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**TANGAZA COLLEGE
CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA**

THE POWER OF THE TONGUE
(According to St. James and its application in religious formation)

A Long essay submitted to the Department of Biblical Studies in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in
Religious Studies

By

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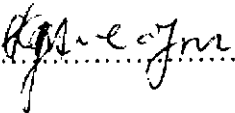
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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflections. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

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This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this Long Essay to my mother, whose well chosen words in speech has always struck me. She remains for me a wise mother endowed with a great gift among others of wise use of the tongue.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my heart-felt gratitude to Fr. Lacomara who first and fore most approved my thesis statement and gave me a go ahead with my research. Fr. Lacomara, being a renowned scripture scholar, has patiently journeyed with me from time I proposed my thesis statement to the final completion of this work. I am greatly indebted to him.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Wisdom as a quality has been respected globally throughout the ages. In the traditional past, wisdom was passed on orally from one generation to the next through wise sayings, proverbs, and riddles just to mention a few. The power of the tongue was inherent in the words a person used. A person could use harmful words and likewise could use healing words. The latter was always advocated.

James discusses the power of the tongue that is inherent in words that are spoken. Once a word is uttered, it is no longer within the control of the one who has said it. As we all sin with the tongue, a greater danger of faltering with the tongue is with teachers who have to use it daily in teaching. James then is calling for a wise use of speech; a reflection of what one wants to say before saying it.

James' reflection has a background in Wisdom Literature. It is for this reason chapter one will treat 'power of the tongue in Wisdom Literature'. James' suggestions on the proper use of speech remain relevant to all ages. One of the many applications to this topic is in 'religious formation' a scenario that corresponds to what James was addressing, namely teachers in the early Church. In religious formation, formators have a teaching role and constantly use the tongue as an instrument for their work. It is my conviction that James has some suggestions that could be helpful to formators. This is what constitutes the third chapter of this study.

It is my hope that the study sheds some light not only to formators but also to all who will read this paper on how to use the tongue in speech more appropriately.

Motivation (Reasons) and Aims of the study

I wish to investigate the power of the tongue manifested in speech. This is because we use the tongue in speech every day but may be we do not reflect on how powerful an instrument the tongue is. Once this power is established, I wish to discuss how to use this power appropriately. There is proper and improper use of speech. When is speech proper and when is it improper? The paper attempts to answer this question.

The Procedure of the Study

Since this is a Biblical study, I will approach the texts I have chosen exegetically to have a deeper understanding of them before discussing the theology of the texts. This paper contains three chapters. The first chapter will deal with the power of the tongue in Wisdom Literature. The second will focus on the power of the tongue in the Epistle of James. The third will be an application focussing on the use of speech in religious formation.

Why this kind of Procedure?

1st Chapter: Why the use of speech in Wisdom literature? It is because the kind of literature found in the Epistle of James best resembles that of Wisdom Literature. In the whole NT, it is the only literature which best corresponds with Wisdom Literature. The primary focus in Wisdom Literature is “guide for successful living”. One who knows how to control his/her tongue (speech) is in full control of his/her life. The contrary is true. Chapter one then, provides a good foundation for our main chapter, “the power of the tongue in the Epistle of James”. This shows that James is not speaking out of a

vacuum but from an already existing tradition best depicted in the literature mentioned above.

In treating “general characteristics of wisdom literature”, I am giving this research a perspective. In a nutshell, it gives the reader the essence of wisdom literature and hence helps to situate the topic of our concern, in the framework of wisdom literature with ease. It also provides a good ground for understanding better chapter two of this study. The texts I have chosen in Wisdom Literature are the ones that best resemble my topic. Part three of chapter one will focus on the theology of the discussed texts on the use of speech. My aim here is to summarize in few words the theology, teaching on the use of speech. I will then draw a conclusion from my findings in the 1st chapter. The aim here is to capture in a very succinct way the message of the 1st chapter. It is also an aid to keep the topic focussed.

In chapter two, I will start by discussing the use of speech in James in general. By doing this, I wish to show first, how this chapter is connected with the first chapter and how ideas in the first chapter run through the Epistle of James. I will then give a detailed exegesis of Jas 3:1-12 as my key pericope in this paper. It is a pericope that dwells in a very elaborate way on the ‘power of the tongue’. In doing this, I will show how ideas expressed by James here are echoed in the Wisdom Literature, discussed in the first chapter. In the third section of this chapter, I will treat the theology of James in the use of the tongue. I will try to show what James discusses or introduces that is not in wisdom literature, i.e. James’ legacy. Once this is done, I will be ready to begin chapter three, an application of use of speech in religious formation.

Why this Kind of Application?

While James asserts that we all have sinned in many different ways, no one is exempt from sins of the tongue. If we all sin with the tongue, those who teach are even at a greater disadvantage because the tool of their work is the tongue and agent is the speech. Religious formators can be compared with teachers because by imparting the spirituality of the founder/foundress of their congregation are in actual fact teaching a particular aspect of Christian faith. There is then great need to harmonize between what they teach and what they do.

In section, two we will focus on the power of speech by religious formators both positively and negatively. If there is no dichotomy between what a formator says and what he/she does, his/her words will be powerful because they reinforce what is obvious. The opposite is true. In section three, I will draw suggestions from James that could be of great help in religious formation. I will then draw a conclusion as a synthetic approach to the chapter. I will then draw a general conclusion that will put together in a succinct way the message of this paper. Welcome to the journey.

CHAPTER ONE

POWER OF THE TONGUE IN WISDOM LITERATURE

Introduction

This section covers in a succinct way the general characteristics of wisdom literature as an aid to situate the kind of literature found in the Epistle of James. It provides some background to the reader. The texts from Proverbs and Sirach provide a good background on the use of speech in Wisdom Literature. They portray the dual character of a human tongue, a gentle tongue, whose speech brings healing and a harsh speech that stirs up anger. The power of the tongue is experienced in both its positive and negative use. Positively it nurtures the other while negatively it destroys the other. This aspect is covered in the third section of this chapter that treats the theology of the chosen wisdom texts.

1.1 General Characteristics of Wisdom Literature

In biblical studies, five books are usually put under the category “wisdom literature”. They include: Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes (Qohelet), Sirach, and Wisdom.¹

¹ Cf. David L. Peterson, ed., *The New Interpreter's Bible*. V. 5, *Proverbs and Sirach*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 179. Other biblical literature is sometimes put under the wisdom umbrella; the counsels in Tobit 4:3-21; 12:6-13, the poem in Baruch 3:9-4:4, the Song of songs, on the grounds that it like the wisdom books, is “of Solomon” (Cant 1:1), Psalms such as 37, 49, 73, 112 etc. Cf. Roland E. Murphy, ed., *The new Jerome Biblical Commentary*, *Introduction to Wisdom Literature* (New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs, 1990), 447.

Wisdom literature focuses on the questions of life. It offers a “guide for successful living”.²

The basic concern of the ‘Wisdom Tradition’ is giving instructions concerning how to live well. The authors teach using different methods e.g., “story telling, exhortation, warning, questioning” and others. In addition to the standard proverb, they use riddles, parables and metaphors to instruct, advise and persuade. There are usually very specific lessons that they want to teach and so we should not be surprised when we come across what appears to be “the moral of the story”.³

In Wisdom Literature, “righteousness is not connected to the observance of the law and covenant or to performance of rituals as it is elsewhere in the Bible”.⁴ Genres and themes of neighbouring literatures⁵ are frequent in Wisdom Books than in other parts of the Bible. These share a “strong didactic tone”. The word “wisdom” appears in all the books: “42 in proverbs, 18 in Job, 28 in Qohelet, 60 in Sirach and 30 in the book of Wisdom. The numbers are much higher if synonyms of “wisdom” are counted.”⁶

There is a recurring attention to wisdom in itself, which makes these biblical books different from their canonical counterparts. The objective of wisdom is to provide good life, in this present life which manifests itself through length of days, riches as accounted in Job 30:2-20. More importantly, wisdom fosters a proper relationship to

² Donald Senior, *The Catholic Study Bible, New American Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 231. The same author continues to say, “Since every person in every culture must struggle with the questions of life, there is a universal character to the literature in question. This might explain why, even today, people of other religious cultures often can more readily identify with the teaching of the wisdom books that with the uniquely Israelite or Christian theology found in other sections of the Bible.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Petersen. *Op. cit.*, 2.

⁵ Israel’s wisdom tradition did not develop in a vacuum. It was part of a much broader movement within the ancient Near Eastern World. Reference to the sages of foreign nations can be found throughout the biblical text itself; usually within passages that depict an Israelite outstripping a non-Israelite in wisdom. Job had a reputation that surpassed that of all the sages of the East (Jb 1, 3). Senior. *Op. Cit.*, 232.

⁶ Petersen. *Op. Cit.*, 2.

God, indeed, fear of the Lord leads to wisdom⁷ (Prov 9:10; 1:7; Job 28:28; Ps 111:10; Sir 1:16). The books are also concerned on how to understand the secrets of the universe.⁸

In this category of canonical Wisdom Literature, there are various differences arising from the different literary genres and from the different meanings of “wisdom in antiquity”. Proverbs consist of the specific genres of “wisdom poem, instruction and proverbs”; Job is a conversation on “divine justice” set within a story; Qohelet is (among other things) a “royal pseudo-autobiography”; Sirach is a book containing a collection of useful hints and the book of wisdom is a “philosophical exhortation” to a way of life.⁹

Personification of wisdom¹⁰ is also characteristic of wisdom literature. Wisdom is personified as a lady. According to Murphy, “she is the divine summons issued in and through creation, who finds her delight among the humans God has created (8:31). She is a “communication of God, through creation, to human beings”.¹¹ The key texts are Job 28, Prov 1, 8, 9; Sir 24; Wis 7-9; Bar 3: 9-4:4.

The subject matter of Wisdom Literature can also be described according to kinds: “judicial”,¹² “nature”,¹³ “theological wisdom”¹⁴ and “experiential wisdom”. “Experiential wisdom” is the most extensive and common category. It is a human response to environment and an attempt to understand and cope with it. The wise (sages)

⁷ DeSilva David, “The Wisdom of Ben Sira: Honour, Shame, and the maintenance of the values of a Minority Culture.” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 58, 3 (1996): 444.

⁸ Petersen. *Op. Cit.*, 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ We are dealing with a personification not a person or hypostasis within the divinity. Literary personification is not rare in the Bible (cf., Prov 20:1), but the case of Lady Wisdom is unique in its intensity and scope. Murphy. *Op. Cit.*, 450.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² As when Solomon prayed for and received a “listening heart” (1Kgs 3: 9, 12) - this would have been part of the training of royal counsellors (Ahiathophel in 2 Sam 15:34). Murphy. *Op. Cit.*, 447.

