AOSIS

Exegesis is a game

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Eben Scheffler's understanding of Luke 24:13–33 enabled us to understand the exegesis of the Old Testament of the past two millennia as a play with words, expressions and interpretations. According to Luke, the suffering of the community can be alleviated when the Old Testament is studied because they would once again experience the presence of Christ and would be filled with joy. This is exactly what happened since the early church up to now. The Old Testament has been read and preached and God's presence experienced, but it is important to note that up to now no fixed method has been designed or a final message has been formulated. This can be ascribed to our finiteness, and therefore it is suggested that we must rather speak of exegesis as a play (as formulated by Hans-Georg Gadamer) instead of depicting it as a scientific method comprising definite steps which must be applied in a strict way to identify and describe eternal truths.

Keywords: Luke; Emmaus; Old Testament; joy; church; game or play; exegesis as game; Gaudentius Brixiensis.

Scheffler (1989:251–267) once wrote an article on the Emmaus event in Luke 24:13–33 which influenced my own thinking and understanding of the function and the role of the Old Testament in the early church, the Middle Ages and up to our time. The important point which Scheffler (1989) made was that the Lukan community could survive amidst bleak circumstances if they continue reading and appropriating the Old Testament. When doing this, the Lukan community would experience a joy that would carry them through difficult times. This practice, however, was not restricted to the early church but has continued until today. To understand this endless process of interpretation and reinterpretation of the Old Testament, we employ the term 'play' and illustrate this by referring to a 4th – 5th century bishop and his understanding of the Old Testament as well as the ideas on play by Hans-Georg Gadamer (1990:107–139).

First of all, we explain the remarkable experience to which Scheffler (1989) alludes and how it spilled over into the subsequent centuries until today.

Something remarkable is experienced

According to Psalm 1 (as well as Ps 19 and 119), the closeness of Yahweh is experienced when people read and reflect on the Torah or Pentateuch (Gn, Ex, Nm, Lv and Dt):

> How blessed is anyone … who delights in the law (Torah) of Yahweh and murmurs his law day and night. Such a one is like a tree planted near streams; it bears fruit in season and its leaves never wither, and every project succeeds. (Ps 1:1–3)

Whoever appropriated the Torah experienced joy because the nearness of Yahweh was being experienced. In short, when Yahweh's words were taken seriously and reflected on, his immediacy was experienced and this caused gladness and delight (Albertz 1992:497–504; Otto 2016:155–168, 443–168, 2019:179–188; Römer 2016:357–370; Sonnet 2016:349–358; Weber 2018:75–102).

After the Roman devastation of Jerusalem in 70 AD, the author of Luke's Gospel took over this idea of Yahweh's presence and used it in his narrative of two men walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus on the Sunday after the crucifixion (Lk 24:13) (Scheffler 1989:251–261). According to this story, the two men were completely absorbed in discussion about the events of the recent days. Jesus was crucified on the Friday and it appeared as if the Jesus event came to an end at the cross. As they walked, Jesus joined them and explained Moses (or the Torah) and the prophets to them. Something extraordinary then happened which they expressed thus: 'Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?' (Lk 24:32). With this story, Luke's author underscored the importance of the Old Testament for the Christian believers after 70 AD. Poverty and hardship caused by the Roman Empire made life difficult, but the

reading of the Old Testament, the experience of Yahweh's closeness and 'hearts that burn' would alleviate their daily sufferings. This was Luke's attempt to comfort and encourage the community because they were suffering. The Romans made life difficult and their hopes that the second coming of Christ was imminent were crushed and this caused the community to become despondent. Luke comforts them with the Old Testament: '… the Christian of Luke's day will again experience Christ's presence if the Scriptures are studied carefully' (Scheffler 1989:262)**.** It is, however, important to note that nothing is said about the method Jesus used. It is only stated that he interpreted the Old Testament in a specific way and applied everything to himself. The exact method of interpretation is not stressed but the constant reading and appropriation of the Old Testament was rather emphasised.

