

Interculturality in peace-building and mutual edification (Rm 14:19)

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This article shows that, according to Romans 14:19, peace-building and mutual edification are closely interrelated. This hypothesis is substantiated through an intercultural method, which explores the issues of peace from a triple perspective: a contemporary culture (DR Congo), an original Biblical culture (Rm 14:19) and a past Church culture (Church Fathers). These three frames basically agree that for restoring and maintaining peace, it is important to fight against its main cause, namely sin. It is equally important to cultivate things that promote peace and mutual edification.

Keywords: Interculturality; Peace-building; Mutual edification; Rm 14:19; Church Fathers; Original Biblical culture.

Introduction

The rhetoric of peace-building is often used by churches, but the commitment for mutual edification remains challenging in view of devastating armed conflicts in predominantly Christian countries. The major hypothesis of this article posits that, according to Romans 14:19, peace-building and mutual edification are closely interrelated. In fact, they are syntactically linked not only by the conjunction *καὶ* [and] but also by the verb *διώκωμεν* [let's pursue] of which they are objects. The aforementioned hypothesis is substantiated through an intercultural method, which explores the issues of peace from a triple perspective, namely a contemporary culture (DR Congo/Catholic bishops of Central Africa and a South African exegete), a past church culture (Patristics) and an original Biblical culture (Rm 14:19).¹ Other models of intercultural exegesis do not include church culture as a specific component of this method (Jonker 2006:19–28; Matand 1998; Manus 2003; Ndayango 2003; Ukpong 1996:189–210, 2001:88–112, 2004). The conclusion summarises the differences and similitudes of interpretations between the findings pertaining to an 'original' Biblical culture, a church culture of the past and a contemporary target culture. In addition, the present author intends to show his respect for the late Prof. Emeritus Andrie du Toit (1931–2018), a mentor in intercultural mediations, and proposes this method as one of the committed answers to the question raised by Prof. Emeritus Bernard Latagan, 'Quo vadis New Testament studies?' (Latagan 2009:30–38; Wessels 2009:39–41).

Romans 14:19 in the contemporary African culture

In this study, 'culture' is understood as an all-embracing reality or the totality of human experience in a given time and space. Africa or African seems to be 'more of a mind-set entity shaped from the worldview shared by the beholder' (Loba-Mkole 2011: 2). In this article, it refers to a geopolitical and multicultural continent that bears this name, without excluding its people in diaspora. The mediation of Romans 14:19 in contemporary Africa will be represented by scholarly and pastoral readings.

Pastoral reading of Romans 14:19

In 2002, the Association of Episcopal Conferences of DR Congo, Rwanda and Burundi 'ACEAC' decided to use Romans 14:19 as both Scripture reference and title for their appeal for peace, requesting the end of the Congolese deadliest war. In an intercultural approach, vertical and horizontal dimensions are important. Vertical interculturality applies to the interplay between cultures, which supersede and illuminate each other in a given time frame (e.g. past cultures, present cultures and future cultures). Horizontal interculturality refers to how a target culture and its neighbours relate to an issue. The message from the central African Bishops indicates that the neighbouring countries concerned have the same challenge regarding peace, though wars affect them at different levels. The war in DR Congo started in 1996 and has the claimed lives of

1. On similar intercultural studies, see Loba-Mkole (2005:291–326, 2007a:141–159, 2007b:39–68, 2008:20–36, 2009:189–207, 2010:115–132, 2011:1–11, 2012).

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approximately 6 million people (International Rescue Committee Report of 2009, New York Times March 2010). It is considered to be the second most dreadful war after the Second World War. Up to 2008, 41 United Nations Security Council resolutions were voted to restore peace in DR Congo, but without conclusive results (Migabo 1998:36–139). This applies even to the more recent settlements such as the Addis-Ababa Agreement on DR Congo (24 February 2013) and the Saint Sylvester Agreement in Kinshasa (31 December 2017). Belligerents keep changing their tactics ranging from sporadic ceasefire to intimidation, looting, raping, poisoning and extra-judiciary executions.

