oprean, 2021, 189).

I believe that the man Miroslav Volf, the theologian and disciple prophet Miroslav Volf has something to say to Christianity and to the current context in which mankind desperately needs a bridge over which to cross, thus finding its humanity. And Volf has worked on this bridge and is still working on it.

5. Conclusions

Today mankind is faced with an extremely delicate situation: the problem of emigration from less developed countries to Europe. Immigrants are coming from Asia and Africa, especially from Islamic countries. If the economic and social crises are so obvious and felt by Europeans that politicians have no positive solutions, however, as far as the spiritual reality is concerned, this can escalate to the highest levels, because, on the one hand, Islam is unable to assimilate the values of Western civilisation and on the other it wants to promote its religious values which, in fact, have contributed and are contributing to the destabilisation of the countries of origin. If anti-Semitism was a constant in Christianity and WWII was blamed on the Jews, as a result of political, economic, social and religious trends that were totally unorthodox, the scapegoat ending up in extermination camps, the quality of disciple of Christ for those who approved, cheered and participated in that genocide is questioned. Nor are those who remained passive and indifferent to the Jewish question qualified to say anything to humanity about being a disciple of Christ. For the present generation, the Holocaust, the Shoah, is only history (and not objective enough either, as it is still littered with attitudes unsuited to the quality of human beings), the extermination in the camps and the war losses remain only figures, for which a student might even advance and wave the diplomas of knowledge. Christianity risks failing to address an orthopraxy appropriate to orthodoxy and the quality of human beings, thus orthopraxy remains questionable in crisis situations.

But the present reality is critical. Theodor Adorno (Brain 2017, 111) proved in 1950 with the help of a test, the F-Scale, that the concept of *authoritarian personality* could give birth to monsters that would affect humanity. Also, in 1963, the Milgram test (Russell 2022, 151-153), proved that realizing conditions like the Third Reich, destructive obedience to authoritarian personalities leads to the reality that the Holocaust could be repeated today and also in other nations, not only the German one. What is happening in Europe today is an evil environment conducive to the development of extermination policies and actions. Here, I am referring to the Islamic population in Europe which, by its attitude, religion, social and economic challenges, is a potential scapegoat (except that compared to the Jews, Muslims really are a danger), leading towards the Holocaust, with the specification that now it will be on a much higher level. In this situation Christianity, which must understand history and the present times, has a particularly important mandate to address the imminent danger with an attitude of discipleship to Christ and to make discipleship as well, now in times of peace, because in times of crisis the levers will be fewer but the responsibility will be greater.

What ought we to do? At this question Barth answered: "We ought to do that which corresponds to grace". For these reasons, Barth characterized Christian morality as obedience not to an absolute law, but to an ever actual invitation, offered

to humanity between the creation of the world by Christ Alpha and its completion by Christ Omega, to respond freely to a gracious God." (Hunsinger 2019, 113).

Creative grace, this path to which Christ invites his disciples, encompasses a spectrum of attitudes, often different, like Ezra (Ezra 9) and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 13: 23-31); *creative grace* accepts both the pope's silence and Bonhoeffer's sacrifice; *creative grace* is incapable of being defined and pinned down by any dogma, even the Holy Fathers; *creative grace* is the scaling of any boundaries, paying any price, just so that it is possible for the disciple to offer grace, like his master, like Volf; *creative grace* is the ultimate finality, the path that opens an infinity of solutions to impossible challenges when the human being fails in trying the best; *creative grace* is the divine seed becoming seed (allusion to the parable of the tares in which the seed, being the Word, and therefore God himself, becomes the sons of God); *creative grace* is the eternal communion between the disciple and his master, more precisely the eternal communion of the master with his disciples.

In the first part of this article, I sketched just a few lines of the life and context of these people to help me then define the notion of the disciple, whose orthodoxy is the theology of reconciliation and the theology of the stranger, expressed succinctly in part two. Thus the people in part two I intended to be a kind of referee for those in part one. In part three, I have also drawn some theological lines which, taken together, portray the image of a disciple who addresses the present context a praxis which, taken into account, can become contextualizing in a world which is in desperate and urgent need of restoration of its humanity, dignity, identity and communion, and of transcendent rehabilitation through a relationship with an immanent divinity, an immanence whose bearers are the disciples.

Following the red thread of this article, the referee Brueggemann is able to conclude the theology of discipleship and discipleship by the term "proslambaneste" (Brueggemann 1998, 56). *Proslambano* is a powerful word, it is the *welcome* greeting! addressed to man by the divinity and which the divinity expects the disciple to bear in his mission. And the Volf disciple passes this test, *summa cum laude*, certainly noted as such not only by the arbiters of part two but by the Master himself: "For in the light of Christ's self-sacrifice and resurrection, the future belongs to those who give themselves in love, not to those who nail others to a cross" (Volf 2006, 83). With all due respect to the other categories of theology and theologians, with all due respect to their contribution throughout history, however, the pressing answers on the mission field we have found in public theology. It keeps Christians "awake" and relevant, and the violent and unjust terrain of humanity is the proper ground for a Christian, however insignificant, to become a genuine disciple. From Sedmak's point of view, orthodoxy born out of contexts of crisis and conflict can lead to the dichotomy between orthodoxy and orthopraxy: He concludes like that: We do theology "but once we visit a refugee camp, once we see the pictures of war, once we listen to the story of people...we wake up." (Sedmak 2002, 101) And he has every right in such situations to emphasize action. However,

what he wants to convey is not exactly discipleship at the expense of theology, but that process of transformation of the Christian, expressed in Bonhoeffer's words as follows: "When I first took up theology, my idea of it was quite different - much more academic, perhaps. But now it has become something else entirely...The restoration of the church depends...on lives of uncompromising discipleship, following Christ...It seems to me that peace and social justice are such things (of discipleship).... (Metaxas 2016, 345).

A particularly important fact, of divine revelation value, is that the public theology proclaimed in the school I attend by the faculty contains in its very essence this paradigm of the theologian-disciple, who is able to address the challenges of the world in the way that these people I have addressed in my article have helped define the notion of disciples of Christ.

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