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Gadamerian Background of Merold Westphal's Existential Hermeneutics of Religion

Abstract: Merold Westphal's hermeneutic epistemology developed in the work "Whose Community? Which Interpretation? Philosophical Hermeneutics for the Church" (2009) represents an organic synthesis of the basic principles of the hermeneutic project of Hans-Georg Gadamer and the dialogic ethics of Søren Kierkegaard, which marks the incipency and formation in the late period of the work of the original version of the existential hermeneutics of religion of well-known American theologian. Westphal's desire to overcome the "relativism of hermeneutics" becomes a prerequisite for the further development and application of the tradition of hermeneutic analysis in theology. The attribute "existential" for own methodology Westphal "gained" on the basis of the study and reinterpretation of Kierkegaard's legacy. The same happened with the Westphal's understanding of the specifics of the application of hermeneutic analysis in theology. Gadamer's hermeneutics is perceived by Westphal in the context of Kierkegaard's intentions, for which it is primarily understood as the practice of personal participation (existential presence) in the interpretation and realization of God's will, which generally defines the Westphal's non-typical perception of the Scripture. Therefore, in this case we are talking about the life of the text as a way that, to a certain extent, resounds with the Kierkegaard's interpretation of the human existence as a process of constant formation of the personality of a human being.

Keywords: existential hermeneutics, existential ethics, the Bible, the Christian church, practical wisdom, application, subjective truth, personal involvement.

1. Introduction

Merold Westphal is a well-known American contemporary religious philosopher and theologian, Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at Fordham University. His phenomenology of religion and postmodernist views are methodologically based on the philosophy of existentialism. His views have undergone a peculiar evolution from the existential phenomenology of religion ("existential phenomenology") to its phenomenological-hermeneutic analysis and existential hermeneutics, and eventually embodied in the original interconnected concepts of existential ecclesiology and ecumenism. Westphal's

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philosophy of religion is formed under the significant influence of existentialism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, postmodernism, traditional Christian thought.

Numerous publications of the American thinker, such as “God, Guilt, and Death: An Existential Phenomenology of Religion” (1984), “Kierkegaard’s Critique of Reason and Society” (1991), “Becoming a Self: A Reading of Kierkegaard’s Concluding Unscientific Postscript” (1996), “Overcoming onto-theology: toward a postmodern Christian faith” (2001), “Transcendence and self-transcendence: on God and the soul” (2004), “Levinas and Kierkegaard in dialogue” (2008), “Kierkegaard’s Concept of Faith” (2014) and other works are devoted to various topics, and in particular, the analysis of the relationship between existentialism, phenomenology, postmodernism and Christian thought, the problem of overcoming onto-theology, modernization of Christianity – in general are almost unknown in Ukraine.

Merold Westphal is a living legend for contemporary foreign researchers and compatriots, and his views are called “prophetic”. Thus, the collection “Gazing Through a Prism Darkly: Reflections on Merold Westphal’s Hermeneutical Epistemology” (2009) starts with an article of the editor of this edition – Keith Putt “The Benefit of the Doubt: Merold Westphal’s Prophetic Philosophy of Religion”, in which Westphal is recognized as “one of the most creative and influential phenomenologies of religion of the past two decades” (Putt 2009, 3). Westphal became notable as a phenomenologist after the publication of “God, Guilt, and Death: An Existential Phenomenology of Religion” (1984). This book became a significant contribution to the philosophy of religion, in particular, in understanding the essence of religiosity as such. On the first page of his work he asks: “What does it mean to be religious?” (Westphal 1984, 1). This question goes through the whole book. Westphal sets the task to understand religious life, interpreting its various manifestations.

