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"Not by might, nor by power..." (Zech 4:6) – A conference on vulnerability and security

Shalom – a biblical view of security and vulnerability

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I. Uruguay: from the security risk of the 1970s to the security problem of the 1990s

I first became aware of the concept of "security" as a 13-year-old in my home country of Uruguay. In that year - in June 1968 - the government decreed *Medidas Prontas de Seguridad* (= immediate measures for [preserving] security). The trigger was the threat to public life from the Tupamaros National Liberation Movement (*Movimiento de Liberación Nacional -Tupamaros*)¹, a relatively small left-wing extremist urban guerrilla group operating underground in the capital, the port city of Montevideo. The restricting of constitutional civil rights to protect internal security in this small country situated on the Atlantic between Brazil and Argentina was praised as an essential step to protect Uruguayan society from the threat of "subversive groups". Nevertheless the social and political situation in Uruguay got worse and worse. As a 17-year-old I experienced the suspension of all constitutionally guaranteed civil freedoms and the imposition by decree of a "state of internal war" (*Estado de guerra interno*) - six months after the government had mandated the military forces with "combating subversion", prior to that the responsibility of the police. Despite the promulgation of a new "state security act" and regular elections in November 1972, the enfeebled democratic system of government was brought to an end in June 1973 by a coup d'état. It took 12 years for a democratically elected government to be restored again, in March 1985.

I recall associating the term "security" with force used for political purposes, but not with social violence. In the Montevideo of my childhood and early youth there was no danger of robbery in homes, shops, taxis or when walking the streets at night. Garbage was collected by the municipal authorities, and only cars or pedestrians waited at the traffic lights. In the Montevideo that I have visited regularly since the early 1990s the topic of a "lack of security" is no longer associated with political use of force; now it is more about increasing social violence - violence that is the consequence of unemployment, poverty and the social decline of large segments of the population. Poor people rummage through garbage in the streets before it is collected hoping to find recyclable materials; poor teenagers perform juggling tricks for a coin or two at central crossings while drivers wait for the traffic lights to change or offer to clean car windows. Burglaries of apartments and shops, hold-ups of taxi-drivers or pedestrians at night are a daily occurrence, particularly in the suburbs of this city which now has 1.7 million inhabitants.

When I began my theological studies in early 1976 I moved to the 8-million city of Buenos Aires (Argentina) on the opposite bank of the River Plata. After the coup d'état in March 1976 a military dictatorship was in place there until 1983. The military junta and its henchmen caused the "disappearance"² for good of about 30000 people - on the pretext of preserving "national security". Tens of thousands

¹ *José Harari: Contribución a la historia del M.L.N. Tupamaros* (= Contribution to the History of M.L.N. Tupamaros) (2.Bde.); Montevideo 1986; *Gerardo Caetano / José Rilla: Historia contemporánea del Uruguay* (= Current History of Uruguay); Montevideo 1994; particularly pp.199-238.

² Claiming citizens had "disappeared" (the official term was *desaparecidos* ("disappeared"), and so not reacting to the *habeas corpus* petitions of relatives) was the "technique" used by the Argentinean military dictatorship to create a lawless space in which to wage their "dirty war" against "subversive elements". For most of those citizens who had "disappeared" this practice which violated human rights ended in their murder (after interrogations under torture in clandestine "detention centres"). In the case of the Argentinean navy units individuals who "disappeared" were doped with pentobarbital and flung out of planes at a great height into the Atlantic. See *Horacio Verbitsky: The Flight. Confessions of an Argentinean Dirty Warrior. A Firsthand Account of Atrocity*; New York 1996 (Span. original: *El vuelo*, Buenos Aires 1995).

were detained and tortured in clandestine detention centres. In the shadow of this reign of terror a "Process of National Reorganisation" took place which implanted a neoliberal economic and social model.

These experiences of my early childhood and youth are fundamental in two regards to my approach to the topic of *Vulnerability and security from a biblical perspective*:

- Firstly, for me the collective (societal) component of the two concepts comes to the fore (in comparison to a more strongly individualist understanding of "private security");
 - and secondly, I am convinced that in the southern cone of Latin America (Uruguay, Argentina and Chile) there is a causal connection between the implementation of that political strategy of "national security" in the military dictatorships of the 1970s and the increasing lack of *social security* - or the widespread *social vulnerability* - since the 1990s.
- My interpretation (or selection) of biblical texts is determined by these pivotal experiences.

