RICŒUR AND THE BIBLE

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Abstract: This article briefly presents the relationship between philosophy and religion in the work of Paul Ricœur, demonstrating how he established a dialogue between both languages, both methodologies – that of philosophy and that of religion – in his philosophical and biblical hermeneutics. The article briefly recaps Ricœur's personal and intellectual trajectory and the way he dealt with this double allegiance, showing the differences between biblical and philosophical hermeneutics but also their relation in Ricœur's works.

Keywords: Bible, hermeneutics, reason, religion, Ricœur.

Résumé: Cet article présente le rapport entre philosophie et religion dans l'œuvre de Paul Ricœur, montrant de quelle manière Ricœur entretenait un dialogue entre les deux langages et méthodologies – celles de la philosophie et de la religion – dans ses herméneutiques biblique et philosophique. L'article revisite la trajectoire personnelle et intellectuelle de Ricœur, et spécifiquement son approche à cette double allégeance, montrant les différences entre l'herméneutique biblique et l'herméneutique philosophique, mais aussi leur rapport dans le contexte de l'œuvre ricœurienne.

Mots-clés: Bible, herméneutique, raison, religion, Ricœur.

Resumen: Este artículo presenta la relación entre filosofía y religión en la obra de Paul Ricœur, demostrando cómo él establece un diálogo entre ambos lenguajes y metodologías – las de la filosofía y las de la religión – en su hermenéutica filosófica y bíblica. El artículo recapitula brevemente la trayectoria personal e intelectual de Ricœur y la forma en que él afrontó esta doble lealtad, mostrando las diferencias entre la hermenéutica bíblica y la filosófica, pero también su relación en la obra de Ricœur.

Palabras-clave: Biblia, hermenéutica, razón, religión, Ricœur.

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1. Introduction

In a special issue dealing with Ricœur's relation to the classics, it is appropriate, in my view, not only to mention the wide range of philosophers Ricœur read and incorporated into his thought, but also to highlight the impact of the Bible as an unavoidable reference in many of his works of a philosophical and religious nature.

Allow me to start by recounting an episode that I experienced at Paul Ricœur's side and which I see as enlightening. It occurred during his last visit to Santiago de Compostela, towards the end of November 2003. Against the advice of doctors and the caregiver of his final days, Ricœur agreed to give the opening keynote lecture at the VII International Philosophy Meetings on the Way of St. James, devoted to the subject "Hermeneutic and Responsibility: Homage to Paul Ricœur", held on the 20th, 21st, and 22nd November 2003. He was in very poor health at the time, but wanted to travel one last time to Santiago de Compostela to say goodbye to those close to him, the professors and researchers who had dedicated many years of work to his thought and who had also become his friends over the years.

Ricœur focused the inaugural address of this International Meeting, held on 20 November in Santiago de Compostela, on the topic "The Struggle for Recognition and the Economy of the Gift" (*La lutte pour la reconnaissance et l'économie du don*). Two days later, on the morning of Saturday, 22 November, he joined us at the session held at the University of A Coruña, because at the closing luncheon we staged a tribute to Ricœur where he would take the floor to bid us all farewell and encourage us to carry on when he would no longer be with us. As we were walking around the university assembly hall, Professor Manuel Maceiras asked him what kind of readings he was doing at the time. Ricœur stared at us and said solemnly: "Now I only read the Word of God". A year and a half later, on 20 May 2005, many of us who were there received an e-mail from Catherine Goldenstein in which she broke the sad news of his death and informed us that the previous night he had gone to bed peacefully, had prayed the 'Our Father' and had serenely surrendered his soul to God.

Ricœur was in fact a lifelong reader of the Bible, although he always avoided letting his religious writings, and even his work on biblical hermeneutics, interfere with his distinctly philosophical work, probably to avoid being undervalued as merely a religious philosopher. Yet the truth is that, in July 2003, Pope John Paul II awarded Ricœur the quinquennial Paul VI International Prize for having succeeded in highlighting in his writings the "fruitful relationship between philosophy and theology, between faith and culture".

I endorse this view of the intimate bond between philosophy and theology, between reason and faith, because the believer too, as a reader of a

word revealed through a text, seeks reasons to build up a discourse based on faith. St Peter, in his well-known Letter, emphasizes the need for providing a rational basis for Christian faith: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have".[2] Paul Ricœur develops this idea in his work "La liberté selon l'espérance," by introducing the concept of "*intellectus spei*" (the understanding of hope) and thereby offering us a philosophical reading of the theological virtue of hope contained within the limits of reason alone.[3] John Paul II, for his part, introduced the metaphor of the two wings in his encyclical *Fides et ratio*, to stress the necessity for the reciprocity between reason and faith, calling them the "two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth".[4]

In a way, faith begins precisely where philosophy ends. There is a point beyond which reason cannot go, or it betrays its own limits. But that does not mean that philosophers have not reflected, albeit from their own perspective and with their own methods, on the problems addressed by theology from the perspective of faith: the sense of existence (immanent or transcendent), death, the language of faith (symbols and metaphors, for expressing the absolute), the problem of evil, etc. In fact, anyone interested in *La symbolique du mal* realizes that the foundations of Ricœur's philosophical hermeneutics, as synthesized in the epilogue *Le symbole donne à penser*, owe much to the phenomenology of religion.

