



## THE FR. LYDIO F. TOMASI, C.S. ANNUAL LECTURE

### **Migrations: A Contemporary Challenge to Theological Thinking**

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### **Heterology: A “new” form of knowledge?**

The word heterology is defined in the dictionary as an antonym to homology. It therefore relates to something that pertains to a different structure from that which properly belongs to a given context or environment. In the medical sciences that which is heterologous is considered nothing but a disturbance or aberration from what is normal.<sup>1</sup> One may also call something heterologous if it comes from another species. Something that is heterologous is a strange element, a strange body, so it is different and foreign from whatever is normal or common to the environment or context.<sup>2</sup>

In the human sciences and according to Michel de Certeau's definition, heterology is discourse of the other and at the same time discourse about the other, a discourse in which the other is both addressed and speaks.<sup>3</sup> The two parts address each other. Heterology therefore moves in an intermediary and reversible space in which the last word does not pertain necessarily to the first subject of discourse and where the criticism can be redirected to the person who first began the discourse. This, in turn, will elicit a new response from the subject. As a locus of experimentation, heterology assumes the risk of being understood as a liberating discourse, an expression of freedom with all its consequences.

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<sup>1</sup> C. Bernard, *Princ. méd. exp.*, 1878, p. 139)., Segundo o <http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/hétérologue> acessado em 16/12/2016

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> See Michel Bousseyroux, « Hétérologie de l'abject », *L'en-je lacanien* 2005/2 (no 5), p. 39-57.

And perhaps the main consequence would be the fact that the receiving subject or the object of the reflection and discourse assumes the word which is being revealed, the word which reaches the subject and has an impact upon him or her. Michel de Certeau describes history in terms of heterology as a discipline where the narrator relates facts and testifies about the other who remains mute and without a capacity to respond.<sup>4</sup> This has to do with another who is always absent and in the meantime always presupposed. In the case of ethnology, in contrast, the source of the discourse is bound up in the heart of another discourse, that of the ethnologist who wants to trace the testimony about some form of otherness but who at the same time enters into the scene. And this will allow for learning both about the object and the subject of the discourse.<sup>5</sup>

Our hypothesis here is that theological discourse is also a *heterologous* discourse or a discourse where heterology occurs. First, because it has to do with a discourse constructed from a revealed language, that is a language which comes from the Other who is God who in God's word directs Godself to the human being. Second, revelation pertains to a discourse which relates what is lived by others, other persons in whom it is believed the Holy Spirit of God dwells. Those "other" persons can be a community of faith, a Church, or they can also be others who live in spaces that are heterologous to the ecclesial space. Or there may be others who remain outside the space of either ecclesial or social society strictly understood because they have been marginalized or excluded from those spaces.

Liberation theology in Latin America identified the poor with "those others" who have lived excluded from the benefits of progress and who constitute the great majority of the Latin American people. They have lived excluded from the category of "persons." And Gustavo Gutiérrez, founder of liberation theology, affirms that "the poor are non-persons." Or we could say they are persons that are not considered as such and do not enjoy the rights that all human persons enjoy.<sup>6</sup>

In a later phase of this theology, Jon Sobrino coined the word "victims" to signify the category for those whose lives are constantly being threatened, suffering the consequences of an unjust

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Michel de Certeau, *L'absent de l'histoire ou L'écriture de l'histoire*, Dosse François, « Michel de Certeau et l'écriture de l'histoire », *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 2/2003 (n° 78), p. 145-156.

<sup>5</sup> Michel Bousseyroux, « Hétérologie de l'abject », art. Cit.

