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Analogia Verbi
The Truth of Scripture in Rudolf Bultmann and Raymond Brown

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> At its core, the debate about modern exegesis is not a dispute among historians: it is rather a philosophical debate. Only in this way can it be carried on correctly; otherwise we continue with a battle in the mist. In this respect, the exegetical problem is identical with our time's struggle about the foundations as such. …The exegete should approach the exegesis of the text not with a ready-made philosophy, not with the dictate of a so-called modern or scientific worldview, which determines in advance what is permitted to be and what is not permitted to be. He may not exclude a priori that God is able to speak as himself in human words in the world. — Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger[1]

> God, who spoke in the past, speaks without any break with the bride of his beloved Son, … All that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm is to be held as affirmed by the Holy Spirit. — Second Vatican Council[2]

"There is a big difference between still believing something and believing it again: still believing that the moon acts on plants shows stupidity and superstition; believing it again is a sign of philosophy and reflection."[3] Georg Christoph Lichtenberg's irony in this aphorism expresses his firm faith in the irresistibly victorious power with which the natural science shaped by Francis Bacon and René Descartes was sweeping all superstition from the table. Everything in the universe follows

1 Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "Biblical Interpretation in Crisis," The Erasmus Lecture (January 27, 1988), in *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI: His Central Writings and Speeches*, eds. John F. Thorton and Susan B. Varenne (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007), 243–258, at 253, 255.

2 Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* [The Word of God], Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, (November 18, 1965), 8, 11, in *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, ed. Dean P. Béchard, S.J. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 19–31).

3 Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742–1799), *Sudelbücher* [Sketchbooks], Bk. E, 52, written in the early 1770's. For an English translation, see *The Waste Books*, trans. and introd. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: New York Review Books, 2000).

mathematical laws, without exception. There are no spiritual mystical forces that descend from the moon. The old herb woman who still goes into the woods at half moon to pick her medicinal herbs is behind the times. She "still believes." "Believing again" is legitimate as long as it is based on science,[4] but not on the grounds of mere "philosophy and reflection."

Lichtenberg also writes, "If you only understand chemistry, you don't understand it rightly."[5] Is mathematical physics the only thing one needs to understand outside of chemistry? Or must one go even outside that master discipline to ask whether the choices made by Bacon and Descartes at the origin of modern science, which includes the choice of mechanics as the one true mode of understanding replacing all others, are good choices? This is the philosophical question at the root of the debate about the truth of Scripture.

During the debates about the truth of Scripture at the Second Vatican Council, Cardinal Franz König of Vienna argued, "Peer reviewed science in Near Eastern studies shows in addition that in the sacred books historical accounts and accounts bearing on matters of natural science at times fall short of the truth."[6] The final text of the Council's *Dei Verbum* should be read as agreeing with Cardinal König, Cardinal Aloys Grillmeier argues, even though this agreement "cannot be grasped immediately in the actual words *[Wortlaut]* of the text," but must be inferred from the history of the text's redaction and the surrounding discussion.[7]

An intense debate took place during the Council about the phrase, "the truth, which God, for the sake of our salvation, willed to be recorded in the sacred letters."[8] As Grillmeier points out, Pope Paul VI personally asked the Council's Theological Commission to change the original "saving truth" into "the truth, which God, for the sake of our salvation" to avoid the impression that the truth taught "without error" is limited to matters of faith and morals.[9]

Nevertheless Grillmeier concludes in a more subtle manner that the assurance of the truth of Scripture is in fact limited to statements that directly bear on salvation.

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4 Recent evidence shows that there is "a semilunar periodicity of neurotransmitter-like substances from heart-stimulating plants." Wolfgang Schad, "Lunar Influence on Plants," *Earth, Moon, and Planets* 85 (1999): 405–409, at 408.

5 Lichtenberg, *Sudelbücher*, Bk. J, 860.

6 Franz Cardinal König, Address to the Plenum of the Council (October 2, 1964); quoted according to Aloys Grillmeier, "Kommentar zu Kapitel III der Konstitution über die Göttliche Offenbarung *Dei Verbum*" [Commentary on Chapter III of the Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*] in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* [Lexicon of Theology and the Church], 11 vols. (Freiberg: Herder, 1993–2001) 2:528–558, at 532.

