

Aleksandra Brand / Aaron Pidel / Thomas Söding (Hg.)

Die Heilige Schrift in der katholischen Kirche

Holy Scripture in the Catholic Church

Ekklesiale Dimensionen biblischer Exegese

Ecclesial Dimensions of Biblical Exegesis

HERDER 

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Vorwort

Die Bibel ist geschrieben worden, um gelesen und verstanden zu werden (Mk 13,14) – persönlich, aber auch gemeinschaftlich, und zwar vor allem mit den Glaubensgeschwistern, aber auch mit allen Menschen guten Willens: im Gottesdienst, in der Katechese, in der Apologie, die Rechenschaft vom Grund der Hoffnung ablegt (1 Petr 3,15), in der öffentlichen Debatte über Religion und Politik mitten in der „Welt“.

Die Kirche als Lesegemeinde spielt eine Schlüsselrolle: Sie hat in ihrer großen Mehrheit und in ihrem amtlichen Dienst dafür Sorge getragen, dass die Bibel Israels nicht abgetan, sondern neu erschlossen wird; sie hat die neutestamentlichen Schriften gesammelt und überliefert; sie hat Mission im Zeichen von Glaube, Hoffnung und Liebe auf ihre Fahnen geschrieben (1 Thess 1,3; 5,8; 1 Kor 13,13). Die Kanonisierung ist ein eminenten Prozess ekklesialer Rezeption, die Inspiration des Alten wie des Neuen Testaments eine Glaubensüberzeugung, die in der christlichen Gemeinschaft, jüdisch verwurzelt, gewachsen ist, die „Wahrheit“ der Schrift eine Einsicht, die an der Fähigkeit hängt, auf menschliche Weise das heilbringende Wort Gottes zu bezeugen.

Die Geschichte der kirchlichen Schriftlektüre ist allerdings kontaminiert: durch Antijudaismus, durch die Verketzerung alternativer Lektüren, durch einen Hochmut gegenüber der „Welt“, die nicht von dieser Urkunde des rechten Glaubens überzeugt ist. Die Ablehnung Markions kann mit sublimem Markionismus einhergehen, die Notwendigkeit, zwischen Wahr und Falsch im Glauben zu unterscheiden, mit Rechthaberei, das Wissen um die Orientierungskraft des Evangeliums mit einer Verkennung der Weisheit, die außerhalb der Kirche zuhause ist. Hermeneutische Stringenz und Selbstkritik sind umso wichtiger, als die christliche Bibel von einem starken Glauben an Jesus Christus geprägt ist, der die Verheißungen Israels bejaht (2 Kor 1,20), von einem starken Willen zur Einheit (Joh 17), die durch die Vielfalt des Geistes geprägt ist (1 Kor 12), und vom Aufbruch zur Umkehr, die Gottes Nähe wahrnimmt und deshalb um die Erfüllung seines Willens bittet „wie im Himmel, so auf Erden“ (Mt 6,10).

Die katholische Kirche steht im Fokus. Sie ist nicht nur die größte christliche Glaubensgemeinschaft. Sie hat auch mit der Unterscheidung zwischen dem Glaubenssinn des Volkes Gottes, dem bischöflichen Lehramt und der Theologie eine ebenso dynamische wie fragile, ebenso leistungsstarke wie gefährdete Hermeneutik organisiert, die große Chancen bietet, den Glauben schriftgemäß zu verheutigen (Lk 4,21), aber auch große Gefahren aufbaut, Definitionsmacht über Gottes Wort zu behaupten.

Auf einem internationalen Symposium, das der Bochumer Lehrstuhl für Neues Testament 2021 digital veranstaltet hat, sind auf Deutsch und Englisch wichtige Fragen im Gespräch zwischen Exegese und Systematik diskutiert worden, ökumenisch aufgeschlossen und interreligiös reflektiert: Welchen Horizont bauen die Relationen zwischen dem lebendigen Wort Gottes und dem geschriebenen Bibelwort für Exegese und Glaube auf? Wie werden der Kanon und die Inspiration der Bibel in den Entstehungsprozessen und Auseinandersetzungen der Kirche verstanden? Von welcher „Wahrheit“ ist in welchem theologischen Konzept die Rede? Wie prägt die Autorität, die der Bibel zugeschrieben wird, die Lehre, in der die Kirche die Heilswahrheit des Evangeliums zu klären berufen ist? Welche Rolle spielt die Bibel in der Sphäre der Politik? Die meisten Beiträge können hier in überarbeiteter Form erscheinen; einige weitere gehen aus dem Kreis derer hervor, die teilgenommen haben.

