

TANGAZA COLLEGE
THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

JAVIER ANTONIO BARRIENTOS MARAVI, S.D.B.

**GOD'S INITIATIVE IN THE PRAXIS
OF THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION**
**An Interpretation of Hosea's Story and the Parables of
Luke 15**

Moderator

Rev. David Blowey, O.F.M. Conv.

A Long Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfilment
of the Requirements for the Bachelor of Sacred Theology

NAIROBI 2004

*To all those who were my confessors during the time of formation,
especially the late Fr. Alcides Fanello. S.D.B.*


ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my most sincere gratitude to Fr. David Blowey, O.F.M. Conv. for his help throughout the composition of this essay. My appreciation also goes to all the teachers of the biblical department who in different ways have given me many insights in regard to the topic I have developed.

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 reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor in Sacred Theology. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

Signed:



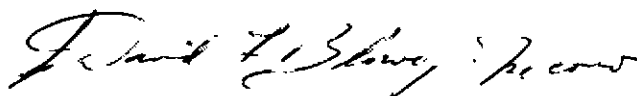
Name of the Student: Javier Antonio Barrientos Maravi. S.D.B.

Date:

21 Decm. 2004

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

Signed:



Name of the Supervisor: Rev. Fr. David Blowey. O.F.M. Conv.

Date:

21 December 2004

INTRODUCTION

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is the main reason for this research. In order to understand in a better way this sacrament of the mercy of God, I thought of presenting the biblical perspective of the reality behind our rituals and practices in regard to this sacrament, namely the grace of God that is offered to everyone and that precedes any act of conversion.

One of the main reasons why I chose this topic is the crisis I have seen in regard to this sacrament. Both penitents and ministers in some ways seem to have lost sight of the mysteries behind this sacrament.

I believe that the knowledge of the biblical background of this sacrament can help us to understand in a better way that God is at work in reconciling the world to himself through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit; and therefore the Sacrament of Reconciliation is the privileged place of meeting with the mercy of God. He is the one who prompts each one of us to come back to him to welcome us as he did with the prodigal son.

Obviously, this essay is not a thorough research on the biblical and theological foundations of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, not even a presentation of its fundamental truths, but a presentation of one basic truth: the initiative of God who, having entered into a relationship with humanity in the person of Jesus Christ, constantly looks towards humanity to restore us to his friendship and love any time

we go away from him deceived by the Evil One, as it happened to our forefathers in the text of Genesis.

In brief, the way I present this topic is as follows: in Chapter I the main purpose is to underline the story of Hosea as the best example of God's faithful love for Israel despite Israel's unfaithfulness. In Chapter II, the three stories of Luke chapter 15 give to the understanding of God's love for humanity an additional element: God's joy when a sinner repents. Finally, in Chapter III the main purpose is to compare the findings of Chapters I and II with the theology of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In order to do so, I briefly present some basic ideas regarding the sacrament.

One of the most amazing mysteries of all times is the creation of the world and human beings. I find particularly interesting the way God comes to meet humanity. He created man and woman to live in communion with him, nevertheless sin put a division between the Creator and the creatures. Despite this situation God has constantly been looking for ways to restore this communion with humanity. The history of Israel is, therefore, the most impressive story of this passionate God who loves humanity with steadfast love.

The story of Hosea a witness to this reality as follows. First, God's love for humanity is steadfast in spite of humanity's sinfulness. Second, humanity's sinfulness is clearly portrayed in Gomer's unfaithfulness. Third, God's merciful love for the people of Israel comes to rescue them from the misery they have reached by forgetting the Lord. Fourth, Israel needs to accept God's love and respond to him in faithfulness and truth.

Chapter II deals with God's love for his people that in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ has reached its best expression. In the same way that God visited his people in the person of Hosea, two thousand years ago in the person of Jesus Christ God the Father continued visiting his people prompting them to conversion.

God the Father who through Jesus Christ reaches out to sinners is the 'Good Shepherd' of Israel. Jesus who is the image of the Father showed sinners the depths of God's love for all. The novelty of Luke's gospel in regard to God's love for humanity is the element of 'joy' which the evangelist stresses in chapter 15.

Finally, Chapter III combines the themes of the first two chapters in order to present the Sacrament of Reconciliation as the up-to-date version of God's love for humanity. A brief presentation of this sacrament is done in order to acknowledge the Catholic understanding of this sacrament and its importance in the economy of salvation.

Putting together the main ideas of Chapters I and II it is possible to see that in the history of humanity everything is a gratuitous intervention of God on our behalf. God never gives up in inviting us to live in full communion with him. In the person of Jesus Christ, humanity has experienced the depths of God's loving mercy. After Jesus, the Church continues this work of mercy and administers the graces of God following Jesus' command to bind and loose.

The ministry of reconciliation as exercised by Jesus of Nazareth is a constant reminder to priests that God is at work through Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit moving people's hearts to come back to him and thus be reconciled with him and neighbour through the ministry of the Church.

Chapter I

Hosea's Experience: The Story of Yahweh, the God Who Looks after His People with Love

1. Introduction

The story of the people of Israel is the amazing unfolding of the relationship between Yahweh and his people. Yahweh is the faithful God who never ceases to look after his people. Throughout the history of the people of Israel, Yahweh has shown himself faithful and caring despite Israel's unfaithfulness.

What is of our concern in this chapter is the story of the prophet Hosea. God's faithful love for his people is shown at its best through the metaphor of Hosea's family life. The hardships Hosea goes through are analogous to what God experiences in the relationship with Israel. God's steadfast love cannot stand the ruin and moral depravation of his people, therefore, he looks for different ways to help Israel become aware of her wickedness and thus repent. God's demands for Israel will be met only when Israel will truly convert to the Lord out of love.

This chapter aims at showing God's merciful love for his people. Yahweh as experienced through Hosea's story takes the initiative in looking for his people who

have gone astray. He out of his merciful love constantly intervenes in the history of his people inviting them to come back to him. This understanding of God's merciful love will help us in Chapter III to perceive more clearly how God is at work in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

2. Yahweh and His Relationship with Humanity

2.1 Yahweh's Election of Israel

The history of humanity as read by the people of Israel¹ shows us how in creation God has freely made the world (Wis 11:23-26),² created human beings and entrusted them with the care of his creation (Gen 1:28; Wis 9:1). God intervened in Abraham's life and with him he has freely decided to enter into a more personal relationship with one people: Israel (Exod 34:27).³ After celebrating the covenant,⁴ the people of Israel decided to put God aside, and make themselves idols (Exod 24:3-8). Despite this situation God has kept faithful to his word and in the story of Hosea he showed the depths of his love.⁵

¹ The Bible is an expression of the Jewish outlook. Their history reveals the way Israelites saw their lives and history as guided by God's hand.

² In this essay the citations are taken from the Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise indicated.

³ The election of the people of Israel is a pure and gratuitous action of God so much so that the people cannot make any claim whatsoever (Deut 7:7-8). M. SCHMAUS, *Dogma*, III, 80.

⁴ "This was [...] the idea which enshrined the truth that the relationship between Yahweh and his people was one of the intimate fellowship and love" J. MAUCLINE - H.C. PHILLIPS, "The Book of Hosea", 568; see also J. COMAY, *Who Is Who*, 140; D. RYAN, "Hosea", 682.

⁵ In the context of the Old Testament, God's steadfast love, loyalty, faithfulness and goodness are better expressed in the word *חסד* which in the Hebrew Bible occurs 246 times. This noun has the correlative adjective *חסיד* which means pious, godly faithful. *חסד* is commonly used to describe the human behaviour toward one another, but all the same it also describes the attitudes of God toward his people. The exercise of the *חסד* in the Bible is what constitutes the essence of this covenant relationship.

The divine *חסד* sustains life, counteracting the powers of death that threatens human life. It also counteracts God's wrath, which in a way seems to run in two opposite directions, that is to say in front of human failure and sin, punishment and forgiveness meet, the latter being the one prevailing (Micah 7:18; Lam 3:31-32). Surprisingly enough God's *חסד* outdoes his wrath. Finally the bible describes God's love as enduring and persistent (Jer 31:3) unlike the human *חסד* that is compared with the dew that soon evaporates (Hosea 6:4). Cf. D.A. BAER - R.P. GORDON, "חסד", 44-54.

2.2 The Story of Hosea

The book of Hosea gives very little information about the life of the prophet. However, in the text there are some details that can give some valuable data.⁶

The book of Hosea keeps the format of a lawsuit or רִיב⁷ in which the two parties contending are Yahweh and Israel. The symbolic marriage of the prophet will be the best accusation of Israel's unfaithfulness.⁸ Following the imagery of marriage the prophet will utter two main accusations against Israel: infidelity⁹ and apostasy.¹⁰

Often the imagery of the prophetic literature is very rich in describing the situation of infidelity on the side of Israel.¹¹ The prophetic action of Hosea in marrying Gomer points out clearly the gratuity of God's love for Israel, and Gomer's behaviour, Israel's response to this love.¹²

⁶ "A Hebrew prophet in the Kingdom of Israel. Hosea the son of Beeri, prophesied in the northern kingdom of Israel for a period starting towards the end of the reign of Jeroboam II (783-43 BC) [...] Nothing is known about Hosea's personal life, except for his own revelations about his disastrous family life [...]" J. COMAY, *Who Is Who*, 139; see also, P.R. ACKROYD, "Hosea", 610.