And this is exactly what happened. The Jewish scriptures and the faith of Israel were appropriated and this helped early Christianity to survive the trauma of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, to determine the uniqueness of their faith and to shape their new identity (Koole 1938:52–76; Pelikan 1971:11–25). And over the years the church provided the institutional space for the Old Testament to increase in significance and to become the book of the church.

The church provided the space

For the Old Testament to excel in importance, it had to become part of an institution in which it was read and explained and became an integrated part in the daily activities of that institution (Markschies 2009):

> So kann man von der *Wissenschaftssoziologie* lernen, dass neue Ideen zu ihrer Durchsetzung die *soziale Basis* einer Institution brauchen und daher die Menschen, die eine neue Idee in einer Gesellschaft durchsetzen wollen, eine solche soziale Basis schaffen müssen. (p. 35)

In this case the institution was the church, which was not just an association of people, but according to II Clements it already existed before creation. In about 150 AD, Clements referred to the 'first church' or the spiritual church that already existed before the creation of the sun and the moon. He interpreted Genesis 1:27, 'God created man in the image of himself … male and female he created them', as a reference to Christ (the male) and the church (the woman), emphasising that the church was from the beginning a spiritual phenomenon which took a visible form in Christ and came to live amongst us. This pre-existence of the church had to encourage the believer not to harm the church in any way (2 Clem XIV, 1–3).

The Old Testament thus grew in importance and meaning because it became an integral part of the pre-existent church (Stoop 1970a:97–106). Bishops read and preached from it daily, festivals such as Easter were deeply rooted in the Exodus story and the Christian faith was shaped and moulded by the stories in the Old Testament (Koole 1938:16–51). Those who could read also had to read the Old Testament and the

New Testament at home (cf. Tertullianus 1844:MPL 1, col 1297–1299). Origen encouraged his congregation in the 3rd century to devote at least 1 h a day to Bible reading. When the churches increased and more people joined the Christian faith in the 4th century, much was done to inspire individual members of the congregation to read the Scriptures themselves (Markschies 2006a:99).

John Chrysostomos instructed his congregation to take the text of the morning service seriously. If possible, they could read it beforehand, but after the service the whole family had to assemble at home and reflect on the text and the sermon (cf Cyrillus, MPG 33, col 496). In a sermon, Chrysostomos mentioned some reasons why congregants were so unenthusiastic to read and study the Old Testament and the New Testament on their own, and one reason was that they were so involved in their daily affairs that there was no time for Bible reading. Some also ventured to say that Bible study was meant for priests in a monastery and not for ordinary church members. However, Chrysostomos rejected this statement as prompted by the devil (Markschies 2006a:94–101). Paul of Nola placed an important note on the door of his church saying anyone who wanted to read the law and other writings in the church library was welcome to do so (Van der Meer 1957:133; cf. Hieronymus, MPL 24, col 17).

In short, part of the wonder of the Old Testament's survival is that it formed an integral part of the early church's daily activities. This daily reading and reinterpretation of the Old Testament has contributed to its relevance for every situation. However, as we have already said, this did not contribute to a fixed method or absolute model of understanding. There were always free flow of ideas, the multiplication of interpretations and the most diverse applications (Oeming 2007:31–62). The Old Testament was thus never understood in the same way during the past two millennia. Sometimes it was understood allegorically, then typologically and then again spiritually but always from different angles and perspectives.[1]

