

native to a conservative scholasticism. We can hardly find a fundamentalistic current, although we meet many loose naive or old-fashioned opinions.

The past of our country favored an interest in others, we lived for centuries in a multinational and multiconfessional environment. Polish culture willingly adopted foreign ideas (and the language, foreign words). Nevertheless, no single source of inspiration was preferred. We tend to select, take something from France, something from Germany, something from the Eastern Churches, something from the Jews. The attitude towards new methods and proposals is therefore positive, if only a good and practical use should be made of them. Sound, critical scholarship always serves the Christian faith well. This attitude follows from a practical approach resulting from the experience in teaching and pastoral work.

We often find a very similar look in the British and American biblical studies; more often than in Germany or France; although the contact of our scholars with the English-speaking world is certainly weaker. Let us hope that we will know one another better in future.

As for areas of study, it seems that the biblical theology prevails over exegesis itself and history. Among the problems related to the Bible, the interest in the Jewish background of the New Testament is worth mentioning, with a considerable number of studies on Qumran.

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PATRISTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURE AND MODERN BIBLICAL STUDIES. METHODOLOGICAL SUGGESTIONS

In the last twenty years we observe a significant shift in the field of biblical studies. The historical-critical method of textual analysis yields the priority to a varied group of so-called synchronic methods. This shift is not merely a change of the instruments of research in the academic context but seems to affect deeply the hermeneutical approach to the Scripture itself. The topic is too extensive to discuss it in the frames of this paper, nevertheless it seems useful to stress some characteristic points common to the synchronic methods:

1. First - as Kenneth Craig in his book *A Poetics of Jonah* says - *the changes that have come from looking at (instead of behind) the Bible are producing an important new discourse*¹. It means the concern is focused in the *intention of the text* - using an expression drawn from Paul Ricoeur's *Le conflit des interprétations*² - instead of the traditional notion of the *intention of the author*, that is considered as an unattainable, hypothetically constructed idea.

2. Second, in an interesting paper published some month ago in by Stephen Farris in *Interpretation* we find a statement that in a certain way derives from the former and pulls the question even farther: *meaning is not only found in or behind the text; it is created in front of the text in the interaction of the interpreter with the text*³. Further we will discuss the expression *it is created*, now however it is important to emphasize the part of the relationship between text and reader, unimportant from the historical-critical perspective.

¹ *A Poetics of Jonah. Art in the service of Ideology*, Columbia 1993, 1.

² *Le conflit des interprétations. Essais d'herméneutique*, Paris 1969, 7.

³ "Limping Away with a Blessing. Biblical Studies and Preaching at the End of the Second Millennium", *Interpretation* 51/4 (1997) 365.

3. Third, the essential being and meaning of the biblical texts derives from the process of their reception as *Holy Scripture*. This is one of the main points in the book *Text, Church and World* of Francis Watson⁴, that seems to be one of the most successful attempts of the application of the synchronic methods to the theological reflection. In this perspective the canonical context of the biblical text - that is his interaction with a community of faith and his intertextual relations with other canonical writings - attains priority towards his historical context in which the text was created.

During my research on the doctoral thesis⁵ at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, concerning the hermeneutical approach of the ancient Christian traditions to the Book of Qoheleth from the perspective of its interpretation in the works of saint Jerome, I had often an intuition that the way of thinking about the Bible that represented the Fathers of the Church is in many points close to the modern synchronic approach to the Scripture. At the same time I stated that this question is almost absent in the contemporary biblical and patristic research. In the biblical field, the historical-critical method brought a complete discredit on the patristic exegesis that endures up to now, at the same time the patrologists seem not to be interested in the synchronic methods developed in the last years by some biblical scholars. There are nevertheless scholars that draw inspiration in their exegesis from patristic sources, mainly Luis Alonso Schoekel and others authors publishing their commentaries in the series *Nueva Biblia Española*. On the other hand there are interesting works concerning the patristic interpretation writ-

⁴ *Text, Church and World. Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective*, Grand Rapids 1994.