⁷ It denotes strife, quarrel, or the act of conducting of a legal suit among the people. In some cases it has theological significance implying a pronouncement of judgement (Gen 13:7-8). Normally Yahweh has been the advocate of Israel, but in the case of the book of Hosea he is presented as the accuser of Israel. Cf. J.M. BRACKE, "רִיב", 1105.

⁸ P.A. KRUGER, "Theology of Hosea", 708.

⁹ D. RYAN, "Hosea", 683.

¹⁰ The existence of some welfare is sign of some political stability. Israel's prosperity, however, was due to some foreign alliances (Hos 8:9), symbol of Israel's infidelity. Israel no longer trusted in Yahweh who led them through the desert. Moreover, soon after celebrating the Covenant, Israel committed apostasy by following the Baals forgetting Yahweh. Cf. C.L. SEOW, "Book of Hosea", 294; D. RYAN, "Hosea", 677.

¹¹ When the people of Israel entered the Promised Land, they came in contact with the Canaanites, a nation that was very much attached to their traditions and especially their fertility cults. While the Canaanites were very dedicated to their way of worshipping their gods, especially through religious prostitution, the Israelites had a different religious outlook altogether. They had a covenant and a moral code to rule their way of living. However, this confrontation with the other religions was not a lucky one. It normally ended up being more what is called religious syncretism. Cf. H.D. BEEBY, *Grace Abounding*, 2.

¹² P.A. KRUGER, "Theology of Hosea", 712.

Therefore, in the context of the covenant, the existing relationship between God and Israel is more like that of the husband and wife.¹³ In this relationship, while the wife [Israel] has become wicked, defiling herself, the husband [Yahweh] continues to love his unfaithful wife, keeping his word as given in the covenant.¹⁴

The book of Hosea, then, concentrates on the sinful situation of Israel and the faithfulness of God who calls his people to repentance out of his merciful love (Hos 14:4), his faithfulness and integrity (Hos 11:8).¹⁵

3. God's Love for Israel

3.1 God's Command to Hosea: God's Initiative

Go take yourself a wife of harlotry [...] for the land commits great harlotry by forsaking the Lord (Hos 1:2).

God's command to Hosea to go and marry Gomer changed the whole perspective of Hosea's life. He seemed to have been living faithfully to God but that a certain moment in his life he was called to leave the peace, quiet and secrecy of his own family life, in order to denounce Israel's unfaithfulness to the covenant, and thus his own experience will portray the human understanding of God's love for Israel.¹⁶

This is not an easy experience for the prophet. He is called to live a situation of public shame and derision. God's command goes beyond the common human thinking in order to let people understand in which situation they have ended up by

¹³ H.D. BEEBY, *Grace Abounding*, 4; see also, J. COMAY, *Who Is Who*, 121; P.R. ACKROYD, "Hosea", 603.

¹⁴ Yahweh does not make up his mind like men; his nature is to be faithful. However, Hosea is presenting an anthropomorphic image of God where mixed feelings meet. On the one hand, anger is the reaction toward Israel's sin, but love is what moderates his anger. Cf. J.L. MCKENZIE, "Divine Passion in Osee", 179.

¹⁵ J.L. MCKENZIE, "Divine Passion in Osee", 179; P.A. KRUGER, "Theology of Hosea", 713.

¹⁶ C.L. SEOW, "The Book of Hosea", 295; P.A. KRUGER, "Theology of Hosea", 713.

forgetting the Lord and his love for Israel. God's suffering¹⁷ as portrayed in Hosea's experience is quite unique. It shows in a human way how deeply God has entered into a relationship with the people of Israel.¹⁸

3.2 Hosea's Experience

The book of Hosea offers a wonderful metaphor regarding God's faithful love for his people. It describes the unhappy marriage between Yahweh and Israel.¹⁹ Throughout the Old Testament marriage had a juridical nature which comprised also certain privileges and obligations.²⁰

Yahweh and Hosea share quite a common reality. They share similar situations, that is to say a deep love for their partner and a terrible deception and betrayal of that love.²¹ The way Hosea reacted in front of Gomer's behaviour was certainly not common for people of his time, especially in regard to the Jewish Law.²² This situation, therefore, reveals the integrity and authenticity of Hosea's vocation and mission as guided by Yahweh, thus his life can be better described as a living tragedy.²³ The importance of Hosea is that the story serves to show God's faithful love in contrast to Israel's faithlessness.

¹⁷ The natural anthropomorphic analogy of 'God suffering' does not imply alteration of his nature, 'changing' the Divine Essence. Nevertheless, since "God is capable of love God really suffers with the man who suffers [...]" N. FOGLIACCO, *The God of all Consolation*, 63.

¹⁸ D.J. MCCARTHY · R.E. MURPHY, "Hosea", 223.

¹⁹ H.D. BEEBY, *Grace Abounding*, 15; see also, W.R. HARPER, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 204; F.I. ANDERSEN · D.N. FREEDMAN, *Hosea*, 219.

²⁰ P.A. KRUGER, "Theology of Hosea", 712.

²¹ F.I. ANDERSEN · D.N. FREEDMAN, *Hosea*, 116; J.L. MCKENZIE, "Divine Passion in Osee", 178.

²² A woman could have been put to death if found in the act of adultery. The death penalty was considered one way to deal with adultery, numbered among the capital sins, as seen in Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22. Cf. H.H. COHN, "Adultery", 315; E.A. GOODFRIEND, "Adultery", 82.

²³ H.D. BEEBY, *Grace Abounding*, 15.

3.3 Fidelity to the Covenant

The covenant sealed at Sinai (Exod 24) meant that Israel was to enter into a relationship with Yahweh. The prosperity of Israel depended upon the observance of the covenant.²⁴ Therefore, the commandments aimed at making of Israel a holy nation (Exod 19:5-6), giving her some moral standards²⁵ which would make her different from other nations (Wis 18:4; Ezek 20:41).²⁶

A second image of the relationship between God and Israel is that of the suzerain of vassal states,²⁷ and perhaps this example can give a clearer understanding of God's complaint against Israel (Hos 2:8-9; 3:1; 4:6).

Apart from mutual responsibilities, the covenant celebrated between the suzerain and the vassal included an addition of blessings and curses. In the case of faithlessness on the side of the vassal the suzerain could call for a lawsuit, and if the relationship was declared broken that signified that the vassal was then susceptible to the curses included in the covenant.²⁸

Therefore, since God had shown himself ever faithful to the covenant, the fickleness of Israel would only mean ruin and death (Hos 7:13)²⁹ as the prophet foresaw (Hos 4:1-3.6.9). However, death was not the last word for the prophet since God by punishing his people meant only to call them back to the initial love they

²⁴ Integrity, mercy and knowledge of God are the words that describe the elements of the covenant. Israel will constantly be reminded of these words whenever she walks away from the Lord. Cf. F.I. ANDERSEN D.N. FREEDMAN, *Hosea*, 336.

²⁵ R.F. COLLINS, "Commandment", 1098.

²⁶ This special election of Israel did not mean an exclusive election. God's plan in choosing Israel was to make of Israel the depository of his law and the place of encounter between the human and the divine. Cf. C. DISANTE, *Jewish Prayer*, 124.

²⁷ The suzerain was none other than a 'greater' king who would offer protection to a vassal state or king, by sealing a covenant through which the vassal state had to meet some financial duties in exchange for security provided by the suzerain. Cf. N. NAAMAN, "Amarna Letters", 175-176.

²⁸ G.E. MENDENHALL G.A. HERION, "Covenant", 1191.

²⁹ C.L. SEOW, "The Book of Hosea", 297.

once had for him (Hos 2:14-15). After the punishment healing would come once Israel had converted (Hos 2:14-15), establishing an eternal covenant (Hos 2:19-20).³⁰

3.4 Analysis of the Context of Hosea

The main accusation of the prophet Hosea against Israel is her unfaithfulness to the covenant. Since at Sinai Israel promised to be faithful to God (Exod 24:7), now that Israel has come in contact with the Canaanites, her people have been seduced by the Baals: forgetting Yahweh they have lost their identity (Exod 19:5-6; Deut 7:6).³¹ This time, however, Israel was facing the greatest crisis she ever had since she entered into a covenantal relationship with Yahweh: Israel has apostatized (Hos 4:12-14; 11:2).³²

Hosea's prophetic action of taking Gomer as wife, according to God's command, denounced Israel's sins.³³ Gomer is the image of Israel, bound to the Lord by the covenant but totally given to the idols by her behaviour. However, the problem does not fall on the people only, but on their leaders, too.³⁴

Leaders and priests are confronted because if the people have reached that situation it is because their leaders and priests have forgotten the Law of the Lord (Hos 4:10). Therefore, the cause of Israel's defilement is mainly due to the lack of knowledge of God.

³⁰ The invitation to conversion closes the story with a note of hope for the people of Israel. Hosea's prophecy gives the people hope, a hope based on the certainty that Yahweh loves his people. Cf. D.J. MCCARTHY – R.E. MURPHY, "Hosea", 228.

³¹ P.A. KRUGER, "Theology of Hosea", 712.

³² J.L. MCKENZIE, "Divine Passion in Osee", 175; see also, D.J. MCCARTHY – R.E. MURPHY, "Hosea", 222.

³³ D.J. MCCARTHY – R.E. MURPHY, "Hosea", 224.

