

THOMAS TOPS

Paroimia and Parrēsia in the Gospel of John

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*

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Mohr Siebeck

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Thomas Tops

Paroimia and Parrēsia
in the Gospel of John

A Historical-Hermeneutical Study

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

This monograph presents my doctoral dissertation defended at the Protestant Theological University (PThU) of Groningen/Amsterdam on 11 June 2021 (*judicium: cum laude*) with some minor adjustments. From April 2017 until April 2021 I worked on a Joint PhD project at the PThU Groningen and KU Leuven under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Annette Merz (PThU) and Prof. Dr. Reimund Bieringer (KU Leuven). I would like to express my deepest gratitude for the guidance and encouragements that I received from my two supervisors. I greatly benefitted from their comments and suggestions regarding the content, style, and structure of my dissertation. It was a pleasure to work with them. Along with my supervisors, I would like to thank Prof. em. Dr. Gilbert Van Belle, from whom I have learned too much to enumerate here.

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Abbreviations and Used Editions

For biblical writings, I make use of Nestle-Aland 28, the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, and the Göttingen edition of the LXX.¹ For the LXX writings of which there is presently no Göttingen edition (e.g., Proverbs), I am obliged to consult Rahlfs' edition.² Translations of biblical texts are my own, if not indicated otherwise. For ancient non-biblical writings, I have, as a rule, in the first quotation mentioned the edition I quote from. If I provide a translation, I either refer to the translator in footnote or mention that it is my translation, or a translation that is adapted by me. The reader can find the full references of the translations in the bibliography.

The abbreviations of journals, major reference works, and series used in this monograph are taken from the *SBL Handbook of Style*.³ For the abbreviations of the names of ancient authors and their writings (including biblical) I have used the *SBL Handbook of Style*, Liddell – Scott – Jones, and Lampe.⁴ In some rare occasions, these reference works did not offer the required abbreviations, or the abbreviations offered were difficult to understand for an uninformed reader. I then used the abbreviations provided by the Franz Joseph Dölger Institut.⁵

The following abbreviations were used that cannot be found in the above-mentioned reference works:

¹ Karl Elliger *et al.* (eds.), *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, ⁵1997); Barbara Aland *et al.* (eds.), *Novum Testamentum Graece* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, ²⁸2012); Joseph Ziegler *et al.* (eds.), *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum. Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Gottingensis editum*, 16 Bände (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926–2015).

² Alfred Rahlfs (ed.), *Septuaginta: Id est Vetus Testamentum Graece iuxta LXX interpretes* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006).

³ See Billie J. Collins/Bob Buller/John F. Kutsko (eds.), *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines* (Atlanta GA: SBL Press, ²2014), 171–260.

⁴ See Geoffrey W.H. Lampe (ed.), *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), xi–xlv; Henry G. Liddell/Robert Scott/Henry S. Jones (eds.), *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. with revised supplement (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), xvi–xxxviii; Collins/Buller/Kutsko (eds.), *The SBL Handbook*, 124–171.

⁵ See Franz Joseph Dölger Institut, https://www.antike-und-christentum.de/rac_tools/abkuerzungen [accessed January 19, 2021].

- GW Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Gesammelte Werke*. 10 vols. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985–1995.
- KNT *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*. 18 vols. Leipzig: Deichert, 1903–1926.
- KSA Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari. 15 vols. Munich: dtv & de Gruyter, 1977.
- NLLT Natural Language & Linguistic Theory
- NZST Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie

Introduction

The Gospel of John is known for its abundance of figurative language, metaphors, and symbols. In the last thirty years, major works have been written on these elements of the Johannine language.¹ Much attention has been given to the classification of the different types of figurative language and how the imagery is used in earlier biblical traditions or in the world around the New Testament.² These attempts have led to an awareness of the peculiarities of Johannine language and the importance of studying this language in its own right in comparison to the parables of the Synoptic Gospels. The present study has grown out of this awareness and aims to provide a historical-hermeneutical analysis of the Johannine views on language, as they are expressed by the terms *παροιμία* and *παρρησία*.³ The main research question is how to interpret John's use of these terms in its historical context. As we will see, previous scholarly literature has mainly interpreted these terms in the literary context of the Gospel. My evaluation of the scholarly literature will show that many difficulties of interpretation in John's use of *παροιμία* and *παρρησία* have not yet been observed.⁴ I will go beyond the limitations of previous scholarship by providing a broad historical-contextual framework to interpret John's use of

