Church and Peace
Conference 2025
Herrnhut (Germany)
October 24th - 26th 2025

Topic: ‚Don‘t let yourself be hardened in these hard times...‘
Resist, reconcile, transform

Reference text: Ez 36, 26: *And I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit into you: I will remove the heart of stone from your body and give you a heart of flesh …*

Dear Colleagues, Sisters and Brothers,

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for this opportunity to speak to you today. As you may have noticed, I am not Hana Tonzarová. However, I am from the same church. My name is Roman Zábrodský. I am from the Czechoslovak Hussite Church and serve as a preacher in a very small town which some of you may know, although I assume most of you do not. I often joke that I work in Venice, but the place where I work is actually called Venice upon Jizera. In the small chapel where I preach, I discuss topics directly related to the theme of our conference. At the same time, I am still a student at the Hussite Theological Faculty of Charles University, and perhaps that is why I am all the more pleased and honored to be able to speak to you here today.

The text from the Book of Ezekiel is difficult in many ways. This is mainly due to the period it describes: Jerusalem and the Temple have been destroyed. The nation is in chaos. Society is falling apart, and the morality framed by the Torah is in decline. This situation is similar to, and familiar to us, in many places around the world and in Europe lately.

Context of the Book
The Book of Ezekiel is set during the difficult period of the Babylonian exile. It follows the most serious cultic and national tragedy that happened to the nation after the kingdom was established, as described in the Books of Samuel.

As with other books in this genre, it should be noted that the author and the prophet are most likely not the same person, even though the text is written solely from the prophet's perspective.[1] Scholars believe that the book was written long after the events described in it, and much later than the period in which the story is set. This is supported by the fact that it describes events that can only be verified historically from the Hellenistic period. The time of canonisation and editorial work on the book also point to the Hellenistic period. The combination of the first and third person supports the above claim. This incongruous combination leads us to conclude that some parts were compiled and linked editorially, thus creating a seemingly coherent text. For example, Ezekiel 1:1 refers to the prophet in the first person, but Ezekiel 1:2–3 uses the third person[2].
At its core, the book describes the consequences of the sins committed by God's people. At least, this is how the author presents it as he attempts to explain the community's trauma and encourage them with the hope of reconciliation with God.

Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls
Another interesting clue can be found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, which refer to the prophet Ezekiel quite frequently. For example, in The Damascus Document (CD) and Hodayot (1QHa). These frequent references are only indirect evidence that the community that created the scrolls valued the message of the book highly. The Dead Sea Scrolls also contain the so-called 4Q Pseudo-Ezekiel (4Q385, 4Q385c, 4Q386, 4Q388 and 4Q391).[3]

<u>Ezekiel 36:26</u>
This particular verse is set within the context of the Lord's speech, or rather the prophecy that opens the entire chapter. This prophecy speaks of the tragedy that fell upon His chosen people, but at the same time it gives the prophet the task of prophesying about the land of Israel, which the Lord promised to His people. Within these boundaries, we can also interpret the above verse as a sign of hope for reconciliation.

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[1] MARK J. BODA a J. GORDON MCCONVILLE. Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets. InterVarsity Press, 2012
[2] MARK J. BODA a J. GORDON MCCONVILLE. Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets. InterVarsity Press, 2012
[3] MARK J. BODA a J. GORDON MCCONVILLE. Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets. InterVarsity Press, 2012

In the case of the Tanakh, one possible way to understand the meaning of a particular text is to use the method known as tradent tradition or ad fontes. This method primarily involves studying the text in its original language and then examining relevant commentaries. Another option is to interpret Scripture using Scripture itself. Combining these two methods can provide useful insight into the meaning of the verse in our discussion.
The verse from the Book of Ezekiel that I am attempting to analyze here, Ezekiel 36:26, reads as follows in Hebrew:

וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם֙ לֵ֣ב חָדָ֔שׁ וְר֥וּחַ חֲדָשָׁ֖ה אֶתֵּ֣ן בְּקִרְבְּכֶ֑ם וַהֲסִרֹתִ֞י אֶת־לֵ֤ב הָאֶבֶן֙ מִבְּשַׂרְכֶ֔ם וְנָתַתִּ֥י לָכֶ֖ם לֵ֥ב בָּשָֽׂר

