

The Authenticity of the Word in the Expression “Yahweh Touching Jeremiah's Mouth”

(Jer 1:4-10)

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ABSTRACT

The prophetic offices are always started with prophetic call narrative. There are several unique elements in this prophetic call narrative, which can be found in prophetic call moments of the prophets, namely the role of God's Words, the appearance of God (theophany) in its variety, and the delegation mission task. What is interesting to analyze is the variety of God's appearances (theophany), since the varieties depend on the context of each prophet and the delegation mission tasks given to them. This

article discusses the prophetic call narrative of Jeremiah. At first sight, the calling and delegation moments of Jeremiah resembles Isaiah and Ezekiel's, especially in God's hands and the prophet's mouth activity. Nevertheless, in Jeremiah's prophetic call narrative, God's activities have a special meaning related to his context. In Jeremiah's case, the act of God touching his mouth and putting His words into it is the emphasis of the authenticity of God's Words that comes out of Jeremiah's mouth. The authenticity is needed by Jeremiah because he has to face false prophets.

Key Words:

- *Divine Word* • *Prophetic Office* • *Authenticity* • *Prophetic Call Narrative*
- *Touching Mouth* • *Wortereign is Formel*.

The Jeremiah's call narrative, with its appended versions, reflects a certain style, but almost certainly draws on authentic elements of the Jeremiah tradition. It serves both as an affirmation of the divine origin and authority of the message that is given in the book that follows, and as a key to its central message.¹ But it is easily recognized that the story of Jeremiah's call in Jer 1:4-10 is understood by other themes.

Introductory problems

At first glance, the section of Jer 1:4-10 seems to be yet other prophetic call narratives.² The comparison between Jeremiah and others prophets lead to a consideration of form-critical studies of prophetic call narratives. Older form criticism connected this passage with others narrating the "call" of prophetic and other charismatic figures in ancient Israel – for example,

Moses, Samuel, Gideon, Isaiah, and Ezekiel. Common motifs occurred suggesting the existence of oral genre as precursors to the written texts that served, especially in the case of prophets, as apologetic oral forms defending the legitimacy and authority of the oracular speaker. Be that as it may, in the present literary context meaning and fiction outstrip such postulated oral performances.³ In this article, it is noted that Jeremiah's call narrative can be compared to other prophetic calls at least in three categories. First, according to how God calls someone to be a prophet. Second, according to how God calls someone to be a prophet. Third, according to with which tradition this call narrative is approximately nearer.

The typical element of prophecy: the word

If Jeremiah's call narrative is viewed from the age when he was called, it appears similar to Samuel's call. Jeremiah was called to be a prophet in the thirteenth year of King Josiah (Jer 1:2.4). This was 627 B.C., the same year Assurbanipal of Assyria died. In his account of the call, Jeremiah emphasizes his young age.⁴ In Masoretic Text, the Hebrew *na`ar* (Jer 1:6-7) should be translated "boy" or "young one" (Vulgate: *puer*⁶), not "young man". The age which is indicated *na`ar* can only be conjectured, but from the range which covers *na`ar* "young man" rather than "child" is appropriate.⁷ Jeremiah is more like 12 or 13 years old, the approximate age of the "boy" Samuel when he was serving Eli at Shiloh, and the call to be Yahweh's prophet came to him (1Sam 2:11.18.21.26; 3:1.8). From the angle of age, Jeremiah's call appears to have its closest similarity to that of Samuel, which was lived out at the Shiloh sanctuary not far from Anathoth. Jeremiah later in his temple oracles revives the painful memories of Shiloh's destruction (Jer 7:12-14; 26:4-6).⁸

Jeremiah's prophetic call can also be compared to those of other prophet's calls according to the manner in which God calls him to be a

prophet. Lawrence Boadt mentions that this first block of narrative in the Book of Jeremiah can be compared to the call narratives of Isaiah (Isa 6) and Ezekiel (Ezek 1-3). In each case, God overcomes the weakness or shortcomings of the prophet and gives him courage.⁹ While W. Zimmerli emphasizes that one could make similar observations regarding the investigation of the call narratives of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, whose records also betray apart from the validation of the prophetic call the purpose of confrontation with the Lord who approaches for the purpose of judgment.¹⁰ However, according to W.L. Holladay, it is special in that it involves analogous signs which were perceived by both Isaiah and Ezekiel: in Isaiah's case, the seraph touched his mouth with a burning coal taken from the temple altar (Isa 6:6-7), while in Ezekiel's, Yahweh commanded him to eat a written scroll (Ezek 2:8-3:3).¹¹

But not all of the commentators agree with the opinions that are explained above. In a quick comparison with those classical call narratives (Isa 6:1ff; Ezek 3-4; 1Sam 3), A. Spreafico stresses four specific points of Jeremiah's call narrative which distinguish it from another call narratives.¹² Firstly, it concerns the dialogue and poetic structure of the text without insertion in a narrative frame. Second, the prophetic call doesn't happen with a punctual action and at a precise moment in history, but is already established from birth. This is the most evident characteristic of Jeremiah's call. It is clear that this detail confers a strong divine legitimacy to the prophetic call, in as much as it underlines both the privileged relationship between God and Jeremiah ("I knew you") and the separation of the prophet from his assignment ("I consecrated you – I appointed you as prophet"). Third, it prevails the typical element of prophecy: the word. This fact also places emphasis on the other call narratives, though in different ways, particularly in Exod 4:10-16; 1Sam 3:19-21; Isa 6:5-7; Ezek 3). Fourth, another element in common with all of the stories is the public quality of the prophetic function: "So now I am sending you to Pharaoh," (Exod

3:10); "Go, and say to this people," (Isa 6:9); "Go and speak to the House of Israel" (Ezek 3:1).