³⁴ C.L. SEOW, "The Book of Hosea", 296.

Now, since Israel has been unfaithful to the covenant (Hos 1:2), Yahweh is going to bring punishment to his people in order to restore and heal them;³⁵ therefore by bringing them to the desert (Hos 2:14 exile), Yahweh will make Israel understand that all the material wealth they enjoyed came from him alone (Hos 2:7-8).³⁶ So, the whole purpose of this castigation is to bring about the conversion of his Beloved.³⁷

4. Israel's Answer to God's Love

The forthcoming punishment as announced by Hosea (5:9-10; 9:7) brought the people to their senses.³⁸ The Israelites know that Yahweh can bring about punishment upon them and therefore in order to avoid this all they have to do is to repent and observe the covenant (Hos 6:1-3). However, the invitation to go back to the Lord may seem in a way too easy. Hosea 6:1 denotes a false repentance, since the people think that all that has been mentioned about the restoration of Israel would come automatically if Israel converted.³⁹

Nevertheless, the author's experience is different, Gomer [Israel] cannot do away with her bad habits overnight, therefore, Hosea 6:4 is an accusation of this superficial sort of repentance on the side of Israel.⁴⁰ Israel is not truly sorry and contrite, besides, the structures in which the people live are not so conducive so as to

³⁵ J.L. MCKENZIE, "Divine Passion in Osee", 172.

³⁶ H. CAZELLE, "The Problem of the Kings in Osee 8:4", 20.

³⁷ "And I will punish her for the feast days of the Baals [...] Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness *and speak tenderly to her*". Hosea 2:13-14, *emphasis mine*.

³⁸ The Israelites have experienced situations in which Yahweh has withdrawn from them where any attempt to look for him showed to be futile, but at the same time there were situations in which Yahweh hid his face that his people might look for him. Cf. F.I. ANDERSEN – D.N. FREEDMAN, *Hosea*, 416; W.R. HARPER, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 282; H.D. BEEBY, *Grace Abounding*, 67-68. See also, J.L. MCKENZIE, "Divine Passion in Osee", 177.

³⁹ D.J. MCCARTHY – R.E. MURPHY, "Hosea", 223.

⁴⁰ H.D. BEEBY, *Grace Abounding*, 72.

draw them back to the Lord and observe the covenant.⁴¹ Israel's answer to God's love is an answer that needs to mature and grow, namely she needs to actually become aware of God's presence in her midst and thus live and walk in the ways of the Lord, moved and guided by God's חסד,⁴² rather than by the mere desire to achieve prosperity or for fear of the punishment,

For it is love what I desire, not sacrifice, and knowledge of God rather than holocausts (Hos 6:6 NAB).

This is what Yahweh God expects from his people. The people of Israel are called to come and know the Lord in a covenantal relationship which will be manifested in works of love and justice.

5. Conclusion

The covenant made at Sinai was meant to be a lifetime commitment on the side of God and his people Israel, a relationship which demanded loyalty as well as moral conduct on the side of Israel. Through their history, the Israelites have been experiencing the fragility of the human will, that is to say lots of good intentions but little serious commitment to one's own promises. On the other hand, Yahweh has shown himself ever faithful and full of steadfast love. His love for his people has made him look for different ways to teach and correct them.

Through Hosea's experience Yahweh calls his people to conversion. By showing Israel their sinful situation what God actually wants is that Israel become aware that she needs to know him and turn to him in sincerity. Israel knows the demands of the covenant, but what God wants is Israel to enact them in love.

⁴¹ W.R. HARPER, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 279; F.I. ANDERSEN -- D.N. FREEDMAN, *Hosea*, 426.

⁴² The word חסד that occurs in Hosea 4:1; 6:6; 10:12; 12:6, describes the mercy or unfailing love of God that looks in the human counterpart a response of the same kind, namely in works of mercy and love towards the fellow Israelites and God. Cf. R. YOUNG, "Mercy", 655.

Chapter II

Luke 15: Stories of God Who Looks after the Sinners with Love

1. Introduction

This second chapter concentrates on Jesus, the messenger of the Father, who came to bring reconciliation. Jesus here is presented as the love of the Father for humanity. This chapter continues the line of thought of Chapter I in regard to God's fidelity to his promise of salvation and his love that reaches the sinners and prompts them to conversion. This is the New Testament counterpart of the idea of God's love as described in Hosea (Chapter I).

The whole purpose of Jesus' mission here on earth was to proclaim the good news to the poor. In the context of Palestine of the first century, the poor and the sick were considered religious outcasts. Their situation was worsened by the fact that people believed that their situation was due to some sinful situation.

Jesus came to show God's love to all, especially to those who were considered least in society. He admitted into his company sinful people, despising

the criticism of the self-righteous in order to win them over to God, since Yahweh expects the sinners to acknowledge his love for them, repent and convert.

Therefore, in Jesus Christ God has given humanity the best example of his unending love. His ministry was totally dedicated to showing this love and concern of God especially for the poor, the sick and the sinners.

2. The Experience of Sin in Luke's Gospel

But the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2 NAB).

For the Middle East mentality sin was a reality that affected people in the totality of their relationships. For instance, in the Jewish tradition, the handicapped and the sick were considered to be sinners and therefore outcasts due to their physical condition.⁴³

In the Scriptures, especially in the Old Testament, sin⁴⁴ is totally opposed to the holiness of God. Sinners were not allowed to enter God's presence (Lev 21:17), and in some cases they were also cut off from society.⁴⁵

The Jews believed that suffering and sickness were a punishment for one's own sins⁴⁶ or those of one's parents (John 9:2); despite that some books of the Old Testament such as Ezekiel⁴⁷ had already tried to change that sort of thinking, it was still widely accepted. Also in the New Testament, the experience of sin was seen as

⁴³ R.J. KARRIS, *Luke: Artist and Theologian*, 64.

⁴⁴ ἁμαρτία, ἡ, (ἁμαρτάνω) a failure, fault, sin. Cf. Liddell-Scott Lexicon, *Bible Works* CD-ROM.

⁴⁵ R.J. Karris commenting on Leviticus 21:17-23 points out the way Jesus did away with the old teaching regarding sickness and sinfulness. Cf. R.J. KARRIS, *Luke: Artist and Theologian*, 61; J.A. FITZMYER, *Luke the Theologian: Aspects of His Teaching*, 180.184.

⁴⁶ J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel according to Luke*, I, 580.

⁴⁷ "What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'?" Ezek 18:2.

part and parcel of the condition of the poor. The Jews of the first century endorsed the ancient belief of the existing relationship between sin and sickness.⁴⁸

In Luke's Gospel sin has its ultimate root not only in one's own fault but in the presence of the Evil One.⁴⁹ Jesus' mission on earth was to overcome the powers of death through the proclamation of God's kingdom.⁵⁰ Sin is one's own attitude of self-exaltation and pride (Luke 18:9). In this regard, the Pharisees and scribes are pictured as people who, while claiming to be righteous, never understood their need of God and his forgiveness.⁵¹

2.1 Who are the Sinners according to Luke's Gospel?

And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner [...] (Luke 7:37).

In the Luke's Gospel the word sinners⁵² occurs more times than in any other writing of the New Testament.⁵³ Therefore, it seems that in the proclamation of the good news Luke used the word sinners, often in order to convey the message of humanity's absolute need of God and therefore the need for repentance.⁵⁴

By contrasting these two categories, sinners and righteous, Luke often works upon two ideas. The first idea is that, according to the Jewish society, sinners are judged to be so because of different factors such as moral behaviour, sickness,

⁴⁸ Proof of Jesus' power to overcome the cause of sickness he forgives the paralytic's sins and then he cures him (Luke 5:17-26). Cf. C. OW CZAREK, *Sons of the Most High*, 165.

⁴⁹ H. CONZELMANN, *The Theology of Saint Luke*, 157; J.A. FITZMYER, *Luke the Theologian*, 148.

⁵⁰ J.A. FITZMYER, *Luke the Theologian: Aspects of His Teaching*, 146.

⁵¹ R.J. KARRIS, *Luke: Artist and Theologian*, 23.

⁵² ἁματωλός, ὄν sinful; sinner. Cf. Liddell-Scott Lexicon, *Bible Works* CD-ROM.

⁵³ The word 'sinners' occurs 18 times in Luke; 5 times in Matthew; 6 times in Mark and 4 times in John and in the New Testament 47 times. Cf. C. OW CZAREK, *Sons of the Most High*, 163.

⁵⁴ H. CONZELMANN, *The Theology of Saint Luke*, 227.

deformities and the like, which means that sinners not always were such due to their own fault [moral behaviour] but due to some external cause.⁵⁵

The second idea Luke conveys in the narrative is that unlike the Pharisees and the religious leaders, the sinners recognised their need of God and his forgiveness.⁵⁶ The Pharisees and scribes were often scandalized by Jesus' approach to sinners:⁵⁷ for them a prophet should not allow such kind of people into his company.⁵⁸ Thus, since the sinners in the Jewish society⁵⁹ were regarded as God's offenders and therefore unworthy of the compassion and forgiveness of the people, to be in their company was enough cause for one to be regarded as one of them (Job 34:8; Ps 26:5; 141:4). This is the reason why Pharisees could not stand Jesus' welcoming attitude towards sinners.