Allen, die sich am Lehrstuhl in der Vorbereitung und Durchführung des Kongresses engagiert haben, sei herzlicher Dank gesagt, namentlich Miriam Pawlak und Dagmar Heuser. Die Konrad Adenauer-Stiftung hat die Organisation des Kongresses logistisch und finanziell unterstützt. Dafür gebührt ihr herzlicher Dank, besonders Felix Meier und Dr. Andreas Schulze.

Die Keimzelle des Projektes ist ein Humboldt-Stipendium, das Aaron Pidel, damals an der Marquette University, für Bochum eingeworben hat. Der Stiftung sei nicht nur für die Auswahl und für die Unterstützung ihres Stipendiaten, sondern auch für einen namhaften Zuschuss zur Publikation gedankt, in den auch Fördermittel der Ruhr-Universität haben einfließen können, gleichfalls Grund zu herzlichem Dank.

Die Debatte wird weitergehen. *Das hermeneutische Ziel des Projekts:* dass keine Theorien über die Heilige Schrift als *locus theologicus* entwickelt werden, die nicht mit ihr entwickelt werden, und dass keine Exegese, die Geltungsansprüche diskutiert, von der lebendigen Tradition und von den Zeichen der Zeit abgekoppelt wird. *Das ekklesiologische Ziel:* dass sich die katholische Kirche als Lesegemeinde versteht, die sich weder von anderen Kirchen und Gemeinschaften abkoppelt noch vom Judentum und Islam abwendet, sondern selbstkritisch und lernfähig, verständlich und verbindlich Orientierung am grundlegenden Glaubenszeugnis der einen Bibel beider Testamente sucht, um in Wort und Tat glaubwürdig das Evangelium verkünden zu können. *Das politische Ziel:* dass die katholische Kirche die Verheißung der Freiheit, mit der das Christentum seinen Weg begonnen hat, in einer zerrissenen Welt der Ungerechtigkeit nicht verrät, sondern „wider alle Hoffnung auf Hoffnung hin“ (Röm 4,18) wahrmacht.

Bochum, im Januar 2025

Aleksandra Brand – Aaron Pidel SJ – Thomas Söding

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I.

**Grundlagen und Horizonte:
Wort Gottes – Schrift –
Glaube – Exegese**

**Foundations and horizons:
Word of God – Scripture –
Faith – Exegesis**

Listening to the Word of God

New Testament approaches to ecclesial dimensions of biblical hermeneutics

Thomas Söding

Christianity has a Holy Scripture, but it is not a “religion of the book” like Islam. The Holy Scriptures grow in the pilgrim people of God with God’s promise. The canon¹ is the result of an eminent reception by the believers in their community. The roots of the first part, the ‘Old Testament’, lie in the history of Israel; the roots of the second part, the ‘New Testament’, lie in the mission of Jesus and of his pre- and post-Easter disciples. The first part is read in Judaism and Christianity, which are sister religions. For Jews, the Torah, the Prophets and the “Scriptures” (*ketubim*) form the entire Holy Scripture – which is opened up through interpretation by the Rabbis.² For Christians, the first part of the Bible is the “Old Testament”, which is opened up by the “New”, just as the “New Testament” is opened up by the “Old”, and both testaments are transmitted in the Tradition of the Church. The decisive point of reference is not the written word—it is the living Word of God, personally represented by Jesus Christ. He is sent by the Father and mediated by the Holy Spirit. But Jesus Christ himself read and interpreted the Bible of Israel. What he taught and suffered is originally testified to in the Gospels. The fact that he died “for all” and rose from the dead becomes the confession of the earliest church through his own Easter presence – and is handed down in the New Testament writings, which, along with Jesus, programmatically refer to the Old Testament.

Therefore, it is essential for a hermeneutic of Sacred Scripture to reflect its ecclesial dimensions, even if the place of scientific exegesis is the scientific community. The Catholic Church is in the spotlight because it has a magisterium that also touches on the interpretation of Holy Scripture; but the horizon must be opened ecumenically, because of the reality of reception and the call for unity.³ Two perspectives are crucial: not to

1 Historical and exegetical approaches are connected in: *Jean-Marie Auwers – Henk Jan de Jonge* (eds.), *Canons; a rich fruit of long own research: Martin MacDonald*, *The Formation of the Biblical Canon*.

