

Report from the 8th International Biblical Conference “From the Faith of Abraham to the Faith of the Church”

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The 8th International Biblical Conference in Lublin was organized by the Institute of Biblical Studies at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin by Biblical Work in Poland. The theme of the Conference, “From the Faith of Abraham to the Faith of the Church”, was chosen as a response to the proposal by Pope Benedict the XVIth to dedicate the present year to a reflection on the act of faith. The purpose of the Conference was to expose the biblical roots of faith in the following aspects: the language with which the faith is expressed in the OT and NT; heroes of faith like Abraham, Noah, Saint Peter, Paul; the faith of Jesus; faith and knowledge; faith and memory; the communitarian character of faith; faith and disbelief; the dangers which the faith faces.

The guest of honor at the Conference was the renowned biblical scholar and Professor at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, Jean-Louis Ska, S.J. One of the speakers was also the biblical scholar and linguist Dr Janos Szekely, an auxiliary bishop of the Esztergom-Budapest diocese. The participants and lecturers of the Conference came from Italy, Hungary, Slovakia and from Polish centers of biblical studies like Lublin, Wrocław, Katowice and Cracow. The International Biblical Conference lasted two days (the 18th and 19th of October) and was divided into six sessions. After each session there was a time dedicated to the discussion with the speakers.

The first session opened with a lecture in Italian entitled „Il vocabolario biblico sulla fede (‘aman; batach; pisteuo etc. Un confronto con il linguaggio ellenistico, e con il linguaggio del giudaismo intertestamentario”, by H. E. Dr Janos Szekely. Dr Szekely draw a general panorama of the biblical vocabulary portraying the act of faith. The speaker paid attention to the different meanings of the verb *aman* which can signify the security experienced by a baby in its mother’s arms, or a mature decision of Abraham opposing the purely human logic. Faith in the NT, especially as shown in the Gospel of

Mark, means the acceptance of the mystery of the Suffering Messiah and the path of the Cross. In the second lecture, entitled „We have believed and have come to know...” (John 6:69), Prof. Henryk Witczyk proposed a reflection on the relationship between faith and knowledge in the Gospel of John. The point of departure for the reflection was the confession of Peter: “We have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God” (John 6:69). In the Fourth Gospel, faith, preceded by the natural cognitive process regarding visible things, leads to further cognition, the subject of which is the supernatural world, especially the person of Jesus, the Son of God. The first session finished with a lecture by Dr Krzysztof Napora SCJ, entitled “The Father of Our Faith—Abraham or Noah?”. Following the biblical references of Noah as a hero of faith, can we call him, instead of Abraham, the father of our faith? The speaker claimed that in the figure of Noah we can find a model of faith (obedience and righteousness), but his too great a universality was probably an obstacle to calling him the father of faith, first for Israel and then for Christians.

The second session was comprised of two lectures. Dr hab. Henryk Drawnel SDB presented a paper entitled „Reasons for the creation of Jewish apocalyptic literature in the Second Temple period”. The speaker argued that the fall of angels described in 1 Enoch 6–11 is rooted in the polemic carried by the Jewish writers of the third century BC against Babylonian priests called *āšipu*. The myth of the fallen angels is, in fact, a thinly veiled critique of the Babylonian religious circles of the Persian and Hellenistic period. The goal of the critique was to show that Babylonian science came to mankind by the wrong transmission channel, that is, through the polytheistic priests and craftsmen. Only after their punishment is the figure of Enoch introduced (Chap. 12), as the one taught the same astronomical art by the angels faithful to God. The polytheistic context of the transmission of knowledge symbolized by the fallen angels was replaced by the transmission of knowledge revealed by God of Israel. The second lecturer in this session, Dr Wojciech Węgrzyniak (UPJPII, Cracow), presented a speech entitled „The Foolishness of Disbelief”. Taking as a point of reference the texts of Ps 14, Wisd 13 and Rom 1, the speaker analyzed the semantic range of the vocabulary of foolishness, which in biblical language refers to disbelief, and confronted it with the contemporary understanding of foolishness.

The third session was comprised of the three lectures. The first one, presented by Mariusz Górny SSP, a doctoral student at PIB Rome, was entitled “The Faith of Abraham in Ps 47 and 105”. The speaker analyzed Ps 47 and 105 as the products of the final stage of the compositional process of the Psalter, and showed the role of Abraham in redefining the idea of the Covenant and

