



What Does Theology Do, Actually? 2

Program

Friday 09.07.

09:00-09:20 // Welcome and Introduction

Prof. Dr. Cornelia Richter, Prof. Dr. Dr. Jochen Sautermeister, Deans of the faculties

Dr. Phillip Andrew Davis

09:20-10:35 // Panel 1. Bible between Academy, Religious Communities, and Society: Reports from the Centers of Christianity Globally.

Ratheesh Appuchamy- Practise and Challenges of theological education in India

Anja Block- Exegesis means (more than) translating

Since the Reformation one of the principles of Protestantism is to study the biblical texts in detail. The first step in studying biblical texts academically is to learn the ancient languages and translate the texts. Alas, finding words in another language alone is not sufficient to understand a biblical text. The literary, historical, and social context, the discourses that were virulent at the time of its genesis, the place in the canon as we know and read it today – they all shape the understanding of a text and are explored in modern Exegesis. Not only the text itself is translated, but also its various con- und subtexts. This approach shows that biblical texts are stranger and more ambiguous as it might seem, and it can keep theology from jumping to conclusions and challenge beloved interpretations.

Moreover, German theological faculties are the place where prospective pastors and religious teachers are educated. Working in churches and society they face the challenge to translate once more: The professional jargon must be retranslated, so that people in their communities understand them.

Tahina Rahandrifenosoa- Responses to Online Exegetical Teaching in Malagasy Churches

This paper attempts to determine the audience's reaction to the online Bible teaching of Pastor Tahina Rahandrifenosoa, a recent graduate of the University of Bonn in Germany. He explains how he conducts his exegetical approach by presenting examples of his published teachings. He also discusses the subsequent theological debates, through which it has been possible to observe the general way of interpreting the Holy Scriptures by the Malagasy Churches. After raising the problems generated by these differences of

opinion within the Church and his online ministry, Pastor Tahina Rahandrifenosoa justifies his response to these differences in exegetical approaches. He concludes by proposing the reinforcement of the teaching of exegesis within the Church as well as at the lay level.

Discussion for Panel 1

10:35-11:00 // Coffee Break.

11:00-12:00 //Keynote: Athalya Brenner

12:00-13:00 // Lunch Break.

13:00-14:00 // Panel 2a. Bible between Academy, Religious Communities, and Society: A Question of Method.

Jeremy Punt- Bible and Method: Perennial questions, useful stratagems, and scholarly homes

Notwithstanding the centuries-long dominance of historical critical biblical interpretation, and its wide-spread and lasting allure, the methodological breadth of biblical hermeneutics nevertheless has been on the increase for some decades now. The daunting and expanding array of hermeneutical methodologies initially gave rise to uneasiness about their variety as much as their potential impact on historical criticism. However, growing appreciation for the social location of interpreters and their hermeneutics has led to questions about the conventional understanding of methodologies as simply the tools of the trade, or interchangeable instruments dissociated from those who use them or their contexts. A more holistic hermeneutical perspective means that methods are seen as scholarly homes that both create and define the spaces within which scholars work but at the same time, reciprocally, inform their identity. The heuristic functions of biblical hermeneutical methods are part of and work in tandem with an understanding of methods as enabling environments. Such developments in broadening out hermeneutics and its impact in biblical studies pose challenges but also present promises for biblical hermeneutics.

Dogara Manomi- Is it in the Bible? (Dis)locating, (Re)locating, and (Re)negotiating Five Biblical Exegetical Boundaries

Biblical exegesis is continually being dislocated and relocated at three different levels: geographically—from the West to the Global South; methodologically—from historical-critical methods to contextual and activist-oriented methods on the one hand, and from the academia to ecclesia on the other hand; and thematically—from the familiar biblical

themes to issues of contemporary relevance that may not find a slot in a list of key biblical themes. While we reflect on, appreciate, and participate in this exegetical dislocation and relocation of biblical exegesis, it is expedient to reflect on more specific aspects within these three broad new exegetical locations, asking whether it is meaningful or even necessary to methodologically (dis)locate, (re)locate, and (re)negotiate exegetical boundaries? This paper argues that if exegesis will continue to serve the church as it should, it is meaningful and even necessary to (dis)locate, (re)locate and (re)negotiate five exegetical boundaries, namely, thematic boundaries, semantic boundaries, pragmatic boundaries, appropriative (applicative) boundaries, and intuitive (individualistic) boundaries.

