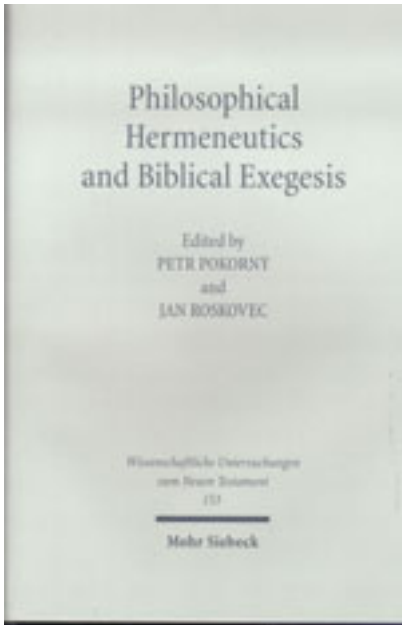


RBL 09/2004



Pokorný, Petr, and Jan Roskovec, eds.

Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Exegesis

Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen
Testament 153

Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003. Pp. x + 389. Hardcover.
EUR 84.00. ISBN 3161478940.

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This work is a collection of twenty-six studies that were originally presented at a symposium in Prague in the fall of 2001 under the theme “Philosophische Hermeneutik und biblische Exegese.” The respective essays are as follows: Petr Pokorný, “Philosophische Hermeneutik und biblische Exegese: Zum Wesen des hermeneutischen Prozesses” (1–4); Paul Ricoeur, “The Canon between the Text and the Community” (7–26); Zdeněk Mathauer, “Verständnis und Gültigkeit: Zu künstlerischen und biblischen Texten” (29–41); Ladislav Hejránek, “Hermeneutik und die Zeit” (42–48); Jaroslav Hroch, “Hermeneutics and the Contemporary Anglo-American Philosophy” (49–58); Martin Šimsa, “The Question of Understanding and Its Criteria in Conservative and Critical Hermeneutics” (59–67); Michael Kirwan, “The Limits of Interpretation: The Gadamer-Habermas Conversation and Its Implication for Philosophical Hermeneutics” (68–82); Ivana Noble, “Apophatic Elements in Derrida’s Deconstruction” (83–93); Jan Dušek, “Saying ‘True’ According to A. J. Greimas” (94–100); Oswald Bayer, “Hermeneutical Theology” (103–20); Jean Grondin, “Gadamer and Bultmann” (121–43); Hans Hübner, “Zuspruch des Seyns und Zuspruch Gottes: Die Spätphilosophie Martin Heideggers und die Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments” (144–75); Manfred Oeming, “Existenzerhellung. Karl Jaspers als Ausleger des Alten Testaments” (176–90); Jens Schröter, “Überlegungen zum Verhältnis von Historiographie und Hermeneutik in der

neutestamentlichen Wissenschaft” (191–203); Bernard C. Lategan, “History, Historiography and Hermeneutics” (204–18); Prosper Grech, “Inner-Biblical Reinterpretation and Modern Hermeneutics” (221–37); Jan Sokol, “Der zweifache Schöpfungsbericht als hermeneutischer Schlüssel” (238–44); Petr Pokorný, “Christliche Verkündigung als Modell des hermeneutischen Prozesses nach 1 Kor 14, 23–25” (245–51); Patrick Chatelion Counet, “Paroimiai (John 16:25): A Post-Hermeneutical Model” (252–69); Detlev Dormeyer, “Interkulturelle Exegese: Der pragmalinguistische ‘Kommentar für die Praxis’ für Lateinamerika und Europa” (270–98); Jaroslav Brož, “From Allegory to the Four Senses of Scripture: Hermeneutics of the Church Fathers and of the Christian Middle Ages” (301–9); Lenka Karafíková, “Res significare habent: Exegese der Schrift und der Wirklichkeit nach Hugo von St. Viktor (†1141)” (310–22); Ivana Noble, “The Apophatic Way in Gregory of Nyssa” (323–39); Solange Lefebvre, “Hermeneutic, Biblical Text and Interdisciplinary Dialogue: The Question of Creation and Cosmology” (340–44); Rerenc Szűcs, “Reformed Dogmatics as a Hermeneutical Circle between Exegesis and Preaching” (345–51); Eva Kapsová, “Intertextuality in Visual Interpretation of Biblical Motifs in Contemporary Slovak Fine Art” (352–63). The volume includes also a list of contributors (365–67); an index of biblical, Jewish, and Greek sources (369–75); an index of names (376–82); and a bilingual (German and English) subject index (383–89). Overall there are many stylistic and spelling mistakes.

Every once in a while there is a book that is refreshing and stimulating. For this reviewer, this volume falls into this category, for here we find a substantiated effort to make intelligible the purpose of the symposium, namely, “die Reflexion des hermeneutischen Prozesses” (2). The (mostly European) participants kept in mind Schleiermacher’s definition of hermeneutics as an art to understand classical—in this case biblical—texts in terms of grammar and philology but went far beyond it. The question of biblical hermeneutics was intentionally approached from the perspective of philosophical hermeneutics. The embedding of biblical in philosophical hermeneutics is based on the assumption that all hermeneutical reflection must proceed from the same methodological principles. As frequently in these studies, Paul Ricoeur became the guiding voice also in this respect: “l’herméneutique biblique est une herméneutique *régionale* par rapport à l’herméneutique philosophique, constitué en herméneutique *générale*” (3). All the contributors of the symposium attempted, more or less, to navigate their proposals and theses in view of the particular nature of biblical texts and the broader perspectives of the hermeneutic process and methodology. I will now comment on only a few representative studies.