In their appeal for peace, the bishops denounced and condemned different aspects of the war, including the abuse of human dignity, manoeuvres to destabilise and oppose the citizens to each other, provocation and fuelling of violence, illicit weapon traffic, bad governance, ethnic hatred and division, excessive debt burden, fights among foreign forces and complicity of local leaders. They recommended to every person of good will to accept that the time has come for positive change, the church ministers to become agents for peace and reconciliation, the Christian faithful to engage more in prayer and actions of solidarity, justice and peace for the edification of the church – God’s family in the Great Lakes sub-region. They urged politicians of the three countries to work hard to restore the state of rights, the judges to reject corruption and render equitable justice for all, the armed forces to ensure security, the youth to reject whatsoever that leads to war, social workers to promote fellowship among the people, the business men and women to improve the standard of living of the people and the international community to plan an international conference with the states of the Great Lakes sub-region. The latter has come to pass through the Addis-Ababa Agreement on DR Congo (24 February 2013).

A major insight from the bishops relates to the decision of devoting each first Sunday of Advent to prayer and reflexion on forgiveness, reconciliation and peace, to create specific services for reconciliation and conflict resolution, and to undertake ecumenical and inter-religious actions for a sense of more sustainable peace in the sub-region. This would be thoughtfully reinforced to become a backdrop for sensitising the ‘divided Christians’ to daily show evidence of their reconciliation with God, peaceful interaction and mutual edification.

Contrary to military and expensive peacekeeping policies, an intercultural strategy for conflict resolution means translating into action a Swahili saying, ‘*Amani hamhitaji mlinzi*’ [peace does not need a guard], and investing more in re-construction dialogue between cultures involved. What can we learn of Romans 14:19 from a South African theologian?

Scholarly reading of Romans

In Africa, Andrie du Toit has been arguably the most prolific and respected New Testament scholar, who has devoted a substantial amount of studies to the letter to the Romans

(see Du Toit 1979:261–291, 1991:65–74, 1993:69–77, 1998a:3–31, 1998b:367–388, 2000a:287–298, 2000b:213–246, 2006:167–198, 2007). Nonetheless, none of his studies specifically deals with Romans 14:19, nor does he include peace and mutual edification among the ethical indicators in Romans. For him, these indicators are inferred from the presence of both indicative and imperative moods, contrary to Rudolf Bultmann for whom there is no intrinsic correlation between theology and ethics in Paul.² Certainly, ethical indicators in Romans proceed from faith essentials, such as existence in faith (Rm 1:16–17, 12; 11:20; 12:3, 6; 14:22–23) and justification that transforms the believers into the citizens of Graceland (Rm 5:1–2, 9; 8:30). These essentials also embrace the believers’ state of being the holy (Rm 1:7; 8:27; 12:13; 15:25, 26, 31; 16:2), in Christ or in the Lord (Rm 6:11, 23; 8:1, 39; 16:2, 8, 11–13, 22), in a new relationship with God (Rm 5:5, 8; 8:35–39; 9:25), in the Spirit (Rm 8:9) and in an eschatological existence (Rm 3:21; 5:1–20; 8:18–30; 13:11–14; 14:10). The faith essentials finally command the ‘in-between’ ambivalence that drives the believers to engage in a demanding fight against the evil spirits (Rm 6:12–13) and the corrupt crouching of the flesh (Rm 7:7–8:17) (Du Toit 2007:372–375).

Du Toit has identified four ethical indicators in Romans, namely obedience (Rm 1:5; 10:16; 15:18; 16:19), righteousness (Rm 1–6), sanctification (Rm 1:7; 8:27; 12:13) and love (Rm 5:5; 13:8–10; 14:15; see also Gl 5:13 – 6:10). These indicators are lived in various ways, such as dying and rising with Christ (Rm 6:2–10), participating in the body of Christ (Rm 12:3–8), putting on Christ (Rm 13:11–14; see also Gl 3:27), following the example of Christ (Rm 14–15) and being at the service of Christ as Lord (Rm 16:2–13).