14:05-15:05 // Panel 2b. Bible between Academy, Religious Communities, and Society: A Question of Method.

Hindy Najman- Forward Moving Philology and Ethical Reading

This paper explores a prospective approach to the study of biblical studies. We don't just retell or rewrite the past, but rather we see forward and create forwards. I will consider how the emerging compositions can be traced through traditionary processes, discourses tied to founders, and dynamic considerations of textual traditions through poetic processes and pluriformity. Further, I will explore the ethical implications for how we reconstruct the past.

Discussion for Panel 2

15:05-15:30 // Coffee Break.

15:30-16:50 // Panel 3. Academy: Parsing the Study of Bible by Institutional Context.

Amy Jill Levine- Jesus and the Liberal Academy: From First Century Jew to Twenty-First Century Anti-Fascist

The eclipse if not the erasure of historical-critical approaches in favor of exegesis based in subject position or social location, coupled with the already limited attention to Jewish history in many liberal and non-denominational divinity schools, reintroduces anti-Jewish tropes (e.g., xenophobia; obsession with ritual purity; misogyny; militaristic messianic views) to construct a radical Jesus singularly engaged in ending systemic oppression. Instead of regarding Torah-practice as a means by which Jews preserved their identity in an imperial context, such readings view Jewish particularity as a problem that Christian universalism solves. For students who do not accept traditional theological claims concerning incarnation, resurrection, or ascension, the anti-Jewish context preserves Jesus as unique and so divine. In some cases, critical attention both to Jesus' historical

context and to the problem of anti-Jewish interpretation is met with resistance. Such responses speak to the limitations of weak Christology, identity politics, Christian fragility, and the utility of alternative facts.

David Joy- Postcolonial Exegesis: A Perspective Interpretation or Bias Hermeneutics?

It is noted that with the entry of Liberation hermeneutics and sociological perspectives of the study of the Bible, many scholars across the globe initiated the process of analyzing the Bible within the context of their life situations. Bible societies, theological institutions, SBL, SNTS, BNTS, ABS, SBSI and other national biblical forums indeed contributed immensely to the progress of creative exegetical studies of the Bible. I as a postcolonial practitioner of the Bible, would like to make a survey of the important milestones and trajectories in the study of exegesis as well as endeavors shaped by the indigenous scholars including the mother-tongue hermeneutics. It is very significant to state that more or less all the scholars systematically use the historical-critical methods and literary methods as a creative and strong foundation to build up the contextual exegesis. However, the political, racial, sociological and institutional vested interests and motifs of the scholars could not be evaluated in a meaningful fashion as many exegetical works move along with the global institutional and professional streams. The future of the bible should be assessed in the light of the creative and dynamic efforts owned by the faith communities across the globe and their real-life contexts. Therefore, a study of postcolonial reading strategy as perspective interpretation or bias hermeneutics will uncover many areas of truth in terms of biblical exegesis in connection with very strong and dominant institutions.

Discussion for Panel 3

16:50-17:10 // Coffee Break.

17:10-18:30 // Panel 4. Religious Communities: On the Confessional Construction of the Bible(s).

Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger

Ivana Noble

The paper looks at what actually takes place within process of the retreat, when people from different Christian traditions and cultures learn to read the Scriptures contemplatively. It draws on practical experience, and in its analysis concentrates on three specific areas: (1) a hermeneutics that works with the physical as well as with the spiritual meanings of the texts; (2) traditions of discernment allowing people to engage their imagination kindly and critically; (3) ways of ecumenical and intercultural

translation that allow people to feel at home in traditions that they initially thought could not be their own (e.g. Ignatian tradition for Protestants; Jesus Prayer for Western Christians).