It can also be seen that Jeremiah's call is a clear and unmistakable appropriation of Mosaic tradition.¹³ Jeremiah's protestations about not being able to speak (Jer 1:6) have a parallel in the demur Moses made about his lack of eloquence (Exod 4:10-17). Jeremiah is reminiscent of Moses who also complains and gives excuse at the moment of God's call. Moses protests that he is inarticulate and therefore unfit and Jeremiah argues a lack of rhetorical expertise based on this inexperience. But here, Jeremiah's youth (*cf.* Moses' eighty years) provides the justification. He is young and lacks a commanding presence and authority, and he has had no practice in the skills of public speaking. His response has also been contrasted to that of Isaiah. Isaiah's reaction to a vision of Yahweh's majesty and purity is that he is an unclean man in an unclean community. His strong conviction that the unclean community must be warned overcomes any personal misgivings or sense of inadequacy (Isa 6:6-7).¹⁴

Even so, the composition writes Jeremiah under the sign of Moses. For Yahweh's sign-act ("I will put my words in your mouth" [Jer 1:9]) plays off Deut 18:18 ("I will put my words in his mouth, and he will proclaim to them whatever I command him" [Jer 1:7]; "Whatever I command you, you will proclaim") and enrolls Jeremiah in the Mosaic prophetic succession.¹⁵ When Jeremiah reports that Yahweh intends to put his words into Jeremiah's mouth (Jer 1:9), repeating a promise made earlier to Moses at the time he was called, it is considered more than a simple case of role modeling: Jeremiah has understood himself to be the "prophet like Moses" promised in Deut 18:18.¹⁶

The theme "prophet like Moses" also appears in Jer 1:8. It is worthwhile to note what God says to Jeremiah in Jer 1:8: "Fear not, I am with you!" it also refers us back to the great figure of Moses, who needed God's reassurance in order to return and proclaim God's message of freedom to

his people and who declared he did not know how to speak, and asked God to let his brother Aaron come with him (Exod 4:13-17). The prophet Jeremiah in this description will be a new Moses, both declaring God's words and interceding for the people when they are evil, as Moses had to do again and again in the wilderness when the Israelites rebelled out of hunger and tiredness (Num 11-14).¹⁷

At first glance we saw that the section of Jer 1:4-10 appeared to be yet other prophetic call narratives. It is also easily recognized that the story of Jeremiah's call in Jer 1,4-10 is acknowledged in other themes. This present work attempts to discover the particular elements of Jeremiah's call narrative which is distinguish it from other prophetic call narratives. In order to understand Jeremiah's call narrative and its context, many proposals have been suggested by biblical scholars. Perhaps the most influential work on this subject is the work of W. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, published in 1986. According to McKane, the interest in the Ancient Versions, which is characteristic of his commentary, is not only, or even principally, related to their importance for textual criticism. The assumption that the versions are of prime exegetical significance is so fundamental that it would be impossible to separate the treatment which has been given to them from the body of the work and to isolate it in small print as merely a technical and textual material. The ancient versions which are used (*Septuagint, Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion, Vulgate, Peshitta, Targum*) are regarded as indispensable early witnesses to the exegesis of the Hebrew words, or a grammatical contribution with respect to obscure passages, and a conscientious attempt has been made to exploit all the possibilities of help.¹⁸

Some specific questions about Jer 1:9

One of some particular elements of Jeremiah's call narrative is Yahweh's sign-act, "I have put my words in your mouth (Jer 1:9)". The study of Jer 1:9 will be of interest because this symbolic action was very important, for the Hebrew prophet believed himself to be a spokesman or mouthpiece for God. His mouth must be pure, and he must speak the words given to him.¹⁹ This is the proclaimed word and it carries intrinsic power within itself. This is not, however, to be understood supernaturally. To hold, as is sometimes done, that the Hebrew conception of prophecy regards the word "as effecting its own fulfillment" is a dangerous half-truth – as though the word uttered by the prophet were "filled with this divine energy" and "passed from the prophet's lips into an independent existence of its own".²⁰

According to D. Kimchi, the expression "God touching Jeremiah's mouth" is evidence that God is the source of the prophetic utterance. It is a striking figure to communicate the sense that the prophet speaks authoritatively for Yahweh. The written scroll in Ezekiel's call narrative function similarly (*MTEzek 2:8ff*). It is unsafe and unwise to make theological deductions from the different imagery in the two books, that in one prophecy it is still the dynamic and plastic spoken word, whereas in the other it pre-exists as a written scroll. We are dealing in both with a prophet's credentials and authorization: Yahweh puts his words in Jeremiah's mouth and Ezekiel digests a scroll which makes him an authentic prophet of doom.²¹ In addition to these emphases, the expression also brings out the personal qualification, the commissioning and the legitimacy of the prophet.²² To be a prophet or an apostle as, one's own terms would be arrogance: "Divine authority is the decisive factor".²³