Analysis
For the sake of completeness, I would like to mention the discourse in which the selected terms appear, thereby indicating their meaning.
What is the heart?
The term can be understood in two ways, as either the masculine or feminine nominative. The masculine nominative[4] is based on Proverbs 23:15: '*My son, if your mind gets wisdom, My mind, too, will be gladdened*.' - בְּנִי אִם־חָכַם לִבֶּךָ יִשְׂמַח לִבִּי גַם־אָנִי. It is clear that, in this sense, the term 'heart' can also be translated as 'mind', as in the above example. The feminine nominative[5] is based on Proverbs 12:25: '*If there is anxiety in a man's mind let him quash it, And turn it into joy with a good word*.' - יַד-חָרוּצִים-תִּמְשֹׁל-וּרְמִיָּה-תִּהְיֶה-לָמַס.
This concept suggests that the term 'heart' can also be understood as 'inner man', 'mind' or 'will'.
It is interesting how we can understand the concept of the 'inner man'. In the context of the entire book, it probably refers to some kind of inner transformation. This could be a transformation in the way a person approaches thinking, so that they no longer violate God's commandments and sin. It is a different mentality, a different mindset, a different will. It will no longer be the hardened heart of stone that we read about in Exodus 10:20. We could view the new heart of flesh as a transformation of identity or even as the acquisition of a new one.
The concept of a person's identity changing as a result of realising their sin, guilt and repentance is referenced in numerous places in both the Old and New Testaments. One of the most famous passages is John 3:3–5. In this passage,

[4] BROWN, Francis; DRIVER, S. R. a BRIGGS, Charles A. The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English lexicon: with an appendix containing the Biblical Aramaic. 11th print. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007.
[5] BROWN, Francis; DRIVER, S. R. a BRIGGS, Charles A. The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English lexicon: with an appendix containing the Biblical Aramaic. 11th print. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007.

Jesus tells Nicodemus that unless one dies, one cannot be born again. Unfortunately, Nicodemus does not understand. In a figurative sense, Jesus is talking about the death of the ego or identity. To gain a new identity, as we see in Ezekiel 36:26, a person must abandon the old one or ask for forgiveness of sins. This is one of the main ideas of John the Baptist and Jesus's original thesis.

Ezekiel and the New Testament

The New Testament refers to the prophet Ezekiel in many places, and many of its passages are directly inspired by him. John 10:11-18, for example, stands out among the Gospels for its reference to the shepherds in Ezekiel 34 and 37:15-28.

Also fundamental to our theme are 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Ephesians 2:3, which adopt the concept of a new heart from Ezekiel 11:19-20 and 36:25-27[6].

As I have already said, the significance of repentance is important for acquiring a new identity. Michel Foucault describes this process in his work. He describes repentance as a form of technique for the self, a necessary step for acquiring a new identity. This is remarkably relevant to the theme of our conference. Building on the previous thesis, Foucault argues that repentance, a practice rooted in the confession of sin among early Christians and also evident in the Book of Ezekiel, is a form of dialogue. He follows Seneca in this statement, who introduces two important concepts: '*cognoscere de moribus suis*' and '*me causam dico*', meaning that the accused confesses his crime to the judge, who is the accused himself. In the case of the Book of Ezekiel or the Bible in general, the role of the judge is clear. I am merely trying to demonstrate that the idea of a 'new heart' — a transformation of identity — is necessarily linked to the techniques of the self described by Foucault in his study of the discourse of repentance[7].

I would like to emphasise that it is impossible to successfully overcome the violence that currently lurks around every corner without a fundamental transformation of society's identity.

Jan Amos Komenský

[6] MARK J. BODA a J. GORDON MCCONVILLE. Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets. InterVarsity Press, 2012

[7] FOUCAULT, Michel. About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Lectures at Dartmouth College, 1980. University of Chicago Press, 2015.

In the context of where we are, brothers and sisters from the Moravian Church and my homeland, I cannot fail to mention a famous native of my country. His name was Jan Amos Komenský Johannes Comenius. He is known as an important reformer, teacher and philosopher, but above all as a pacifist. His resistance to oppression, his preservation of his faith and his opposition to violence in any form can inspire us even today. Comenius was forced to leave his homeland in 1628 due to violent recatholicisation, and despite all the violence he experienced there and while fleeing, he is known for promoting his own Christian ideas of non-violence and love for one's neighbour. He believed that the world could only be changed through gentle love and wisdom, not force. After all, he was a bishop of the Unity of Brothers, a group referred to as 'a people without a sword'.

Conclusion

It is precisely the suffering, oppression and violence inflicted by human beings on one another that constantly forces us to reflect on the meaning of peace. Through empathy and love for our neighbours, we can recognise our mistakes and openly admit that racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia and any other form of chauvinism and violence committed against others is our fault too. We are also guilty of being blind to the evil and violence perpetrated against those who are persecuted. As described in Ezekiel 36, acknowledging sin is the first step towards returning to the Promised Land, into the arms of Christ – towards a new heart, not of stone but of flesh. This transformation leads to a new identity. From this emerge resistance and the will to defend the weak and oppressed. The example we set the world by testifying to God's grace will also lead to the transformation of society as a whole — a change of identity, or the acquisition of a new heart. Ultimately, this will lead to reconciliation.

Thank you for your attention.