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The Narrative Construction of Peter in the Gospel of Mark in Light of the Reports of Displacement and Exile Due to the Armed Conflict in Colombia

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Abstract

A scenario of conflict, as in the Colombian case, may be related to the socio-political context in which the Gospel according to Mark may have been written, and therefore offers new insights for the understanding of the narrative phenomena presented. In effect, Mark could have been a response to the traumatic experiences of the followers of Jesus to whom the Gospel was addressed. Likewise, the experience of those displaced and exiled by the Colombian armed conflict has involved a series of traumatic events, but also bears witness to processes of resilient reparation. Against this background, it is proposed that in Mark, the figure of Peter, courageous and determined at the beginning but cowardly and flighty at the end, is analogous to that of many victims in the Colombian armed conflict who, faced with the imminent danger of losing their lives, were forced to abandon their deepest convictions and even their loved ones to end up fleeing into hiding and exile. Nevertheless, both Mark and the experience of those displaced and exiled because of the conflict in Colombia suggest the possibility of vindication of these victims and their respective narratives, helping them to recognize that their flight was not a betrayal and that, thanks to it, the memory of the events can be reconstructed to guarantee the truth and the non-repetition of the facts.

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Colombian armed conflict, contextual reading of the Bible, exile, forced displacement, Gospel of Mark, Peter, testimony of victims

Introduction

Those who have pioneered the popular reading of the Bible in Latin America maintain that the first word that God addresses to human beings is life, prior to the word that is contained in the Bible (Mesters & Orofino 2007: 17). Thus, it is possible to propose a dialogue of mutual illumination between historical reality, as the word of God discernible in the becoming of the world, and the Bible, as the written word of God that provides the criteria for discerning this reality (Casas-Ramírez 2020a: 104).

Therefore, reality can also illuminate the Bible as far as it provides light for the discovery, clarification, or problematization of the meanings that emerge in the encounter with the text, thanks to the identification of ‘homeomorphic contextual equivalences’; these consist in the recognition of analogous or equivalent contextual situations between the social scenarios in which the texts are read and the socio-historical background in which the texts were written (their original *Sitz im Leben*). This process requires being alert to the risk of anachronistic or ethnocentric interpretation. It is therefore essential to be aware of the cultural, linguistic, and historical distance between the world of the text and the world of today’s readers and to have sufficient and critical knowledge of ‘both worlds’.

In this regard, and in relation to our specific topic, Sanjuero Otero (2021: 388) states that,

The (still) proximity of the traumatic event and the temptation of presentism can lead us to overestimate the similarities of the present situation with that of the post-war period in which Mark writes. Even so, there are a number of coordinates in common that can help us understand how the evangelist’s response to the concerns of the Christians of his time can be enlightening for believers in the 21st century.¹

Conversely, some situations of twenty-first century believers can contribute to the understanding of first-century narrative realities (with their respective theological implications), thanks to the empathetic identifications between contemporary readers, the characters within the narrative, and the possible reality experienced by the audience of the gospel.

The exercise can be carried out both in academic settings of scientific study of the Bible, as well as in popular settings where grassroots communities have developed processes of contextual reading of the Bible. In this way, contemporary

1. Quotes from Spanish sources have been translated into English by the author.

readers do not understand themselves as passive receivers of the texts looking for moralizing application of these texts in their everyday life, but establish a dialogical encounter in which they question, criticize, and enrich the meanings of the texts, exploiting their reserve of meaning, based on their own experiences and stories.

Consequently, this paper suggests that contexts of conflict and victimization, such as the Colombian case, may have a certain analogical relationship with the sociopolitical setting in which the Gospel according to Mark may have been written, in the period immediately following the Jewish War of 66–73 C.E. (Kimondo 2018), and thus offer new understanding of the narrative phenomena enunciated.