Those are all important for Jeremiah, remembering his tender age when he was called to be a prophet to the nations (Jer 1:6). Jeremiah objects that he is too young and that he has no training in public speaking. How is it

possible for one solitary individual like Jeremiah “to pluck up and to break down, to build and to plant” in respect of whole nations (Jer 1:9f)? This is probably the initial crisis point in Jeremiah's inner experience. Here “his own law” – as the psychologist would describe it²⁴ – and the law of Yahweh becomes one.²⁵ Clearly, only by means of the word of Yahweh which Yahweh injects into history, for this word is very different from that of his degenerate professional fellow-prophets – it is like a hammer which breaks the rocks in pieces (Jer 5:14; 23:29).²⁶

God overrules him and promises to give him the words to say. The prophecy will not be Jeremiah's but God's. It will be a task far greater than anything he could do on his own, for he shall speak to many nations, not just to Judah and Israel. But he will have to speak judgment as well as hope.²⁷ Jeremiah's self-awareness, “I am inexperienced”, is corrected and superseded by his commission (Jer 1:6f).²⁸ It is clear that especially in Jeremiah, the divine word that touches him personally also reveals itself to him as a crushing force.²⁹

The theme of the word which reveals itself also becomes an important matter to discuss. It means that the words which Jeremiah has to announce are not just the “human word”, but “the authentic word of God”. The authenticity of the word of God is very important in the prophecy. The prophet is inspired. One does not seek out this task. Indeed to be a prophet is often an unenviable role.³⁰ The special gift of a prophet is his ability to experience the divine in an original way and to receive revelations from the divine word. The prophet belongs entirely to God. His paramount task is to listen to, and obey, his God. In every respect he has given himself up to his God and stands unreservedly at his disposal.³¹ The last theme mentioned will be the central theme in this present work. It will be discussed especially in the last part of this work and become the theological focus of the text.

Theological focus of the text

In present section, we shall attempt to summarize some theological points, tacking some remaining problem, especially concerning to authenticity of Yahweh's word in the prophetic office of Jeremiah. Whether we can speak of his theology in any strict construction of the term may questioned, for nowhere does he endeavor to delineate his thought into a nicely articulated system. The language and literary modes are such as to resist intellectual formulations, which is Jeremiah likely would not have understood or would have deemed inadequate to his meaning. So abundant and striking are his imagery and symbolism that a general or abstract terminology deprives his thought of what is most alive and most significant.

The calling word (Jer 1:4-5)

“Before I formed you in the belly I knew you and before (you) came forth from the womb I consecrated you, a prophet to the nation I appointed you.”

In Jer 1:4-5, we have the narrative program which is to be developed in the following verses. It consists of two parts. First, we have “divine revelation in narrative form.” This is also usually named “the introductory formula” (Jer 1:4). Second, we have “divine commission in poetry form (Jer 1:5). This part at all once becomes the introductory discourse of Yahweh for beginning his planning to Jeremiah. From these two verses, we shall take two points of considerations. The first point is the coming of Yahweh's word (*Wortereignisformel*)³² for Jeremiah. As mentioned in the beginning part of the analysis of the narrative, this is the only decisive event for all of his life. Yahweh's word changes Jeremiah way of life as a shock or a summer storm.³³ For that reason, Jeremiah limits himself to a personal shaped formula of Yahweh's word.

The word experience becomes his personal experience. Further, his message is dominated completely by the event of the divine word in which

he refers in the first person. The word of Yahweh is possessed and entered Jeremiah's life by Yahweh, inserts this human life in a horizon that has extremely wide dimensions. The horizon is not a result of human reflection, but divine revelation.

The second point refers to Yahweh's action ("to know, to consecrate, and to appoint"). As mentioned above, the two first indicated ("to know and to consecrate") verbs are parallel. Because of the parallelism, the power of the two actions is equal. The interesting thing is the third verb. Actually, the third verb ("to appoint") could be parallel too. Just here, this point could be discussed. Regarding its form, the verb *nūtaTTîkâ* ("I appointed you") parallels to the two verbs. However, its bound to the parallelism of the verbs is as if weak, because this verb does not have words order, which precedes it. The verb looks like separated from the other parallelisms.

From this fact we could interpret that the power of the verb *nūtaTTîkâ* ("I appointed you") is not equal to the two verbs'. Its power could be stronger. Jeremiah's original existence is as a son of Hilkiyah, of a priestly family in Anathoth, in the land of Benjamin (Jer 1:1). This sense of originality could also be seen in the parallelism of two expression of womb as *terminus a quo* of Yahweh's plan. Priest is his *status quo*. Yahweh knows him (including his *status quo*). Thus, the usage of expressions "to know" and "to consecrate" is natural for him. On the other hand, the usage of the expression "a prophet of the nations I appointed you" becomes interesting, concerning Jeremiah's *status quo*. With this expression, Yahweh as if strengthens another status to Jeremiah. That is a prophet to the nations.