Consequently, in Luke's Gospel the sinners are not so much those whom society rejects and unjustly condemns but everyone,⁶⁰ especially those who exalt themselves in the face of others and God (Luke 18:11-12).⁶¹

2.2 Jesus' Approach to Sinners

And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick (Luke 5:31).

⁵⁵ In the Palestine of the first century, tax-collectors and sinners were religious outcasts. The religious authorities regarded their situation as unchangeable. Cf. E. LAVERDIERE, *Luke*, 198; J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel according to Luke*, II, 1075.

⁵⁶ L.T. JOHNSON, *The Gospel of Luke*, 239; C. OWCZAREK, *Sons of the Most High*, 166.

⁵⁷ R.J. KARRIS, *Luke: Artist and Theologian*, 23; J. A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel according to Luke*, II, 945.

⁵⁸ J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke*, II, 1071; E. LAVERDIERE, *Dining in the Kingdom*, 43.

⁵⁹ We are speaking of the Jewish society of the first century. Cf. E. LAVERDIERE, *Luke*, 198.

⁶⁰ C. OWCZAREK, *Sons of the Most High*, 164.

⁶¹ Sinners are the people's situation before meeting Jesus; but sinners are also those who after meeting Jesus do not change their lives or do not recognize their need of God and his saving love. Cf. C. OWCZAREK, *Sons of the Most High*, 167.

Luke's Gospel has a particular way to portray the relationship of Jesus with the 'sinners'. Jesus' mission on earth was totally directed towards the sinners calling them to repentance; his proclamation of the good news was focused on the offering of salvation (Luke 19:10).⁶²

Jesus presented himself as the physician who has come into the world to heal the sick (Luke 5:31-32). Luke has Jesus curing people from both physical as well as spiritual sickness.⁶³ This is the best contribution of the Lucan theology towards the understanding of God's unfailing love for humanity. God's redeeming love has found its best expression in the person and ministry of Jesus (Rom 5:11).⁶⁴ Therefore, Jesus strongly criticised the scribes since in their dealings with God's people they have made the Law burdensome, instead of making of it a way to show God's love and care for his people.⁶⁵

For example, in the gospels, Jesus is never shown as someone throwing a party, instead he was either invited (Luke 7:36; 11:37; 14:1) or it was he who purposely chose to go and dine with some people, such is the case with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:5). He also never refused the acts of kindness of the 'sinful people' such is the case of the woman who anointed him (Luke 7:50).

On the contrary, in Luke's presentation of these situations the Pharisees are presented as people criticising Jesus especially because he received the sinners and dined with them (Luke 5:30; 15:1-2), but something that is unusual here is that the

⁶² J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel according to Luke*, II, 1072; E. LAVERDIERE, *Dining in the Kingdom*, 54.

⁶³ E. LAVERDIERE, *Dining in the Kingdom*, 44.

⁶⁴ R.J. Karris quoting J. JEREMIAS, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus*, New York, 1971, 115-116, stresses the concept of the mercy of God as worked out in Jesus as the major contribution of Lucan theology. Cf. R.J. KARRIS, *Luke: Artist and Theologian*, 59; see also, B. HARING, *Shalom*, 65.

⁶⁵ J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel according to Luke*, II, 946.

Pharisees never said that Jesus accepted the sinners' invitation to dine with them, rather Jesus is portrayed more as a host than as a guest (Luke 15:2). Consequently, it is clear that Jesus' attitudes towards the sinners were of understanding, compassion and love in order to gain them back for God.⁶⁶

3. Luke 15: Stories of God's Love and Concern for Humanity

The three stories gathered in chapter 15 of Luke's Gospel are the best presentation of what a human picture of God's love for humanity can be like. Fitzmyer says that these three stories are really the heart of Luke's Gospel, and therefore, they are the best examples of God's love and mercy.⁶⁷ The parables of the 'Lost Sheep' and the 'Lost Coin' are the two best examples of the joy of finding that which had been lost.⁶⁸ In this case, these two parables together with the parable of the 'Prodigal Son' show the joy the Father has when a sinner repents.⁶⁹

3.1 Brief Analysis of the Parable of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin

As mentioned above, these two parables are mainly concerned with the joy of finding that which was lost.

In the first story, the shepherd after having sought the sheep that was lost carries it on his shoulders, calls his friends and celebrates because he has found the

⁶⁶ E. LaVerdiere, sees in Jesus' welcoming of this people into his company as a sign of Jesus' acceptance of their repentance. Cf. E. LAVERDIERE, *Luke*, 202; J.P. KEALY, *Luke's Gospel Today*, 328.

⁶⁷ "They make a major contribution to the Lucan theme of God's love and mercy for sinful human beings and Jesus' call for repentance and conversion." Cf. J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel according to Luke*. II. 1071.

⁶⁸ L.T. JOHNSON, *The Gospel of Luke*, 240.

⁶⁹ J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel according to Luke*. II. 1072; L.T. JOHNSON, *The Gospel of Luke*, 240; see also, E. LAVERDIERE, *Luke*, 201.202.

sheep that was lost.⁷⁰ There is no mention of ill feelings regarding the lost sheep. The emphasis, instead, falls on the joy of finding the sheep (Luke 15:6).

In the second story, the same idea comes along. The joy a woman finds in getting back the coin she had lost (Luke 15:9) is now applied to God who rejoices whenever a sinner repents (Luke 15:7,10). These two parables clearly describe Jesus' openness to sinners in spite of the murmuring of both scribes and Pharisees (Luke 15:2).

Jesus⁷¹ was not bothered with the criticism of the self-righteous but he wished them not to miss the point of his mission (Luke 5:32; 19:10; 1 Tim 1:5).⁷² Besides, the setting of the first parable outlines the readiness of the shepherd to leave the bigger group behind (Luke 15:4) and run after the lost sheep,⁷³ pointing out the efforts made in finding the lost one.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ E. LAVERDIERE, *Luke*, 201.

⁷¹ When speaking of Jesus, we ought to bear in mind that Jesus and the Father are so much related that to speak of Jesus is also to speak of the Father, because Jesus who is the image of the Father (Col 1:15; John 1:1-5,14; 14:10) has come to the world to bring about the work of salvation. His work and mission is the Father's will (John 4:34; 5:30). He so identifies himself with the Father that the acceptance or rejection of his person and message is considered as acceptance or rejection of the Father (Luke 4:18,43; 9:48; 10:16; John 5:23,36,37). Jesus' mission of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-19) is the initiative of the Father who makes all things new in Christ. Jesus' work is the work of God the Father. John Paul II speaking of this mystery of mercy says, "[...] it becomes visible in Christ and through Christ, through his actions and his words, and finally through his death on the cross and his resurrection." JOHN PAUL II, *DM*, 2.

⁷² E. LAVERDIERE, *Luke*, 202.

⁷³ Fitzmyer commenting on Luke 15 develops the idea of God the Shepherd of Israel who in Jesus fulfils the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:10-20. Therefore, Jesus' ministry to the sinners is the revelation of God's infinite mercy towards all. The love of God goes as far as looking for sinners. Cf. J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel of Luke*, II, 1075.

⁷⁴ The rhetorical question Jesus puts across expects a 'no' for an answer. However, he uses this example to demonstrate how great is God's love for those who went astray. Cf. J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel according to Luke*, II, 1076.

3.2 Analysis of the Parable of the Prodigal Son

This parable that is unique to Luke combines the joy of the father who recovers his son⁷⁵ with the attitude of the younger son who decides to return to his father's house. The father⁷⁶ who waits for his son's return is an image of God who never gives up the idea of the sinner's repentance and conversion,⁷⁷ but at the same time it shows that God's mercy precedes the sinner's act of contrition.⁷⁸ In fact, the father is shown as the one who restores his son to the joy of his friendship before he even opens his mouth to express his sorrow.⁷⁹ In the same way, through Jesus' ministry⁸⁰ God the Father shows sinners his love and concern especially for those most in need (Luke 19:10).⁸¹

Therefore, looking at the parable of the 'Lost Sheep' as a key to the understanding of the parable of the 'Prodigal Son' it is possible to conclude that repentance cannot take place without the initiative of the God who is rich in mercy.⁸²

⁷⁵ This joy is the most striking element of this parable. This is the gift of the father to the son who although he does not deserve it, receives the love generously poured forth by the father who restores the lost dignity of his son. Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *RP*, 5.

⁷⁶ Jesus and the Father are in this story so much related that Jesus' acceptance of the sinners into his company (Luke 15:1-2) parallels the father's joy in recovering the son that went astray (Luke 15:20). Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *DM*, 5.

⁷⁷ E. LAVERDIERE, *Luke*, 202; see also, JOHN PAUL II, *DM*, 6. *Id.*, *RP*, 5.10.

⁷⁸ "The father's kindness gave the son a greater realization of his former folly, and each new kindness could not help but draw the son closer to the father [...]" B. HARING, *Shalom*, 76; see also, JOHN PAUL II, *DM*, 6.

⁷⁹ Another example of this gratuitous love is the Lucan passage of John 8:17 in which Jesus forgives the woman's sins even without her request of forgiveness. Cf. L.T. JOHNSON, *The Gospel of Luke*, 241; see also, JOHN PAUL II, *RP*, 13.

⁸⁰ The whole purpose of the life and mission of Jesus was that God's plan of salvation may be carried out, that is to say sinners may attain salvation. Cf. H. CONZELMANN, *The Theology of Saint Luke*, 152.