Indeed, Mark has been defined as a ‘trauma text’ in that it may have been a response to the traumatic experience lived by the followers of Jesus to whom the Gospel was addressed (Guijarro-Oporto 2019: 141). Similarly, the narratives of the victims of the Colombian conflict are an expression of their experience of trauma, but also of their resilient resignification. According to this approach, the world that is ‘in front of the text’ (the reader and his or her historical reality) can contribute to the understanding of the world that is ‘behind the text’ (the historical context in which a given text is supposed to have been written) and, consequently, of the text itself. But it is not simply a matter of understanding or enriching the understanding of a first-century text. Let us remember that ‘the main purpose of reading the Bible is not to interpret it, but to interpret life with the help of the Bible’ (Mesters & Orofino 2007: 17). In this direction, at the end of the article, as part of the performative dimension of the meaning of the biblical text, in the light of the understanding provided by the current context and as a dialogical response to the interpretative arc, some challenges suggested from the Markan story are posed to the Colombian reality, immersed in a situation of evident violent conflict, despite the fact that several years ago there were some agreements on the laying down of arms between certain armed groups and the government in power (with paramilitarism, in 2005, and with the FARC² guerrilla, in 2016).

Reading Contexts

In particular, this article addresses the themes of betrayal, denial, and flight in the midst of situations of repression and trauma. In the case of the Colombian armed conflict, countless people had to leave their homes, land, family, friends, professions, etc., fleeing the war to save their lives and those of their loved ones. ‘According to historical records published by UNHCR, in the last decade, more

2. FARC stands for ‘Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia’, which means ‘Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia’.

than half a million Colombian people have become refugees or were in a similar situation in different parts of the world' (CNMH 2018: 21). Regarding the causes of such flight, the National Center for Historical Memory notes that:

Colombian exiles have occurred as a consequence of mechanisms and forms of violence, used indiscriminately and systematically by all actors in the conflict, against people for belonging to a certain social, ethnic group, for their political opinions or simply for opposing being part of or being related to the conflict (CNMH, 2018: 50).

For its part, the Final Report of the Comisión de la Verdad (2022: 12)—the 'Truth Commission'—points out that no one flees because they want to. Exile is almost always the last resort 'after other successive events of violence suffered, such as previous forced displacement, threats, loss of loved ones or attempts on one's life'. This flight has caused uprooting, loss of identity both culturally and personally (since in many cases it has even required changing one's name), rupture of vital relationships, new re-victimizations due to the emergence of accusations, suspicions, and speculations about the causes of migration; in the end, anguish and uncertainty become the daily way of facing reality.

The exiled person loses his or her identity because we exist in a territory, in a community, in a family, and when we have to leave everything unexpectedly, it is necessary to start again. Exile speaks to us of dignity, of the need for recognition based not only on the citizenship of a given place, but on the real possibility of existing as a human being.... Exile implies losing everything that allows a person to be who he or she is: the territory, the family, the profession, the way of living life and even one's own recognition. Exile becomes for those who live it a label that implies a new identity: no longer a nurse or a peasant, but an exile, refugee/asylum seeker, immigrant, or foreigner (Comisión de la Verdad 2022: 12, 19).

However, not everyone is forced to flee in the same way. As noted by the National Center for Historical Memory, 'exile affects in a differentiated manner the most vulnerable of the population, such as women, children, youth, older adults, indigenous and Afro-descendant exiles, some of whom have remained outside the country for years or decades' (CNMH 2018: 20).

In many cases, the situation of exile and uprooting is compounded by phenomena of revictimization in which those who have had to flee are stigmatized in several ways: it is pointed out to them that, if they fled, it was because they had done something that made them worthy of persecution or that their flight has turned them into traitors of their loved ones or their people by having had to abandon them. Some people see in their flight a sign of cowardice and opportunism for wanting to seek better living conditions at the expense of those who did not have the possibility to move. The fact of having to hide their identity and keep a 'low profile' so as not to be recognized by the violent people from whom

they are fleeing has meant a denial of their authentic selves, of their family, geographic, ethnic, or socioeconomic origins, to venture into wild, unknown, and uncertain settings in order to survive. For all these reasons, many of them are received in the places where they arrive with distrust, indifference, contempt, or rejection. Their vulnerable condition makes them easy prey to any kind of exploitation, deception, extortion, or abuse.