the identity of Israel. The reference to Abraham allowed the biblical author to relativize the genealogical criterion of belonging to Israel, and enabled the transfer of the Davidic royal prerogatives to the entire nation. In the second lecture, "Jesus, a believer (Mk 9:23)?", Prof. Artur Malina (US, Katowice) argued that in the scene of curing the paralyzed man in the Gospel of Mark, Christ cannot be ascribed the same faith which he demands from his disciples. Considering the character of NT faith, which is strictly connected with the idea of justification and the call for conversion, Christ presents himself rather as an example of unconditional trust put in God. Finally, the last lecture of the first day of the Conference was presented by the guest of honor, Prof. J.-L. Ska. In his speech given in Italian and entitled "Abramo ed Ulisse. Il viaggio senza ritorno", Prof. Ska drew a parallel between the journey of Ulysses and that of Abraham. Abraham represents a typical for the Bible anti-heroic personality which can be especially deduced from the episode about God visiting the patriarch in Gen 18. The old Abraham does not control the situation and does not recognize his guest. He is the exact opposite to Ulysses who, in the scene of his return to Ithaca, takes revenge on his enemies and wooers trying to conquer Penelope's heart. In the story of Ulysses, the gods help the hero put his plans into effect, while in the Bible Abraham remains a humble servant of God's plan. In our Western culture, concluded prof. Ska, both Greek humanistic and biblical models form our one common heritage.

The second day of the Conference (the 19th of the October) started with a session comprised of three lectures. The first one was given by Dr Mykhaylyna Kluskova (*The Catholic University* in Ružomberok, Slovakia) and was entitled "The Function of the Confessions on the Incomparability of God in Ps 71:77 and 86". The speaker analyzed the abovementioned texts which belong to the category of individual lamentations. The frequent appeals to God as incomparable to anybody in this world help the praying person find trust in the Lord, the Creator and the first agent of human history. In the next lecture, "The Confession of Peter (Matt 16:13-20) in the Composition of the Gospels", Prof. Jan Klinkowski (PWT, Wrocław) showed the creed of Peter, in which the apostle expresses the faith in the Messiah and the Son of God, as being the heart and pivotal point of the synoptic Gospels. In the third lecture of the morning session, "Memory Leading to the Fullness of Faith According to the Fourth Gospel", Dr Branislav Kluska (*The Catholic University* in Ružomberok, Slovakia) illumined the role of memory in sustaining the faith of the disciples in the Fourth Gospel. By analyzing the texts in John 2:22 and John 14:26 the lecturer showed how memory, enlightened by the paschal mystery of Christ, becomes a guide to the fullness of faith.

In the second session, Prof. Krzysztof Mielcarek presented a lecture entitled „The Faith of Pagans in Luke 7:1-10”. In the narrative analysis of the story of the curing of the centurion’s servant, the speaker spotted in the two delegations coming to Jesus an important element of the Lucan theology of faith and word. Playing on the identity of the centurion, the biblical text also discloses God’s will to save the pagans. Another speaker, Dr Piotr Nyk OCD, in his lecture entitled “The Actualizing Method of the Old Testament Interpretation in Acts 4:23-31 as an Expression of Faith and a Factor Contributing to Its Growth”, analyzed Acts 4:23-31 as a messianic-eschatological interpretation of Ps 2:1-2. The characteristic trait of this interpretation is its actualizing method, according to which the prophecy on the rebellion of the nations against the Messiah foreshadows not only the Passion of Christ, but also the persecution of the Christian community. Such a reading of Acts 4:1-22 is to encourage the community to continue Jesus’ mission of preaching Gospel despite the opposition and persecutions.

Finally, in the last session, Prof. Ewa J. Jezierska OSU (PWT, Wrocław) in a lecture entitled „In Christ Jesus neither circumcision or uncircumcision is of any avail (Ga 5:6)”, exposed, in two stages, the faith of Paul, the apostle. First, she described his pharisaic faith in one God, the Creator and the giver of Law. Then she showed the faith of Paul, the Christian, which he himself describes as an intimate relationship with Christ and shares in his death and resurrection. The Pauline teaching on faith stresses its universality, the justification which it gives, and the necessity to imitate Christ. In the next lecture “We believed in love (1 John 4:16). The meaning of the terms ‘faith’ and ‘to believe’ in 1 John”, Dr Adam Kubiś, presented the faith in 1 John as a confession on the divinity and messianic identity of Christ. In 1 John the act of faith is found in a close relationship with the commandment of love. Faith understood this way defeats the world, proceeds from the Holy Spirit, and gives eternal life. In the last lecture, „Threats to Faith and the Ways of Overcoming Them in Light of the Letters to the Churches (Rev 2–3), Dr Tomasz Siemieniec spoke of the threats to the faith which Jesus discerns in the local churches, and which can be divided into two categories. The first of them contains external dangers, the source of which is outside the community, that is, blasphemy, poverty, imprisonment, and death. The second group is comprised of internal dangers, namely, the faithfulness to the orthodox faith without testimony, the false teachings justifying the compromise with the contemporary world, and the sterile faith with no humility. Christ indicates the ways of overcoming the above indicated threats: perseverance, good Christian testimony, faithfulness to the received teachings, and the renewal of the relationship with him.

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The Conference was attended by the students of theology, seminarians and professors from Lublin and different parts of Poland. It was an inspirational intellectual and spiritual adventure, which played the role as a valuable introduction to the Year of Faith.