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### **My »Galatians« in (self-)critical review**

Different eras, different fields of reception research and different intended readers shape the distinct profiles of the four recently published commentary series concerning the history of reception and interpretation of Biblical texts, viz. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, *Blackwell's Commentary Series*, *The Church's Bible*, *Novum Testamentum Patristicum* (NTP). There is no competition between these series; indeed, they complement each other. But the newly awakened interest in reception history also stands in need of critical self-reflection. Margret M. Mitchell's critique of my commentary on Galatians is to be appreciated as an impulse in this direction.<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. On the tenor of the inquiries

Mitchell's critical inquiries seem to me to demonstrate a common tenor that is expressed above all in her last point (2.7). In my commentary on Galatians Mitchell wishes for a more intensive methodological reflection of my way of proceeding, clearer information about the intention which guided my work and a greater amount of hermeneutical reflections embedding the presented material in overarching – and current – contexts of discussion of various kinds.

I would first like to couch my reply to this in an image. Coal, in modern times, is useful in two main ways: We can burn it in a power station in order to produce electric energy, and we can use it in order to make steel. The one thing is the production of energy, which can then have a beneficial effect on exegetical work, writing sermons, working on cultural studies topics, etc. The other thing is to make steel, even high-grade steel, which can then be used in order to engage in discussion with other scholars, for example on allegory and typology. But what differs fundamentally from both of these things is this: to be the miner and to prepare the coal for transport either to the power station or to the steelworks. But just that was my modest aim.

The following remarks relate to Mitchell's review in a way that is feasible and meaningful from the perspective of this objective.

#### 2. The outline of my commentary

a) Mitchell first raised the problem of genre with regard to this book. The intention behind the reference to »catena« in my foreword was only to give the reason for the outline of this book: After an introductory overview, the individual pericopes and verses and parts of verses are commented on with regard to ancient Christian reception; each section is introduced by a summary concerning the contents of the following. Two reasons were decisive for this outline: 1. Ancient Christian authors sometimes take up only one verse or even only one part of a verse for the sake of application, irrespective of the Biblical context; 2. We felt the necessity of providing quick information for the readers; therefore we decided to give the intro-

<sup>1</sup>) I very sincerely thank Dr. Kelley Kucaba for the intensive editing of my English and Prof. Angelika Reichert for the intensive discussion of my article.

ductory overview.<sup>2</sup> The problem of whether to use pericopes, verses or parts of verses as the basis for presentation is a real one. In the footsteps of the ancient sceptic Pyrrhon of Elis I presented the material along the line of what seemed to me most commensurate with ancient Christian reception. Sometimes I stated the reason for my decisions, but it is true that more such explanations would have been useful.<sup>3</sup>

b) Mitchell's second question deals with the problem of text, translation, and interpretation. In the NTP group we discussed whether we should offer a translation for the reader or the Greek or Latin text, but in the latter case the problem emerged as to which particular ancient version should be included and what form a critical apparatus should take. Due to the limited space we could not reproduce the wealth of variants presented in a forthcoming volume of *Editio critica maior* of the Greek New Testament or in the »Vetus Latina«. For ecumenical reasons we chose the »Einheitsübersetzung«. In some cases, however, a change in wording proved unavoidable. These, of course – in this Mitchell is right – should have been noted and a brief reason given.

c) Mitchell's third question deals with the distinction between thematic clusters and »historical traditions that are passed on, identifiably, by one interpreter to another«, a distinction that becomes important, for example, in the Antiochene interpretation of the ἀλληγορούμενα (Gal 4:24). To be sure, the Antiochene provenience of Diodore of Tarsus, John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsueste and Theodoret of Cyrus was not unknown to me,<sup>4</sup> but a greater amount of information would certainly have been helpful, especially for non-theologians.

