

Duty and Sense of Reviewing

Selection and critique

About the tasks of the “Theologische Literaturzeitung”

I

Never throughout the entire history of mankind has it been so easy to access information about important and unimportant issues at any time and in any place. Whatever we might want to know, today the information is only a mouse click away. Although we know that no search engine can provide all existing information, since it is selective and does not include everything, the amount of information we find is often more than we have time and enthusiasm to cope with. How are we supposed to know, what information is really important? And how can we be sure, whether the flood of information actually contains the bit of info essential to answer our question?

A main problem today is not a lack of information, but the confusion caused by the amount of the available information and the absence of structure. Instead of increasing peoples' level of information, the growing data flood of information makes orientation more and more difficult, since we often lack the ability and the means to evaluate the data. As a result we often don't know what we really know. In order to make this distinction, we depend upon criteria and the judgement of those whom we can trust for the relevant matter with good reason.

This can turn out to be a bad idea when experts prove unreliable or when we apply specific criteria, which may work in some, but not in all areas of knowledge. Those who think that the most recent publications are also the most important ones, may be right in fields like astronomy or neurological science, but nevertheless this does not have to hold true for fields like philosophy, theology or literature. However, in all mentioned fields confidence in proven (but alterable) criteria and reliable (but possibly wrong) experts are required in order to filter reliable knowledge from the flood of information.

II

The fact that we seem to be drowning in the flood of information and available publications also holds true for the field of theology and religious studies. The confusing amount of scholarly papers not the only but surely one reason for the problem that fewer and fewer people recognise these fields of study at all. On the one hand, in theology and religious studies many important questions are waiting to be answered, on the other hand, the sheer amount of what is being produced day after day is more and more becoming an obstruction to serious theological thought and specialisation. The globalisation of information does therefore not necessarily lead to more and more substantiated knowledge, but often to parochial contentedness based on well-known standard facts or to an inappropriate limitation of one's

view to a few current publications encountered rather accidentally than systematically. In order to avoid this, it is necessary to select the important bits from the overall amount of available information. A critical selection of information, however, requires certain criteria.

Criteria are usually aspects of evaluation that have proved applicable due to experience, but may sometimes have to be revised as new experiences are made. Criteria are part of any contingent practice and scientific criteria are part of contingent scientific practice, in which many scholars take part. This also holds true for the criteria of evaluation used to gather relevant knowledge in theology and religious studies. Those criteria do not have to be re-invented by every single scholar over and over again, but are embedded in traditional scientific discourses that vary with the different fields of study. Scholars must be familiar with the relevant criteria in order to be able to evaluate new research results in a critical manner. In addition, scientific discourse always requires critical checking and evaluation as well of the research results as of the adequateness of the criteria used to obtain those results. Whoever wants reliable information, orientation and deeper insights in the manifold fields of theology and religious studies will have to observe these discourses.

III

This, however, widely exceeds the possibilities of the individual. In the fields of theology and religious studies the observation of the scientific discourses can only be realized as a joint project, in which many people inform themselves mutually in a critical way and show traceably in a public discussion, how important matters can be distinguished from the less important, good ideas from the bad and supportable from unsupportable theories.

Exactly for this purpose scientific institutions are established and one of the most renowned in the German-speaking areas is the Theologische Literaturzeitung. It was founded in 1876 and since then it has strived to provide well-founded, comprehensive, and impartial information about scientific publications in the fields of theology and religious studies. Right from the beginning, the paper did not only cover German publications, but also the international scientific production. There is no other German institution that provides such comprehensive information about the literature of theology and religious studies and about the scientific developments in these fields and that counts with such a widespread circle of authors.

We intend not only to keep this concept alive but also to further improve it. Important works deserve to be reviewed by expert reviewers, who do by means of their work, also contribute to the scientific discourses of the different issues. The editorial board spends a lot of time discussing, who could and should review which book. We owe all possible care to the authors of the reviewed books and also to our readers. Critical, fair, and topic-oriented

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reviews are the hallmarks of the *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, which our readers will also be able to appreciate in the future.

However, it is almost impossible to handle the ever-growing flood of new publications. Therefore it is one of the main tasks of the editorial board to select the most important works from the mass of publications in the different fields and find competent reviewers. This requires a group of experts who know the publications and scientific discourses in their specific fields and who observe the international research developments. At the moment the editorial board consists of I.U. Dalferth/Zurich (systematic theology, philosophy of religion, philosophy), B. Ego/Osnabrück (Jewish studies, exegesis), A. Feldtkeller/Berlin (religious and missionary studies), Chr. Grethlein/Münster (practical theology, religious education), Fr. Hartenstein/Hamburg (Old Testament, studies of antiquity), Chr. Marksches/Berlin (Church history: old church and middle ages), K.-W. Niebuhr/Jena (New Testament, Jewish studies), F. Nüssel/Heidelberg (systematic theology, ecumenism), M. Petzold/Leipzig (systematic theology, ethics), A. Beutel/Münster (church history: reformation, modern history, contemporary history). Several times a year the editorial board looks through the new publications in the various fields and considers the question of who to choose as possible reviewers. This process is supervised by the editorial board in Leipzig with Frau Dr. Weidhas being in charge of the project.

IV

In order to continue and extend the tradition of the *Theologische Literaturzeitung* in the field of specific articles, overviews and research reports, the editors founded the Forum *Theologische Literaturzeitung* in 1999. This forum wants to contribute to theological evaluation as well as to cultural self-reflexion by providing a platform for the discussion of current topics in topic-related scientific essays in which the fields of theology and religious studies can verify their position in science, church, and society.

At the moment both fields face special challenges. For this reason the unnecessary and unfruitful competition that consisted and sometimes still consists between the two fields is especially detrimental to scientific development. The *Theologische Literaturzeitung* has always been and is still convinced now, that both fields with their different type of questions should work hand in hand and face current challenges together. As religious studies in its quality as a cultural science is not completely noncommittal and very much concerned with current social problems, the field of theology is not only an application of church dogmas or noncommittal cultural science. Both fields must take part in the public discourses on the issues concerning them and they cannot disregard this task.

The Forum *Theologische Literaturzeitung* was created to serve exactly this purpose. It is a forum, because it is not intended to serve only as a platform

for exchange of information, but also for critical discussion of criteria and perspectives in a bidirectional way: On the one hand current issues and thoughts must be discussed and included in the fields of theology and religious studies, on the other hand it is also important to communicate the findings of research in theology and religious studies into other areas of our culture. Both ways of communication can only be realised in a selective way, but at least this has to happen. The forum can also help non-experts to find quick information about important current issues and debates of the main disciplines of theology and religious studies. Doing this, the forum supports the main goal of the *Theologische Literaturzeitung*: retaining the unity of theology, presenting the individual disciplines in their contexts and pointing out the scientific importance of theology and religious studies to the public.

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