1.Over the years many important works on the history of the interpretation of the Old Testament have appeared, illuminating the different ways of interpreting the Old Testament over the centuries. According to Sæbø (2008:19), interest in the reception-history of the interpretation of the Old Testament and New Testament was 'surprisingly low' at the beginning of 1980 and stood at the fringe of Biblical studies but since then 'there has been an awakening of interest in this field'. We mention only four of the most important series focussing on the history of the Old Testament's interpretation as well as the different ways in which it was understood. Smalley (1952:XI) wrote an excellent introduction to the Middle Ages. She begins by making the following important remark: 'The Bible was the most studied book of the middle ages. Bible study represented the highest branch of learning'. To illustrate this view, she devoted, for instance, a long section on the Victorines such as Hugo, Richard and especially Andrew, and emphasised their piety as well as critical study of the Bible. Of Hugo, Smalley (1952:86) says: 'As a contemplative religious, his supreme object was union with God through prayer and meditation on God's works, especially the Scriptures' but 'he (also) appreciated the modern development of the liberal arts' and stressed the importance of 'contemporary sciences' which 'the student of Scripture must welcome'. De Lubac devoted three volumes to Medieval exegesis by focussing on original or primary works in order to recover an authentic history and voice of the church. In the first volume De Lubac (1998) introduced the reader to Medieval exegesis by focussing amongst other things on its patristic origins. In the second volume De Lubac (2000) discussed the importance of names and numbers as well as the significance of historical understanding ('littera gesta docet') and the role allegory, mystical tropology and anagogy played in the exegesis of the Bible. In the third (De Lubac 2009) volume, attention is paid to Hugh of St Victor and the Victorine School. Hugh is very important and often regarded 'as the principal figure in the constitution of the new exegesis' and what made him so significant is the fact that he made history the foundation of his exegesis.

No fixed method or meaning yet

If we consider the long history of the past 2000 years of interpretation of the Old Testament, it is striking that no final interpretation of the Old Testament has yet been reached. We are only confronted with an increasing number of interpretations, and the reason for this state of affairs must be sought for in our finiteness (Heidegger 1998:496–497; Schmid 2017:41–60)). We are thrown into this world and to cope, we have to embrace the 'episteme' or intellectual underground of our times; we are thus historical beings existing and in a specific historical context and shaped by the thinking of that historical context; we are not capable of transcending the here and now and transpose ourselves into the era of ancient Israel; we can therefore never be in a position to see history as a whole and in an objective way (Foucault 2009:xxiii).

Because we are finite and historically determined, we would always fail to understand the Old Testament in final terms. The constant study of the Old Testament is therefore never completed because history is not completed yet (Gadamer 1990:13–14, 124, 305–312; Grondin 2001:152–159). Each insight in the text is therefore also tentative. Or as Heidegger (1998:232) said: the exposition of a text is a never-ending process and never final or conclusive. *niet alleen geen "klare zaak," het is ook geen afgesloten factum.*

We are thus fragile human beings shaped by the times we live in and our exegesis remains a frail attempt to speak about God or the text in final terms. The exegesis of the past two millennia was therefore 'not concerned primarily with amassing verified knowledge, such as would satisfy the methodological ideal of science' (Vilhauer 2010:xxi) and is not the result of exact scientific observation, investigation

(footnote 1 continues...)

Reventlow wrote four important volumes on the history of the interpretation of the Old Testament. In the first volume, Reventlow (1990) stated that the Old Testament had an enormous influence in the western culture. The Old Testament profoundly influenced poets, painters, artists and ordinary people over the centuries. It was and still is interpreted by many, and this constant reading, interpretation and application of the Old Testament in many different contexts contributed to its lasting influence and impact on people of all times. Volume II (Reventlow 1994) begins with the city of Antioch and Theodore of Mopsuestia and stretches to the end of the Middle Ages. It covers a thousand years of Old Testament interpretation until John Wycliff. Volume III (1997) covers the period from the Renaissance, the Humanism and the Reformation. According to Reventlow (1997) many changes regarding the approach to the Bible took place in this era (p. 7). His depiction of the understanding of the Bible during the Reformation is very important. In the last volume, Reventlow (2001) describes the history of interpretation from Matthias Flacius Illyricus up to Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann. This is an interesting period very close to us and it illuminates how our understanding has been shaped by events such as the rise of the historical consciousness in the 18th century. Sæbø was the main editor of an extremely important series on the history of the interpretation of the Old Testament. According to Sæbø the series opted for a more 'overall picture' emphasising the whole history of interpretation from its beginnings to the postmodern era, placing each exegete and each interpretation in a broader socio-intellectual context. Volume I/1 (Sæbø 1996) stretches from the earliest beginnings to the time of Augustine. It covers themes such as the formation of the canon, early Jewish interpretation, the New Testament use of the Old Testament, the interpretation of the Apostolic Fathers, Clement, Origen, Irenaeus, etc. Volume I/2 (2000) covers the Middle Ages up to 1300 and much attention is given to the enormous importance of Jewish exegesis. References are also made to the school of St Victor in Paris, Christian interpretation of the Old Testament in the High Middle Ages and the development of biblical interpretation in the Syrian churches of the Middle Ages. Volume II (2008) highlights the period from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment and focuses on the late-Middle Ages, the Reformation and ends with Johann Philipp Gabler's views on the historical character of biblical scholarship. Volume IV is the last of the series on the history of the Old Testament's interpretation and has the subtitle, 'From Modernism to Post-Modernism (The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries)'. Sæbø (2013) rightly called this period, 'The fascination with history', and this volume presents an excellent depiction of the social, intellectual and theological context of the 19th and 20th centuries and how these influences have shaped the understanding of the Old Testament.

