

THE BOOK OF LAW AND ITS IMPACT ON KING JOSIAH'S PERSONHOOD AND THE COMMON GOOD

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ABSTRACT. This paper sets out to observe every stage of the life of the king of Judah, Josiah, childhood, adolescence and the adult period from a spiritual perspective, respectively the implication of the discovery of the Book of Law. In order to achieve the objective, we aim at answering two main questions, namely: did this book create a bridge between the individual and the public sphere?, and how was the divine sphere involved in the individual and public sphere? Therefore, we will examine the way in which the individual sphere intertwines with the political and public sphere and the influence that the Book of the Law manifests at the individual level on the identity and the personhood of the king Josiah, as well as on the common good, namely human flourishing. Finally, we will extrapolate this information in order to uncover the degree to which it meets the needs of contemporary Romanian society.

KEY WORDS: personhood, common good, Book of Law, Josiah, public sphere

Introduction

An overview of the book 2 Kings, and more specifically the period before exile, helps us understand the spiritual decadence and social-political crises that have imprinted on God's chosen people (Măcelaru 2009: 65) and, at the same time, their implications for the common good and human flourishing. Because, in this research, we intend to analyse the life of king Josiah, we will narrow the temporal element on which we will focus our attention and look in particular upon the period in which he reigned. Previous periods will be observed only strictly from the perspective of the influence they had on Josiah and, regarding those after his reign, only to examine whether the emperor had an impact on future generations and whether he contributed significantly to the preservation of the identity of the Jewish people during the exile. The main objective of the argument is an analysis of the impact that the Book of the Law had on the personhood of the king Josiah, but also on the common good. Therefore, in order to achieve this aim, first we intend to analyse the personhood term. Secondly, we will look at the spiritual roots from Josiah's life, namely at the environment in which he grew up and the spiritual discipline that has spread to the family sphere of the emperor, which inevitably left its mark and contributed to the formation of the individual

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sphere. We will review all stages of Josiah's life in order to observe gradually the emperor's spirituality and make a longer stop on the moment when he came into direct contact with the Book of the Law. Taking into account that Josiah's individual sphere interacted with and even identified with the political and public sphere, we intend thirdly to study the influence that the Book of the Law had on the last spheres and the way in which the Sovereign sphere interfered with them. Fourthly, we propose a study of interdependency between these spheres, where the actions of the individual sphere influence either positively or negatively the common good and human flourishing. Finally, we will take a rather bold approach, namely we will extrapolate the information to observe how Scripture influences the individual and implicitly the public sphere, namely the contemporary Romanian society.

Josiah: Personhood and Spiritual Roots

The term personhood describes the quality of being a person with everything that involves it: personality, identity, individualism, character, authority (Nesteruk 2009) and coincides with the individual sphere. From a biblical perspective, personhood represents "life with God". From this point of view, "life with God" is a transformational journey, a process of growth from knowing about God to knowing God (Măcelaru 2017: 51-53), and finally to become a social agent, a virtuous chosen (Yong 2020: 93) through which Divinity acts in other spheres, such as the public sphere. A correct reading of Scripture, consisting of contextualised applications of the divine message, leads to a Christian existence that responds to God's claim to "being" before "doing" (Măcelaru 2016: 69) and, at the same time, to imprint on the "social imagination" of the believer which, together with other Christian practices, contributes to the way one understands the world in the light of the Gospel. When using this expression, we refer to a life in which Christian practice takes precedence at the individual level, thus the application of biblical teachings becomes a basic norm and implies a visible transformation of one's life, which will inevitably be confirmed by those around. Such a Christian will pass his actions through the filter of Scripture, because they have implications not only at the individual level, but also at the community level and across the entire public spectrum. Only such a way of living will result in true human flourishing (Măcelaru 2016: 69; Măcelaru 2016: 134-135). It is important to remember the following diagram and to return to it whenever necessary because it is the foundation on which we will build this research.



Figure No. 1 – Transformational journey

We will thus look at the spiritual roots in Josiah's life, namely the environment in which he grew up and the spiritual discipline that has spread to this emperor's family sphere, which inevitably left their mark and contributed to the formation of his individual sphere.