⁵ *Il Commentarius in Ecclesiasten di San Girolamo. Dall'intenzione del testo alle tradizioni interpretative* (The Commentary to Ecclesiastes of Saint Jerome. From the intention of the text to the interpretative traditions), director of the thesis: M. Gilbert. Published fragments: *Il Commentarius in Ecclesiasten di San Girolamo. Dall'intenzione del testo alle tradizioni interpretative* (estratto della dissertazione), Roma 1997; L'allegoria della storia nell'interpretazione ebraica di Qo 12, 1-7 trasmessa da Girolamo nel 'Commentario all'Ecclesiaste', "Cassiodorus" 2 (1996) 291-303; Vá, mangia e bevi! I piaceri della vita dell'Ecclesiaste nell'interpretazione di San Girolamo, "Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne" 9 (1996) 17-42; *Yitrôn* nelle traduzioni dell'Ecclesiaste di Girolamo, "Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne" 10 (1997) 31-36; Summary: Bardski Krzysztof, dioc. Varsavia, *Il Commentarius in Ecclesiasten di Girolamo. Dall'intenzione del testo alle tradizioni interpretative* (Mod.: R. P. Maurice Gilbert, S. J.), "Acta Pontificii Instituti Biblici" 10/3 (1996-97) 346-347.

ten by Anne Marie Pelletier (about the interpretation of the Song of the Songs)⁶, Mariette Canevet (about the exegetical methods of Gregory of Nyssa)⁷, Pier Cesare Bori (about the transformations of the ancient Christian hermeneutics)⁸. I mention these authors among many others, because their conclusions have not only a historical importance (what this or that Father said), but some interesting suggestions concerning our actual way of interpreting the Bible.

In my doctoral thesis I proposed a kind of research itinerary that has been applied to the interpretation of the book of Qoheleth. These are the main points:

1. On one side we have something that could be called "the perspectives of the reader". They are like ways from the text to the reader. The dialogical structure of the biblical text offers to the reader numerous possibilities of creative interpretation. The width of this possibilities depends on the grammatical and literary characteristics of the single text.

2. On the other side we have the interpretative traditions, or - in other words - ways from the reader to the text. In patristic commentaries to biblical texts we find a variety of interpretative currents. A critical analysis of this currents leads to determine and classify their position in relation to the dialogical "intention" of the text.

I consider that the harmony and at the same time tension between these two sides was a central point that generated the meaning of the text in the patristic interpretation and could be an interesting methodological proposal even for us. In the background of the dichotomy intention of the text / interpretative traditions we find the fundamental hermeneutical question: the meaning of the literary text is something that the reader creates or discovers? In which way it is created and in which discovered? Or, maybe there is something that transcends the conflict between creating and discovering?

The historical-critical perspective had one answer: the meaning is something static (the intention of the author was a historical fact and cannot be changed), and every creative approach to the text is considered as *esiegesis*, and not *exegesis*. The point of view of the fathers is different: the meaning of

⁶ *Lectures du Cantique des Cantiques. De l'enigme du sens aux figures du lecteur*, Analecta Biblica 121, Roma 1989.

⁷ *Grégoire de Nysse et l'herméneutique biblique. Étude des rapports entre le langage et la connaissance de Dieu*, Études Augustiniennes, Paris 1983.

⁸ *L'interpretazione infinita. L'ermeneutica cristiana antica e le sue trasformazioni*, Bologna 1987.

the text is something dynamic, not univocal, and subjected to some kind of creative process. The best way of illustrating this dynamic process I consider the metaphor of growing, according to the famous sentence of Gregory the Great: *divina eloquia cum legente crescunt*⁹. Like the flowers, leaves and fruits seem to be something new, and indeed are, in similar way the meaning of the Scripture grows and gives birth to varied interpretative traditions but is founded in the immutable intention of the text that derives from its semantic and syntactic structure. The expression *cum legente* implies that the reader is not the creator of this process of growing, he participates in it in a humbly way, at the very most - as Origen said - in a part of a spiritual farmer¹⁰.