If we still affirm the stronger power of the third verb, the last action could be the climax of the actions. Yahweh does not only add a new status to Jeremiah, but also changes him to a prophet. The effect of this action is a changing existence. Prophetic function becomes more significant in Jeremiah rather than priestly function. In the following parts of Jeremiah's book, we can see that Jeremiah cannot do his priestly function. Even, he is

prohibited to enter and speak in the temple (Jer 7:1-15; 11:9-14; 26). From here, we could affirm that Yahweh's program for Jeremiah is not to do his priestly function, but to perform his "new status". That is prophetic function. In this text, prophetic function is more important than the priestly one. However, we could also smell Deuteronomyc influence here. In Deut 17-18 it is figured that the prophetic vocation is more sacred than the priestly one.

Finally, we can connect those two points. Yahweh establishes his plan for Jeremiah. Yahweh gives a special authority to Jeremiah to be a prophet to the nations. Prophetic function focuses in providing sustenance for Yahweh's word. First, the prophet has to experience by himself the coming of Yahweh's word. In its turn, this experience leaves the prophet to realize it (to the nations). How Jeremiah has to realize it can be seen in the following verses in this presence text.

The rebuttal of the prophet and its overcoming (Jer 1:6-8)

"And I replied, Ah, Lord God, behold: I do not know how to speak for a youth I (am). Yahweh said to me: Do not say I (am) youth, for to all to whom I shall send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Be not afraid of them, for with you I (am) to rescue you, oracle of Yahweh."

In Jer 1:6-8, there is a different formula referring to the previous part (Jer 1:4-5). There is no more monologue (of Yahweh). Here, Jeremiah begins to convey his answer to Yahweh's commission. Yahweh perceives Jeremiah's answer in his turn. Thus, we have a dialogue between Yahweh and Jeremiah. The dialogue here all at once shows the dramatic event of the text. It reveals the encounter between two different real types of characters, which meet each other, bringing their own interest to discuss.³⁴ We can experience their argumentations, which are expressed by their own language, expression and emotion. Here, we could see the vivid angle of the text.

This presence block of text can be divided into two parts. First, “Jeremiah's objection” (Jer 1:6: “And I replied, Ah, Lord God, behold: I do not know how to speak for a youth I (am).”) Second, “Divine rebuttal and reassurance in poetry form” (Jer 1:7-8: “Yahweh said to me: Do not say I (am) youth, for to all to whom I shall send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Be not afraid of them, for with you I (am) to rescue you, oracle of Yahweh.”)

In this part, we face the programmatic plan of Yahweh. This is the first point. Yahweh overcomes the weakness or shortcomings of the prophet and gives him courage. Note how Yahweh says to Jeremiah, “Be not afraid of them, for with you I (am)”. It also points us back to the great figure of Moses, who needed Yahweh's reassurance in order to go back and proclaim Yahweh's message of freedom to his people in whom he has to declare, but he did not know how to speak and asked Yahweh to let his brother, Aaron, come with him (Exod 3-6).

Jeremiah in this description would be a new Moses, both declaring Yahweh's word and interceding for the people when they are evil, as Moses had to do again and again in the wilderness when the Israelites rebelled out of hunger and tiredness (Num 11-14). There are not of any excuses for Yahweh's plan. Yahweh himself already programs all. The prophecy thus will not be Jeremiah's but Yahweh's. Jeremiah is “only” an instrument³⁵ to realize Yahweh's plan. Jeremiah just has to obey to Yahweh's will. For Jeremiah, however, there is a borderline between obedience and disobedience. This borderline is fraught, all his life long, with even greater peril.

What happens with Jeremiah is an increasing inability to see where he is going. It is indicated by Yahweh's commission in Jer 1:7 (*tlk – dbr*: “go and speak”). It is not merely that he ponders on the lack of success, which attends his work. The failure, however, is not only an outward one, stemming from other people. It is also personal in that the prophet is no

longer at one with his office and his tasks at all events. He now calls the first part company. Indeed, serious tensions threaten the whole of his calling as a prophet. As a result of this parting between the man and the prophet, the prophetic calling as it had been known up to Jeremiah's own time entered upon a critical phase of its existence. So that, he needs Yahweh's assurance.

In the second point, we have to turn to a subject which is equally central for all the prophets, namely, *dübar-yhwh* [‘ädönäy] (“the word of Yahweh”). The importance of *dübar-yhwh* [‘ädönäy] (“the word of Yahweh”) in the present part is indicated by Jeremiah's excuse that he does not know how to speak (Jer 1:6) and his specific mission commissioned by Yahweh, *tlk – dbr* (“go and speak”) in Jer 1:7. In the first expression, Jeremiah already understands that the prophetic office given by Yahweh is especially to speak or to articulate the word of Yahweh.

In the second expression, it is Yahweh himself who affirms the central place of his word in the prophetic office. To speak and to articulate the word of Yahweh, special authority is needed. In all of these accounts, there is an explicit recognition that the prophet mission will be accomplished only in the teeth of powerful opposition. This may even denies the prophet's authority. This authority must come from the owner of the word. The owner of the word is Yahweh. Thus, Jeremiah as the one who commissioned to do the prophetic office has to have that authority. Jeremiah confuses that he has it. He implicitly expresses his excuse of lacking the authority to say Yahweh's word.

