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The impact of power-relations on resonance: Does it matter whose texts became part of the canon?

Biblical texts are canonical text. This means that the inventory is fixed, stable, not to change any more, not even to the smallest character, the jota. As such texts are continuously important for the respective religious communities, they immediately provoke explications, which try to update the sense: the commentaries. In contrast to the stable text, commentaries need to be fluid (Kilcher and Weissberg 2019). To help make canonical texts resonant for the community, they do not need mere repetition, but appropriation (de Certeau 1988). This means that the postulated collective resonance of biblical texts is being guaranteed only by adaption to different contexts, cultures and times. Literal exegesis as done by fundamentalists is therefore a less than adequate attempt to secure the resonance of biblical texts.

Nonetheless, especially texts dealing with gender issues as well as with women in other positions as mothers and caretakers are till today often not actualised, but repeated word by word (Fischer 2020). Old Testament anthropology therefore still has to deal with the contextualisation of biblical prohibitions like Leviticus 18.22 that a man should not lay down with a man as he lies with a woman, although it is clear that homosexuality as we recognise it today was an absent conception in biblical times. The same is true for restricted biblical female gender roles which may not be valid in today's Western European gender democracies.

To beware biblical texts from growing mute, theology has to inquire about power relations represented in the texts, but also concerning the production and tradition of texts. The Hebrew Bible as a collection of world-making narratives (Goodman 1978; Nünning et al. 2010) gives an insight into the patriarchal society of Ancient Israel and into the processes of identity formation within the people of Israel's God. In connection with my international research project 'The Bible and Women' (www.bibleandwomen.org) this project should develop the concept of resonance (Rosa 2016) by analysing the connection of resonance and the asymmetric relations of gender in biblical texts and specific traditions of interpretation. The relationship between antiquity and modern European culture will become especially clear in this context, since the Hebrew Bible still influences the resonance spaces of the receiving religions (Jewism, Christianity, Islam) when it comes to gender relations. This project should bridge the gap between the biblical text and its reception history till today and should analyse the reproduction of gender stereotypes through mere repetition without appropriation.

References

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