<sup>6</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, interview IHU <http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/161-noticias/noticias-espanol/564708-gustavo-gutierrez-el-compromiso-con-el-pobre-no-puede-evitar-la-denuncia-de-las-causas-de-la-pobreza> accessed on October 11th 2017

system which keeps marginalizing and excluding them from the possibility of living life fully and with dignity. The Basque-Salvadorean theologian makes the point that these “victims” should be considered in history as the very face of Jesus Christ who would identify Himself with them. The attitude of the Christian in the face of these women and men victims should be that of seeking that these victims descend from the cross to which they have been nailed by injustice and oppression.<sup>7</sup>

Our hypothesis is that today among the major victims of society are migrants, the strangers who arrive in large numbers on the borders of developed countries in search of a better life for themselves and their children. They are strangers escaping situations of war and devastation; victims of hunger and of scarcity who seek jobs far from home where there are no opportunities. They are “others” who present themselves before the sensibilities and perceptions of prosperous societies of the northern hemisphere-concretely Europe and the United States. Often in place of finding a reception and a much hoped for improvement in their life situation, they find death in the waters of the Mediterranean, in the Arizona desert, or in some other circumstance.

This has to do with a phenomenon that grows in importance and which constitutes a new form of slavery. People are obliged to leave their land of birth, their culture, and become permanent “illegals,” shipment, as it were, in a modern version of the slave ship, or in a fragile rubber raft vulnerable to the slightest bad weather, and wanderers who will never find a lasting place to rest because this planet and the human race which lives on it will not find a place for them.

In the face of this human reality, of their impotence and visible presence before us and growing numbers as they attempt to move in the direction of a better life, philosophy enters into a reflection and seeks to elaborate more fully about the deeper identity of these migrants. Who is the stranger today? Above all who is the stranger revealed on the face of the migrant understood as an individual and as collective subject, a human person and member of a community made up of hundreds of thousands of people who are moving into my and our comfort zones? Why so much discomfort? Why does their difference threaten our rigid and closed “homology”? Why do we maintain this person as a mute in our discourses? Why don’t we give the immigrant a right to heterology, a right to speak and challenge us?

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<sup>7</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America*, NY, Orbis, 1987

## Strangers to us ourselves

The French thinker Julia Kristeva reflects on the question of the stranger in terms of tensions that stretch one's identity. The experience of the stranger is like undergoing a sprain, a stretching not of an ankle, however, but of our mind, of our way of thinking. The stranger isn't just an otherness that is exterior to us, that challenges us with its being before our very eyes, with its being palpable in our environment. To the contrary, the stranger is an otherness that is interior to us. But one, however, which challenges us with its look and its concreteness before us, one which is also an otherness that is interior to our very selves, "the hidden face of our identity."<sup>8</sup> According to Kristeva this has to do with a phenomenon which begins when the perception of oneself arises in consciousness and terminates "when we recognize ourselves as strangers, rebels to everything that holds us down and links us to others in our communities."<sup>9</sup> Consequently when we recognize the stranger in ourselves we overcome our self-hatred and struggle against it. Today besides challenging us to recognize the migrant outside ourselves but also within ourselves, the reality of strangers is made more poignant by the tragic problem of migrations and leads us to reflect on our capacity to accept new modes of otherness and also construct serious defenses against xenophobia.<sup>10</sup>

Kristeva affirms that the violence of the problem raised by the stranger today is connected to the crisis of the construction of religious and moral discourses. The absorption of strangers, of foreignness, proposed by our societies in the past is today unacceptable for modern persons who are jealous not only of their ethnic or national diversity but also conceive of themselves as irreducible subjects. It is just at the moment when this modern individual stops thinking of herself as complete and glorious that she discovers her incoherence, her strangeness, that the question begins to be posed in a new way: Now it's not just a matter of receiving or even accommodating the stranger within the interior of a system that negates the stranger, but it's a matter of cohabitation, living with these strangers that we ourselves recognize ourselves to be.<sup>11</sup> The space of the stranger is found in wandering or nomadism, and what is its condition is equally its secret wound. Yet at the same time it helps him or her from being overcome by the

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<sup>8</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Etrangers à nous-mêmes*, Paris, Fayard, 1988, p 9

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *ibid* p 10, reflecting about the new code of nationality in France