An interesting example of the relationship between the intention of the text and the interpretative traditions we find in the patristic commentaries to the poem *Time for Everything* in Qo 3, 1-8. The meaning of the words used in antithetical pairs is - in most cases - univocal; but the lack of farther context offers to the reader large possibilities of creative interpretation not contrary to the intention of the text. Thus, when Qohelet says 'et le'ehob w'e'et lisno' (*time to love and time to hate*, Qo 3, 8) the reader, for example saint Jerome applies the text to three different situations: first, in the light of Matt 10, 37 and 19, 29, time to love the family and time to hate them in the martyrdom offering the life for Christ; second, time to love the *Torah* and its commandments before Christ came and time to hate them in the new covenant; third, to love the present reality in this life and hate it as we will see God face to face in the future¹¹. Now, these three interpretations aren't contrary to the intention of the text though they are probably absent in the intention of the author. Then, if we make comparisons between the interpretation of Jerome and Didymus of Alexandria¹², Gregory of Nyssa¹³, Olympiodorus¹⁴, Paulin of Nola¹⁵, Gregory of Agrigentum¹⁶ and other Fathers that wrote about this verse, it is possible to trace common lines of interpretation that illustrate the *process of growing* of the meaning of this particular verse in the tradition of the Church.

⁹ In Hiez. 1, 7, 8.

¹⁰ In Ex. 1, 1.

¹¹ Comm. in Eccl., 3, 8; CCL 72, 276.

¹² Ad Eccl 3, 8; f. 81; vol. 2, 80-82.

¹³ Hom. in Eccl., 8, GNO 5, 416-418.

¹⁴ Comm. in Eccl., 3, 8; PG 93, 513D.

¹⁵ Ep. 40, 5; CSEL 29, 345.

¹⁶ Expl. in Eccl., 3, 12, 8; PG 98, 865A-868A.

Finally, is there any method or logic in the *process of growing* of the meaning in the patristic tradition? Generally, we could distinguish three main ways that are present in the ancient Christian commentaries:

1. First, the symbolism. In the modern theory of literature the symbol is considered as a special semantic construction that on the basic meaning of an literary motive builds another secondary meanings. In the Christian tradition the symbolism was applied mostly in the case of christological typologies in the text of the Old Testament. An interesting example of symbolical interpretation could be the invitation to *eat and drink* in the so-called *epicurean texts* of Qoheleth¹⁷. *Eating and drinking* are considered by Qoheleth as the only advantage, satisfaction and comfort in the human toil. These role in the text predisposes them to become symbols of other realities that give satisfaction and comfort in a spiritual sense. Thus they symbolise the joy of the good deeds in Jerome¹⁸, Ambrose of Milan¹⁹, Gregory of Nyssa²⁰, Pseudo John Chrisostom²¹ and also in the Aramaic Targum to Qoheleth²² and in the Midrash Qohelet Rabbah²³. Eating and drinking may also symbolise the reading of the Bible as a spiritual banquet (in Origen²⁴, Jerome²⁵, and Midrash²⁶). And finally, only in the Christian tradition, they become symbols of the Eucharist (Jerome²⁷, Augustine²⁸, Olympiodorus²⁹ and Gregory of Agrigentum³⁰).

2. Second, intertextual interpretations in the canonical context. Francis Watson wrote in his book already mentioned that the various literary genres that compose the Bible *are transformed by the fact of canonisation. The canon converts poetry, narrative, law, prophecy alike into "holy scripture"*³¹. It means that all the canonical writings belong to one corpus and may influ-

¹⁷ Qo 2, 24-26; 3, 12-13, 22; 5, 17-19; 8, 15; 9, 7-10; 11, 7-10.

¹⁸ Comm. in Eccl. 3, 12-13; 3, 22; CCL 72, 278. 283.

¹⁹ Exhort. virg., 10, 69; PL 16, 357A.

²⁰ Hom. in Eccl., 8; GNO 5, 441.

²¹ Comm. in Eccl., 2, 26; 3, 12; CCG 4, 72. 75.

²² Tg. Qo 3, 22.

²³ QohR 2, 24, 1; 3, 12, 1; 5, 17, 1; 8, 15.