However, the late period of Westphal’s creativity, in which the hermeneutics played a prominent role, remains a little studied. For Westphal, the “art of understanding” (phenomenological, and subsequently hermeneutical) is an alternative approach in the philosophy of religion, which distinguishes its descriptive philosophy of religion from traditional evaluative and explanatory approaches. In assessing what is not the descriptive philosophy of religion, the American thinker turns to the continental European philosophical thought. In particular, Westphal’s application of his methodological means of interpreting the phenomena of religiosity in our time is interesting in the other work “Whose Community? Which Interpretation? Philosophical Hermeneutics for the Church” (2009), in which the scholar on the background of rethinking the hermeneutical project of the leading representative of the philosophical hermeneutics of the twentieth century – Hans-Georg Gadamer (in

the context of the views of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, Paul Ricoeur), conceptual provisions of Eric Donald Hirsch Jr. and Nicholas Wolterstorff, ideological polemic between liberalism (represented by John Bordley Rawls and his “A Theory of Justice”) and communitarianism (represented by Alasdair Chalmers MacIntyre and his “After Virtue”), forms his own original version of the existential hermeneutics of religion, the basis of which is the no less original concept of the “existential ethics”. Studying out the specifics of the incipience and formation of Westphal’s existential hermeneutics of religion in its relation to the existential ethics is the purpose of this work. The problem is that Westphal interpreted “non-classically” both existentialism and hermeneutics.

2. Overcoming the “relativist hermeneutics” and addressing to the ideas of Gadamer

In his work, Westphal draws attention to the fact that

postliberalism – a related “effect” of postmodernism – has engendered a new, confessional ecumenism wherein we find non-denominational evangelical congregations, mainline Protestant churches, and Catholic parishes all wrestling with the challenges of postmodernism and drawing on the culture of postmodernity as an opportunity for rethinking the shape of our churches. (Westphal 2009, 7)

The American thinker, drawing on the ideas of the well-known theorists in continental philosophy and contemporary theology, is seeking to write for a broad audience, non-specialists interested in the influence of postmodern theory on the faith and practice of the church. In his works he holds a dialogue, on the one hand, with such philosophers as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Levinas, Derrida, Foucault, Irigaray, Rorty and others, and on the other hand, with the most famous theologians – St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Irenaeus and others.

“Relativist hermeneutics” is the central problem of this work of Westphal, who understands that it is impossible to overcome it, and therefore seeks other ways to solve this problem. In the series editor’s foreword James K.A. Smith we read about this:

One might say that Westphal is redeeming relativity and dependence, which seem to be the specific features of creaturehood. Along the way, he helps us navigate between “hermeneutical despair” and “hermeneutical arrogance”. That, it seems to me, is a gift for the church. Westphal can pull this off because these two worlds – philosophical hermeneutics and the church – come together in his thought... His project here is motivated by the conviction that the rigors of philosophical hermeneutics, when understood and appreciated, can actually help the church to be a faithful community of interpretation. Who could ask for more? (Westphal 2009, 11)

In this aspect, Westphal focuses on the Gadamer's hermeneutics, more precisely, its significance in the context of contemporary religious problems. Heidegger, Ricoeur and Gadamer, according to Westphal, insisted that interpretation is never without foundation. We arrive at it with certain "prejudices" (preliminary judgments) that form our understanding and our interpretation, which can be corrected or even replaced in the further process of interpretation.

However, according to the American thinker, we should not think that hermeneutic despair and hermeneutic arrogance are the only alternative to this fact. Thinking over whether or not an interpretation is needed, and also over the dilemma of choice between interpretation and intuition, Westphal examines the concept of "naive realism". Analysis of his speculations testifies that he is a frank Kantian on this issue. Westphal agrees with Kant that we do not know neither "thing in itself", nor the surrounding world as it is, but only the world that appears to us as such. Answering question: "Why would anyone want to hold to the hermeneutical version of naive realism?" – Westphal claims that this intention was due to two reasons – "the desire to preserve truth as correspondence and desire to preserve objectivity, a closely related notion, in our reading, preaching, and commenting" (Westphal 2009, 21).

For Westphal, the most outrageous is a situation, where proponents or theology representatives like to think of themselves as innocent, "philosophically unbiased" (pre-judgements, presuppositions) thinkers. It looks as if hermeneutics, this interpretation of interpretation, is itself relative to presuppositions of a particular philosophical tradition. In his opinion, the situation in various normative areas, in particular ethics, politics and theology, in which individuals and communities even appeal to intuitions, appear to be worse regarding what Westphal calls "just seeing", which is contradictory, as well as the traditions from which they try to escape. Therefore, Westphal speaks about the existence of a "conflict of intuition", as well as in the other case it is said about a "conflict of interpretation", and also that the most powerful motivation of the privilege of intuition over interpretation is related, first of all, with the notion of the use of different traditions (Westphal 2009, 22).

