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The Art of Biblical Hermeneutics: The Story of the Canaanite Woman

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Abstract

Biblical hermeneutics is originally utilized as a theory, a methodology and a formal process through which the interpreter employs certain principles and methods in order to derive the author's intended meaning and comment upon the different shades that a religious discourse carries. Using Gadamer's (1977) hermeneutical framework, the study examines how the four techniques (literal/moral/allegorical/anagogical) of biblical interpretation are not enough within scholarship to channel broader understanding of biblical texts and maps out how these levels of interpretation relate to each other. The corpus, which consists in the narrative of the Canaanite woman in its Matthean form, is qualitatively and quantitatively explored. Personal and demonstrative references as well as naming strategies are identified in the corpus and are qualitatively studied using the deictic anchorage to unveil their shifting relevance. The quantitative analysis then qualifies how frames are constructed using Simple Concordance Software for the frequency of keywords. The results divulge that the prospological-pragmatic interpretation proves the literal and moral interpretations and overrides the allegorical and anagogical ones. The findings also show that biblical hermeneutics is an art of understanding rather than a proper science. The study findings may be used by exegetes and biblical hermeneutics researchers to consider the artistic and the discursive processes in biblical texts.

Keywords: hermeneutics, pragmatics, exegesis, literal interpretation, naming, reference, deixis, allegory, anagogical interpretation, prospology

Introduction

Since this study falls into the scope of religious discourse, I may first start by giving a plain definition of hermeneutics as stated by George (2020) that "[h]ermeneutics is the study of interpretation. Hermeneutics plays a role in a

number of disciplines whose subject matter demands interpretative approaches". Forster (2007) has already clarified that hermeneutics is "the theory of interpretation i.e. the theory of achieving or understanding of texts, utterances, and so on". Theologically speaking, the term 'biblical hermeneutics,' as George (2020) states, "concerns the general principles for the proper interpretation of the Bible". Though some scholars (Kimmerle 1977; Hahn 1997; Forster 2007; Zimmermann 2015) relate the term 'hermeneutics' to interpretation in general which "occurs in many fields of study and also in day-to-day life" (Zimmermann 2015), I may claim that it fits well the context of biblical studies and more broadly religious discourse. My view goes in line with Thiselton (2009) who suggests that hermeneutics "explores how we read, understand and handle texts, especially those written in another time or in a context of life different from our own". This view is maintained by the recent definition given by the Encyclopedia Britannica (2023) that hermeneutics "is the study of the general principles of biblical interpretation. For both Jews and Christians throughout their studies, the primary purpose of hermeneutics, and of the exegetical methods employed in interpretation, has been to discover the truths and values expressed in the Bible".

Having agreed on this claim, it becomes a necessity to refer to the work of Origen. However, I do not intend to give a detailed review of Origen's approach. Rather, I incline to build on his work by adding another angle of interpretation: the pragmatic one. Origen relied on four major techniques while developing his interpretations. Heine (2019) refers to them as "figurative interpretation (*tropologia*), allegorical interpretation (*allègoria*), anagogical interpretation (*anagogè*), and prospological interpretation (*prosopon*)." Heine (2019) argues that the first three techniques are nearly similar "in that they all produce a meaning from a text that differs, sometimes quite strikingly, from what the literal words of the text say". Gadamer's (1977) model includes the "literal, moral, allegorical and anagogical" interpretations as the major types of biblical hermeneutics. Gadamer (1977), therefore, fused Origen's typology with Erasmus's. The latter "tended to limit the senses to three: literal, allegorical and tropological" (Mckim 1998). The

tropological is important for Erasmus as it is concerned with moral sense (Mckim 1998). Gadamer (1977) refers to literal interpretation as the "plain meaning conveyed by its grammatical construction and historical context". Moral interpretation "seeks to establish exegetical principles by which ethical lessons may be drawn from the various parts of the Bible" (ibid). Gadamer (1977) minutely distinguishes between 'allegorical' and 'anagogical' interpretations by stating that the former "interprets the biblical narratives as having a second level of reference beyond those persons, things and events explicitly mentioned in the text" whereas the latter "seeks to explain biblical events as they relate to or prefigure the life to come" (Gadamer 1977). I find the second typology yielded by Gadamer more convincing as it offers a gradual interpretation of biblical texts knowingly that the reading of Scriptures transcends the surface level of understanding. Moreover, this typology avoids the overlap between the four layers of interpretation. Back to 'prospological' exegesis introduced by Origen, Heine (2019) displays that this technique "focuses on identifying who is speaking in a text and sometimes also to whom the words are addressed". I will elaborate on this fourth technique by making it a pragmatic angle of interpretation while keeping the aforementioned techniques by Gadamer.