Ricœur uses what he calls "primary hermeneutics", to inscribe the archaic, sacred symbols in his philosophical discourse[5]. Thus, although philosophy and theology are obviously different both from the disciplinary and the methodological point of view, the subjects of their reflection and analysis can be the same. Ricœur's very respect for religion is the reason that led him to differentiate very clearly between the philosophical and the religious dimensions throughout his work. He states this in various autobiographical writings. In one of the fragments of his posthumous work, *Vivant jusqu'à la mort,* he underlines that he is not a "Christian philosopher" – an adjective

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[2] 1 Pe 3, 15.

[3] Cf. Paul Ricœur, "la liberte selon l'espérance", in *Le conflit des interprétations. Essais d'herméneutique* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), 394. The kerygma of hope, as Ricœur writes in another work, is both rational and irrational at the same time: irrational because it introduces us to the framework of an event that escapes reason (the resurrection of the dead); and rational because it opens a path to the hope that fulfills man's desire for life after death. Cf. Ricœur, "Foi et philosophie aujourd'hui", *Foi-Éducation* 42 (1972): 9.

[4] Juan Pablo II, *Fides et Ratio*, 13ª Carta Encíclica (Madrid: Ed. San Pablo, 1998), 7.

[5] I have dealt with this issue in my work "Simbolismo y hermenéutica: Mircea Eliade y Paul Ricœur", in *Anthropos* nº 42 (1994): 101-114. See also Ricœur, "Épilogue: Le symbole donne à penser", in *Philosophie de la Volonté II: Finitude et Culpabilité. Vol II: La Symbolique du mal* (Paris: Aubier, 1960).

attributed to him, more to distinguish him from the other contemporary philosophers than for classifying him[6].

In this article, I briefly present the relationship between philosophy and religion in the work of Paul Ricœur. This relationship had already been visible in the first years of Ricœur's formation as a person and has remained vital throughout his life and intellectual development. Ricœur, as we shall see, has established a dialogue between both languages, both methodologies – that of philosophy and that of religion – in his philosophical and biblical hermeneutics.

2. Between Critique and Conviction

Ricœur was a man of faith. His paternal grandparents and his aunt raised him as a Protestant in the Huguenot tradition. Ricœur's aunt was eleven years younger than his father, who died during the First World War. Ricœur spent his childhood in Rennes (France). As Ricœur himself said: "My paternal grandparents came from two very ancient pockets of Protestantism, going back to the Reformation: my grandmother coming from the Bearn region and my grandfather from Normandy, from a village by the name of Luneray, a sort of *boutonniere* where the tradition of the Reformation had been continuous since the sixteenth century, hardly affected by emigration or forced conversions".[7] Thus, Ricœur grew up in an environment in which the Bible was read on an everyday basis. He inherited the practice of reading the Bible from his grandmother and had kept it up both in his youth and as an adult. His major interest in the Bible was not intellectual or literary, but *pneumatological*, as he called it, alluding to the relationship between man and the spiritual realities. Ricœur thus spent his youth far from the critical attitudes of philosophers and men of science and was absorbed in the daily practice of reading, prayer and examination of conscience. As he claims: "I have always moved back and forth between these two poles: a biblical pole and a rational and critical pole, a duality that, finally, has lasted through my entire life".[8]

This does not mean that Ricœur did not have doubts, or experienced agonizing moments in his faith. He lived through an "internal war between faith and reason" as a student at the University, where his Protestant education

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[6] Ricœur, *Vivant jusqu'à la mort, suivi de Fragments* (Paris: Seuil, 2007), 107.

[7] Ricœur, *Critique and Conviction: Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay*, transl. by Kathleen Blamey (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 5. Henceforth: *CC*.

[8] *CC*, 6.

was confronted with his intellectual formation. In *Réflexion Faite*[9], Ricœur shares with the reader an interesting testimony on these delicate moments, in which paths of knowledge and paths of faith sought their own space in his mind. In particular, he recalls a kind of personal armistice in relation to his religious anxieties, as experienced during the process of writing his bachelor thesis (maîtrise) on the problem of God in Lachelier and Lagneau. These two thinkers, who wrote at the turn of the 20th century, belong to the tradition of French reflexive philosophy. This tradition, related closely to names such as Maine de Biran and Jean Nabert, greatly influenced Ricœur's thought. The latter is quoted as one of his philosophical references in various writings.