Discussion for Panel 4

Saturday 10.07.

09:00-11:00 // Panel 5. Society: Scientific Transfer and Exegetical Knowledge for Whom and for What?

Andrea Pichlmeier- Towards a Second Naivety: Reading the Bible in the 21st Century

In 1993, the Pontifical Biblical Commission issued a document, entitled: “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church”. Attempts to interpret the Bible outside the context of the Church are rare indeed. While serving as a provider of norms for churches and Christian communities, the Bible has also become an independent cultural influence outside these contexts and beyond their norms. Exegesis and biblical hermeneutics, however, remain marginalised and confined to academic ivory towers. There is no other book from antiquity which, even in the 21st century, is being read in such a literal or deliberately naïve way. Some people declare it invalid or irrelevant, in the face of contemporary knowledge; others use it in order to protect their own faith from this very knowledge. Between these two extremes, I want to present two hermeneutical approaches, equally directed towards the apologists of both sides. The first one takes a step back, insisting on the “difference” of the Bible. It draws on the conviction that the ancient texts were not written for 21st century readers and can only be approached through debate and dialogue. This is where academic insights play their part, because they help us to understand these texts, across a distance of several thousand years. The Bible, however, is not just any ancient book, but the central document of Christian faith. Debate and dialogue, even when allied to an academic understanding of the Bible, do not enable us to comprehend its religious dimension. Therefore, I propose a second approach, following Paul Ricoeur’s concept of a “second naïveté”. My claim is that biblical hermeneutics should lead us beyond a naïve reading and its criticism to this “second naïvety”, in order to embrace its insights, both within and outside church contexts.

Jonathan Lo- From the Streets to the Scriptures: “Liberating Exegesis” in Hong Kong

Hong Kong Christian culture provides a fascinating opportunity for exploring the political dimensions of exegetical knowledge transfer within an Asian socio-cultural context.

Issues raised by post-colonial critics of the Bible—power, economics, politics, religion, culture, and how these elements are interwoven in relation to colonial and imperial hegemony—inform the ways biblical texts are understood and applied in response to political challenges. With the city’s complicated history as a former British and somewhat Christianized colony, and now a special administrative district of the People’s Republic of China, HK Christians are situated within a complex and precarious socio-political reality. In the following essay, I will discuss the interpretation and use of biblical texts by a representative selection of HK Christian scholars and leaders in response to three significant political events in recent years: the “Umbrella Movement” in 2014, the “Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement” which began in 2019, and the passing of the “Hong Kong National Security Law” in 2020. I will give a description of these events and assess the impact they have had on HK’s culture. I will then attempt to survey the selection, exegesis, and contextualization of biblical texts in response to these events, focusing on the political dimensions of these interpretations through the lens of the “theology of liberation,” as defined by Christopher Rowland and Mark Corner in *Liberating Exegesis: The Challenge of Liberation Theology to Biblical Studies* (Westminster/John Knox, 1989), whereby the theologian introduces his or her own socio-political context into the process of exegesis. These examples of “liberation exegesis” will serve as a basis for identifying the political concerns of HK Christians and highlight the important place of contextualization and localization within the exegetical process.

Moritz Gräper- White Privilege in Exegesis, Church, and Society.

As a white, cisgender male pastor with a doctoral degree I belong to a very privileged group in society. The aim of my paper is to critically reflect my position and the racist structures that enable my privilege. By exploring how in biblical scholarship, in church and society white privilege is visible I try to find traces of methods and strategies that could help overcome racist hierarchies and patterns. I will draw on examples from academia, ministry work and observations in society.

Discussion for Panel 5

11:00-11:15// Coffee Break

11:15-12:10 // Panel 6a. Possible futures: What will Bible Do between Academy, Religious Communities, and Society?