⁸¹ C. Owczarek quoting D.A. Neale, *Non but the Sinners*, agrees that the text of Luke 19:10 is the 'policy statement' of Jesus, the key to understanding his life and mission. Cf. C. OWCZAREK, *Sons of the Most High*, 166.

⁸² J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel according to Luke*, II, 1075; JOHN PAUL II, *DM*, 1.6.8; *Id.*, *RP*, 7.10.

4. The Sinner's Answer to God's Love

Jesus' mission as envisaged by the first two parables can be understood as God's initiative to restore the lost ones to his friendship.⁸³ Thus, Jesus is the good shepherd looking after the wandering sheep. The whole of his ministry is the continuous searching for the lost ones (Luke 5:32; 1 Tim 1:15).⁸⁴

The return to God as mentioned above does not take place without God's personal intervention.⁸⁵ In Jesus, God the Father is the good shepherd who goes out to meet the sinners. Therefore the attitudes of many sinners like Zacchaeus (Luke 19:8), the woman who washed Jesus' feet (Luke 7:38), and the crowds following him are examples of the sinners' response to God's merciful love.

For Luke the proclamation of the good news necessarily expects on the side of the listener acceptance of God's love in faith, repentance and conversion.⁸⁶ Faith in Jesus is but the first step in a sinner's process of conversion.⁸⁷ Therefore, the best answer to God's love is, first of all, belief in his mercy, and then repentance and conversion to start a new life helped by his grace (Luke 7:50).⁸⁸

5. Conclusion

Luke's Gospel is very rich in presenting God's love for humanity. In fact, chapter 15 contains the best examples of it. God is presented as the Good Shepherd who is concerned with bringing back the lost sheep: he rejoices over the finding of the lost one and shares this joy with all those around him.

⁸³ JOHN PAUL II, *RP*, 10; *ID.*, *DM*, 6.

⁸⁴ L. T. JOHNSON, "The Book of Luke- Acts", 418.

⁸⁵ See note 73.

⁸⁶ J. A. FITZMYER, *Luke the Theologian*, 130.

⁸⁷ J. A. FITZMYER, *Luke the Theologian*, 131.

⁸⁸ E. LAVERDIERE, *Luke*, 202.

The characteristics of this love and concern on the side of God can be described as follows: God takes the initiative in seeking the lost one, welcomes the repentant sinner and restores his friendship to all who have gone astray. In front of God's gratuitous love is the sinner who is called to acknowledge and accept God's gift of forgiveness. This love is what prompts the sinner to repentance and conversion.

God the Father is the one who takes this initiative and in Jesus Christ his plan of salvation reaches all humanity. In the work of salvation the economic Trinity is fully at work.

In summation, the gratuitous love of God reaches all, especially those who have gone astray, an unmistakable sign of his faithfulness and unchanging love. The sinner is expected to be open to God's love and accept his love and forgiveness and thus repent.

Having stressed God's initiative in searching for the sinner and having underlined God's joy when the sinner repents, now we move on to Chapter III to see the similarities between God's initiative as seen through the experience of Hosea and the stories Luke 15 in relation to the praxis of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Chapter III

The Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the Light of Hosea and Luke 15

1. Introduction

This chapter deals with the Sacrament of Reconciliation from the point of view of God's mercy that prompts the sinner to conversion. We do not intend to study this sacrament from the systematic point of view; instead the aim of this chapter is to look at the biblical foundations of its theology, namely we will combine the basic ideas found in Chapters I and II.

This sacrament is more than the mere confessing of one's sins to the priest; it is the loving encounter of God with sinful humanity, after having searched for them far and wide. The mystery of grace and sin is briefly looked at in order to understand how the person's dialectical existence unfolds in the choices of everyday life. Human beings who have been created to live in communion with their Creator often turned away from him, denying his existence. Nevertheless, humanity is constantly invited to accept God's grace and thus live in communion with him.

The anthropomorphic image of God's love for humanity is taken from two biblical texts: Hosea (Chapter I) and Luke 15 (Chapter II); in the light of these two texts, this mystery of love underlines one basic idea, God's faithful love 'cannot stand' to see humanity destroyed on account of its sins. God is interested in humanity as St. Irenaeus says, "[...] the glory of God is a living man; and the life of a man consists in beholding God."⁸⁹

Therefore, this last chapter combines the understanding of the Sacrament of Reconciliation with the stories of Hosea and Luke 15 in order to underline God's faithful love who in the person of Jesus takes the initiative in searching for sinners, working out their conversion and welcoming them back into his friendship, the ideal for the practice of the Sacrament of Reconciliation today.

2. Brief Understanding of the Sacrament of Reconciliation⁹⁰

God has created humanity in a state of communion with him (Gen 2:7-24; Wis 2:23).⁹¹ This communion was lost by means of sin⁹² as rejection of God's grace.⁹³ In the Bible the promise of salvation is proclaimed as the final victory over sin (Gen 3:15). The history of the people of Israel witnesses to Yahweh's continuous

⁸⁹ IRENAEUS, *Adversus Haereses*, IV,20,7, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, I, 490. "[...] in man there shines forth a reflection of God himself". JOHN PAUL II, *EV*, 34.

⁹⁰ As indicated before, the purpose of this chapter is to look at the biblical foundations of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, according to the findings of Chapters I and II.

⁹¹ The biblical image of communion between God and man is made clear in the fact that God after breathing life in man's nostrils placed him in the garden, entrusting his creation to his care. In so doing, God endowed man with intelligence and free will. This also manifests God's freedom in creation, since God created man out of love, and not out of necessity. Cf. E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Christ the Sacrament*, 10; K. RAINER, *Theological Investigations*, XI, 259; see also, S. FRIGATO, ed., *In Lui Ci ha scelti*, 91-92; VATICAN II, *GS*, 17; JOHN PAUL II, *EV*, 35.

⁹² Sin as denial of God's existence is one of humanity's deepest mysteries. Cf. VATICAN II, *GS*, 13; JOHN PAUL II, *EV*, 34; N. FOGLIACCO, *The God of All Consolation*, 25.

⁹³ This rejection ought to be understood not as something done against God, but this sin is to be taken as exclusion of God from one's own life, a denial of his existence, which makes of nature or created things the new god, an idol. This is what John Paul II calls the 'mystery of sin'. Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *RP*, 14; N. FOGLIACCO, *The God of All Consolation*, 24; K. RAINER, *Theological Investigations*, XI, 256; M. SCHMAUS, *Dogma*, III, 79.

care for his people and the need for the people to trust him and answer to his love in freedom.⁹⁴

God's faithfulness has reached its fullness in Christ who gave his life for the salvation of all (2 Cor 5:15).⁹⁵ Therefore, the Church through the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation keeps faithful to Christ's mission of salvation,⁹⁶ sign of God's unfailing love for humanity.⁹⁷

Jesus' mission of healing and bringing sinners back to God (Luke 19:13) is what reconciliation is all about.⁹⁸ However, in order to grasp the meaning and efficacy of the sacraments we need to understand the meaning of this reality: "the Church is the sacrament of Christ as Christ is the sacrament of the Father."⁹⁹

In order to explain this concept we need first to reflect on the mystery of grace and sin, in order to focus, later on, on the salvific mystery of Christ.

2.1 *Grace and Sin*

Early on in the essay we said that God in creating human beings endowed them with intelligence and freedom.¹⁰⁰ The status of communion with him is what

⁹⁴ K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, XI, 261; S. FRIGATO, ed., *In Lui ci ha scelti*, 96.100.103.

⁹⁵ M. SCHMAUS, *Dogma*, III, 68; M. KEHL · W. LÖSER, ed., *The von Baltasar Reader*, 171; see also, N. FOGLIACCO, *The God of All Consolation*, 67.

⁹⁶ "[...] the most decisive action in the sacrament of Penance is what Christ does through the power of the Holy Spirit". B. HÄRING, *Shalom*, 65.

⁹⁷ C. O'NEILL, *Meeting Christ in the Sacraments*, 53; see also, M. KEHL · W. LÖSER, ed., *The von Baltasar Reader*, 199.

⁹⁸ By the sacrament of reconciliation we ought to understand the continuation of Jesus' work of salvation. The calling of sinners to conversion and healing people's sickness (spiritual, psychological and moral) is what we proclaim in the sacrament of reconciliation, which is no other than the work of the Father who in Christ reconciles the world to himself. Cf. M. SCHMAUS, *Dogma*, III, 80.

⁹⁹ R.P. MCBRIEN, *Catholicism*, 1122; VATICAN II, *LG*, 48; see also, K. RAHNER, *The Church and the Sacraments*, 11; E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Christ the Sacrament*, 48;

¹⁰⁰ VATICAN II, *GS*, 12.

dogma calls *grace*.¹⁰¹ The loss of this original communion with God is known as *original sin*.¹⁰² Thus, human beings were created in a dialectical situation. Prior to the fall grace and sin laid bare before them, nevertheless humanity chose to live without their creator.¹⁰³

The rejection of God is therefore the source of all evils (Gen 3:1-24).¹⁰⁴ However, the loss of this friendship with God in no way did away with God's plan (Rom 5:20).¹⁰⁵ Yahweh out of his merciful love (Exod 34:6; Neh 9:17) did not abandon humanity to the power of evil,¹⁰⁶ instead he sought for ways to restore this communion with them.¹⁰⁷

2.2 The Sacrament of Reconciliation

The Sacrament of Reconciliation¹⁰⁸ as it is today is the final product of centuries of Christian life. Through the centuries, but especially from the thirteenth century onwards, the Church has based the understanding and practice of the

¹⁰¹ K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*. XI, 255; see also, M. KEHL – W. LÖSER, ed., *The von Baltasar Reader*, 197-198.