In the case of Mark, misunderstanding, denial, betrayal, and flight are staged in a peculiar way in the context of the accounts of the passion, burial, and announcement of the resurrection of Jesus by several male characters who from the beginning of the plot were characterized as followers of Jesus, becoming part of the group of ‘the Twelve’ (Mk 3.13–19; Yarbrow Collins 2007: 14). Among them, three disciples stand out, Peter, James, and John, who are presented as receiving a privileged and more intimate treatment by Jesus. They are the first to be called (according to Mk 1.16–20³) and are exclusive witnesses of some healings (5.37) and manifestations of Jesus (Mk 9.2–13) and of his private teachings (13.3–37); but they are also the recipients of his reproaches and rebukes because of their lack of understanding of the passion announcements (8.31–33; 10.35–45). In the episode of the master’s agony, they are unable to watch with him (14.32–42) and end up fleeing with ‘all’ when their master is apprehended (14.50). The flight of the disciples at the moment of the arrest is described as abandonment of Jesus (14.50), a clear irony in the face of a story that begins with the disciples abandoning everything to follow Jesus (1.18, 20), as Peter expresses in 10.28: ‘You see, we have left everything and followed you’. After the arrest, Peter, who ventures to follow Jesus’s trial from afar (14.54), will join the denial to his previous flight (14.66–72). Nevertheless, in the end of the Gospel, as part of the Easter message addressed by the young man in the tomb to the women, they are asked to go and tell Peter and the other disciples that the Risen One will go before them to Galilee, where they will see him (16.7).

In the actancial function of ‘the Twelve’, of ‘the three’, and among these, in a particular way, of Peter, the author of the Gospel offers several clues about discipleship, not only with a critical and even negative posture, due to the incomprehension of those with respect to Jesus (Casas-Ramírez 2020b), but as a

3. Cf. Bockmuehl 2014: 194: ‘In the call account of Mk 1:16–20, Simon and Andrew are practicing their trade as fishermen, casting their nets from the shore into (literally “into”) the sea. Striking is the redundancy of “Simon and Andrew, Simon’s brother,” which immediately highlights the most prominent character. The account contains a well-known play on words related to the brothers’ profession, anticipating their future missionary activity as “fishers of men,” a correspondence rooted in OT prophecy of restoration and judgment (Jer 16:15–16) and exploited by patristic interpreters. There may be a significant reminder in the fact that Peter and his brother fish only with nets from the shore: unlike the sons of Zebedee in Mk 1:19 (and unlike Lk 5:3), Peter evidently has no boat, let alone employees, to give up - a statement in tune with patristic statements about Peter’s poor youth.’

possibility of vindication of all those who had to flee and even betray their deepest convictions and their loved ones to save their own lives in a situation of repression or trauma. These can become unparalleled witnesses of the life that opens in the midst of death.

The Narrative Construction of Peter in Mark

In the Gospel according to Mark, after Jesus, Peter is the character with the greatest number of mentions: 26 times, much more than any other disciple.⁴ His vocation is the first act of Jesus's ministry that evidences the imminent arrival of the Kingdom of God (Rodríguez Carmona 1991: 30). He is the first disciple called by Jesus, together with his brother Andrew (1.16) and before the sons of Zebedee, James, and John (1.19).

All together they enter Capernaum and will witness the initial signs performed there (1:21). They allude to their presence in the synagogue (1:29) and then go to the house of Simon and Andrew, where Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law, as they speak to him about their situation (1:29–31)... At dawn the next day, Simon and those who were with him look for Jesus, who had gone to pray in a deserted place, they tell him that they are all looking for him, but Jesus invites them to go elsewhere (Rodríguez Carmona 1991: 30).

Peter is the first mentioned in the list of the Twelve (3.16) and the last to be mentioned individually in the Gospel (16.7; Brown et al. 1976: 64). From the account of the calling of the Twelve the nickname Peter is imposed on him, a name by which he will be identified henceforth, except for 14.37.⁵ 'Peter is practically the only one of the Twelve with whom Jesus converses individually and the only one he addresses by name' (14.37; Bockmuehl 2014: 193). His mention, then, frames the entire narrative, from his initial call in Galilee and his new call on the way back to Galilee. Thus, contrary to Weeden's (1979) classic approach, which assumes an anti-Petrine perspective in the gospel, it is evident that Peter is an important part of Mark's literary construction, indicating that he was a

