

UDK 1Ricoeur, P.

27-23:1

<https://doi.org/10.53745/bs.94.5.14>

Received: 10. 1. 2025

Accepted: 15. 2. 2025

Original scientific paper

## TEXT AND ACTION. INSIGHTS INTO THE HERMENEUTIC PHILOSOPHY OF PAUL RICŒUR FOR CHURCH APPLICATION

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### Abstract

Ricoeur's desire to understand man led him to hermeneutics through reflective philosophy and phenomenology. He tried to combine a more ontological approach with the demand of structuralism and modern science for a general and precise method. We will show that it is the text that enables Ricoeur to do both; to understand the ground of being and at the same time to conduct certain objective research. His fundamental position that the more we interpret, the better we understand, requires a certain distantiation. It is this hermeneutic stance that leads him to open interpretations that emphasize the human desire for the transcendent. For Ricoeur, it is precisely this human entanglement in the finiteness of possibilities and the infinity of desire that is the path to religiosity. It can only be approached indirectly, through symbols, rituals and texts. With this in mind, we will show how Ricoeur applies his hermeneutics to biblical texts. On the basis of his interpretation of the Bible, we will show what consequences this has for the Church itself.

*Key words:* Paul Ricoeur, hermeneutics, text, distantiation, Bible, understanding.

### Introduction

Understanding, especially when it comes to explaining global issues, is a growing social challenge in a flood of different forms of communication. It is not just a matter of understanding between people in a variety of conflict situations that they cannot resolve on their own on a personal or societal level; it is the process of understanding at all levels that is being challenged. This

includes conflict situations and times when we think we understand everything. The whole process of searching for truth has become questionable today. Since Socrates the search for truth has had the goal of gaining knowledge; knowledge that does not depend on different interpretations. However, the very emphasis on the word understanding implies that the truth depends on one's own judgment and on the current situation in which the interpretation takes place.

In the postmodern, the emphasis is on transcending limitations, on overcoming all possible measures that would indicate what is better or worse, more successful or less successful. Above all, it is about giving the individual their rightful place and rights in a democratic society. And also to build and strengthen the resilience of society as a whole against attempts to abuse the democratic process of collective decision-making. The transition from a truth that is independent of individual perception to a truth that always depends on individual understanding has seriously shaken the foundations of beliefs based on objective truth. This is not just about certain authoritarian views, but about all metaphysics, which postmodernism rejects because it sees it as an instrument of control and coercion (Klun 2022, 985). Writing this with a capital letter, as Truth, makes the understanding and application of the process of understanding even more problematic. Any viewpoint that is supposed to lead to the Truth that liberates is deeply questioned.

If we look at the realm of faith and limit ourselves to the Catholic Church, the question of understanding is very much present. When we ask about understanding, we presuppose the truth that follows this process. The journey from the simple conviction that the Catholic Church is the only and true path to salvation has taken different directions since the Second Vatican Council. Postmodern interpretations have done much to make many doubt their faith, let alone their belonging to the Church. Pope St John Paul II stated at the turn of the millennium: »According to some of them, the time of certainties is irrevocably past, and the human being must now learn to live in a horizon of total absence of meaning, where everything is provisional and ephemeral. In their destructive critique of every certitude, several authors have failed to make crucial distinctions and have called into question the certitudes of faith.« (John Paul II FR 1998, 91) It is this uncertainty that can lead to a search for clear and unchangeable positions, which in the field of religion often leads to conservatism and ultimately to fundamentalism. But it can also be seen as the end of the search for a deeper and more certain truth that provides answers to fundamental human questions. The Pope combines the relativism of postmod-

ernism with radical phenomenology: »A radically phenomenalist or relativist philosophy would be ill-adapted to help in the deeper exploration of the riches found in the word of God.« (John Paul II FR 1998, 82) Our aim is to show how an originally phenomenological approach, which develops into a hermeneutic philosophy, can contribute to an understanding in which truth is not only a process of individual understanding, but can also be given by Revelation and goes beyond mere personal and momentary opinion. The French thinker Paul Ricoeur, himself a philosopher who tried to move from bare interpretivism to the openness of a believer in the Word, will help us in this aim.