¹⁰² "The absence of holiness which is an existential modality imparted by God's own holiness prior to the concrete condition of individual existence, inasmuch as this was intended to be mediated through human descent but in fact is not so, is rightly called original sin". K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*. XI, 256; see also, M. KEHL – W. LÖSER, ed., *The von Baltasar Reader*, 198.

¹⁰³ M. SCHMAUS, *Dogma*. III, 79; K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*. XI, 256-257.

¹⁰⁴ Once the communion with God is disrupted the communion with nature, fellow human beings and oneself is also lost, for the rejection of God's grace (the source of communion) is the origin of all divisions. Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *RP*, 15.

¹⁰⁵ For God can draw good from evil, as St. Paul says where there abounded sin, grace abounded all the more (Rom 5:20). However, this should not be taken as occasion to remain in sin.

¹⁰⁶ M. KEHL – W. LÖSER, ed., *The von Baltasar Reader*, 199; JOHN PAUL II, *RP*, 10.

¹⁰⁷ Commenting on 1 John 3:20, John Paul II says that God is greater than our sins and thus the *mysterium pietatis* (mystery of God's mercy) is what at the end will overpower the *mysterium iniquitatis* (mystery of iniquity). Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *RP*, 17. "[...] it is not our movement toward God, but God's movement to us. It is heaven irrupting into our world." M. KEHL – W. LÖSER, ed., *The von Baltasar Reader*, 114.

¹⁰⁸ Surely, there are many aspects of the Catholic doctrine regarding the truths of this sacrament that have been left out, such as matter, form, minister, recipient, intention. Besides, this is not a thorough study on the sacrament but only a brief presentation of some fundamentals of reconciliation.

Sacrament of Reconciliation¹⁰⁹ on Jesus' mandate to bind and loose (Matt 16:19),¹¹⁰ following Jesus' example.¹¹¹

Humanity's option for sin disrupted God's original plan for them.¹¹² Therefore, sins are to be understood as obstacles to man's salvation. The Church's dogma teaches that God's grace is lost by means of mortal sin.

Mortal sins are forgiven through the confession of sins,¹¹³ while venial sins by means of contrition, prayer and reception of Holy Communion.¹¹⁴ However, this does not mean God is tied to the performance of this sacrament and that he cannot forgive sins other than through the Sacrament of Reconciliation;¹¹⁵ instead, God wishes to grant his grace by means of the Church.¹¹⁶ This sacrament actualizes Jesus' ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18) prolonged in time through the action of the Church.¹¹⁷

In brief, in the words of K. Rahner we can say that.

¹⁰⁹ The history of this sacrament shows how there has been a major shift from the understanding of absolution as the ending of penance (Early Christians) to absolution as the action by which God forgives the sinners' guilt through the action of the Church (Middle Ages). Another major shift is the differentiation between matter and form of the sacrament, of which the scholastics were very fond. Cf. K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*. II, 154; ID., "Sacramento della Penitenza", 314-326.

¹¹⁰ The Church by the power invested from Christ fulfils her mission of healing by means of separating the Christian who had sinned from the community in order to help them to understand that his/her ways are wrong and needs wholeheartedly to ask for God's forgiveness and do penance in order to amend his/her life and be readmitted in the community. Cf. K. RAHNER, *The Church and the Sacraments*, 93; see also, ID., *Theological Investigations*. II, 138.

¹¹¹ K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*. III, 179-181.

¹¹² M. SCHMAUS, *Dogma*. III, 79; see also, K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*. XI, 259; B. HÄRING, *Shalom*, 67.

¹¹³ The confession of sins is a condition for salvation, for those who have fallen away from God after baptism. This sacrament is based of the power given by Jesus to the apostles to bind and loose (Matt 16:19). Cf. K. RAHNER, "Sacramento della Penitenza", 306.

¹¹⁴ K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*. XI, 265.

¹¹⁵ K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*. II, 138, 164-165.

¹¹⁶ C. O'NEILL, 266; K. RAHNER, *The Church and the Sacraments*, 95; see also, S. FRIGATI, *In Lui ci ha scelti*, 94.

¹¹⁷ G. O'COLLINS, "Love", 608-609.

[...] in the sacrament of penance God forgives us our guilt by the grace of Christ and through the word of the Church [...].¹¹⁸

In addition, on the side of the penitent true repentance, confession of sins and change of life is needed.¹¹⁹

3. Similarities between Hosea's Experience and the Stories of Luke 15

The purpose of Chapter I was to point out the following ideas: God's election of Israel, his freedom in entering into a covenant with Israel, Israel's unfaithfulness to this covenant, God's intervention in front of Israel's sin, and Israel's response to God's action.

In the Chapter II, we have worked upon the following ideas: God's freedom in sending his Son to heal his people, God's love for his chosen people (Tit 3:4) came to its climax with Jesus' ministry of reconciliation (Rom 5:11),¹²⁰ Jesus' mission and the call to conversion,¹²¹ and the people's answer to Jesus' call to conversion.

Yahweh out of his merciful love did not leave his people to perish in this moral and material corruption; instead he has continuously sent messengers (prophets) to call them back to the covenant (Hos 14:1; Jer 2:13).¹²² At the plenitude of time, God has sent his only Son for the salvation of all (1 John 4:9; Rom 8:3-4;

¹¹⁸ K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, II, 136.

¹¹⁹ Conversion, from the Hebrew *שׁוּב* and the Greek *μετανοια* is the turning towards something, moving away from something else. In this regard, the sacrament of reconciliation requires of the penitent the acceptance of God's primacy in one's own life and also a change of life, turning to God, moving away from sin, passing from death to life. Cf. A. DUBLES, "Conversion", 191-192; C. O'NEILL, 266; see also J. FEULLENBACH, "Kingdom of God", 590.

¹²⁰ The images of the shepherd and the woman who swiftly look for that which was lost express the mystery of God's love for his people. Yahweh is the faithful God who in the person of Jesus Christ takes the initiative in looking for the lost ones.

¹²¹ M. KEHL W. LÖSER, ed., *The von Baltasar Reader*, 170.

¹²² M. KEHL W. LÖSER, ed., *The von Baltasar Reader*, 356; see also, JOHN PAUL II, *EV'*, 49.

2 Cor 5:18).¹²³ and with the death of Jesus on the cross God has shown his love for humanity to be credible (John 3:16).¹²⁴

The experience of Hosea shows God's unfailing love for his chosen people (3:1-2). God's love is in no way defeated by his people's unfaithfulness (Hos 11:1.9-10). He does not abandon his people to the power of death and destruction but calls them to conversion and expects the beloved to acknowledge his love (Hos 6:6).

Luke's stories in chapter 15 recall to mind the same ideas. However, in them Luke goes a step further and shows how God loves the lost ones (Luke 15:2.31-32) so much¹²⁵ that he goes looking for them until he finds them and *celebrates*¹²⁶ the finding (Luke 15:5-6.9.23). God's love for his people is so deep that even when they have gone astray and have been disfigured by sin (Luke 15:24),¹²⁷ he is still able to recognize them at a distance and run to embrace them with love, restoring them to his friendship, love and dignity (Luke 15:20).¹²⁸ In these two biblical passages what is at stake most of all is God's love for his people (Hos 3:1; 11:1; Luke 15:4-32). God's initiative of seeking, healing and restoring his beloved is wonderfully shown

¹²³ God's work of redemption has shown its best and deepest meaning in Christ. After letting humanity depart from him, God, in the Son, continues to care for them, he is looking after them, waiting like the father of the prodigal son welcoming the sinner, restoring him to his friendship and love. On the cross God's love for humanity shows itself credible. Cf. G. O'COLLINS, "Love", 607; see also, R. FISCHHELLA, "Hans Urs von Balthasar", 73-74.

¹²⁴ M. KEHL, W. LOSER, ed., *The von Balthasar Reader*, 199.

¹²⁵ God does not love them because they are sinners and have rejected him, but as Luke pictures it, God is like the good physician who cares for the sick and wounded to heal them and restore them to life. Cf. B. HÄRING, *Shalom*, 42-43.

¹²⁶ The element of *joy* is unique. Luke portrays God as exulting of joy for having found the sheep that had gone astray or because he has found the coin that was lost. In the text of Hosea there is no mention of God's rejoicing for Israel conversion. Instead in Luke this is very clear (Luke 15:4).

¹²⁷ N. FOGI IACCO, *The God of all Consolation*, 29; see also, VATICAN II, GS, 13-14.

¹²⁸ M. KEHL, W. LOSER, ed., *The von Balthasar Reader*, 65.

best in the parable of the “Prodigal son”. God’s implicit request that he love him, namely to answer freely to his grace.¹²⁹

4. Parallel between the Two Biblical Passages and the Sacrament of Reconciliation

In the Bible, creation, election and salvation are key concepts that are intertwined.¹³⁰ The purpose of studying Hosea was to underline God’s action on behalf of his people. He has chosen them, and despite their unfaithfulness (4:7),¹³¹ he never ceased to visit his people prompting them to conversion (14:1).¹³²

Luke also works upon these concepts of election and salvation. Moreover, he gives another more pregnant characteristic of God: his joy as fruit of people’s conversion (Luke 15:23.32).