The literal interpretation of a biblical text might be absurd or it "conflicts with the doctrine of Christ or morality" (Mckim 1998). Therefore, I claim that allegorical and moral interpretations are necessary but not sufficient since "in modern theology, as in modern culture" (Bostock 1987) this type of interpretation "has become an unfashionable and indeed a discredited literary mode" (ibid). Bostock (1987) proceeds by stating that "[a]llegorical interpretations of the Bible, which were once considered normative, are now rejected by modern scholarship". This rejection is still debatable and even Bostock ends up by confessing that allegory "is a means of indicating and discerning truths which are hidden in parables and extended metaphors. As such, it can take many forms and can be used by poets or by theologians. But in either case its primary function is didactic. It has its origin in the philosophical perception of a spiritual world and of the need to

reveal that world" (Bostock 1987). I find this claim convincing but still needs 'meta-levels' of interpretation to meet the ends of biblical understanding. What I mean by 'meta-levels' are the anagogical and the pragmatic-prospological interpretations. Anagogical interpretations "elevate the meaning of myths above the human and the mundane, explaining them in natural, astronomical, or ethical terms" (Berg 2022) whereas 'pragmatic-prospological interpretation' deconstructs hidden ideologies within the discourse and lays bare the tacit communicative events.

As demonstrated above, the five techniques of biblical interpretation suggested by this study are not covered in great depth within scholarship and little to no work has been done on how they relate to each other. Therefore, as I enter the scholarly discussion on the story of the Canaanite woman, I will highlight how my modified typology of interpretation will be insightful and will contribute well to the field of study.

Many scholars (Wainwright 1994; Saenz 1997; Levine 2001; Hare 1993; Dolto 1980; Mukendi 1997; Garland 1993; Young 2001; Jackson 2002) believe that the story of the Canaanite woman carries cultural, political, gender, economic and ethnic affinities. Hare (1993) considers that the Matthean Jesus is depicted in the story as a tribal messiah with a culturally-limited mission: converting the "lost sheep of Israel" (Matthew 10: 5-6). However, Hare (1993) shows that Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman gave another perspective to his mission by making it universal. Wainwright (1994; 1998; 2001) views the story from a post-colonial angle and claims that "the Matthean Jesus confronted Roman imperialism and Israelite cultural and religious structures" (Wainwright 1998) along his journey of proselytizing. Even the Canaanite mother, by her silenced voice, incarnates what "goes on in a world filled with inequalities" (Wainwright 2001) because "[l]ike many colonized and marginal voices, the space to speak from is never peacefully negotiated, it is rather (re) claimed by means of resistance and insistence" (ibid).

The feminist view (Saenz 1997; Fiorenza 1992; Kitzberger 2000, Schumacher 2003; Ross 2004) considers that the Canaanite mother is doubly victimized, by her writer and

her reader, who "mistreated and incarcerated [her] in the oppressive boundaries of the text" (Saenz 1997). Fiorenza (1992) adds that "feminist biblical interpretation meets resistance when it seeks to enter scholarly discourses on equal terms. In recent years, feminist biblical interpretation has continuously sought to enter the 'house' of biblical criticism as an 'insider' to interrupt biblical criticism's androcentric isolation and to challenge its prevailing discourses". Regarding the story of the Canaanite woman, Fiorenza (1992) comments that the woman's attempts "to enter the discourses of the discipline on equal terms often receive no response at all-'but he did not respond to her word' or they are met with the reaction of Jesus' male disciples who wish to send the woman away because her voice is too loud and noisy". Recently, Rukundwa and Van Aarde (2009) have interpreted the story from a psychoanalytic perspective by stating that the mother "seemed to be familiar with a known Judean liturgy" through her very simple and polite prayer. The psychoanalytic reading extends further with Dolto (1980) and Mukendi (1997) who claim that Jesus' encounter with the woman renders him a savior and a messiah who transcends "cultural and religious barriers". Dolto (1980) concludes by saying that "Jesus learned through these circumstances that he was to take care of all, regardless of their social-political and geographical provenance". The social reading suggested by Levine (2001) claims that the Canaanite mother "provides a major means by which social hierarchies can, finally be broken down".