II. Security (or security strategies) in the Bible

(1) The Old Testament

a) *Quietness* and security (or vulnerability)*

***Translator's note: term used hereafter taken from Is 32: 17 NRSV**

In the First Testament many of the aspects we associate today with *security* are covered by the Hebrew concept *batah* – in part in conjunction with *saqat*³. For example, in the book of Judges the Danite men going out to scout out the land describe the situation of the city of Laish as *quiet and secure [NRSV: unsuspecting] (s'ooqet uboteah)*, before Dan attacks and conquers the place in the plain (Judges 18:7.27)⁴. It is interesting here that the inhabitants, "*living securely after the manner of the Sidonians*", owe this security to their prosperity, not to military strength or protection afforded by special fortifications. These seem to be lacking as do protective agreements with the coastal city of Sidon or Aramaic cities. Hence Laish is vulnerable despite its *security*.⁵

The link between collective prosperity and security is also expressed in the description of the (ideal) kingdom of Solomon (1 Kings 5:1-8). If there are no serious social rifts then everyone can live...*from Dan even to Beersheba, all of them in security [*laboetah] under their vines and fig trees* (1 Kings 4:25).

Until the post-exile period (5th century BC) – when *Israel* was a religious community and no longer a state – the connection between "shock absorption" in times of economic hardship and *secure* social conditions subsisted. The *amazing "humanitarian"*⁶ arrangement in Leviticus 25 aimed to "regulate the system in such a way that dependants would not be reduced to absolute poverty and it would not

³ On *batah* see E.Jenni / C.Westermann (Hgg.) Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum AT, Bd.1 (1971), Sp.300-305 und H.-J.Fabry u. H.Ringgren (Hgg.) Theologisches Wörterbuch zum AT; Bd.I (Bonn 1973) Sp.608-615); zu *saqat* ebda. Bd.VIII (Bonn 1995) Sp.449-454.

⁴ Judg 18:7 – The five men went on, and when they came to Laish, they observed the people who were living there securely in the manner of the Sidonians, *quiet and unsuspecting, lacking nothing on earth, and possessing wealth*
Judg 18:27f – They (= the Danites)... came to Laish, to a people *quiet and unsuspecting*, and put them to the sword, and burnt down the city. **There was no deliverer, because it was far from Sidon, and they had no dealings with Aram.**

⁵ See also Ez 38:11 – I will go up against the land of unwalled villages; I will fall upon the quiet people who live in safety, all of them living without walls, and having no bars and gates; to seize spoil and carry off plunder. [taken from New Revised Standard Version, as elsewhere in this translation]

⁶ Erhard S. Gerstenberger: In der Schuldenfalle. Zwangsvollstreckung und Insolvenzregelung in Lev 25, in: Bibel und Kirche Jg.62/1 (2007) 16-21 (p.17).

come to complete disintegration of the social order."⁷ The theological basis for this was the conviction that both land (as a means of production from which people live) and also people (as producers tilling it) are, and remain, the exclusive property of Yahweh (Lev 25:23 and 55). The provision of a *sabbatical year* every seven years (v.2-7) and a *Jubilee year* every 7 x 7 years (v.8-17) shows that the economy's own dynamic needs periodic interruption – if the splitting of the community into ever richer and permanently poorer groups is to be prevented. It is therefore only logical that Lev 25:18f. represents the observance of these *humanitarian* rules of Yahweh as a strategy to enable the Israelites *to live securely (*labetah) in the land*.⁸

b) Isaiah 32: the harvest of justice and law is *shalom, security & quiet*⁹

This chapter is a structured unit artfully divided into three sections (Is 32:1-8; 9-14; 15-20). A synoptic examination of these three texts reveals a dynamic running through this passage.

Isaiah 32:1-8 (= **A**) contains a (two-part) prophecy of salvation. The first part concerns the change in society (v.3-4) resulting from the just rule of a king and the lawful enforcement of his edicts by his leading officials (v.1-2). (Four) Metaphors describe the social significance for the population of this just and lawfully effected change (v.2):

- a hiding place from the (driving) wind;
- a covert from the tempest (rain);
- streams of water in a dry place;
- the shade of a great rock in a weary (dehydrated) land.

Because the leading officials do not neglect their social responsibility but rather execute it with due care (v. 3-4), security - and fertility, as alluded to by the last two metaphors - results for all around them.