Ricœur also shares a common philosophical legacy with Emmanuel Mounier, both regarding reflexive philosophy and the influence of authors such as Descartes and Bergson. However, the most important link between Ricœur and Mounier is Gabriel Marcel. Marcel, along with – among others – Jacques Maritain, supported Mounier explicitly when the latter launched the periodical *Esprit* in 1932. Marcel's activist philosophy, combined with the existential perspective on human life, brought Ricœur closer to Mounier's personalism: a philosophy of action that attempts to materialize a Christian utopia.

During Ricœur's university education, he was also greatly inspired by the philosopher Henri Bergson and the theologian Karl Barth, both of whom had a remarkable impact on French Protestantism during the first half of the 20th century. Ricœur passionately read Bergson's *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*[10]. He later confessed that, when he did so, he felt caught between "a religious philosophy of the Bergsonian type and Barthian radicalism". "At that time", he adds, "I experienced an inner conflict which was exacerbated to the point of threatening to rupture the double allegiance to which, ultimately, I remained faithful"[11].

What is this allegiance to which the French philosopher alludes? Ricœur never wanted to confuse his personal faith and religious practice with the perspective of the philosopher who needs to reflect with the help of autonomous reason alone. He repeatedly stressed that the two spheres, the religious and the philosophical, do not overlap in his work. In *La critique et la conviction* he tells us: "I have been concerned, living a kind of double allegiance, not to confuse the two spheres, to acknowledge continuous negotiation within a well-established bipolarity".[12] Although the theme of religion concerns

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[9] Ricœur, *Réflexion faite. Autobiographie intellectuelle* (Paris: Ed. Esprit, 1995).

[10] Henri Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020).

[11] *CC*, 6.

[12] Ibidem, idem.

both the philosopher and the man of faith – who is, at the same time, an intellectual and also familiar with Protestant theology – the very methodology of analysis of both spheres helps him to maintain this promise of allegiance, while allowing him not to confuse the two spheres. The terms "critique" and "conviction" are the two fundamental references in the life and thought of Ricœur, and therefore rightly constitute the title of his book of conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay. "I have given this a number of formulations", he says, "perhaps the most precise of these, the one I prefer today, is expressed by the relation between conviction and critique [...]. But this is only one manner of expressing the polarity of conviction and critique, for philosophy is not simply critical, it too belongs to the order of conviction. And religious conviction itself possesses an internal, critical dimension".[13]

In another passage Ricœur writes about an "inner conflict" concerning his double allegiance. Sometime around the sixties, Ricœur, especially through the influence of Karl Barth, adopted as his own the idea that philosophy should not deal with the question of God. "For I have always been mistrustful with respect to speculation termed ontotheological, and I had a critical reaction to any attempt to fuse the Greek verb *to be* and God, in spite of Exodus 3:14 (I am that I am)".[14] Ricœur dons a kind of protective armour so that the religious does not interfere with the philosophical, and vice versa. This stratagem is not unrelated to cultural and institutional reasons: "It was very important to me to be recognized as a professor of philosophy, teaching philosophy in a public institution and speaking the common language, hence assuming the mental reservations that this entailed, even if it meant that I would periodically be accused of being a theologian in disguise who philosophizes, or a philosopher who makes the religious sphere think or be thought"[15].

In his later writings, Ricœur adopts a different stance. For example, from the very beginning of *Soi-même comme un autre*, we can appreciate a language of transition, a sort of armistice between the religious and the philosophical. In this book Ricœur deals with the religious in the chapter dedicated to the voice of conscience. He distinguishes the sphere of religious argumentation from the heritage we receive from the religious tradition[16].

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[13] *CC*, 139.

[14] *CC*, 150.

[15] Ibidem, idem.

[16] Ricœur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1990).