The American thinker argues that contemporary man is mistaken in a "just seeing" in the same way as it was described in the ancient Indian poem "On Blind Men And an Elephant", an analogue of the famous ancient European myth "On a Cave".

According to Westphal, the hermeneutics of the twentieth century adopted the psychologism and objectivism of the hermeneutic tradition of the nineteenth century, in particular, the "romantic hermeneutics". From the standpoint of psychologism, the language, first of all, was understood as an external expression of internal mental life. Gadamer and Ricoeur distanced themselves from these elements of the "romantic hermeneutics". They come from the notion that we (whether it is an author, translator, reader, etc.) are

always included in the social, cultural and historical context. While Heidegger expands the notion of interpretation beyond the realm of interpretation of a text, Gadamer and Ricoeur retain “deregionalization” of hermeneutics and search for a general theory of textual interpretation, retaining the notion of the “hermeneutical circle”. That is why exactly Gadamer’s hermeneutics becomes the subject of Westphal’s scrupulous analysis.

3. “The Death of the Author”. The correlation of a reader with the historically created perspective. Hermeneutics is, first of all, practice...

Westphal attracts the ideas of Gadamer to consider the problem of “the death of the author”, which was initiated in the writings of three French philosophers – Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. According to them, real authors do not create meaning in the way God created the world. They are neither the Alpha (pure, unconditional origin) of meaning nor the Omega (ultimate goal) of interpretation. Of course, as atheists – argues Westphal – these authors do not believe in God as Creator of the world. Sometimes it can seem as if they are saying in the Nietzschean tone of voice:

We as authors are not absolute; we do not divinely dispose over the truth and meaning. Thus, there is no God, and all truth and meaning is relative. Of course, this is a non sequitur and would not help you get a good grade in Logic. From the fact that we are not God it does not follow that no one else is. ...Atheistic postmodernism sometimes seems to say (fallaciously): I am not God; therefore there is no God. The believer says: Someone else is God; therefore I am not God. (Westphal 2009, 58-59)

Gadamer makes a similar conclusion, but somewhat laconic. In accordance with his position, not only sometimes, but always the content of the text goes beyond the scope of the author’s understanding. Therefore, understanding is not only reproductive, but always productive activity. At the same time, Gadamer and Ricoeur agree that a participant of interpretation, a reader, is limited by historical time, which ultimately excludes any claims for “absolute knowledge” and is evidence that we are really simple beings, not the Creator. Westphal considers this position as follows: “Fortunately, we do not need to concern ourselves with this theory, which no longer dominates the French intellectual scene and has never dominated the Anglo-American scene” (Westphal 2009, 68).

Westphal is interested in philosophical hermeneutics, developed by Gadamer in the “Truth and Method”. He makes his reference to literary, legal and theological interpretations and intends his own understanding of this theory to apply to the reading of all culturally significant texts, while empha-

sizing that his hermeneutics is a descriptive, rather than normative theory of interpretation. As it is well known, Gadamer also positively treated Heidegger's expansion of interpretation beyond the text of a particular author, but he focused on "work", on a certain text (Westphal 2009, 69).

Under the influence of Heidegger and Kierkegaard, Gadamer was deeply convinced that truth and Being cannot be studied through objectification and generalization. Unlike late Wittgenstein, he rejected the "will to generalization" as a "scientific method", agreeing with Bultmann on the need for "de-objectification". After all, the "understanding, according to Heidegger and Gadamer, comes even before the statement". (Thiselton 2011, 226-227)

According to Westphal, hermeneutics was greatly enriched by Kierkegaard's subjective truth, since it required direct participation in every moment of our life. Gadamer agrees with this, proving that there are moments and questions when personal involvement is required instead of abstraction. In particular, he writes about this: "Hermeneutics is, first of all, a practice... Hearing, the susceptibility of the prerequisite, expectations and influences contained in the concepts are surprisingly important" (Gadamer 1997, 17). According to Thiselton and Westphal – this is the main thesis that in general determines our perception of the Scriptures.