### **1. Hermeneutical presuppositions of Ricoeur's philosophy**

In his long career, Ricoeur has brought together various streams of philosophical hermeneutics and applied them to fields ranging from literature, politics and even theology. He himself has always stressed that he is not a theologian or a biblical scholar, but a philosopher who grew up and lives in the Christian tradition (Ricoeur 1994, 24). To understand his hermeneutics, it is useful to know the three main influences: the initial reflexive philosophy, then the encounter with phenomenology and the often-difficult confrontation with structuralism and later analytic philosophy. In one of his first major works, he establishes a fundamental anthropological starting point which slowly opens the door to hermeneutics (Kearney 2017, 2-5). Ricoeur's anthropological starting point lies in a phenomenological understanding of the process of cognition. Whenever we first encounter an object or a phenomenon, we are limited to a certain aspect. Our senses limit us and provide only restricted information. But we want to know the whole object or phenomenon. Our interpretation is preceded by the desire to know. It is human nature to strive for understanding. This is not only for the sake of mere survival, but to elevate man beyond what is conveyed by the senses. Despite this emphasis on man's desire to know, to understand, there is a desire at the basis of existence. Ricoeur is always guided by the conviction that the desire, the intention, precedes the understanding, the concept. In this desire to understand we see only a part of an object, but we use words to capture the whole meaning; we name the whole phenomenon. We see only the trunk of the tree and we say that there is a tree in front of us. By learning language alone, we are trained to conceive of the whole, not just what we perceive with our senses. We can see that the process of interpretation is fully involved in the language itself, and thus subject to misinterpretation.

»It also follows that the verb, human activity, precedes the noun, bare knowledge. The distance between the finite noun (the name we give to things) and the infinite verb (the predication of meaning) creates a primordial disproportion, an imbalance.« (Arthos 2019, 172) Recognizing and naming objects is the easiest part. It is much more complicated when it comes to naming one's own feelings and opinions. The root of all this lies in the limited capacity of human cognition: »because of the object's obvious property of always showing itself from only one side, then another.« (Ricoeur 1986, 24) If I am aware of this limitation of my understanding, I have already overcome it, because in doing so I open the door to creativity: »It is also upon the thing itself that I transgress my perspective. In point of fact, I can express this onesidedness only by expressing all the other sides that I do not currently see . . . I do not come upon this limiting act directly but reflectively as I apprehend the perspectivity of perception through reflection on the onesidedness of the perceived object.« (26) The awareness that cognition is not an automatic process through sensory perception triggers the phase of reflexivity. This reflection leads to the discovery of the concept of signification. »Thus I judge of the entire thing by going beyond its given side into the thing itself. This transgression is the intention to signify.« (26) The process of meaning-making is infinite, it leads us to endless striving. Finally, it also opens the door to transcendence; we long for the infinite meaning of everything.

That is why Ricoeur believes that before human thinking, there is willing. Man wants to understand, and he wants to live in a world that he must interpret all the time. The deep desire for understanding, which is not limited to the world outside us, but also includes an understanding of our own self, is the fundamental starting point for Ricoeur's hermeneutic philosophy. In this way, he extends the old regional hermeneutics, which developed through interpretation of the Bible, classical texts and law, to the ontological field, as M. Heidegger understood it. But it retains the methods of classical hermeneutics because it sees them as a better methodological basis for a path to truth that is worth incorporating into real life. And above all, because he is aware that Heidegger's repositioning of the 'technical' hermeneutic into an ontological one has shifted the focus from the concrete person and the concrete situation to the metaphysical environment of being as such (Ricoeur 1989, 10).