¹³ *Ibid.* A knowledge of which is attributed to Solomon (1 Kgs 4: 33) and which is illustrated in Prov 30: 15-33 and Job 38-41.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* This is knowledge in which the sages reflected more intensely on the nature of Wisdom (Prov. 8; Sir 24).

reflect on a wide area of life in order to provide insights into the way things are and the way they should be. Their lessons consist of simple observations as well as moral exhortations.¹⁵ The Epistle of James fits in this category of moral exhortations.

In Comparison with the “commandments of the Torah”, their teaching deals with the “grey area of life” that deals with “formation of character”. In the formation of character, “Control of the tongue and of all the appetites is the ideal”.¹⁶

1.2 Use of Speech in Proverbs 15:1-2, 4, 7, 23, 26, 28, and Sirach 5: 11, 12, 15; 6:1; 28: 13-26¹⁷

Prov 15:1-2.¹⁸ In these three verses, it is evident that “the quality and manner of one’s speech are part of its power and can have profound effects”.¹⁹

15:1. This verse focuses on human interrelationships, with the aim to show that people use its twofold dimensions.²⁰ A harsh word inflicts pain in another person (cf., 10:22; Gen 3:16) “but also embody the speakers pain.” A gentle answer on the other hand “embodies the speaker’s calm and hearing presence”.²¹

15:2. This verse naturally follows verse one. The one who is wise or endowed with wisdom speaks in the proper manner (cf. v. 28). A wise person also comes up with

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ I will insert these scripture references in the footnotes to make is easier for the reader, to have the references at hand. All quotations are from “The Revised Standard Version.”

¹⁸ “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise dispenses knowledge, but the mouth of fools pour out folly.”

¹⁹ Thomas P. Mc Creesh, A Commentary on Proverbs. New Jerome biblical Commentary (New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs, 1990), 458.

²⁰ Leander E. Keck, The New Interpreter’s Bible. Vol. 5, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 148. On speech, cf. also Prov 25: 11-12, 15).

²¹ Cf. Prov 12:18; 14:29; 15:4, 18).

insight and the expertise that a particular situation, task or problem needs (10:31; 13:16; 15:7).²²

15:4.²³ Verse four continues with the ideas introduced in vv. 1-2. “The NRSV rendering “gentle” translates the same adjective “*marpe*” as “tranquil” in 14:30, its root connotes “health”.²⁴ It suggests that “a gentle tongue has the power to heal and lift up the spirit”.²⁵ This idea is also found in Prov 12:18.²⁶ The “tree of life”²⁷ mentioned in this verse is a tree that brings healing. Cf. Ezek 47:12, Rev 22:2. The opposite situation is a tongue whose talk is “twisted”. Such persistence in holding to what is wrong in speech twists reality and causes damage (11:3; 19:13 uses the same root). In this case despair in another’s inmost being (see v. 13, Ps 51:17; Isa 65:14). The psalmist prays against foes that cause harm with their tongue (Ps 5:9; 12:1-4; 73:8-9). In this verse, we see a duality of the tongue or the theme of double-mindedness.²⁸ It is in this dichotomy that the power of the tongue is inherent.

15:7.²⁹ This verse gives an antithetic comparison of the wise and the fool. “The wise person knows how to communicate wisdom; the fool is too confused to be of

²² Keck. *Op. Cit.*, 148.

²³ “A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.”

²⁴ Keck. *Op. Cit.*, 148.

²⁵ Bernard Dom Orchard, ed., A Catholic commentary of Scripture (New York: Thomas Nelson and sons Ltd, 1953), 482.

²⁶ “There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”

²⁷ This is a common image known throughout the ANE. In the Bible, outside of proverbs, this tree is present only at the beginning and the end of all things, in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:9; 3:22, 24) and in the city-garden of the new creation, where it bears its fruit in season (cf. Ps 1:3) and its leaves are for the “healing of the nations” (Rev 2:7; 22: 2, 14). In Prov, the phrase has become a metaphor for the good life offered by wisdom (3:18; 11:30; 15:4) or even by hope fulfilled (13: 12). Keck. *Op. Cit.*, 53.

²⁸ Keck. *Op. Cit.*, 148.

²⁹ “The lips of the wise spread knowledge; not so the minds of fools.”

assistance to others”.³⁰ The wise person communicates wisdom on account on his/her proper use of speech. This is contrasted with fools who are not steadfast.

15:23.³¹ Verse 23 is one of many sayings on speech whose agent is the tongue. An answer suggests the interrelational character of speech in community (See vv.1, 28; 18:21; 24:26; 25:11). There is “joy” in speech that fits the moment.³² The author portrays the wise man as one who delights in well-chosen words and well-shaped graceful speeches.

15:26.³³ “Evil plans” or “thoughts”. For similar thoughts, cf. 12:5; 24: 8). These ideas go against God’s nature and reasons for reality. Inner plans and outer speech (“words”) are often contrasted (vv. 14, 28, 26:23-25), as are various expressions for good and evil. “Pleasant” or “gracious” words stand in opposition to “evil plans”, and “abomination” is opposed to what is pure and pleasing in the Lord’s eyes. The root for “gracious” or “pleasant” *n'm* is related to what is good (Gen 49:15; Job 36: 11) and lovely (Cant 1:16; 7:6). Thus wisdom’s ways are pleasant (3:17), and the attributes of “gracious” words are associated with wisdom (16:24; 24:13-14). The “words” (“promises”) of the Lord are pure (Ps 12:6).³⁴

15:28.³⁵ This verse is antithetic. It considers what comes from the mouth of the righteous and that of the wicked. The righteous is given credit because he/she considers how to answer fittingly, cf. (16:1, 26:4-5). “This inner capacity to reflect, rather than react emotionally, defines the wise person and produces the sort of speech described in

³⁰ Orchard. *Op. Cit.*, 482.

³¹ “To make an apt answer is joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is!”

³² Keck. *Op. Cit.*, 151.

³³ “The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord, the words of the pure are pleasing to Him”.

³⁴ Keck. *Op. Cit.*, 151.

³⁵ “The mind of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things”.

vv. 1a, 2a and 23a".³⁶ A malicious mouth, however, "pours out harmful words like un restrained waters (17: 14; 19: 28; see also 1:23). "Evil" here is plural - "evil things" perhaps because the behaviour and speech of the wicked are not one sort of evil, but diverse. "Heart" and "mouth" are emblems of the inner and outer person. What is on the inside will come out (1Sam 24:13).³⁷

Sir 5:11.³⁸ In this verse, Ben Sira recommends swiftness in hearing but a considered response³⁹, one "long in spirit" (the same advice can be found in Jas 1:19). I will discuss this verse in details while treating James. The necessity of hearing correctly before answering is advocated as we find it expressed in Prov 18:13. Qohelet will later contrast a patient person with an arrogant individual in Eccl 7:8.⁴⁰

The one who takes time to listen and only gives a reflective response is held responsible for whatever he she says. A person who just talks without any reflection will probably have a lot of contradictions in most of what he/she says.

5:12.⁴¹ Verse 12 naturally follows verse 11. It emphasizes on the importance of owning what one says; giving a reflective response. It is better not to talk/ respond/give answer at all, attested by the phrase "put your hand over your mouth" than to give an answer when one is not ready. This verse lays emphasis on the importance of being in control of what we say.⁴²

³⁶Keck. *Op. Cit.*, 151. This could be compared with the folk advice to "count to ten" before responding to an affront (cf. also 15:18; 19:11).

³⁷Keck. *Op. Cit.*, 152.

³⁸"Be quick to hear, and be deliberate in answering".

³⁹Alexander A. Di Lella. *Wisdom of Ben-Sira. Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Vol. 6. (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 936.

⁴⁰Keck. *Op. Cit.*, 680.

⁴¹"If you have understanding, answer your neighbour; but if not, put your hand on your mouth".

⁴²The expression "to put the hand to the mouth" indicates humility and respect in the presence of gentleness, perhaps also the lack of an adequate response. This symbolic gesture is mentioned in Job 21:5;

5:14.⁴³ Verse 14 warns against double-tongued. The double-tongued person is like a “thief in robbing innocent people of their good reputation”. In the same way, speech with integrity brings honour, so also deceitful remarks cause shame. The aim of such dichotomy is described in the language of “hunting lying in wait”. Therefore, the “double-tongued person lays a trap for the unwary”.⁴⁴

28:13-26.⁴⁵ Verse 13 addresses gossips and double-tongued. Curse to them for they have destroyed so many. Gossips spread like forest fire. A gossip from one part of a locality can reach the other end within a very short while. Once a gossip is uttered, it is out of control of the utterer. It has power to destroy many.

Gossips and the double-tongue destroy domestic peace. In v. 14, the “Greek Codex Alexandrinus” has “third tongue”, a technical expression found in rabbinic literature for slander that according to Arak “slays three people: the slanderer, the slandered, and the person who believes the slanderer”.⁴⁶

29:9; 40:4 and elsewhere in the OT (Prov 30:32, Mic 7:16; Wis 8:12). Like so much in wisdom literature, it also appears in Egyptian texts. Cf. Keck. *Op. Cit.*, 680.

⁴³ “Do not be called a slanderer, and do not lie in ambush with your tongue; for shame comes to the thief, and severe condemnation to the double-tongued”.

⁴⁴Keck. *Op. Cit.*, 680. The significant terms in 5:14 comprise an ABB’ A’ pattern i.e., a chiasmic structure: double-tongued/shame/reproach/double-tongued.

⁴⁵ It is worthwhile quoting this text in full for it expresses the power of the tongue in such an elaborate way. “Curse the whisperer and deceiver, for he has destroyed many who were at peace. Slander has shaken many, and scattered them from nation to nation, and destroyed strong cities, and overturned the houses of great men. Slander has driven away courageous women, and deprived them of the fruit of their toil. Whoever pays heed to slander will not find rest, nor will he settle down in peace. The blow of the whip raises a welt, but a blow of the tongue crushes the bones. Many have fallen by the edge of the sword, but not so many as have fallen because of the tongue. Happy is the man who is protected from it, who has not exposed to its anger, who has not borne its yoke, and has not been bound with its fetters; for its yoke is a yoke of iron, and its fetters are fetters of bronze; its death is an evil death, and Hades is preferable to it. It will not be master over the godly, and they will not be burned in its flame. Those who forsake the Lord will fall into its power; it will burn among them and will not be put out. It will be sent out against them like a lion; like a leopard, it will mangle them. See that you fence in your property with horns, lock up your silver and gold, make balances and scales for your words, and make a door and a bolt for your mouth. Beware lest you err with your tongue, lest you fall before him who lies in wait”.

⁴⁶ Keck. *Op. Cit.*, 772.