3. Philosophical and Biblical Hermeneutics

Essentially, Ricœur's aim is to find an alliance between two languages, the religious and the philosophical, and their respective and inevitably different hermeneutics. The Scriptures contain a revealed message whose interpretation is marked by the need to "apply" to the life of the believer what the sacred text says (Gadamer). Philosophical hermeneutics, on the other hand, carries within it the mark of conflict, of a conflict of interpretations that – in Umberto Eco's terminology – characterizes the philosophical text as an open work. As Ricœur warns, in a work entitled "Philosophical hermeneutics and biblical hermeneutics", we must resist the temptation of treating the second (the biblical) as a case of application of the first (the philosophical). A complex bundle of reciprocal interpenetrations stretches between these two hermeneutics.[17] In both cases there is, moreover, a clearly differentiated textual community. Ricœur, referring to the philosophical corpus, mentions authors such as Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Bergson, Husserl, Heidegger, Nabert, Jaspers (although we can disagree with the inclusion of some of these names). The Christian corpus has its distinct features, even though it contains some of the famous names in the history of philosophy as well as theology (St. Augustine, The Fathers of the Church...). "The list of the fundamental texts in philosophy" – writes Ricœur – "is not the list of texts forming the religious corpus. I place great importance on the mediation of writings, which are different from one sphere to the other, even if the activity of reading draws them closer. As for the Biblical writings, by these I mean the Hebraic Bible, the New Testament of the early Church and what is most directly theological and exegetical in the Fathers"[18].

Without this distinction between the philosophical and the biblical language, between the various ways of reading texts, we would find ourselves in a veritable "dialogue of the deaf". For Ricœur, the problem of the various ways of reading texts is, of course, inseparable from the problem of interpretation. "Each type of reading, and hence of interpretation, serves different objectives and begins from presuppositions which are not only separate but often even opposite. A historical reading must not be encumbered with dogmatic prejudices any more than the official reading of the church should be content to remain blissfully ignorant of what is brought to light by archeological work, such as the deciphering of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The philosophical reading of Biblical texts must not, in its turn, ignore the confessional side or the historical and philological investigations"[19].

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[17] Ricœur "Herméneutique philosophique et Herméneutique biblique", in *Paideia* Ed., Brescia (1983, 2): 79.

[18] *CC*, 140.

[19] Ibid.

On the other hand, philosophical hermeneutics is different from bibli-
cal hermeneutics not only because of making use of different methodolo-
gical and disciplinary principles. Within biblical hermeneutics itself, there
are different exegetical traditions that constitute an authentic hermeneutical
universe. Consider, for example, the hermeneutics practiced in Hebrew and
Christian communities. "In this way, the Christian Church of the early times
read the Jewish writings in a different way than the Rabbinical school, which
shaped Judaism properly speaking"[20]. Moreover, as is well known, the first
Fathers of the Christian Church had the task of building the doctrinal foun-
dations of the new Christian religion. This required the establishment of an
official or canonical interpretation within the hierarchical framework of this
ecclesiastical institution[21]. Anyone who sought alternative interpretations
was persecuted under the charge of erroneous, even heretical, readings. In
the Renaissance era, such alternative readings led to a split within the Chris-
tian religion. It is very interesting to note how the Protestant Reformation
(led, among others, by Luther) was profoundly based on hermeneutic dissi-
dence regarding the canonical readings of the Bible. Allegedly, and this was
also the case in the Rabbinic context, the canonical interpretations of biblical
texts were promoted and sanctioned by the authority of Church or Synago-
gue. In Ricœur's opinion, "it is at the level of this canonical exegesis that the
theological and the philosophical begin to split apart. (…) The philosophical
moment is here, in this recognition of the authority of canonical texts worthy
of guiding the kerygmatic interpretations of the theologies of this profession
of faith. I agree with those exegete theologians who say that these texts are
said to be inspired because they stand as authoritative, and not the reverse"[22].

Biblical hermeneutics is a highly specialized field. Battalions of theolo-
gians and exegetes have transformed it into a science of interpretation. Ri-
cœur, one of the fathers of contemporary philosophical hermeneutics, moved
in this field with extraordinary facility, as we can observe in his essays on
biblical hermeneutics. He was always careful to distinguish the perspectives
and methodologies inherent in philosophical versus biblical hermeneutics,
differences that stem from the individual hermeneutics' own stance.

> The critical attitude will be more on the philosophical side, the religious
> moment as such not being a critical moment; it is the moment of adhering
> to a word reputed to have come from farther and from higher than myself,
> and this occurs in a kerygmatic reading within a profession of faith. At this

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[20] *CC*, 142.

[21] Marcelino Agís Villaverde, *Historia de la Hermenéutica. Devenir y actualidad de
la filosofía de la Interpretación* (Madrid: Ed. Sindéresis, 2020), 43.