In his turn, Yahweh already understands that Jeremiah needs the authority of the word. Because of that, Yahweh specifies Jeremiah's prophetic office by the specific commission: *tlk – dbr* (“go and speak”). Thus, the authority changes Jeremiah. He is now “the man of the word” (Jer 18:18). In the following part, Yahweh strongly affirms the authority to Jeremiah by touching his mouth and putting Yahweh's word into it (Jer 1:9)

However, it is in Jeremiah that in the face of growing skepticism about his own capability and office he is yet able to give an almost superhuman obedience to Yahweh. Bearing the immense strains of his calling, Jeremiah is also able to follow a road which leads him that this mediatorial suffering might have a meaning in the sight of Yahweh. Again, if Yahweh brings the life of the most faithful for a night and there to all appearances allowed him to come to utter grief, this remains Yahweh's secret program.

The conferment of the divine appointment (Jer 1:9-10)

"Then extended Yahweh his hand, and touched my mouth and Yahweh said to me: Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See: I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms to uproot and to demolish, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

We arrived in the third part of the text. This present part is parallel to the first part (Jer 1:4-5). Nevertheless, the word (of Yahweh) only could not be enough. The action (of Yahweh) which particularly seals His discourse is also necessary. Thus, word and action would have to be still interwoven. Thus, in this present part we have both: word and action. The action precedes the word. We can find it in Jer 1:9a: "Then extended Yahweh his hand, and touched my mouth, and Yahweh said to me." Thus, it is first part. As continuation of the action, here the specific office for Jeremiah is spelled out in general terms, which are nevertheless given a degree or particularity. It is the second part. This part contains the word itself. It can be found in Jer 1:9b-10: "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See: I have set you this day over the nations and over kingdoms to uproot and to demolish to destroy and to overthrow to build and to plant." Thus, in the two following verses the conferment of the divine appointment is revealed.

The examination of two last verses (Jer 1:9-10) of the text above may help us to interpret the ultimate depth of meaning of the connection between

Yahweh's action and his word. The action precedes the word, but both are not separated. Both of them are still interwoven. Both of action and word construct the word event for Jeremiah. The action cannot stand by itself because it functions as tool, which delivers the word (of Yahweh) to Jeremiah. Thus, the relation between the action and the word is reciprocal. Again, the unifying point of the reciprocity is the coming of Yahweh's word (*Wortereignisformel*). In its turn, the *Wortereignisformel* becomes the very important element for prophetic authority of Jeremiah. This is our unique point of consideration in the present part: Jeremiah's prophetic authority.

As mentioned above, Yahweh's action is developed in three moments: *šālaH 'et-yād* ("extend the hand"), *naGa`al-Peh* ("touch the mouth") and *'mr* ("say"). They make up a parallelism formula. It means that each action has the same quality. The parallelism formula is constructed by a series of *w* (*wāw*) – consecutive. However, we could also observe the parallelism as a concentric arrangement. The first action (*šālaH 'et-yād* – "extend the hand") and the third action (*'mr* – "say") frame the second action (*naGa`al-Peh* – "touch the mouth"). Thus, we have an inclusion construction.³⁶ It could also be understood because the verb in the second action (*naga`* is in *hiphāl*, while two other verbs in the first and third action (*šālaH* and *'mr*) are in *qal*.

The consequence of this construction is that the second action is emphasized stronger. If we follow this argumentation, it could be clearer that "touch the mouth" for Jeremiah becomes the most important sign. We have already examined that this gesture is also found in some passages of the other prophets (Isaiah and Ezekiel). The verb that is used in Isaiah (Isa 6:7) is the same as in Jer 1:9 (*naga`*). However, the context is different. In Isaiah, "touching the mouth" is in the purification and preparation of prophetic office. In Ezekiel (Ezek 2,8ff), there is no implicitly "touching the mouth", but Yahweh's hand helps him to make his mouth can eat the scrolls of Yahweh's word.

The usage of the verb *naga`* for expressing “touching the mouth” is strange enough. Actually, the more expected word for “put” in such action is *Sim*. It can be found in the passage when Yahweh put a word in Balaam's mouth (Num 23,5: *wayyā`Sem yhubh[`ädönäy] Däbär Büpî bil`äm*). We can also find the usage of the verb *Sim* in Second Isaiah (Isa 51,16: *wä`äSîm Dübäray Büpî`kä* – “I have put my words into your mouth”) and eight other instances with “word(s)” and “mouth”.³⁷ This note of the stranger usage of the verb *naga`* affirms the special role of the action. It could be to emphasize that the action is in the same event with the other prophets. That is calling event.

Nevertheless, as also mentioned above, context of “touching the mouth” in Jeremiah is exactly the affirmation of Jeremiah's authority to realize the prophetic office. It leads us to face another prophet. That is Moses. The following Yahweh's action (*mr* – “say”) strengthens Jeremiah's authority, because here Yahweh does not only touch Jeremiah's mouth, but also put in it his words *näta`TTî dübäray Büpî`kä* – “I have put my words in your mouth”). This expression brings us to enter in Deuteronomistic tradition indicated by the passage in Deut 18:18: “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth (*wünäta`TTî dübäray Büpî`kä*).” It could be rightly draw attention to the close relation between Jeremiah and Moses. This relation could show that Jeremiah is a prophet who stands in the succession of Moses, demanding Israel's obedience to Yahweh's laws. The proposal is argued persuasively and bears certain plausibility.