Ben Sira in a specific way talks about the break of marriages because of “slanderous allegations about innocent wives” (v.15). He compares “slander with an iron yoke” (cf. Jer 28:14). A particular example of the effect of slander comes from the time of Herod the great, “who believed such reports on his action to the point of near madness.”⁴⁷

Going back to the earlier teaching about retribution, Ben Sira “claims immunity from slanderer’s power for the godly but asserts that wild animals will pounce on the wicked”. As a warning against succumbing to the temptation to slander others, he advises putting a strong bolt on the door of one’s mouth and using accurate scales to weigh every utterance prior to speaking.⁴⁸ The images of a yoke and chains also occur in Prov 6:24-25, 29-30 with regard to the discipline of wisdom.

1.3 Theology of the Wisdom Texts on the Use of Speech

The proverb and Sirach texts I have treated above distinguish between the wise and foolish. The wise person is the one who chooses his/her words well before speaking, words that bring healing to those who hear them.⁴⁹ A powerful image is used in Prov 15: 4 of a “soothing tongue” which is metaphorically called “a tree of life”. To have wisdom was considered living in accord with God’s order that prevailed in creation.⁵⁰

The wise person is the one who lived according to the way God ordered things. It was understood as promoting peace and harmony inherent in God’s ordered creation

⁴⁷ *Ibid*

⁴⁸ *Ibid*.

⁴⁹ Victor Zinkuratire, ed., *The African Bible* (Nairobi: Paulines Pub. Africa, 1997), 1026.

⁵⁰ The Israelites came to believe that their God was the great God, the one responsible for the world and everything in it. Observing the regularity in creation, they concluded that there was some kind of order inherent in nature itself. They believed that, if they could discern how this order operated and then harmonize their lives with it, they would be successful and at peace.

hurting somebody through speech, was interfering with peace and harmony within the person, hence disrupting God's order. The author of proverbs focuses on giving instructions geared to a proper way of living. He calls for pursuit of wisdom, usually personified as Lady Wisdom.⁵¹ I tend to perceive this Lady Wisdom as a quality inherent in God.⁵² It is God communicating to us through his wisdom. With the New Testament revelation, we encounter Jesus as the Wisdom of the Father and through whom all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.⁵³

The wise person then is the one who seeks to be guided by the wisdom of God and on our case as Christians, guided by Jesus Christ through His Spirit. The one who is guided by the wisdom of God is concerned about enhancing good relationships, which in effect promotes peace willed by the creator God.⁵⁴

The foolish person is the one who lacks wisdom; one who does not promote order in what God has created. Rather than working at promoting good relationship with other individuals a fool is a cause of disharmony and hurt breaks.⁵⁵

The vital question to pose at this moment is, "where is wisdom to be found?" "Wisdom is inaccessible; only God knows where it is, because God saw it, "appraised it, gave it its setting, knew it through and through". How then do we come to acquire, gain

⁵¹ Kathleen O'Connor, *The Wisdom Literature* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1988), 59. She continues to say that at the centre of the wisdom literature stands a beautiful and alluring woman. She is Lady Wisdom or Wisdom Woman.

⁵² *Ibid.* Her connections extend to every part of reality. She is closely joined to the created world; she is an intimate friend of God; She delights in the company of human beings. No aspect of reality is closed off from her. She is the centre of all creation.

⁵³ Cf. Col 1:15-20.

⁵⁴ Kathleen. *Op. Cit.*, 61.

⁵⁵ Murphy. *Op. Cit.*, 450.

wisdom? The only approach to it available for humans is fear of the Lord, which is indeed the beginning of wisdom.⁵⁶

Conclusion

God helps those who help themselves. Any person who consciously desires to live according to God's order will be in a position to put his/her speech in order, to be responsible and accountable for every word he/she utters. His or her speech will be directed toward the good of others and hence will avoid loose words that hurt and even kill the person of the other.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER TWO

POWER OF THE TONGUE IN THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will focus on three main parts namely: use of speech in James, exegesis of Jas 3:1-12 (the main pericope of my work) and theology of this text of James. I will then draw a short conclusion to sum up the chapter. The general use of speech in James provides a good background to Jas 3:1-12 which per se treats the power of the tongue. The power of the tongue is made manifest in what it is capable of both negatively and positively. The greatest contrast that is given Jas 3:1-12 is that of a tongue that blesses God and curses human beings created in the image and likeness of God. Such is the peril if the tongue. The section on the theology of James in 3:1-12 is meant to draw the moral teaching that James wants to offer to his readers. Let us now journey through these sections.

2.1 Use of Speech in James

The epistle of James, though called a letter, has none of the characteristic features of a real letter⁵⁷ except the address. It belongs to the “genre of parenthesis or exhortation”⁵⁸ and is concerned almost exclusively with “ethical conduct”.

⁵⁷Leander E. Keck, ed., *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol XII. Epistle of James. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 179.

⁵⁸Senior. *Op. Cit.*, 548. The Greek moral exhortation was concerned with traditional values rather than with theory. It could take the form of short maxims or of essays. James' first chapter has such maxims, less connected to each other than to other sections of the composition. The maxims state themes that are

James is concerned with practical Christianity namely practical wisdom of right behaviour⁵⁹. James' concern in use of speech is in this line. He promotes the use of speech that is meant for the well being of members in a given community. Speech is very fundamental in any community for enhancing relationships. Usually, there is peace and harmony in a community if there is proper/healthy communication. Whenever there is improper use of speech in any given community, tensions start building and this is detrimental to a good community living.

Throughout the letter of James, he addresses the proper and improper use of speech geared to a practical Christianity. I will single out various examples that James regards as negative or improper use of speech.

In 1:13, he is against those who claim that temptations come from God.⁶⁰ In this case, a person tries to avoid what is rooted in him/her by blaming it on God. James is against such use of speech.

In 2:3-6, James is against greetings that are flattering to the rich and scornful of the poor.⁶¹ It is James' conviction that the rich and poor alike should be given the respect due them as persons and not through their status in society.⁶² Though the poor are

developed in the essays of chapters 2-5. Notice, for, example how "control of the tongue" in 1, 26 is extended by 3:1-12. Paraenesis also attached its moral maxims to the imitation of models. In James, the figures of Abraham, Rahab, Job and Elijah provide examples from scripture of the practical virtue James encourages.

⁵⁹ R. Kugelman, *James and Jude*. (Wilmington, 1980), 20.

⁶⁰Victor Zinkuratire, ed., *The African Bible*. (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1999), 2054. Jm 1:14, each person is tempted when he/she is lured and enticed by his/her own desire. In addition, we tend not to own up for our faults, mistakes and sins (cf. Gen 3:12-13, 1Cor 10:13; Sir 15:11-20).

⁶¹ Keck. *Op. Cit.*, 203. Poor: It pointed to the socially powerless, scarcely able to maintain their honour and dignity, while "rich" or "wealthy", as a rule meant "avaricious, greedy". For James there is no possibility of sincere piety without social justice. Cf. Zinkuratire, 2055, for the same idea.

⁶² Tollesfson Kenneth, "The Epistle of James as Dialectical Discourse." *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 27, 2 (1997): 65.

economically disadvantaged, they are rich in faith.⁶³ In a Christian society, the rich and poor are called to compliment each other than creating divisions through worldly measures. James is indignant with the careless religious discourse of those who wish well for the poor but do not help them (Jas 2:16).⁶⁴ Practical Christianity entails merging our words with our actions. If a dichotomy between the two exists, our words become empty and vain. James emphasizes this idea in 2:18 where he criticizes the superficial speech of those who claim to have faith even without deeds.⁶⁵ Faith without deeds-good works is dead as James attests latter in 2v.26.

In 4:11, James is against a speech that is judgmental and slanders another person.⁶⁶ James points out that slander implies a judgment of one's neighbour. The slanderer⁶⁷ sits in self-righteous judgment and condemns his victims. Thus, he violates the law of love of the neighbour that, together with the law of love of God, sums up the entire law.

⁶³ God's choice of the poor to be rich in faith and to receive the kingdom is illustrated in the story of Abraham (Gen 11:27ff) and in the prayer of Jesus (Matt 11:25ff; Luke 12:32; Luke 6:20) cf. Jas 2:21 ff.

⁶⁴Kugelman. *Op. Cit.*, 29. The believer whose faith is not expressed in deeds of love for the neighbour is like a person who dismisses the hungry and the naked with a hypocritical wish that their suffering be alleviated but does not move a finger to help them. Such a believer is a pious fraud.

⁶⁵ Keck. *Op. Cit.*, 203. Cf., also Kugelman. *Op. Cit.*, 28. James knows that Christianity is rooted in faith. He has spoken of faith in 1:3 and 2:1. In chapter one, he contrasted the doers of the word to the hearers only. Now he contrasts "faith only" with a faith that manifests itself in deeds.

⁶⁶ Zinkuratire. *Op. Cit.*, 2058. This prohibition addresses once more the use of the tongue, a persistent pre-occupation of the letter (1:19. 26; 2:12. 16-17; 3:2. 9-10). Here James condemns slander. The Greek expression can mean any loud or boisterous speech against another (cf. Pss 50:20; 101:5; Wis 1:11 and appears as such in NT vice lists (cf. Rom 1:30; 2Cor 12:20). To judge others is to criticize the Law stated in 2:8, and to set oneself above it. However, there is only one lawgiver who is the judge and that is God whose position must not be usurped.

⁶⁷Kugelman. *Op. Cit.*, 52. He arrogantly presumes to put himself in the place of God who is both lawgiver and judge. The slanderer forgets completely his creatureliness, what he really is, and a miserable, sinful human being who must stand before the judgment seat of God his creator. Verses 11 and 12 are a stinging condemnation of the self-righteous and arrogant presumption of those who are causing discord and wrangling in the Christian communities. Cf. also Tollefson. *Op. Cit.*, 66

In 4:13, James warns against “boasting of one’s plans”.⁶⁸ Perhaps James is thinking of Jesus’ parable about the foolish farmer who, when he had an abundant harvest, decided to build larger barns to store his grain and goods and planned to enjoy his wealth.⁶⁹ James’ concern is of such a person whose “loose” tongue leads him/her to talk in a way that excludes dependence on God as if all life revolved around him/her. Such is an improper use of speech.

Finally but not the least, James warns against grumbling against a brother in 5:9. The Greek verb used here *στενάζειν* means “groan” “complain of distress”. James advocates/advice that we ought to cultivate patience in general and we ought not to blame one another for our unmerited distress, for we should recognise that it is part of the inevitable and temporary evil of the present age.⁷⁰

The above-discussed verses through the epistle of James are implicit illustrations of improper use of speech as James presents them. There is though, one explicit verse 1:26 on the improper use of speech. I will now focus on it before discussing examples of the proper use of speech as James presents it.

1:26 *Δοκεῖ θρησκὸς εἶναι* (thinks himself to be religious). This is a condition of first class (*εἰ δοκεῖ*). *θρησκὸς* (This word is of uncertain etymology. It is perhaps from *θροεομαι*, to mutter forms of prayer). It is a predicate nominative after *εἶναι*, agreeing with the Subject of *δοκεῖ* (either “he seems” or “he thinks”). This source of self-

⁶⁸Zinkuratire. *Op. Cit.*, 2059. During the Hellenistic Period, Jews frequently engaged in trade. Financial profit was the normal motive for survival. Successful trade brought wealth (Ezek 28:5), but it could breed violence and corruption (Ezek 28:16) leading to destruction (Ezek 28:18).