In order to go beyond Heidegger's hermeneutics of being, Ricoeur finds parallels in Gadamer. His starting point of historical conditionality and the focus of the investigation of the process of understanding on the consequences

of the influence of so-called prejudices on the hermeneutic process is a good starting point for concentrating on the concrete situation and person. Gadamer saw hermeneutic understanding as the center of the practical life of experience. This choice between direct (which can be understood as the classical interpretation of texts) and indirect (which is the ontological understanding of being as such) modes of understanding is the basis for the difference between regional and general hermeneutics. »Ricoeur's double allegiance – the older hermeneutic tradition of textual exegesis and its newer Heideggerian appropriation as ontology – is replicated in the structure of his narrative theory. Narrative understanding becomes an off shoot of hermeneutic understanding as a second-order process, as Ricoeur describes in Volume 1 of *Time and Narrative*: »It is the task of hermeneutics, to reconstruct the set of operations by which a work lifts itself above the opaque depths of living, acting, and suffering, to be given by an author to readers who receive it and thereby change their acting. The extraordinary thing about this second-order task is that it has a primary ontological function: I think that it is always through the mediation of structuring operations that one apprehends the fundamental meaning of existence.« (Arthos 2019, 96-97) As mentioned at the beginning, Ricoeur is rooted in the human desire to understand. This is not an end in itself, but leads to the good life, as he derives it from Aristotle. But in order to be able to direct our life, to transform it, to understand it anew, a method that goes beyond previous understanding, a certainty, is essential in the process of this understanding. Hermeneutics allows and demands a distance, because Ricoeur's fundamental claim is that the more we interpret, the better we understand. It is narrative that makes this possible and leads us to a deeper understanding of ourselves, to ontology.

»We can safely say that Heidegger's fundamental ontology short-circuited the passage of hermeneutic identity through linguistic culture by confining itself to an analysis of the experiential structures that make up our being-in-the-world. Ricoeur spoke of a 'detour' and of an 'indirect route' to being-in-the-world to emphasize the discursive mediation of direct experience. We have to turn around and look closely at that mediation to understand experience at all. Now, indirection is not rejection.« (Arthos 2019, 13) This distancing only allows a possibility for what Ricoeur sets out at the outset. In every interpretation we want to understand ourselves, to get in touch with others and to integrate into a whole of understanding. It is therefore important how we understand and approach the whole process of interpretation. And for him, the text is the basis for understanding the whole process of hermeneutics.

## 2. Universalization of the text as a hermeneutic path to action

Since we have already established that there is no direct access to truth, since it always requires interpretation, and it is even more difficult to arrive at self-consciousness, we understand and place ourselves beyond the already given meanings that we must interpret. Consciousness is realized and formed through speaking. For Ricoeur, language is the way in which meaning comes from e.g. the unconscious, which we can understand and use to construct consciousness, as we do not first interpret dreams but narrate them (Ricoeur 1965, 15). Although language is first and foremost a system of signs, Ricoeur does not stop at a semiotic and structuralist analysis of this system, but tries to understand how the tools of the linguistic system are used. Discourse, as Ricoeur takes it from Benveniste, brings in the semiotic function of language, which is based on the sign, and the semantic function, which is based on the sentence. The contribution of discourse theory is the moment of the event in the function of speaking, of communicating, which is ignored by structural analysis (Van Den Hengel 1982, 25). The sign contained in the system of language is limited in semiotics by the laws of the structure in which it is embedded. In the broader context of language, according to Ricoeur, this occurs above all through the text, as it enables a certain objectification. Communication is always an event of the transmission of meaning, which is transported from the timelessness of the moment in the temporal dimension of the narrative.

An event that disappears at the end of a conversation distances itself from the original event in the text, but preserves it for the reader, who can bring it back to life. The text allows for a threefold autonomy, first in relation to the author's intention, then in relation to the cultural and social environment in which the text was created, and finally in relation to the audience for whom the text is intended (Ricoeur 1986a, 124-125). This threefold autonomy of the text does not mean that the author is lost. What the text can tell me now is more than what the author intended to say, for a process of exegesis is necessary in which the reader brings his or her own insights to deduce the meaning. When we read, we are usually looking not only for the meaning of what the author wanted to communicate, but above all for what the text is about (128). This is not a kind of relativism of interpretations, although several different understandings of a text are always possible. It is always possible to argue for a more or less correct interpretation, which in turn is verifiable, since we now have an objective field of research, namely the fixation of the discourse in the text. Every text has limits to interpretation. Three structural features that ev-

ery text exhibits allow us to argue objectively in search of a more appropriate argument: composition, literary genre, and style (Van Den Hengel 1982, 42-44).

