

Paul, Wesley and labelling
Reading Paul and Wesley together

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The aim of the paper is to read an epistle of the New Testament in a way that we could consider “Methodist”. Besides that, we will look for some clues for reflecting the theme of our 14th Oxford Institute: “Thy Grace Restore, Thy Work Revive”

The epistle we choose for working is Philemon.

Our proposal will be that this epistle shows some dynamics inside it that are similar to those coming from the renewal of the Methodist movement many centuries after it.

In this sense, we are going to understand the Epistle to Philemon as a witness of a renewal movement and we will compare Philemon with a Methodist document. This document is *Reflections on Slavery*, published in 1774.

We appreciate in both writings the slavery as focus. Our idea, then, will be compare them to get an idea of some common and different points in them.

Also, we expect to take some insights from this comparison that offer us clues for thinking us in our own times as Methodist, as heirs of those renewal movements.

A methodist is...

I still remember vividly a small painting on the wall of my parent's house where I use to live until my twenties. There could be read the phrase: “A Methodist is someone in whose heart has been poured the love of God. Who loves God with all his/her heart, with all his/her strength and with all his/her knowledge. And to his/her neighbour like himself/herself” Since that time I got profoundly interested in getting involved in those movements or relationships that have the face of the persons as the paradigm not only for action but also for any spoken word between the persons.

This picture coming from the Methodist tradition is rooted in the very evangelical tradition of consider the person before any dogma or instead of some “truth”. The fight of Jesus against the doctrinal movement of the Pharisees is a sharp example of what I mean.

If we had a summary, we would say that is the continuous danger of becoming an institutional movement instead of being a human movement. It was the Jesus fight, then it continued being the John Wesley fight and, I suspect, is our new challenge at the present.

So, if we could look the problem today, we would see a complex society where the face to face relationship are increasingly forgotten. Or we may say, the relationships are mediatized by ideological structures that become more rigid. In fact, many times this mediatization is the only relationship and replace the face to face encounter.

We will try to explore the idea of label as the tool that has increasingly replaced the face to face encounter.

We will go through the Philemon and *Reflections on Slavery* trying to look for how both writing fight against the labels working in their social media. Because the specific theme we have in these writings, the slavery will be the label we will study. However, we believe that the same mechanism works today for any label.

Structure of the paper

We organized the paper in three parts.

The first one is a reading of the letter to Philemon. We will read taking in account some rhetorical dynamics inside it. We will pay attention specifically to the use of some adjectives, comparisons, etc. In this first part is not supposed to take reflections. They will be in the second part.

The second part is a comparison between some of the clues found in the first part and some parts of the document Reflections on Slavery. Here we will try to elaborate some conclusion having the Reflections document as a counterpart of Philemon. What I mean is that the comparison is what we look for emphasize in our work. This comparison will prepare the ideas of the third part.

The third part is transitory conclusion of the paper and the hermeneutics that give us some challenges as Methodist in this century. The conclusion is not a conclusion itself. It attempts to give some lines to continue reflecting.

First part - About Philemon

When we read the letter to Philemon we find two points that give us a framework to understand it.

The first of them is as obvious as useful, we work with a letter and it is mean no real presence, no physical and visual communication. Considering this point, it will be profoundly meaningful to pay special attention to the diverse ways in which the text creates the presence of the other.

The second point to take in account will be the emphasis in the person construction. The previous point was about the necessity of create the persons because it is not in the text. What I want to highlight here is that Philemon is a writing where the building of the persons is done basically through corporal approach instead of ideological ones. This second point focalizes on the rhetorical tools or emphasis used to support that building. In this sense, the absent body, the absent looking and gesture communication will need to be imagined.

Because we think that the literary construction is important it will be useful go ahead verse to verse in the analysis.

In this sense we are going to divide the text in some parts because of the better understanding:

Salutation vv 1-3

Captatio benevolentia vv. 4-7

The introduction to the petition vv. 8-12

The Petition vv 10-20

- a. vv 10-13. The presentation.
- b. vv14-15. Onesimus-Philemon relationship
- c. vv 15b-16. The petition.
- d. vv 17-20a Pauls as guarantor

Salutation vv 1-3

We can see here the way Paul introduces himself, to his collaborator, Philemon and others.