⁶⁹“And I will say to my soul, soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry” But God said to him; “Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:19-21).

⁷⁰J. H. Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of James*. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 38 George Street, Latest Impression, 1991), 297.

deception is in saying and doing. It is worth noting that the word *θησκόσ* is found nowhere else except in Lexicons. Hatch (*Essays in Biblical Greek*, pp 55-57) shows that it refers to the external observances of public worship, such as Church attendance, almsgiving, prayer, fasting (Mt 6:1-18). It is the pharisaic element in Christian worship.⁷¹

Μή χλιναγωγῶν γλῶσσαν (while he bridles not his tongue). "Not bridling his own tongue". This echoes verse 19 and the metaphor is repeated in 3:12. This is the earliest known example of the compound *χλιναγωγέω* (*χάλινος*, bridle) *αγο*, to lead. The picture is that of a man putting the bridle in his mouth, not that of another. A similar metaphor of muszling (*φίμω*) one's mouth is found in Matt 22:12 ἐφιμώθη. *Ἀπατῶν* (deceives). This is the present active participle from *ἀπατη* (deceit). He plays a trick on himself. *θησκόσ* (religion), is the later form of *θησκη* (Herodotus) from *θησκόσ* above. It means religious worship in its external observances, religious exercise or discipline, but not to the exclusion of reverence. In the N.T. we have it also in Acts 26:5 of Judaism and in Col 2:18 of worshipping angels. It is vain (*μάταιος*, feminine form same as masculine) or empty. It comes to nothing. Pretence of religion without control of the tongue is worthless.⁷²

Against these negative examples of use of speech, James also expresses his optimism by showing the positive functions of speech in the faith community (5:12-20). Christians in the faith community are called to be truthful and sincere in their relations with others. All double-talk,⁷³ the divine judge will condemn equivocation and lying. Jas 5:12 and Matt 5:34-37 condemn the practice prevalent in their contemporary Judaism of

⁷¹ Michael, Bushell and Michael D. Tan. Edts. Bible Works, Version 4, Electronic Version, on the Epistle of James, Robertson's Word Pictures, Broadman Press, 1998.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Kugelman. *Op. cit.*, 62. James' admonition against swearing is similar both in content and wording to Jesus' prohibition in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:34-37).

needless swearing, of buttressing almost every statement in ordinary conversation with an oath.⁷⁴ James warns against any kind of unnecessary swearing. Frequent swearing promoted lying, cheating, “falsehood and swindling”.⁷⁵ It diluted the meaning and importance attached to swearing when it was necessary.

In verses 13-18, James is advocating a use of tongue or speech in praying and praising God. The prayer is directed to God and to one another especially to the sick. In verse 16, James encourages them to confess their sins to one another. To me, this is a very positive use of speech that reveals the inner life of a person. This of course entails trust from members in the same community.⁷⁶ Vv. 17 and 18 continue the theme of use of speech for prayer⁷⁷, prayer that is meant for the well being of members in the Christian community. Vv. 19 and 20 that end this section deal with fraternal correction, which is a task of all and for the benefit of all in the community (Matt 18:15; 1John 5:16).⁷⁸ It is through honest dialogue-spirit of sharing in a community that brings this to fruition.

James had alluded to this in 1:19⁷⁹ when he encourages on being quick to hear and slow to speak. Since this is an explicit example on how James advises on appositive use of speech, it needs deserves a more detailed treatment.

“*Ιστε* (know this). Probably the perfect active indicative (literary form as in Eph 5:5; Heb 12:17, unless both are imperative, while in Jas 4:4 we have *ιδατε*, the usual

⁷⁴James’ favourite Old Testament writing, the book of Sirach, inveighs against this practice: “Do not accustom your mouth to oaths, and do not habitually utter the name of the Holy One; for as a servant who is continually examined under torture will not lack bruises, so also the man who always swears and utters the Name will not be cleansed from sin. A man who swears many oaths will be filled with iniquity, and the scourge will not leave his house.... If he has sworn needlessly, he will not be justified, for his house will be filled with calamities” (Sir 23:9-11).

⁷⁵William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*. (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1965), 4th impression, 147.

⁷⁶Kugelman. *Op. Cit.*, 61-71.

⁷⁷Tollefson. *Op. Cit.*, 66

⁷⁸Barclay. *Op. Cit.*, 150-159.

⁷⁹“Know this, my beloved brethren. Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger”.

vernacular *koine* perfect indicative). The imperative uses only "ἵστε and only the context can decide which it is." *Εστο.* (let be) is imperative. *Ταχὺς εἰς τὸ ἀκοῦσαι* (swift to hear). For this use of *εἰς τὸ* with the infinitive after an adjective, see 1Thess 4:9. For *εἰς τὸ* after adjectives see Rom 16:19. The picture points to listening to the word of truth (v.15) and is aimed against violent and disputatious speech (Chap. 3:1-12). The Greek moralists often urge a quick and attentive ear. *Βραδὺς εἰς τὸ λαλῆσαι* (slow to speak) same construction and same ingressive aorist active infinitive, slow to begin speaking, not slow while speaking. *Βραδὺς εἰς ὀργήν* (slow to anger). He drops the infinitive here, but he probably means that slowness to speak up when angry will tend to curb the anger.⁸⁰

Being quick to listen/ hear and slow to speak gives someone time to be reflective responsible for what he/she says. However, in normal circumstances, this does not always happen. More often than not, the opposite is true. Let us then focus on what uncontrolled tongue/speech is capable of bringing forth.

2.2 A Detailed Exegesis of James 3:1-12⁸¹

Delimitation of the Text

Terminus ad aquo (the pericope begins with 3:1)

Terminus ad quem (the pericope ends with 3:12)

The **remote context** of this pericope is 1:19-5:12. This a large section dealing with "exhortations and warnings." 1:19-27 deal with "doers of the word." 2:1-13 focuses on "sin of partiality". 2:14-26 treats "faith and works." 3:1-12, the pericope of our

⁸⁰Bushell. *Op. Cit.*

⁸¹ Each verse of this exegetical section will appear in the footnote. This is to facilitate an easier grasp of the Greek used in the exegesis. All the quotations are from "The Revised Standard Version".

concern treats the “power of the tongue.” 3:13-18 deals with “true wisdom.” 4:1-12 explores “causes of division in a community” while 4:13-17 deals with “warning against presumption. 5:1-6 gives a warning to the rich and finally 5:7-12 treats “patience and oaths.” This exposition is meant to help us situate the pericope of our concern (3:1-12), which is both an exhortation and a warning. James exhorts his readers on a wise use of speech and warns against dangers of sins of the tongue.

The **immediate context** is 2:14-3:18. The theme of doublemindedness appears in this section, i.e., a person claiming to have faith without works. A similar theme is even more pronounced in the pericope of concern 3:1-12, where we encounter a tongue that blesses God and curses the human beings created in the image and likeness of God. 3:13-18, focuses on true wisdom. This discussion of true wisdom is related to the previous reflection on the role of the teacher as one who is in control of his speech. The qualities of the wise man endowed from above are detailed (17-18; cf. Gal 5:22—23), in contrast to the qualities of earthbound wisdom (14-16; cf. 2Cor 12:20).

3:1.⁸² μὴ πολλοὶ διδάσκαλοι γίνεσθε **“Be not many teachers”**

Here we see a prohibition with *μὴ* and present middle imperative of *γίνομαι* i.e. “Stop becoming many teachers”(so many of you).⁸³ Few should assume the responsibility of teaching.⁸⁴ *πολλοί* is to be understood either as subject or as in apposition with the proper subject (in that case *ὑμεῖς*); *διδάσκαλοι* is the predicate.⁸⁵

⁸² “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, for you know the we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness”.

⁸³Bushell. *Op. Cit.* There is thus a complaint that too many of the Jewish Christians were attempting to teach what they did not clearly comprehend. There was a call for wise teachers (v.13ff.), not for foolish ones.

⁸⁴ Laws Sophie. *Epistle of James, Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Vol. 3. (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 626.

⁸⁵Bushell. *Op. Cit.*

Διδάκαλος means rabbi (teacher) c.f., Matt 23:8, Luke 2:46, John 1:38; 20:16; 3:10). The teachers mentioned here, presumably in Jewish Christian Churches, would have obviously held a place like rabbis in the synagogues.⁸⁶

The teacher is here treated as the wise man (3:13-18) as he ought to be. James counts himself a teacher (*λημφόμεσα v.1*) and addresses the moral dangers of the teacher's life with special insistence on the liability to disputes based on ones opinions (vv. 13-18).⁸⁷

Teachers were important from the earliest times. In the Antiochean Church, they are put at the same position with the prophets who sent out Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey (Acts 13:1). Paul rates them 2nd from apostles and prophets (1Cor 12:28, Eph 4:11).⁸⁸

Teachers ordinarily worked with a congregation. They instructed converts to Christianity on the gospel and Christian faith. "It was the teacher's awe-inspiring responsibility that he could put a stamp of his own faith and knowledge onto those who were entering the church for the first time".⁸⁹

In the New Testament, we have evidence of teachers who failed in their responsibility and duty, who became false teachers.⁹⁰ Leaving aside the issue of false

⁸⁶Ropes. *Op. Cit.*, 227. This would apply both to the dignity of the position and to a part of the duties of the rabbis. Among Christians the term was used both for a teacher resident in a Church (Acts 13:1, Antioch) and for a travelling missionary (*Didache* 11:1ff; 13:2; 15:2). Nothing in the text indicates whether James' reference was limited to one or the other of these classes.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁸⁸ Barclay. *Op. Cit.*, 93. The apostles and the prophets were forever on the move. Their field was the whole Church; and they did not stay long in any one congregation.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* There were teachers who tried to turn Christianity into another kind of Judaism and who tried to introduce circumcision and the keeping of the law (Acts 15:14). There were teachers who taught others, but who themselves lived out nothing of the truth which they taught, teachers whose life was a contradiction of their instruction, and who did nothing but bring dishonour on the faith they represented (Rom 2:17-29). There were some who tried to teach before they themselves knew anything (1Tim 1:6,7). There were false teachers who would pander to the false desires of the crowd (2Tim 4:3).

teachers, James is convinced that teaching is a “dangerous occupation for any person”. His or her instrument is speech and his or her agent is the tongue. As Ropes puts it, James was concerned to point out “the responsibility of teachers and the dangerous character of the instrument they have to use”.⁹¹

In line with what has been said, every teacher should avoid the following two dangers:

- A teacher must take care that he/she teaches the truth and not his/her own opinions or even his/her own prejudices.⁹²
- The teacher must never get into the position when his/her scholars and students cannot hear what he/she says for listening to what he/she is.⁹³

3:2.⁹⁴ Πολλά “In many things”. This is an accusative neuter plural either cognate with *πταίομεν* or accusative of general reference. On *πταίομεν*, (Stumble) see on 2:10. James includes himself in this list of stumblers.⁹⁵

πολλά γὰρ πταίομεν ἅπαντες. This provides the reason (*γάρ*) for the warning of v.1. “All people stumble,⁹⁶ and of all faults those of the tongue are the hardest to avoid”. It then logically follows that the profession of a teacher is “the most difficult mode of life conceivable”.⁹⁷ The advice about proper and improper use of speech is frequent in the

⁹¹ Ropes, *Op. Cit.*, 226.