Ricoeur states that if we want to find the sense, the meaning and, even more in the spirit of semantics, the reference in a text, we have to focus on the so-called notion of the world of the text. This is something that the text does not project behind itself, so to speak, does not describe something that has passed, but rather depicts in front of itself. A discourse is always about something. What the texts talk about is this 'world', and it is a world in which the readers can imagine themselves living; they experience it as their possible world. For Ricoeur, therefore, understanding a text (or a discourse) depends on understanding this newly imagined world produced by the text (or what is said) as a world that we can imagine as possible for our own being. However, as the self (or we) that inhabits this world of the text changes, develops, and grows over time, the meaning of the text we understand as we read it will also somehow change from time to time and place to place without losing its meaning. »Using an image that Ricoeur takes from Hans-Georg Gadamer, we can say that these horizons of meaning overlap or even 'fuse' in the act of understanding what is said, hence they are not beyond comparison with one another. A text becomes meaningless only when it can no longer be understood.« (Pellauer 2007, 61)

Although the text that the reader understands enters the reader's world, it remains a limited point of reference, for it is only an imaginary variant. Ricoeur insists, however, that our way of being in the world is imaginary, since we always interpret and understand what our senses tell us. This is a fundamental choice for a hermeneutic philosophy in which the whole of being is wrapped up in the process of understanding. Ricoeur describes the interaction between text and reader as »transcendence within immanence«. Ricoeur uses the metaphor of a window to describe the way in which the reader understands, and simultaneously acts, within the textual immanence. This 'window' reveals a glimpse of the landscape beyond, in the new, possible world. The text we understand uses a familiar structure that represents places and spaces we can inhabit, but the opening of this distant horizon shaped by the frame of the 'reading window' is based on the reader's personal experience and life. Although we have a great freedom of interpretation when reading, as we bring a unique experience to the text, this does not change the fact that the focus is on the concrete text and thus on the view into a new landscape of life. But this is only temporary, for the transition from configuration – making sense of the narrative – to the problems of refiguring the placement in one's



own experience, in one's own time, involves the ability of any work of art to suggest the possibility of a transformation of human action. The narrative accomplishes two things for the reader: revelation and transformation: it reveals in the sense that it illuminates for us features that were hidden from our understanding and yet are already at the heart of our experience, our praxis. Transformation in the sense that it opens up a new possible life for us, a transformed life, a different life that is explored anew through the text. In this process of understanding, of revealing new possibilities, we can never come to an end, because meaning is always limited and so the door of creativity is always open (Arthos 2019, 104-105). »Narrative voice is the silent speech that presents the world of the text to the reader. Like the voice that spoke to Augustine at the hour of his conversion, it says, Tolle! Lege! Take and read!« (Ricoeur 1984, 99). This narrative voice is not to be confused with the voice of the author. It is the distinctive style and tone that has a quasi-vocal presence in the written text. This narrative voice is what »makes the work speak and address itself to a reader« (102).

### 3. Hermeneutics on the way to Revelation

To the outside world, Ricoeur often appeared to be a cool thinker who weighed every word and never made a final decision between two opposing positions: as we mentioned already – between the ontological and the objective textual method. It is precisely his insistence on the necessity of applying the objective method in hermeneutics, in contrast to Heidegger, that opens up possibilities for him that lead out of subjectivism or a kind of mystical lostness in ontologism. He himself calls this the longer path, the path that leads over the distance to the so-called second naivety. Although he only seems to be reasoning about thinking and only appears to be looking for rules of reading and would not read out anything definitively himself, for him »reading is an intellectual task and a promise that opens up the richness of reality to us: a task, because the starting point of Ricoeur's thought is the 'subject', which has become radically questionable in relation to itself, since it understands itself as the possibility of questioning itself and everything else, and also exercises this possibility with a radicality that exceeds Cartesian doubt; a promise, because in reading the subject necessarily unravels the mysteries of the otherness of 'being' through the entanglement of intersubjectivity.« (Kocijančič 1999, 64) In the traces of reading, the reading of life, one can also search for the religious attitude of his life. The narrative, which he retells each time with different turns



of thought, always returns to the reading of life written in divine revelation. If he wants to understand it in all its woundedness, he must read it with human eyes and in the time of his own life in order to be able to open his mouth to a creative – poetic naming of the infinitely sayable. He always presents the double human being, the wounded one who suffers and the capable one who creates. Woundedness forces him to search, the ability gives him the possibility of creativity, opens up hope and discovers the transcendent (Vincent 2008, 21).

