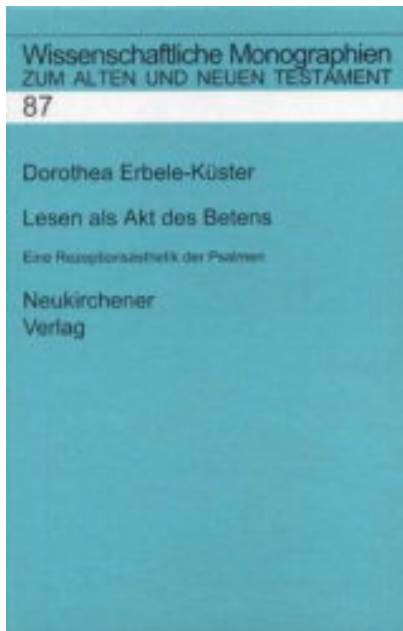


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Erbele-Küster, Dorothea

Lesen als Akt des Betens: Eine Rezeptionsästhetik der Psalmen

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This dissertation, approved in 2000 at the Theological Faculty of Hamburg and directed by Hermann Spieckermann, is a valuable contribution to the studies of Psalms. Dorothea Erbele-Küster succeeds in her combination of historical-critical analysis with “Rezeptionsästhetik” and opens for new ways of understanding the process of reading the Psalms.

Her introduction (1–3) is titled “Lesen oder Beten?” What she refers to as “Lesen” is a historical-critical reading of texts, while she uses the term “Beten” for the communication between text and reader. The question mark might give the impression that the two terms are contradictory, but one of her main points is that historical and aesthetical experiences supplement each other. Dorothea Erbele-Küster thus begins her introduction with the following statement: “Leserinnen und Leser, die der Eigendynamik der Psalmen folgen, werden zu Betenden” (1). Her methodological approach is influenced partly by Hans Robert Jauss’s and Wolfgang Iser’s “Rezeptionsästhetik” and partly by reader-oriented criticism. It is her aim to bring these approaches into dialogue with the historical-critical exegesis of Psalms, and to reach that aim she first gives a methodological introduction, then presents examples of readings, and finally shows how her readings contribute to the

creation of a literary anthropology (see Wolfgang Iser, *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* [London, 1989]).

The first part of the book (5–50) begins with a fine introduction to Wolfgang Iser, Hans Robert Jauß, and Stanley Fish in order to describe the possible roles of readers, that is, the empirical reader and the various kinds of “Modell-Leser” (8–31). In an instructive section (32–36), she systematizes the results of her presentation under the headings “Empirischer Leser und Lesermodell,” “Leser und Kritiker,” “Autor und Leser,” and “Autorin und Leserin.” After this follows a section on “Rezeptionsästhetik und Exegese” (37–50), where she emphasizes that reading is a creative act that changes the reader.

The second part (51–187) is called “Psalmenlesen als anthropologischer Akt.” After a short survey of form-critical and redaction-critical exegesis, Dorothea Erbele-Küster introduces the figure of David as author, “Leser,” “Beter,” and singer of the Psalms under the perspective of “David als Leserfiktion” (53–85). Much interest is attached to the role of David in the headings and to the consequences for the reader of this fiction. Various examples of headings are discussed, and she convincingly emphasizes the importance of intertextuality when reading these psalms. It is especially the thirteen headings that combine a psalm with the traditions about David’s life that are important in this context. Dorothea Erbele-Küster has an interesting section on “Die Psalmenüberschriften und ihre Leerstellen in narrativen Texten” (76–78), in which she points at various examples in, for instance, 2 Samuel, where D or D is used to mark a “Leerstelle.” In 2 Sam 16:13 a D indicates that something is missing. The reader therefore has to consult one of the psalms (it might be Ps 3) to understand how David called for the help of the Lord in this critical situation. Another example is 2 Sam 12:13, where a D invites the reader to read Ps 51.

A section (86–107) is devoted to “Das Davidisierungsprogramm im Septuagintapsalter und in 11QPs^a,” which clearly shows the ongoing interest in combining David with the Psalms. In LXX even the YHWH-*mālak* psalms are called psalms of David, which leads to a messianic reading of the psalms with David as the righteous king. Dorothea Erbele-Küster concludes this section by saying: “Der Stabilisierungsprozeß des Psalters wurde begleitet und beeinflusst durch mehrere Davidisierungsschübe. Der im Text implizite Leser und Dichter David hat ersten Lesern in den Jahrhunderten um die Zeitenwende neue Rezeptionsmöglichkeiten eröffnet und gibt darüber hinaus nachfolgenden Lesern und Leserinnen Leseanweisung” (107).