Building on the theories advanced by Oswald Spengler and Arnold J. Toynbee, Măcelaru presents an interesting analogy on the emergence, life and disappearance of the Israeli civilization in accordance with the four seasons of the year. Thus, the spring of the Jewish people is defined by the liberation from Egypt, the wandering through the wilderness under the leadership of Moses and the possession of the holy land, the defining point of transformation from the nomadic people into the people with their own country. The summer of this nation coincides with the reign of king Saul and king David, when the monarchy was established and became an economic, political and military influence in the area. Under the reign of king Solomon, Israel enters the third season, namely autumn, being a period of peace and safety in which the people gather the fruits of the previous reigns. The division of the nation into two distinct kingdoms marks the beginning of winter, a period of decline, spiritual degradation and implicitly of wars, ending with the massive deportation of the Jewish people (Măcelaru 2009: 66-68).

During this glacial period, our protagonist, Josiah, appears. At the age of only eight, he became emperor of Judah, an idolatrous kingdom, crushed by the spiritual degradation propagated by his forerunners: king Manasseh, the grandfather of Josiah, and continued by king Amon, his father. Of the two we find written that they did what was evil before the Lord, the culmination of this spiritual downfall being reached during the reign of Manasseh, who resorted to a massive shedding of innocent blood, "until Jerusalem was filled from one end to the other with innocent blood" (2 Kings 21:16). It is very important to point out that Manasseh had the longest reign in Judah, i.e. 55 years, every moment of these years inevitably contributing to the death of the Southern Kingdom (House 2001: 376). In short, Manasseh, the representative of the royal house, violated three fundamental principles of the Old Testament life. Firstly, he failed following the example of his ancestor David, and consequently broke the Davidic covenant (according to 2 Samuel 7:7-17). Secondly, he defiled with idolatry the central sanctuary chosen by God (according to Deuteronomy 12:1-32, 1 Kings 9:1-9), a sin that would lead to the destruction and exile of Judah (according to 1 Kings 9:6-9). Lastly, Manasseh

rejected the covenant of Moses, which would contribute to the loss of the promised land (according to Deuteronomy 28:49-63), (House 2001: 376). However, a significant detail of Manasseh's life is recorded in the Chronicles, a period of repentance and prayer, determined by Assyrian oppression. The chronicler presents an external religious reform undertaken by the emperor of Judah which aimed to remove idols from the House of the Lord and Jerusalem (House 2001: 379). This short period of rectification had no positive effects on the life of son Amon, who succeeded him to the throne. The shaping education received as a child permanently marked Amon's spiritual trajectory, adopting the religious practices and political agenda promoted by his father (House 2001: 380), which he inevitably passed on to the generations that followed them. It seems that, although the commandment of the transmission of divine law from generation to generation (Loghin 2020b: 146-154) was still valid, Josiah did not benefit from it. Amon neglected and we can say that he disregarded this commandment. Firstly, he did not cultivate a proper relationship with God and secondly, he did not cultivate an attitude of love towards God's law. The process of instilling the law was to begin in the first years of life and continue with a daily repetition of it, the role of the parents being to provide spiritual education, to evangelize the child daily, to deal with his spiritual growth, to shape a spiritual discipline (Loghin 2020a: 419-428) in the child's life, as well as to be a worthy example to follow. Thus, the parents ensured that their heirs would follow the trajectory that would lead them in the presence of God and that would also arouse their interest in the faith in God (Trent, Osborne and Bruner 2005: 24-25). The fulfilment of this commandment actually ensured the continuity of the covenant and the existence of Israel as a nation, while its oblivion or ignorance opened the door to failure (Craigie 2007: 151-152). However, Amon chooses to deprive his son of spiritual values, cultivating the opposite, which led to the strengthening of the idolatrous environment initiated by king Manasseh.

Inevitably, these evil spiritual roots, the family and the environment, both spiritually fallen, have left their mark on the personhood of Josiah and implicitly on the common good and human flourishing, because we are witnessing a society that has ignored and forgotten the law of God. However, we note with amazement that king Josiah manages to get rid of these harmful influences and, at the age of 16, in his teenage years, his concern becomes the search for God. There are different theories about the start of the reform undertaken by Josiah, due primarily to the differences that arise between the two narratives of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. Some researchers subscribe to the theory that the beginning of the reform was in the twelfth year of the reign of Josiah (Dillard 2002: 276), while others accept the eighteenth year as the year of initiation of the reform (House 2001: 382). We reckon that the reform undertaken by king Josiah should be seen via its two major stages,

where the first stage presents an external religious reform, while the second stage coincides with an inner religious reform.