and formulation of exegetical laws. Another way of talking about exegesis past, present and future is to employ the notion of 'play' (Lawn & Keane 2011:109–111). The term 'play' elucidates 'the very process of understanding … including our encounters with art, with text, with tradition in all its forms, with others in dialogue, and which even constitutes our very mode of being-in-the-world' (Vilhauer 2010:XV).

Exegesis must thus rather be viewed as a game. In this process the exegete becomes the *homo ludens*, the playing exegete attempting to discover new or other perspectives in the text but always fail to speak the last word (Huizinga 1950:105). To elaborate this point we refer to the 4th, 5th century bishop of present-day Brescia in northern Italy and use the insights of Hans-Georg Gadamer to explain the notion of exegesis as a game. Focusing on Gadamer's view of understanding as 'play' allows us to see more clearly that understanding always remains a dynamic and a never-ending process (Davey 2006:196–202; Gadamer 1990:107–139).

By focussing on Gaudentius who was bishop in Brixia from 387 to 410 AD we are supporting Michel Foucault's view that our history writing must also focus on the small events and less-known people of the past. Foucault's works about madness, sexuality, prisons, etc. are very different from traditional history-writing which focussed on the great figures of the past. He turned his gaze 'toward a history of small and unimpressive truths, which he researched through rigorous method'. Paging through his works, it becomes clear that 'the great and famous play a secondary role in his historical research'. In the *The Order of Things*, for instance, he wrote more about minor people and devoted only four pages to Kant's thinking (Fersini 2018:50).

By searching the corners of history in order to discover new or other ways of thinking can be of great value. This is also true of Gaudentius' sermons (1845) to the young who would be baptised during Easter. In his own small way, he reflected the general traits of the interpretation process of the past 2000 years: it is a endless task, using the exegetical tools of the day (whether allegory, typology etc.) and never reaching the ultimate meaning of a text.

Put differently, Gaudentius (1845) illustrated that exegesis is a game, and to illustrate this we briefly focus on his life and approach to the Old Testament.

Gaudentius of Brixia

Gaudentius is very unknown and we do not know where and when he was born or died or how old was he.

Probably, he was part of the church in Brixia during the latter part of the 4th century, where someone called (Philastrius, MPL 12, col 1111–1302) was the bishop. Gaudentius was fond of him and referred to him as 'our father' or 'pater noster' (Gaudentius, Sermo XII, MPL 20, col. 997) and 'my father' or

'pater mei' (Gaudentius, Sermo XVI, MPL 20, col. 957). (Philastrius, MPL 12, col 1111–1302) created a very specific theological atmosphere in Brixia, fought against all kinds of heretics, especially Arius, and later also wrote a book about them (Philastrius 1845: MPL 12, col. 1111–1302). Philastrius also knew Ambrosius because Augustine said he saw them together somewhere (Galeardus, MPL 20, col 1061). Philastrius probably died in 387 AD or shortly thereafter, but in Brixia his theological heritage was vibrant and exerted great influence.

During that time, Gaudentius travelled the East and later told stories of the cities of Cappadocia he visited, as well as the monastery of 40 virgins, which was established by Basilius (Gaudentius, Sermo XVII, MPL 20, col. 964, 965). Halfway through the trip, Gaudentius was called back to reluctantly become bishop of Brixia. At his confirmation, Ambrosius or 'Beatus Pater Ambrosius' was present, and Gaudentius (Sermo XVI, MPL 20, col. 956) requested him to address the congregation after the sermon.