Westphal also approves Gadamer's fundamental thesis on our belonging (thrownness, immersion) to tradition:

Because we are situated within traditions, history does not belong to us, we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state [and, we might add, church] in which we live... That is why the prejudices [Vorurteile] of the individual, far more than his judgements [Urteile], constitute the historical reality of his being. (Westphal 2009, 70)

At the same time, according to Gadamer, knowledge itself can never be complete, because we are immersed in life (or history), and we can never stand apart from life (or history) and look at it as a whole. For Gadamer, according to Westphal, the assertion that God speaks to us in revelation is one thing, but the assertion that God opens up own view of revelation's meaning, thereby transforming us from ordinary humans to divine knowers, is quite different. Similar to the postulate of the French philosophers on the "death of the author", American researcher writes, Gadamer uses theological language when speaking about the finitude of historically effected consciousness. Therefore, Gadamer claims the need for "insight into the limitations of humanity, into the absoluteness of the barrier that separates man from divine" (Westphal 2009, 74).

"However, according to Gadamer, – as Westphal tries to prove, – the birth of the reader is not the absolute death of the author, but only the death

of the absolute author, the one who could fix meaning unilaterally” (Westphal 2009, 82). At the same time, the power of tradition is real, but not absolute, since man who is trying to understand the text is always engaged in design, creating a new projection of meaning, and, as a result, generating competing projects. Gadamer, followed by Westphal, also speaks about the relativity of the reader to a historically effected perspective, and about Dilthey’s anxiety on anarchy, which is caused for different readers or communities of readers by the fact that they are shaped by different historical traditions. Hence, there is a problem of whether or not “might the author’s (intended) meaning provide hermeneutics with a determinate object (the meaning of the text) that by means of intuition (divination, as Schleiermacher puts it) and methodical validation can preserve objectivity in the sense of universal validity for interpretation?” (Westphal 2009, 77). Gadamer thinks not. Because this way will lead us once more to human prejudices. This is why he advocates that each century should understand the transmitted text in its own way. The meaning is realized in the changing process of understanding, like it is the same history whose meaning is constantly in the process of being defined. Even the sense of a historical event, for example, according to Westphal, “the significance of the war in Iraq, begun in 2003, is vastly different from what was intended by President George W. Bush and his neocon supporters when they started it” (Westphal 2009, 78). In this case, if we speak about the theoretical foundations of the methodology of historical and religious analysis, it is that “when we try to understand a text, we do not try to transpose ourselves into author’s mind, but we try to transpose ourselves into the perspective within which he has formed his views” (Westphal 2009, 79).

4. The Bible – “classical text” of Christian church.

“Interpretation” requires “virtue of practical wisdom”...

For Westphal, Gadamer’s hermeneutics is also interesting because gives the possibility of interpreting the meaning of works of art. In the history, according to Gadamer, the works of art are apparently accompanied by the active-historical consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*) of the author, who, however, cannot know absolutely for sure what and what about his work will say to descendants. In this case, we are talking about the life of the work as a way correlated with the way of human existence, evaluated by Kierkegaard in the parameters of constant formation. In chapter “Art as the Site of Truth beyond Method” Westphal analyzes the views of Gadamer in the context of humanistic tradition. “Over against the “romantic” idea of interpretation as the attempt to re-create or reconstruct the inner life of the author, – researcher writes, – Gadamer sets the idea of interpretation as the search for the truth of what the author says about the Sache...” (Westphal 2009, 87).

The humanistic tradition, which is now the dominant scientific tradition, has carried out a significant influence on Western culture since Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo and Newton, and including the thinkers of the era of the scientific and technological revolution. Since then, particular emphasis has been put on attempting to extend the scientific method to the human sciences so as to neutralize traditions and its prerequisites (“prejudices”). Already in the eighteenth century, David Hume had torn boldly along this way, trying in “A Treatise of Human Nature” to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into “moral subjects”. Over against this methodology, as Westphal writes, Gadamer tries to find truth beyond method in classic texts and works of art, which are understood not as objects to be observed and explained, but as “voices to be listened to” (Westphal 2009, 88-89).

In determining the definition of “classics” Westphal refers to the David Tracy’s “Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope” (1987), where classics are “those texts that have helped found or form a particular culture... those texts that bear an excess and permanence of meaning, yet always resist definitive interpretation”. In creation of these texts, as Westphal argues, there is a paradox, though highly particular in origin and expression: classics have the possibility of being universal in their effect... And “I have to include the Bible into the category of classical texts not because I do not think that it is more than what it means, but because I think that, of course, it means no less” (Westphal 2009, 89).