[22] *CC*, 143.

level, one finds, then, the idea of a dependence or a submission to an earlier word, whereas in the philosophical domain, even in a Platonic perspective, even if the world of ideas precedes us, it is nevertheless by a critical act that we appropriate the reminiscence that takes on the sense of a pre-existence. What seems to me to be constitutive of the religious is, therefore, the fact of crediting a word, in accordance with a certain code and within the limits of a certain canon.[23]

This double hermeneutical attitude is best articulated in *Thinking Biblically*. The book was published in 1998 by the University of Chicago, a fruit of the collaboration between André LaCocque – an exegete and specialist in the Hebrew Bible – and Paul Ricœur, who interprets the same selected texts of the Bible from the perspective of philosophical hermeneutics. "The exegete makes use of the historical-critical method, modified in the light of the methodological considerations […] that one might even qualify as scientific without abusing them. […] From his side, the philosopher considers the reception of the biblical text by thinkers initially marked by Greek philosophy, then by modern philosophy. It is not so much the diversity among these modes of thought that took up the Bible that causes problems as it is the introduction into the commentary on biblical texts of tools of thought – concepts, arguments, theories – that were forged outside the biblical field of thought, from the Greeks up to the present".[24]

What is provided by biblical exegesis, is, in the first place, related to the formation of the biblical corpus. Each reading of the Bible confers "an autonomy, an independent existence on a text, which thereby opens it to subsequent developments and subsequent enrichments, all of which affect its very meaning"[25]. For Ricœur, the fullest expression of this fact is St Gregory the Great's phrase: "The Scripture grows in its readers". In this way, biblical hermeneutics is brought closer to the spirit of contemporary hermeneutics, which emphasizes the importance of the reader in the process of updating or revitalizing the text. It renounces the aspiration of romantic hermeneutics to reconstruct the author's original intention, an intention embodied by F. Schleiermacher. From Ricœur's perspective, "the meaning of a text is in each instance born at the intersection between, on the one hand, those constraints that the text bears within itself and […], on the other hand, the different expectations of a series of communities of reading and interpretation that the presumed authors of the text under consideration could not have

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[23] *CC*, 144-145.

[24] André LaCocque and Paul Ricœur, *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), (Preface), X.

[25] Ibidem, XI.

anticipated"[26]. Of course, in the case of the Sacred Scriptures, the author of the text is God Himself[27] and, as Thomas Aquinas reminds us in the *Summa Theologica*: "The author of Holy Writ is God, in whose power it is to signify His meaning, not by words only (as man also can do), but also by things themselves"[28].

Critical biblical hermeneutics does not neglect the belief (which is unquestionable from the perspective of faith) that the author of the text is God. However, it emphasizes the importance not only of the exegete (remember that "the Scripture grows in its readers"), but also of the community that accepts the collection of interpretations as its "tradition". The fact that the inspired author is in many cases anonymous, invites us to consider the "irremediable incompleteness of his work". This incompleteness requires from the community the effort of re-modelling and re-updating the text. In this way the community becomes an agent subject of these texts. "The text exists, in the final analysis, thanks to the community, for the use of the community, with a view to giving shape to the community. In other words, if we take the relation to its author as the background of a text, the relation to the reader or the readers constitutes the foreground"[29]. The foreground becomes more important than the background and marks the life of the community in the present and in the future.

The second factor that characterizes this critical exegesis is the fact that the text is rooted in one or several traditions, which have all left their mark on it. This exegetical orientation moves us away from the concept of "authority" – a concept present in most of the medieval thinking, which, from the hermeneutical perspective, is associated with the romantic ideal of uncovering the author's intention and thereby the original meaning of the text. "The interpretive process is not limited to restoring the source text all along this sequence or sequences of repeated actualizations, rather this process re-invents, re-figures, and re-orients the model"[30].

The third factor of this critical exegesis is that which connects the text with a living community that makes it its own through successive readin-

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[26] Ibidem. Ricœur quotes this from Pier Cesare Bori, *L'interpretazione infinita. L'ermeneutica cristiana antica e le sue trasformazioni* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1987).

[27] The sacred author responds to divine inspiration and is considered a mediator who transmits the word revealed directly by God. In ancient Greek culture we find a similar idea at the beginning of Homer's *The Iliad*, when he appeals to the Muse: Sing, O goddess, the anger of Achilles son of Peleus"; Homer: *The Iliad*, I.

[28] St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province*, I, q.i.a.10., (Benziger Bros. edition, 1947)

[29] LaCocque and Ricœur, *Thinking Biblically*, XIII.

[30] Ibidem, XII.

gs and interpretations. The late Jewish tradition distinguished between the concepts of the "written Torah", and an "orally transmitted Torah" which accompanied it. The latter extended the semantics of the first, renewing its vitality and the current meaning of the revealed message in question. In the 16th century, the reformers who advocated the exegetical principle of "*sola scriptura*" ("the Scripture by itself"[31]) have put an end to this hermeneutic richness. The restrictive nature of the hermeneutical principle adopted during the Protestant Reformation caused the definitive separation between the Christian exegesis of the Bible and the Jewish vision of the biblical text. A text disconnected from the community of believers is 'dead.' Ricœur expresses this unequivocally: "Cut off from its ties to a living community, the text gets reduced to a cadaver handed over for autopsy" and adds further on: "It is almost as though one were to give the funeral eulogy of someone yet alive. The eulogy might be accurate and appropriate, but it is nonetheless "premature"[32].