²⁴ Comm. in Matt. Ser., 85; GCS 38, 196; Comm. in Io., 32, 24; GCS 21, 468.

²⁵ Comm. in Eccl., 2, 24-26; CCL 72, 272.

²⁶ QohR 2, 24, 1; 3, 12, 1; 5, 17, 1; 8, 15.

²⁷ Comm. in Eccl., 3, 12-13; CCL 72, 278.

²⁸ De civ. Dei, 17, 20; CCL 48, 588.

²⁹ Comm. in Eccl., 5, 17-19; PG 93, 549 C-D.

³⁰ Expl. in Eccl., 8, 6, 7. 8; PG 98, 1072C-1073B.

³¹ Op. cit., 4.

ence reciprocally their meaning. This argument was fundamental in the rules of interpretation of Rabbi Hillel, Rabbi Yismael and Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrkanos and largely applied by the Fathers of the Church. The reason of the arrangement of one verse with another may derive from linguistic similarities, for example the eschatological interpretation of Qo 3, 4 (*time to weep and time to laugh*) in the light of Lc 6, 21 (*Blest are you who are weeping; you shall laugh*) in Jerome³², Didymus of Alexandria³³, Gregory of Nyssa³⁴ and Olympiodorus³⁵; or because of a general resemblance of the motives of both verses, for example Qo 3, 5 (*a time to embrace, and a time to be far of embraces*) in the light of Gen 1, 28 (*Be fertile and multiply*) and 1 Cor 7, 5 (*Do not deprive one another, unless perhaps by mutual consent for a time, to devote yourselves to prayer*).

3. Third, something that could be called *peritextual creativity*. The commentator presents an explanation that apparently doesn't result from the text but it fits with the text and enables its deeper understanding. This kind of interpretation that frequently assumes a feature of a supposition or conjecture creates a number of associations that indirectly enrich the meaning of the text. Qoheleth treats frequently about the futility of the *toil under the sun*³⁶. If the *toil under the sun* is vanity, what about the *toil over the sun*? The text of Qoheleth doesn't say anything about it, but if the *toil under the sun* concerns the transient world, gains no profit and ends with the death, the *toil over the sun* concerns the spiritual reality, gains infinite profit and transcends the death. This kind of interpretation shares largely the Jewish tradition (Midrash Qoheleth Rabbah³⁷ and Midrash Wayyiqra Rabbah³⁸) and the Christian tradition (Didymus of Alexandria³⁹, Dionysius of Alexandria⁴⁰, Augustine⁴¹, Gregory Taumatrgos⁴² and Gregory of Agrigentum⁴³).

³² *Comm. in Eccl.*, 3, 4; CCL 72, 274,

³³ *Ad Eccl* 3, 4; f. 72, vol. 2, 38,

³⁴ *Hom. in Eccl.*, 6; GNO 5, 386. Referring to the parallel Matt 5, 4.

³⁵ *Comm. in Eccl.*, 3, 4; PG 93, 509.

³⁶ Qo 1, 3; 2, 22; 4, 7, *passim*.

³⁷ QohR 1, 3.

³⁸ WaR, Emor, 28, 1.

³⁹ *Ad Eccl*, 1, 3; f. 11; vol. 1, 46.

⁴⁰ In: Procopius of Gaza, *Catena in Eccl*, 2, 9-11; CCG 4, 18.

⁴¹ *Enarrationes in Ps.* 118, 12, 1; CCL 40, 1700.

⁴² *Metaphr. in Eccl.*, 1, 3; PG 10, 989A.

⁴³ *Expl. in Eccl.*, 1, 3, 3; PG 98, 757B.

We are aware that the process of the growing of the meaning of the biblical text that we have presented in this paper and we analyse in our research of patristic texts may seem suspicious for some biblical scholars. On the other side this was the way of reading the Bible in the Church till the last century. We stay in front of questions: Should the exegesis be founded only on the historical-critical or literary bases of the modern scholarship or it should integrate a tradition of twenty centuries? May this tradition teach us something about the meaning of the Bible in our time? Today *divina eloquia cum legentibus crescunt*?