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid* p 11

dominion and control of all. Always absent, always inaccessible to all, the stranger is attached to what is lacking, what is absent, and to what causes one to experience one's homeland as a desired country but not now dwelt in and always deferred. This homeland "he carries in his dreams and beckons him beyond."<sup>12</sup>

This strangeness the stranger confronts from outside and is yet lived from within. What is strange arouses discomfort, animosity, hatred. It raises questions about not being in one's proper place but always in the place of the "other" or in the "other" place. The space between the stranger and the locals, the citizens, dislocates her from herself and provides a privileged distance to see what the others cannot see. This confers a heady feeling of not being grounded in the truth, of everything including oneself being relativized, while others, the locals, are rooted and belong. The stranger's sense of being disconnected from the truth becomes a way of resisting and combating her matricidal anguish.<sup>13</sup>

In truth, the stranger is someone who is condemned to being mute as Michel de Certeau noted in his reflections on heterology within the context of history, a discipline in which the narrator relates facts and testifies about the other who remains mute and unable to intervene.<sup>14</sup> The stranger is even mute with regard to his or her own mother tongue. As Kristeva poetically puts it referring to the stranger: "To live in a world of sound logically cut off from the darkening memory of the body, of the bittersweet sound of infancy. To bear within oneself a vaulted secret, or like a mentally challenged child—loved and useless—this way of speaking from some other time and place that withers and fades but never leaves one completely."<sup>15</sup>

Even learning the language of the other, of the country where he or she is, where he or she tried to fit, it will always be the accent that will distance him from the locals and will exile him to his true linguistic terrain: silence.<sup>16</sup> And the truth is that silence is not only imposed from outside. It is interior, within the person.

More than that, in the meantime, the stranger is someone who works, who did not find appropriate work in his or her land of origin and seeks to work in the new place of emigration.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid p 14

<sup>13</sup> Ibid p 19

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<sup>15</sup> *Etrangers à nous mêmes*, op. cit., p 27

<sup>16</sup> Ibid p 28, with the examples of a Russian scholar, of Hölderlin, etc.

Kristeva herself, Bulgarian by birth and residing in France, says that the stranger is a person for whom work is still a value.<sup>17</sup> Besides being a vital necessity, it is the only means of survival. This has to do with a primary and primordial right, “the ground zero of dignity.”<sup>18</sup>

Work is truly the promise land, the fatherland of the stranger, of the migrant. For migrants, on the one hand, this is their one means of self-affirmation in a land and among a people not their own. It is the one means by which the migrants affirm themselves and raise their heads. On the other hand, work is equally the means by which the strangers are and can be detested, showing themselves more competent than the locals because they work harder than the native citizens. This can be particularly true of the first generation of immigrants. The second generation now assimilated to the country to which their parents and grandparents emigrated, can have the luxury of relaxing their effort and struggle to maintain the highest levels of performance.

The stranger is someone who can assume more than one job striving to excel in effort and quality in all jobs, even the most unusual, risky or dangerous. Thus immigrants are among the pioneers in the vanguard of areas of cutting-edge development.

Kristeva analyzes this radical dedication of immigrants observing that “because the immigrant has nothing, because she is nothing, she can sacrifice everything. And the sacrifice begins with work: the only exportable good with no tariff attached, something of universal value as a refuge for the wayfarer and exile.”<sup>19</sup> Hence one may grasp the migrants’ disappointment, anger and desperation when they do not achieve legalization and therefore recognition of the legitimacy of their work.

Strangers/immigrants are also often far from their families, that is, deprived of parents. For some persons, for many young people today, for example, being far away from family can provide an experience of freedom in which they assume responsibility for themselves and for their own actions.