We shall not examine the relation between Jeremiah and Moses. However, there is the same context. There is indication to the false prophecies. This is exactly Jeremiah's problems. The contrast between reality and delusion, truth and falsehood, dominates Jeremiah's prophecy and is an important key to his thought. Jeremiah, too, is incensed by injustice and profligacy, but he particularizes about very few of Judah's

failings. Rather, he is distinctive for his deep psychological penetration and despairing conviction that the whole of Judah's life is permeated by falsehood (cf. Jer 9,3: “Falsehood and not truth has grown strong in the land”). That is why prophetic authority becomes very important for Jeremiah.

Conclusion

Time, space, and above all, relevancy to our topic, do not permit us to explore every single element in the Jeremiah's call narrative. During our journey throughout the passages of Jer 1:4-10, we have indeed encountered some interesting points that we can only suggest to be in need of further development. We believe that they have some importance and relevance that deserve our attention, especially when we are to deal with the problem of authenticity of Yahweh's word, whether in the biblical field or in our modern age. Without intending to repeat what has been discussed at considerable length before, particularly in the previous section, we could just state here that the Jeremiah's call narrative cover two important points. First, Yahweh's activity in the life of Jeremiah. Second, authenticity of Yahweh's word in Jeremiah's prophetic office.

Yahweh's activity in the life of Jeremiah

Yahweh's activity in Jeremiah's life is best understood by an examination of the many verbs in which he is addressed, more particularly in his narrative call. Here, we have Jeremiah's most inward “theology” in *nuce*.³⁸ We confine ourselves to the divine first-person verbs: “I knew you” (Jer 1:5); “I consecrated you” (Jer 1:5), “I appointed you” (Jer 1:5), “I shall send you” (Jer 1:7), “I command you” (Jer 1:7), with you [am] I” (Jer 1:8), “I have put my words in your mouth” (Jer 1:9), and “I have set you this day

over nations and over kingdoms” (Jer 1:10). It is in lines such as these that we come to grasp what Yahweh's presence meant to Jeremiah.

That series of the divine first-person verbs also offers a description who is a prophet. A prophet is a person who is from Yahweh, not because of his own personal will, but because of the divine choice, a symbol of a gratitude love. It is dedicated in Jer 1:5 in which Yahweh knew Jeremiah before Yahweh formed him in the belly and consecrated him before he came forth from the womb. It is obvious that Yahweh's knowing of Jeremiah is more than cognitive. It is rather an activity of relationship, an interior and prior being – apprehended. This choice has a purpose in the specific assignment to be a prophet that in Jeremiah's case is valid for the nations (Jer 1:5). This prophetic call at once affirms Jeremiah's prophetic role more than his priestly role (*cf.* Jer 1:1-3).

The following difficulty comes from Jeremiah's young age. It becomes his rebuttal to Yahweh's plan. Young age seems become obstacle of Yahweh's choice that is given trust completely to Jeremiah. However, for Yahweh it is not enough to block his plan. Yahweh absolutely insists on his stand. He has to realize his plan. Overruling Jeremiah's lack of authority by his assurance, Yahweh still pursues his plan. Yahweh realizes his plan by himself intermediate his prophet, and he protects it (Jer 1:6-8).

The mission that is given by Yahweh to Jeremiah –go and speak – becomes clearer. Yahweh puts his own words into Jeremiah's mouth. Jeremiah therefore becomes Yahweh's spokesman, the person who speaks not in his name, but in the name of the person who entrust it (Jer 1:9). This divine word refers to the prophet the same authority, as an official representative and as a person who replaces the main person who has the authority. The text (Jer 1:10a) uses the same verb that indicates the official assignment from Nebuchadnezzar to Gedaliah to govern Judea in his name after the destruction of Jerusalem (Jer 40:5-7).

Jeremiah also has to shatter all who against the sovereignty of the person who assigns him. In the same time, Jeremiah has to build the life situation related to Yahweh's plan to save the nations (Jer 1:10a). In his prophetic office, Jeremiah has to realize the marvelous work of Yahweh, build by first doing a total destruction and from the ruins, creates a new life.

In brief, in Jeremiah's case, Yahweh does his activities to call Jeremiah to be a prophet. Because of this calling, Jeremiah is grasped. The call to the prophetic office leaves no room for wiggle. The fact that he was called from before his birth shows that Jeremiah is specifically called to exercise his prophetic office over nations. The fact that Jeremiah includes a frank statement of his objection³⁹ to the call underlines that he devises for himself but something lies upon him. Jeremiah hesitation in accepting his commission (Jer 1:6) to be Yahweh's spokesman in bringing against his people is overcome by Yahweh in his assurance. It allows understanding that Yahweh's assurance to Jeremiah will make him strong enough to withstand whatever opposition that comes.⁴⁰

Authenticity of Yahweh's word in Jeremiah's prophetic office

In Jeremiah's dramatic call narrative, the main actor is the word, so that, here the theology of the word reaches its culmination. Throughout his life, Jeremiah is aware that it is his destiny to proclaim Yahweh's word. The hour of his call is the arrival of Yahweh's word to him. Theologically, it affirms that the word and deed come from Yahweh to this particular man at a specific time. This word comes from Yahweh as his real representation. This word has Yahweh's intention and will in front of a dynamic word. Its dynamic force goes into Jeremiah. As a consequence, Jeremiah's existence is in its grasp.