Sharon Padilla- Towards Marginality and Transversality: On the Challenges of Biblical Studies in Latin America

In the last five decades, the study of the Bible in Latin America has made significant efforts to go beyond a passive reception of foreign methods to propose a plethora of original and critical pathways of biblical interpretation. The “preferential option for the poor” (Medellín, 68), the attention to the “signs of times”, and the emergence of popular Bible reading groups, have been especially essential in showing how the marginal situation of the people of God in the continent and the biblical text can get to illuminate each other. While one can agree that this two-way relationship remains at the heart of the interpretation of the Bible in Latin America, there is a growing awareness that there are several challenges that must be urgently overcome if the biblical text is to remain “alive and active” (Heb 4,12). This paper will address these challenges by referring to the current debate and taking some studies as illustrations. It will be argued that one main challenge is the lack of a healthy and mindful relationship between Latin American hermeneutics (present-focused) and historical-critical methods (past-focused). To a great extent, the absence of institutional support to promote the specialization in biblical studies, especially of “marginal” readers, is here to blame. At the same time, the continent is witnessing an increasing non-confessional interest in biblical texts and early Christianity (by scholars in the disciplines of classical studies, history, and philosophy). With this scenario in view, I propose that the future of biblical studies in Latin America will have to, through a conscious appropriation of historical-critical methods, 1. Mature its hermeneutical position in “marginality” and, 2. Open up to “transversality”. It is only by allowing the reader and the biblical text to move out of their customary institutional boundaries that new bridges of engaged meaning will be built and crossed.

Michael Wandusim- The Bible and Its Interpreters: Assessing the Future of Biblical Scholarship from a West African Context

As to why scholars continue to read the Bible and why they will do so in the future is better appreciated and answered contextually taking cognisance of factors that shape a given context within which biblical scholars find themselves and carry out their research on the Bible. As a result, this paper approaches the subject of the Bible and its exegesis contextually by casting an analytical gaze at the West African exegetical/hermeneutical space, African theology, and West African Christianity. Through that, it posits that the context sensitive and reader-centred nature of the biblical interpretative setting as well as the inexorable link between the Bible and African theology and Christianity in West Africa suggest that the Bible will continue to be researched and receive increased critical attention in the times ahead, not necessarily for its own sake but due to its (documented) influence in the West African context. Additionally, an integral part of its context and reader-centred nature is that biblical scholarship in West Africa takes seriously the contribution of popular readings of the Bible. Concretely, this observation will be

substantiated by assessing the role of the Bible in the emergence of African Theology in (West) Africa, its impact on Christianity in the sub-region, and the hermeneutical approaches that dominate its interpretation there. Moreover, some biblical research of selected New Testament exegetes, both established and emerging ones, will be critically presented, as part of the ways to situate the observation this paper seeks to present. Given the broadness and diversity in West Africa, however, the paper will limit its focus to Ghana. This will allow for a more specified and contextualised approach to the subject of the paper.

Discussion for Panel 6a

12:15-13:10// Panel 6b. Possible futures: What will Bible Do between Academy, Religious Communities, and Society?

Mirjam Jekel- So what? On hermeneutics, perspectives, and questioning the self-evident

Over the past decades, the Bible, religion, and theology have lost importance in the west in general and in Germany in particular. The contents of the Bible as well as their interpretation and understanding have become the specialised knowledge of experts who tend to concentrate on detailed textual and historical work. At the same time, the question of “so what?”, i.e. the consequences and conclusions from this detailed work, recedes into the background. In response to this, the paper aims to focus precisely on this question. It will demonstrate how exegetical knowledge and skills can contribute to contemporary discourses – from interpretations of biblical texts that are sensitive to the concerns of our time to the hermeneutical skills of myth and ideology critique and the ability to navigate ambiguities and uncertainties. Special attention will be paid to the question of perspectives. Why is the method of historic criticism and its cognates regarded as objective and properly scientific, while other methods are called ‘engaged readings’ and relegated to the background? Which criteria determine subjectivity? And how can we learn to see and question our own biases, thus understanding that what we believe to be objective is in fact one of many different perspectives? This leads to a systemic question: Who does exegesis? Here, the focus will be on the institutional, often hidden barriers that decide who can participate in exegetical knowledge production in the first place. This fundamental reflection matters, because exegesis will only have an impact on modern societies if the scientific community reflects their diversity.