### 3. The beginning of the reception of Galatians

Where is the starting point of reception? In her sixth question Mitchell proposed discussing in our series its beginning within the New Testament itself, in the case of Galatians within the Pauline literature and within James and Acts. In our project, however, we decided to be guided by the ancient, not the modern point of view. According to Origen Paul wrote the epistle to the Romans in a higher degree of spiritual perfection than the letters to the Corinthians<sup>5</sup> – he does not include Galatians in this comparison. The question of the order in which Paul wrote his letters was seldom discussed. John Chrysostom dates the letter to the Galatians before the letter to the Romans. Theodoret of Cyrus<sup>6</sup> proposes dating Galatians after Romans. But these questions are of no real importance for the exegesis. Concerning the issue of the reception of Paul in Acts, we have to keep the hermeneutical presuppositions of ancient Christian exegesis in mind: Texts like Acts 13:38; 14:15–17; 17:22–31; 20:18–35 are regarded as Paul's, not Luke's. The ancient Christian point of view concerning the relationship between Paul and James can be exemplified by the work of the Venerable Bede: According to this exegete James wants to wipe out a misunderstanding by some people concerning Rom 3:28,<sup>7</sup> and that is a process of reception of Paul by James; yet for Bede the consensus

2) Cf. the similar structure of the »Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture«.

3) Concerning Gal 2:19 f. I tried to find the proper way in light of the fact that sometimes both verses, sometimes only one of them is quoted – the wealth of material justifies a splitting in any case.

4) Prof. Mitchell also rightly criticized the order of the explanations of the commentary on Galatians by John Chrysostom.

5) Origen, in Rom., proem. Origenis (lat.).

6) Theodoret of Cyrus, epp. Paul., praefatio (PG 82, 41 BC); John of Damascus, in Gal. (PG 95, 821 B).

7) The Venerable Bede, in Iac., CC.SL 121, 198.

between Paul, James and John with regard to the command of love<sup>8</sup> is a case of Biblical harmony. Therefore it would be inappropriate to impose the lenses of modern critical scholarship on Bede's exegesis.

### 4. Application and explanation

Most important in my view is Mitchell's fourth question concerning application and exegesis, »Schriftgebrauch« and »Schriftklärung«. To be sure, the problem *verba et res* is a very difficult thing. Further, commentators are indeed also engaged in polemics and in admonitions to the readers of their own time, and the process of reception is very often based on a specific way of exegesis. Application and explanation are by no means to be strictly separated from one another since they both are grounded in a global hermeneutics. Yet I see different nuances: Their aim is different, and the practice of dealing with texts is different as well.

This is not peculiar to Christianity, but has its Greco-Roman roots in the dual nature of the reception of Homer. The mythographer Herakleitos<sup>9</sup> and Dio of Prusa<sup>10</sup> praised Homer as a source for moral instruction – despite Plato's verdict<sup>11</sup> – but Zenodot and Aristophanes of Byzantium and Aristarch dealt with Homer concerning issues of philological and literary criticism.<sup>12</sup> Jewish life is in general oriented to writings that are regarded as normative for the distinct groups within Judaism, but Demetrius, in the third century B. C. E., transfers the Hellenistic genre of »Questions and Answers« to the interpretation of the Torah in order to find answers to questions that occur to a careful reader, and the Hellenistic genre of »Questions and Answers« is used by ancient Christian authors as well. Origen and many exegetes along with him justify their spiritual interpretation of the Bible by quoting Gal 4:24,<sup>13</sup> but the Antiochene exegetes and Jerome deal with the *term* ἀλληγορούμενα.<sup>14</sup> It happens that precisely the text from Diodore's of Tarsus *comm. in psalmos* that is quoted by Mitchell (footnote 19) cannot be appreciated without distinguishing between application and exegesis. Some authors use Gal 1:8 with its curse in order to attack other authors as heretics, whereas other exegetes ask why Paul uses such a harsh formulation. Some authors quote Gal 1:1 in order to prove the co-equal divinity of Jesus Christ or of the Holy Spirit, other authors like Ambrosiaster ask why Paul in his situation over against the Galatians uses this wording and no other.<sup>15</sup>

To extend this issue beyond Galatians: Jerome offers insights into textual criticism in referring to possible sources of mistakes in transmission; for example, confusion between  $\eta$  and  $\eta^16$  is an explanation for some variants analogous to the modern way of explanation. Cassiodor, in his commentary on Psalms, refers to Ps 33 (34):21 *custodit Dominus omnia ossa eorum* (»The Lord will guard all their bones«) not as literal but as spiritual truth. His argument is

8) The Venerable Bede, in Iac., CC.SL 121, 197.