At the same time this experience equally correlates with a deep sense of being an orphan. Immigrants feel that their family and country do not count in the statistics nor in everyday life in

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid p 30

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Ibid p 32

their new land because they are invisible and simply absent from many affairs. Strangers may also feel that to some extent they are responsible for being orphans. Not in vain should it be noted that migrants belong to two categories of persons that the Bible considers unprotected: the orphan and the stranger simultaneously. They will seek solidarity with relatives who may have arrived before them, but often not achieve this either because they are still too far away, do not communicate, or have died and no longer are around. In the midst of the local community who remains close to their families, however, the sense of being orphans is increased and makes the sense of otherness, the heterology and discourse about immigrants even less capable of assimilation in a land that is not theirs and distant from his or her origins. Conversation with one's family of origin does not exist and may never exist with the people the migrant will find along the way. And so the loneliness grows more intense; and so does the migrant's interior experience of exile.<sup>20</sup>

The question about migrants is therefore very serious. This is so quite independently of the fact that today migration is one of the planet's most serious challenges, one that appeals to what is deepest in our humanity, because it appeals directly to our sense of ethics, speaking solely at a purely human level. The question about migrants presents itself to a people when "having experienced the spirit of religion, they rediscover an ethical concern...in order not to die of cynicism..."<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Kristeva adds: "The figure of the stranger comes after and in place of the death of God; and for those who believe (who actually experience a life of faith) the stranger is present there to renew and give them life."<sup>22</sup>

Because theology is an experience of faith it will perceive an epiphany which reveals in the face of the stranger similarities with the reality of Sacred Scripture, both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament.

### **The Stranger in the Bible**

The first chapters of Genesis present us with two opposite figures of the migrant. Before anything else comes the killer migrant, the cursed of the earth, Cain. "You will be a wayfarer and vagabond," says God, in reaction to the killing of Abel. And in agreement Cain responds

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<sup>20</sup> Cf *ibid* pp 38-39

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid* p 59

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid* p 60

insisting on the anxious fragility of his situation: “I will be a wayfarer and vagabond on earth and whoever meets up with me will kill me” (Gn 4:12,14). On the other hand, however, we have the designated migrant, blessed by God: Abraham, our father in faith: “Leave your country, your relatives and your father and go to a country I will point out to you. I will make of you a grand nation and will bless you.” (Gn 12:1-2).

In the Hebrew Bible to be interested in the migrant or stranger implies in fact distinguishing among three words which more or less capture three different realities: *nakri* in general refers to “a stranger to the country, one who has no connection to a family, clan or tribe;”<sup>23</sup> *tosab* refers to strangers who are passing through, temporary migrants or guests who have no specific rights; *ger* refers to the stranger who is now permanent in Israel, the emigrant (or the refugee). A difference in social status is understood here as exemplified in Dt. 29:10, “The immigrant in your house who is there to cut trees or draw water from the well;”<sup>24</sup> or the “poor person and migrant” mentioned in Lev 19:10 to whom it is stipulated must be given the fruit fallen from the tree.”<sup>25</sup>

Many exegetes argue that the Hebrew term *ger* in its nominative, masculine and singular form is a technical term used in all the legal codes of the Pentateuch to refer to a “legal status” and not to a particular person. In other words, it is a neutral term used to designate all “permanent residents” (of foreign origin) who resided in ancient Israel. At the same time despite the positive message gleaned from these legal codes which stress the human dignity of the *ger*, the term lacks a vision of the greater reality of other unique categories of vulnerable persons such as the stranger in Israel.<sup>26</sup> This theme is not approached in Sacred Scripture from the outside or superficially. The awareness of what wayfaring is about, that is, what migration is about, goes back to the very origins of Israel and includes the awareness of other migrations and dislocations that have occurred going back to the very origins of the Chosen People.

