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Mayordomo-Marin, Moisés

***Den Anfang hören: Leserorientierte Evangelienexegese
am Beispiel von Matthäus 1-2***

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John Nolland
Trinity College
Bristol , BS9 UP UK

This work is the published form of a 1997 University of Bern dissertation supervised by Professor Ulrich Luz. As the title suggests, the book is offered primarily as a contribution to methodological reflection: by the establishment of an appropriate theoretical framework it tries to develop a method that seeks to make fruitful for the exegesis of the gospels the reader-oriented impulses of more recent literary criticism. A little more than a third of the book is given over to a detailed implementation of the method proposed: Matthew 1-2 is examined in the reader-oriented manner proposed.

From the beginning the writer makes it clear that he does not see a reader-oriented approach as eclipsing other methods. Indeed he holds out the hope that even where there seems to be unavoidable mutual exclusion between methods, at some higher level of perception it might be possible to bring together the perceptions of apparently irreconcilable approaches. And in any case he has no interest in displacing the methods of historical-critical exegesis: he rather draws upon them and is concerned to offer enrichment and possibly a degree of correction. He wants to stress that in an important sense his reader-oriented approach uses existing methods in relation to new questions and perspectives rather than being itself an alternative and competing method.

In the first and largest section of the work, after an introduction, key figures in the development of reception-oriented approaches to literary criticism are engaged with: Michael Riffaterre, Gerald Prince, Peter J. Rabinowitz, Stanley Fish (phase 1), Umberto Eco, Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, Wayne C. Booth, Jonathan Culler and Stanley

Fish (phase 2) are chosen for particular attention. The author also looks back to ancient literary theory for attention there to the reception of texts. There is no corresponding critical survey of that strand of recent biblical scholarship that has taken up the hermeneutical role of the reader, but Mayordomo-Marín is well aware of this (primarily English language) scholarship.

The author then moves on to offer considerations for the development of an operative model for a reception-oriented approach to gospel exegesis. His approach is unashamedly eclectic and he offers it only as a productive one, not as the best or the only one. In part following Jauss, he makes a pragmatic distinction between “understanding,” which he relates to the engagement of modern readers “reception,” which is the term he reserves for readers of the past, especially the “first-reception” readers, and “influence (*Wirkung*),” by which he refers to the embedded textual strategy, often referred to with the language of the “implied reader.” He considers that reading approaches that subordinate the text to the reader and those that subordinate the reader to the text are inadequate: reader and text contribute to the task on an equal footing. The question of appropriate competence of readers is explored, with attention to the knowledge required of a reader (signals as to the knowledge required are embedded in the text), the relationship between a first reading and subsequent re-readings of a text (attention is focused mainly on the former, and specially on the situation of being a collective of joint-hearers of the text), the problem of intertextuality, and the relationship between naive reading and scientific reading (problem identified, but left unresolved). Emphasis is placed upon reading as a whole-person response and not merely a cognitive activity. The intention of the real author is in part rescued as a valid interest of readers.

Out of these considerations the author distils a practical methodological procedure that governs the remainder of the work. Critical of the way that reception-critical reflection characteristically operate, at a giddy height of abstraction which offers no concrete instructions for the actual exposition of texts, he makes practical success in interpretation and a flexibility in the face of the specificity of texts important criteria for his own method. The author proposes a procedure that involves a preliminary examination of the text in relation to one’s own contemporary location and one’s first reaction to it, then moves on to a careful reading of the text in relation to hypothetical first readers (this allows the text to emerge as an alien object), which will involve an analysis of the situation of the hypothetical first readers, a description of the reader-experience they are likely to have had, and an overview of the first reception of the whole text. The procedure concludes with final hermeneutical reflections that will allow for creative interaction between one’s own contemporary location and the possible challenges of the text.

The second section of the work takes up Matt 1-2 in relation to the three methodological steps identified above. The first is dealt with fairly summarily. The second occupies 143 pages and represents a thorough exegesis of Matt 1-2. Readerly questions are regularly asked, but the overwhelming impression is of an analysis of the

text that will stand scrutiny from a whole range of methodological viewpoints, with the only really notable gap being a total absence of interest in source questions. The procedure adopted brings into sharp profile the interplay between what is likely to have been the initial state of awareness of the readers and their experience of encountering the specific features of the text. What emerges is a superbly informed and very-well integrated reading of Matt 1-2. The third step brings the process to completion by providing a dialogue between the horizon of the first reception and the sense-horizon of one's own reading. But here, after an excursus dealing with theoretical considerations concerning effective history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*), treatment is restricted to the question of Jesus as a Jew and that of God's providence.

A final section of the book is concerned with critical review and hermeneutical outlook. It deals with such matters as the possibilities and gaps of a reception-critical approach to gospel exegesis, the hermeneutical function and significance of the first-reception, and appropriate boundaries for any understanding that would wish to offer itself as adequate to the text.

The work operates on an impressively wide front. Occasionally it is marred by over-summary treatment of complex matters. Often its strengths are those of critical evaluation and synthesis rather than originality. But here is a work that will powerfully commend and effectively illustrate a very credible reader-response perspective to all who read it.