9) Herakleitos Quaest. Hom. 7–78, Platonismus in der Antike, Vol. 2, Heinrich Dörrie (ed.): Der hellenistische Rahmen des kaiserzeitlichen Platonismus, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 1990, 44.

10) Dio of Prusa, Or. 53.11.

11) Plato, de re publica 398ab; 599b.

12) Cf. Hartmut Erbse (ed.), Scholia Graeca in Homeria Iliadem (Scholia Vetera), Berlin 1969 ff.

13) Sometimes other authors as well use Gal 4:24 in order to justify an allegorical reading of a story which is not really interesting in the literal sense, cf. The Venerable Bede, expos. in Act. 20.7–110, CC.SL 121, 81.

14) John Chrysostom, comm. in Gal. (PG 61, 662); Theodoret of Cyrus, in Gal., PG 82, 489 D – 492 D; Jerome, in Gal., CC.SL 77 A, 139.

15) Ambrosiaster, in Gal. 1.9.1, CSEL 81/3, 10.

16) Jerome, in Os. 1.2,10, CC.SL 76, 23; id., in Am. 1.1.3, CC.SL 76, 212f. 216 f.; id., comm. in Eccl. 8.6, CC.SL 72, 316; id., in Ier. 3.55.1, CC.SL 74, 150.

that the fate of the martyrs would contradict a literal interpretation.<sup>17</sup> This argument emphasizes the aim of congruence between reality and text and has its analogy in the efforts of Alexandrian philologists to produce a Homeric text »fitting« to reality. Eusebius of Caesarea comments on Ps 69:23 (»Let the table become a trap for them«) as follows: 1. This does not correspond historically to David's life.<sup>18</sup> 2. This must be interpreted in a special way if it is to be interpreted as the speech of Christ: It is neither wish nor commandment but prediction. Eusebius wants to avoid the contradiction to Jesus' commandment of loving one's enemies (Mt 5:44).<sup>19</sup> Again we have to underline the analogy to pagan prosopographic exegesis; in addition, the commandment of love aroused anti-Christian polemicists, who made critical remarks for example about Paul's rebuke against his adversaries in Gal 5:12.<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, some elements of ancient application can also be stimulating for our modern exegesis. This can be illustrated by the word group »cross«: Distance to the world and self-denial are constantly recurring motifs in ancient Christian devotional literature. Important Biblical references are Gal 2:19; 5:24; 6:14, combined with Mt 16:24. This ancient Christian combination may appear strange from the standpoint of modern exegesis. On the other hand, a glance at the concordance yields a surprising result: The word group *σταυρός*, whenever it does not explicitly refer to the historical cross of Jesus in Jerusalem, is always found in a context with which the topic of self-denial can be associated in one way or another. This ascertainment implies that, in modern Pauline exegesis, more attention must again be paid to this topic together with the role-model function of Christ.

##### 5. The proportionality of importance and the criteria for selection

Mitchell inquired into the criteria that guided the selection and the weighting of the presented material. Admittedly, the problem of proportionality in selection is a real one. What were my criteria for inclusion and exclusion? Quality played no role as a criterion for selection, either in our modern or even in the ancient sense. Further, I did not exclude receptions that are inconsistent with our theological and ideological criticism; for we must also present the problematic interpretations in order to avoid any misuse of our agenda, which is to take into account, and not suppress, the voices of ancient exegesis in modern interpretation. – The criteria for selection were threefold: a distinct manner of reception, a distinct theme of reception, and influence. The criteria for excluding receptions were twofold: 1. superfluous repetition, 2. disproportion between the necessary efforts to clarify a reception for our readers and the actual intellectual gain. Therefore not all material concerning Old Testament allegory could be presented, for example.

Mitchell pointed out that there is by no means an interpretation for every verse or part of a verse in medieval catenae. The matter is similar, one should add, with regard to many ancient Christian commentaries. In any case, it was my aim to inform the reader whether or not there existed any act of reception to an individual verse. Second, it was not my intention to underrepresent Gnostic or other so-called heretic material – I collected what I could find, yet we all know, for example, that a proper reconstruction of Marcion's teaching is difficult; I used the cautious reconstruction of Ulrich

Schmid at this point.<sup>21</sup> Third, my short comment on Gal 4:21–31 as a whole centres on the explicit references to Gal 4:24 – the theme of typology and allegory is a very broad one and is very often based on other Biblical references. To my mind, reasons of space make it impossible to treat the topics of typology and allegory fully within the framework of such a commentary to the degree of differentiation due to them (cf. my comments on Cassiodor and Eusebius above) and with the inclusion of recent debate. But this concerns the question of the objective of the commentary series as a whole.