The rough above-mentioned review of literature on the story of the Canaanite woman is meant to show the intricate nature of the story and how a one-sided interpretation does not suffice. This fact ultimately proves that there is an urgent need for a trans-disciplinary view of the Matthean story, specifically, and biblical studies in general. The former scholars previously dealt with might have followed the four steps of interpretation (literal/moral/allegorical/anagogical) in their biblical hermeneutics which led to such findings. However, I will add the pragmatic angle of interpretation and check if those findings remain valid or not.

1. Method

Though the narrative of the Canaanite woman is mentioned in the gospels of Mark (7: 25-30) and Matthew (15: 22-29), I will focus on the narrative "in its Matthean form, where Jesus' negative attitude is more emphatic and harsher than in Mark" (Falade 2017). Another important variable in Matthew is Jesus' confession of the woman's great faith 'O woman, great is your faith' (Matthew 15: 28) which is not focused upon in Mark. This variable displays "how her exemplary faith compares with aspects of the disciples' 'little faith' and the Jewish religious leaders' lack of faith" (O'Donnell 2021). The interpretation will follow Gadamer's (1977) typology with its four steps (literal/moral/allegorical/anagogical) as a first level of analysis since this typology synthesizes the pioneering works of Origen and Erasmus. The second level will encompass the 'prospological-pragmatic' perspective which merges the traditional view suggested by Origen (prospological) with a contemporary one (pragmatic) suggested by this study. The analysis of the corpus is mainly qualitative as it is "an analysis of the dialectic relationships between discourse… and other elements of social practice" (Fairclough 2003, 205) and it gives a thorough understanding of "the wider socio-cultural, political, ideological, institutional and historical context and structures surrounding the text" (Fairclough 1989, 26). The qualitative analysis will be validated by a quantitative analysis based on Simple Concordance software (version 4.05), for its easy manipulation, in order to list the words used in the corpus and their frequency and subsequently detect among them those that are supposed to construct the frame. Pragmatically speaking, I will highlight the shifting of pronouns as well as the use of demonstratives since 'This' means something which is 'related to me' while 'That' means 'out yonder' (Lakoff 1974, 352). Deixis, which is seen as a "human language activity" (Mey 2001, 8), is therefore deployed in the analysis to decipher the personal and demonstrative references. Naming is also deemed relevant in my analysis since it "is inseparable from the speaker's own feelings towards the *delocuté* and is inevitably colored by them" (Triki 1989).

2. Results

This section deals with the major findings derived from the analysis of the corpus. It starts by the literal and the moral interpretations. Next, it sheds light on the allegorical and anagogical interpretations and finally suggests a new angle of analysis which is the pragmatic-prospological one.

A) Literal Interpretation

Sproul (1997) states that "the literal sense of the scripture was defined as the plain and evident meaning". Based on this parameter, the story is interpreted as a Canaanite mother who has a demon-possessed daughter coming to Jesus and supplicating him to heal her daughter "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly" (Matthew 15:22). The way she addresses Jesus (Lord/Son of David) indicates that the mother is well informed about his prophecy and divine power. Her request seems meek, honest, humble and goal-oriented. However, this request is doubly rebuffed: through his silence and through the incitement of his disciples to ignore her "[s]end her away, for she keeps crying out after us" (Matthew 15:23). Jesus' silence may denote deep thinking about whether the woman's beseeching deserves help or not. Yet, his disciples' negative response is twice approved by him when he says: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matthew 15:24) and "it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs" (Matthew 15:26). If Jesus' response stopped at the level of verse (24), we might see things normal but the more the woman begs, the harsher his reply becomes. This confusing response to her request "toss it to the dogs" literally means that the woman is impure and unclean. Dogs in Jewish culture symbolize the starving and sickly dogs rummaging streets and garbage. References to dogs as such are used throughout the holy scripture as in (Luke 16:19) where "Lazarus's miserable plight is made even more wretched by the dogs that would lick his sores" (Mel 2009). The word 'dog' is also used pejoratively by Paul (Phil 3:2) to show how dogs are unclean scavengers and to depict heretics and false teachers (Mel 2009). The woman's

third intervention "Yes it is Lord. Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table" (Matthew 15:27) literally means domestic pets living with their masters and being close during eating times. It may also refer to street dogs which approach people at eating places to be fed. But in general, the woman's boldness and persistence strike Jesus who cries out saying "Oh, woman. Your faith is great" (Matthew 15:28) and on the spot her daughter is healed.