First of all, Paul introduces himself as δέσμιος. It is a unique presentation that we must take in account because, usually, Paul uses other campus of meanings to introduce himself. The religious campus is often used in this situation. Mostly, he defines himself as an apostle. This definition of course put him in a place in relation to other people of the community.

Twice he uses the social campus of meaning when he introduces himself as a slave. In those opportunities the relationship with those receiving the letter is inverse to the previously mentioned, as an apostle he put over the community, over a slave his submission is notorious.

However, we said that in Philemon Paul introduces himself as δέσμιος. The different meanings coming from this word are obvious, but I want to highlight the idea of isolation. He defines his own position as someone isolated. This particular option can be read as a rhetoric tool (of course it also could be a real situation) which not only carry the basic idea of isolation but also that of impossibility to act, to decide, to go anywhere. The imprisonment Paul is using to define himself is a strong noun to mean the fragility in which he is living.

Second, Paul introduces Timothy as a brother like in 1 Corinthians. Brother has the connotation of companionship, relationship. Here we could have a first contrast with Paul. The noun brother next to prisoner are join two ideas that can be understood in opposition.

Third, Philemon is introduced in very opposite way. Here we have an adjective which implies relationship, a person (Philemon) which is receiving love: ἀγαπητῶ. This adjective starts a picture facing that of Paul. The opposition is about the possibility or not of relationship.

This opposition is developed with the next noun naming to Philemon: συνεργῶ. The word itself contains the preposition συν which means “together with”. So, the introduction of Philemon is given in relationship to the link made for him. Philemon appears like something that has created ties around him. On the other hand, Paul introduces himself like having been cut of all links.

Finally, both Apphia and Archippus are introduced using terms with similarity to Philemon or Timothy. Then, Apphia is given the same term as Timothy, sister. Archippus is named in similar way to Philemon: συστρατιώτη. The συν preposition also is here at work.

So, except Paul, for introducing the characters has been used the idea of relationships. Paul will be the opposite.

Captatio benevolentia vv 4-7

In v. 4 we can see how the memory in some way works as a possibility to bring back the person. In this sense the prayer become a tool for the encounter, the meeting with a person that is not really present. It sounds interesting considering how we really understand the prayer, as a mean to connect with the divinity. Instead of that, Paul remarks the prayer as a possibility to be with the brother that actually is far away.

As we saw before, the isolated prisoner has now the possibility to connect with Philemon. The opposition highlighted above has here a resolution. Paul is not longer alone because the prayer brings back Philemon.

In v 5 we have an accusative related to the verb to listen, obviously after the genitive. This accusative has the nouns love and faith as nucleus and they refer to Jesus and all the brothers.

In v 6 the inclusion of κοινωνία helps to visualize the faith made community. This is the first thing I want to remark. The second one has to do with the word ἐνεργής which is in fact about the action. Faith is in essence action, building of community. This action of building community works making “every good in us”

In v 7 we can see how Philemon has been working and how his work has resulted in the refresh of the hearts (here Paul uses the word that means bowels) of the saints.

In conclusion, in the captatio benevolentia we can see some points that are important to resume. First of all, the point to celebrate or to praise Philemon is the action. These actions coming from Philemon are faith transformed in acts.

Secondly, we can appreciate that these acts are related to make community and to reinforce the relationship between brothers and sisters.

Finally, I want to conclude the appreciation of the captatio benevolentia marking that the praise of Philemon is not a praise to a Doctor of Law, an intellectual per se. Instead of that, every aspect praised has to do with the faith made good to others, faith that helps to the encounter, faith that build community. There is no any doctrine here. Or, we may say, if there is doctrine it is as implicit framework which is building relationships. The point for discussion or praise is not any explicit doctrine here.