Even if Du Toit does not elaborate on Romans 14:19, his analysis of ethical indicators, their expressions and ethos can contribute to a broader view of this verse. Besides, he tactfully points out God and Jesus as reference paradigms for mutual acceptance for which Paul argues in Romans 14:1–15:6 to which belongs Romans 14:19:

The correct Christian ethos around matters of eating, drinking, and celebrating holy days, particularly the Sabbath is a bone of contention. The injunction to accept one another in Rom 15:7 recapitulates the essence of 14:1 – 15:6 ... Its importance is undergirded in 14:3 by the reference to the example of God and in 15:7 that of Jesus Christ. (Du Toit 2007:397)

To sum up, only a responsible and God-inspired action or a Christ-like mind can generate and promote peace. Du Toit (2007:400; see also Loba-Mkole 2008:20–36) finds that in ‘applying righteousness with the concrete circumstances of everyday life (14:17) ... peace is also concretised, manifested on the horizontal level (14:17, 19; cf. 15:13)’ and ‘it becomes visible proof of Christians’ being reconciled and at peace with God (5:1–11)’ (Du Toit 2007:400; see also Loba-Mkole 2008:20–36).

² See Du Toit (2007:377) versus Bultmann (1924:123–140, [1958] 1965:334–335). See other views against Bultmann in Windisch (1924:265–281), Dibelius ([1933] 1966:239–241) and Furnish ([1968] 1978:227).

Romans 14:19 in the Patristic church culture

The views of selected Church Fathers will not be presented in chronological order, but according to the word order in the immediate context of the text concerned (Rm 14:13–23).

The sequence of Paul's argument in Romans 14:13–23

Saint Gennadius of Constantinople (458–471 CE): Gennadius marvels at how wonderfully Paul develops his argument. For him, Paul firstly starts off at the bottom, by referring to food. Secondly, he calls the person who is sinned against a brother. Thirdly, he considers what has been done to that person as destruction. Fourthly, he says that this outrage has been committed against someone for whom Christ died. Fifthly, he states that someone who does this causes godliness to be blasphemed. Sixthly, he declares that we have not come to faith in Christ to be able to enjoy this or that but to be able to share in righteousness, which means in sinlessness, peace and joy (see Staab 1933:412).

Let's not judge one another or be a stumbling block on the account of food (Rm 14:13–14, 17, 21)

Clement of Alexandria (150–215 CE): Clement finds the true banquet in the Word. In his view, it is a silly mind that can be amazed and stupefied at what is presented at vulgar banquets after having enjoyed the rich fare, which is in the Word of God (*The Instructor* 2.1.6). For him, he who eats of this meal, the best of all, will possess the kingdom of God, fixing his gaze on the holy assembly of love, the heavenly church (*The Instructor* 54).

May we then pursue things of peace and mutual upbuilding (Rm 14:19)

Saint John Chrysostom: For Chrysostom, the Pauline exhortation for pursuing peace and mutual edification applies equally to both sides, that is, the strong and weak. One must become peaceable and the other must not destroy his brother. Without peace it is impossible to edify anyone (see Migne 1857–1886:26.3). Chrysostom adds that men will approve a peaceful person 'not so much because of his perfect state but because of his devotion to peace and good relations' (Migne 1857–1886:26.60).

Saint Augustine: In his letter to Darius, Saint Augustine appreciates the courage of great warriors who, with the assistance of God's protection, subdue the foes and restore peace by a sword, but he added that it:

... is a greater glory to slay war with a word than men with sword and to gain and maintain peace by means of peace, not by means of war. For even those who fight are certainly seeking peace, if they are good men, but seeking it by the shedding of blood, while you have been sent to prevent the shedding of anyone's blood. (see Baxter 1998:445)

Furthermore, for Augustine, it is clear that only the Holy Spirit can assure our liberation from sins through the grace that is given to human beings and through the peace by which we are reconciled to God (see Schaff & Wage 1894). Peace can also be explained as a result of grace overcoming the desire of flesh:

For Augustine Romans is about the relationship between the works of the law (lex) and grace (gratia). Commenting on Romans 3:2, he explains that Paul neither condemns the law nor does he take away the free will. Before the law (ante legem), humans pursue the desire of flesh (concupiscentiam carnis), under the law (sub lege) they are pulled by it. Under grace (sub gratia) they are neither pursuing it, nor pulled by it. In eternal peace (in pace) there is no desire of the flesh (Exp. prop. Rom 13–18:2 sic). (Breytenbach 2017:276)

In a nutshell, Church Fathers equated the Word of God and the fruits it yields (righteousness or sinlessness, peace, mutual edification and joy) with the true food and drink (Clement of Alexandria and Gennadius). All those qualities produced by the Word of God are the gifts of the Holy Spirit (St Augustine). Every person and *a fortiori* each Christian (strong or weak) is encouraged to cultivate them, while fighting not against a brother or sister for whom Christ died, but rather striving to overcome destructive judgments (John Chrysostom). How can Romans 14:19 be understood in its original Biblical culture?

Romans 14:19 in its original Biblical culture

Original variant: διώκωμεν, διώκομεν or διώκετε?

The text of Romans 14:19 poses a relatively major text-critical issue pertaining to three variants of the only main verb of the whole sentence. One variant reads διώκωμεν [*may we pursue*: subjunctive, first-person plural of διώκω, *pursue*] while another has διώκομεν [*we pursue*: indicative, first-person plural] or διώκετε [*pursue*: imperative, second-person plural]. External evidence of διώκωμεν includes C D Ψ 33 81 104 256 365 424 436 459 1175 1241 1319 1506 1573 1739 1852 1881 1912 1962 2127 2200^c **Byz Lect** it^{ar, b, d, f, g, gue, o, r} vg syr^{pal} cop^{sa, bo} arm eth geo² Origen^{lat} Chrysostom; Ambrosiaster Pelagius Augustine Speculum. Διώκωμεν is supported by κ A B F G L P 048 0150 0209 6 263 2200^{*vid} 1 60 I 147 I 165 I 422 I 592 I 593 I 597 I 603 I 884 I 1154 I 1356. Διώκετε is attested by 921 I 1021 I 1439 geo.

The subjunctive reading is geographically well spread, as it is supported by Alexandrian type (C), Caesarean type (Ψ) and Western type (D) (Aland & Aland 1982:167). It is also attested by both early and later versions (it^{ar, b, d, f, g, gue, o, r} vg syr^{pal} cop^{sa, bo} arm eth geo). The indicative reading is evidenced most exclusively by the Alexandrian type of manuscripts of which the earliest dates from c. 400. The imperative reading is supported only by few later papyri.

With regard to internal evidence, the subjunctive reading suits the exhortation tune of Romans 14:13–23. Nonetheless, the indicative reading is not less appropriate, given that

ἄρα οὖν is always followed by the indicative in Romans' (Jewett 2007:854) and that the indicative mood had the ability to convey a demand as well as an imperative:

The imperative is not only integrated into the indicative and *vice versa*, each is part and parcel of the other. We would even state that the indicative is an imperative. The imperative merely constitutes the ethical cutting edge of the indicative, as the indicative forms the fundamental and transformative basis of the imperative (Du Toit 2007:377).

The ethical indicator has been made stronger by the reading διώκετε, which resonates with another imperative towards the end of the section, namely κατάλυε in Romans 14:20. Omanson (2006:318) finds another imperative in Romans 14:13, but κρίνωμεν is rather a subjunctive. Nevertheless, he correctly concludes that 'the context here seems to require the subjunctive, that is, an exhortation and not the indicative' (Omanson 2006:318). The discrepancy between the second person plural διώκετε and the second person singular κατάλυε betrays the former as an *impromptu* at a later editing. Then, it can be argued that the subjunctive reading of Romans 14:19 echoes and reinforces the exhortation already expressed at the beginning of the section in Romans 14:13 (μηκέτι ... κρίνωμεν: let's not judge). Moreover, according to Gundry (2010:622), 'the use of both "therefore" and "then" emphasizes the following exhortation and makes it grow out of what God's reign does and doesn't consist in (Rm 14:17)'. This reign of God consists of a realm where there is no space for negative discrimination among the disciples, as everything belongs to them, them to Christ and Christ to God (1 Cor 3:23).