Gaudentius (Sermo XVI, MPL 20, col. 957) was mindful of his inabilities ('meam parvitatem') and in comparison to Philastrius he was the least (Gaudentius, Sermo XXI, MPL 20, col. 1000).

Gaudentius's theology as well as his understanding of the Old Testament, however, was thoroughly formed and shaped by the early church's thinking. This was a theology based on the Nicene Creed or the 'Symbolum Nicaenum' emphasising the co-essential divinity of the Son, which formed the starting point of all exegesis. Gaudentius (Sermo XIX, MPL 20, col. 985, 987) also explicitly stated his acceptance of the Catholic faith ('confessio catholicae fidei') and that his theology was in accordance with the apostolic belief ('apostolicam fidem').

He would thus explain the Old Testament Christological, but struggled to express it adequately or precisely. He rather used words and expressions that made his exegesis difficult to understand. For example, he speaks of 'spiritualibus typis', 'spiritualiter' ('spiritual'); 'umbra', 'umbraliter' ('shadow'); 'moraliter' ('morally'); 'allegoria' ('allegory'), 'figuraliter', ('figuratively') etc. (Gaudentius, Sermo IX, MPL 20, col. 867; I, MPL 20, col. 854; VI, MPL 20 col. 877; VIII, MPL col. 891, 892). He also wanted to explain the historical events in the text first ('pimum juxta historiam gesti') and then illuminate the spiritual meaning of the celestial mysteries ('deinde secundum spiritualem coelestis mysterii intellectum') (Gaudentius, Sermo XI, MPL 20, col. 898; VIII, MPL 20, col. 891).

Gaudentius thus explained the Old Testament with some difficulty. He did not always know what words to be used. He was often unsure whether a verse or word or name was a type of something and whether it should be explained spiritually. In other words, Gaudentius was so overwhelmed by the Old Testament that he often was in doubt about his exposition and therefore his sermons became a play with words like 'umbra', 'moraliter', etc. An endless play of words, expressions and thoughts to explain and express something of the Old Testament's depth. Despite Gaudentius' apparent doubt about the right way of approaching, for instance, the Exodus narrative, he nevertheless contributed to our understanding of the exodus by interpreting it in an existential way by telling the young candidates for baptism during Easter that the exodus is being repeated in them: In their baptism the exodus from Egypt came to fruition (Gaudentius, Sermo I, MPL 20, col. 848,849; Le Roux 1976:130).

To understand Gaudentius' exegetical game we briefly discuss some aspects of Hans-Georg Gadamer's views on play (cf. Le Roux 1976:44–70). It is important to note that according to Gadamer, 'play' does not imply the undermining of the exegetical task, but is rather another way of approaching and dealing with the Old Testament. Put differently: If the text is approached more playfully, a different kind of truth is discovered, which is just as true and meaningful as any other (Gadamer 1990:107–139).

The exegetical game entices the reader

If we understand exegesis as a play, something happens to the players or the readers when studying the Old Testament. Firstly, the subject–object relationship is dismantled. The players cannot objectify the game, nor gain control over it nor manipulate it. The players never take the initiative nor determine the course of playing (Gadamer 1990:108). Actually, the contrary happens: Play or the exegetical game is lord, the 'subject' that determines how the game or reading process would evolve. It entices, lures the players and exegetes to take part, it draws them closer; it makes them participants and keeps them occupied (Gadamer 1990:110) The play has its own spirit. It is never dependent on the players and is never caused by them. The play creates everything itself. And what play creates is so strong that the players want to play and continue with dedication (Gadamer 1990:112).

Secondly, continuous movement is another characteristic of play. The word 'play' expresses this in different ways. We speak of colour play, light play, group play, power play, word play, etc. In all these cases there is uninhibited, uncontrolled and unrestricted movement. Movement is never cornered, restricted nor comes to a stand still. Everything moves freely without restrictions. First it is here and then it is there. An essential aspect of play is thus freedom of movement: to and fro, up and down, forward and backward. And the individual player or the referee does not determine this. Movement is closely associated to play itself.