The introduction to the petition vv 8-12

This part is introduced by διό, consequently we have here the real reason because the writing is made. We can see some division inside the petition. It begins with a couple of verses that set the situation of the petition.

vv 8-9. These verses set up the situation from which the asking is made. Is like an introduction to the petition itself. Again, Paul is not giving here some legal, biblical, historical arguments. Here the basis for the asking is the personal situation. There is no other argument. Paul appeals Philemon from his own life, his own body that is old and in prison. The body of Paul would seem the reason why the asking is made.

There is an opposition in these two verses built by the comparative μάλλον.

V 8 v 9

ἐπιτάσσω παρακαλέω

παρρησία.....ἀγάπη

ἐν Χριστῷ.....ὡς Παῦλος πρεσβύτης καὶ δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ

Looking at this opposition we can appreciate that the argument, the power, is not set on any law or doctrine but in the relationship between two persons. The kind of relationship is the basis for the petition.

I would like to add that Paul uses here the word παρρησία while he could use another word like ἐξουσία. The meaning of παρρησία is linked more to a practical activity any time it's come from the necessary relationship between two or more. Instead of that, ἐξουσία is linked to something that gives a quality to somebody.

The petition vv 10-20

After the introduction to the petition we find the petition itself running from v 10 to 20. We divide this part in some sections.

- a. Vv 10-13. The presentation.
- b. Vv14-15. Onesimus-Philemon relationship
- c. vv 15b-16. The petition.

d. Vv 17-20a Pauls as guarantor

a. The presentation vv 10-13

These verses have the presentation of the person who will be helped, the object of the asking. At the presentation Paul give the characteristics of a slave: uselessness/utility (ἄχρηστος εὐχρηστος), service (διακονέω) and property implied by the verb κατέχω.

Besides that, Paul sets up his own relation with Onesimus in verse 12. It becomes so interesting because is in the middle of the presentation of Onesimus as a slave. I'm referring to the phrase: τοῦτ' ἔστιν τὰ ἐμὰ σπλάγχνα. So, in the presentation Paul is giving Onesimus a new frame and this frame come from the personal relationship with himself.

Taking in account the gender issue here we can appreciate the maternal idea of Paul giving the life to Onesimus in v 10 with the noun τέκνον and the verb γεννάω.

b. Onesimus-Philemon relationship, vv. 14-15.

In v. 14 is interesting that the relationship which Paul is doing with Philemon is one based on the free will (giving the adjective ἐκούσιος) The opposition between ἐκούσιος and ἀνάγκη gives the rhetorical idea that it is a relationship where the force is not implied. This kind of relationship remarks that of the freemen and possibly is an indirect reference to the opposition between the slave and the free human relationships. In this sense, Paul is making a kind of relationship with Philemon where is possible the choice as constitutive element. Moreover, Paul is positioned at the top of the relationship giving the frame of it and the place of Philemon.

This statement is understood as rhetorical, I know, but what we can see here is that a human relationship is something to be built. It can be in this way or not. Here we have two free man setting a frame to their own association in a narrative that works on the slavery as central theme.

Besides that, this part is making the relationship between Onesimus and Philemon as something broken, something far away. Is meaningful the passive for the verb χωρίζω. The separation was not an action coming from Onesimus or Philemon. It was just an action that happened. The action is mentioned just to know how the relationship is working now.

In sum, we have relationships to be built. Relations which are no statics but mouldable. Relationships that are far away (literal and/or symbolic). We have, until here in the narrative, interconnections, and insulations. Paul has been working through the speech with all these elements.

c. The petition. vv 15b-16.

The petition itself will work facing opposite terms. They are both temporal ones and socio-economical ones. While the separation between Onesimus and Philemon would be for a limited space of time (ὥρα) the suggested reunion would be forever (αἰώνιος). The limited term is applied to the slave status while the endless one is over the brother term. This opposition is working in a subtle way to dismantle the fixed and statics social levels. Moreover, is affirming that the slave situation can be a transient one. Here we like to refer

to 1 Co 7:21-24 and 7:29-31 the “as if” way of life that puts between brackets the fixed social roles. Maybe we can consider here how these affirmations play against the roman social ideas and cosmivision that the slave status is something that is forever like the free status.