This is firstly the case because the personhood of Josiah has been influenced by several major events. As a child, he witnessed an external religious reform undertaken by his grandfather, king Manasseh. He had a brief period in which he sought God with repentance and prayer as a result of Assyrian oppression and also removed the idols from the House of the Lord and from Jerusalem. I believe that this external religious reform marked Josiah's childhood. Consequently, after at the age of 16, he began to seek God, at the age of 20, Josiah decides that it is time to initiate an external religious reform (Hobbs 2002: 318; Dillard 2002: 278), given that the Jewish people had fallen spiritually. In the first stage of the six-year reform, the young emperor follows exactly the measures taken by his grandfather and commands the destruction of idols in the House of the Lord, in Jerusalem and throughout the country. Moreover, Josiah crosses the borders of the Southern Kingdom and also enters the northern territory with this process of external cleansing.

Even though Amon did not turn to a shaping education that would mould a spiritual discipline, his grandfather's actions, however, undertaken during the first six years of Josiah's life, had a defining impact on his spiritual trajectory. The German socialists made the following statement in what such trajectory is concerned: "Give us a six-year-old to educate him and he will follow us for the rest of his life." The Roman Catholic Church also said that the education of a child up to the age of seven is the foundation for what the child will become (see LeBar 1952: 25-26). Vasile Bancilă (2015: 20) argues that "childhood age is the most important to undertake the religious formation of man", while A. Lewis, the psychologist emphasises the importance of religious education in the early years, delaying it to adulthood being a major mistake that many parents make (Kaleda 2006: 274). Therefore, all of them supported and, at the same time, were convinced of the importance of the first years of the child's life in the formation of religious customs, which in adulthood will define the adult (LeBar 1952: 25-26). Consequently, one can state that this first stage of religious reform is the result of the influence of the family sphere, namely the influence of grandfather, Manasseh on the individual sphere of Josiah, and coincides with the first station of the transformational journey, namely knowledge of God (see fig. 1).

The Book of Law and Josiah as Social Agent

In the previous chapter I noticed that the personhood of this remarkable leader was primarily influenced by the spiritual roots of his family and the environment in which he grew up. In the following, we will focus on the intervention manifested by the Sovereign sphere in the individual sphere by two factors. Firstly, the Divinity intervenes through its social agents, the priest

Hilkiah and the secretary Shaphan, empowered with authority to act both in the individual sphere and in the public sphere. The priest Hilkiah finds the Book of the Law (Hobbs 2002: 325; Dillard 2002: 280; House 2001: 382; Selman 1994: 552), which he gives to Shaphan, the emperor's secretary. Regarding the content of the Book of Law discovered during the reign of Joseph, researchers are divided. Some claim that it contained strictly the code of deuteronomic laws, while others consider that it contained the entire Deuteronomy book or a primary form of it. Shaphan not only accepted the Book of the Law, but he also read it in its entirety, and then presented it to the emperor and read it to him without hesitation.