If we sum up the story, we will be ending with a 'ping pong' encounter where the woman starts by approaching, kneeling and finally uttering wise words. Jesus' response is also gradable as he keeps silent, gives a harsh answer and then decides to be cooperative. We do not have a preacher and a listener. Rather, there is a balanced dialogue where the supplicant terminates by overwhelming her counterpart.

B) Moral Interpretation

Gadamer (1977) argues that moral interpretation "is necessitated by the belief that the Bible is the rule not only of faith but also of conduct". Given as such, the story of the Canaanite woman is replete with moralities as in her words of supplication which are full of ritual and salvific meanings. The lexical field that she utilizes (Lord/Son of David/master/mercy) is a sign of putting pride aside in favor of humility while addressing a holy spirit. Her words apply to the church at present or the kingdom of heaven in the future. Another moral lesson that might be drawn from the disciples' response is that many people are selfish since they do not consider the burden of others. Their reply "[s]end her away, for she keeps crying out after us" (Matthew 15:23) denotes that the woman is not entitled to the miracle because of her identity. The fact of being a gentile (non-Jewish) puts her on the margin. "If Jews were 'in' and gentiles were 'out', if men were 'in' and women were 'out' in Matthean's church, then gentiles were probably the most marginalized" (Jackson 2002). However, her ethnic belonging does not hamper her from believing in the super and divine power of Jesus which so many Jews do not recognize. This implicit comparison between gentiles' faith and non-gentiles' teaches us that faith is not granted on the basis of race or

ethnicity. Rather, it transpires that God pays attention to recurrent prayers by people who do not get distracted by what others think of them. The reference to Jesus as "Son of David" signals that the Canaanite woman is conscious about the gentile genealogy of Christ (Matthew 1:2-5/ Genesis 38) and she is in the course of reminding him. These reminiscing words have double effect on Jesus: forcing him not to forget his origin and urging him to lend a helping hand. Depicted as "the lifeblood of this story" (O'Day 2011), this Canaanite woman's persistence despite the insult shows her intention to create a thriving life for her and for her daughter in a culture that "marginalizes living with experiences we might understand today as complicated behaviors or disorders" (Bogocius 2002).

The focal moral lesson that I derive from this story is a submissive woman who asks for "crumbs". The fact of demanding portions from a 'main course' tells acceptance, on her part, of second-class citizenship and gratefulness of a 'dog' though being kicked away. This may imply that sacred texts are questionable as they can advocate and re-inscribe patriarchal power-relations. So, are we in front of a misogynist scripture that is presupposed to give moral sense for all? Do gentiles need all this submissive behavior to be counted by Jews? Is this the appropriate way of instructing people to behave well? Is moral interpretation sufficient to get an insightful understanding of the Bible?

C) Allegorical Interpretation

"If the moral sense was that which instructed men how to behave[,t]he allegorical sense revealed the context of faith" (Sproul 1997). The moral interpretation as I argued above (section 3.2) still needs more angles of interpretation to be validated or overridden. Kister (2013) assures that "biblical narratives are given a non-literal, symbolic interpretation of a sort rather rare in (but not absent from) rabbinic literature and more akin to what might be labeled allegorical interpretation". The bone of contention in the narrative mainly revolves around the words 'dogs' and 'bread' I guess. Does Jesus mean 'loaves of bread' or 'basic food' or 'sustenance'? This question is legitimate since the story, I believe, cannot be separated from the general