Other rhetorical tool Paul is using here is the connection of two terms, brother and loved. These terms have been used before and is fundamental how they connect the persons using them. We are talking of Timothy (v1) as brother, Philemon (v1) as loved and brother (v7), Apphia as sister and loved (v2). Supposedly, all of them are worthy people for having these terms in the Roman Society: brother-sister and loved. Besides that, all of them are leaders of the church. Consequently, when Paul describes Onesimus using these terms is putting him in parallel with all of them. When Onesimus is mentioned being loved and brother, then, he is being understood as a person with a social level identical to the other that use those terms.

Besides that, we reinforce an idea that we are been working before. The terms above are relational ones. They do not imply knowledge, fidelity, or any intellectual quality but tangibles human relationships.

d. Pauls as guarantor vv 17-20a

Here we have a personal relationship and nothing else. The only frame Paul uses is the connection he has made with Philemon. We must say the connection he has, he had (v19b) and he will have (v22).

Besides that, this section opens with two “if clauses” giving the idea of something to re thinking. The first conditional clause (v 17) has a present indicative giving the idea of something true, real. The *koinonía* is a fact highlighting that the personal contact is itself the guaranty. The second conditional clause (v 18) has inside a couple of verbs, one in aorist and one in present. The aorist corresponds to the verb ἀδικέω while the present to the verb ὀφείλω. The protasis with these verbs are making a frame from where understand. Both protasis use the personal situation, again.

The verse 20 uses again a verb coming from the verse 7: ἀναπαύω. Paul asks for refresh to Philemon giving the idea of Philemon as somebody concerned for the wellness of his brothers and sisters. Here the guarantor moves from his own discursive place and puts Philemon in his place. In this way, Philemon is both the guarantor and the person who is going to do the favour. This idea of Philemon as guarantor is made even stronger when Paul requires from him lodging in v 22.

Greetings

As usual in a letter, Paul uses the last verses for sharing some greetings. In the case of the Letter to Philemon, Apphia and Archippus, these greetings will act in a rhetorical way. The greetings spread out the relationships further than the house of Philemon. In this sense, the greetings let know to Philemon that there so many people interested in the situation. For Philemon it could be understood as a way of Paul to press, but also it can be received as a dedicated support for the action Paul is asking. Again, the force is located in no intellectual reasoning but in the human relationships.

Second part – Reading Philemon with Reflections on Slavery

The reading of the text of Philemon help us to do some reflection about a topic that, in my humble opinion, is central for the justice, the love and the solidarity today in our world. What I am referring here is labelling as a method that is getting more and more widespread as a way of defining groups of human beings.

In this sense, I would want to point out that one of the most important problem in our times has to do with the labelling of every human being. The level of labelling has become higher than other past times in our societies. The virtual networks have help in this sense to make more profound and systematic this way to connect (I want to use specifically this word, related to virtual net). In my opinion, the extreme use of labelling is the root of many of our conflicts. Or, in any case, is the most powerful tool to conquer, to subjugate.

The label is a first step in the communication, it is true and obvious. In a meeting, in a first encounter, a label is the key which will lead us to know who is probably in front of us. That is a first, necessary step. It also happens every time when we describe, when we narrate situations.

Moreover, I would want to remember that the label has been used to support social revolutions where some change of world vision was implied. I am referring here, for example, to fights for gender issues which rethinking every label inside the society, create new labels (bi sexual, pan sexual, transgender, etc). These new labels were in its own moment something that helped to think, to open to another world vision. However, when the new label gets stratified it became a problem because once again the label instead of opening the possibility to found new perspectives, close the possibility to any different vision. Besides that, the new labelling could play a role like that it tried to eliminate: the stigmatization.