7 Grillmeier, "Kommentar," 2:528.

8 *Dei Verbum*, 11.

9 See Grillmeier, "Kommentar," 2:536–537.

> There are immediate saving statements and narratives, in which this formal aspect *salutis causā* [for the sake of salvation] is fully verified. There are also parts of Scripture, however, that only perform an auxiliary function in relation to these immediate saving truths. Here there can be—from the point of view of the secular sciences—a falling short of the truth. Here we must recognize the facts without prejudice or fear. The question of inerrancy must not become a matter of bad conscience or cramped attitudes. …
>
> Everything in Scripture has a share in "the truth, which God, for the sake of our salvation, willed to be recorded," either *immediately* and *by its contents* or *mediately* and *in virtue of its service* to the saving statement. …Items in Scripture that are, from the point of view of the secular sciences, not right or not exact, must not be seen in isolation, nor should one call them simply "errors." All of this must be left in the whole of Scripture and should be judged in its service to the saving Word.[10]

A different reading of *Dei Verbum 11* is proposed by Cardinal Augustin Bea.

> Does the text we have before us now imply a restrictive interpretation of inerrancy? Here also the answer is firmly negative. The first proof of this is seen in the fact that all those (and in the first place the Pope himself) who had been anxious to prevent the possible misunderstanding that might have arisen from the expression "the saving truth" have instead accepted the present form, which means that they consider that this does not present the same danger of misunderstanding. …
>
> Let us then conclude: all that the inspired writers assert is asserted through them by the Holy Spirit. Consequently, in all their assertions the sacred books teach "firmly, faithfully and without error, what God wanted put into them for the sake of our salvation."[11]

I had accepted Grillmeier's reading of *Dei Verbum* early in my studies and continued to maintain it without much philosophy and reflection until a thesis written in 2002 by one of my students in Austria, David Bolin (now Fr. Thomas, O.S.B.), convinced me that I was wrong. I now believe again in the truth of Scripture

10 Grillmeier, "Kommentar," 2:549–550.

11 Augustin Cardinal Bea, *The Word of God and Mankind* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1967), 190–191; emphasis added.

without the nuance of "falling short of the truth." Philosophy and reflection, which belongs to those who believe again, cannot be credited to my account, however, because they were (at least to begin with) not my own.

During one of the open discussion sessions of the 2008 Synod of Bishops on "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church," Peter Cardinal Turkson dramatically raised the question of the truth of Scripture.[12] The *Instrumentum Laboris* ("Working Document")[13] distributed before the Synod, he argued, turns the text of *Dei Verbum* 11 on its head by adding the word "only," so as to limit the inerrancy of Scripture. Heated discussions followed in the coffee breaks after this intervention. I heard even normally measured and balanced people complain angrily about the attempt by "fundamentalists" to turn the clock back to the time before Vatican II. Here is a comparison between the *Instrumentum* and *Dei Verbum*, translated in parallel from the Latin (emphasis added).

Although all parts of sacred Scripture are divinely inspired,	*Since* therefore *all* that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm is to be held as affirmed by the Holy Spirit,
nevertheless, its inerrancy applies *only* to	*therefore* one must profess that the books of Scripture teach
"the truth *that* God, for the sake of our salvation, wanted to be recorded in the sacred letters"	the truth, *which* God, for the sake of our salvation, wanted to be recorded in the sacred letters, firmly, faithfully and without error
—*Instrumentum Laboris*, Pt. 1, Chap. 2, A	— *Dei Verbum*, 11

In the Council text, the word "all" plays a role that is parallel but opposite to the *Instrumentum:* "truth" applies to "all that the sacred authors affirm" since "all … is to be held as affirmed by the Holy Spirit," while the *Instrumentum* admits some errors as long as they are not directly related to salvation. When one combines *Dei Verbum's* reason for the truth of Scripture, "All is to be held as affirmed by the Holy Spirit," with the statement, "Some errors are affirmed in Scripture," the conclusion inevitably follows, "These errors are to be held as affirmed by the Holy Spirit."

12 In the open discussion session of October 7, 2008.

13 Synod of Bishops, "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church," *Instrumentum Laboris* (May 11, 2008). Available online at: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/index.htm.