The player is drawn in through this, and he or she can participate wholeheartedly (Gadamer 1990:110).

Put differently: In the exegetical game the readers are not the masters controlling the text but are constantly being drawn in and being 'played' by the text creating the desire to lose

themselves more and more in the text and to become one with it. Gaudentius' exegesis became the endless play between him and the text; the ceaseless movement between him, the text, the exegetical tradition of his time and the works he consulted (Grondin 1994a:106–117, 1994b:24–39).

Each reading implies another interpretation

Nothing is fixed in the endless play and in the never ceasing interaction with texts. The reading process is repeated timelessly, but the true meaning stays out of reach. In spite of starting and restarting, the truth of the artwork or a text can never be grasped in totality. In fact, with each reading another facet of the truth comes to the fore.

Gadamer (1990:116–126) uses a festival to illustrate this point. A festival only exists if it is repeated over and over again. The festival returns time and again. When this happens, it is not an exact replica of the original. Festivals are not mere imitations of an original event. Things look different each time. Although there is continuity with the original festival, each new festival has its own identity and an array of new and different presentations. Thus, a characteristic of a festival is not only repetition but also total difference (Gadamer 1990:128).

The same happens when a text is read. Repeated reading is not the repetition of the original meaning; it is not a literal repetition of the original (Vandenbulcke 1973:204–210). Each interpretation is independent and valid. In other words, the repetition is just as original as the original work (Gadamer 1990:127). However, something is added. Another meaning is unlocked with each reading of a text. For Gadamer, the distance between text and reader is 'the prerequisite for genuine understanding, because to understand, is necessarily to understand differently' (Van Niekerk 1992:31).

This point is so important that it must be recapped. A playful approach to the text does not lead to fixed truths, which are recognisable to everyone (Lawn & Keane 2011:109–111). What rather happens is that we look at the text differently each time, and we play with different possibilities of meaning. This is not a form of relativism but of genuine understanding. We can only start to understand when playing with the text opens up to new and different possibilities (Gadamer 1990:126–133).

The text's truth

When a text is played with, truth is not undermined. Meaning is formed in the playful struggling with a text. It is different. It is not truth obtained through the strict application of a method (Gadamer 1990:XXVII–XXXI). It is not a clear and final truth that is accessible to all people. It is not a truth that can be abstracted and described empirical clinically and to everyone's satisfaction. This truth is more a truth for me. In other words: It is an internal homecoming. Through the struggling with the text my truth develops so within me that it feels like I am rediscovering myself. When this happens,

there is joy and happiness (cf. Ankersmit 1990:127–148, 1993:5–50, 2007:409–421).

To illustrate, Gadamer (1990:133–139) referred to Aristotle's views on the Greek tragedies.

According to him, Aristotle did not talk about tragedies in abstract but in practical terms: each tragedy involved the audience and had considerable effect on them. If someone watched a tragedy, that person did not stand at a distance but was grasped immediately by what happened on stage and was transformed by that. We can use two words to describe this '*Wirkung*' [*effect*] of the tragedy: 'eleos' or 'pity' and 'phobos' or 'fear'. Neither are mere emotions. They are not concerned only with feelings of sorrow or fear.

They are concerned with the seizing and sweeping away of the audience. 'Eleos' is a feeling of misery that seized the audience when they saw human distress being portrayed in the performance (Grondin 1994b:40–49).

'Phobos' refers to the cold chills that run down a person's spine when s/he watches someone is on course of a disastrous end. The people in the audience are overwhelmed by anxiety because they could not intervene and change the course of the events. They see everything on stage but are helpless spectators.

People rebelled against their powerlessness, but were unable to change anything about it. Through the whole process, reconciliation between audience and stage is made possible. Suddenly, the events and audience were not separated, but the audience became part of the events. The audience became one with what they saw through a process of identification. Moreover, the spectators recognised themselves in what they saw. What happened to the characters on stage was also happening to them. Their misery reflected the spectator's own problems. The audience experienced their own anxieties and fears through, and in the tragic figures.