Over time, researchers have issued various opinions about the discovery of the Book of the Law. Some, like Raymond B. Dillard (Dillard 2002: 280), consider the discovery as a divine reward to Josiah for the faithfulness shown. Others are not quick to see in this a perfect strategy to manipulate the people for the easy and rapid implementation of the new code of laws provided by the reform or exclusively for its justification. There is another category of researchers who see this event as a simple and pure chance (Măcelaru 2009: 73), which had such a strong impact in Josiah's life and led to the beginning of the second phase of the reform. I also subscribe to the last category, because, from my point of view, the discovery of the Book of the Law is the second decisive factor in the formation and influence of Josiah's personhood and, at the same time, it is the event that distinguishes Josiah from both his predecessors and his successors (Ristau 2005: 44). If, up to this point, Josiah knew about God and took up the reform model of religious purification put into practice by his grandfather, Manasseh, from now, Josiah has entered a new stage – life with God. He came to know God after reading the Book and continued the transformation process provided by the transformational journey (Măcelaru 2017: 49-50), see also Fig. 1. This transformation is distinguished from his first actions: first, he “tore his clothes” (2 Kings 22:11) – a symbol of repentance and humility; secondly, he sent a delegation to the Huldah prophet to know God's decision about him and the nation he leads. Through this act, Josiah demonstrates the decision to subordinate the two spheres in which he acts as an authority to the Sovereign sphere, namely the individual and the public spheres (Kuyper 2008) and recognizes the relationship of total dependence on God (a broader explanation of sovereignty spheres can be found in Kuyper's third lecture, “Calvinism and Science”). It is important to remember that God confirms the transformation of Josiah. Thus, Josiah becomes a social agent of Sovereignty, whose social imagination is transformed and who proves that he has understood the divine requirements and responds to God's claim to “being” before “doing”. This point is actually the beginning of inner spiritual reform. Josiah gathers the elders of Judah and Jerusalem, a sign of the call to spiritual unity, and goes to the

House of the Lord. Important to note that, up to this point, the chronicler does not mention such a habit in the emperor's life. Moreover, the king reads the Book of the Law in front of the people, renews the covenant with the Lord and decides to celebrate Passover according to the criteria set out in this book. Thus, at this moment, it becomes visible that the individual sphere of Josiah overlaps with that of the public sphere, he is in fact a decisive factor of the public sphere, empowered by God with the necessary authority to act in an influential way in the spectrum of the public sphere. Josiah publicly accepts the responsibilities that fall to him as leader of the Jewish people, namely the responsibility to implement and respect the divine covenant, not only at the individual level, but also at the level of the public sphere and the responsibility to lead the kingdom so that it would become again exclusively the Lord's people (Wiseman 1993: 318). Such a living will have a defining influence on the public sphere and will contribute to shaping true human flourishing (Măcelaru 2016: 69; Măcelaru 2016: 134-135).

In the following lines we will look at the cyclical impact that the Book of Law had in the public sphere, which has as its very beginning the event of the discovery of the book. Initially, it was read on a personal level (2 Kings 22:8), then to the king (2 Kings 22:10) and finally publicly to the whole people (2 Kings 23:2, see Wiseman 1993: 317). The discovery of the Book led, first, to the transformation of Emperor Joseph, a fact confirmed by the Divinity and followed by a promise: Judas would have peace during the reign of Josiah. If we look at the global context, we will find that during this reign, world policy has undergone some changes. Assyria fades, Babylon is not prepared to dominate territories as distant as Judas, and Egypt has no agenda for the conquest of small countries. This explains the time of peace and quiet, Judas being no longer the political ball disputed by the empires of the time (House 2006: 381). Josiah becomes the social agent who first lives personally what he read and then acts. He initiates the inner religious reform that contributes to the spiritual righting of the Jewish people, and the example of the royal leader leads to the national renewal of the covenant and, thus, to the protection of the common good. God postpones the punishment proclaimed by his servants, and the people can enjoy a true human flourishing at the national level. It should be noted that, by human flourishing, we refer not only to that state of emotional fulfilment intertwined with a good state of health and material, professional satisfaction, but also to living life in a correct relationship with God. This kind of human flourishing actually shows interest in a dynamic and relational involvement with the Divinity. Thus, the Jewish people returned to the original state of monotheistic worship and to the relationship of obedience and dependence on the Sovereign sphere. All these transformations produced by the Book of the Law had a last but important consequence in determining the form of the future of Israel (Selman 1994:

555). In the exile that followed shortly after Josiah's death, the Jews of Judah survived as a people and preserved their identity. The researchers confirm the major contribution of the divine Book and the reign of Josiah in this regard (see, for instance, Măcelaru 2009: 81).