Like the *Instrumentum*, Grillmeier's commentary omits the reason, "affirmed by the Holy Spirit," which is astonishing, considering Grillmeier's famous care and precision as a scholar. From his commentary alone, one could not infer that this sentence is present in *Dei Verbum* 11. There is not even the slightest allusion to it in Grillmeier's text. What could have moved him to avoid this text?

On a very general level, it is not difficult to answer this question. All who reflect about their Christian faith in the modern age experience the pressure of the scientific picture of the world or, more exactly, of the choices and philosophical premises implicit in that scientific picture. These premises, which lie in the voluntaristic nominalism of William of Ockham and the choice of mathematical mechanics as the master science of nature by Bacon and Descartes, destroy the metaphysics of analogy and participation required for understanding the *analogia verbi* ["analogy of the Word"] in *Dei Verbum* 11.

The purpose of this essay is to illustrate the power of this pressure in two cases. Rudolf Bultmann completely submits to it, but attempts to neutralize its consequences in a Lutheran dialectic. Raymond Brown resists it, but not without a highly dramatic struggle. Following the recent stimulating study of the truth of Scripture by Denis Farkasfalvy,[14] the essay pursues the close connection between Scripture and the Eucharist in Christ's spousal gift of self, "I am yours and you are mine." For this reason, the backbone of the essay's argument is Raymond Brown's interpretation of the eucharistic passage John 6:54–57. The argument's method is to apply the "hermeneutics of the gift"[15] to the question of the truth of Scripture, as suggested by St. Bernard.

> "He spoke and they were made" (Psalm 148:5). Yet, he who made me by merely speaking, by speaking once, certainly remade me *by speaking* much *and by doing* wonders ["Do this in memory of me"]. …In the first work he gave me myself; in the second *himself*, and where *he gave himself*, he gave me back to myself. As one given and given back, I owe myself for myself, and owe myself twice. What shall I render to God for himself? Even if I could give myself back to him a thousand times, what am I [compared] to God?[16]

14 Denis Farkasfalvy, *Inspiration & Interpretation: A Theological Introduction to Sacred Scripture* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2010). See especially Chapter Four: "The Eucharistic Provenance of the Christian Bible."

15 The "hermeneutics of the gift" is the theological method adopted by Pope John Paul II. See *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline, 2006), 179.

16 St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *De Diligendo Deo* [On Loving God], Chap. 5, 15, in *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist, 1987), 173–206; emphasis added.

Bultmann on the Truth of Scripture

One can grasp Bultmann's overall vision under five headings: truth, sin, God, Scripture, and Jesus.[17]

Truth. At the very foundations of Bultmann's thought, which was complete in its essential outlines before his encounter with Martin Heidegger, there lies the philosophical thesis that being human in the authentic sense does not mean being an object in the cosmos with a certain nature or essence; it means "existing"; and existing means being a historical possibility which continually realizes itself through decision. "The free deed is the expression of our existence; in fact, only in the free deed, and nowhere else, do we exist in the authentic sense, since the free deed is nothing but our existence itself … "[18]

One can recognize in this thesis a post-Kantian form of the nominalism of William of Ockham (1288–1348), who radicalized the voluntaristic theses of his teacher Duns Scotus (1265–1308). There was a storm of protest in the Islamic world about Pope Benedict XVI's 2006 Lecture at the University of Regensburg and its claim that Mohammed's practice of imposing Islam by violence implies a voluntaristic denial of human rationality. This storm has deflected attention from a similar accusation of voluntarism made shortly afterwards much closer to home.

> The decisive statement in [the Byzantine emperor's] argument against violent conversion [as practiced by Mohammed] is this: not to act in accordance with reason is contrary to God's nature. The editor, Theodore Khoury, observes: For the emperor, as a Byzantine shaped by Greek philosophy, this statement is self-evident. But for Muslim teaching, God is absolutely transcendent. His will is not bound up with any of our categories, even that of rationality. Here Khoury quotes a work of the noted French Islamist R. Arnaldez, who points out that Ibn Hazm went so far as to state that God is not bound even by his own Word, and that nothing would oblige him to reveal the truth to us. Were it God's will, we would even have to practice idolatry. …
>
> In all honesty, one must observe that in the late Middle Ages we find trends in theology which would sunder this synthesis between the Greek spirit and the Christian spirit. In contrast

17 For a more detailed analysis of Bultmann, see my three interrelated articles: "The Foundations of Bultmann's Work," *Communio* 14 (1987): 115–145; "Hans Jonas's Construct 'Gnosticism': Analysis and Critique," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8 (2000): 341–372; "The Evolution of Bultmann's Interpretation of John and Gnosticism," *Lateranum* 70 (2004): 313–352.