¹ I mention here Jan G. van der Watt, *Family of the King: Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel According to John*, BibInt 47 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000); Ruben Zimmermann, *Christologie der Bilder im Johannesevangelium: Die Christopoetik des vierten Evangeliums unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Joh 10*, WUNT 171 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004); Jörg Frey/Jan G. van der Watt/Ruben Zimmermann (eds.), *Imagery in the Gospel of John*, WUNT 200 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006); Ruben Zimmermann (ed.), *Kompendium der Gleichnisse Jesu* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007), 697–848; Clémence Hérou, *Symbole et langage dans les écrits johanniques*, Pensée religieuse et philosophique arabe (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2012). Many more studies could be mentioned. For overviews of the literature, see van der Watt, *Family of the King*, xvii–xviii; Zimmermann, *Christologie*, 77–87; Ruben Zimmermann, “Imagery in John: Opening up Paths into the Tangled Thicket of John's Figurative World,” in Frey/van der Watt/Zimmermann (eds.), *Imagery in the Gospel of John*, 1–43, at 2–9.

² See the studies mentioned in the overviews quoted above in n. 1.

³ As we will see in Chapter One, historical hermeneutics is not a new historical method, but goes beyond the modern understanding of method, as it grounds historical research in the historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) of the researcher.

⁴ See *infra*, Chapter Two.

παροιμία and παρρησία: Philodemus' *Περὶ παρρησίας*, Plutarch's *Πῶς ἄν τις διακρίνει τὸν κόλακα τοῦ φίλου*, LXX Proverbs, the ancient rhetorical theory of figured speech, etc. I will provide original analyses of the views on παρρησία and παροιμία in these writings and will examine whether John is (indirectly) influenced by these views. By reading John against the background of these writings I will open up new paths into "the tangled thicket of John's figurative world".⁵

In Chapter One, I will provide the theoretical framework of the methodology of this study. It is notoriously difficult to interpret John's language because of its incoherent and intricate nature. Our modern love for coherency and clarity is not shared by John, who appears to have different standards and a different understanding of how language operates. Interpreting John's language requires of us to translate his language to ours. There is always an inevitable historical mediation in the interpretation of language. In this mediation, it is important not to project our own understanding and standards of language onto the Gospel and to take into consideration John's views on Jesus' language. At the same time, mediation can only take place on the basis of our own presuppositions. Biblical interpretation without presuppositions is impossible.⁶ Chapter One will provide a critical reflection on this process of historical mediation. With Gadamer, I will argue for the necessity of elucidating the "prejudices", or presuppositions, that constitute my historical horizon. Only by becoming conscious, as much as possible, of the presuppositions that have guided previous interpretations of παροιμία and παρρησία in the Fourth Gospel, I can be addressed by the otherness of John's Gospel. The text can either correct, alter, or confirm these presuppositions. The confrontation with the otherness of the text will generate new questions, which will allow me to identify with the hypothetical first reader of the Gospel. Given this substantial influence of Gadamer's understanding of historical hermeneutics on my methodology, the present study is characterised as historical-hermeneutical.

In Chapter Two, I will provide an overview of previous scholarly literature on παροιμία and παρρησία in the Fourth Gospel. This overview will not only be descriptive, but also evaluative. I will provide an analysis of the shortcomings of the scholarly literature, and an elucidation of the presuppositions that have guided scholarly interpretations. In this endeavour, new research questions will be formulated that will allow me to provide a new perspective on John's use of παροιμία and παρρησία. These questions will be addressed by

⁵ The metaphor is derived from Zimmermann, "Imagery in John," who is inspired by Adolf Jülicher's comments on Johannine imagery.

⁶ For instance, the questions that guide Biblical exegesis already presuppose a certain idea of the subject matter with which biblical writings are concerned. Correctly observed by Rudolf K. Bultmann, "Ist voraussetzungslose Exegese möglich?," *TZ* 13 (1957) 409–417.

the subsequent chapters. Chapter Two is the backbone of Chapters Three to Twelve.

Chapter Three will pose the question of how *παροιμία* relates to *παρρησία* in the literary context of the Fourth Gospel. Are they opposite terms, as might be concluded on the basis of John 16:25? Or can they be reconciled with one another? Jesus claims to have spoken *ἐν παροιμαῖς* before his death (16:25), yet equally claims to have taught *παρρησία* in this period (18:20; cf. 7:26; 11:14). Through literary analyses of *παροιμία* and *παρρησία* in John 10; 11:11–16; 16:23–33, I will examine whether Jesus' *παρρησία* is in opposition to his *παροιμία* teaching, or whether his *παρρησία* is expressed through *παροιμιαί*.