⁹² Cf. Barclay, 94. It is fatally easy for any teacher to distort the truth, to teach, not God’s version, but his/her version of the truth. He/she must have every care that he/she does not contradict his/her teaching by his/her life, and that he/she does not continually in effect have to be saying, not, “Do as I do,” but, “Do as I say.”

⁹³ It is James’ warning that the teacher has of his own choice entered into a special office; and is, therefore under a special responsibility; and is therefore under the greater condemnation, if he/she fails in it. The people to whom James was writing coveted the prestige, the place, and the honour of the teacher; James demanded that they should never forget the responsibility of being a teacher.

⁹⁴ “For we all make mistakes, and if any one makes no mistakes in whatever he says he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also”.

⁹⁵ Bushell. *Op. Cit.*

⁹⁶ This is a well-known theme in scripture (cf., Eccl 7:20; Sir 19:16; 1John 1:8, 10; 2Esdr 8:35).

⁹⁷ Ropes, *Op. Cit.*, 228.

Old Testament literature (cf. Prov 15:1-4, 7, 23, 26, 28; Sir 5:11-6:1; 28:13-28) among others.⁹⁸

A perfect man (*τέλειος ἀνὴρ*) “A perfect husband” also, because ἀνὴρ is husband as well as man in distinction from woman (*γύνη*), seemingly what is implied is that the wife is free to test her husband by this rule of the tongue.⁹⁹

In this second verse, James presents two ideas characteristic in Jewish thought and literature.

- There is no person in this world that does not sin in one-way or another.¹⁰⁰
- There is no sin into which it is easier to fall, and no sin that has graver consequences than the sin of the tongue.¹⁰¹

Once a word is spoken out, it is no longer within the control of the one who spoke it. It is gone. Its effect can be very severe depending on how it is perceived by those out there. A rumour is very hard to stamp out.

“ To bridle the whole body also” (*χαλιναγωγῆσαι καὶ ὅλον τὸ σῶμα*) see 1:26 for this rare verb applied to the tongue (*γλωσσάν*). In this case, the same metaphor is used to apply to the whole body just as the mouth leads horses. “The man follows his own mouth whether he controls the bridle therein (1:26) or someone else holds the reins.” Here James simply means that a person who bridles his tongue does not error in speech

⁹⁸ Raymond, Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy, eds. *The New Jerome Biblical commentary* (New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs, 1990), 913.

⁹⁹ Bushell. *Op. Cit.* Cf. also Tollefson. *Op Cit.*, 65.

¹⁰⁰ For only an ideally perfect person would be able to resist temptation: and, apart from Jesus, such a person never existed, for “all have sinned” Rom 3:23.

¹⁰¹ Jesus Himself warned people that they would give account for every word they spoke. “By thy words you shall be justified; and by thy words you shall be condemned” (Matt 12: 36, 37).

and is able to control his whole body with all its passion. In other words, a person who has gained control of his/her tongue has gained mastery of his/her life.¹⁰²

3:3¹⁰³ “If we put” (*εἰ βάλλομεν*). With this construction of sentence, condition of the first class is assumed as true. “The horses bridle” (*τῶν ἵππων τοὺς λαλινούς*). “ἵππων” is the genitive plural of ἵππος, horse. In the New Testament, it is used only here except in the Apocalypse. It is put first because it is the first of the several examples of the “power” and the “peril” of the tongue. This is the only New Testament example of χαλινός, which is an old word for bridle, from χαλαω meaning to slacken, to let down, except in Rev. 14: 20.¹⁰⁴

“That they may obey us” (*εἰς τὸ πείθεσθαι αὐτοὺς ἡμῖν*). Present middle infinitive of πείθω with εἰς τὸ as purpose clause with the dative ἡμῖν after πείθεσθαι and αὐτοὺς the accusative of general reference. “We turn about” (*μετάγομεν*). Present active indicative of μετάγω, late compound to change the direction (*μετά αγω*), to guide, in New Testament only here and verse 4. The body of the horse follows his mouth, guided by the bridle.¹⁰⁵

3:4¹⁰⁶ “The Ship also” (*καὶ τὰ πλοῖα*). πλοῖα is an old word from πλεῶ. Which means to sail cf., Matt 4:21. Here we have another metaphor like “horses” (*ἵπποι*). “Though they are so great” (*πηλικαῦτα ὄντα*). ὄντα is a concessive participle of εἶμι. The quantitative pronoun *πηλικούτος* appears in the New Testament only here, 2Cor

¹⁰² Bushell. *Op. Cit.*

¹⁰³ “If we put bits into the mouths of horses that they may obey us, we guide their whole bodies.”

¹⁰⁴ “. . . and the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the wine press, as high as a horses’s bridle, for one thousand six hundred stadia.”

¹⁰⁵ Bushell. *Op. Cit.*

¹⁰⁶ “Look at the ships also; though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs.”

1:10, Heb 2: 3 and Rev. 16:18. James seems to be amazed at the big size of ships that are driven by the small rudder.¹⁰⁷

“And are driven” (*καὶ ἐλαυνόμενα*). *ἐλαύομενα* is the present passive participle of *ἐλαύνω*, an old verb, and in this sense as in 2Pet 2:17 means “rowing” cf., Mark 6:48; John 6:19...”Rough” (*σκληρόν*). This is an old adjective from the verb *σκελλω*, to dry up, harsh, stiff, hard (Matt 25:24). “Are yet turned” (*μετάγεται*). This is the present passive indicative of the same verb, *μετάγω*, in verse 3. James is fond of repeating words (cf. 1:13f; 2:14, 16; 2:21, 25). “By a very small rudder” (*ὑπο ἐλαχίστου πηδαλίου*). (from *πηδόν*, the blade of an oar) is an old word, which is used here and in Acts 27:40 in the relative superlative as in 1Cor 4:3. “The impulse” (*ἡ ὄρμη*). It is an old word for rapid, violent motion, here referring to the hand that worked the rudder. “Of the steersman” (*τοῦ εὐθύνοτος*). This is the present active genitive articular participle of *εὐθύνω*, an old verb that means to make straight (from *εὐθύς*, straight, level, Mark 1:3). It is also used of the shepherd, the charioteer, and today it would apply to the chauffeur.¹⁰⁸

“Wills” (*βούλεται*). This is present middle indicative of *βούλομαι*, common verb “to will”. Here intention of the steersman lies back of the impact of the hand on the rudder.¹⁰⁹

Important to note in these two verses 3 and 4 is that the images that James uses: ships, winds and rudders are “real” and “literal”. He has in mind the ships on the Sea of Galilee. The bridle and bit, the rudder and helm, are analogies, not allegories.¹¹⁰ They are

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*. If only James had only seen the modern mammoth ships. But the ship on which Paul went to Malta carried 276 persons (Acts 27:37).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*. The twin figure of the control of horse and ship are frequently found together in later Greek writers.

¹⁰⁹ Ropes, *Op. Cit.*, 231.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Barclay, 98. Horses, ships, and winds were familiar enough in James’ word; the analogy in these, and in fire-kindling, in the huge contrast between the size of the originating element and the magnitude of the effect achieved, as between the size of the tongue and its potency. In the case of horses

compared to the tongue, because despite being small (See 5.a) “both are instruments of the will (of rider and the navigator).¹¹¹

The three are alike in one thing, their potential power. Each is comparatively small and yet each produces great effect. The tongue also is very small in comparison with the entire body and yet produces great effect. By putting bits in horse’s mouth, we can control its whole body. In the same way James says if we can control our tongues, we can control the whole body and indeed one’s whole life. Like wise if we fail to control the tongue, the whole body becomes unruly and in deed one’s whole life.¹¹² The rudder is very small and yet it directs the course of the whole ship. In the same manner the tongue, though small can direct the course of the whole body and life of a person.¹¹³

At this juncture, what is James advocating? Is he advocating silence than speech? Is he pleading for a Trappist life, where speech is forbidden? To me, James is advocating for the control of the tongue, namely reflecting on what one wants to say before saying it.¹¹⁴ “Abstention from anything is never a complete substitute for control in the use of it. And James is not pleading for a cowardly silence, but for a “wise use of speech.”¹¹⁵

3:5¹¹⁶ “A little member” (*μικρὸν μέλος*). *Μέλος* is a common word for members of the human body (cf., 1Cor 12:12ff; Rom 6:13ff). “Boasts great things” (*μεγάλα αὐχεῖ*). This is the present indicative of *αὐχεω*, an old verb, only here in the

and ships the Greek verb literally means, “we make horses change their direction,” and, “The ships are made to change their course.” i.e., big as they are, we turn them this way and that by such little means.

¹¹¹ Brown. *Op. Cit.*, 913.

¹¹² Barclay. *Op. Cit.*, 98.

¹¹³ Philo had called the mind the Charioteer and steersman of man’s life; it is when the mind controls every word and emotion, and when the mind is itself controlled by Christ, that life is safe.

¹¹⁴ Aristippus the Greek had a wise saying, “The conqueror of pleasure is not the man who never uses pleasure. He is the man who uses pleasure as a rider guides a horse or a steersman directs a ship, and so directs them wherever he wishes.

¹¹⁵ Barclay. *Op. Cit.*, 99.

¹¹⁶ “So the tongue is a little member and boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire!”

New Testament. *Μεγάλα* is used in contrast with *μικρόν*. “How much-how (*ἡλίκου..ηλίκην*). Here we have the same relative form for two indirect questions together, “What-sized fire kindles what-sized forest?” The verb *ἀνάπτει* is present active indicative of *ἀνάπτω*, to set fire to, to kindle. “*ἴλην* is in accusative case, object of *ἀνάπτει* and occurs here only in New Testament, though old word for forest, wood.¹¹⁷ Worth noting is that forest fire were common in ancient times as it is now. In most cases, small sparks carelessly thrown caused them. This is the point James is making here. Just as a spark carelessly thrown causes a great havoc, catastrophe of forest fire, so much so is a word carelessly spoken. It can cause a great damage to whom it is directed.