18 Rudolf Bultmann, "Welchen Sinn hat es, von Gott zu Reden?" [What is the Point of Talking about God?], in *Glauben und Verstehen: Gesammelte Aufsätze* , vol. 1 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1933), 26-37, here 35. Eng.: *Faith and Understanding I*, ed. Robert W. Funk (London: S.C.M., 1969).

> with the so-called intellectualism of Augustine and Thomas, there arose with Duns Scotus a voluntarism which, in its later developments, led to the claim that we can only know God's *voluntas ordinata* ["ordained will"]. Beyond this is the realm of God's freedom, in virtue of which he could have done the opposite of everything he has actually done. This gives rise. …to the image of a capricious God, who is not even bound to truth and goodness. God's transcendence and otherness are so exalted that our reason, our sense of the true and good, are no longer an authentic mirror of God, whose deepest possibilities remain eternally unattainable and hidden behind his actual decisions.
>
> As opposed to this, the faith of the Church has always insisted that between God and us, between his eternal Creator Spirit and our created reason there exists a real analogy, in which—as the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 stated—unlikeness remains infinitely greater than likeness, yet not to the point of abolishing analogy and its language. God does not become more divine when we push him away from us in a sheer, impenetrable voluntarism; rather, the truly divine God is the God who has revealed himself as *Logos* ["Word, Reason"]. …[19]

Duns Scotus's student, William of Ockham, radicalizes his teacher's emphasis on divine free will to the point of nominalism, that is, "name-ism." He argues that God could command us to hate him, in which case hatred rather than love would be good. "Good" is thereby reduced to a mere *name imposed at will*.

Ockham's nominalism cuts the bonds of analogy and participation that unite God and creatures and thus obscures the interior goodness of creatures. It sees their order as an order God happens to have imposed on them from the outside, one among many orders he could have imposed. It regards natural beings as artifacts, not as natural beings, not as having an interior principle of order toward the good. They reflect the free divine power, not the divine being, goodness and wisdom. They have no inner participation in the being and goodness of God.

Charles Taylor points out the close connection between nominalism and Bacon's proposal of mechanics as the master science of nature.

19 Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University : Memories and Reflections," (December 12, 2006), in *The Regensburg Lecture,* ed. James V. Schall (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine, 2007). Also available online at: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/index.htm.

> This [voluntaristic and nominalist] line of thought even contributed in the end to the rise of mechanism: the ideal universe from this point of view is a mechanical one.[20]

> In nominalism, the super-agent who is God relates to things as freely to be disposed of according to his autonomous purposes. …The purposes of things are extrinsic to them. The stance is fundamentally one of instrumental reason. …The shift will not be long in coming to a new understanding of being, according to which, all intrinsic purpose having been expelled, final causation drops out, and efficient causation alone remains. There comes about what had been called "the mechanization of the world picture." And this in turn opens the way for a view of science in which a good test of the truth of a hypothesis is what it enables you to effect. This is the Baconian view … [21]

Luther was strongly influenced by Ockham, mainly by way of the Ockhamist Gabriel Biel (1420–1495). Bacon inherited the same philosophical premises in his Calvinist theological training.[22] Bultmann inherited them in his Lutheran formation, though in a post-Kantian form.

Bultmann's entire ontology is based on the voluntaristic principle, "The free deed is nothing but our existence itself." One can observe the crucial role of this principle with particular clarity in his doctrine of knowledge, and his correlative doctrine of truth.

> If *human existence* is *temporal-historical*, and thus concerned in every concrete Now with itself, not merely by choosing in every concrete Now one among many possibilities that offer themselves, but, in doing so, by grasping ever again a possibility of itself, if, I say, the Being of human existence is thus *Being-able-to-be*, because each Now is essentially new and receives its meaning precisely now, now through its decision, and therefore not from a timeless meaning of the world, then the question of truth has meaning only as the question of *the one truth of the moment*, my moment.[23]

20 Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1989), 82.

21 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007), 97–98.