context of the bible where Jesus in (Matthew 6:11) says "give us today our daily bread" or when the Lord said to Moses in (Exodus 16) "I will rain down bread from heaven for you". In so doing, Jesus may mean that he is the 'bread of life' and his mission is solely designated to the 'lost sheep of Israel'. The fact of saying "it is not right to take the children's bread" may be explicated as follows: "these people, to whom I am sent, are lost children and I am their savior and protector". If we go further within this context, we may end up by claiming that "these are parentless children who need a holy father to be saved". All the remaining people are not included in this mission. However, is this exclusion of the gentiles based on God's recommendations or Jesus' choice or the disciples' unwillingness? The first and the third claims, I reckon, do not apply since Jesus confessed his great impression towards the woman's faith but we are still in a dilemma because without the woman's boldness and righteousness Jesus would never choose to heal her daughter and highlight her 'great faith'. This allegorical interpretation would suffice if the wording 'dog' is not mentioned in the story. So, why 'dogs' specifically? I argued in section (3.1) that dogs are symbols of impurity and uncleanness in a Jewish culture but what about Greek, Canaanite and Syrophoenician cultures? Mel (2009) claims that "[t]he woman's Greek culture may also have given her an appreciation of the positive quality of dogs" and Dufton (1989) "postulates that Jesus' Jewish background gives the word 'Kynaria' the sense of 'dogs outside', while the woman's Hellenistic culture brings an implication of 'dogs outside'". Dufton (1989) proceeds by stating that the "Jews were not pet lovers. To them, dogs were dirty, unpleasant and savage animals….Everyone knew that the Greek had a special fondness for dogs…Only a gentile, perhaps only a Greek, could have spoken the memorable words about dogs eating the scraps under the table, for no Jew would have followed dogs to be there". Ami (2016) dives more into biblical metaphors and considers that the "Hebrew word for 'Canaan' comes from the root of the verb 'to buy' and even today we can hear the expression 'I don't buy it' when some idea or explanation is rejected". Ami (2016) concludes that "a Canaanite is a person who will 'buy into anything' and 'accept any teaching' just like a

dog will accept and eat almost any type of meat with equal enthusiasm".

These claims, somehow, seem convincing but this interpretation remains allegorical as we do not have any sign about references to one's culture from any of the speakers. From another side, there is also no record that Jesus treated with disrespect the supplicants during his healing encounters. Even if we consider that Jesus explains a family affair to the woman and reminds her that she is an outsider, it becomes unethical not to invite a 'guest' for food especially that this guest is wretched.

Allegorical interpretation, therefore, may lead us to other horizons of research about putting Jesus' reference to 'dogs' and his 'disrespectful' response in the entry of 'prophets' hamartia'. Therefore, other perspectives of interpretation are still needed to deconstruct these biblical messages.

D) Anagogical Interpretation

Back to Gadamer (1977), anagogical interpretation "seeks to explain biblical events or matters of this world so that they relate to the life to come". So, if we look at the narrative from this scope, we might touch futuristic promises on the part of Jesus to the woman. His reply that his mission does not include gentiles denotes that other prophets will be sent to you and the way of salvation is never closed. This may comfort her if she is a true believer in the life to come. If not, the end of the story assures that she got indulgence through Jesus' confession that her faith is great. Recently, Felecan (2018) has shown the anagogical layers of the story by saying that the "last verbal intervention of the Savior sheds light on His behavior throughout the encounter-He postpones, delays the verdict in order to offer attendants an instance of faith that is more treasured precisely because it was professed by an outsider. The reward matches the trials to which the woman was subjected". It is, thus, an implicit teaching, by Jesus, of how help is granted to non-believers which will be disseminated, through the woman, to others during future courses. The woman's faith is gradually boosted and in this way she should behave within her community. She is given the responsibility of

expanding her community's imagination and guiding them to the right path. The refusal of Jesus to give his children's bread to others unveils that 'charity begins at home' and affirms that the notion of family has to be strictly preserved. However, the woman's plea confirms the reverence of all human differences: whether physical, psychological or financial. Anagogically speaking, her call for her demon-possessed daughter is a universal call for more passion within our human family and brotherhood. It is a call for more equity, compassion and self-denial so that peace will propagate and love will be maintained. The woman is also "symbolic of the struggle of gentiles and women for participation within the life of new Christian communities" (Fiorenza 1992). So, this story "may reflect the catalytic influence of women in enlarging the ethnic boundaries of the early Christian community" (ibid). Despite the thoughtful claim given by Fiorenza (1992), I may say that our anagogical interpretation allows us to compare between the contemporary western cultural context and the ancient one (Jesus' time). My focal point here is the wording "woman" which sounds weird and cold in our modern culture. Nevertheless, there are other women whom he addressed in this manner like Jesus' mother "(at Cana, John 2:4; at the Cross, John 19:26), Mary Magdalene (at the tomb after the resurrection, John 20:13-15), a crippled woman who was healed (Luke 13:12), the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:21) and the adulteress saved from stoning (John 8:10)" (Mell 2009). None of these has overtones of cold or misogynist address; rather, it was the norm at that time. Therefore, the anagogical interpretation refutes the feminist claims at this level and in so doing the story delves into considerable insights. Another instance that maintains this view is Jesus' response to the great faith of the woman. Although the Israelites are the sole target in Jesus' ministry, exceptions occur and display that Jesus "is more concerned with matters of the heart than with ethnic boundaries" (Mel 2009). The radical change that happened to Jesus shows that the redemptive plan, firstly targeted to Israel, could at any time be altered regardless of ethnicity. If we consider that Jesus is the 'word of God', we may land on the interpretation that the Matthean Gospel evokes a new tradition which is arguing with