The biblical history speaks effectively of a first stadium of the patriarchs in Canaan, of the migration of seventy “economic refugees” to Egypt in times of slavery, of the migration back of

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<sup>23</sup> “Étranger”, *Dictionnaire encyclopédique de la Bible*, Brepols, 1987, p 447-448. Our translation

<sup>24</sup> Here the foreigner is associated to the widow and the orphan, those for whom God cares the most and for whom he speaks as *go'el*, advocate, defender. See Marianne Bertrand, “L'étranger dans les lois bibliques”, dans Jean Riaud (éd) *L'étranger dans la Bible et ses lectures*, p 55-84 (56)

<sup>25</sup> André Wenin, “Israel, étranger et migrant. Réflexions à propos de l'immigré dans la Bible”, *Mélanges de sciences religieuses* 52 (1995) p 281-299 (287)

<sup>26</sup> For instance women, Cf. *Dictionnaire Encyclopédique de la Bible*

a great number, as it is in the book of Exodus), of the conquest and sharing of the territory and finally, of the experience of the Exile.<sup>27</sup> It is from this memory of forced migrations which gave rise to the legal texts which fixed the status of the foreigner or the migrant in Israel. And the people who made the laws are the same who confess: *My father was a wandering Aramaean, and he went down with a small number of people into Egypt* (Dt 26,5).

If the memory of slavery in Egypt is explicitly mentioned in Ex 22,21 - *Do no do wrong to a man from a strange country, and do not be hard on him; for you yourselves were living in a strange country, in the land of Egypt*; if it is stipulated in Dt 10,18 that God gives *food and clothing in his mercy to the man from a strange country*; if we can perceive a whole series of laws that seek to integrate the foreigner migrant within Israeli society, we have to recognize, nevertheless, that there is a good distance between theory and practice. The Old Testament legislation maintains a difference and assumes as pre-supposed the social inferiority of the strangers. Foreigners remain strangers in a very well-defined ethnical and social group.<sup>28</sup>

Even if the strangers and the autochthonous [indigenous peoples] have the same rights,<sup>29</sup> and even if prophets denounce those who deny their rights (Micah 3, 1 ss), there remains a distance between the juridical, legislative texts and lived reality. In this sense, we can observe in the Old Testament a delicate tension between the inclusivism and the exclusivism, respecting the stranger. The book of Ruth, on the one hand, narrates the way a stranger Moabite is integrated by marriage to the people of Israel, supporting the thesis of universalist openness.<sup>30</sup> But, on the other side, there are hard denunciations in the books of Esdras and Nehemiah of any mixture among nations.<sup>31</sup> Openness and welcoming of the difference have always lived together with exclusion and xenophobia.<sup>32</sup>

The daughters of Israel couldn't be given in marriage to those who were not from their country and vice-versa. On the other hand, Deuteronomy insists that one cannot have the foreigner in abomination, because the Jews had been foreigners in Egypt and, therefore, the foreigners'

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<sup>27</sup> André Wénin, « Israël, étranger et migrant », art. cit. p. 286.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid p 64

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Lev 24,22 ou Ex 12,49

<sup>30</sup> V. the beautiful reflection made by Julia Kristeva about this biblical book, in op. cit., pp 101-112

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Esdras 10 and Nehemias 13. Marianne Bertrand, « L'étranger dans les lois bibliques », p. 81

<sup>32</sup> André Wénin, « Israël, étranger et migrant », p. 296.

children, who were born from them, till the third generation, would be able to enter YHWH's assembly.<sup>33</sup>

The covenant with God makes the Jewish people a chosen people. And election implies the exclusion of others.<sup>34</sup> Elijah's cycle, in 1 Kings 17-19, will remind that "the true border is not situated at the level of territorial belonging, but at the level of a choice for or against YHWH."<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, this election is not the result of a privilege or of a favoritism, but of a choice, always threatened, always in need of being reconquered and object of a constant perfecting of those who were chosen.<sup>36</sup>

In the fullness of times, the event of Jesus of Nazareth shatters these notions of stranger and migrant in order to give them a new dimension. In the New Testament those two concepts are used in order to characterize the Christians whose goal is not to quietly enjoy a heritage of a land, but to inhabit – as Paul says – a "heavenly country"<sup>37</sup> not having here a permanent and "fixed resting place" (Heb 13,14).<sup>38</sup>