3:6.¹¹⁸ “The tongue is a Fire” (*ἡ γλῶσσοσα πῦρ*). This translation is fitting because there is no article with *πῦρ*. The same metaphor of fire is applied to the tongue in Prov 16:27; 26:18-22; Sir. 28:22. The picture of the tongue as fire is a Jewish picture.¹¹⁹ We could give two reasons why the damage that the tongue can do is like a fire.

- It is wide-ranging. The tongue is a dangerous weapon that can damage from a distance. “A chance word dropped in one end of the country or a town can finish up by bringing damage and grief and hurt and heartbreak at the other.¹²⁰

¹⁷ Bushell. *Op. Cit.*

¹⁸ “And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is an unrighteous world among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the cycle of nature, and set on fire by hell.”

¹⁹ “An ungodly person digs up evil”, says the writer of the proverbs, “and in his life there is a burning fire” Prov 16: 27. “As pitch and tow, so a hasty contention kindles fire” Eccl 28:11.

¹²⁰ The Jewish Rabbis had this picture: “Life and death are in the hand of the tongue. Has the tongue a hand? No, but as the hand kills, so the tongue. The hand kills only at close quarters; the tongue is called an arrow because it kills at a distance, an arrow kills at forty or fifty paces, but of the tongue, it is said (Ps 63:9) “they have set their mouth in heaven and their tongue goes through the earth.” It ranges over the whole earth and reaches to heaven.” That, indeed, is the peril of the tongue. A person can ward off a blow with the hand, for the striker must be in his presence to strike him. But a man can drop a malicious word, or repeat a scandalous and untrue story, about someone who stays hundred of miles away, and cause infinite damage and harm. The very range the tongue can reach is the tongue’s greatest power.

- It is quite uncontrollable. “In the tinder-dry wood and scrub of Palestine, a forest fire was almost immediately out of control’. No human person can control the damage caused by the tongue. There are three things that never come back:
 - An arrow that is spent
 - The word that is spoken
 - The opportunity that is lost.

Once a word is spoken, it is no longer within the control of he/she who uttered it. It is gone. A rumour is so impossible a thing to kill. James’ advice then is that before a person speaks, let him/her think/reflect on what to say, because “although he/she cannot get it back, he/she will certainly answer for it.”¹²¹

“The world of iniquity” (*ὁ κόσμος τῆς ἀδικίας*). According to Ropes, this is a difficult phrase to understand as it stands.¹²² To attempt to grasp what James has in mind, it is vital to explore the possible meanings of *κόσμος*, and then deduce what is closest to our context. *Κόσμος* can have two meanings:

- It can mean adornment, i.e., “the wheel of evil”, but the sense “the wheel” for *ὁ κόσμοι* is attested only in Prov 17: 6. This thought, does not seem to fit on our pericope well.¹²³
- *Κόσμος*. it can mean world with more than a suggestion or not necessarily referring to the evil world. This is the picture we get in most parts of the New Testament.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Barclay. *Op. Cit.*, 101.

¹²² Ropes. *Op. Cit.*, 233.

¹²³ *Ibid.* 234

¹²⁴ The world cannot receive the Spirit (John 14:17). Jesus manifests Himself to the disciples, but not to the world (John 14:22). The world hates Him, and therefore hates his disciples (John 15:18, 19).

When *κόσμος* is used in this perspective, it means the world without God, “the world in its ignorance of, and often its hostility to God”. Following this deduction, when we call the tongue the evil *κόσμος*, it means that the tongue is that part of the body that is without God. “An uncontrollable tongue is like a world hostile to, and ignorant of, God. It is the part of us that disobeys, defies, and rebels against God.”¹²⁵

“The wheel of nature” (*τὸν τροχὸν γενέσεως*). This is “one of the hardest passages in the Bible” (Hort), to interpret.¹²⁶ As Ropes points out, the importance of this phrase lies not in finding its exact meaning but because it is not a common Jewish way of expression and therefore suggests contact with Greek thought.¹²⁷

To interpret its intended meaning by James, it is worthwhile exploring how the ancients used the picture of the wheel to describe life in four different ways.

- **The wheel is a circle.** From this perspective, the wheel of life could mean “life in totality”.¹²⁸
- **The wheel is always moving.** Any particular point on the wheel is constantly moving up and down. The wheel of life from this understanding would refer to the ups and downs of life, the chances and the changes.¹²⁹
- **The wheel is circular.** The wheel keeps turning round and round on its axis. From this view, the wheel came to refer to the cyclical repetition of life, the

Jesus' kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). Paul condemns the wisdom of this world (1Cor 1:20). The Christians must not be conformed to this world (Rom 12:2).

¹²⁵ Barclay. *Op. Cit.*, 102.

¹²⁶ Cf. Ropes, 235. The grammarians distinguish between *τροχός*, “course” *τροχός*. wheel”, but in view of the derived senses of the latter word the distinction is unimportant.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 236.

¹²⁸ Cf. Ropes, 237. Everything that is contained in life and living. Ropes, 237.

¹²⁹ J.B Adamson, *James, The Man and his Message*. (Grand Rapids, 1986), 143. In this sense, the phrase very nearly means the wheel of fortune always changing and always variable.

unchanging coming and going of the generations, an existence that is constantly repetitious.¹³⁰

- **The phrase had one particular technical use.** The religion of the Orphics held a belief in birth and rebirth. Human soul according to this belief was constantly being born and dying and being reborn again. The aim of life was to purify person through birth and rebirth until he/she reaches the state of endless and infinite being. Hence, the Orphic devotee who has achieved can say, "I have flown out of the sorrowful, weary wheel." In this understanding, the wheel of life could mean "**the weary treadmill of constant reincarnation.**"¹³¹

It is entirely unlikely that James knew anything about Orphic reincarnation. It is not at all likely that any Christian would think in terms of a circular and cyclical life that was not going anywhere. From the four ways of addressing life, the phrase most probably means "the wheel of life and living". James seems to say that the tongue can kindle a devastating fire that can destroy all life; and the tongue itself is kindled with the very fire of hell¹³². Here lies the power of the tongue namely its capacity to destroy, to harm another, if not controlled in the same way a forest fire does.

3:7.¹³³ *Γάρ* explains how the extreme statement of v.6 is justified. The dreadful character of the tongue comes from its inability to tame it.¹³⁴

¹³⁰Cf. Ropes, *Op. Cit.*, 237. Hence arose various derived senses of both "wheel" and "circle". Thus, the Rhetoricians and grammarians speak of the "circle of the period," and of the closed "circle" of an argument: a verse beginning and ending with the same word was called a "circle", and so was a continuous series of myths (especially the "epic cycle").

¹³¹Cf. Ropes, *Op. Cit.*, 102. To think of the tongue as enlaming the "wheel" of metempsychosis is nonsense, and, on the other side, nothing could be more opposed to James' robust doctrine of moral responsibility than the idea of a fatalistic circle.

¹³²Barclay. *Op. Cit.*, 103.

¹³³"For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by humankind."

¹³⁴Ropes. *Op. Cit.*, 240.

Θηρίων τε καὶ πετελιῶν ἑρπετῶν τε καὶ ἐναλίω. The four types of animals are biblical. They appear in the same order in Gen.2:9; Deut 4:17-18 and 1Kgs 4:33. “Beasts” as used in the New Testament refers only to undomesticated animals. It is believed that both pagans and Hebrews took pride in man’s Lordship over the animal world.¹³⁵ As in Ps 8:6-8, a recurring thought in biblical and secular literature of the dominion man has over the animal world comprises both aspects of his power:

- Over what he depends on for food e.g., trapping, hunting etc.
- Over what he domesticates, either for food or for work e.g. horses, chicken, sheep cows etc.¹³⁶

The domesticating of wild animals is a sign of the messianic Age (Isa 11: 6-9)

3:8.¹³⁷ While human beings have been able to tame all sorts of animals; James here emphatically says human beings are unable to discipline their own tongues... *ἰοῦ θανατηφόρου*. “deadly poison”. This is probably in parallel with the poison of the serpents tongue (cf., Ps 140:3, Rom 3:13).¹³⁸ It is like the restless death-bringing tongue of the asp before it strikes.¹³⁹ The figure of poison, a point worth noting, was common among the Greeks used “for various hateful things”.¹⁴⁰ Man’s ingenuity, as James sees it, has tamed every wild creature; the tongue alone is beyond taming. To tame means to control, and to render useful and beneficial; that, says James, is what no person by his/her own unaided efforts has ever been able to do with the tongue.

¹³⁵ Mayor, J.B. *The Epistle of James*. 3rd ed. London, 1990, 115.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* 322.

¹³⁷ “But no human being can tame the tongue- a restless evil, full of deadly poison.”

¹³⁸ Ropes., 241.

¹³⁹ Bushell. *Op. Cit.*

¹⁴⁰ Ropes. *Op.Cit.*, 241.

I think James is a real pessimist in this verse. While it is difficult to tame, control one's tongue; it is not all the same impossible. On our own, it may seem so but with the Grace of God through the Holy Spirit, it is possible. As Christians, we do not live by ourselves. The Holy Spirit has been given to us though he cannot work in us without our cooperation. Once we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us in what we say, it is then possible to gain mastery over what we say.

3:9¹⁴¹ Verse 9 continues the thought of verse 8. Even good use of the tongue now gives no security against misuse later. This is why we have to constantly invoke the help of the Holy Spirit. *ἐν αὐτῇ*, “This instrumental use of *ἐν* is not merely Hebraistic, but appears in late *Koine* writers cf., Rom 15:6”.¹⁴² “We bless” (*εὐλογοῦμεν*). Present active indicative of *εὐλογεω*, old verb from *εὐλογος* (a good word, *εὖ λόγος*), as in Luke 1:64 of God. According to Hort, “this is the highest function of speech”.¹⁴³ “The Lord and Father” (*τὸν Κύριον καὶ πατέρα*). These two terms are applied to God.

“Curse we” (*καταρώμεθα*). This is the Present middle indicative of the old compound verb *κατάραομαι*, to curse (from *κατάρα* a curse), as in Luke 6:28. “Which are made after the likeness of God” (*τοὺς καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν θεοῦ γεγονότας*), 2nd perfect articular participle of *γίνομαι* and *ὁμοίωσις*, old word from *ὁμοίω* (to make like), making like, here only in New Testament (from Gen 1:26; 9:6), the usual word being *ὁμοιωμα*, resemblance (Phil 2:7). It is this image of God that sets man above the beasts cf., 2Cor 3:18”.¹⁴⁴ Here, we encounter the antithetic nature of the tongue. This clear

¹⁴¹ “With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who are made in the likeness of God.”

¹⁴² W. F. Moulton, and A. S. Geden, *Concordance to the Greek Testament*. 4th ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 38 George Street, 1967), 11ff, 61ff, and 104.

¹⁴³ Bushell. *Op. Cit.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*

contrast was not made by the wisdom texts. This idea is unique to James. I consider it as his legacy because it shows in extreme opposites, the power of the tongue.