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4. The compound name Simon Peter does not appear in Mark (only in Matthew, John, and 2 Peter). The name Simon (Σίμων, derived from Hebrew שָׁמַע, 'to hear', or Greek Σῖμος, 'flat nose') occurs 7 times (excluding Simon of Cyrene, Simon the leper, Simon the brother of Jesus, and Simon the Canaanite), most of these in the opening of the Gospel (1.16, 29, 30, 36; 3.16; 14.37). The name Peter (Πέτρος, from the Greek noun 'stone') occurs 19 times, concentrated particularly in chapter 14 (3.16; 5.37; 8.29, 32, 33; 9.2, 5; 10.28; 11.21; 13.3; 14.29, 33, 37, 54, 66, 67, 70, 72; 16.7).
 5. This nickname, which may refer to an attribute of his personality or to a 'rock-hard' faith, will contrast with his narrative characterization, more akin to 'shifting sand' (Ehrman 2006: 14–23).

significant referent of discipleship for the Markan audience (Whitaker 2013: 670; Vorster 1987; Best 1978).

As a spokesman for the disciples, Peter was the first to acknowledge Jesus's messianism, albeit in a partial and fragmentary way (see 8.29). 'Peter's slowness in understanding Jesus's messianism is memorably symbolized in the immediately preceding pericope (Mk 8:22–26): the difficult two-stage healing of a blind man at Bethsaida' (Bockmuehl 2014: 203; see also Casas-Ramírez 2017: 249–52). Next, at the first announcement of the Passion his reproach of Jesus caused Jesus likewise to rebuke him and address the epithet 'Satan' to him (8.33). In both cases the use of the verb ἐπιτιμάω, employed in accounts of exorcisms (see 1.25; 3.12; 4.39; 9.25) and used here to express both Peter's reproach of Jesus and Jesus's reproach of Peter, denotes that each regarded his counterpart as speaking and acting under the influence of demonic forces. This highlights Peter's misunderstanding of the suffering character of Jesus's messianism and explains the term Jesus addresses to Peter, 'Satan'.

However, the expression that precedes the term Satan, 'come after me' (ὑπαγε ὀπίσω μου) (8.33), involves an attempt to rehabilitate Peter in his condition as a disciple through a new call with a clearly vocational character (Whitaker 2013: 666). In this regard, for authors such as Guijarro Oporto:

Just as at the beginning of the story Jesus had called Peter and his brother Andrew telling them 'Come follow me', so now, when on the horizon of Jesus's journey his Passion begins to be glimpsed and this new horizon is scandalous for the Twelve, Jesus himself addresses to all of them a new call in the person of Peter: 'Stand behind me!'. With his attitude of incomprehension and rejection, Peter had placed himself in front of Jesus: he wanted to prevent him from advancing along the road that leads to the Passion. For this reason, Jesus rebukes him to return to the place that belongs to the disciple: 'Stand behind me'.... [For this reason,] it is a call on the horizon of the Passion.... [And] if in the first call the following of Jesus demanded above all a break with their own family, in this second call they will have to renounce themselves: to lose their own life in order to gain it (Guijarro Oporto 2015: 27, 29, 64).

Later, in the prelude to the Passion, on the road to the Mount of Olives, in the face of Jesus's announcement about the scandal and the dispersion of the disciples, Peter protests, assuring his eternal fidelity to the master: 'even if all are scandalized, I am not' (14.29). What follows is a progressive denial of this resolution: during Jesus's agony in Gethsemane, together with James and John, Peter falls asleep. Although Jesus finds all three of them asleep, his words of complaint are addressed to Peter in a particular way: 'Simon, do you sleep, have you not been able to keep watch for one hour?' (14.37).

As a consequence of Jesus's arrest, although the narrator notes that they all fled (14.50), it is then indicated that Peter follows Jesus (ἠκολούθησεν αὐτῷ) when he is led before the High Priest; but he follows him only from a distance

(ἀπὸ μακρόθεν) (14.54), as later the women before the cross (15.40; Moloney 2012: 332). Paradoxically, this following culminates in the denial of the following, because on three occasions he denies Jesus, coming to swear, between curses, that does not know him (14.66–72; Marcus 2010: 1230); with these denials Peter ends up turning away from the path of Jesus and leaving the scene in tears (14.72; Whitaker 2013: 675–76).

