

Unit 8

The Ethics of Reading

Critical Biblical Interpretation serves a number of different purposes which are determined to some extent by the divergent perspectives and hermeneutical presuppositions by which particular interpretations are shaped. Understanding ancient texts, the function of particular texts in particular situations, and the effect texts have on readers are among the significant aspects of studying the Bible in a critical vein. Moreover, for many the study of the Bible is embedded in particular faith communities and thus is a tool in the search for guidance and meaning of individuals and communities in the contemporary world. But whatever the particular presuppositions and social location of the interpreter, a critical study and interpretation of the Bible never takes place in a vacuum. It is influenced as we have seen in the previous units by contemporary circumstances and situations and interpretations are not merely views individuals adhere to in their soul. They affect, and are themselves in turn affected by, the lives of individuals as well as communities and thus also the wider society. When we look at the history of Biblical Interpretation strong links to views promoted by the various church traditions as well as to policies they promoted can be discovered. Particular views and policies over against particular groups of people have been legitimized via biblical texts, not always to the advantage of the respective group (i.e. women, Jews, minorities). Interpreters are responsible for their work and teaching and thus must be accountable to all those who are directly and indirectly affected by it. The ethical dimension in reading the Bible is more than an additional method, it is a dimension that is of upmost significance whatever method is applied and whatever hermeneutical presuppositions are shaping an interpretation. It is 'about living and dying and justice' not merely in the interpretative endeavour but in 'real' life. (Gary A. Phillips and Danna Nolan Fewell, 'Ethics, Bible, Reading As If'). It is a dimension which therefore should be kept in mind and which should permeate all our interpretations.

Essential Readings:

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| **Daniel Patte | 'Assuming Responsibility for Our Biblical Interpretations'
in Daniel Patte, <i>Ethics of Biblical Interpretation</i> ,
Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press 1995,
pp.17- 37 |
| **E. Schüssler Fiorenza | 'The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: Decentering
Biblical Scholarship'
In Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, <i>Rhetoric and Ethic: The
Politics of Biblical Studies</i> . Minneapolis, MN: Fortress
Press 1999, pp.17-30 |

****Gary A. Phillips and
Danna Nolan Fewell**

‘Ethics, Bible, Reading As If’
In Danna Nolan Fewell and Gary A. Phillips eds., *Bible
and Ethics of Reading*. Semeia 77/ 1997

**** Kathy Ehrensperger**

‘Reading Romans “in the Face of the Other”’: Levinas,
the Jewish Philosopher Meets Paul, the Jewish Apostle’
in D. Odell-Scott (ed.), *Reading Romans With
Contemporary Philosophers and Theologians*. New York,
London: T&T Clark 2007, pp. 115-50.

Further Readings:

Tamara Cohn Eskenazi,
et.al. eds

Levinas and Biblical Studies. Atlanta: Society of
Biblical Literature 2003

Daniel Patte

Ethics of Biblical Interpretation, Louisville, KY:
Westminster John Knox Press 1995

Questions to consider:

What are the ethical aspects involved in a particular reading ?

How does a particular reading affect particular groups of people ?