When James insists on the tongue, he does not distinguish it from the person using it. He is not blaming it as a different entity from the person using it. He is very much in line with Hebrew thought from whom the tongue “was a part of the ego”. You could not separate an organ from the person.¹⁴⁵

To bless God is the most sublime function of the human tongue. Three times a day, the devout Jew recited “the eighteen Benedictions, “with their ending, **blessed art thou, O God.**” But the very tongue that blesses can also curse. It is because of man’s nearness to God, as Adamson puts it quoting Mitton, which makes the cursing of him a still greater offence to God who made him. This is what has been referred to as a double-tongue in Jewish wisdom literature cf., Sir 5:9, 6:1 and Sir 28:13.¹⁴⁶

3:10¹⁴⁷ “Ought not” (*οὐ χρή*). This impersonal verb is used only here (from *χρᾶω*) in the New Testament. It is more like *πρέπει*. “It is appropriate” than *δει* (it is necessary). “It is a moral incongruity, for blessing and cursing to come out of the same mouth”. “So to be” *οὕτως γίνεσθαι*. “so to keep on happening”, not just “to be”. This is the, “present middle infinitive of *γίνομαι*.”¹⁴⁸

In the strongest possible Greek, James condemns the tongue’s ambivalent defiance of any uniformity of law in its character and behaviour (cf., 1:13; 3:7-12). This phrase is rather like our “it is not right!” spoken with all the force of protesting condemnation. Bunyan’s character “talkative”, described as “a saint abroad and a devil at

¹⁴⁵ Adamson. *Op. Cit.*, 146.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁴⁷ “From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brethren, this ought not to be so.”

¹⁴⁸ Bushell. *Op. Cit.*

home,” is a good illustration of what James is condemning of the tongue’s fundamental ambivalence the rabbis were also well aware: “From the tongue comes good and bad, the best and the worst” Lev.33.¹⁴⁹

3:11¹⁵⁰ “The contrary example of springs and trees. What takes place with the tongue would be impossible in nature”.¹⁵¹ “The fountain” (ἡ πηγὴ). Old word for spring (John 4: 14). “Opening”(οπή). This is an old word for “fissure in the earth”, in New Testament it is found only here and in Heb 11:38 (caves). “Send forth”(βρύει) is an old verb, to bubble up, to gush forth, that is found only here N.T. “The use of μήτι shows that a negative answer is expected in this rhetorical question.” “The sweet and the bitter” (τὸ γλυκὺ καὶ τὸ πικρὸν). They are Cognate accusatives with (βρύει). They “separate articles to distinguish sharply the two things”. “The neuter singular articular adjective is a common way of presenting a quality. Γλυκὺς is an old adjective (in NT only here and Rev. 10:9), the opposite of πικρὸν (from old root, to cut, to prick), in N.T. only here and verse 14 (sharp, harsh)”.¹⁵²

3:12.¹⁵³ “Can?” (μὴ δύναται). A negative answer is expected. For a similar metaphor, cf. Matt. 7:16ff. “Fig tree”(συκῆ) is a common word, cf. (Matt 21:19f). “Figs” (σῦκα). This is a ripe fruit of (ἡ συκη). Olives (ἐλαίας). “Elsewhere in the N.T. for olive-trees as Matt.21:1 “Vine”(ἄμπελος), old word (Matt 26:29). “Salt water” (άλυκον), old adjective from αλας (αλας- salt), only here in N.T.”.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ Adamson. *Op. Cit.*, 147.

¹⁵⁰ “Does a spring pour forth from the same opening fresh water and brackish?”

¹⁵¹ For the same thought, Enoch 2-5:4.

¹⁵² Bushell. *Op. Cit.*

¹⁵³ “Can a fig tree, my brethren, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.”

¹⁵⁴ Bushell. *Op. Cit.*

The fig, the olive and the vine are the three common natural products of warm countries about the Mediterranean.¹⁵⁵ “No application of these illustrations is made, and James turns abruptly to another aspect of the matter”. The passage well demonstrates his “vividness and fertility of illustration, as well as his method of popular suggestiveness, rather than systematic development of the thought”.¹⁵⁶

According to Barclay, a tongue that blesses God and curses human beings created in his image and likeness is something unnatural. It is as unnatural as for a stream to gush out both fresh and salt water, or as for a bush to bear opposite kinds of fruit. “Unnatural and wrong such things may be, but they are nonetheless tragically common”.¹⁵⁷

2.3 THEOLOGY OF THIS TEXT OF JAMES

The theological implications of speech stand out in this James’ exhortation. In 3:9-12, he makes a contrast of the speech that “blesses God” with that which “curses human beings” who are made in God’s image! Here, James attacks the “two-minded” person, who thinks that it is possible to have a relationship with God that does not respect human obligations.¹⁵⁸ These verses are key in understanding James’ theology. As in 2:14-17, James emphasizes that “religious language” and “practical human care” must co-exist. Just like the same source does not yield two kinds of water, a Christian should not speak with two tongues. In the same way actions follow conviction, so should “speech conform to faith”.¹⁵⁹ This is James’ unique contribution.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Ropes, 243. There were salt spring or brine-pits on the shore of the Dead Sea, and the hot springs of Tiberias are described as bitter and salty.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁵⁷ Barclay. *Op. Cit.*, 105.

¹⁵⁸ Senior. *Op. Cit.*, 551.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*.

James directs this most of all to those who desire to be teachers in the faith community (3:1). If care is required for all speech, it is even more necessary for those who shape the minds of others according to the measure of God and not of the world.

CONCLUSION

While James presents a rather pessimistic view of our inability to control the tongue, our situation is not hopeless. We have the gift of the Holy Spirit who is present among us. He makes what appears impossible possible when we co-operate with Him. Since the tongue is so important an instrument of communication let us ask the guidance of the Holy Spirit whenever we use it.

CHAPTER THREE

USE OF SPEECH IN RELIGIOUS FORMATION

Introduction

This section covers three sub-topics namely: religious formators as teachers, the power of speech by religious formators and suggestions from James. In the main pericope of this paper, James addresses teachers in the early Church. These teachers were responsible for imparting faith to the new converts to Christianity. More than what they taught verbally, they were expected to be exemplary in the way they lived. Religious formators have a similar role of initiating young formatees to the spirituality of their respective congregations. They have a teaching role and hence qualify to be called teachers. Since they use speech in teaching, section two of this chapter covers the power of speech by the formators geared to explore how best formators could use speech profitably than in a destructive way. Finally, the third section draws some helpful suggestions from James on the use of the tongue in speech.

3.1 Religious formators as teachers

The terminology teacher has a wide range of meanings. A teacher may for example be termed as one who gives instructions on something. For example, a person may give another instructions on how to bake a cake. Once the learner has followed the instructions to the letter, he/she has acquired new knowledge to do something new. A teacher can also mean, a person who imparts knowledge on another by way of words (instructions) and example. For example, a person who wants to learn carpentry may do so by being an apprentice to an experienced carpenter. More than receiving instructions

from the experienced carpenter, the apprentice learns by seeing the “how” to make a chair, table etc and learning practically how to do it.

A teacher can also be understood as one who puts something forward as a fact or as a principle. Jesus, for example, taught forgiveness, i.e., that we should forgive our enemies. This type of teaching has a dual character in it. The first aspect is the teaching of the principle while the second is explicitly living out the principle. Jesus taught that we should forgive our enemies and he demonstrated it by especially forgiving his executioners.¹⁶⁰ He merged theory with practice and this made his teaching very profound.

The religious formators according to my perception fall under this category. Religious formators are entrusted with a special task of teaching a certain Christian way of life, initiated by different religious founders and foundresses. They themselves have learned their particular ways of life from the older members of their Orders, Congregations, and Societies of Apostolic life. Their task has a dual character inherent in it. First and foremost, they must have integrated the spirituality of their particular way of life before teaching it to those aspiring to join them. Their greatest task then is to see to it that the kind of spirituality they intend to impart on their formatees is manifested in their own way of life.

In the early church, “teachers worked with a congregation and their supreme importance was that it must have been to them that the converts to Christianity were handed over for instruction in the facts of the Christian gospel, and for edification in the Christian faith. It was the teacher’s awe-inspiring responsibility that he could put the

¹⁶⁰ And when they came to the place that is called the skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on the right and one on the left. And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23: 33-34.)

stamp of his own faith and knowledge on those who were entering the Church for the first time”.¹⁶¹

While the ideal in teaching about a particular way of life is merging between words and deeds, it is not always an easy task. It is much easier to learn principles pertaining to a particular way of life, and reproduce them perfectly well to others while we remain unchanged by the principles. In the early Church, while there were teachers who lived what they taught, there were others who “taught others, but who themselves lived out nothing of the truth which they taught, teachers whose life was a contradiction of their instruction, and who did nothing but bring dishonour on the faith they represented.”¹⁶²

The same situation may happen with some religious formators who spend much time giving instructions about their particular way of life while they live contrary to the instructions. In this kind of scenario, it is very easy for formatees to see inconsistency between the formator’s words and his/her way of life. Once such dichotomy is evident, tension starts building in those who are formed because they lack a mentor on whom to base their life. This tension spreads even to the formator because the formatees start distancing themselves from the formator. Instead of cultivating a brother-to-brother or sister-to-sister relationship, we create a situation of superior-inferior relationship in which in most cases, formatees do not let their true selves shine out. They live in their disguised selves that conform to the “will” of the formator.

¹⁶¹ Barclay. *Op. Cit.*, 93

¹⁶² Barclay. *Op. Cit.*, 93. Cf. Rom 217-29.

3.2 The Power of Speech by Religious Formators

James, in the pericope we have treated is convinced that teaching is a very dangerous occupation for any human person. This is because, for every teacher the instrument for his/her work is speech and the agent is the tongue. James is concerned to point out “the responsibility of teachers and the dangerous character of the instrument they have to use”.¹⁶³

Each religious congregation bases its life on a particular Rule of life that is updated through constitutions. Religious formators are meant to teach/instruct on their particular way of life basing it on their Rule of life and updated through their constitutions. The instrument through which this is imparted is the speech whose agent is the tongue. While the principles governing each religious congregation are clearly stipulated, the manner of teaching them to formatees varies from one formator to another. This is because we are all endowed with different personalities that make us perceive life differently. The way a formator instructs his/her postulants or novices depends very much on his/her temperament. Some are rather calm, reflective and patient with their formatees. They journey with them slowly, being convinced of their gradual growth in integrating the spirituality of a particular way of life, not expecting “saints” overnight. Other formators are impatient with those in formation, especially when they perceive some as “slow learners”. This at times makes such formators react¹⁶⁴ to the formatees in question

¹⁶³ Barclay. *Op. Cit.*, 94.

¹⁶⁴ Reacting to a situation rather than acting shows that one is not in control of him/herself emotionally.

than acting¹⁶⁵ to different situations. Some formatees have been rebuked, talked to angrily because of being “slow learners”.