In Chapter Four, I will address the question of the orientation of the teaching of the Paraclete. Scholarly literature on *παροιμία* and *παρρησία* in John assumes that the orientation of the teaching of the Paraclete is retrospective (John 14:25–26; 16:12–13). In this interpretation, the Paraclete's teaching provides the disciples with a univocal knowledge of Jesus' words. The authors of this position claim that this *modus intelligendi* of the disciples is characterised by *παρρησία* in opposition to the *modus intelligendi* of misunderstanding, which is depicted by *ἐν παροιμαῖς* (16:25). In this dominant interpretation of *παροιμία* and *παρρησία*, they are purely cognitive terms used by John to reflect on the conditions of Christological knowledge. I will examine on the basis of philological criteria whether the orientation of the teaching of the Paraclete is presented as retrospective or prospective in 14:25–26 and 16:12–13. The formulation that the Paraclete is to teach τὰ ἐρχόμενα (16:13f) suggests that the teaching of the Paraclete is prospective as well.

In Chapter Five, I will analyse John's discourse on the different forms of asking (*αἰτέω*, *ἐρωτάω*) in connection to *παροιμία* and *παρρησία* (John 16:23–27). A strong division between past and future is present in this passage. The pre-paschal *ἐρωτᾶν* is juxtaposed to the post-paschal *αἰτεῖν* (16:23–24, 26). The positioning of 16:25 within this discourse suggests a connection of *παροιμία* to *ἐρωτάω*, and *παρρησία* to *αἰτέω*. I will address the question how to understand these connections. Important primary sources that will be used for interpreting the connection of *παρρησία* to *αἰτέω* in this context are Philo, *Her.* 6–7, 26–27 and LXX Job 27:7–10.

Chapter Six will deal with a paradox in John's depiction of Jesus' *παρρησία*. John repeatedly stresses that Jesus spoke, and even walked, *παρρησία* during his life time (John 7:26; 10:24–25; 11:14, 54). At the same time, he considers the hour of Jesus' death to be the time of his *παρρησία* (7:6–8; 16:25). As we will see, this ambiguity in the text is difficult to explain from within the literary context of the Gospel. The question I will address is how the hypothetical first reader, who is directly or indirectly influenced by the contemporary conventions of *παρρησία*, probably interpreted this puzzling description of Jesus' *παρρησία* in the Fourth Gospel. An important idea that I

will use for this purpose is Philodemus' understanding of *παρρησία* as an experimental ("stochastic") teaching method of which the outcome is uncertain in advance and dependent on the *καίρως*. Other ancient authors who will be discussed are Plutarch and Clement of Alexandria. Similar to Philodemus, they compare the use of *παρρησία* to the use of medicine.

In Chapter Seven, I will pose the question how Jesus' *παρρησία* adjusts itself to its addressees in the literary context of the Fourth Gospel. Among others, I will examine whether the intensity of Jesus' *παρρησία* to the disciples differs from his *παρρησία* to the 'Jews', and, if so, how. I will provide a historical-contextual reading of this adaptability from the perspective of the conventions of *παρρησία* as attested by Philodemus, Philo, the Cynic Epistles, Plutarch, Dio Chrysostom, and Clement of Alexandria.

Chapter Eight will address the question how Jesus' *παρρησία* is connected to the idea of the salvation of the *κόσμος* in the Fourth Gospel. Many passages in the Gospel speak of, or presuppose, the salvation of the *κόσμος* (e.g., John 3:16–17; 8:28; 12:32, 39–40, 46–47). Jesus always taught the *κόσμος* *παρρησία* (18:20) and the Paraclete will, as the mouthpiece of Jesus' *παρρησία* at the hour (16:25), continue this *παρρησία* teaching by means of his *ἐλέγχειν* of the *κόσμος* (16:9–11). I will research how to understand this connection between Jesus' *παρρησία* and the promise of the salvation of the *κόσμος*. The important primary sources and authors that I will discuss for this purpose are LXX Proverbs, Philodemus, Philo, Plutarch, and Clement of Alexandria.