It is in this sense that the author of the 1st letter of Peter addresses the recipients of his epistle (2, 11), calling them "exiled," "people who are passing through," "paroikoi;" and even "foreigners" (parepidèmoi) in the sense that their values and their hope are other, "strangers" to those current ones. The author of Ephesians underlines on the other hand and in apparent "contradiction" that thanks to the work of peace realized by Jesus, the Christians of pagan origins are henceforth, "no longer as those who have no part or place in the kingdom of God," excluded from the covenant and the promise (Eph 2:12,19). Their exclusion doesn't exist and their needs are fulfilled. "[T]here is no Greek or Jew, no one with circumcision or without circumcision, no division between nations, no servant or free man: but Christ is all and in all" (Col 3:11). And also "There is no Jew or Greek, servant or free, male or female: because you are all one in Jesus Christ." (Gal 3: 28)

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<sup>33</sup> Dt 23, 3-9

<sup>34</sup> Julia Kristeva, op. cit., p 95

<sup>35</sup> Jean Riaud (éd.), *L'étranger dans la Bible et ses lectures*, p. 85-101 (90).

<sup>36</sup> Julia Kristeva op. cit., p 97

<sup>37</sup> Phil 3, 20: *For our country is in heaven; from where the Saviour for whom we are waiting will come, even the Lord Jesus Christ:*

<sup>38</sup> Heb 13,14 *For here we have no fixed resting-place, but our search is for the one which is to come.*

All this happens thanks to Jesus “who destroyed the wall of separation,” that means, who made obsolete the prohibition in Jewish law against Jews and pagans (foreigners) presenting themselves together before God (Eph 12:14). That is why in the Scriptures, Jewish and especially in the Christian Scriptures, there is a demand for universality that does not contemplate nor allow the exclusion of the foreigner. In the spirit of Judaism, the total integration of the stranger in the Jewish community parallels with the idea of “Chosen People.” To be chosen means to receive a grace, a favor, yes, but one that is open to any individual at any time.<sup>39</sup> Hence the hybrid conception of election that passes through heredity and through the free assumption of all individual or collective consciousness. It is not in vain that the Talmudic treatise of Pessahim 876 says: “God – blessed be your name – has exiled Israel among nations only with the purpose that the proselytes (foreigners) could be joined with Him.”<sup>40</sup>

And it is Paul himself, a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, a polyglot and indefatigable traveler of the western Mediterranean in the years 45-60 of our era – who is the one to transform the little Jewish sect into an Ecclesia: He adapts the Gospel’s language to the Greek world, the Ecclesia adds to the community of Christians in the polis another community, one of those which is different, of the strangers, transcending national and ethnic divisions through faith in the Body of the Risen Christ.” The first Apostle of Christianity, Paul will write to his beloved community of Corinth: “To the Jews I made myself as a Jew to win the Jews, to one under the Law as one under the Law (though I am not) to win those under the Law...to those outside the Law...so that I might win those outside the Law...All this I do for the sake of the gospel, that I may share its benefits with others. (1 Cor 9:20-23)

Saul, alias Paul, the foreigner, the stranger, the “untimely born,” Pharisee according to the law, from persecutor to persecuted, disciple of Gamaliel, broken from the synagogue, constant traveler, develops to the maximum point an essential feature of a world full of strangers through which he moves, namely gracious hospitality. And his Ecclesia – present in his letter-writing ministry and safeguards his legacy – has a broad sensibility which goes from political assembly to ideal community. Paul moves between the local and the universal quietly and easily and does not put locals and strangers in opposition. On the contrary he transitions between Jewish

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<sup>39</sup> Julia Kristeva, op. cit., p 102

<sup>40</sup> Ibid p 113

messianism and the universal messianism which is inclusive of the whole humankind. He preaches about the universality of all as one people beyond individual nationalities and peoples.<sup>41</sup>