##### 6. The wealth of material and the aim of this commentary

For our series we decided to present the wealth of material, and I think that this is a task in its own right. My intention in writing my commentary was to be a »trustworthy steward« (cf. 1 Cor 4:2). My basic decision was to avoid rejecting material (for example topics of Mariology in Gal 4:4) which is unimportant in the eyes of a German Protestant New Testament scholar and sometime sceptic, so as not to hinder the generations of today and tomorrow in making investigations into hitherto neglected texts and traditions. A summarizing chapter would also have weakened my original intention, which was simply to bring the raw material to light.

There is a growing consensus<sup>22</sup> concerning the relevance of ancient Christian exegesis for modern theology. Up to now this consensus has referred to this relevance in broad terms, from the perspective of general hermeneutic considerations: Ancient Christian exegesis reminds us of the function of application,<sup>23</sup> it presumes the unity of explaining and understanding which is lost for us,<sup>24</sup> and it makes us modest: Our modern Western tradition is not the first<sup>25</sup> and not the only possible kind of exegesis. These reminders are important but not enough for me. My point is to underline this relevance of ancient Christian exegesis also at the level of the individual texts; I want to explore the usefulness of this exegesis in problems of detail. If we cannot prove the relevance of ancient Christian exegesis for our modern exegesis at the level of the individual texts, we will fall back into the dichotomy of piety on the one hand, which is enriched by ancient Christian applications, and scholarship on the other, which neglects the work of our predecessors who were not only pious believers but scholars as well, at least when measured against the standards of their time.<sup>26</sup> Only when we take both seriously – their piety and their scholarlyness – do we truly do them justice.

In conclusion, I can only give thanks to Margret Mitchell for her seminal review of my book.

rische Einordnung der marcionitischen Paulusbriefausgabe, ANTT 25, Berlin-New York 1995.

22) For the beginnings of the reconsideration of premodern interpretation, cf. Martin Meiser, *Vom Nutzen der patristischen Exegese für die neuzeitliche Schriftauslegung (am Beispiel des Galaterbriefes)*, in: David Bienert/Joachim Jeska/Thomas Witulski (ed.), *Paulus und die antike Welt. Beiträge zur zeit- und religionsgeschichtlichen Erforschung des paulinischen Christentums*, FS Dietrich-Alex Koch, FRLANT 222, Göttingen 2008, 189–209; 189.

23) Ulrich H. J. Körtner, *Der inspirierte Leser. Zentrale Aspekte biblischer Hermeneutik*. Sammlung Vandenhoeck, Göttingen 1994, 81.

24) Ulrich Luz, *Die Bedeutung der Kirchenväter für die Auslegung der Bibel. Eine westlich-protestantische Sicht*, in: James D. G. Dunn et al. (ed.), *Auslegung der Bibel in orthodoxer und westlicher Perspektive. Akten des west-östlichen Neutestamentler/innen-Symposiums von Neamt vom 4.–11. September 1998*, WUNT 130, Tübingen 2000, 29–52; 37.

25) With regard to his well-known distinction between »getting in« and »staying in«, for example, Ed Parish Sanders has his predecessors: Origen, John Chrysostom, Theodoret, Augustine, Faustus of Riez and the Venerable Bede.

26) A methodological integration of ancient Christian exegesis would primarily have to deal with the comparison to ancient Homeric philology; this comparison, however, would not only have to be addressed in general, but undertaken in detail – there are still a good many things to be discovered there.

17) Cassiodor, exp. in Ps. 33, CC.SL 97, 302; cf. Ps.-Jerome, Brev., PL 26, 978 B.

18) Eusebius of Caesarea, in psalms, PG 23, 728 CD.

19) Eusebius of Caesarea, in psalms, PG 23, 749 D – 752 A.

20) Porphyry, Frgm. 37 (Adolf von Harnack 63).

21) Ulrich Schmid, *Marcion und sein Apostolos. Rekonstruktion und histo-*