God and demanding interference. The woman seems submissive but powerful at the same time. This 'smooth power' is striking as it succeeds in turning one's negative opinion into a welcoming one. The anagogical interpretation, therefore, is replete with spiritual and eschatological dimensions as I consider the woman an exemplary monk who does believe in a divine power. Even Jesus' response unveils his unwillingness to let a non-Jewish faith be not redeemed since his mission is primarily eschatological.

E) Prospological-Pragmatic Interpretation

Who is speaking to whom about what or whom and in what social capacity? This would be my paramount concern in this section so that we get a more perspicuous interpretation of the Canaanite woman narrative. I will shed light here on personal and demonstrative references in an attempt to figure out the discursive processes within the story.

If we focus on verses (26-28) where Jesus refers to 'dogs' and the woman refers to 'crumbs', we have a third person human 'Them' replaced by a third person non-human 'the dogs'. Strikingly, the speaker addresses multi-addressees. He is apparently speaking to the woman in front of him while addressing the others, i.e., the gentiles in general. He is also addressing his disciples who are listening to him at the time of speaking. The third person pronoun 'They' replaced by 'children' is meant for the speaker's fellows and all the others who belong to them while 'They' replaced by 'dogs' is targeted toward the woman asking for a solution and her fellows who are absent at the time of speaking. Thus, there is a shift from a second person pronoun 'You' to a third person non-human. In this case, there is dehumanization of the addressee by the speaker. However, the woman answers by taking a third person non-human to describe herself 'dogs' and a third person human to refer to the addressee 'their master's table'. Using a third person pronoun when speaking to someone is meant to belittle the speaker and elevate the addressee. The woman doubly distances herself. On the one hand, she refers to herself by a third person non-human pronoun and, on the other hand, she refers to the addressee by a third person plural pronoun. A

close look at deixis and especially at the use of personal pronouns depicts a privilege shown to Jewish people and an underestimation of the gentiles. Person deixis always shifts towards the side of the "Lost sheep of Israel" (Matthew 15:24).

Naming the woman or referring to her as Canaanite or Syro-phoenician is very telling as it shows that she does not have a real name, in other words a clear identity. Throughout the story, she is deprived of a name which labels her as a human being in society. It is even harder for her to hear Jesus referring to her as a "dog". Dogs are seen as unclean, much like pigs in Jewish culture as argued before. Jesus displays to her that God's election of Israel as the 'Chosen People' is still valid despite Israel's unfaithfulness. The reference to her as a gentile bluntly puts her as an enemy to the people of Israel. The book of Genesis reads that Canaan is the land promised by God to the patriarchs (Genesis 12:50). The book of Judges and Joshua mention the conquest of the land and consequently the settlements of the Israelites in Canaan are meant to fulfill God's promise. The Canaanites, therefore, are depicted as Israel's enemies and the pagan opponents who are doomed to be expelled from the land that is promised by God to Israel. So, the Canaanite woman in the story is referred to as a Canaanite, then as a dog and finally as a woman. The successive rebuffs towards her by Jesus Christ added insult to injury. As Meier notes: "the woman has three strikes against her before she even starts: she is a woman; she is the mother of a demoniac; and worst of all she is a pagan Canaanite, a member of the ancient enemy of Israel" (Meier 1986, 399). Nevertheless, Jesus is referred to as a 'Lord' and 'Son of David'. The woman clearly displays her meekness and humility expressed by her acceptance and affirmation of her second order status as a gentile. Jesus deepens the woman's inferiority when he refers to his people with the wording "sheep". The latter symbolizes peace, kindness and submission since a sheep is a pet which is guided by a shepherd. It is an animal which is always seen as a prey by other animals. Jesus uses an ethnic slur 'dogs' to designate the gentiles among whom the Canaanite woman is (Levine 1988). The metaphor of the puppies was frequently used in Orthodox and Judaism to refer to the gentiles.