It should be noted that the narrator embeds the account of Peter's denials between two scenes depicting the judgment against Jesus (14.53–65; 15.1–5). By placing these accounts in a typical 'Markan sandwich', he seeks to accentuate the atmosphere of judgment and the possibility of danger that is before Peter. Moreover, the sandwich technique gives the impression that these two trials (Jesus's and Peter's) are occurring simultaneously. And the juxtaposition of the two accounts underscores their discrepancies: Jesus is questioned by the high priest, while Peter is questioned by one of the maids; the accusations against Jesus are false, while those directed at Peter are true; Jesus confesses 'I am' (ἐγώ εἰμι, 14.62), while Peter denies his discipleship identity three times. The greatest irony lies in the fact that at the very moment when Jesus is mocked by asking him to guess (14.65), the rooster crows and Peter acknowledges that Jesus's recent prophecy has been fulfilled (14.30, 72).

On the other hand, the charges against Peter and Peter's responses are increasingly specific and serious. The repeated use of πάλιν ('again') emphasizes the persistence of the accuser. The author evokes the language of discipleship in the maid's indictment: 'were you also with the Nazarene Jesus' (καὶ σὺ μετὰ τοῦ Ναζαρηνοῦ ἦσθα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ). It should be remembered that 'being with Jesus' is the condition of the Twelve whom Jesus called in 3.14. Likewise, in the last confrontation Peter is told 'you are of them for you are a Galilean' (καὶ γὰρ Γαλιλαῖος εἶ). The reference to Galilee points to the proper place of discipleship according to Mark. Peter's negative reaction to these expressions suggests that he has not only denied Jesus, but has also denied his called status as a disciple and his identity as a Galilean. Peter's denials (14.30, 31, 72) subvert the meaning of Jesus's exhortation to deny himself, take up the cross and follow him (8.34): instead of denying himself, Peter denies his master.

In the accounts of Jesus's burial, in 15.43 it is reported that 'Joseph of Arimathea, a respectable member of the Council, who was also waiting for the Kingdom of God, had the courage to go into Pilate and ask him for the body (σῶμα) of Jesus'. In reply, 15.45 indicates that Pilate granted the corpse (πτῶμα) of Jesus to Joseph. With regard to this, we may make two observations: a) although it is indicated that Joseph 'waited for the Kingdom of God', it is not explicitly said that he was a disciple of Jesus; he is present (as are Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses, who watched where the corpse was laid, according to 15.47), but there is no mention of the presence of any of the Twelve; had it not been for Joseph's boldness, Mark implies, the corpse of Jesus

would have ended up in a common grave. b) In Mark, the word *πτῶμα* ('corpse') is recorded only twice: here in 15.45, referring to the dead body of Jesus, and in 6.29, in reference to the corpse of John the Baptist which his disciples bury. Thus, the faithfulness and courage of John's disciples contrasts with the abandonment and cowardice of Jesus's disciples, including Peter.

Notwithstanding all the above, after Jesus's death and burial, in the context of the young man's Easter announcement to the women, in 16.7, Peter is mentioned explicitly and singularly: 'Go and tell his disciples and Peter that [Jesus] will go before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you' (in an analeptic reference to 14.28). This indicates that despite his threefold denial and misunderstanding of Jesus (14.66–72), Jesus remains attached to the group of disciples who fled. On their return towards Galilee, Jesus will go out to them (Beavis 2011: 243).

On the other hand, the addition of the brief ending of the gospel attested in the Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae of Vetus Latina (it^k) omits the second part of v.8, which refers to the fearful silence of the women. Instead, it notes that these 'briefly reported to those around Peter (τοῖς περὶ τὸν Πέτρον) what had been announced to them' (Metzger 2000: 190). Of note is the contrast with 4.10 where it is stated that there are some 'around Jesus's (οἱ περὶ αὐτόν). Now, in the Paschal time, which is the time of the church, the reference point around which the disciples will gather, as they did with Jesus, will be Peter. However, according to this narrative addition, both they and Peter himself, if they really wish to be an Easter community, will have to dispose themselves to be competent recipients (hearers) of the women's message.