Since that event, Jeremiah's life is established strongly by the word. Without hesitation, now Jeremiah becomes the man of the word. In its turn,

Yahweh's word in Jeremiah's prophetic office determines the destination of the prophetic office. The fate of the nations as the destination of Jeremiah's prophetic office is in its hands. It saves or condemns them.

Yahweh's word does not happen in mysterious way, for example in a dream or in a midnight vision. Yahweh gives his word directly in human life, in the daily happening, in the person surrounding the prophet. In those circumstances, in the word of history and of the people, the prophet finds Yahweh's word. Since *dābār* means both "word" and "thing", and since the name of a person or place may contain insight into Yahweh's purposes, it is clear that Yahweh may bring to bear upon the event in which the prophet participates a meaning that transcends the event itself. It is clear too, because of the fact mentioned above, that Yahweh may reveal himself through ordinary human experience in symbolic action of prophetic word.

However, in Jeremiah's word event, Yahweh's word comes in a series of action which is done by Yahweh as if human gesture: touching the mouth and putting the words in it.

The divine words are placed in Jeremiah's mouth, words which are to extend to nations and kingdoms with overwhelming consequences. A "touching the mouth" of Jeremiah followed by a conferment "I have put my words in your mouth" (Jer 1:9) and an assignment to go and to speak whatever it is commanded by Yahweh (Jer 1:7) clarify the function and the office which has to realize: to say what will said by Yahweh. To the words Jeremiah as a true prophet must subject himself in obedience, listening, and waiting. For Jeremiah, it forms the line of battle where he wages his terrible conflicts.

However, Yahweh overrules him and gives the words which he has to say. Thus, the prophecy will not be Jeremiah's but Yahweh's. It all at once affirms that the special characteristic feature of a prophet is that he speaks not in his own name, but in the name of another.⁴¹ In the words of the

prophet there are in fact the words of another. Yahweh takes an initiative in putting his words into Jeremiah's mouth. Thus, Jeremiah understands his prophetic office to be centered in his mouth. His mouth, in turn, might give forth those words.

A "touching the mouth" gives a foundation of Jeremiah's authority emphasizing that his message does not just come from human creative force, but from Yahweh's word. There is not hesitation, therefore, that the word which comes forth from Jeremiah's mouth is purely Yahweh's word. This fact at once strongly indicates the authenticity of the word of Yahweh in Jeremiah's prophetic office.⁴²

In brief, the call narrative embodies Jeremiah's testimony that he is a legitimate prophet commissioned by Yahweh to speak and act with an authority and authentic word that come also from Yahweh. The whole narrative then serves the purpose of self-legitimation.

Epilogue

Epilogue, but is not a conclusion. The whole narrative then offers a precious lesson not only for Jeremiah in that time, but also for all readers throughout the ages. For them the encounter between Yahweh and Jeremiah should also produce a prophetic call as a divine revelation. When the world of the readers meets the world of the text, then an appeal is made to readers to adopt the idea offered by the text. As soon as they encounter the text, they are also invited to learn Jeremiah's experience so that they may place themselves in the proper relationship between human beings and the Almighty, who does not act in a systematic, but rather, in a dramatic way.

However, readers must have adequate knowledge of the background questions and must at least be acquainted with theoretical and methodological problems. In the case of narrative material the reading should go beyond banal paraphrase and yet avoid fanciful allegory.

End Notes:

- ¹ R.E. Clements, *Old Testament Prophecy, from Oracles to Canon*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky 1996, p.109.
- ² W. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, New York 1986, p.9.
- ³ J.D.G. Dunn (ed.), *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids (MI) 2003, pp.548-549.
- ⁴ J.R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, Anchor Bible Dictionary, New York 1999, p.107.
- ⁵ L. Koehler – W. Baumgartner, *A Bilingual Dictionary of the Hebrew and Aramaic Old Testament*, Brill, Leiden 1998, p. but *The New Jerusalem Bible*, London-New York 1985 translated it "child".
- ⁶ R. Weber, *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*, Württembergische Bibellanstalt, Stuttgart 1969.
- ⁷ W. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, pp.7-8.
- ⁸ J.R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p.107.
- ⁹ L. Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament, an Introduction*, Paulist Press, New York 1984, p.372.
- ¹⁰ W. Zimmerli, *The Fiery Throne. The Prophets and Old Testament Theology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 2003, p.28.
- ¹¹ W.L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1986, pp.29-30.
- ¹² A. Spreafico, *La Voce di Dio. Per capire I Profeti*, Edizioni Devoniene, Bologna 2002, pp.178-179.
- ¹³ J.R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, pp.107-108.
- ¹⁴ W. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, p.7.
- ¹⁵ J.D.G. Dunn (ed.), *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, pp.548-549.
- ¹⁶ J.R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, pp.107-108.
- ¹⁷ L. Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament*, p.372.
- ¹⁸ W. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. xv.
- ¹⁹ G. A. Buttrick (ed.), *Interpreter's Dictionary of Bible*, Abingdon Press, Nashville (TN) 1962, p. 798.
- ²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 804.
- ²¹ Cf. W. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, p. 10.