### **Foundations for a theology of the stranger**

The foundations for a new Christian reflection on the stranger form a trilogy: Christ's risen body, the Church as the body of Christ, and the Eucharist which is communion in the body and blood of Christ.<sup>42</sup> Such a triad allows us to recognize a logic which reconciles the rejection of the stranger more and in a better way than juridical solutions in the transition from reality to the symbolic and vice-versa. Well, "strangers cannot again find their identity without there being a recognition of sources of and for the otherness that divides them internally within themselves, sources for this very itinerancy between flesh and blood, life and death. Now isn't this what the Resurrection of Christ, his Transfiguration, and our Eucharist insistently propose to our personal experience?"<sup>43</sup>

According to psychoanalyst and semiologist Kristeva, St. Paul is the founder of an institution which rests on the logic of desire whereby we are called to identify ourselves with a cleavage, a gap, which will no longer be painfully rigid like that of the stranger's melancholic depression. Rather, thanks to Jesus Christ, that gap is lived as a transition to a spiritual liberation in the heart of a concrete body. That union is achieved by the Resurrection and the Eucharist. The word which brings them, the Resurrection and the Eucharist, to our attention becomes a therapy for exile and desolation. The resultant community is not the sum total of each individual, but a new community following on a logic of subjectivity which undoes and redoes itself permanently in a new creation (Col 3:9-11).

Also according to Kristeva, this emergence of the subject of desire will be lived as a journey, echoing Judaic messianism and the reality of Christian messianism. This emergence is a contemplative theory of change and permanent spiritual renewal, a contemplation which must keep its eyes fixed on Jesus Christ and on his condition as stranger, permanently in tension between his condition as Incarnate Word and the Father from whom he came, in which he lived,

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid p 118

<sup>42</sup> Ibid p 119 ff

<sup>43</sup> Ibid p 120

and from which was returning (See John's Gospel). Thus the "foreignness" of Jesus will be at the foundation of Paul's cosmopolitan church and of all Christian theology which takes seriously the Gospel and its startling novelty about the human condition.

### **Conclusion: The heterological discourse about the human condition**

Between the human being and the citizen, subject to laws and recognized juridically, there is a scar: the stranger. Can one be fully human if a stranger? Not being situated inside the laws of citizenship, can someone be the subject of human rights?

Christian ethics and also the ethics of human rights, reinforced by the economic needs in the modern world and by the increased attention of the Church towards the poor, recognize that strangers and the migrants share in the same rights allowed every human being. Nevertheless, strangers are still considered by many to be harmful to national independence and to the interests of countries in which they hope to settle.

The stranger in our society is a "symptom" of our difficulty in living as others do and as the other. Strangers to ourselves, we do not accept our interior "exile." Strangers where we live, we do not live together with the other's diversity and we do not allow the other to be co-author and communicator of our heterology. Politically, the "symptom" of the stranger underlines the limits of nation-states and the political conscience that configures them. We all interiorize these limitations to the point of normalizing the belief that strangers and migrants do not have the same rights as we do. In other words, human dignity belongs to human beings, independently of its recognition by law.

The mass of strangers that populates our imagination as well as the pages of the press challenges our theology, reminding us that, if heterology, that is, discourse about the other, is absent or ignored, Christian theology itself will lose its identity and its capacity to announce the good news and to gather together God's children. To reflect upon the "stranger" as a category that encompasses us all, in all our dimensions, can help us to find adequate words to think theologically about the question that shakes our time and makes it turn on its very hinges. The importance that the Holy Father Pope Francis is giving to this matter, moreover, shows clearly how important it is to the Church and its mission. In addition, it is a subject where human dignity and identity are deeply at play and because of that it cannot be ignored by any human being.

A very important and old Christian text from the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the Epistle to Diognetus puts it this way:

...For Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking [281] method of life. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers...they are assailed by the Jews as foreigners, and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Epistle to Diognetus, Chapter V. — The manners of the Christians., in <https://www.ellopos.net/elpenor/greek-texts/fathers/diognetus/epistle-diognetus.asp?pg=7> accessed on October 5<sup>th</sup> 2017