The same argument can be applied to the relation between the texts of the New Testament and the Christian community. In a way, the texts that form the New Testament (Gospels, Letters, Acts of the Apostles, etc.) are the answer to the needs and expectations of a living community. The community is the ultimate reason why these texts were written. Nonetheless, once written, they have brought about an authentic hermeneutic revolution in the context of the Christian culture. They have generated, for example, a comparative hermeneutic between the texts of the Old and the New Testament. Interestingly, the New is not the overcoming of the Old, but instead, its confirmation. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfil them"[33]. The phrase is apparently simple in its formulation. But to corroborate the harmony of the message

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[31] The Protestant point of view can be found in the Westminster Confession of Faith, the profession of Calvinist faith, which says: "We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to a high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture. [10] And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it does abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.[1]" (The original form is from the year 1647. This is the form adopted by the Presbyterian Church in the nineteenth century, Cf. Archibald Alexander Hodge, "Westminster Confession Commentary" Chapter 1, "Of the Holy Scripture", in *Confessional Collective*.).

[32] LaCocque and Ricœur, *Thinking Biblically*, 14.

[33] Mt 5:17

of both Testaments, it would have to be incorporated in an analogical sense in the exegesis of the Bible.

Augustine of Hippo was one of the first authors in the Patristic era to point to the analogical meaning of the revealed message, a meaning which would unite the other three meanings that it carries with itself. This exegesis of the Bible, in accordance with the four meanings, varied throughout the Middle Ages. One of its most mature and exhaustive formulations was St. Thomas' theory of the four laws, formulated in the *Summa Theologica*. The Bible constitutes an immense hermeneutical challenge due to its varied literary genres, its symbols and metaphors, the chronological and historical distance that separates the books of the Old and the New Testaments, the polysemy of the religious language used when speaking of God, the encrypted message of the parables, to name but a few aspects. The richness of biblical hermeneutics inspired the exegetical practice from the beginnings of Christianity. It has stimulated the emergence of various hermeneutical theories that adhered to that praxis and that stemmed from both the theological and the philosophical perspectives[34].

In a way, the successive interpretations of a text magnify it, giving it life and even projecting it towards the future. Ricœur explains this by using the example of the prophetic books. The prophecies and oracles, communicated orally during the life of the prophets, existed in relation to the expectation of their fulfilment. When the disciples of the prophets had written these oracles down, they began to exist in a different way, that is, as part of the collective memory and the tradition. This leads Ricœur to conclude: "The project of confiding a text to writing, thus, far from being encased in retrospection, turns out to be primordially prospective".[35] Ricœur and LaCoque see this phenomenon, which they call the "dynamism of the text", in almost all the genres used in the Bible.

Ricœur presents these levels of biblical hermeneutics to us in a graphic manner, as a series of concentric hermeneutical circles[36], as follows:

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[34] Marcelino Agís Villaverde, *Historia de la Hermenéutica*, 79-80 and 100-103.

[35] LaCocque and Ricœur, *Thinking Biblically,* XIII.

[36] *CC*, 145.

FIRST HERMENEUTICAL CIRCLE	The first circle is linked to the written dimension of the revealed word: "I know this word because it is written, this writing because it is received and read".
SECOND HERMENEUTICAL CIRCLE	The second circle is linked to the communitarian dimension of writing and its interpretation: "and this reading is accepted by a community, which, as a result, accepts to be deciphered by its founding texts".
THIRD HERMENEUTICAL CIRCLE	The third circle emphasizes the communitarian dimension of interpretation: "it is this community that reads them (the foundational texts)".

These three dimensions characterise the essential features of a religious person. Ricœur writes: "to be a religious subject is to agree to enter or to have already entered into this vast circuit involving a founding word, mediating texts, and traditions of interpretation"[37]. Considering the question of why one belongs to a certain religious community and not to another, Ricœur initially points to the random nature of being born in a certain cultural and religious context. This context is comparable to the context of our native language that provides us with words and allows us to discover other linguistic realities. "A religion is like a language into which one is either born or has been transferred by exile or hospitality; in any event, one feels at home there, which implies a recognition that there are other languages spoken by other people".[38] Therefore, it is initially arbitrary, but implies nonetheless a conscious choice. Ricœur calls it an "arbitrariness turned destiny by means of constant work of election". "For every believer, belonging to a community of listening and interpretation remains a random destiny transformed by a reasoned choice continued throughout a lifetime"[39]

Another important aspect is the potential of creating a certain "religious hospitality", similar to the linguistic hospitality that we build due to the phenomenon of translation. Ricœur considers the possibility of religious hospitality that would facilitate and propitiate a dialogue between all religions, particularly those religions that, from the outset, share the idea of a single God. "Perhaps our problem today would be to determine if we are still in this

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[37] Ibidem, idem. Ricœur clarifies: "I say traditions, because I have always been convinced that there was a multitude of interpretations within the Judeo-Christian domain, and so a certain pluralism, a certain competition between traditions of reception and of interpretation."