Søren Lorenzen- Navigating Exegetical Plurality: The Future of Pursuing Philosophical Themes in the Hebrew Bible

The Hebrew Bible scholar John Barton recently wrote that biblical exegesis has entered a highly pluralistic stage, a succinct observation that summarizes how present-day

exegesis have shot off into various methods and purposes. Studies ranging from final form literary readings to detailed analyses of the individual biblical books' theology have made exegesis a multi-colored venture. The historical-critical toolbox has been filled with new contextual methods, and scholarly interest in the reception history of the Bible has grown exponentially in the last decades. Another promising approach is to sieve out philosophical, anthropological, and existential themes from the Hebrew Bible in order to establish a dialogical partner in humanistic inquiries. Thematic questions ranging from "What is a human being?" to "What kinds of epistemologies are found in the Hebrew Bible?" have appeared in recent exegetical articles and monographs in order to challenge preconceived ideas of Hebrew mentality. Such thematic ventures also have potential to engage with academic fields outside exegetical studies (e.g., philosophy and the history of ideas) and bring a valuable voice to the humanities that rarely engage Semitic sources. With a view to the future, the thematic approach is one way to expand the gradually shrinking bubble of Hebrew Bible studies performed at the universities. As an example of engaging philosophical themes within the Hebrew Bible, this paper traces some methodological outlines inspired by Paul Ricoeur's philosophy for analyzing selfhood as portrayed in the ancient sources. These outlines are preceded by a discussion on the present state of exegetical studies and followed by a gaze into the future of academic biblical exegesis.

Discussion for Panel 6b

13:10-13:30// Closing Thoughts

Panels

FRIDAY

Panel 1. Bible between Academy, Religious Communities, and Society: Reports from the Centers of Christianity Globally

An ecumenical panel of early career scholars from three different regional-cultural centers of Christianity will open the symposium with short provocations addressing the questions: Why do we study the Bible academically? How does this help us? What challenges, tensions, or problems does academic study of the Bible create ecclesialogically, socially, or academically in our situation?

Panel 2. Bible between Academy, Religious Communities, and Society: A Question of Method

It is a truism to say that exegesis comprises a wide range of methods: The "classical" canon of historical-critical methods is nowadays flanked by many "engaged" approaches such as feminist, post-colonial, queer or ecological hermeneutics. One gets the overall impression, however, that these approaches rather coexist than really cooperate. This panel aims at a meta-reflection on this phenomenon, including consideration of the reasons for this situation and what can we do about it. Questions to be addressed include: To what extent are methods culturally bound and/or products of specific socio-historical developments? Or, more concretely, given the fact that historical-critical methods are a European invention, how can they be made compatible with non-Western cultures, and is it even necessary to do that? What is the status of contextual and post-colonial interpretations within the field of exegesis, and what exactly can we learn from them? How can we make use of new trends in neighboring disciplines, such as Digital Humanities? In what ways are or could methods be combined?

Panel 3. Academy: Parsing the Study of Bible by Institutional Context

Scholarly exegesis of the Bible takes place in a variety of systemic and institutional contexts, each of which operate on the basis of presuppositions that can fundamentally impact the way the Bible is handled. This panel seeks to make these implicit, often impervious backgrounds explicit in order to understand the conditions in which exegesis is undertaken in various academic systems around the world. More concretely the panel brings together presenters from various global perspectives who can speak about their own contexts by reflecting on questions such as: In what sorts of institutions is exegesis practiced and taught? How do these institutions relate to other academic institutions or disciplines? Is exegesis practiced and taught at religious or secular institutions? If religious, which religious confessions are present and how do they interact? How are these institutions regulated legally and how is the academic-cultural position of exegesis

negotiated politically? What is the historical background to the socio-political and institutional position of exegesis in that context? And finally, in what concrete ways have exegetical debates or exegetical questions been influenced by this contextualization?