The Bible and the Romanian Society

According to the 2011 census, 93% of the Romanian citizens have declared themselves to be Christians, which however does not mean or prove that all of them are reading, studying or memorizing the Scripture regularly. This is more likely an indicative to the fact that "the translation of the Bible into Romanian had meanings of national identity and cultural affirmation, so this percentage suggests the Bible's influence on the Romanian society" (Loghin, 2020: 84). In my aforementioned paper, *The Project "Bible²": A Case Study of Cross-Denominational Youth-Ministry in Romania*, I presented the results of a survey and tried to clarify the way in which disciplined Romanians behave towards the Scripture. Even if a majority of Romanians declared themselves Christians, they have not a special moment in the day for reading, studying and memorizing the Word of God. Without this spiritual discipline, Romanian Christians cannot gain the biblical knowledge of "being" before "doing" and they cannot speak from and about the Word of God. So, the process of contextualization of the divine message became a difficult one without a consistent knowledge about and from the Bible.

If we transpose the impact cycle of the Book of the Law from the time of Josiah to the Romanian society, we will observe the following: the correct reading of the Bible, consisting of contextualized applications of the divine message, will generate a transformational journey into the life of the Romanian reader who will understand God's claim to "being" before "doing". This means that

Only the light of the gospel, the power of the Word that will be able to awake people to a new life [...] the Bible should be taken out of the church altar and delivered to the families, to the society at large, to the whole nation, in the midst of the world, in the life of every single man and woman. (Constantineanu 2011: 104)

A good example is the Romanian Orthodox Church experience from the first half of 20th century, when many orthodox people wanted more than a superficial or an "empty" Christian life. They started a journey to find out more about Christian faith, about what it means to "be" a Christian. They discovered

for them the essence of the gospel, as it is written in the Scriptures and as they have experienced a new vitality of their Christian spiritual life, due particularly to

a close and living relationship with Jesus Christ. Although the number of people directly and notably involved in this process was very large. (Constantineanu 2011: 86)

Reading the Bible can also be perceived as lenses with which the Romanian believer encodes and interprets his own context and gives meaning to the circumstances of his life and, why not, of the public sphere. Thus, the transformed Romanian can become a social agent, a virtuous chosen of God through whom Divinity influences the common good and human well-being. Every person, regardless of nationality, even Romanians, can be transformed by God's Word because the Scripture has the power to change the character and behavior of the person, the whole personhood. When somebody reads the Scripture, something happens with and in him (Constantineanu 2010: 24). Therefore, it can be said that, just as for the Jewish people the Book of the Law has contributed to the preservation of national identity, the Bible can be a factor that will contribute to the preservation of Romanian national values and, why not, to the preservation of identity. And this because the Romanian identity and cultural context is influenced by the translation of the Bible into Romanian, the Romanian people in a high percentage identifying with the Christian church and its spiritual value.

Conclusions

Josiah has remained in history as a prominent figure, as a reformer, who influenced not only the present of the people he led, but even its future, and this is due to an important factor that had a particular impact on his personhood. The young emperor of Judah, not only rid himself of the harmful influences brought into his life by his family roots and the idolatrous and fallen environment in which he grew up, but, at the time of the discovery of the Book of the Law, he voluntarily agreed to subordinate to the Sovereign sphere the two spheres in which he operated as authority, namely the individual and the public spheres. At the same time, in the transformational journey Josiah took, if he initially only knew about God, in the end he became the social agent of the Divinity, whose social imaginary was strongly imprinted by the message from the divine Book. Thus, the Sovereign sphere made its presence felt in the public sphere, due to the new social agent, who took advantage of its hierarchical position and presented the Book of the Law to the whole people. At the same time, Josiah led the Jewish people towards the renewal of the covenant and the fulfilment of its purpose as a monotheistic people, a people of God. Thus, the Book of the Law left a mark not only on the individual sphere of Josiah, but also on the public sphere, and as a consequence, the Jewish people were able to enjoy peace and safety in their own country, which implicitly led to the establishment of human flourishing on all levels and the preservation of national identity.

In conclusion, the correct reading of the Word of God, consisting of contextualized applications of the divine message, will primarily generate a transformational journey at the individual level, which will have as its end the formation of the social agent through which the Sovereign sphere will interfere and act within the other spheres, including the public sphere. The more people dedicated to a proper reading of Scripture, the more transformed people, who can become social agents with an impact in the public space on a smaller or larger scale, which will ultimately generate a true human flourishing to which any nation aspires and at the same time will contribute to the preservation of national identity

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