A Theological Perspective on Peter as Disciple in Mark

A panoramic view of the way that Peter is presented in Mark, having as a focal point the final accounts and the young man's announcement to the women in which it is anticipated that Peter, despite his failures and inconsistencies, will be vindicated as a disciple, implies both for him and for the other disciples that their betrayal, abandonment, and infidelity do not exclude them definitively and irrevocably from discipleship. It is implied that, if Peter finally allows himself to be encountered by the Risen One, his discipleship can be restored and he will have, beyond the limits of the narrative, the possibility of denying himself, taking up his cross, following Jesus, and showing that he is not ashamed of the Lord and his words (8.34–38).

In Peter's journey, according to Mark, a paradox is revealed: denying Jesus, besides betraying the master, means renouncing the call, the way of discipleship, and one's own identity, while denying oneself is to recognize oneself as a disciple. But this is possible only starting from the encounter with the Crucified Risen One, who was the first to deny himself by giving himself 'for many' (14.24).

Thus, as Marcus (2010: 1230) points out regarding Peter, 'it is imperative from every point that the hand of reconciliation be extended beyond the tomb to this wayward disciple who had not recognized the necessity of Jesus's suffering, nor even human wickedness, including his own'.

According to Whitaker (2013: 667), this Markan presentation of Peter as a disciple who stands out above the others is not despite his failure but precisely because of it. Moreover, as Wiarda (1999: 19) points out, Peter would be a kind of 'spokesman' of the disciple group, configured more as a 'type' than as an individual. Thus, he exercises a special narrative role as one who falls, becomes aware of his fault by 'breaking down in tears' (14.72), is forgiven, and is finally restored as a disciple. And from such a perspective he would simply reflect both the thoughts and attitudes and the fall of the Twelve and thus would not be a distinct character from the rest of the group.

In this way, as Whitaker (2013: 681) points out, Peter offers the reader/hearer a paradigm of one who, in his misunderstanding, failed Jesus twice but was forgiven and called to follow after each failure. Despite denying Christ, Peter can show, if he allows himself to be found by Jesus on his way to Galilee, that the doors of restoration are always open to anyone who recognizes the 'gratuitous and gracious' dimension of the call. Thus, to be a disciple of Jesus is, for Mark, to recognize oneself as an undeserved follower of one who has been rejected, crucified, hated, and misunderstood. And a disciple of this kind of messiah is called to take up the cross, follow him along the way, and know that the world will hate him or her too.

Failure can be overcome, and discipleship restored, not because of human beings' understanding and success, but because of God's grace operated by the Risen One (Moloney 2004: 167). In fact, as Moloney (2012: 331) points out, if the road to Jerusalem characterized the disciples by their inability to accept and understand, that is, to follow Jesus fully, it also characterized Jesus by his unconditional fidelity to the Father and to his own disciples: he never abandoned them in the same way as the Father never abandoned the son. Thus, the disciples' abandonment of Jesus contrasts with Jesus's faithfulness to them despite their incomprehension.

Indeed, Moloney (2004: 193) further observes, after each of the passion announcements (8.31; 9.31; 10.32–34) the disciples failed, but after each failure, Jesus summoned them (called them back) and continued to instruct them. Thus, Jesus's continual rebukes and exhortations to his disciples (8.21; 9.19) are further evidence of Jesus's never-failing permanence in the midst of the ever-failing disciples. The more they failed, the more he remained united with them. This motif of Jesus's faithful presence amid his fragile disciples reaches its zenith during the Markan presentation of the last night with them in 14.1–72, in which Jesus prophesies the betrayal of Judas (vv. 17–21), the flight of all the disciples, and the denials of Peter (vv. 26–31). In the scene at the centre of both predictions

(vv. 22–25), Jesus breaks bread and shares the cup with them, establishing a new covenant that will go beyond the events of the crucifixion. Thus, Jesus gives himself unconditionally to the disciples who betray, abandon, and deny him.

A Contextual Perspective in Terms of Flight and Reparation

Beyond the anti-Petrine or pro-Petrine positions that try to explain the ambiguous presentation of Peter in the Gospel according to Mark (Rodríguez Carmona 1991: 34–39), it is important to point out that, from the narrative point of view—and taking into account the collectivist tendency and the patterns of axiological valuation present in the Mediterranean culture of the first century, where honour determines the social concept of person (Malina 1995)—the way Peter is characterized in Mark describes the dramatic process of someone whose initial leadership and visible recognition ended up becoming discredit, failure, dishonour, uprooting, and cowardice. A man without honour and betrayer of the leader of his reference group (having been his ‘most trusted man’) deserves no consideration. If it is true that Peter returns to Galilee, which is his territory of origin, he will certainly be the victim of rejection, mockery, and contempt. He had ‘left everything’ (10.28)—his trade and his family—to follow Jesus, whom he ended up denying and abandoning; now he could hardly recover his previous condition. He would be a deserter or exile in his own land.