The comparison that follows of the actions of the fool (or deceiver) – [who leaves] the hungry and thirsty [unsatisfied] (v.6b) –, or those of the villain who ruins the poor and the needy (v.7), with the actions of the noble (v.8) depicts the situation in the past: the social vulnerability in a society without law or legal recourse.¹⁰

Isaiah 32: 9-14 (= **B**) is an oracle of disaster. Referring back to *self-assured [NRSV: at ease, complacent]* (v.9b, 10a, 11a) female city-dwellers, it makes clear that wealth generates *deceptive security* if only part of society benefits from it. Fruit and vine harvests (v.10b) produce the income of an affluent class (of land-owners?); the prophetic word of threat is addressed to them.¹¹ Their situation will change dramatically; these *secure ones* will tremble and shudder when the economic harvest fails (v.11). Then their (naked) breasts (v.12, a symbol of fertility and life) will give the children just as little food as the dried-up fields and vineyards (on the hills). Here the link is made between infertility and social irresponsibility. The image of the women beating their (dried-up) breasts constitutes a realistic and also ironic transition to the final verses 13f. These describe the depopulation and desertification of a previously *joyous, jubilant and fortified* city [i.e. allegedly offering *security*]. The soil of Yahweh's people (v.13) grows up in thorns (because it is no longer being worked); the palace and city are forsaken and deserted.¹²

⁷ Rainer Kessler, Das Wirtschaftsrecht der Tora, S. 86 in: K. Füssel/ F. Segbers (Hgg.) ...so lernen die Völker des Erdkreises Gerechtigkeit. Ein Arbeitsbuch zu Bibel und Ökonomie (Luzern 1995), pp.78-94.

⁸ Lev 25:18-19: You shall observe my statutes and faithfully keep my ordinances, so that you may *live on the land securely*. **The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live on it securely.**

⁹ In the passage directly preceding Is 32, the verses in Is 30:1-17 and Is 31:1-3 criticise the attempt to avert a military threat from the Assyrians through an alliance strategy with Egypt. This "security strategy" is clearly portrayed as wrong (before God).

¹⁰ José Severino Croatto: Isaías 1-39 [= Comentario bíblico ecuménico: AT], Buenos Aires 1989, p.185.

¹¹ Cf. also Ezekiel 16, the oracle of disaster against Jerusalem [= woman] referring back to the offences of her sisters: Samaria and Sodom. Ez 16:49: "This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food and *prosperous ease*, **but did not aid the poor and needy.**"

¹² Croatto, op. cit. p.186

Isaiah 32:15-20 (=A'), a concluding prophecy of salvation, takes up the theme of justice and righteousness developed in the first announcement of salvation (A). This results in a contextual framing of the middle passage B (A > B < A'); this framework stresses the importance of the contrast with the societal experiences described in the middle passage for the overall structure of this chapter. The expression "(deceptive) security" introduced in reference to the women (and already hinted at in the initial metaphors) is taken up again in the concluding message of salvation (A'), but only to illustrate when and how (lasting) security (and quietness) come about. There is no prospect given of reconstruction of the devastated city because the matter at hand now is the realisation of a new order in which **no** royal ruler is responsible any longer for justice and righteousness [compare with A: ...the palace will be forsaken, v.14a], but rather a **spirit** from on high (v.15a)¹³.

Firstly, this spirit (v.15b) increases the fertility of the desert and fields – the basis for wealth in a society based on the yields from crops. Thereupon, without any intervention by hierarchical institutions such as king or princes, justice and righteousness permeate the area that has (once again) become fruitful; it produces enough for all (v.16). Under such conditions, righteousness brings about peace and produces lasting quietness and security (v.17). Yahweh's people (v.18) abide in a peaceful (=fertile/secure) meadow [NRSV: habitation] and secure dwellings; the metaphors (A) have become reality.

The last three verses (18-20) seem to want to make clear again that security in this situation does not need any secured place (i.e. made safe through fortification). Even the sudden lack of the protection of a forest or the laying-low of the (fortified) city will not, in this case, change the overall secure situation. Security will remain because no one is refused access to water and the animals (oxen and donkeys) needed for farming can move about freely (v.20) because no one needs to steal them from others in order to ensure their survival.