Each of the three readings attested by the external evidence uses a particular verbal mood (subjunctive, indicative and imperative) and fits well within the literary context of an ethical exhortation. However, the reading with the subjunctive mood is most probably the better one as it conveys an exhortative appeal more considerately than an indicative or an imperative. Therefore, given both external and internal evidence, the subjunctive reading should be preferred because of its early attestation, wider geographical distribution and better rendering of an exhortative tune. One can convincingly assert that διώκωμεν represents the original variant in the sense of a *predecessor text-form*, an *autographic text-form* or even a *canonical text-form*, but not an *interpretative text-form*. According to Epp (2010:22–23), a predecessor text-form is a form of text discoverable behind a New Testament writing, an autographic text-form is the textual form as it left the desk of a Biblical author or his secretary, a canonical-text form is 'the textual form of a book at the time it acquired consensual authority' and an interpretative text-form represents 'any and each interpretative iteration or reformulation of a writing'. The term 'predecessor form' might be problematic due to a lack of evidence. Holmes (2011:61–79, 2012) prefers to speak of 'earliest transmitted text' or 'initial text' that can be identified through *recensio*, *examinatio* and *emandatio*. In the final analysis, διώκωμεν and especially διώκετε can be regarded as interpretative text-forms, since διώκωμεν might also be the result of a scribal error through which the second omega in

διώκωμεν was mistakenly replaced by an omicron to produce διώκομεν. Struggling to establish the most 'original text' in the sense depicted above is an appropriate exercise, because 'making theological statements about the text without reference to the nature of the text ... is an arbitrary attempt to impose dogma on reality' (Parker 2007:583–589).

It is worthy to note that the French 'recherchons' do not strictly render a subjunctive form, but rather an imperative, first person plural. The literary correct French rendering of διώκωμεν should be '*que nous recherchions*' [may or shall we pursue, let's pursue]. French versions like Bible de Jérusalem and Traduction œcuménique de la Bible have chosen the imperative form 'recherchons' and have certainly influenced the use of this verbal form by the bishops of Central Africa for their appeal for peace. The best option would have been to stick to the literal and yet meaningful translation of the subjunctive διώκωμεν (*que nous cherchions*), which is both a natural rendering in French as well as an accurate representation of the 'original' verbal form.

Together with its likelihood of being the most original reading, the subjunctive διώκωμεν in Romans 14:19 seems to be equally an ethical indicator that conveys the sense of a gentle directive through a clearly considerate tune of exhortation that the imperative and indicative forms cannot communicate.

Literary analysis of Romans 14:19

Ἄρα οὖν τὰ τῆς εἰρήνης διώκωμεν καὶ τὰ τῆς οἰκοδομῆς τῆς εἰς ἀλλήλους

Delimitation

The syntax of Romans 14:19 is organised in such a way that makes it an independent sentence built around the verb διώκωμεν, which commands two objects (things of peace and things of upbuilding of one another). But the use of two distinct markers of result (ἄρα οὖν, *so then*) is a strong signal that this sentence is a conclusion of a preceding reasoning. Therefore, these markers explicitly link the exhortation to the reasoning that starts at Romans 14:13.