In this sense, a new labelling could be a tool to fight against some oppressor system. In fact, it is very common that it happens in a revolutionary movement. The critic to a hegemonic classification is faced with a new classification. As an example, we can see the new movement raising from inside of the Judaism in the first century. It required a new terminology to designate their members. Concepts like brother, sister, believers, slave of the Messiah, and other were new constructions that re installed the process of subjectivation. Besides that, this new personal situation was complemented with a new institutional situation. The process of subjectivation is inserted and creates new institutional structures. The first letter to Thessalonians could be read as a map of new terminology that is being used to re define roles, social places and relationships.

Taking in account all that, we must highlight that the label is the result of a work, is a product that synthetize the social class fight, the religious and gender fight. In other words, a label is a product useful to support the social status. That reality is the key to think why in a liberation movement is essential to erase the existing labels. In any case, the label portrays the force of the oppressor and the submission of the oppressed.

The Methodist movement in its beginnings, similarly to the raising Christianity from the first century, did an enormous work with existing labels. Being movements of renewal, both Paul and Wesley were significant exponents of them. In this sense, I read the text of Philemon and the text of *Some Reflections on Slavery* of John Wesley as two writings dealing with labels of their own societies. In this paper, I choose specifically the labels related to slavery which are commons to both writings. Their work on the slavery

terminology and the social conditions that it supports was determinant to the relationships inside their movements and, besides that, outside too.

I found some clear similitudes between these two texts considering that both are facing the social slavery situation. I also can appreciate some differences that show us the social places from which the texts were written. Take a couple of points which are useful as examples in both writings.

The first of these points is the rethinking about the idea of human being. The question about if the slave is or isn't a human being is fundamental. We are going to see here a point shared between them.

The second question has to do with the use of feelings or legal and dogmatic reasons to justify their positions. We will see here that there is a slight difference between them. Wesley appealed to theoretic reasoning while Paul didn't. And we will explore both reasoning as means to find the humanity in slave and master.

Let see the points.

1. The slave, a human, a brother

Consider that a label is a tool for helping to know a person. We understand that, we use them every day, everywhere. However, we must say that in many occasions some labels become not a tool for a first step for knowing one another but they become the only way to reach the other. The label as the only way to know could be useful when the other isn't present.

However, is imperative to recognize how some specific labels work not to know but to the contrary. Some labels are useful tools to avoid reach the other as a human being. The label can portray inside some feature of the humanity. On the other hand, it can have inside some feature of inhumanity. Depending on how the label has been elaborated inside the social fight or social movements, it will highlight one human aspect or, by the contrary, will despoil to the recipients from human features.

The label "slave" is in the text of Philemon and in the text *Some Reflections on Slavery*. It is significant that in both text the concept of slave is opposed to others like brother, loved brother, co-worker in Philemon while is opposed to citizen or human in the Wesley's text.

It is illuminating that the text of Wesley said:

"II. That is the nature of slavery, that is the beginning of the slavery of black people in America. However, if somebody want to know from what kind of country the black people are taken, or what kind of human being they are, or what temperament or behaviour they have in their own country and how they are hunted, shipped and treated in America..."¹

In this text we can see that the aim of Wesley was to discuss some affirmations about the slaves, about the idea of a slave. He remarks how these affirmations were circulating in

¹ P 101. Obras de Wesley. Tomo VII. La vida Cristiana. Editor general Justo L. González. Wesley Heritage Foundation, Henrico NC, 1996. I should apologize for the font used here which is a Spanish one, but I haven't an English one. I totally understand the problems arising for a double translation. So, please refer to English font if you had the possibility.

the English society. He goes to discuss each one of them. If we could group them maybe we would say they are appreciations about the inhumanity of the slaves.

In the text of Philemon, as we could see in the analysis verse by verse, Paul works on the idea of a slave as a brother, one like Philemon. This idea will be made by different ways. One of them is that Onesimus has name in the text and it is a considerable situation. It is known what the assignment of a name means in a narrative. His name will be connected to others in the letter that have names because their social status, Luke, Archippus, Apphia, Timothy, Demas, etc.

Besides this, the connection between Onesimus and the others is made with the use of same adjectives as we could see. The use of adjectives like *loved* in Onesimus and other persons in the text will be a meaningful tool for make a union in the characters that rise inside the text.