A "synoptic-linear" approach to the three sections of the text (A - B - A') reveals a further level of meaning in this prophetic statement. A represents a (classical) **hierarchical approach** to realising lasting security. B shows how such an approach can fail. It's only the "uncovering" [NRSV: pouring out] of the spirit from on high (A') that creates the (innovative) **community approach** which can generate peace, security and quietness for all. The movement from A (through B) to A' makes clear at least two other aspects:

(1) The tension between declining fertility (in B) and fertility that increases again (A') due to the power of the Spirit - in Hebrew the feminine term *ruach* - requires the textual contrast with the (self-assured) women (without making mention of the men who are obviously also responsible).

(2) The devastation of the "king-official / city-palace reality" (common to both A and B) is **not** a consequence of violent (military) destruction, but rather one of the exhausted fertility of (hitherto productive) fields and vineyards (v.10b).

In light of this one must ask whether the exploitation of the economic and social livelihood (orchards, vineyards and fields as well as the farm workers and vintners themselves) is not responsible for the soil of my [= Yahweh's] people growing up in thorns and briars (v.13a).

An impressive transformation takes place between the first and second approach (A, A'). Here it is, in my view, not evident that the new order - in which community justice and righteousness are the basis for peace, quietness and security - is only realised in a time **after** this history of my people (v.13, v.18). The fascinating thing about this 32nd chapter of the Isaiah text is that it is, in its dynamic and themes of hope (which have social justice as their core), only "mildly" eschatological and not exclusively focused on Israel.

¹³ Croatto (p.187) points out that the (divine) *ruach* is not "poured out" from on high (Heb) but (Heb) „uncovered" [cf. v.11b, the same contrasting terms applied to the self-assured, complacent daughters].

c) Deceptive security in a supposedly stable building: Jeremiah 7

I would like briefly to highlight another prophetic motif¹⁴ that seems particularly important in terms of its links to the gospels and the way in which the Jesus movement understands security. This motif comes out most clearly in the temple speech of the prophet Jeremiah (chap.7:1-15, cf. also chap. 26).

On the occasion of an important feast-day (in 609 BC) for which people *from all of Judah* (v.2) streamed to the temple in Jerusalem for prayer and sacrifice, Jeremiah stands up to proclaim a message from God. This message unmasks the people's trust in the inviolability of the house of God as deceptive security. God announces the same fate for the temple of Zion as that of the sanctuary in Silo, long a pile of ruins – if the people do not radically improve their behaviour and actions. Jeremiah's criticism is triggered by social injustice and idolatry. No lawful judgments are pronounced; foreign orphans and widows are oppressed; innocent blood is shed in the temple; foreign gods are worshipped (v. 5f.). Under such conditions the temple is becoming a *den of robbers* (v.11; cf. Mt 21:3); Yahweh will no longer allow his name to be used in this connection. Yahweh no longer wants to live there. The litany-like repeated assurances of trust – such as, "*This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord*" (v.4) – by those attacking their fellow human beings does not bring about security. Their conviction "*We are safe*" (v.10) in the temple from the consequences of unlawful deeds is a fallacy. According to Jeremiah, God will deal with this building (...) in which they set their trust [root: *bth*] in just the same way as before in Silo (cf. Ps 78:60).

The connection Jeremiah describes here between socially just action and preservation from disaster through Yahweh also becomes clear in chapter 34 (v.8-22). Under siege by the Babylonian troops of Nebuchadnezzar of Jerusalem (587 BC), King Zedekiah of Judah decides to release all Hebrew [debt] slaves (v. 14).¹⁵ This release represents a gesture of socially just action towards God and is affirmed in the temple with ceremonial Covenant ritual (v.15). The Babylonians briefly interrupt the siege when they learn that Egyptian troops are on the march (Jer 37:5.11).¹⁶ Then the release of the slaves is revoked! This is proof of the shamelessness of the leaders in Jerusalem and triggers (v.16ff.) definitive catastrophe. In the same year the Babylonians capture Jerusalem, destroy the city and the temple, purloin temple equipment and deport Zedekiah along with some of the population of Judah and Jerusalem.