For a reader who lives in a situation of certain comfort, this characterization may be shocking and difficult to explain, especially because it is questioning one whose image in later Christian tradition will be held as that of the ‘prince of the apostles’. However, for readers who have experienced a situation of aggression, repression, or violence that has led them to flee, abandon, betray, and even deny their loved ones, their identity, or their most deeply held convictions (as was supposedly the reality of many readers of the Gospel, who suffered the onslaught and consequences of the Jewish War of 66–73), Peter can offer a sign of hope and vindication.

Faced with extreme situations in which life and integrity are at risk, it is normal for fear to arise and for this to be translated into expressions of cowardice and denial. Even those who show themselves to be the bravest and most determined, in the face of imminent danger, may be the first to give up and flee. More than guilty, they are victims. The real responsibility lies with the violent: those who motivated the murder of Jesus and motivated the flight of his friends; those who resort to weapons or instigation of any kind to generate fear, submission, or flight; but also, those who ignore, stigmatize, reject, exploit, or abuse those who have had to migrate. From the perspective of some readers and the society of their time, flight and fear are reprehensible and shameful attitudes. From the perspective of the narrator and the Markan Jesus, they are unparalleled

opportunities to recognize one's vulnerabilities, to allow oneself to be encountered by the Risen One, and to 'begin again' in following him.

In the cases of those who fled because of the armed conflict in Colombia,

exile became a sort of prolonged limbo, in being alive because they were left alive or were able to survive, but in a new reality in which they do not recognize themselves. It is halfway to nowhere between their territory of origin, to which they cannot return, and another, the place of arrival or reception, from which they never end up really being—a huge gray area through which they wander long after fleeing and in which uncertainty is the daily ground (Comisión de la Verdad 2022: 18).

Added to this are situations of finger-pointing or self-blame because the exit implied abandoning one's own (whether possessions, people, or convictions), to save one's life. In this regard, the Final Report of the Comisión de la Verdad (2022: 188) includes the testimony of some survivors who had to go into exile:

'I came to feel guilty that they didn't kill me'... 'I would think that there is a perception that, on the one hand, people who work with peace building and the defence of human rights—especially in the latter—do it almost as if they were kamikazes. That is, as if to the death. I mean, if they are not suffering and they are not threatened and disappeared and all those stories, people feel as if they are not doing work to defend people's rights. Maybe at another time I did that too, but I was not aware of that. And then people who are forced to leave the country in a certain way are... I would not know whether to say reproached or subjectively valued in terms of inferiority. Like "you were not brave and did not stand and left, and we are still here resisting".'

The report clarifies that in several movements, whether political, subversive, human rights or even religious, 'exile was censored and survivors were viewed with suspicion, if not accused of "betraying the cause", although with time they recognize that it saved many lives. To delve into the stories of exile is also to recognize the courage and dignity of the survivors' (Comisión de la Verdad 2022: 85–86).

Those who have had to flee because of the war, and feel that in their flight they have denied, abandoned, or betrayed people close to them, may find in the figure of Peter a reflection of their experience, but also an opportunity not to blame themselves, since they have been victims of others whose harassment produced their flight. In the same way, they can experience, like Peter, that on their way to their flight the Risen One comes to meet them and with him the memory of those whom they left behind. It will be that memory that will allow them to recount the events that led them into exile as a testimony to the trauma they suffered and as an expression of a series of events that should never have happened, but which also cannot be repeated. Just as thanks to Peter and the other fleeing disciples—men and women—we receive the testimony of the resurrection, it is thanks to the

testimony of those who fled that today the truth about the armed conflict in Colombia—its causes, actors, consequences—can come to light and become a tribute to those who did not have the opportunity to escape; but it also becomes a legacy for the peaceful and co-responsible reconstruction of a severely wounded social structure.

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