In our own lives we experience the presence of sin, both at the personal and social levels.¹³³ Nevertheless, God is still at work: through his Son and the Spirit he continues to reach out to his people, especially in restoring them to his love and friendship in the Church. In the same way he had visited his people Israel in the person of Hosea, and searched for his people like the ‘good shepherd’, today through the Sacrament of Reconciliation God is working out our salvation by means of the ministry of reconciliation as exercised by the Church.¹³⁴

¹²⁹ S. FREGATO, *In Lui ci ha scelti*, 96.116.

¹³⁰ M. KEHL · W. LÖSER, ed., *The von Baltasar Reader*, 66.

¹³¹ In front of God’s love in creation, man answers with the rejection of God, cutting himself off from the community, disrupting all the possible relationships. This is the mystery of evil. Cf. B. HÄRING, *Shalom*, 28-29.33.

¹³² This conversion “[...] stems from appreciation of the goodness of God who is all merciful and has shown his love in Jesus Christ”. B. HÄRING, *Shalom*, 67.

¹³³ JOHN PAUL II, *RP*, 13.

¹³⁴ B. HÄRING, *Shalom*, 40; see also, M. KEHL · W. LÖSER, ed., *The von Baltasar Reader*, 356-357.

God forgives his people's sins out of his merciful love but requires the conversion of their hearts to him and neighbour (Hos 12:6; Luke 10:27). God who is rich in mercy (Eph 2:4) loves his people with an unfailing love¹³⁵ and welcomes the lost son full of tender love, filled with joy.¹³⁶ Nevertheless, despite God's faithfulness to humanity, human nature bears the inclination to sin (Jer 17:9-10), and thus easily human beings turn away from him.¹³⁷ The story of Israel reflects this drama, but also our lives in a way are witness of this continuous process of God loving us, and we moving away from him. Reconciliation is the witness of this process of rise and fall as we journey towards the final encounter with God.¹³⁸

God's gratuitousness in salvation is also proclaimed in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.¹³⁹ Though sin is always crouching in the human heart to spoil God's plan, God unceasingly visits his people in different ways. In the Bible there are innumerable examples of his interventions, and today he is also accompanying his people in the sacraments, especially through reconciliation.

In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, God is continually visiting his people to offer them salvation. As he did in the time of Hosea, also today God is commanding his ministers to go and show his unfailing love for the sinners. God, the father of the prodigal son, is anxiously waiting for his son's return; and therefore, in the words of

¹³⁵ JOHN PAUL II, *DM*, 2; *Id.*, *RP*, 10.

¹³⁶ The Father never closes his heart to those who have sinned against him by means of rejection of his love. He continuously gives them a new opportunity to start over again (Luke 15:22-24); see also, E. LAVRDIÈRE, *Luke*, 202.

¹³⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *EV*, 49.

¹³⁸ "The subject-matter, origin and content of the message received and proclaimed by the Christian community is [...] the free act of the faithfulness of God who [...] in Jesus Christ manifests his own glory to the world". C. GREEN, ed., *Karl Barth*, 205.

¹³⁹ God's love is constantly knocking at the sinner's heart prompting him/her to conversion, so much so that any act of repentance is the product of God's mercy at work in us. Cf. K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, II, 164.165.

absolution he is continuously welcoming the lost son to his house, restoring him to life (Luke 15:20,22).¹⁴⁰

5. Importance of Stressing God's Initiative in Celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation

The Church [...] cannot forget that at the source of her gift and mission of reconciliation is the initiative, full of compassionate love and mercy, of that God who is love and who out of love created human beings [...].¹⁴¹

By way of summary we can say that regarding the Sacrament of Reconciliation there are few essentials to remember. First, God's grace anticipates the sinner. Second, the action of the priest in absolving the penitent is only a channel of God's grace.¹⁴² Third, the acts of the penitent reflect the human response to God's merciful love, and not so much the penitent's act of self-justification. Fourth, God's grace is unmerited because it is not due to the acts of the penitent but, as it is shown in Hosea's experience and the stories of Luke 15, it is God who visits his people even as they are sinners. Fifth, God's grace requires a completely free answer on the penitent's side, love in return of love (Hos 6:6). Finally, an element totally unique to Luke is the Father's joy¹⁴³ when the sinner repents.

In Africa unlike Europe and the Americas, the sense of God is not yet lost,¹⁴⁴ however, the sense of sin is no longer felt, especially among youngsters who due to lack of an adequate formation of conscience, no longer consider sinful many of their normal practices, such is the case of pre-marital relationships, theft, witchcraft and

¹⁴⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *RP*, 5.6; see also, R.P. MCBRIEN, *Catholicism*, 782.

¹⁴¹ JOHN PAUL II., *RP*, 10.

¹⁴² "He has the privilege of proclaiming, in the name of the Church, the wonders of God's mercy [...] as an instrument of God". B. HARING, *Shalom*, 45.

¹⁴³ The word 'joy' occurs 10 times in the gospel of Luke. It is used twice in chapter 15 and these are the only two instances in which they are applied to God or the heavenly realm.

¹⁴⁴ VATICAN II, *GS* 20; N. FOGLIACCO, *The God of all Consolation*, 30.

the like.¹⁴⁵ In a context like this, the example of Hosea and the stories of Luke 15 can help the ministers of the Sacrament of Reconciliation devise new ways¹⁴⁶ to help young people and society to recover the sense of sin as absence of God in one's life.

The minister of the Sacrament of Reconciliation as *alter Christus*¹⁴⁷ is called to exercise this ministry of reconciliation under the example of the shepherd of Luke 15, with the tenderness and care of the father of the prodigal son, optimistic of the future because the future is God himself.

Therefore, stressing God's primacy and initiative in salvation can help us rejuvenate the practice of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, becoming aware that God's grace is ever at work in human life, and most of all, becoming aware that each one of us as future priests is invited to share in God's joy for the return of the sinner to God's communion.¹⁴⁸

6. Conclusion

The mercy and love of God is greater than anyone's sin (1 John 3:20). This love which God has bestowed on humanity from the beginning is ever at work. God never ceases to look for the sinner. In Jesus Christ, God the Father has given us the proof of his unfathomable love for us.

In turn, Jesus has given to the Church the authority of reconcile humanity with God by the 'Power of the Keys'. In following his example the Church works tirelessly in administering God's forgiveness, but she still can do more in order to overcome the crisis which the Sacrament of Reconciliation faces now.

¹⁴⁵ N. FOGLIACCO, *The God of all Consolation*, 17-18.

¹⁴⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *RP*, 26.

¹⁴⁷ The main goal of the sacrament of reconciliation is the encounter with God. Ministers of the sacrament of reconciliation are called to work in the person of Christ and following his example. Cf. B. HÄRING, *Shalom*, 45.

¹⁴⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *RP*, 29; see also. B. HÄRING, *Shalom*, 37-47.

The story of the prophet Hosea has given us a human image of God's love for his people, even though they are sinners. Likewise Luke has shown how deep is God's love for us so deep that he is portrayed as the loving father who waits with anxiety for his son's return, an anxiety that later on turns into joy.

These two biblical passages, in stressing God's initiative, can help ministers of the Sacrament of Reconciliation find new strength to live and administer God's grace in the Church.

CONCLUSION

God's merciful love for humanity that has been shown through the stories of Hosea and Luke chapter 15 show the faithfulness and tenderness of Yahweh who, having created humanity out of love, did not leave it to the powers of sin and death.

God's faithfulness to the covenant has been made manifest in his industrious sending of prophets who constantly reminded people of their duties to the covenant. In Hosea we have seen how God's mercy came to rescue Israel from her state of sin. Israel overcame the crisis in the long run only because God intervened in her history. Her conversion to the Lord had to be manifested in true works of justice and love.

At the appointed time, God the Father sent his Son (Gal 4:4) to show us how much he loves us (John 3:16). The life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth gave us an idea about the depth of God's mercy. He came to call sinners to conversion, showing how much God loves them. Jesus' ministry is now mediated and prolonged in time through the action the Church. The Church keeps faithful to the Lord by administering this sacrament following the command to 'bind and loose'.

The importance of the Sacrament of Reconciliation lies on the fact that God wills humanity to be saved. The mystery of God's merciful love as expressed in the parable of the 'Prodigal Son' gives us a hint of how much God loves human beings

to the extent that he cannot stand their destruction. He is constantly calling sinners to conversion offering them the means to come back to him. The act of conversion is already fruit of God's grace working in the heart of the sinners who acknowledge that there is a merciful Father waiting their return.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation, therefore, is the mystery of the encounter between God the merciful Father and humanity in the person of Jesus Christ through the action of the Church. God who is rich in mercy (Eph 2:4) has shown us the depths of his love in Jesus' ministry of reconciliation and especially through his death and resurrection for the salvation of all (John 3:17; Acts 16:31). The love of God the Father has been made manifest in Jesus who gave his life for us sinners.

God's initiative in searching out the sinners is wonderfully presented in the story of Hosea and Jesus' ministry. In today's celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation there is an urgent need to rediscover God's presence in the person of the priest who in the name of the Church welcomes sinners back to the Father's house. Moreover, priests are also invited to discover God's grace at work in the person of the sinner who, touched by God's kindness, returns to the Father seeking compassion and strength to live a meaningful life.