This aspect of *false security* based on supposed spatial nearness to God (in the temple building) together with simultaneous disregard for God's demand for social justice¹⁷ is summarised in the book of Jeremiah before and after the temple speech (Jer 6:12ff. and 8:10f.) in a concise, accusatory pronouncement: "... from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest everyone deals falsely. They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying '*Peace, peace*', when there is no peace." (Jer 6:12ff. and 8:10f.).

d) "Under God's protection": the sense of personal security in the Psalms

The Psalms in particular contain many statements about a profound sense of security and trust felt by individuals in their personal relationship with Yahweh. The metaphors for protection and security used in the poetry of the Psalms have also

¹⁴The vision of the prophet Amos (9:1-4) is relevant in this connection. In it, God himself destroys the temple – standing at the altar of burnt sacrifice. Cf. *Milton Schwantes*: Das Land kann seine Worte nicht ertragen. Meditationen zu Amos; München 91, bes. S.32-38

¹⁵ See the regulations for the *sabbatical year* (Ex 21 und Dt 15); *Marlene u. Frank Crüsemann*: Das Jahr, das Gott gefällt, in: Bibel und Kirche Jg.55/1 (2000) 19-24; *Ulrich Duchrow*: Alternatives to Global Capitalism. Drawn from biblical history, designed for political action, International Books, 1995, p.149f (= The attempt to "tame" the kingship system through prophecy and law).

¹⁶ *Luis Alonso Schökel / José L. Sicre Diaz*: Profetas. Comentario (I); Madrid 1980, p.578.

¹⁷ See also Micah 3:11: "Its [Jerusalem's] rulers give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for a price, its prophets give oracles for money; yet they lean upon the Lord and say, "*Surely the Lord is with us! No harm shall come upon us.*"

strongly shaped our Christian understanding of these concepts. Is there a relationship between this apparently so immediate and personally felt security of the speakers of the Psalms and the communal understanding of "quietness and security", primarily viewed as the yield of socially effective justice and righteousness?

Because the psalms result from religious lyrics, concrete situations in them have undergone a process of generalisation. However, that does not change anything about the fact that Yahweh is portrayed in many of them as the God of the poor and dispossessed, the sick and the (persecuted) outsider. The cultic connection of these songs by no means conceals the strong social dimension characterising the faith of Israel. Particularly fascinating in our context are those Psalms which refer to the image of (or the desire to) "dwelling/staying in the **house of the Lord/Yahweh**". Even though the attempt to discover the particular (life) situation of a specific psalmist¹⁸ is usually fruitless, it is hard to dispute that the Psalms reflect and generalise hands-on (social) experience. To briefly illustrate this, two of the most well-known "trust psalms" are, in my view, good examples: the 23rd (*The Lord is my Shepherd*) and 91st (*I will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress"*).¹⁹

The image applied to Yahweh in Ps. 23 has little to do with the peaceful romanticism of the shepherd and his flock. In Israel's ancient Near East environment "shepherd" was a common term for a king which included "the aspects of leadership, care and protection of the flock" [Schottroff/1980, p. 89]. In the middle of the short Ps 23 there is a switch: the text suddenly goes from talking *about* Yahweh (v.1-4a: in the 3rd person) to talking *to* Yahweh (= "you", v.4b-6). There is a parallel change of image from the image of the *shepherd* to that of the (hospitable) *host*. The protection motif is also evident in this second coded phraseology. In Yahweh's house the *enemies/oppressors* of the psalmist can do him no ill (despite being in plain view) (v.5). The danger for the psalmist does still exist, but it has lost its terrifying character [Schottroff/1980, p.94].

The *bêt-JHWH* (v.6b) in which the psalmist (on behalf of others as well) is cared for and *wants to remain*²⁰ is God's (Jerusalem) sanctuary, the temple. The situation of someone being pursued because of manslaughter who finds (temporary) asylum and protection from bloodthirsty avengers [e.g. 1 Kings 1:50ff. and 2:28-34] may form the basic experience for these statements about the protection offered by God as the *host* [Schottroff/1980, pp.100-103]. Again, this constitutes a highly interesting connection with Jeremiah's reference to the (collective) feeling of security in *Yahweh's house* – despite the abominations committed!

Psalms 91 describes, particularly in the wealth of metaphor in its central part (v.3-13), the variety of dangers and risks to which the psalmist feels exposed: false accusations before the court (v.3), ambushes by night and armed attacks by day (v.5), illness (v.6f.). This gives rise to the impression that the person's predicament has come about through real-life experiences of persecution and pursuit by enemies.

"The recurrent key words of the Psalm (such as 'abide in the shadow' and 'shelter' in v.1; 'refuge' and 'find refuge' in v. 2,4 and 9; 'fortress' in v.2; 'shield and buckler' in v.4; and 'dwelling place' in v.9) moreover seem to indicate someone fleeing who has finally found shelter with God. The focus is primarily on someone who, through help from their God, narrowly escapes a powerful adversary, possibly seeking vengeance through blood, or a crowd of enemies." [Schottroff/ 1999, p.171f.]