So, besides the name, the first way to humanize someone through a social label is can use adjectives that are supposed out of that label. The idea of a slave loved as a brother is breaking the idea of a slave as something useful, like a tool. We saw how the adjectives are moving through the text being assigned to different persons. This moving could be read as a strategy to erase the stratified label of slave and the opposite, free citizen. By doing this movement of adjectives, Paul is giving the idea that an adjective is something mobile and can be applied in labels which into this process become mobile too. The process of adjectivation then, will be an interesting way to disarm a stratified label.

We also can see this prolific use of adjectives in the text of Wesley. Continuously, he will apply adjectives to the slaves that transform the slave into citizen. At least the idea of those times of what was a good citizen. In fact, most of the text "*Reflections...*" is built showing the oppositions between the adjectives applied in the society to the slaves and those coming from some narratives read from journals travel from persons who saw the black persons living in their own countries, their own societies. Let read an example:

From these regions from Guinea, Lord Allanson, correspondent of the Real Academic of Sciences of Paris since 1749 to 1753, offers the following story of the country and the people: "Wherever I directed my eyes I contemplate a perfect image of the pure nature... In general, they are very good-natured, sociable and helpful people. I was very pleased with my first reception, and I was completely convinced that the stories about the savage genius of Africans must be suppressed." He adds: "It is surprising that a people without letters can reason so clearly about the stars. Without a doubt, if they had the right instruments they would be excellent astronomers."²

Here we sharply can appreciate how the "stories about the savage genius of Africans" are social constructions that work as label which stigmatize the African people. Wesley stands against the label of the slave using the vision of a traveller, Allanson, which is against the social common sense.

The general dynamic in the text of Wesley and Paul's are quite different. While Wesley openly and directly opposes the stablished vision about the slaves against the vision of the slave as human, Paul never will do that opposition. We can see this open opposition of Wesley in this text:

² Op cit. P. 104-105

In short, the blacks that inhabit the coast of Africa, from the Senegal River to the southern limit of Angola, are far from being stupid, foolish, gross, lazy barbarians, ferocious, cruel, treacherous savages that have been made to appear. On the contrary, they are represented, by those who have no reason to flatter them, as remarkably sensitive considering the few possibilities they have to promote their knowledge; in a high degree laborious, perhaps more than the natives of other not so warm climates; fair and honest in all their dealings, except where the whites have taught them in another way; and more tame, friendly and kind to foreigners, than any of our ancestors. Our ancestors! Where will we find these days, among the beautiful faces of the natives of Europe, a nation that generally practices justice, mercy and truth, as they are among these poor Africans? Assuming that the preceding accounts are true (of which I have no reason or excuse to doubt) we can leave England and France to find genuine honesty in Benin, the Congo or Angola.³

Here we can see noticeably clear how the adjectivation is used in the slaves and opposed to the free citizen.

By the contrary, in the text of Philemon, the slavery and its vocabulary will not be faced against the free citizen or human vocabulary. The text of Paul shows, in this sense, a writer social place which is much weaker than the Wesley is. The legal status of Paul and the community of followers of the Messiah maybe made impossible to take a direct action against the labels the Empire had given to the slaves. Instead of that, Paul used the adjective to prepare the petition as we can saw. A petition that is set up as personal, not as a social requirement.

Meanwhile the use the adjectives has been shown as a literary tool and, of course, a tool that want to help to reflect on the situation, there is another means that I can see had been used to erasing the power of labels. I mention in this opportunity the task we can appreciate in these texts for giving and making visible the History in each slave. The texts will say that the slave has a History of life and this having life History is what make them human being.

In Philemon, as an example, this life history can be appreciated since Paul says he is like the mother of Onesimus:

I beg you for my son whom I have given birth...⁴

Onesimus has history and it is inside a family. He has been engendered by Paul in prison, the history of Onesimus has been crossed by a social movement which has in the prison a place where the life is made meaningful. However, we must say, Paul fight against other history in Onesimus life. This history tells about the life of a slave who made something against Philemon or who was discarded by his master. There is history for slaves and there is history for free citizen. Paul will mix both.