Wainwright comments about the issue by claiming the "commonly accepted position is that 'dogs' was a derogatory term used by the Jews to speak of gentiles. There is no doubt that it was intended as insulting or degrading, as the use of the term in scripture suggests" (Wainwright 1991). I may seem here redundant as I have gone through the multiplicity of references to 'dog' in the previous sections. However, this prospological-pragmatic perspective functions as a sharp reminder that the reference to dogs cannot carry other interpretations in Jewish culture but the so mentioned.

I can shed more light on this view through the analysis of demonstrative reference through this sample: "A Canaanite woman from that area came and cried out" (Mathew 15:22). The woman referred to is viewed as someone coming from a far, unknown and mysterious place. Her native town is distanced from the speaker's sphere in order to declare that the woman spoken of does not belong to 'Us'. Rather, she is regarded as the 'Other' who represents oddness, non-accountability and even threat. My view could be validated through a quantitative analysis of the frequency of personal references and negative connotations. The overall word count of the story is 140 words. Twenty words out of them have submissive, pejorative and negative meanings which could not pass by in silence and which could not be considered as non-remarkable.

Table 1. Frequency of Keywords related to supplication and negativity

Mercy	Demon	Bowed	Crying	Fall	Horribly	Throw	Dogs	Out	Eat
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	3	1

Begged	Crumbs	Healed	Help	Canaanite	Lost	Away	Suffering	Knelt	Toss
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

All these key words depict the wretched situation of the woman and her urgent need for a safer place to land on. The preposition 'out' is repeated 3 times to signal that she is out of 'the house of Israel'. The Canaanite woman is depicted as a woman who is dramatically rebuffed and cast from the territory of 'the house of Israel'. The categorization of words shows that most of the vocabulary used is about her miserable and wretched situation even though she is viewed at the end as

having great faith. She refers three times to Jesus by calling him 'Lord' and 'Son of David'. Thus, she varies her ways of supplication before saying wise words in order to make Jesus pity her. However, Jesus refers to her as 'woman' and even the scripture twice refers to her as such. The table reveals that nearly all the lexis related to her is negative. The focus is put on her wrong side more than on the positive one. The general lexical field obscures her great faith and foregrounds her misery and loss. If I am more accurate I should say that the real number of words, after omitting prepositions and pronouns, in the story is 59. So, words which have negative connotations towards the Canaanite woman approximately constitute 30% of the total words which renders the story a contentious one knowingly that it is included in a holy-sacred Scripture. It is a Canaanite woman-based story and this transpires from the frequency of personal pronouns in the following table:

Table 2. Frequency of Personal Pronouns

His	Her
1	4

The person pronoun 'her' is used 4 times while 'his' is only used once. The story turns around the gentile woman who constantly asks for salvation. She begs Jesus four times and she is rebuffed because of four reasons. She is a Canaanite, a woman, an outsider and a demon - possessed. She is put in a frame of loss and by so doing, I may wonder: is this the right strategy to test one's faith? Shouldn't be glad to find a person led astray seeking help and conversion? Doesn't he/she deserve redemption and salvation on the spot?

3. Discussion

This story is really controversial and "it is necessary for the exegete to be trained in the biblical languages, grammar, rhetoric, history and other secular disciplines" (Mckim 1998). I do not claim that I am an exegete of Scripture but as a discourse analyst, I intend to contribute to the scholarship of biblical hermeneutics. I totally side with Hanson (2002) who

criticized Origen of making "biblical hermeneutics into a true and proper science and in this sense conditioned in a decisive manner all successive Patristic exegesis…even that of his adversaries". The old debate over whether biblical hermeneutics is a science or an art is no longer valid, I guess, since biblical texts as it transpires from my analysis of the Canaanite woman narrative are elusive and do not abide by scientific norms or scientific commitment. Similarly to Gadamer (1977), I assure that biblical hermeneutics "is above all a practice, the art of understanding". We cannot use this term or confine it in a pure technical context. The biblical text, as other holy texts, is a multi-layered text that carries different shades. The mundane interpretation intermingles with the spiritual, eschatological and philosophical interpretations. The recent study of Heine (2019) proves my thoughts on how scriptural exegesis is a theological contemplation on 'sacred history'. This is a nicely- put metaphor by Heine because holy texts need spirit, soul and reason. In other words, they need an artistic vision so that we do not feel chained by pure scientific regulations which hinder our deep understanding. It is a transcendental reading that we need, above all ecclesiastical and ethical limits.