¹⁸ See *Gerhard von Rad*: "Gerechtigkeit" und "Leben" in der Kultsprache der Psalmen, in *idem*: Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament; München (3. Ausgabe) 1965; pp.225-247; partic. 236.

¹⁹ Both psalms were interpreted from a social history perspective by *Willy Schottroff*; I rely on his study and results in the following. Cf. also *W. Schottroff* : Psalm 23. Zur Methode sozialgeschichtlicher Bibelauslegung; in: *Willy Schottroff / Wolfgang Stegemann* (ed.): Traditionen der Befreiung. 1: Methodische Zugänge; Munich 1980, pp.78-113, und *idem*: Wohin ich gestrost fliehen kann. Psalm 91; in: *Claudia Janssen / Beate Wehn* (ed.): Wie Freiheit entsteht. Sozialgeschichtliche Bibelauslegungen, Gütersloh 1999, pp.169-173.

²⁰ cf. Schottroff, pp. 96-98

Even in a situation described as so life-threatening there is the possibility of asylum and shelter in Yahweh's sanctuary. It would also be conceivable that a priest might welcome the refugee with the divine promise of protection that forms the final part of Ps 91 (v.14-16). Precisely such a context - a fundamental experience of security - could underlie v. 4-6 of Psalm 27.

This shows that, even though the descriptions of security (or vulnerability) occurring in these psalms are generally expressed as personal feelings, a frame of reference guaranteeing individual security actually exists only within the functioning environment of community (religious/social) structures (or institutions).

(2) The New Testament

The attempt to discover similar instructive texts on biblical security strategies (as in the OT) in the New Testament by means of Greek terms (e.g. *pepoíthesis* or *anapaúo / anápausis*) does not produce convincing results, in my view. That does not mean, however, that the approach indicated thus far is foreign to New Testament texts. Two examples show that the Jesus movement understood *security* as a consequence of economically and socially just action and saw the loss of quietness (and/or security) in the disregard for solidarity-based action.

e) The parable of building the house: Matthew 7:24-27 [Luke 6:47-49] Security and vulnerability as the framework of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount/ Luke's Sermon on the Plain

The stably built house (as living space), in which people are protected from natural forces, remains an image of *security* rich in significance. Whoever *hears and acts according to* Jesus' words is like a man who built the foundations of his house on firm ground. No tempestuous gusts of (autumnal) rain will shake such a house built on solid ground. People founding their everyday life on Jesus' ethic as set out in the Sermon on the Mount/Sermon on the Plain have this sense of security. By contrast, people who are familiar with this ethic but do not act upon it in their own lives are likely to experience the sudden collapse of their supposedly stable situation.²¹

As I am not able to elaborate here on the ethic of Jesus described in the Sermon on the Mount (or the one on the plain), I will merely summarise it as fundamentally calling for solidarity and nonviolent dealings - both economically and socially - with all people. The Lukan Sermon on the Plain in particular is a condensed version of programmatic statements on Jesus' social message.²² The OT connection between socially just action and social *security and quietness* subsists into the NT. The metaphors for protection arising from justice and righteousness (Is 32:2), the contrast between *fool* and *noble* (Is 32:6-8), and the security present through God's presence in his house (Jer 7) resonate in the NT texts. As in the First Testament passages, the final image comparison of the different way of building a house in the Sermon on the Mount (or the Sermon on the Plain) is not necessarily to be understood as having apocalyptic overtones. The righteousness of the kingship of God (Mt 6:33) is not only to be realised **after** the end of history. The metaphor of the house to be protected evokes a conception of *security and quietness* that is described equally as the *fruit* of a general practice of justice and righteousness.

The vulnerability of the hungry, thirsty, poor and needy (cf. Is 32) is actively changed through Jesus' practice of solidarity and nonviolence. Nevertheless, the Jesus movement remains vulnerable. The *Beatitudes* of Jesus in particular clearly reveal this through (mutually complementary) wording in Matthew and Luke (cf. Mt 5:1-12 with Lk 6:20-22). And because beatitudes and woe cries follow in direct contrast in Luke's version (Lk 6: 23-26), it is clear that the poverty of some and

²¹ Matthew's version of this parable of Jesus calls the first (solid) way of behaving *wise*, and the second one (unstable) *foolish* [cf. Is 32:6-8].