In Chapter Nine, I will ask the question as to how Jesus' *παρρησία* relates to friendship language in John's Gospel. Jesus' death is presented as both an act of friendship (John 15:13) and an act of *παρρησία* (16:25). I will enquire how to understand this connection between friendship and *παρρησία* in the Gospel from the perspective of the ancient conventions of *παρρησία*. Given that, in antiquity, *παρρησία* is the discerning feature of a friend in distinction to a flatterer, it is to be expected that I will find an application of this criterion of friendship in John's presentation of Jesus' death as both an act of friendship and an act of *παρρησία*. Important ancient authors that I will discuss for this purpose are Philodemus and Plutarch. Another exegetical question I will address is how to understand the combination of the ideas of commitment (John 15:14) and open communication (15:15) in John's understanding of friendship. The formulation of the open communication between Jesus and his disciples reminds us of the idea of *παρρησία* between friends. LXX Wisdom literature and Philo will be my main reference sources to examine these features of the friendship bonds between Jesus and the disciples.

Chapter Ten will deal with the question as to whether Jesus' *παρρησία* is characterised as public and/or private in the Fourth Gospel. Scholarly discussions of *παρρησία* in antiquity often distinguish between a public (or political)

use of *παρρησία* and a private (or ethical) use of *παρρησία*. I will, first, examine whether John's readers, who were (indirectly) influenced by the contemporary conventions of *παρρησία*, made such a distinction. For my study of these conventions, I will discuss Philodemus, Plutarch, and Lucian of Samosata. Second, I will enquire whether the information that John provides us about what we – as present-day readers – would call Jesus' private use of *παρρησία* and his public use of *παρρησία*, entails that there is a distinction between both. On the basis of John 18:20, it is to be expected that John considered the totality of Jesus' teaching, including his teaching of the disciples, to be a *παρρησία* teaching performed in public instead of ἐν κρυπτῷ (“in secret”).

In Chapter Eleven, I will pose the question how the first readers of the Gospel probably interpreted John's use of *παροιμία* and *παρρησία*. This chapter builds on the research results of Chapter Three. The main primary sources for interpreting how *παροιμία* relates to *παρρησία* in the Fourth Gospel are LXX Prov 1:1–6 and the ancient rhetorical theory of figured speech delivered to us through Demetrius, Quintilian, Ps.-Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and Ps.-Hermogenes. Especially Plutarch will be an important reference source for interpreting the relationship between *παροιμία* and *παρρησία* in the Fourth Gospel.

Finally, Chapter Twelve will provide a historical-contextual comparison of John's use of *παροιμία* and *παρρησία* to Mark's use of *παραβολή* and *παρρησία*. As Mark is the only other canonical Gospel that uses the term *παρρησία* (Mark 8:32), the question arises why John opted for a different term (viz., *παροιμία*) to refer to Jesus' imagery. The historical-contextual framework developed in Chapter Eleven will be used to interpret the relationship between *παραβολή* and *παρρησία* in Mark. This historical-contextual framework will enable me to describe the differences between Mark's use of *παραβολή* and *παρρησία* and John's use of *παροιμία* and *παρρησία*. Finally, the rhetorical theory of Quintilian will be used to explain why John opted for *παροιμία* (in combination with *παρρησία*) instead of *παραβολή* (in combination with *παρρησία*).

All twelve chapters will end with an intermediate conclusion. At the end of the study, I will formulate a general conclusion in which I summarise the research results of the entire study.

Chapter 1

Transforming Historical Objectivism into Historical Hermeneutics: From “Historical Illness” to Properly Lived Historicity

The present chapter aims to provide a critical reflection on the role of modern-historical methodologies in Biblical criticism. The first section will analyse the reservations about modern-historical methodologies coming from recent scholarly literature in the field of Biblical studies and theology. On the basis of this analysis, the second section will argue for the necessity of transforming historical objectivism, or positivism, into historical hermeneutics. The third section will evaluate whether the present practices of reception-historical methodology in Biblical studies are able to perform this transformation by: (i) combining historical criticism with reception-historical methodologies; and (ii) reformulating historical criticism in terms of reception history. I will demonstrate that these attempts, although their intent is to criticise historical objectivism, still operate from the metaphysical subject-object distinction that is fundamental for historical objectivism.