Two processes come together here. The first arises from the subject's desire for understanding, which should lead him to a good life. The second involves an infinite desire and a realization of one's own limitations and woundedness. This gives rise to the process of interpretation, which, in the search for inner certainty, opens itself up to the authority that gives support to the interpretation. The creativity of one's own reading seeks confirmation in the reading of another. Before that, however, it is important to remember that all our understanding takes place in a language that we ourselves have not found. All understanding is in a sense trapped in language, and we have learned to speak from others. By learning a language, we have also adopted a way of understanding. Within all these limits of the process of understanding, we retain freedom that always maintains a kind of uncertainty. Despite the positive influence of prejudice, as Gadamer explains it, we are perplexed in our interpretation and search for the right direction of understanding.

On the other hand, we have already shown how the author of the text no longer has control over its interpretation by writing it down and distancing himself from the original discourse. It is precisely this approach to the message of the author, who does not have full power to interpret his own text, but whose style, place and time of composition, and tradition of interpretation can determine the direction of understanding, that also allows Ricoeur a kind of philosophical interpretation of the Bible. The question of truth is always linked to the structure of authority. This can be built up through the canon, inclusion in institutional reading, popularity, and so on.

From the history of the development of the understanding of Revelation, we know the role of the living community in selecting, compiling, and guiding interpretation. It is the creation of an official canon and the completion of a collection of books that a particular Church recognizes as relevant that demonstrates the power of these texts. This recognition often occurs through traditions of reading and interpretation, but also through the judgment that some texts are superior to others. The authority of a text also manifests itself in disputes. The Councils in the history of the Church have made it clear that

the community is also formed and shaped by a particular interpretation. The recognized authority determines the 'correct' reading and thus also gives support to the interpretation of each member of this community. In this hermeneutical process, the community is established as the interpreting authority and the individual reader as the recipient of the tradition transmitted by the community (Krašovec 2023, 267). The structures of the ecclesial community thus develop in parallel with the authority of the textual canon, and there is a kind of hermeneutical circularity between the text that establishes the identity of the community and the community that reads and interprets these texts (Brian 2019, 112-113). »These texts exercise authority over the communities that place themselves under the rule – the canon of these texts.« (113)

Ricoeur clearly accepts the authority of community and tradition, but at the same time maintains the plurality of reading. If we want to justify the possibility of openness to new interpretations despite the authority of the community, then we can refer to the various images of God that can be found in the Bible. Ricoeur summarizes this on the basis of the polyphonic reading in the rabbinic tradition. It is not only the contrasts between narrative and prophetic texts, there is also the law, the wisdom writings, poetic forms. All this together forms a discourse of naming God. The various narratives of naming arise from different traces of experience, which ultimately require an ongoing dynamic process of determining the 'true' image in the process of interpretation. A critical approach to reading the Bible is an integral part of interpreting Revelation. The image of God acquired in one reading is constantly subjected to distancing in another reading in order to create a new image that better corresponds to human experience and understanding (Topping 2007, 40).