Paul Ricoeur’s essay is programmatic in that it frames the question of the hermeneutical process. It is crucial to understand that hermeneutics is always a dynamic process and not a static event. Ricoeur moves from the (six) characteristics of a general text—spoken

word, written word, status as work, world of the text, revelation or a “new being-in-the-world” or Heideggerian “non-concealment” (11), understanding or, as Ricoeur prefers, “appropriation . . . the very heart of the act of reading” (12)—to the characteristics of an authoritative text. Any authoritative text is always and necessarily based on interpretation, and that, for Ricoeur, means that the text itself entails “the idea of *being able to say something differently*” (13, emphasis original). Hence, a text may assume plurality, diversity, and otherness of interpretation. In order to move beyond conflictual interpretations to gain authority, a text has to meet four criteria: it needs to be selected, there must be a tradition of reading and interpretation, it must be reckoned as superior over other texts (a crucial criterion for Ricoeur), and the “entire process of interpretation and . . . conflicts of interpretation” is the responsibility of “a historical community” (15). Thus the becoming of the church, the historical community, went hand in hand with the process of canonization. Ricoeur admits “the circular character of the link between authority of the institution that specifies the texts of reference and the authority of the texts that are supposed to authorise the reference that is made to them” (20). However, the circle is a hermeneutical circle “by virtue of which a community interprets itself by interpreting its texts” (21).

Part 2 of the volume contains seven contributions that deal with a specific philosophical aspect of hermeneutics. Mathauser discusses three aspects of the hermeneutical process: parallelism (a text may be parallel to the world of the sender, its content, and other texts), partnership (transition to new semiotic values), and participation (symbols transcend language and participate in reality). Hejdánek emphasizes one of the most important philosophical discoveries, Heidegger’s discussion of “*Zeitlichkeit des Seienden*” (45), and draws out the consequences for hermeneutics, namely, that the interpreter’s own *Zeitlichkeit* implies that every hermeneutical act is necessarily directed toward the future. Hroch examines the contributions to hermeneutical theory by Anglo-American philosophers, including Peter Winch, Charles Taylor, E. D. Hirsch, Paul de Man, Harold Bloom, Richard Rorty, and American pragmatism (Emerson, James). Šimsa argues that hermeneutics needs to leave behind a conservative hermeneutics (Heidegger and Gadamer with their emphasis on ontology) and move toward a critical hermeneutics (Habermas, Apel and their emphasis of hermeneutics as a critique of ideology). Kirwan’s study revisits the Gadamer-Habermas debate on “the meta-theoretical status of hermeneutical reflection, that is, its claim to universality” (73). While Gadamer’s ontological hermeneutic gives life a certain existential anchor, it is also open to ideological misuse, and while Habermas’s critical theory of communicative action confronts ideological misuse, its desire for discourse can all too easily be truncated or simply ignored, as he himself admits in relation to September 11. In more technical studies, Noble examines the extent of apophatic elements in Derrida’s work, and Dušek

applies the semiotic theory (specifically the concept of “veridicion”) of Greimas to Mark 13:1–27.

Part 3 consists of six studies that focus on the importance of hermeneutics in theology in general and the thought of some theologians in particular. Bayer argues that all Christian theology is hermeneutical theology in that God himself in his self-communication is a hermeneut (103). In a fine essay Grodin traces the relationship between Bultmann and Gadamer and their indebtedness to Heidegger in their own hermeneutic proposals. In one of the longest and most demanding essays, Hübner discusses Heidegger’s understanding of being in relation to the New Testament. The question, specifically, is whether there is an analogy between a person’s relation to being (*Seyn*) and a person’s relation to God (151). Hübner affirms this analogy and proceeds to show (carefully and tentatively) how such an analogy may be said to exist, in spite of the quite different assumptions of Heidegger (who thinks *aus dem Seyn*) and the New Testament (which must be interpreted *offenbarungsgeschichtlich . . . aus Gott*). Oeming presents an interesting study of Jaspers as an interpreter of the Old Testament, while Schröter and Lategan critique the lack in hermeneutical reflection to take into account conceptions and constructions of early-Christian historiography, the importance of time and space, and the necessity of memory.

The five essays in Part 4 discuss an aspect of hermeneutics in relation to biblical exegesis. Grech examines hermeneutical shifts and developments between and within the Testaments, Sokol argues that the deliberative twofold narrative of creation at the beginning of the Bible points to the hermeneutic key of multiple interpretations, and Pokorný proposes that there is an inner logic of a hermeneutical process, as, for example, in Paul’s discussion of prophetic versus glossarial speech in 1 Cor 14:23–25. Counet attempts a poststructuralist interpretation of John 16:25 along the lines of the Stoa, Saussure, and Derrida. Lastly, Dormeyer describes the hermeneutic foundations for an intercultural commentary, a project that is exemplified with reference to Acts 28:16–31. In the last section of the book, part 5, six authors examine specific hermeneutical aspects from the church fathers to contemporary religious art.

The strength of this collection of studies lies in the manner in which hermeneutical questions are articulated and brought into focus for biblical exegetes. This very fact is decisive for biblical scholars. Arguably, it is an ever more important task for exegetes and theologians in a posthermeneutical world to be aware of their own—implicit or explicit—hermeneutical presuppositions, since no person can interpret a text in a hermeneutical vacuum. In this regard, most of the contributions elucidate crucial hermeneutical questions and are, rightfully so, hesitant to offer quick answers. This work, therefore, offers a great entry point for biblical scholars into the rich but often complicated field of

hermeneutics; this holds true in spite of the aporia that, hermeneutically speaking, the hermeneutical question cannot *sui generis* be solved.