

Report on the Seventh East-West Symposium of New Testament Scholars in Moscow (26.9.–1.10.2016)

The Seventh East-West Symposium of New Testament Scholars was held in Moscow, from September 26 to October 1, 2016. Almost 100 participants (including several day visitors from Moscow) had come together from various parts of the world to discuss “History and Theology in the Gospel Narratives.” The symposium was organized by the Eastern European Liaison Committee of the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas (SNTS) under the leadership of Prof. Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr (Jena, Germany) at the invitation of Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk and in collaboration with Prof. Mikhail Seleznev (Moscow).

The symposium was opened by a public lecture of Metropolitan Hilarion on “The ‘Demythologization’ of New Testament Studies.” In his paper, the Metropolitan identified two traditions of New Testament scholarship: one strand goes back to the disciples of Jesus, the other to the liberal theologians of the nineteenth century. According to Hilarion, New Testament scholarship is at the crossroads and has to choose between having its foundation in Jesus himself or in modern myths and dogmas inspired by liberal ideologies. He appealed to the participants of the symposium to take the text of the Gospels in its totality as the foundation for research, studying it in both its historical context and in theological perspective in the light of the Church’s tradition. Hilarion’s paper ignited a lively discussion, to which the steering committee of the symposium devoted extra space on the final day of the conference chaired by the present president of SNTS Carl Holladay (Atlanta, GA, USA). Senior scholars William Loader (Perth, Australia), Joel Marcus (Durham, NC, USA) and Francis Watson (Durham, UK) were invited to present responses to Hilarion’s paper. Apart from various points of agreement, they were not fully convinced that New Testament scholarship is at the crossroads of two paths leading into opposite directions. Among other things, they pointed towards the much more nuanced positions of recent critical scholarship. In the course of a friendly discussion, Hilarion defended his views, particularly his skepticism with regard to Historical Jesus studies. For example, when studying different versions of the Beatitudes, he maintained that there is no need to identify different layers of (later) traditions because Jesus may have preached different versions of the Beatitudes throughout the years of his ministry.

The other invited papers of the symposium dealt both with the individual Gospels as well as with overarching themes. Joel Marcus spoke about Matthew as historian and theologian. Vladan Tatalovic (Belgrade, Serbia) elucidated the role of the passion narrative in Matthew in Slavonic and in modern Serbian exegesis. Francis Watson’s paper on Mark looked at faith, history, and memory in the Second Gospel. Cosmin Pricop (Bucharest, Romania) then investigated the transfiguration story in Mark, devoting special attention to Eastern and Western traditions (“Between Criticism and Patristics”). While none of the invited papers had an exclusive focus on the Gospel of Luke, the Third Gospel was one of the thematic options of the afternoon seminars to choose from – in variation with seminar papers on the other Gospels, discussions of the main papers and short presentations of current research projects.

Two main papers were devoted to John's Gospel: Margareta Gruber (Vallendar, Germany) spoke about the presentation of Jesus in the light of paschal imagination as a 'performer' of his death and resurrection in John 2:13–23, and Anatoly A. Alexeev (St. Petersburg, Russia) discussed John's way from Christology to theology. On a more general note, Armand Puig i Tàrrach (Barcelona, Spain) introduced the audience to a polyhedric approach to the figure of Jesus in the canonical Gospels. Mikhail Seleznev discussed the question whether one can comprehend the "Theology of the Septuagint" as *praeparatio evangelica*. Tobias Nicklas (Regensburg, Germany) directed the attention to extra-canonical Gospels, investigating their historical impact and theological contribution. Finally, focusing on the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the Gospels, Stefanos Alexopoulos (Washington, USA) presented an overview of the Gospel narrative in Byzantine liturgy.

The papers were given in the Danilovsky hotel, the Orthodox theological graduate school Aspirantura and in the premises of the Moscow State University. The presentation in the university context was particularly significant because theology has only recently been recognized as an academic discipline in Russia. The Aspirantura also hosted several post-conference teaching sessions for students and seminary lecturers from all over Russia by members of the symposium (including Margaret Barker, Richard Burridge, Carl Holladay, David Moessner, Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr and Volker Rabens). Along the way, the symposium provided various opportunities for ecumenical encounter through the optional attendance of devotions led by symposium participants of different denominational backgrounds and through the invitation to participate in several Orthodox liturgies, such as the Feast of the Holy Cross led by the Metropolitan Hilarion. (Post-)Conference excursions included the Tretyakov State Gallery and the monastery Sergiyev Posad.

In keeping with a good tradition, the conference proceedings will be published in the Mohr Siebeck's series *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*. Previous conferences were held in Neamț (1998), the Rila Monastery (2001), St. Petersburg (2005), Sâmbăta de Sus (2007), Minsk (2010) and Belgrade (2013). The Eighth East-West Symposium of New Testament Scholars is planned to take place 2019.

Volker Rabens