One could see in this polyphonic reading merely a kind of hermeneutic of doubt. Ricoeur's method of doubt, which he never renounces, is the exact opposite of skepticism, in which we are merely to accept the illusion of true knowledge and accept only what we think at the time. He emphasizes that we can understand the world by reconciling antinomies such as justice and love, altruism and egoism. The Bible is full of examples of this kind of hesitation that eventually finds an answer in surrender to God, a common theme especially in the Psalms (LaCocque and Ricoeur 2003, 302). We know too much to assent in any way to a behavior that remains trapped in our world alone, but at the same time we will never know enough and must therefore accept the possibility of error, of provisionality, of incompleteness. It is doubt that enables this search for a restless and precarious balance in knowledge itself. »The

incomprehensibility of God is not diminished by the shift from 'Urleiden' to glorification. We would dare to say that it becomes even more inaccessible as soon as it no longer means what it seemed to be in itself, namely a newly found access to the divine presence without the dialectic of absence.« (315) This is less about the suffering of God than about understanding the suffering of man himself, the one who complains to God. Any reading of Ricoeur that wants to do him justice must recognize the ethical dimension in the intention of his hermeneutic. Doubt is an affront to the individual, and Ricoeur links it to motivation. When properly applied to the hermeneutic process, it allows us to understand ourselves as others, and also our own actions, since we are all caught in contradictions which, if we accept them as a challenge, are the basis for our personal development (Scott-Baumann 2009, 184).

Of the so-called polyphony of the Bible, which names God in various ways and is based on the rabbinical tradition, we would like to point out only for the sake of illustration the most 'philosophical' image of God in the Bible. Wisdom literature, which may resemble other philosophers of the time, has a specific meaning in its narrative nature that underlies the whole biblical message: to name God and to situate Him in human life. »Unlike the prophet, who claims that his speech is the speech of another, the sage appeals to a prior wisdom in which he and all wise people participate. This is why more than one sage in the biblical tradition came from outside of Israel.« (Brian 2019, 108).

The Wisdom Scriptures, sometimes called *sapiential* literature, are accepted as inspired because their often very human views reflect a closeness to divine wisdom. This in turn, always in the spirit of rabbinic theology, points to a closeness to God. On a superficial reading, it seems that there is not much difference between the Hebrew 'wisdom' and the Greco-Roman interpretation of the art of living, or as a kind of universal philosophical guide to happiness. Let us not forget that Ricoeur's hermeneutic also remains faithful to textual analysis, where it becomes clear that the biblical genres differ from other ancient sources, since the authors of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs do not pretend to be intellectually self-sufficient like the pagan philosophers. The focus is always on the interpretation of life through God's understanding (Pellauer 2007, 87). The pagan writings point the way to the realization of the good life through experience and reflection alone, while the Hebrew wisdom literature reflects at its core a life of faithful and humble obedience to God (Brian 2019, 108). For the biblical sage, wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord (Pr 9,10).

## Conclusion

By concentrating on the text as the starting point of a general hermeneutics, Ricoeur reconnects understanding with ethics. Just as we have an interlocutor in conversation, we presuppose a reader in writing. The text is always open to the other. If we start from Ricoeur's assumption that man is always in the process of establishing his identity, since this presupposes not only a kind of fixed stability of self-consciousness, which he calls *idem*, but also an evolving, dialectical self-consciousness, which he calls *ipse*, and which is not possible without a transcendence, a distancing of the self into the other, hermeneutics is always in the service of action. As we said at the beginning that the verb precedes the noun, the text is always at the service of reading, of understanding. This in turn is ethically shaped, because it presupposes the other, and is always dependent on confirmation from the other in the search for the self. It is precisely in the openness to the infinite meaning that Ricoeur understands by the notion of the horizon, in the connection to the Other, who comes into contact with the human being and at the same time opens up incomprehensible meanings for him, that the hermeneutic path is always a path of understanding that opens up, invites and obliges (Stegu 2024, 917).

So, if we want to move from interpretation to action also in believing, then Ricoeur's biblical hermeneutics is exactly the right tool. R. Kearney states: »'Practical understanding' is the name Ricoeur gives to that limited capacity of the human mind to think the enigma of evil. He draws here from such varied models as biblical 'wisdom' (discussed above), Aristotle's 'practical wisdom' (*phronesis*), Kant's indeterminate judgement and the hermeneutic notion of 'narrative understanding'. What each of these models has in common is an ability to transfer the *aporia* of evil from the sphere of theory (*theoria*) – proper to the exact knowledge criteria of logic, science and speculative metaphysics – to the sphere of a more practical art of understanding (*technē/praxis*), which allows for an approximate grasp of phenomena: what Aristotle calls 'the flexible rule of the architect'.« (2017, 94)

