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QM-15: MOGILANY 1995. *Papers on the Dead Sea Scrolls in Memory of Aleksy Klawek*. Ed. by Z. J. Kapera, Kraków 1998, 256 pp. Bound copy USD 42.00.

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THE VISUAL INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE AN OUTLINE

My paper includes three points. It will (1) give a brief description of an approach known as the "visual interpretation" of the Bible; (2) give some examples of the of the pictorial art; (3) consider the value of the visual interpretation approach.

It is appropriate to give serious consideration to the various methods and approaches in the interpretation of the Bible. Such is the purpose of my paper. As for the style adopted here, I try to use ordinary, common and simple English. Nowadays, however, some readers are eager to a certain special and exclusive terminology. I completely agree with those who react against this tendency.

1. *How are we to read a text? How are we to come into contact with it?*

To have a better feel for the literary texture of the Bible, the first step is a literal translation into one's own language. The second step would be a more literary exercise, the purpose of which is to find the best equivalent for every word or expression, especially for idiomatic expressions. One can speak of a "scene" or an "act" or an "episode".¹

When I arrived in Cracow in 1968 to teach the introduction to the Old and New Testament, I discovered new sources of exciting distraction: The world of Jewish midrash was opened up to me. A few years later I made my first effort at sketching some problems of literary analysis, in particular rhetorical analysis, narrative analysis and semiotic analysis.²

¹ See J. L. Ska, "our Fathers Have Told Us". *Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives*, Ed. PIB, Roma 1990; L. Sormani, *Semiotik und Hermeneutik im interkulturellen Rahmen*, Frankfurt/M., Berlin, Bern, New York, Paris, Wien 1998.

² See *The Pontifical Biblical Commission, the Interpretation of the Bible in the*

In the last few years B. S. Childs has focused his interest on the final canonical form of the biblical text, the form accepted by the community of the faith.³ J. A. Sanders has devoted more attention to the so called "canonical process".⁴ He studies the way in which older traditions have been used again in a new context. The use of older traditions can be midrashic.

What is, indeed, a visual interpretation of the Bible?

It is surely not a history of biblical art. It is an *approach*, that is an enquiry proceeding from a particular point of view.⁵ This approach is based upon three main presuppositions:

(a) procedures, often *midrashic*, serving to make the biblical text relevant for a later time;

(b) the semiotic level; here one studies the transformations which move the action of a story from the initial to the final stage;

(c) a holistic reading of the Christian Scripture.

The authors of the book *Penser la Bible*, Paul Ricoeur and André LaCoque, use the term "foreground of traditional history".⁶ This approach looks at the history of the influence of the text. (Wirkungsgeschichte or Nachgeschichte). Paul Ricoeur wrote: "C'est la dynamique du texte qui est prise en compte: c'est d'elle qu'est retracé le cours, le trajectoire".⁷

The visual interpretation of the biblical texts belongs to the artists. This activity has aspects which go beyond the academic analysis of texts.

2. Now I would like to present *some examples from the pictorial art* of different artists from different countries. I am very unhappy, indeed, that I cannot at the moment present the reproductions.

2.1. Example No. 1. Marc Chagall and 'Aqedah.

'Aqedah is the story of the offering of Isaac by Abraham (Gen 22). The

Church, Rome 1993; J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Biblical Commission's Document "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church". Text and Commentary*, Ed. PIB, Roma 1995.

³ See B. S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments. Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible*, SCM Press, London 1992 (Reissued 1996).

⁴ See J. A. Sanders, *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text: Canon as Paradigm*, Philadelphia, PA 1987. Cf. J. A. Fitzmyer, *op. cit.*, p. 69 f.

⁵ "By an exegetical 'method' we understand a group of scientific procedures employed in order to explain texts. We speak of an 'approach' when it is a question of an enquiry proceeding from a particular point of view". See *The Document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission*, Introduction B.

⁶ A. LaCoque, P. Ricoeur, *Penser la Bible*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1998.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

story is a masterpiece, presenting God as the Lord whose demands are absolute. In all pictures of 'Aqedah by Chagall there is in a corner of the picture a very small figure of a Jew carrying the cross.⁸ Two important studies of the chapter of Gen. 'Aqedah from a philosophical and literary perspective are found in S. Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, and E. A. Auerbach's *Mimesis*.

2.2. Example No. 2. Maurycy Gottlieb as a witness.

M. Gottlieb (1856-1879) is an outstanding representative of Polish painting and, at the same time, a major Central and Eastern European Jewish artist. He died at the young age of 23. The artist toured to the Old and New Testament in several paintings decisive for the determination of his own religious stand. The New Testament inspired the paintings *Christ Teaching in Capernaum* (now at the Warsaw National Museum) and *The Trial of Jesus* (now at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem).⁹

The artist placed himself among the listeners. In this manner, Gottlieb defined his attitude towards religion torn between loyalty to the Jewish tradition and a fascination with the figure of Christ. In the first composition, Christ is presented as the "divine master", in the second as the "consoler and saviour". For Henryk Struve, one of the Polish critics, Christ thus portrayed is not "a harbinger of a new order or new idea, a reformer calling for the spiritual rebirth of the people, but a priest who, aware of his concurrence with the existing order of things, fulfils the obligations of his faith, praying to eternal God in his own name and for the sake of his people".¹⁰ An interesting opinion on this subject was offered by Jerzy Malinowski: "Striving towards a conciliation within the Judaeo-Christian world, Gottlieb adopted from *The History of the Jews* by Heinrich Graetz, his favorite book, an interpretation of the figure of Christ as a Jewish religious reformer, a successor of the Old Testament prophets, and part of the Jewish tradition".¹¹