Romans 14:13 can be viewed as the beginning (*terminus a quo*) of the literary unit in which Romans 14:19 is found. As a matter of fact, either identical or similar expressions are displayed or reasons for seeking peace and mutual edification are given in the whole section of Romans 14:13–23. The particles μηκέτι οὖν [therefore no more] in Romans 14:13 indicate both continuity and discontinuity with the preceding Romans 14:12. It is a continuation in the sense that the beginning of Romans 14:13 shows a concrete implication of what Romans 14:12 means by 'each of us shall give account of himself to God' with regard to interpersonal relationships. This logically leads to the next declaration 'then let us no more judge one another' (Rm 14:13a). But, the discontinuity prevails: on one hand the concluding particle οὖν signals that a different conclusion is being drawn from Romans 14:12, which already has another

concluding marker (*ἄρα*). On the other hand, the discontinuity or demarcation is signposted by the presence of the particle *μηκέτι* [no more] coupled with new addressees *ἀλλήλους* [one another], deviating from the single addressee of Romans 14:12 (*περὶ ἑαυτοῦ*, [about himself]) to join a more inclusive group. Verse 13 is then the beginning of a new development of the conclusion reached in Romans 14:12.

Romans 14: 23 can be presented as the end (*terminus ad quem*) of the section that started in Romans 14:13. Firstly, the explicit reference to judgment and eating occurs in Romans 14:23, forming an inclusion with Romans 14:13. Secondly, the beginning of the next verse (Rm 15:1) marks another shift from an all-encompassing group of addressees of Romans 14:13–23 to an exclusive group of addressees made of the strong ones (*οἱ δυνατοί*). Moreover, the section limited by Romans 14:13 and 23 makes a clear-cut appeal to the inclusive group of addressees concerned: let's not be judgemental towards one another (Rm 14:13) but bear in mind that whatever does not proceed from faith is sin (Rm 14:23) (Légasse 2002:872; Schlier 1977:412).

The internal coherence of Romans 14:13–23 is based on both syntactical (particles of connection) and thematic devices. The unifying theme of this section concerns the reasons for seeking peace and mutual edification. These are given in the lines surrounding Romans 14:19. They are marked by the particle *γάρ* that is repeated three times in the previous verses dealing with table fellowship issues (Rm 14:15–18). These *γάρ*-clauses follow two declarations of which the first one is a general statement that prohibits passing judgement on other people while the second one illustrates Paul's personal view about uncleanness (Rm 14:13–14). The issue of contaminated food being addressed here is not a matter of "Torah-free "liberals" versus Torah-observant "traditionalists" but Torah-observant traditionalists versus Torah-observant ultra-traditionalists" (Bolton 2009:621).

The internal cohesion is reinforced by a threefold repetition of the *οὐν* particle in the section of Romans 14:13–19, highlighting the exhortations on avoiding judging others (Rm 14:13) or blaspheming the good (Rm 14:16) but pursuing peace and mutual upbuilding (Rm 14:19). Amazingly, the subsequent verses (Rm 14:20–21) resume and reinforce Paul's arguments on table fellowship. Still more interestingly, Romans 14:19 is sandwiched between two sections of Paul's argumentation on table fellowship (Rm 14:15–18, 20–21). Finally, Romans 14:22–23 recap general statements on judgement (Rm 14:13–14) and table fellowship (Rm 14:15–18, 21–22) in the light of faith. Indeed, Romans 14:13 and 23 seem to mark the boundaries of this literary unit that focuses on the call for peace and mutual edification in the context of conflicts around the table fellowship. Besides, these conflicts feed on ethnic divisions or social class factions.

Rhetorical structure

The flow of arguments in Romans 14:13–23 includes two major introductory statements (Rm 14:13–14), followed by

reasons (Rm 14:15–18), a core summary of expected code (Rm 14:19) and more ethical indicators (Rm 14:20–23).

The two major introductory statements of which the first is in negative form and the second in affirmative form (Rm 14:13–14):

- Let's no longer judge one another but decide not to scandalise any brother (Rm 14:13).
- I know and am persuaded that nothing (no food) is unclean in itself and in Jesus, except in one's mind (Rm 14:14).