In her discussion of “Modelle ästhetischer Identifikation” (109–40), she argues for the importance of the paradigmatic dimension and shows how the shift between first and third person in the Psalms can be understood as a means to invite the reader to imitation and to let his or her personal life story become part of the collective telling about the

rescue of the righteous. In an excellent section on the use of irony, “Die kathartisch-ironische Dimension” (114–40), she gives several illustrative examples of the use of irony to mark the difference between the reader and the enemy. Quotations are often used to unmask the enemy and to intensify the reader’s identity. One example of her many good points about the enemies is her demonstration of the use of “fingierte Zitate” (122), where the enemy accuses God. Such accusations may well mirror the psalmist’s own frustrations. They function as arguments toward God, who, after having been accused of passivity, for instance, is expected to wake up and rescue the psalmist.

A very important topic in Dorothea Erbele-Küster’s book is what she calls “Die Leerstelle” (141–77). She explains this phenomenon as follows: “Im Akt des Lesens sind es gerade die Unbestimmtheiten, die die Psalmen zu Gebrauchstexten werden lassen” (141). As examples of such “Unbestimmtheiten” are mentioned “die Offenheit innerhalb der Textstrukturen der Psalmen in der Beschreibung der Notsituation” and “Die offene Bittstruktur.” The danger or affliction is described in an open way, which makes it possible for the reader to include his or her own situation in the description. The Psalms open the way for various understandings of how or why the reader is now in deep need, and likewise the use of metaphors adds to the openness of the psalm. In addition, it is often open to interpretation who is responsible for the situation, God or humans, and it is regularly open to interpretation whether God has answered the prayer or not.

One of the many problems in Psalm studies is how to deal with the sudden change of mood in some of the Psalms. Dorothea Erbele-Küster argues that “der ‘Stimmungsumschwung’ nicht nur einen emotionalen Stimmungswandel erfaßt, sondern sich als Erkenntnisprozeß realisiert, der sich in konkreten Erfahrungen des Beters widerspiegelt” (166). I do agree that what is going on here is first of all a cognitive shift, but I had difficulties in following her when she goes on talking about theophany: “Die Theophanie enthält cognitive wie sinnliche Momente und ist konstitutiver Bestandteil der Erhörungsgewißheit” (168), and later on she says that “Gottes Angesicht, mehr noch seine Gestalt, sind die ersten Sinneseindrücke für den Beter nach dem Erwachen am Morgen” (170–71). How can we know that what is said in Ps 17:15 (her own example) about seeing God’s face is a theophany and not imagery for receiving God’s answer in the temple?

Dorothea Erbele-Küster carefully analyzes examples of this phenomenon of change in the Psalms (e.g., Ps 56) and argues for a better understanding of what makes the psalmist change from lament to praise. At the end of this passage, she concludes:

Anstatt von einem Stimmungsumschwung zu sprechen, wurde vorgeschlagen, das Phänomen als Erkenntnisgewinn und Sprachgeschenk zu denken. Die Leerstellen

in den Psalmen ermöglichen den Betern, ihren existentiellen Erfahrungen der Fragmentarität Ausdruck zu geben und damit offen zu sein für Gottes rettendes Eingreifen. Die notwendige Sprachhilfe dazu liefern die Psalmen. Die anthropologische Dimension ästhetischer Erfahrung zeigt sich darin, daß beim Lesen der Psalmen eine neue Sicht auf die vorfindliche Welt eröffnet wird. Der Beter erkennt, daß Gott zugunsten der Angefeindeten und Bedrückten rettend eingreift. Im Akt des Lesens erscheint die Welt unter der Perspektive Gottes, so daß die ästhetische Erfahrung zur religiösen Erfahrung wird. (177)

In a short section “Ausblick: Der Akt des lesenden Betens” (179–87), Dorothea Erbele-Küster gives a clear presentation of the results of her analyses and of the consequences for exegesis. The book is provided with a bibliography (189–200) and an index of psalm references, including 11QPs^a and the Septuagint (201–7).

I have read Dorothea Erbele-Küster’s book with great interest and enjoyed her careful argumentation. The claims she makes are based on her readings of the texts, and she is able to combine the perspectives taken from scholars such as Jauß, Iser, and Fish with her exegesis. She is well read in methodology and has a sound judgment when it comes to reading the texts. This new approach is a great help in seeing the strategy of the text and in seeing that, for instance, shifts from first to third person may be part of such a strategy and not markers of redactional activity. Her ability to apply the best from traditional German scholarship and new approaches has brought us further in the studies of the Psalms. Reading the book was a pleasure, but trying to translate her main terms into English was difficult. I apologize for the many direct quotations in German, but I found it the best way of doing justice to her very precise formulations. I would therefore fully recommend that she has her book translated into English by somebody who is capable of doing it. Dorothea Erbele-Küster’s studies in “Lesen als Akt des Betens” really deserves to be read, also by scholars who are not familiar with German.