Due to this inability of present practices in Biblical studies to dismantle the foundational metaphysical framework of historical objectivism, the fourth section of the present chapter will renew the dialogue between Biblical studies and philosophy. Modern historicism neglects the historical horizon of the historian. Human consciousness is, however, dispersed in time. It is oriented towards the past, the present, and the future. The subject-object distinction of historical objectivism posits the historian outside history. The modern historian operates from a view from nowhere. The limitations of one's own historicity are neglected. Modern historical consciousness seeks to gather the totality of history, but is ultimately overwhelmed by history. By neglecting the limits of historical knowledge set out by the historicity of human consciousness, one is unable to carry history further, and suffers from what Friedrich Nietzsche calls “*historische Krankheit*”. In order to relate authentically to one's own historicity, Nietzsche experiments with the idea of transforming historiography into an art form. I will evaluate Nietzsche's understanding of antiquarian, monumental, and critical historiography in this respect. Nietzsche, however, understands the historical horizon of human life as something that is closed, whereas, even speaking of one's own historical horizon presupposes that one can transcend it.

The fifth section of the present chapter will discuss how Hans-Georg Gadamer tackles this problem with his notion of *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*. After the theoretical discussion of this notion, the sixth section will be more oriented to the practice of Biblical interpretation by addressing Gadamer's understanding of the hermeneutical consciousness of the researcher and the *Fragehorizont* of the text. The seventh and eight sections will continue this focus on the practice of Biblical interpretation by addressing Gadamer's thinking on the alterity of the text, and the (in)validity of textual interpretation. In the intermediate conclusion, I will explain how Gadamer and historical hermeneutics are fundamental for the approach of the present study on the terms *παροιμία* and *παρρησία* in the Gospel of John.¹

1. The Tension between Theology and Modern-Historical Methodologies

The relationship between theology and modern historicism is one of tension.² The Pontifical Biblical Commission has argued for the necessity of the historical-critical method for the interpretation of the foundational texts of Christianity:

“The Eternal Word became incarnate at a precise period of history, within a clearly defined cultural and social environment. Anyone who desires to understand the word of God should humbly seek it out there where it has made itself visible and accept to this end the necessary help of human knowledge.”³

Regardless of the indispensability of historical study for the interpretation of the Bible, scholarly literature of the 21st century in the field of Biblical studies and theology has, according to my analysis, three reservations about traditional modern-historical methodologies.

¹ Parts of the present chapter were previously published in Thomas Tops, “Transforming Historical Objectivism into Historical Hermeneutics: From ‘Historical Illness’ to Properly Lived Historicity,” *NZST* 61/4 (2019) 490–515. See, also, Thomas Tops, “The Challenge of Ideological-Critical Interpretation in Biblical Studies: From Modern Historical to Historically Effected Consciousness,” in *Theology in a World of Ideologies: Authorization or Critique?*, ed. Hans-Martin Kirm/Wolter Rose, Beihefte zur Ökumenischen Rundschau 133 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2020), 186–199.

² The present reader will see that the understanding of theology used in the present subsection is very democratic in the sense that theologians and Biblical scholars of different Christian denominations are discussed.

³ *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church: Address of His Holiness Pope John Paul II and Document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission*, Vatican Documents (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), 189.

The first reservation is epistemological. According to George Aichele, Peter Miscall, and Richard Walsh, claims to knowledge of an essential or definite meaning of a biblical text are without foundation (anti-foundationalism). They, therefore, do not accept that there is “a final account, an assured and agreed-on interpretation” of any biblical text (anti-essentialism).⁴ As historical critics think that they reconstruct the definite meaning of biblical texts, Aichele, Miscall, and Walsh have portrayed the practice of historical criticism as myth making.⁵

The second reservation about traditional historical-critical methodologies is theological. According to some critics, historical criticism is anti-theological. Historical criticism only leads to more historical questions, whereas theological questions recede.⁶ According to Ulrich Luz, the major problem of historical-critical exegesis is that it isolates biblical texts in their original historical context so that they have no contemporary relevance at all.⁷ John Millbank observes that historical criticism operates from an anti-theological world view, because it presupposes that the world is ontologically autonomous from God and leaves no room for divine intervention.⁸ Jürgen Moltmann claims that modern historicism has factualised history and has, thus, detached the present from the past. As the Gospel cannot be reduced to facts, it cannot be the research object of historical criticism. Moltmann concludes that historical criticism has diverted New Testament studies from its proper research object.⁹

The third reservation about traditional historical-critical methodologies is cultural-historical. According to Bradley McLean, modern historicism has caused what he calls the present state of nihilism, because it has made people aware of the cultural and historical contingency of all forms of biblical belief, values, and ethics. Modern historicism has discovered that there are no eternal truths, nor is there an absolute point of reference. Everything is subjected to

⁴ George Aichele/Peter Miscall/Richard Walsh, “An Elephant in the Room: Historical-Critical and Postmodern Interpretations of the Bible,” *JBL* 128/2 (2009) 383–404: at 384.