The 'joy' of the Father who welcomes the lost son is also an important element in the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, because if priests understand that they are ministers of the graces of God, then their ministry will show people that in them the merciful Father is waiting for their return (conversion).

Finally, I have discovered that one of the most important consequences of stressing God's primacy and initiative in the Sacrament of Reconciliation is that of becoming aware of being God's messengers to his people: we need to look for new

ways to show people how much God loves them. This is so important nowadays because if we keep waiting for people to come to our confessional boxes much of God's love for humanity will not be felt in the lives of many people who have never heard of God's mercy and compassion. Thus, the example of Jesus going out to meet sinners like Zacchaeus in their own milieu is the best example of this ministry of love and compassion that God has entrusted to the priests for the salvation of all, especially for those people who have gone far away from the Father's house.

ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|--------|---|
| cf. | confer; compare |
| DM | Dives in Misericordia |
| ed. | edited by |
| EV | Evangelium Vitae |
| GS | Gaudium et Spes |
| Id. | <i>Idem</i> – The same as previously given or mentioned |
| LG | Lumen Gentium |
| NAB | The New American Bible |
| RP | Reconciliatio et Paenitentia |
| trans. | translation |

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

- ANDERSEN, F.I. – FREEDMAN, D.N., *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Garden City – New York 1980.
- BEEBY, H.D., *Grace Abounding: A Commentary on the Book of Hosea*, Grand Rapids 1989.
- COMAY, J., *Who Is Who in the Old Testament*, London 1995.
- COMMON BIBLE., *The Revised Standard Version*, New York – London – Toronto – Sydney – Auckland 1973.
- CONZELMANN, H., *The Theology of Saint Luke*, Philadelphia 1982.
- DISTATE, C., *Jewish Prayer: The Origins of Christian Liturgy*, New York – Mahwah 1991.
- DULLES, A., *John Henry Newman*, New York – London 2002.
- FITZMYER, J.A., *Luke the Theologian: Aspects of His Teaching*, New York 1989.
- –, *The Gospel according to Luke*, I. (I-IX). II. (X-XXIV), Anchor Bible 28, 28A, Garden City – New York 1981, 1985.
- FOGLIACCO, N., *The God of all Consolation*, Nairobi 2004.
- FRIGATO, S., “‘In Lui ci ha scelti’”. Studi in onore del prof. Giorgio Gozzelino”, *Biblioteca di Scienze Religiose* 166, Roma 2001.
- GREEN, C., ed., *Karl Barth: The Theologian of Freedom*, Minneapolis 1991.
- HÄRING, B., *Shalom: Peace. The Sacrament of Reconciliation*, Garden City – New York 1969.
- HARPER, W.R., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea*, The International Critical Commentary, ed. S.R. Driver – A. Plummer – C.A. Briggs, Edinburgh 1994.
- THE HOLY BIBLE. *The Revised Standard Version*, New York – Glasgow – London – Toronto – Sydney – Auckland 1973.
- IRENÆUS., *Adversus Haereses*, IV,20,7, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, ed. A. Roberts – J. Donalson, Edinburgh 1996.
- JOHN PAUL II., *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, Vatican City 1984; *On Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church Today*, Boston 1984.
- –, *Dives in Misericordia*, Vatican City 1980; *On the Mercy of God*, Nairobi 1998.
- –, *Evangelium Vitae*, Vatican City 1995; *On the Gospel of Life*, Vatican City 1995.
- JOHNSON, L.T., *The Gospel of Luke*, Collegeville 1991.
- KARRIS, R.J., *Luke: Artist and Theologian*, New York 1985.
- KEALY, J.P., *Luke's Gospel Today*, Denville 1979.

- KEHL, M. – LÖSER, W. ed., *In der Fülle des Glaubens: Hans Urs von Balthasar-Lesebuch*, Freiburg 1980; English trans. *The von Balthasar Reader: Hans Urs von Balthasar*, Edinburgh 1985.
- LAVERDIERE, E., *Dining in the Kingdom of God. The Origins of the Eucharist in the Gospel of Luke*, Chicago 1994.
- _____, *Luke*, Wilmington 1986.
- MCBRIEN, R.P., *Catholicism*. II, London – New York 1980.
- NEW AMERICAN BIBLE, THE., *Saint Joseph Edition*, trans Catholic Biblical Association of America. New York 1970.
- OWCZAREK, C., *Sons of the Most High. Love of Enemies in Luke and Acts: Teaching and Practice*, Nairobi 2002.
- RAHNER, K., *The Church and the Sacraments*, London 1974, 1986⁹.
- _____, *Theological Investigations*. II. *Man in the Church*. III. *The Theology of the Spiritual Life*. XI. *Confrontations*, London – New York, 1975, 1982, 1982.
- SCHMAUS, M., *Dogma*, III. *God and His Christ*, 1971.
- VATICAN II., *Gaudium et Spes*, Vatican City 1965, *Vatican Council II. The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. A. Flannery, Rockville 1975.

Articles

- ACRYOD, P.R., “Hosea” in *Peake’s Commentary on the Bible*, ed. M. Black – H.H. Rowley, London 1997, 603-913.
- BAER, D.A. – GORDON, R.P., “חֹסֵה” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* II, ed. W.A. VanGemeren, Grand Rapids 1996, 211-218.
- BRACKE, J.M., “חֹסֵה” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* III, ed. W.A. VanGemeren, Grand Rapids 1997, 1105-1106.
- CAZELLES, H., “The Problem of the Kings in Osee 8:4” in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 11 (1949) 167-179.
- COHN, H.H., “Adultery” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* II, 315-317.
- COLLINS, R.F., “Commandment” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* I, 1097-1099.
- DULLES, A., “Conversion” in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. R. Latourelle – R. Fisichella, New York 1994, 191-193.
- FEULLENGACH, J., “Kingdom of God” in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. R. Latourelle – R. Fisichella, New York 1994, 586-594.
- FISICHELLA, R., “Hans Urs von Balthasar” in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. R. Latourelle – R. Fisichella, New York 1994, 69-74.
- _____, “Prophecy” in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. R. Latourelle – R. Fisichella, New York 1994, 788-798.
- GOODFRIEND, E.A., “Adultery” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* I, 82-85.
- JOHNSON, L.T., “The Book of Luke- Acts” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* IV, 403-420.
- KERN, W., “Paschal Mystery I: Suffering and Death” in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. R. Latourelle – R. Fisichella, New York 1994, 758-768.
- KRUGER, P.A., “Theology of Hosea” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* III, ed. W.A. VanGemeren, Grand Rapids 1997, 709-714.
- MAUCHLINE, J. – PHILLIPS, H.C., “The Book of Hosea” in *The Interpreter’s Bible* VI, ed. G.A. Butterick – W.R. Bowie, Nashville 1984, 553-725.

- MCCARTHY, D.J. – MURPHY, R.E., “Hosea” in *The New Jerusalem Bible Commentary*, ed. J.A. Fitzmyer - R.E. Murphy – D.J. McCarthy, Washington, D.C. 1988, 217-228.
- MCKENZIE, J.L., “Divine Passion in Osee” in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 17 (1955) 167-179.
- MENDENHALL, G.E. - HERION, G.A., “Covenant” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* I, 1179-1202.
- NAAMAN, N., “Amarna Letters” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* I, 174-180.
- O’COLLINS, G., “Love” in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. R. Latourelle - R. Fisichella, New York 1994, 607-609.
- RYAN, D., “Hosea” in *A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, ed. R.C. Fuller - L. Johnston - C. Kearns, Westminster 1981, 676-688.
- SEOW, C.L., “The Book of Hosea” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* III, 293-297.
- YOUNG, R., “Mercy” in *Analytical Concordance to the Holy Bible*, Guildford - London, 1979, 655-656.
- ZOBEL, H.J., “הסד” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* V, ed. G.J. Botterweck - H. Ringgren, Grand Rapids 1986, 44-64.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Chapter I | |
| Hosea's Experience: The Story of Yahweh, the God Who Looks after His People with Love | 4 |
| 1. Introduction | 4 |
| 2. Yahweh and His Relationship with Humanity | 5 |
| 3. God's Love for Israel | 7 |
| 4. Israel's Answer to God's Love | 11 |
| 5. Conclusion | 12 |
| Chapter II | |
| Luke 15: Stories of God Who Looks after the Sinners with Love | 13 |
| 1. Introduction | 13 |
| 2. The Experience of Sin in Luke's Gospel | 14 |
| 3. Luke 15: Stories of God's Love and Concern for Humanity | 18 |
| 4. The Sinner's Answer to God's Love | 21 |
| 5. Conclusion | 21 |
| Chapter III | |
| The Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the Light of Hosea and Luke 15 | 23 |
| 1. Introduction | 23 |
| 2. Brief Understanding of the Sacrament of Reconciliation | 24 |
| 3. Similarities between Hosea's Experience and the Stories of Luke 15 | 28 |
| 4. Parallel between the Two Biblical Passages and the Sacrament of Reconciliation | 30 |
| 5. Importance of Stressing God's Initiative in Celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation | 32 |
| 6. Conclusion | 33 |
| Conclusion | 35 |
| Abbreviations | 38 |
| Bibliography | 39 |
| Table of Contents | 42 |