A certain formatee shared with me the difficult he was going through because of being a slow learner. His formator was mad with him and would utter every now and then hurting comments like; “you are here just to hide from challenges out there”, “Your being here is just seeking a more comfortable life,” “You seem to have no sense of direction in your life,’ You are just a disgrace to this community.” These comments were uttered not in a caring way but in a harsh way. Uttering any of the above comments takes only a second but the effect of these words may spread throughout the whole lifetime of the person to whom they were directed. The damage they cause may be irreparable. This reminds me of a story of a certain man who had gone gossiping falsely about another for quite some time. Later he came to his senses and realized what he was doing was not good. He decided to go for confession. The priest to whom he confessed, after hearing his confession, asked him to go kill a chicken, and bring all its feathers to him. After he had brought all the feathers, the priest asked him to let them free in the air. The lighter ones were blown very far. The priest then asked him to collect all the feathers together. The man was deeply perturbed and told the priest that it was impossible to gather the feathers together. The priest then got the opportunity to deliver his lesson that in the same way it is hard to gather the scattered feathers, the same it is to repair damage caused through gossiping. From then on the man vowed never to gossip about someone again.

A formator who loosely tells a formatee that he has joined religious life to seek for a better life, has no sense of direction etc, forgetting all the good intentions of seeking

¹⁶⁵ Acting to a situation shows that a person is in control of what is happening and does not allow a situation to act on him or her.

to serve the Lord in a particular way of life, may be so heart broken that he or she becomes disillusioned. Such disillusionment may affect a person for the remaining of his/her life. On the contrary, if the formatee is handled with respect and in a caring way told that religious life entails gradually “letting go” of our former attachments and gradually “letting God” unfold the new attachments He has for us, he would be put in a conducive atmosphere to new growth. In the example I have just given, it is evident that a formator can use a speech that destroys the formatee and likewise a speech that builds the formatee gradually.

It could be even more disturbing if the formatee sees the very things the formator is blaming him for present in him. The formatee would easily question within self, “If he/she is doing the very thing he/she is reprimanding me against, where does the truth lie? In this regard, I agree with Barclay when he says that a teacher “must always have every care that he is teaching the truth, and not his own opinions, or even his own prejudices. It is fatally easy for any teacher to distort the truth, to teach, not God’s version, but his version of the truth.”¹⁶⁶

With religious formators, it is vital that they teach the truth about their own congregations and not their own opinions, or even their own prejudices. It is very easy for any formator to distort the truth, to teach not God’s version, the founder’s/foundresse’s version but his/her version of the truth. We all have prejudices based on our cultural backgrounds. While this stands true, a distinction between “prejudice of authority”¹⁶⁷ and

¹⁶⁶ Barclay. *Op. Cit.*, 95.

¹⁶⁷ In Epistemology, prejudice of authority means a prior positive knowledge about some one or something. This makes it easier for a person to appreciate the thing or person when one comes across him/her.

“precipitous prejudice”¹⁶⁸ need to be made. One may have a positive prior knowledge about someone or something. This prior knowledge helps the person to appreciate the person and the thing better when he comes across them. On the contrary, one may have a negative prior knowledge about someone or something and he or she is blurred by that knowledge from discovering the truth about the person or thing in question. Such a person becomes a slave of his/her prejudice.

A religious formator who is guided by a precipitous prejudice in relation to a formatee may use speech in a way that may greatly damage the person of the formatee. This is made manifest in comments that are directed to the formatee unproportional to the error committed by him/her. On the other hand, a religious formator who uses prejudice of authority approaches each individual formatee from where he/she is. This entails a lot of attentive listening that will enable him/her journey with the formatee from where he/she is. With this approach, it is easy to see the progress in terms of growth of the formatee and the areas of more growth. In this kind of situation, the use of speech employed is one that promotes growth and its power is inherent in its capacity to promote growth in another person.

3.3 Suggestions From James

Religious formators are among other things, teachers of Christian faith. A part from the gospel truth they teach to their formatees they teach a particular aspect of Christian faith based on a particular spirituality of a particular congregation. It would be

¹⁶⁸ In Epistemology, this is a type of prejudice where a person has a negative prior knowledge of something or someone. This prevents a person from knowing the truth of the thing or the person when one comes across him/her.

the formator's awe-inspiring responsibility that he/she could put the stamp of his/her own faith and knowledge on those who are entering religious life for the first time.¹⁶⁹

A part from the theoretical knowledge that is an integral part in religious formation, a religious formator ought to merge his/her words with actions so that what he/she teaches can be seen in his/her life. This in itself entails an adequate preparation in formation work that provides a fertile ground for journeying with young formatees.¹⁷⁰ It is a preparation that helps the formator realize that he/she is assuming a responsibility where he/she constantly will need to use the tongue in speech in sharing ideas with the young formatees. A formator will then need to be so reflective that he/she takes care to harmonize between what he says and what he/she does.¹⁷¹

A formator should never get into the position when his/her formatees cannot hear what he/she says for listening to what he/she is.¹⁷² Actions speak louder than words. When there is evident dichotomy between the two, in a formator, the formatees would become very critical and rather lax in implementing what the formator suggests.¹⁷³ Some formatees may simply be loyalists following orders mechanically. A formator, then needs to realize that he/she has entered a special office and is therefore under a special responsibility, and is therefore under a greater condemnation if he/she fails in it. It is not

¹⁶⁹ Barclay, *Op. Cit.*, 93.

¹⁷⁰ In the early Church, there were some teachers who tried to teach before they themselves knew anything (1Tim 1:6, 7). There were false teachers who would pander to the false desires of the crowd (2 Tim 4:3).

¹⁷¹ A formator must take every care that he/she does not contradict his/her teaching by his/her life, and that he/she does not continually in effect have to be saying, not, "do as I do", but, "do as I say." Cf. Barclay, 95.

¹⁷² *Ibid.* As the Jewish Rabbis themselves said, "not learning but doing is the foundation, and he who multiplies words multiplies sin" (saying of the Fathers 1:18).

¹⁷³ This would make the formator become indignant and use harsh words that are destructive to the formatees and to him/herself. Some would simply avoid the formator's company and even in conversations say only what they believe the formator would like to hear.

simply a prestigious function in which he/she does things without a consideration of their repercussions.

In Jas 3:2, he points out that we all falter in speech.¹⁷⁴ There is a greater danger of sinning with the tongue for those who are constantly using it for teaching, and in our case, religious formators. James is calling for control of the tongue by giving two vivid examples of bits into the mouths of horses and rudder in a ship. We control the horses through the small bits in their mouth and likewise big ships through the small rudders. In the same way, if we control the tongue we control the entire person. James is calling for a wise use of the tongue/control of the tongue. This demands a discipline and a commitment in being selective in the words we use.

James advocates for a wise use of the tongue because in v 5b, he likens the tongue with a forest fire. A chance word dropped in one corner of a convent, friary, and community may circulate the whole community and cause a lot of damage by hurting personalities. The greatest danger in use of the tongue is that no person can control the damage of the tongue.¹⁷⁵ Once a word is spoken, there is no getting it back. There is nothing that is so impossible to kill as a rumour.¹⁷⁶

In religious formation, it is James' advice that, let a formator before he/she speaks, remember that once a word is spoken, it is gone from his/her control and let

¹⁷⁴ Jesus Himself warned people that they would give account for every word they spoke. "I tell you, on the Day of Judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matt 12:36, 37). Also, "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise dispenses knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly. A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit (Prov 15:1-2, 4).

¹⁷⁵ There are three things that do not come back: the spent arrow, the spoken word and the lost opportunity. Barclay. *Op. Cit.*, 100.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* There is nothing that is so impossible to obliterate as an idle and a malignant story.

him/her think/reflect before he/she speaks, because although he/she cannot get it back, he/she will most certainly answer for it.

In vv 9-12, James presents an antithetic nature of human tongue, a tongue that blesses God and curses the human beings created in His image and likeness. For James, this is so unnatural, as unnatural as a stream to which gush out both fresh and salt water, or a bush to bear opposite kinds of fruit. Unnatural and wrong such things may be, but they are none the less tragically common.¹⁷⁷ This kind of dichotomy of the tongue prevails in some religious formators. It would be a great tragedy if such dichotomy is evident in a formator's speech. I will end this discussion by quoting what John Bunyan tells of the Talkative.

He was a saint abroad and a devil at home. Many a man speaks with perfect courtesy to strangers and even preaches love and gentleness, and yet snaps with ungracious and impatient anger and irritability at his own family at home. It has not been unknown for a man to speak with piety on the Sunday, and to curse a squad of workers on the Monday. It has not been unknown for a man to utter the most pious sentiments one day, and to repeat the most questionable stories the next. It has not been unknown for a woman to speak with sweet graciousness at a religious meeting, and then to go outside to murder someone's reputation with a malicious and a gossiping tongue.¹⁷⁸

A person who does not use speech in a responsible way may end up living in a situation similar to the one described in the above quotation. This would be dangerous if it prevails in a religious formator. Rather than forming, he/she would be deforming those intended to be formed.

¹⁷⁷ Peter could say, "Though they fall away because of you, I will never fall away" (Matt 26:33) and that very same tongue of his could deny Jesus with oaths and curses (Matt 26:69-75). The same John who said, "little children, love one another" was the John who had once wished to call down fire from heaven in order to blast a Samaritan village out of existence (Luke 9:51-56). Even the tongues of the saints and the apostles could say very different things.

¹⁷⁸ Barclay. *Op. Cit.*, 105.

Conclusion

Religious formators like all human beings are not perfect and as we all falter with the tongue, they too falter. Mistakes are learning experiences and he/she who is open to learn from mistakes is always open to learning. A proper use of speech entails a commitment and such a commitment is indispensable to all especially those entrusted in teaching others.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

A person with a powerful gun who is journeying through a forest walks with confidence because he is aware of being in possession of a powerful weapon. The power of the gun is made visible when the gun is used e.g. in shooting dead an approaching wild animal. Once the power of gun is manifested in killing the wild animal, the damage caused to the wild life cannot be reverted. This analogy, by way of summary may help us understand the tongue as a power.

As we journey through life, we possess a powerful weapon, the tongue. The power of the tongue is made manifest in the words we speak. Once hurting words are directed toward someone, their effect is outside the control of the one who uttered them. They are not revertible. Their effect may affect a person's entire life. It is for this reason that James advocates for a control of what one says before saying it. What is not said is always within our control but once it is said, it is gone and gone forever. While this is true for all of us, it is even more for those who are entrusted with teaching and they have to constantly use the tongue in speech. For this reason, religious formators as teachers of a particular aspect of Christian faith in a more profound way have a greater responsibility. Whatever I have discussed in the paper especially in the application applies directly to me being entrusted by my congregation with the work of vocation promotion. This is formation in its most initial stage.

It is a call then to be wise in the use of the tongue, a weapon we all possess as we journey through life.

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