⁵ See Aichele/Miscall/Walsh, “An Elephant”: 389–396.

⁶ See Karl Möller, “Renewing Historical Criticism,” in *Renewing Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew/Colin J.D. Greene/Karl Möller, Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 1 (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2000), 145–171; Christopher R. Seitz, “Scripture Becomes Religion(s): The Theological Crisis of Serious Biblical Interpretation in the Twentieth Century,” in Bartholomew/Greene/Möller (eds.), *Renewing Biblical Interpretation*, 40–65; Johnson T.K. Lim, “Historical Critical Paradigm: The Beginning of an End,” *AsJT* 14 (2000) 252–271.

⁷ See Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, vol. 1, *Mt 1-7*, EKKNT I/1 (Düsseldorf: Benziger, 2002), 109–110.

⁸ See Benjamin Sargent, “John Milbank and Biblical Hermeneutics: The End of the Historical-Critical Method?,” *HeyJ* 53 (2012) 253–263: at 254–256.

⁹ See Jürgen Moltmann, “‘Verstehst Du auch, was Du liest?’ Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die hermeneutische Frage der Theologie. Ein Zwischenruf,” *EvT* 71/6 (2011) 405–414: at 407–409.

historical decay. Early Christianity is reduced to pure historical knowledge. Therefore, it is a dead religion. It has no contemporary relevance.¹⁰

In my observation, all three reservations about modern-historical methodologies are ultimately criticisms against historical objectivism or positivism. Historical objectivism is seen as: (i) a myth; (ii) detrimental for the contemporary (theological) relevance of biblical texts; and (iii) one of the causes of the “crisis of nihilism”.¹¹

In spite of these criticisms there is little awareness of the philosophical tenets of historical criticism among Biblical scholars. This is partly because there is little dialogue between philosophers and historical critics. The aggressive reaction of the historical critic John Van Seters to the postmodernists Aichele, Miscall, and Walsh cannot be considered as a dialogue because Van Seters wrongly compares postmodernists to unhistorical novel writers,¹² whereas postmodernists consider history as “a necessary function of consciousness” and a condition of possibility for human understanding.¹³ One might get the impression from Aichele’s, Miscall’s, and Walsh’s polemical projection of the historical critic and Van Seters’ polemical projection of the postmodernist that philosophical and historical perceptions of biblical writings are mutually exclusive; a view that is, sadly, still present until today in Biblical studies. Craig Bartholomew, however, remarks that historical criticism also has a philosophical subtext. The founding father of Biblical criticism, Wilhelm de Wette, was conscious of his philosophical subtext as a historical critic, but philosophical reflection on this subtext became less important for Biblical scholarship when Julius Wellhausen articulated Biblical exegesis as a science.¹⁴ This has led to a less critical form of historical criticism that is still mainstream in Biblical studies today. According to McLean, modern historicism does not simply provide a historical method, but is also a form of metaphysical thinking. The epistemology of historical criticism is based on the epistemological model of the Enlightenment. According to this model, one needs to distance oneself from the prejudices of one’s historical and cultural context to obtain objective

¹⁰ See Bradley H. McLean, *Biblical Interpretation & Philosophical Hermeneutics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 304.

¹¹ McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 304.

¹² See John Van Seters, “A Response to G. Aichelle [sic], P. Miscall and R. Walsh, ‘An Elephant in the Postmodern Interpretations of the Bible’,” *JHebS* 9/26 (2009), <https://jhsonline.org/index.php/jhs/article/view/7238/5950> [accessed September 10, 2021].

¹³ Aichele/Miscall/Walsh, “An Elephant”: 400.

¹⁴ See Craig G. Bartholomew, “Before Babel and After Pentecost. Language, Literature and Biblical Interpretation,” in *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew/Colin J.D. Greene/Karl Möller, Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2 (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2001), 131–170, at 136 and Craig G. Bartholomew., “Uncharted Waters: Philosophy, Theology and the Crisis in Biblical Interpretation,” in Bartholomew/Greene/Möller (eds.), *Renewing Biblical Interpretation*, 1–39, at 20.

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