2 Cf. *Daniel Krochmalnik*, *Im Garten der Schrift*.

3 Cf. *Christoph Böttigheimer*, *Die eine Bibel und die vielen Kirchen*.

fixate only on biblical texts, but to follow their words in search of the Word of God, and not to apply only traditional or modern theories to the Bible, but to look for hermeneutical orientation in the Bible itself – in dialogue with Tradition and with contemporary concepts.

1. Hermeneutical perspectives: The Word of God in human words

The letter to the Hebrews⁴ begins with an *exordium* which testifies to a high level of hermeneutical reflection.

“In many and various ways God spoke to the fathers in the prophets; and in these last days he spoke to us in the Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds” (Heb 1,1–2).

The letter, which is more or less a philosophic-theological sermon on God and faith, is written in order to open the eyes, ears, and hearts of its readers: They are called to listen to the Word of God; reading the letter serves the formation in faith which answers the speaking of God. The author of the letter is aware of the correlation between creation and redemption, revelation and life.⁵ He is focused on God: who spoke and is speaking and will speak.⁶ The letter does not look back on a past that is now closed; rather, it reminds us of a speech that is present at all times and takes on an eschatological and ultimate meaning at every moment: now.

1.1 The hermeneutical program of Hebrews

The *exordium* of the letter (Heb 1,1–4) makes it clear that God’s speaking is humanly mediated and historically addressed. God spoke “through” the prophets and the Son, or, literally translated, he spoke “in” the prophets and “in” the Son: their heart. They are able to speak God’s word with their own words, speaking through the heart. All who speak as prophets speak by listening to God; so the Son speaks when he hears and hears when he speaks. Over a long time and in a lot of different ways God spoke “to the fathers”, who are the ancestors, the patriarchs of the people of God.⁷ According to

4 Leading commentaries: *Harold W. Attridge*, *Hebr.*; and *Knut Backhaus*, *Hebr.*

5 A reduced interpretation without mediation of creation proposes *Paul Dominique Dognin*, *Épître aux Hébreux*.

6 Cf. *Knut Backhaus*, *Der sprechende Gott*.

7 Cf. *Andreas-Christian Heidel*, *Das glaubende Gottesvolk*.

Hebrews, this people on the way to God who gives time and space to all believers who follow Jesus on pilgrimage through space and time (Heb 11,1 – 12,3).

It is the same, the one and only, God who spoke “ἐπ’ ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων”, *hic et nunc*, “today”, in the Son. In the timeline of Hebrews “the last days” are not the reign of terror before the apocalyptic inferno; they are the promised days of Jesus when he came to reconcile the creation with God once for all (Heb 10,10).⁸ In the hermeneutic of Hebrews, the spoken word is more important than the written word, more important even than the Bible of Israel. But the author is aware of the scriptural medium⁹ which allows him to quote today what God used to say and to remember what has been said.

In the Son, God spoke “to us”. The “us” refers to the community of Christian faithful. Jesus has proclaimed the Word of God; this testimony “was attested to us by those who heard him” (Heb 2,3) and, in the letter, “we” are those who are invited to the eternal covenant and who pray that God make them “complete in everything good” (Heb 13,21), guided by the “leaders” together with the “saints” (Heb 13,24). The community of believers is bigger than the “church” (Heb 12,23); it is the people of God in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, the pre-existent Son, which includes the believers in the ongoing history of Israel.

The Letter to the Hebrews is a key text for the communicative theology of revelation, which is characteristic of the entire Bible. The Word of God is witnessed by people who believe – filled with God’s Spirit. What they say, bearing witness to God by virtue of the Spirit, is their word, in their language, at their time and place. God’s own word is expressed and heard in human voices and written signs. It is the human voice of inspired authors that echoes God’s voice; it is the inspired reader who recognizes the Word of God in the human letters which become part of Holy Scripture.¹⁰

The *exordium* of the Letter to the Hebrews serves to indicate that there is a reflection on scriptural hermeneutics in the New Testament itself. The theology of revelation in the letter is closely related to Jewish concepts, such as those developed by Philo of Alexandria (*De Vita Mosis* 2,188)¹¹ on the one hand and Flavius Josephus (*Contra Apionem* I 37–41)¹² on the other. Both Philo and Josephus distinguish between the written word of

8 Cf. Ronald W. Cox (ed.), *By the same word*.

9 Here is a hermeneutical tension to the revelation theories of Eckhard Nordhofen, *Media divina*; *idem*, *Corpora*.

10 This communicative quality is representative for a Biblical theology of inspiration; cf. Ralf Rothenbusch–Karlheinz Ruhstorfer (Hg.), *Eingegeben von Gott*.