Similarly, in "*Reflections...*" we may find how Wesley will narrate the history of the slaves in their own countries. Wesley, in this sense, will enlarge this kind of narratives and will tell about the economy, the agriculture, the religion, the government of the African people. By doing that, he will be comparing the history of England and Africa

³ Reflections on... p 107

⁴ Philemon 10

and showing how in both places the human being can be human being. There is text where we can see that as an example:

All the natives of this Coast (the Gold Coast and that of the Slaves), although pagan, believe that there is a God, author of them and of all things. In the same way they seem to have a confused understanding of the beyond. Thus, each small town and village has a public place of worship. It is noteworthy that they do not have beggars; such is the care of the leaders of each city or village in providing some easy work for the elderly and the weak. Some are employed to inflate the bellows of the blacksmiths; others in producing palm oil; others in obtaining dyes. If they are still too weak for these tasks, then they sell groceries in the market.⁵

The humanity of natives is expressed in the solidarity with the needed. The job in this narrative is conceived as a mean to human dignity. Job and solidarity are linked. It is a no small issue considering the context of Wesley, in a raising industrial society where the job was in crisis as mean to be a better human. But also we need to remember that the issue of work is so present in the letters of Paul and also in the text of Philemon.

As conclusion of this first point we can say that the humanity of a slave is something to be re thinking. Or, probably we must say that has to be stablished. The process of adjectivation, the name assignment and the visibility of a personal history in the life of a slave are ways to erase the label of “slave” from the common sense.

2. Please, comfort my heart. When the free and the slave become human together.

The point above give us the idea of how Paul and Wesley are giving to the label of slave the status of human that the society deny them. In this point I propose that the idea is not only think in the human feature of the slave but go further and think that of the master.

This plan to discover the human face of the master will be made with different tools in Paul and Wesley. Briefly, Paul will appeal to feelings in Philemon while Wesley will do it debating laws or other stablished social affirmations.

Probably, the difference between these approach to the humanity in the master is because the social place of Paul and Wesley as we said before. This social place of course should be understood not only of one person but the groups these persons are part. What I mean here is that sometimes the humanity can be defended by legal means and others through the appellation to feelings.

The social status of the followers of the Messiah Jesus, in the first century, was extremely fragile and ambiguous. They were Jews what means to be accepted as a *religio licita* for the Roman laws. However, inside Judaism they had no power or influence. Besides that, the Jesus movement got involved in conflicts with the principal groups inside Judaism. Differently, the social status of Methodism in the England of the eighteenth century, was cultural and socially accepted as Christianity. This significant difference will do that one and another can appeal to different tools for rebuild the idea of human in the master.

Considering Paul, we have seen before how the use of feelings in Paul and in Philemon happened in the text. Now we can propose that this use is because the idea to rebuild the humanity in every character inside the writing we studied. Here we incorporate the social

⁵ Reflections on...p 106

situation as a possible frame. The humanity is appreciated in the bowels, in the heart, in the comforting the hearts of the saints, in the fragility of Paul needing hospitality, etc. The fragility then will be a sharp sign of humanity. And this fragility is to be applied in Philemon as much as in Onesimus. Moreover, Paul will become as fragile as Onesimus and Philemon. The fragility will be a datum of the humanity all of them share.

On the other hand, the case of "*Reflections on...*" will show the humanity linked to laws, or dogmas that will be the assurance. Here we need to make some clarification. Wesley will criticize the laws about slavery coming from the new World (Jamaica, Virginia, Barbados) as profoundly inhuman any time they keep cruel punishments on the slaves:

The great allegation is: "They are authorized by law." But can the law, human law, change the nature of things? Can it transform darkness into light, or evil into good? No way. Ten thousand laws do not matter, the just is fair, and the wrong is still wrong. There are still essential differences between justice and injustice, cruelty and mercy⁶

There is a sharp discussion about laws, about what is human or is not. This kind of debate was impossible in the text and context of Philemon letter.