Gadamer is contemplating, especially in the cultural context, of the literary heritage of Greco-Roman antiquity as it emerged in the Renaissance, developed through the Enlightenment (as parallel path to the growing worship of science). The humanist tradition looked for the truth beyond the philosophical and theological methodology in the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles; the epics of Homer and Virgil; the histories of Herodotus, Thucydides, Tacitus and Julius Caesar, the philosophical treatises of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics. Since Gadamer, as Westphal emphasizes, does not specify where exactly to look for the truth beyond scientific method, this proves that he does not exclude from the list above even scriptural texts such as the Bible, especially in such important interpretations as the Septuagint, the Vulgate, the Luther Bible and so on.

The central notion of humanistic tradition, as it is interpreted by Gadamer, is “Bildung”, the term that corresponds to Ancient Greek “παιδεία” (bringing up children) – the process of upbringing the citizens of the antique polis, making a mature man from a blunt child. Westphal, referring to Gadamer, remarks that “better translation would be “formation” or even “socialization”, for it concerns “training in the *sensus communis*... the sense that founds community... this communal sense for what is true (theory) and right (practice)” (Westphal, 2009, 91).

To make it obvious that the works of art must and convey the truth indirectly on us, Gadamer calls attention to the Kant's point of view on this problem. It is known that Kant separated the beautiful (the majestic and the sublime) from the True and the Good. In other words, according to Kant, works of art are not bearers of cognitive significance (theory) or moral significance (practice). In Gadamer's opinion, they provide us with a certain kind of pleasure, unselfish pleasure that that does not seek to own or rule over that which pleases. Thus, for example, the pleasure of reading is different from kinds of pleasure that we get from eating, drinking, having sex, having high social status or owning property. None of these latter pleasures is unselfish. Gadamer, according to Westphal, looks at the hidden aspect of the meaning of works of art, namely, their ability to address truth in time (history). Just like we do not read a text, first of all, to restore the author's experience, but to hear what the author wants to say about the subject matter of the text, so we do not turn, first of all, to the work of art for the pleasure we get, but to open ourselves to what it reveals to us about the reality. Therefore, Westphal agrees with Gadamer and states that "we read a book, say a mystery novel or spy thriller, or we watch a movie, say a western or a romantic comedy, primarily for the pleasure it gives and not for what we hope to learn about what it means to be human" (Westphal 2009, 92).

For Westphal, the idea of German thinker that the truth is in the works of art and its message teaches us to think differently, to understand differently and perhaps to live differently, is familiar. According to American philosopher, views of Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty in this sense are similar: for Merleau-Ponty true philosophy consists in "relearning to look at the world". Gadamer tells that "classic texts and works of art do the same thing" (Westphal 2009, 94). As an example, Gadamer's concept of the "Picture" (picture, image), according to Westphal, is similar to a doctrine of the real presence of Christ in Word or Sacrament. This is why Gadamer applies similar method of analysis to the religious picture or icon. For him the picture is "an event of being". However, since he started to speak about the icon, Westphal observes, it is not clear why he speaks about a word as well as about an image. Westphal assumes that we can take it as the allusion of the real presence of God in all forms of the Word of God: the incarnate Christ, Scripture and preaching based on Scripture. To prove this Westphal appeals to Epistle of Paul to Colossians (1:15), it is said that Christ is "the image of the invisible God" (Westphal 2009, 96). According to American philosopher, Gadamer combines epistemological and ontological principles of language in this formula and throughout his analysis of the picture (image). On the one hand, he speaks about human (pre)requisite, and on the other hand, he describes the picture as an event of being. Westphal insists that this does not create the vocabulary conflict, on the contrary, this act as an event of uncovering, of demonstration, of manifestation, of revelation that Gadamer understands by the truth beyond scientific method.

Gadamer's "fusion of horizons", Westphal interprets through the prism of Kierkegaard's and Levinas's existential ethics, in particular, in the context of the concept of "otherness", "me – you relationship". From Gadamerian triad – understanding, interpretation and application (that according to German thinker are one single process) – exactly the latter notion is the most important for Westphal's existential theology. After all "application" is especially important for Christians who are interpreting the Bible because their "vocation is to embody Scripture. Unless Christian communities are committed to embodying their Scriptural interpretation, the Bible loses its character as Scripture" (Westphal 2009, 108-109)¹. That is why Gadamer understands "interpretation" as a practical wisdom (phronesis) rather than theoretical wisdom (nous, episteme, sophia). Following Aristotle, Gadamer and later Westphal postulate the thesis that "interpretation" requires "the virtue of practical wisdom".