- ²² R. Rendtorff, *The Old Testament, An Introduction*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1991, p. 116.
- ²³ S. Kierkegaard, *The Present Age*, tr. A. Dru & W. Lourie, London 1940, p. 144.
- ²⁴ C. G. Jung, *The Integration of the Personality*, tr. S. DELL, New York 1939, p. 301: «In so far as a man is untrue to his own law and does not rise to personality, he has failed of the meaning of his life».
- ²⁵ G. A. Buttrick (ed.), *Interpreter's Dictionary of Bible*, p. 803.
- ²⁶ Cf. G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology II*, SCM Press, London 19987, pp. 91-92.
- ²⁷ L. Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament*, p. 372.
- ²⁸ H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, Sigler Press, Pennsylvania 1996, p. 76.
- ²⁹ W. Zimmerli, *The Fiery Throne*, p. 29.
- ³⁰ Cf. D.J. Zucker, *Israel's Prophets. An Introduction for Christians and Jews*, Paulist Press New York – Mahwah, New Jersey 1994, pp. 27-28.
- ³¹ J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, Blackwell, Oxford 1963, p. 1.
- ³² On this formula, cf. W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1* pp.144-145.
- ³³ A. Neher, *L'essence du Prophétisme*, Vrin, Paris 1972, p. 98.
- ³⁴ R. Alter, *L'arte della Narrativa Biblica*, tr. by E. Gatti, Queriniana, Brescia 1990, p. 93-94: «Il dialogo quindi, oscillando fra i poli della stilizzazione formale e della mimesi drammatica, rivela il personaggio concreto nella pienezza di un'azione portentosa. L'intero episodio, ovviamente, avrebbe potuto essere riportato come un sommario narrativo in un solo versetto, ma rendendolo tramite il dialogo come un vero e proprio evento narrativo, lo scrittore riesce a delineare l'incontro fatale fra due tipi umani differenti.»
- ³⁵ Cf. G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology II*, SCM Press, London 1975, p.57: «Being a prophet is never represented as a tremendous intensification or transcendence of all previous religious experience. Neither previous faith nor any other personal endowment had the slightest part to play in preparing a man who was called to stand before Yahweh for his vocation.»
- ³⁶ A literary device in which a section's opening and closing are identical or at least similar. An inclusion by definition ties the end to the beginning. It recapitulates. One might think of an inclusion as a sandwich: material is placed between identical phrases. The effect of such a device is to give unity and emphasis to the passage. For a discussion see J. Lundbom, *Jeremiah: A Study in Ancient Hebrew Rhetoric*, SBLDS 18, Scholars, Missoula, MT 1975.

³⁷ Exod 4,25; Num 22,38; 23,12.16; Deut 31,19; 2Sam 14,3.19; Isa 59,21.

³⁸ “in a nutshell, briefly stated”

³⁹ Abraham, although he is aware that he is only dust, makes a bargain with God (Gen 18,16-33). Moreover, man protest, even accuses God because of unjust suffering that he has to undergo, cf. P. Ricœur, “Le mal: un défi à la philosophie et à la théologie”, in Lectures 3, Seuil 1994, p.230.

⁴⁰ Natural force are not enough to conceive them, or to desire them, cf. Th. Aquinas, De Veritate, q.14, a.2: “aliud est bonum hominis naturæ humanæ proportionem excedens, quia ad ipsum obtinendum vires naturals non sufficient nec ad cogitandum nec ad desiderandum.”, cf. also Th. Aquinas, Summa Theologiæ, Prima Secundæ, q.114, a.2: “vita autem æterna est quoddam bonum excedens proportionem naturæ creatæ, quia etiam excedit cognitionem et desiderium eius.” That is the first reason why man needs divine assurance and divine grace, cf. William of St. Thierry, Speculum Fidei, PL,180,386 C: “in quibus (bonis æternis) tamen habet natura appetitum ex gratia creante, non tamen ea perfecte diagnoscit nisi ex gratia illuminante, nec apprehendit nisi Deo donante.”

⁴¹ Its results that “the idea of revelation appears as identified with the idea of a double author of speech and writing. Revelation is the speech of another behind the speech of the prophet.” Cf. P. Ricœur, “Herménetique de l’idée de Révélation”, in P. Ricœur – E. Levinas – E. Haulotte – e. Cornélis – C. Geffré, La Révélation, Facultes universitaires Saint Louis, Bruxelles 1984, p.17, Eng.tr. “Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation”, in Essays on Biblical Interpretation, L. Mudge (ed.), Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1980, p.75; cf. also P. Ricœur, “Nommer Dieu” in Lectures 3, Seuil 1994, p.292.

⁴² Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, The Understanding of Faith. Interpretation and Criticism, Sheed & Ward, London 1981, p.41. e. Schillebeeckx articulates its implication into the authority of Scripture as follows: “the believer acknowledges the authority of scripture not so much on the basis of its inspiration – this is an a posteriori interpretation, a reflective affirmation of the second order – but rather on the basis of the authentic witness that it bears to an event and its meaning, and because he understands that event as normative.”

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