²² Luise Schottroff / Wolfgang Stegemann: Jesus von Nazareth. Hoffnung der Armen; Stuttgart/Berlin etc. 1981 (2nd ed), pp.91-95; Richard A. Horsley: Jesus and Empire; Minneapolis 2003, particularly chap.5: Covenantal Community and Cooperation (pp.105-128).

the wealth of others are directly connected. The announced reversal of the respective (social) fates shows that God takes sides. The situation of poverty and distress will be changed (Lk); in their active participation in this process, Jesus' disciples remain vulnerable. *Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account* (Mt 5:11) – *hate you and exclude you* (Lk 6:22). However, this does not call into question the safety of the house *built* with committed action! It is fascinating to see how (precisely through the textual context thus created: "*Beatitudes (/woe cries)*" – "*comparative images of building a house*") *vulnerability and security* do not mutually exclude one another in this New Testament perspective.

f) Accumulation of goods for the purposes of speculation: deceptive quietness (Luke 12:16-20)²³

A situation in which wealth is associated with the availability of enough food, drink and rest *over a period of many years* is described in the *parable of the rich farmer*. The target of the criticism in this comparative image (found in the special fund of Lukan stories) is, in my view, not primarily hoped-for affluence - the Beatitudes also speak of this hope -, but rather the antisocial way by which it is supposed to be achieved.

The land of a rich man produced abundantly (v.16). The basic starting-point for the emergence of wealth is the (God-given) fruitfulness of (farmed) fields (cf. Is 32). In view of the record quantity of goods produced the farmer reflected: "What should I do, because I have no place to store *my* crops (*my* grain / *my* goods)" (v.17f.). In his egocentric way he ignores the fact that this yield is a gift from the Creator God and thus belongs to everyone.

Basil of Caesarea (*c. 330, †379) already pointed out the distortion in the farmer's view of things in a sermon on the Lukan text during an extended drought and food shortage in Cappadocia in the year 368:

"God caused rain to fall on the ... cultivated land; he sent the sun to warm the seeds and multiply the harvest. (...) He (= the farmer) did not think of nature as being common [to all], did not think of having to share the surplus with the needy."²⁴

At the time, the Cappadocian was aware, unlike readers today, that hoarding an abundant harvest (= grain, oil and wine) is a form of speculation intended to raise commodity prices²⁵ :

"Do not wait for a famine to open your barns! 'The people curse those who hold back grain' (Proverbs 11:26). Do not wait for hunger because of gold ... do not speculate with human misfortune! [...] you look at the gold; you do not see your brother. You know the print of the coin and can tell the false from the genuine; but you do not know your brother in need."²⁶

²³ On the interpretation of this parable from a liberation theology perspective: *Luise Schottroff, Wolfgang Stegemann: Jesus von Nazareth- Hoffnung der Armen* (1978), pp.124-126; *Franz Segbers: „Ich will größere Scheunen bauen“* (Lk 12,18). Genug durch Gerechtigkeit und die Sorge um Gerechtigkeit, in: *K.Füssel / F.Segbers (Hg.)*, (Luzern 1995), (wie Anm.*) pp.105-114; *René Krüger: Gott oder Mammon. Das Lukasevangelium und die Ökonomie* (Luzern 1997); *Ulrich Duchrow / Reinhold Bianchi / René Krüger/ Vincenzo Petracca: Solidarisch Mensch werden. Psychische und soziale Destruktion im Neoliberalismus – Wege zu ihrer Überwindung*; Hamburg 2006; pp. 177-185.

²⁴ *Migne, Patrologia, ser. graeca / Vol. XXXI, 261-277*; quoted according to *Anton Stegmann: Basilius des Grossen – Ausgewählte Homilien und Predigten* (Bd.II) (= Bibliothek der Kirchenväter, Bd.47) München 1925 [Neuausgabe u. Bearbeitung von *T.Wolberg: Basilius v. Cäsarea. Mahnreden* (= Schriften d. Kirchenväter, Bd. 4) Munich 1984]; p.228

²⁵ *Alejandro Zorzín: La percepción de los mecanismos de explotación económica en textos de Basilio de Cesarea (c.330-379) y Ambrosio de Milan (339/40-397)* [= The perception of economic exploitation mechanisms in texts of Basil of Caesarea and Ambrose of Milan]; in: *Hugo Zurutusa / Horacio Botalla (Hg.): Paganismoy cristianismo. Pervivencias y mutaciones culturales* (siglos III-IX); Rosario 1995; pp.33-46.