My second point flashed within this study is the extent to which Origen's and Erasmus' ancient typologies of biblical hermeneutics are still valid nowadays. Mckim (1998) clarifies that Erasmus "combined a philological with a spiritual (allegorical and tropological) approach to scripture. The philological method is concerned with textual, literary and historical criticism [whereas the tropological] can be accommodated to the moral sense". Erasmus built on the work of Origen and both of them, ultimately, highlight the literal, figurative and spiritual sides. These sides are really important for our understanding but I argue that the discursive-pragmatic side is also insightful and urgent to get a thorough view of the matter. The fact of manipulating demonstrative and personal references, the resort to a given strategy of naming and even the analysis of speech acts and politeness forms, though they are not dealt with in this study, cannot be put on the margin. Van Dijk (2006), for instance, states that "people are being

acted upon against their fully conscious will and interests, and that manipulation is in the best interest of the manipulator" (Van Dijk 2006, 361). The structural manipulation, despite its subtlety within the story, is important in validating or overriding previous claims.

The prospological-pragmatic angle that I deployed in my analysis validates the feminist and the post-colonial interpretations. Fiorenza "highlights intriguing connections for Christian women to ponder, for in connection with the struggles of contemporary women within the church and the academy to have their voices heard, the Canaanite continues to be a powerful symbol" (Gench 2004). Apart from gender, the prospological-pragmatic analysis also sheds light on the dichotomy of 'Us vs. Them' (Van Dijk 2006) which still exists in modern time, and coincides with the post-colonial findings. The social context in which the gentiles found themselves was a context of negation, torture and stereotyping. Their group identity is devalued and blurred. Their fatal mistakes and wrong beliefs are much focused on. Consequently, they are rendered deficient and are viewed as ethnic minorities who deserve vulnerable positions. Stereotyping them makes them people of "another kind" rather than "our kind" (Liff & Wajcman 1996; Kirton & Greene 2003). At that time, the Torah's prohibition of intermarriage with the seven Canaanite nations was not due to a fear of contracting ritual impurity through physical contact with a gentile but, as Epstein (1942, 158) noted, but it was based on the fear that intimate contact with Canaanites will lead Israelites to imitate their idolatrous and immoral ways. Klawans (1995, 292) states that "though not inherently impure, gentiles are inherently profane. It is for this reason that gentiles were ultimately excluded from the sanctuary". The gentiles came at a time when a new religion was emerging and when a prophet was preaching all over the holy lands. The Israelites, themselves, were not on the right path which necessitated care for them at the expense of the gentiles. The latter had to be distanced in order to build the union and unity of Israel. Jews had to be pure from any stranger who might render them impure "thus said the Lord: let no alien, uncircumcised in spirit and flesh, enter My

sanctuary – no alien whatsoever among the people of Israel" (Ezekiel 44: 9). Stereotyping perpetuates oppression against dominated groups. Therefore, a discourse of racism occurs when talking about the gentiles in order to show the supremacy of Jews. It is this racial supremacy that emerges: "In praying use not vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking" (Matthew 10).

The prospological-pragmatic interpretation, thus, validates the literal and the moral interpretations as discussed above and overrides the allegorical and anagogical interpretations since they are considered as manipulative justifications seeking to shatter the readers' understanding. Figurative interpretation remains figurative and replete with insinuations. The literal interpretation, despite its directness, seems to be the most convincing one because the discursive patterns that emanated from my prospological-pragmatic analysis prove it. The same applies for the moral interpretation as the pragmatic angle lays bare all the communicative events within the story and in so doing we deconstruct hidden ideologies and get the real moral sense of the story.

4. Conclusion

I may close my thoughts on the story through a nice quote by Gench (2004) who suggests that the "the Canaanite woman's story invites us to ponder the ways in which ethnic, gender, and socio-economic differences and prejudices continue to be reflected in our own human experience. Moreover, the story invites us to ponder the role of human initiative and persistence in challenging and overcoming differences and prejudices". This universal thought of Gench is much better than anti-Semitic or racist views because I also call to ponder Jesus' response. The fact that his response is inhuman and disrespectful does not mean that we do not believe in his divine power and prophetic message. Rather, we should daringly ponder the claim that whether this is the original version of the Canaanite woman narrative or not? And whether the Scripture was distorted or not.

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