2.3. Example No. 3. Tadeusz Brzozowski and his Messiah.

Tadeusz Brzozowski (1918-1987) was an eminent Polish painter, surrealist and colourist. I would like to present his small painting, oil on canvas, *The Messiah*. This is a representation of Israel's king (the golden crown), but Brzozowski's Messiah is, at the same time, the suffering servant of God ('ebed YHWH) of Deutero-Isaiah.

⁸ See P. Porvoyeur, *Marc Chagall. Messaggio biblico*, Jaca Book, Milano 1983, 2 1996; *Grosse Chagall-Bibel*, Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, Stuttgart 1998; K. Mayer, *Traumbilder*, Echter Verlag, Würzburg 1997.

⁹ See J. Malinowski, *Maurycy Gottlieb*, Edition ARkady, Warsaw 1997.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 52 f.

3. The value of the visual interpretation approach.

I would like to quote a phrase of Algirdas Greimas, the eminent French semiotician: "It is extremely difficult to talk about meaning and say anything meaningful about it".¹² Exegetes may have a distinctive role in the interpretation of the Bible but they do not exercise a monopoly. They are not owners of the Holy Scripture. The academic analysis of texts is necessary and indispensable, but it cannot be the only one, or exhaustive. One cannot regard the Bible as a collection of historical documents dealing with its own origins. The Bible as the Word of God is addressed both to the Church and to the entire world at the present time.¹³ This conviction leads in turn to the work of actualizing and inculturating the biblical message, as well as to various uses of the inspired text in religious and also pure cultural sense.

To conclude, the Bible is neither a classic of human aspirations nor a noble monument to the potential of creative imagination.¹⁴ It is a witness to God's entrance into our history in an incarnate form as a gracious act of redemption of the world. We read and listen to the Scripture in order to be transformed by the promise of the Gospel. The Bible in its twofold witness of the Old and the New Testament (or, if you will, the First and the Second Testament) remains God's gift to the Church and the world, a source of life for the present and a promise for the future. This reality is already visible in the images, pictures, paintings, and after that will be with sight in facts.¹⁵

We can repeat after Psalm 36:10

beoreka nir'eh 'ōr
"in thy light
shall we see light".

¹² "Il est extrêmement difficile de parler du sens et d'en dire quelque chose du sensé". *De sens: Essais sémiotiques*, Paris 1970, p. 7.

¹³ See *The Document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission*, IV. See further R. C. Hill, *Breaking the Bread of the Word: Principles of Teaching Scripture*, Ed. PIB, Roma 1991; P. Laghi, M. Gilbert, A. Vanhoye, *Chiesa e Sacra Scrittura. Un secolo di magistero ecclesiastico e studi biblici*, Ed. PIB, Roma 1994; D. J. A. Clines, *The Bible and the Modern World*, Sheffield 1997.

¹⁴ See B. S. Childs, *op. cit.*, p. 726.

¹⁵ See R. Jensen, *Giving Texts Vision and Images Voice: The Promise and Problems of Interdisciplinary Scholarship*, and D. R. Cartlidge, *Which Path as the Crossroads? Early Christian Art as a Hermeneutical and Theological Challenge* [in:] *Common Life in the Early Church: Essays Honoring Graydon F. Snyder*, ed., by J. V. Hills, Trinity Press International, Fall 1998 (private communication).

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HOW TO BE WEALTHY? THE LETTER OF JAMES AND THE PROBLEM OF WEALTH

Introduction

I would like to present several problems which arise from the analysis of the texts of the Letter of James which contain the word *plousios*.

I. The rich man boasts in his humiliation (Jas 1.9-11)

The first text contains a paradoxical appeal to the rich: 'Let the lowly brother (*tapeinos*) boast (*kauchastho*) in his exaltation, and the rich (*plousios*) in his humiliation (*tapeinosis*), because like the flower of the grass he will pass away.' (Jas 1.9-10)

1. Exegesis

The command to boast is directed towards both the poor and the rich, which means that no irony is intended here.

The verb *kauchastho* (to boast), used in a positive sense in the OT, has God or the Law (Sir 39.8) as object (Ps 5.12; 32.11)¹. In the NT, Paul on the one hand argues against vanity and the placing of one's trust in good works (Rom 3.27; Eph 2.8) and on the other encourages Christians to boast 'of the Lord' (2 Cor 10.17), 'in God through our Lord Jesus Christ' (Rom 5.11), 'in the cross of the Lord' (cf. 1 Cor 2.2). The object of boasting determines the value of the act.

In the NT the term *tapeinosis*² appears three times in the context of death. Acts 8.32-35 quotes from Is 53.7 f. (LXX) the testimony concerning the Servant of Yahweh who underwent humiliation. In Phil 3.21 we find the phrase

¹ R. Bultmann, *kauchomai*, TDNT 3, 645-654.

² W. Grundmann, *tapeinos*, TDNT 8, 1-26.