11 Cf. Yehoshua Amir, *Die hellenistische Gestalt des Judentums* 67–106.

12 Cf. Steve Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament*.

the Holy Scriptures and the word of the living God; but both also reconstruct an essential relationship, because they are sure: The text of the Bible is inspired – and reading gives orientation for life by training obedience to God's will. One, Philo, follows Platonic thought when he argues that the deepest meaning is rooted in the highest point of ecstasy; the other, Josephus, follows prophetic theology when he argues that the people of God, who read and interpret the testimonies of holy human beings, are the true guardians of the meaning of Scripture. The Letter to the Hebrews is influenced by Platonism, because the problem of the hidden God is the real pastoral challenge that must be overcome; but the Christology of the Incarnation, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection underpins the opposition between letter and Spirit by allowing God's speech to be understood personally: "in" the prophets and "in" the Son. At the same time, the theology of inspiration in the Letter to the Hebrews has an ecclesiological meaning¹³ because God is always in contact with his people; but the horizon is open to the Gentiles, through Jesus, the "leader and perfecter of faith" (Heb 12,3).

1.2 New Testament resonances of the Word of God theology

Theologically, the closest relationship of Hebrews is to Paul. For the Apostle, the gospel in whose ministry he stands is the eschatological saving power of God:

"¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith'" (Rom 1,16–17).¹⁴

Paul's theology of justification is not the same as the theology of promise in Hebrews. But the communicative processes are analogue. Paul uses the letter to build a relationship of faith with the Christian community in the Roman capital. This relationship goes beyond horizontal communication by means of a few papyrus leaves – and yet it is dependent on this fragile means of communication and the personal commitment of Deaconess Phoebe (Rom 16,1–2), so that there is an understanding "in Christ", "with Christ" and "through Christ": a shared listening to the Gospel. The address

13 1958 *Karl Rahner* proposed an ecclesial understanding of inspiration: *Über die Schriftinspiration*. The communicative approach was groundbreaking, but on the one hand there is a lack of a view of Israel, and on the other hand there is no criticism that the church is always confronted with the word of God that it has handed down.

14 Cf. *Thomas Schumacher*, *Ein Schlüssel zum Römerbrief*.

of the letter to the Hebrews is open – but the goal of strengthening the faith of the readers through the proclamation of the gospel is similar. Human words are weak here as there – God’s word is strong in weakness, everywhere.

The Gospel of John represents a communicative theology of revelation which focuses on Jesus as exegete of God:

“No one has ever seen God.

It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made Him known” (Joh 1,18).¹⁵

Jesus is the Word of God incarnate (Joh 1,14). He is not just a passive mouthpiece, but an active partner of God the Father: he says what he hears from him (Joh 5,30); he teaches what he learns from him (Joh 8,28); he does what he sees God the Father doing (Joh 5,19). He frees the people, revealing the truth (Joh 8,32). An echo is to be heard in the *exordium* of the First Letter of John (1 Joh 1,1–4)¹⁶: Here those are writing who have “heard” and “seen” with their own ears and eyes (even in the way of tradition), so that they are able to let other generations participate in their communion with Christ and, through him, with God. The true reference of preaching and teaching in the Johannine community is the Word of God. This conviction is a judgment in faith; it is not self-evident, but coherent. It is originally a response of the apostles to the call of Jesus – and this origin is attested to by the words of the book and the letter, which were written in faith in order to be read in faith. The main difference between the *Corpus Johanneum* and the Epistle to the Hebrews is that the former answers the Christological question of how the man Jesus can be one with God (Joh 10,30), while the latter answers the soteriological question of how faith leads to the experience of God. The basis of the answers is not identical, but similar: God’s word transcends every human testimony, God’s Spirit makes every text transparent – but precisely because of this, God makes it a mediated encounter of readers and listeners with God’s word, which aims at faith.

In the Gospel of Luke and in the Acts of the Apostles, the preaching and teaching, healing and deliverance told about Jesus and the first missionaries exemplifies the gospel that makes God’s grace speak:

“¹In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning ²until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen” (Act 1,1–2).¹⁷

15 Cf. *Philippe Van den Heede*, *Der Exeget Gottes*.

16 Cf. *Michelle Morgan*, *Le prologue de la première épître de Jean*.

17 Cf. *Loveday Alexander*, *The preface to Luke’s gospel*.