[38] Ibidem, idem.

[39] Ricœur, *Fe y Filosofía. Problemas del lenguaje religioso* (Buenos Aires: Ed. Prometeo, 2008), 194. (My translation)

relation of translation between a Jewish and Christian heritage and the other religions said to be monotheistic, although I have the gravest doubts about the nature, even the identity, that could be posited outside of Scripture of that God who would be Allah here and Yahweh elsewhere"[40]. The religions mentioned by Ricœur share the naming and the idea of a single God. But Buddhism or other oriental traditions such as the Shinto, among others, do not have this concept. Nonetheless, according to Ricœur, we can speak of Religion as long as three conditions are met: "the anteriority of a founding word, the mediation of writing, and the history of an interpretation"[41].

4 Conclusion: Philosophical and Biblical Interpretation in the Age of the 'Hermeneutics of Reason'

As we have seen, hermeneutics can be considered a 'sister' to both philosophy and faith, because they both convey their respective messages by using the same material, that is, the written text. However, the differences that exist between philosophical and biblical hermeneutics place them in very different spheres of activity. Philosophical hermeneutics, as Ricœur underlines, has as its object the understanding of human discourse, regardless of the religious or non-religious convictions of a man. In *Soi même comme un autre* Ricœur analyses the set of mediations that elevate understanding to a range of interpretation. He firstly considers the set that is common to all human beings, regardless of whether the person in mind has religious convictions or none, that is: the linguistic mediation, by means of which man recognizes himself as a speaking subject. He then moves to the practical mediation that makes man an active and suffering subject. Then follows the narrative mediation that makes man the narrator of his own life, through which he constructs his identity. And finally, the ethical mediation, through which man constructs the concepts of good, justice, obligatory, and which makes him a responsible being. All these mediations taken together constitute an X-ray of the human being from the perspective of philosophical anthropology. It is this approach that Ricœur considered the most appropriate for the analysis of 'being',[42] and he defined it in *Le Conflit des Interprétations* as his philosophical path. At the same time, he distanced himself from Heidegger, whose analysis of 'being' he deemed to be too narrow, as it excludes these kinds of discursive mediations. While we may agree that ontology appears at some point on the horizon of Ricœur's thought, since he aims at exploring the meaning of

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[40] *CC*, 146.

[41] Ibidem, idem.

[42] Ricœur, *Fe y Filosofía,* 191-192 (My translation).

being human – through his discourses and mediations – we must also agree that in no case does he resort to onto-theology. "Being, even elevated to the highest rank of speculative categories, should not be confused with God. It is therefore not surprising that this ascetism of the argument, which marks, I believe, all my philosophical work, leads to a type of philosophy from which the actual mention of God is absent and in which the question of God, as a philosophical question, itself remains in a suspension that could be called agnostic"[43].

Ricœur is cautious not to convey crypto-theology in his philosophical works and philosophical hermeneutics as such. By the same token, he also avoids assigning a crypto-philosophical function to faith. As we have seen before, theology begins where philosophical-rational reflection ends. However, theology does not aim at answering the questions that remain open in philosophical works. Philosophical and biblical hermeneutics not only produce their respective meaning as derived from the interpretation of the texts, but also reflect on the questions that seem to be the most appropriate for them. Ricœur's words clarify this: "If I defend my philosophical writings against the accusation of cryptotheology, I also refrain, with equal vigilance, from assigning to biblical faith a cryptophilosophical function, which would most certainly be the case if one were to expect from it some definitive solution to the aporias that philosophy produces in abundance, mainly in relation to the status of ipse--identity on the practical, narrative, ethical and moral planes"[44].

This does not mean, as previously pointed out, that biblical hermeneutics or theology are devoid of a rational, even critical approach. Ricœur recognizes an "intelligence of faith", promoted in the Christian tradition ever since the previously quoted passage from the Letter of St. Peter, who invited believers to "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have". And the same "intelligence of faith" figures in John Paul II's encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, written in the 20th century, when he compares reason and faith to the "two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth". Biblical hermeneutics is constructed within a different discourse, with a different language, and it inevitably involves a different kind of reading, namely: from the perspective of faith. "The fate of poetic language on which the religious language depends, is specified, [...], by the naming of God. It is precisely in the naming of God that faith requires a specific kind of intelligence. [...] This experience is mediated by language. A faith that is not spoken of remains not only mute but also formless"[45].