In this regard, Westphal mentions the four questions of Martin Luther that should arise every time we read the Bible or hear when someone else reads it: What am I to believe? What am I to do? Of what am I to repent? For what am I to give thanks? As American thinker mentions, the first question in the Lutheran context bring us beyond the purely theoretical or factual areas to the personal and practical spheres, to the promises of God as they relate to us here and now and are to be believed on hearing the Word of God. Here, to believe means to trust and to act basing on that trust. An earlier version of interpretation of this thinking tells us that inspired by God, Scripture is "useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness (virtue)" (Westphal 2009, 109).

Thus, according to Westphal, the meaning of the "application" implies making concrete meaning, the one that gives practical meaning to abstract language. As an example, Westphal turns to the ambiguity of the texts of the Declaration of Independence (1776) and of the US Constitution (1787). While the first declares that "all men are created equal", the second did not envisage the right of women to vote, there was nothing about the status of slaves, etc. Instead, the Bible specifically states that all people are created equal before God (regardless of gender, social status, skin color, etc.) (Westphal, 2009, 110).

In the context of existential dialogic ethics Westphal reinterprets the Gadamerian concept of "conversation" as openness, even vulnerability to the voice of another. This, according to him, means "true listening". It sometimes means that a person (as a listener, observer, interlocutor) must accept some things that are against him, though nobody forces him to do it. Here Westphal means that a person has to perceive own ignorance, inferiority through the texts, works of art, communication (conversation) adequately, i.e. consciously and positively. The well-known Socratic concept of "intelligent ignorance" ("Docta ignorantia") should be an example.

Socratic dialogues, according to Westphal, are the basis of the Gadamerian model of “conversation” and, at least in his interpretation, its most important feature is not a deconstructive, refutable aspect, but wisdom that recognizes the personal ignorance of human being as opposed to omniscience. Therefore, his deconstructivism and refutation are not aimed at conquering the scientific method of cognition and replacing it with a better philosophical intuition, but actually aimed at the psychoanalytic defense of the openness. That is why, for Gadamer, most of the thoughts about interpretation as conversation mean “entering into dialogue with the text”. At the same time he insists that the model of a conversation between persons in spoken language is “more than a metaphor”. While the position of the interlocutor complements mine and conversely, the goal of “Bildung” is achieved. Westphal claims that Gadamer calls it “the fusion of horizons” (Westphal 2009, 117).

On the basis of the analysis of the Gadamer’s concept, Westphal emphasizes that “classic text” belong to certain communities that “found them” and are “sustained by communities”. And this means that interpretation of these texts is also a communal affair, a dialogical and not a monological process. If the Bible is the “classic text” of the Christian church, this church, in turn, is the community of the Bible’s interpretation. It belongs to the church’s identity and this is the conversation in which its members and its communities seek to understand the Bible and its subject matter: God and our relation to God” (Westphal 2009, 118).

5. Conclusions

Consequently, the development of the original version of the existential hermeneutics of religion by Westphal includes the fundamental provisions of Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutical project (hermeneutical circle, hermeneutics as *phronēsis*; “Bildung”; “conversation”; “the fusion of horizons”; application), rethought and reinterpreted nowadays in the context of Kierkegaard’s ethical-religious ideas (“hermeneutics of finiteness” and “hermeneutics of suspicion”). This has given the American philosopher of religion to interpret the Bible, on the one hand, as a historical classic work of art, and on the other hand, to speak about its beyond-historical, universal significance, about the life of the Bible as a work, as a way correlated with the way of human existence, assessed by Kierkegaard in the parameters of constant formation. According to Westphal’s interpretation, the Bible appears as a work of art that embodies the truth beyond any research method and correlates with the constant formation and dynamics of human existence and the existence of the Christian community in the historical and cultural process.

Notes

¹ Here, Westphal refers to “Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life” (see Fowl, Stephen E., and Jones, Gregory L. 1991).

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