The reasons for the above and for new implications are governed by *γάρ* and *οὐν* combined with ethical indicators (vv. 15–18):

- One reason explaining the major statements is love (*γάρ*-clause): for if someone hurts a brother by what he or she eats, he or she does not walk in love (Rm 14:15a). This reason is followed by two ethical indicators:
 - First ethical indicator (imperative): Do not ruin the life of a person for whom Christ died (Rm 14:15b).
 - Second ethical indicator (imperative + *οὐν*): Then do not let the good to be reviled (Rm 14:16).
- Two reasons explaining why the good is not to be reviled:
 - First reason (*γάρ*-clause): for the kingdom of God is not food nor drink, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rm 14:17).
 - Second reason (*γάρ*-clause): for he who serves Christ in this way pleases God and is approved by men (Rm 14:18).

The core summary of the expected code of conduct is governed by *ἄρα οὐν* (Rm 14:19): So may we then seek things that contribute to peace and mutual edification (Rm 14:19).

It is worthy to note that the reasons introduced by *γάρ* subordinate conjunction may carry a special prominence (Callow 1992:204), namely love, kingdom of God and service to Christ.

The last section (vv. 20–23) is made of a recapitulation of ethical indicators expressed by imperative and indicative, or even by a subjunctive introduced by *ἐάν*. This subjunctive is an elaborate ethical indicator, which shows the direct and negative consequence of a particular action: 'if the one doubting eats, he has been condemned' can be interpreted as a negative imperative, meaning 'don't eat while doubting about the nature or origin of the food'. The ethical indicators of this section include the following:

- First ethical indicator (imperative): Do not destroy the work of God by what you eat (Rm 14:20a).
- Second ethical indicator (indicative): Everything is clean (Rm 14:20b).
- Third ethical indicator (ellipsis of an indicative): But (everything) (is) bad to a person who stumbles another by what he or she eats (Rm 14:20c).

- Fourth ethical indicator (indicative): It is good not to eat pieces of meat, drink wine nor anything by which your brother stumbles (Rm 14:21).
- Fifth ethical indicator (indicative): Keep faith between you and God for yourself (Rm 14:22a).
- Sixth ethical indicator (indicative): Blessed is the person who has no reason for self-approval (Rm 14:22b).
- Seventh ethical indicator (subjunctive + *ἐάν*): If a doubting person eats, he or she is condemned because this is not out of faith (Rm 14:23a).
- Eighth ethical indicator (Rm 14:23b): Anything that does not proceed from faith is sin (Rm 14:23b).

The eight ethical indicators that follow consolidate the importance of the core exhortation, which Jewett in his rhetorical study of Romans 14:13–23 calls ‘the constructive goals of peace and edification’. He regards Romans 14:13–23 as ‘[e]xemplary guidelines for mutual upbuilding in pluralistic congregations’ and ranges it within the fourth proof of the *probatio* (Rm 12:1–15:13) where Paul deals with the topic of ‘living together according to the gospel so as to sustain the hope of global transformation’ (Jewett 2007:833).

The *γάρ* clauses follow a personal statement in which Paul uses a double rhetorical device: *οἶδα καὶ πέπεισμαι ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ*, I know and I am persuaded in the Lord Jesus (Rm 14:14). He calls the attention of his audience by appealing to his own authority in terms of knowledge and persuasion in the Lord Jesus, whereby only very few apostles, if any at all, would outdo him. The arguments developed in Romans 14:15–23 can be ignored simply by someone who undermines the authority of Paul and that of Jesus. In Romans 14:19, Paul delivers one of the core messages of Jesus’ Gospel, namely the exhortation to seek peace and mutual upbuilding in a very ordinary situation under the threat of divisions and rivalries. In Pauline thinking, these divisions are certainly a result of ignorance (cf. the use of the clause ‘I know’, implying that some may not know), lack of faith (faith is repeated thrice in the last section of the pericope) and sin (final statement: everything that does not proceed from faith is sin) (see Gaventa 2009:181–182).