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[43] Ibidem, 192 (My translation).
[44] Ibidem, idem (My translation).
[45] Ibidem, 193. (My translation)

This religious language, which Ricœur compares to poetic discourse, has given rise to a hermeneutic modality that provides meaning to the community of believers, thus constituting a tradition. The elements that come into play are the same as those that characterize philosophical hermeneutics (work, writing, world of text, distancing, appropriation).[46] The difference between biblical and philosophical hermeneutics is marked by the perspective, the interpretative methodology, and the purpose.

> The intelligence that inspires the literary approach to the Biblical Scriptures, considering the literary genres in which the biblical faith is articulated, deserves to be called hermeneutics, insofar as the text-reader relationship engenders an interminable work of interpretation. What we intend as a reader is a confessing community that understands itself through the interpretation of the texts that found its identity. Thus a circle, which can be called a hermeneutic circle, is established between the founding texts and the communities of interpretation[47].

Although up to this point we have focused on the different characteristics of philosophical and biblical hermeneutics, the two share some important elements. We have seen that the meaning of Scripture is constructed by the community that transforms the Word into a living message, a source of its identity as believers. Yet the philosophical texts, themselves rooted in tradition, also create a certain community of readers with a personality and identity of their own. Think, for example, of the identification of the readers of Western thought with the works of our classical authors: Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, Thomas Aquinas, Spinoza, Descartes, Nietzsche, etc. The same could be said of the readers who are familiar with the philosophical literature of Indian or Japanese thought, to mention but a few examples.

From the methodological point of view too, we can see that there are some exchanges and concomitances between the two hermeneutics. After all, we are talking about "hermeneutics". "Biblical hermeneutics finally subordinates philosophical hermeneutics as its own organon. The essence of the difference between them has to do with the kerygmatic function – the word kerygma means proclamation – exerted in the biblical texts by the naming of God"[48].

What Ricœur appreciates in both hermeneutics is the dialectic between the inspiration that leads the man of faith, and the argumentative rigidity of the man who philosophizes. "The relationship between faith and philoso-

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[46] Ricœur, "Herméneutique philosophique et herméneutique biblique", 79.

[47] Ricœur, *Fe y filosofía*, 194 (My translation).

[48] Ibidem, 195 (My translation).

phy", writes Ricœur, "reflects a deeper dialectic, namely, that which exists between the poetics of existence and the argumentation of the intellect"[49]. Ricœur mentions the example of the dialectic of love, as it appears in the Song of Songs, the Beatitudes, etc.; and of the dialectic of justice, a moral notion that philosophers from Plato and Aristotle onwards, through Kant and right up to Rawls, never ceased to elaborate on. In *Soi-même comme un autre*, Ricœur puts forward formula "to live well, with and for others, in just institutions". This formula summarizes one of the principles of his *Little Ethics*, an ethics of reason and not of love. One (i.e. justice) belongs to the realm of argumentation; another (i.e. love) belongs to the poetic realm of thought. Faith falls within the second realm.

A third relationship between biblical faith and philosophical thought is – to borrow the Hegelian terminology – that which exists between figurative thought (*Vorstellung*) and conceptual thought (*Begriff*). This relation stems from the fact that Judeo-Christian biblical faith emerged on the margins of the cultural era determined by Greek thought. "From this interweaving of biblical faith and Greek philosophy", writes Ricœur, "a double movement has resulted. On the one hand, the biblical faith developed conceptually and systematically, at first due to Greek Patristic and then due to Latin. This development fully deserves the title of theology; […] For its part, the program of philosophy has extended in the same domains as that of theology. It took a part of its problematic from theology, under the name of rational or natural theology. Western culture developed largely from that point onwards"[50]. The process of the secularization of thought, and the virulence of Kantian or Nietzschean criticism, have exhausted the viability of the idea of the interweaving between philosophy and theology. However, this should not prevent us from recognizing the reciprocal debts between theological and philosophical thought. The dialogue, established between what Ricœur calls "thinking faith" and the conceptual dimension of philosophical discourse, has greatly contributed to the development of both disciplines.

Ricœur concludes by stating that philosophical and biblical hermeneutics belong to the same contemporary hermeneutic sensibility. I would like to end this article by quoting his words: "a philosophy, conceived of as philosophical anthropology, and an intelligent faith, understood as an exegesis of biblical writings, belong to what Jean Greisch calls "the hermeneutical era of reason"[51].

English translation: Kamila Drapalo

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[49] Ibidem, idem.
[50] Ibidem, 197 (My translation).
[51] Ibidem, idem. (My translation).

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