

The Emmaus-Path(way) – Trauma Healing in the Emmaus Narrative (Luke 24,13-35) and the Model of a “Spiritual Therapy of Trauma Sequelae”

(Original German Title: »*Der Emmaus-Weg - Trauma-Heilung in der Emmauserzählung [Lukas 24,13-35] und das Modell einer Spirituellen Traumafolgen-Therapie*«)

The General Concern

The structure and functionality of the human brain have not fundamentally changed in the last 2,000 years.¹ What is changing in the course of time is the embedment of religious experiences – understood as biopsychosocial phenomena² – into different cultural and social contexts of meaning.

It is therefore possible to search for typical symptoms of a traumatization according to modern clinical diagnostics in textual reports from past times about events we would today classify as traumatic.³

The project looks for traces of such symptoms following a mental traumatization in the “Emmaus Narrative” (Luke 24,13-35). I argue that becoming an eye-witness of the passion of Jesus Christ has deeply traumatized his disciples, and that the Emmaus Narrative contains traces of both this traumatic experience and of how the disciples cope with it. One can even identify parts of the five phases of M. J. Horowitz in the text.⁴ The study tries to work out the specific ways of coping with this traumatic experience against the social and cultural background of the first-century Mediterranean societies.⁵

For this I use a transdisciplinary approach which brings together text-linguistic and psychological exegesis, neuroscience, psychotraumatology, synergetics⁶, K. Grawe’s “Konsistenzregulation”⁷ and a phenomenological and moderate constructivist epistemology⁸. I will interpret the reported incidents in Luke 24,13-35 as a salutary synergetic, biopsychosocial, and spiritual process of information processing and reconstruction initiated by true visionary experiences (understood either as a form of alternate states of consciousness [ASC] or even ordinary states of consciousness [OSC], but not pathological hallucinations⁹).

Walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus and back to Jerusalem was for the two disciples above all a deeply spiritual journey, an experience which allowed them to find sense and meaning in the passion and death of their master, Jesus Christ, whom they believed to be the Saviour of Israel (Luke 24,21). This process involves several steps on all layers of human experience (physiological, emotional, cognitive and behavioural resp. the three parts of the “triune brain”¹⁰) with the full revelation of the new reality and meaning of Jesus Christ’s passion as a passage from death to resurrection during the breaking of the bread (Luke 24,30-31). This

deeply embodied symbolic experience marked the “relative end of mourning”¹¹ and the beginning of a new life for the two disciples.

In Luke 24,13-35 one can find ways of coping spiritually with a traumatic experience and its sequelae which I will compare with modern trauma therapy in order to develop a special “Spiritual Therapy of Trauma Sequelae” (“Spirituelle Traumafolgen-Therapie”) based on Luke 24,13-35 and a specific (Judeo-)Christian worldview.

The Structure

The doctoral thesis contains an introduction, five main parts and a conclusion. The introduction provides some basic information on the social and cultural background of the first-century Mediterranean societies, discusses different models of a psychological exegesis (e.g. I. Baumgartner, E. Drewermann, Y. Spiegel, G. Theißen and U. Gast [et al.]) and formulates the six fundamental assumptions of the study: the psychotraumatological, the neuroscientific, the exegetical, the anthropological, the epistemological assumption and the assumption concerning “Konsistenzregulation”.

The first main part consists of a broad “diachronically reflected synchronic reading of the text”¹² (the exegesis) of Luke 24,13-35, according to the demand of Inselmann to perform an “exact philological and narratological examination of the text” before starting with any form of psychological exegesis¹³. Therefore the results of the text-linguistic exegesis are both the fundament of all further interpretations of Luke 24,13-24, especially in parts 4 and 5, and a critical instance not to find things in the text which are not to be found there, unless seen through anachronistic lenses.

The second main part reviews recent research findings in neuroscience (including the system of mirror neurons), especially in the field of human perception and its character of a phenomenological re-construction of reality.

The third main part brings together some of the most important findings in the field of psychotraumatology. Based on general principles of psychotherapy the study outlines general paradigms and aspects of a therapy of trauma sequelae. The view in this study is that the main feature of trauma and the therapy of its sequelae can be understood as a deeply embodied spiritual one (as seen by U. Wirtz¹⁴ and others).