Keynote: Comparing and Combining Methods of Exegesis

SATURDAY

Panel 4. Religious Communities: On the Confessional Construction of Bible

Exegesis deals with the Bible. But what exactly is a Bible how do concepts of “Bible” impact the ways it is to be read and interpreted? It seems obvious that this question depends on the denominational background, beginning with the fact that there is no consensus on the exact extent of the OT canon between Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Christians. This may lead to the question of how “Jewish”, “Catholic”, “Protestant”, “Orthodox” or “Pentecostal” exegesis might be described. On the other hand, it might be worth asking to what extent these respective approaches to “Bible” also depend on cultural backgrounds: If we ask how, when, by whom, and with what intentions the Bible is read, the answers might differ significantly from country to country. For example, in what ways is exegesis understood to be an academic discipline or not? When it is, should it matter at all whether a text is “sacred” or not? These are some of the questions to be discussed in this panel – from international and ecumenical perspectives.

Panel 5. Society: Scientific Transfer and Exegetical Knowledge for Whom and for What?

The communication of academic results to the public faces a number of challenges, especially when it comes to religious themes. Biblical exegesis in particular encounters various receptions in church and society, whether it is given pride of place in doing theology (à la a classical Protestant understanding of the sola scriptura principle), whether its historical claims are received as harmful to faith, whether its relevance is completely doubted, or whether the Bible and its interpretation is put to political use. In this panel we want to ask how academic exegesis is situated vis-a-vis church and society in different scientific and cultural settings and how it communicates to these different publics. This topic can be approached from a variety of angles, whether in terms of inner-theological discourses themselves (e.g., What does exegesis have to do with systematic or practical theology?); in terms of teaching methods (e.g., How is exegesis taught and for what purposes, and what should student exegetes be able to do with their findings when they go on to teach or preach?); or in terms of communication of exegetical knowledge to society at large (e.g., How does society know about the Bible? Where are biblical contents presented in society? Who communicates this knowledge and in what

contexts? To what extent are books on the Bible accessible and what kind of quality do they have?).

Panel 6. Possible futures: What will Bible Do between Academy, Religious Communities, and Society?

The final panel of the symposium will feature a series of future-oriented papers written by outstanding current doctoral students, scholars with their fingers on the pulse of exegesis and with diagnostic insight into the vitality of academic research on, with, and in Bible. The panel is devoted to two basic questions: Why do scholars continue to conduct research on the Bible today, and why will scholars read the Bible in the future? Within this framing, more specific questions will include: Are scholars who conduct research on the Bible interested in the Bible in and of itself (and if so, on what kind of understanding of canon or of the Bible’s importance is this interest based?), or are they interested in the Bible because of how the Bible refers to or reflects on other issues (and then what are those other issues? Cultural and societal? Existential? Philosophical? How are those categories constructed and “found” in the ancient texts of the Bible?)? This panel strongly encourages bold, vector-charting proposals that are constructively (self-)critical of past approaches, insightful of present cultural and institutional conditionalities of Biblical research, and that approach possible futures of exegesis in creative, norm-bending ways.

Speakers

- Ratheesh Appuchamy (IN)
- Anja Block (DE)
- Mirjam Jekel (DE)
- Prof. Dr. David Joy (IN)
- Prof. Dr. Amy-Jill Levine (US)
- Prof. Dr. Jonathan Lo (HK)
- Søren Lorenzen (DK)
- Dr. Dogara Manomi (NG)
- Prof. Dr. Hindy Najman (GB)
- Prof. Dr. Ivana Noble (CZ)
- Sharon Padilla (MX)
- Dr. Andrea Pichlmeier (DE)
- Prof. Dr. Jeremy Punt (ZA)
- Tahina Rahandrifenosoa (MG)
- Prof. Dr. Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger (AT)
- Dr. Michael Wandusim (GH)