What does this mean? Firstly the members of the audience discovered their own truth. Not general truths that can be unlocked methodologically but their own truth. A truth that made sense to them and gave meaning to their life (Gadamer 1990:13–14). Secondly, they obtained insight into problems regarding our human existence. They discovered that life is destined to be tragic and that they had to cope with life's tragedies. They learned about their own pain through the pain of others. They felt more at home in their world with this insight (Gadamer 1990:135).

In our engagement with the Old Testament something similar happens to us. When we lose ourselves in the text, we are being played by the exegetical game, which leads to different interpretations but also (and this is very important) the experience of a truth that makes sense to our own lives and our own daily struggles. This is also what happened to Gaudentius in his exposition of the exodus event. He became

so absorbed in the narrative that he discovered himself in the story. He identified so intensely with the exodus account that he actually became part of Israel's struggles as well as the exodus from Egypt. He even told the young candidates for baptism that they are repeating the exodus in themselves.

A playful conclusion

Gaudentius of Brixia (1845) is an almost invisible link in the long history of the interpretation of the Old Testament, yet his sermons delivered during Easter subtly reflect the typical features of the struggle of many ages to understand the Old Testament. If we understand Gaudentius' (1845) sermons and his exposition of the Old Testament as a joyful game played by a sincere believer who wanted to instruct the young about Easter and prepare them for baptism, some aspects of Old Testament scholarship were emphasised which even today are important. We mention some below.

Exegesis is a game: A play with words and perspectives as well as insights, which the history of interpretation gave to someone like Gaudentius. This is also clear from his play with words such as 'umbra' ('shadow') or 'imago' ('image') or 'spiritualiter' ('spiritual'). This reveals something of his uncertainty about the most appropriate way of explaining the Old Testament and therefore he was playing with different words and concepts. By means of word play and the theological game he tried to unlock the text and to say something about the unutterable, which cannot be expressed fully.

Immerse oneself into this game: To play this game the reader and the exegete must loose themselves in the process of interpretation. They must allow themselves to be played by the interpretation process and to become part of a movement that takes them from the one explanation to the other until they have discovered their own truth in the text.

Gaudentius's playful explanation of the text contributed to the decentralisation of the exegete: He was not the all-knowing subject or reader who subjected the text to his demands but became a mere player.

The more he attempted to explain the Old Testament, he experienced that the text was drawing him closer and played with him which enabled him to discover his own truth.

Exegesis is a humble undertaking: Gaudentius realised his own finiteness and the finiteness of his own results and this made him humble. Augustine, a contemporary of Gaudentius, also reflected the same humility. Augustine was also a humble exegete because he had a deep sense of the finiteness of human knowledge. He often stated that others can correct him and invited them to improve on his explanation of the Bible. And the reason for this humility could be found in Augustine's total inability to fully understand and explain the Trinity. And because God is unfathomable and inexplicable, nobody's exegesis can be final or absolute (Augustine Trin. 2.9,16).

A method does not invariably determine true meaning: A method rather functions like a rulebook or guideline that explains the rules of playing. Such books are very valuable but they are not the play itself. In other words: play is so much more than a book of rules or guidelines. And yet, the rulebook and guidelines remain important because they fulfil a critical function. However, an exegetical method as such cannot unlock meaning to its full. The method must never dominate the process of interpretation but instead must give direction, enlighten and criticise.

Interpretation needs an intellectual tradition: Gaudentius was overwhelmed by the Old Testament and recognised that exegesis or exposition was not an easy task. He could ultimately only make sense of the Old Testament because he stood in an exegetical tradition that gave him the perspectives and words to understand and write on, for example, the exodus events in Exodus 1–15. He stood in a theological tradition that mediated knowledge and helped him to speak and write about God, Christ and the church. This also formed the foundation of his exegesis and theology. In other words, tradition helped him to deal with the Old Testament and to find his place in the history of interpretation.

Gaudentius's explanation of the Old Testament helps us to *think differently about meaning*. Meaning is created by the exegete and does not exist in itself, but must be constructed and shaped in and through the exegesis and the explanation of the text. In this way the text always grows in new meaning and new understanding. And as already said, it is not a universal truth but a meaning-to-me. *This is all truth that we eventually have*.

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