²⁶ *Stegmann/Basilius, S.232; Duchrow et al. (as in Anm.*, p.183)*

Basil gives a full description of the distress of the poor who have no money when food is scarce and are forced to turn their children into debt bondage. His *rereading* of Luke 12 in the context of extreme social tension shows awareness of the large land-owner's financial manipulation:

"What don't you think up and do for gold? Grain turns into gold for you; wine solidifies into gold; wool is transformed into gold; every trade deal, every undertaking adds to your gold. Gold creates itself by yielding interest."²⁷

At the end God says to the farmer in the parable: "*You fool, this very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?*" (v.20). Apart from the way we might interpret the farmer's sudden death during the night, it is clear that his life, exclusively directed towards his own profit (like the [self-]assured daughters of the joyful city), created a deceptive feeling of calm for many years (v.19). For him, building larger barns does not bring the expected stability. In this biblical example the complexity of the metaphors used is also linked to the question of lasting security. The sudden outbreak of social violence through such experiences of being at the mercy of large land-owners' and capital-owners' manipulation remains a recurring historical reality. But precisely these aspects relevant to the question we are examining here are mostly overlooked in the way we use the Bible, which "...covers up the sin of the rich ...through spiritualist, eschatological and personal-life interpretations."²⁸

III. Conclusions

The attempt to achieve a biblical approach to security (and/or vulnerability) using some important Old and New Testament texts leads to an interesting finding: security arises in direct correlation with economic and social justice (with an "economics of enough-for-all - in production, consumption and distribution")²⁹. Security is the harvest of practical nonviolence and solidarity which heals vulnerability without being able to exclude it.

This biblical perspective contrasts with the security policies seeking to achieve security through preserving and defending the advantages of one group of people - nation or coalition of nations - over against another one; any such security is connected to maximum invulnerability.

For the Christian community it is therefore necessary, when the question of security is raised, to strongly emphasise the point which remains fundamental, from a biblical standpoint (and transposed to a present-day framework), to lasting security: e.g. the promoting of world-wide economic and social justice. In addition, Christians should clearly point out the danger of deceptive security as a likely result of any understanding of security based on national, religious or cultural blocs.

The biblical perspective outlined above contrasts with yet another broader understanding of security, one which mostly focuses on the level of personal security and completely ignores the integration of the individual in the wider economic and social context. Often this individual understanding of security is characterised by a close spiritual bond to an almighty God. Aspects of general security are mostly left to the respective government, without any further reflection.

Especially at the parish or congregational level, not only should such a narrow interpretation be countered by opposing arguments (in sermons, Bible studies etc); this calling into question should also be strengthened by (1) experiencing economic and social vulnerability at the local level in the community's immediate (societal) setting, and (2) discovering and practising forms of active solidarity with the involvement of *all* congregational members (not just youth and young adults

²⁷ Stegmann/Basilus, S.233.

²⁸ Duchrow et al. (as in note *), p.183f.

²⁹ Ibid. p.176f. "...according to the testimony of the Bible, God desires dignity for all. And this requires an economics of enough-for-all - in production, consumption and distribution."

doing a year of voluntary service). After all, the resultant "view from below"³⁰ gives people the opportunity in the first place to espouse the biblical view of security *and* vulnerability, and to understand that individual security can only arise, and endure, in the broad framework of community security.

Friedelsheim, 7 May 2007

Translation from the German: Elaine Griffiths, TRM

³⁰ Bonhoeffer described this „View from below" in the concluding passage of "After Ten Years: A Reckoning made at the New Year 1943", a text written for Eberhard Bethge, Hans Oster and Hans Von Dohnanyi:

"There remains an experience of incomparable value. We have for once learned to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the out-cast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled. In short, from the perspective of those who suffer.

The important thing is that neither bitterness nor envy should have gnawed at the heart during this time, that we should have come to look with new eyes at matters great and small, sorrow and joy, strength and weakness, that our perception of generosity, humanity, justice and mercy should have become clearer, freer, less corruptible.

We have to learn that personal suffering is a more effective key, a more rewarding principle for exploring the world in thought and action than is personal good fortune.

This perspective from below must not become the partisan possession of those who are eternally dissatisfied, rather we must do justice to life in all its dimensions from a higher satisfaction whose foundation is beyond any talk of from below or from above. This is the way in which we may affirm it." From: *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Letters and Papers from Prison*