Paul’s gospel of peace and the table-fellowship in Rome

It is likely that Paul’s addressees in Rome consisted of both the Jewish and Gentile Christians of which some of the Jewish origin had previously been leading pagan ways of life; likewise, some Gentiles would have embraced Jewish traditions before their conversion (Borgen 1995:36, 42; Mitternacht 2003:563; Sandelin 1989:11–26; Sanders 2010:165; Zetterholm 2003:171).

The significance of table-fellowship in Judaism is underlined by Rabbi Simeon (c. 100–160/170) in the following terms:

If three have eaten at one table and have not spoken over it words of the Law, it is as though they had eaten of the sacrifices of the dead (Ps 106:28), for it is written, ‘For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness without God’ (Isa. 28:8 – ‘place’ taken as a designation for God). But if three have eaten at one table and

have spoken over it words of Law, it is as if they had eaten from the table of God, for it is written, ‘And he said unto me, This is the table that is before the Lord’ (Ezek 41:22) (*m. Abot* 3:3). (Dunn 2010:193–235)

To underline the importance of the table-fellowship, Jewish traditions developed concrete dietary laws pertaining to forbidden meat and meat offered to idols (Lv 11:1–23; Dt 14:3–21; 1 Cor 8–10; Ac 15:20, 29; Did 6.3; 9.1–10.6). These laws have been granted legal status as Jewish rights and privileges from the reign of Julius Caesar (48–44 BCE) to that of Claudius Nero Germanicus (41–54 CE) (see Josephus *A.J.* 14.226, 245, 261; Claussen 2003:155).

In Paul’s view, the challenges or contradictions posed by different ways of conducting table fellowship are resolved by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which in fact constitutes the Gospel of peace when it is well understood and well applied. Sanders argues that Paul found the broad middle ground between Gentiles and Jews: ‘He forged a Christianity that was Jewish to the degree that it forbade idolatry and extra-marital sex and was Gentile to the degree that it forbade circumcision, Sabbath, and dietary laws’ (Sanders 2010:173). However, Paul might not have ‘forbidden’, but relativised Sabbath and dietary laws (Bolton 2009:622–624; Dunn 1988:805).

In any case, for Paul, Jesus Christ is the faith canon and the role model as captured in Philippians 2:6 and especially in Romans 15:5: ‘May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus’ (see Grabe 2001:110–114; Okambawa 2002:362; Strüder 2005:499; Tellbe 2001:209). The ethical code that Jesus teaches to his disciples in the context of dispute is summarised in Mark 9:50: ‘have salt in yourselves, and make peace with one another’, which Matthew 5:9 reads: ‘blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God’. For Mark, salt as a metaphor for the Word of God is an important ingredient that can spark and maintain peaceful relations, especially those shaped by love (Jn 13:35). As Miller puts it, ‘the victory comes as believers love with God’s love, genuinely and redemptively’ (Miller 1992:177).

Conclusion

The readings of Romans 14:14 (original Biblical culture) from a contemporary church culture (DR Congo) and from a past church culture (Patristics) basically agree on the fact that for restoring and maintaining peace, it is important not to undermine fighting against its main cause, namely sin. It is equally important to cultivate things that promote peace and mutual edification, such as love, reign of God and service to Christ. A major difference between the three frames of reference consists of the fact that in the contemporary culture, the ethnic and social class disputes have produced the world’s deadliest war. Had the Christians heeded to Christ, such wars would be avoided. Jesus is reported to have recommended peace and love among his disciples: ‘have salt in yourselves, and make peace with one another’ (Mk 9:50) and ‘by this all

will know that you are my disciples, you have love for one another' (Jn 13:35). St Augustine stated that 'it is a greater glory to slay war with a word than men with sword and to gain and maintain peace by means of peace, not by means of war' (Letter ccxxix, 2; cf. Schaff 1894). Similarly, a Swahili saying holds that '*Amani hamhitaji milinzi*' [peace does not need a guard]. Indeed, peace cannot be kept by armed forces, it is the opposite of armed conflicts. A practical way towards sustainable peace entails putting up reconciliation strategies that integrate things of mutual edification (love, reign of God, service to Christ, righteousness and sinlessness).

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