The fourth main part suggests a phenomenological-psychotraumatological interpretation of the Emmaus Narrative, seen as an accompanied spiritual journey to overcome and to transcend the two disciples’ traumatic experiences of Jesus’ passion and death. The study

works out the main dimensions of this antithetic dialectic process, characterized by the three terms of “Wunde” (wound), “Wandlung” (transformation)¹⁵ and “Wiederwerdung” (re-creation).

The fifth and last main part shapes a model of a “Spiritual Therapy of Trauma Sequelae” (»Spirituelle Traumafolgen-Therapie«) based on Luke 24,13-35 and a specific (Judeo-) Christian worldview. It also outlines some concrete ways of practicing the model within a psychotherapeutic context. I call it “*The Emmaus-Path(way)*”.

The main findings of the study are brought together in a conclusion.

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Der Emmaus-Weg

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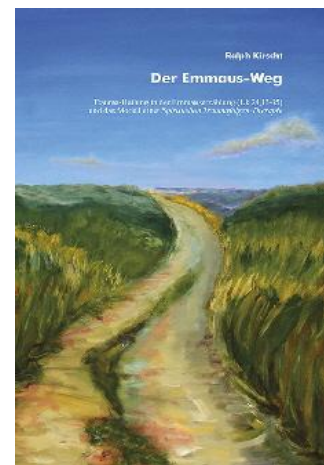
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¹ P. Craffert, Neutestamentliche Forschung nach der Revolution in den Neurowissenschaften. Ungewöhnliche menschliche Erfahrungen ins Bewusstsein rufen, in: G.Theißen/P. von Gemünden (Hrsg.), Erkennen und Erleben. Beiträge zur psychologischen Erforschung des frühen Christentums, Gütersloh 2007, p. 91-117. See also M. Leiner, Dem Evangelium die Seele wiedergeben, in: Theißen/von Gemünden, op cit., p. 29-54.

² J. W. Egger, Das biopsychosoziale Krankheitsmodell, in: Psychologische Medizin, 16. Jahrgang 2005, no. 2, p. 3-12, and P. Craffert, The Life of a Galilean Shaman. Jesus of Nazareth in Anthropological-Historical Perspective, Eugene/Oregon 2008, p. 149.

³ American Psychiatric Association: Diagnostic and Statistic Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, Arlington, VA, American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 280-281 and p. 271-272

⁴ M. J. Horowitz, Stress Response Syndroms. PTSD, Grief, and Adjustment Disorders, Northvale, New Jersey – London ³1997, p. 40 und p. 111-130.

⁵ B. J. Malina, The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology, Westminster/John Knox Press U. S., 3rd revised edition 2003.

⁶ H. Haken, Erfolgsgeheimnisse der Natur. Synergetik: Die Lehre vom Zusammenwirken, Hamburg 1995, und H. Haken/G. Schiepek, Synergetik in der Psychologie. Selbstorganisation verstehen und gestalten, Göttingen etc. 2010.

⁷ K. Grawe, Neuropsychotherapie, Göttingen et al. 2004.

⁸ P. Lampe, Die Wirklichkeit als Bild. Das Neue Testament als ein Grunddokument abendländischer Kultur im Lichte konstruktivistischer Epistemologie und Wissenssoziologie, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2006.

⁹ ASC, see Craffert, op. cit., p. 23 and p. 146-196; OSC, see Michael R. Licona, The Resurrection of Jesus. A New Historiographical Approach, Downers Grove (Illinois) – Nottingham 2010, S. 570-580.

¹⁰ P. D. MacLean, The Triune Brain in Evolution. Role in Paleocerebral Functions, New York 1990.

¹¹ Horowitz, op. cit., p. 127. Horowitz also speaks of a »going on with life« (op. cit., S. 41).

¹² A. Groenewald, Once again the methods: Is there a method in the madness?, in: OTE 17/4 (2004), p. 544 – 559, p. 552-553.

¹³ A. Inselmann, Affektdarstellung und Affektwandel in der Parabel vom Vater und seinen beiden Söhnen. Eine textpsychologische Exegese von Lk 15,11-32, in: Theißen/Gemünden (Hrsg.), op. cit., p. 271-299, p. 271.

¹⁴ U. Wirtz, Die spirituelle Dimension der Traumatherapie, in: Galuska, Joachim (Hrsg.): Den Horizont erweitern. Die transpersonale Dimension in der Psychotherapie, Berlin 2003, p. 136-153.

¹⁵ These two terms are taken from U. Wirtz.