However, what is interesting for our reading is that Wesley will reason about the humanity of the person who trades slaves. The first step is think about the natural law:

But, renouncing for the present all other consideration, I attack the root of this complex villainy: I absolutely deny that the possession of slaves is consistent with any degree of natural justice⁷

There is not natural law that justify the slavery. Of course, Wesley is discussing with the idea present in his society about a natural law justifying the slavery. Wesley will discuss about the economy, about the glory of a nation, etc. All this kind of debate are possible in his society and from his social place.

However, after all the points he will go debating, Wesley address to the different persons involved in the slavery system. Here he appeals to the humanity, exactly as Paul does. We can see, as an example, when Wesley write to the captains of ships that hunt persons in Africa:

Are you a human being? Then you should have a human heart. But do you really have it? What is your heart made of? Is there no such principle as compassion? Do you never feel the pain of the other? Do you not have sympathy, sensitivity for human affliction, pity for the wretched? When you saw the watery eyes of your neighbours, your panting breasts, or bleeding sides and tortured limbs, were you a stone or a beast? Did you look at them with the eyes of a tiger? When you piled up these dying creatures in the hold of the ship, or when you threw their mutilated remains into the sea, did not you have compassion? Did not a single tear fall from your eyes?⁸

Here we can see a connection with Paul. In the last, the humanity, the fragility, the body, the feeling are the places where we need to go to wait for a change.

⁶ Reflections...112-113

⁷ Reflections....113

⁸ Reflections...125

Wesley like Paul try at least to discover any trace of humanity in the master who enslaves his or her own brother, sister. Wesley had the opportunity to show and opposed laws, sayings, reflections on the economic convenience of having slaves. Paul couldn't do it. But both finished thinking that the master become a beast, a non-human anytime he enslaves.

Some conclusions...

Our paper had previously some ideas. We think is honest to remark them. These ideas come, as we said in the introduction, from our Methodist context of life. Is true that they are earlier ideas, but I see here how they are present also in the texts analysed. The hermeneutical circle is that, a circle.

The first of that ideas has to do with the preoccupation for the person, the real person, who is in front of us. This preoccupation is born from the commandment of Jesus for loving the neighbour. After being born with Jesus, the concern about the person with its humanity became central for the methodism and we can appreciate it in the text of Reflections as an example.

We have explored in those writings some clues about this preoccupation. We have found that the Epistle to Philemon and Reflections have in common this strong concern about the real person. We have found that the real person many times has been hidden. The renewal movements have the task to uncover the real person.

The second of that ideas has to do with the label as a tool to hide the real human being. The label in those times where resisted in different ways depending where the writer was. The resistance in Paul was quite subtle meanwhile in Wesley was direct and open. How the movement of Jesus, Paul and Wesley teach us to resist any label that hides the tangible human being? How today we can separate the label for discovering the fragility of a human being? How we can relate to a diverse human being instead of a label?

The third of that idea has to do with our label system today. I suspect profoundly that the label is the mechanism that help to support many of our injustices as humanity. I am thinking here in the immigrants and their sad life trying to be received in other countries. I am thinking here in persons with sexualities out of the heteronormative. I am sure the list continues depending on the situation in each country or region. I am thinking here in the walls around over the world that separate countries. All these walls need the label as bricks. Each label is a brick that build the wall.

Philemon and Reflections work for shoot down the labels that hidden the human while show a slave. Today we need to find where the labels are being manufactured, scattered, reproduced. There are places where the label become stronger. I can think here, as example, in the social virtual networks where the labelling is the media to know and classify persons. I remember how the virtual media had been used in political campaigns for giving the victory to one or another party. There was an elevated level of labelling there.

Philemon and Reflections show the Grace of God liberating slaves, liberating them from the concretes labels that enslave their lives. Philemon and Reflections show us how renew a Church, how renew the relationships inside it. May be a renewal movement should fight, first of all, against the labels of a world that replace a human being, masking inside a label.