In justifying his hermeneutic as one that accepts the static nature of structuralism, he simultaneously introduced the dynamism he found in the biblical interpretation of the development of Revelation through the Salvation history. In the interplay of objective facts, divine language gained understanding in the course of redemptive history, this revelation is found in the relation between diachrony and synchrony (Ricoeur 1989, 45-48). Therefore, the truth revealed at creation is not different from, for example, the prophetic truth,

but with different interpretations or ‘retelling of old stories’ it is closer to man and his daily behavior. In a similar way, we can understand the development of truth in Pope St John Paul II: »For the People of God, therefore, history becomes a path to be followed to the end, so that by the unceasing action of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 16:13) the contents of revealed truth may find their full expression.« (John Paul II FR 1998, 11) Just as Ricoeur had already established desire as the foundation of ethics, the Pope also attempts to develop ethical consequences for his understanding of truth: »it will be not only the decisive critical factor which determines the foundations and limits of the different fields of scientific learning, but will also take its place as the ultimate framework of the unity of human knowledge and action, leading them to converge towards a final goal and meaning. This sapiential dimension is all the more necessary today, because the immense expansion of humanity’s technical capability demands a renewed and sharpened sense of ultimate values.« (John Paul II FR 1998,81)

In his old age, Ricoeur spent some time in the Christian ecumenical community of Brother Roger in Taizé. He asked himself: »What do I come looking for in Taizé? I would say to experience in some way what I believe most deeply, namely that what is generally called ‘religion’ has to do with goodness. To some extent the traditions of Christianity have forgotten this. There has been a kind of narrowing, an exclusive focus on guilt and evil. Not that I underestimate that problem, which was a great concern of mine for several decades. But what I need to verify is that however radical evil may be, it is not as deep as goodness. And if religion, if religions have a meaning, it is to liberate that core of goodness in human beings, to go looking for it where it has been completely buried.«<sup>1</sup> In this light, we can clearly see what the fundamental point of Ricoeur’s hermeneutic philosophy is: to strengthen the fundamental good that transcends all evil, so that the creative interpretation of man serves more and more the good life of each individual in a community that gives support and fosters creativity. This task is also the basis of the motto that has guided the Church throughout the centuries: *Ecclesia semper reformanda est* (Novak 2017; Globokar 2024, 870).

<sup>1</sup> The official website of the community ([https://www.taize.fr/en\\_article102.html](https://www.taize.fr/en_article102.html)) where this is published focuses on Ricoeur’s belief that there he can find the strength to overcome evil and find the path to happiness. Brother Roger emphasized this in a letter to Ricoeur’s family on the occasion of his death.

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### **Sažetak**

## **TEKST I DJELOVANJE. UVID U HERMENEUTIČKU FILOZOFIJU PAULA RICŒURA ZA CRKVENU PRIMJENU**

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*Ricoeurova želja da razumije čovjeka dovela ga je do hermeneutike kroz refleksivnu filozofiju i fenomenologiju. Pokušao je spojiti više ontološki pristup sa zahtjevom strukturalizma i moderne znanosti za općom i preciznom metodom. Pokazat ćemo da je tekst taj koji Ricoeuru omogućuje oboje: razumjeti temelj bića i ujedno provesti određena objektivna istraživanja. Njegovo temeljno stajalište da što više tumačimo to bolje razumijemo zahtijeva određeno distanciranje. Upravo taj hermeneutički stav vodi ga do otvorenih tumačenja koja ističu ljudsku želju za transcendentnim. Za Ricoeura je upravo ta ljudska zapletenost u konačnost mogućnosti i beskonačnost želja put do religioznosti. Može mu se pristupiti samo neizravno, kroz simbole, rituale i tekstove. Imajući to na umu, pokazat ćemo kako Ricoeur primjenjuje svoju hermeneutiku na biblijske tekstove. Na temelju njegova tumačenja Biblije pokazat ćemo kakve to posljedice ima za samu Crkvu.*

**Ključne riječi:** Paul Ricoeur, hermeneutika, tekst, distanciranje, Biblija, razumijevanje.