22 See Steven Matthews, *Theology and Science in the Thought of Francis Bacon* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

23 Rudolf Bultmann, *Theologische Enzyklopädie*, ed. Eberdhard Jüngel and Klaus W. Müller (Tübingen, Mohr-Siebeck, 1984), 50; Eng: *What is Theology*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1997).

"The truth of the moment" refers to something correlative to decision, namely, to a certain challenge in the light of which I understand myself in a concrete moment. "The *whole* truth, *my* truth, is in question. I want to understand *myself*."[24]

Sin. Yet, I am not able to live exclusively in the truth. I also live in "the sphere of the objective" which is cut off from the challenge of the moment. This sphere arises inexorably from the inner dynamism of knowledge. It is here that Bultmann first deploys the Kantian account of "objective beings" as mere phenomena.[25] Negatively, the corruption of authentic truth consists in a detachment from the challenge of the moment; positively, it consists in objectification, in the formation of a sphere of objective being and truth that can be universal and timeless. Modern natural science, according to Bultmann, is the prime example of this corruption of truth in our age, just as Roman Catholicism was at the time of Luther.

One of the main philosophical forces at the very origin of natural science is the ambition for power over nature as articulated by Bacon and Descartes. According to Bacon, "Human knowledge and power coincide in the same. …For nature is not conquered except by obeying."[26] On this point, Bacon's secretary, Thomas Hobbes, agrees with his employer. "Knowledge is for the sake of power."[27] The extent of the power sought by Bacon is vast: "the power and empire of the human race itself over the universe of things."[28] Bacon's choice of mechanics as the master-science of nature follows from his choice of power as the end. "Aristotle [said it] best. Physics and mathematics give rise to practical science and mechanics."[29]

Descartes studied Bacon before he began his first major work in natural philosophy.[30] In his Discourse on Method (1637), he lays down the goal of his philosophy in agreement with Bacon.

> It is possible to reach knowledge that will be very useful to life, and instead of the speculative philosophy which is now taught in the schools [that is, Aristotelian-Scholastic philosophy] we can find a practical one, by which, knowing the force and the actions of fire, water, air, stars, the heavens, and all the other bodies that

24 Bultmann, *Theologische Enzyklopädie*, 49.

25 See Bultmann, *Theologische Enzyklopädie*, 195.

26 Francis Bacon, *The New Organon, or New Directions Concerning the Interpretation of Nature*, Bk. 1, 3; James Spedding, ed., *The Works of Francis Bacon*, 14 vols. (London: Longman, 1857–1874), 1:157.

27 Thomas Hobbes, *Elementa Philosophiae* [Elements of Philosophy], Pt. 1, 1; *De Philosophia* [On Philosophy] par. 6, in *Opera Philosophica* [Philosophical Works], 3 vols., ed. William Molesworth (London: John Bohn, 1839), 1:6.

28 Bacon, *New Organon*, Bk. 1, 129; *Works*, 1:222.

29 Bacon, *The Advancement of Knowledge*, Bk. 3, Chap. 6; *Works*, 1:576.

30 The documentary evidence for Descartes' relation to Bacon is gathered in René Descartes, *Oeuvres de Descartes* [Works of Descartes], 12 vols., ed. by Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1983), 12:479, n. a.

> surround us as distinctly as we know the various skills of our artisans we can employ them in the same way for all the uses for which they are fit, and so make ourselves masters and possessors of nature.[31]

Bultmann accepts the Baconian-Cartesian notion of science, including the self-limitation of reason to the task of discovering mechanical laws in nature. Following Immanuel Kant, he denies the existence of an objective natural world. Far from discovering such a world, human "knowledge" constitutes it in an act of power. When the mind forces the truth of the moment to hold still, when it thus lifts that truth into objectivity, it gives rise to the "objective" natural world according to patterns and causal laws that lie in the structure of the mind rather than in things.[32]

As a member of the modern age I cannot escape agreeing with current natural science. The only responsible way for me to practice historical critical scholarship is in complete agreement with that science. The universe follows mathematical laws, without exception. I must accordingly deny that miracles are possible, which immediately turns the historicity switch of the Gospels to the "off" position. God is entirely absent from the cosmos.

Although it is inevitable for me, objectification poses a grave threat to human existence. By living "according to" the objective world and its stable relations, I can evade the challenge of the moment to find security in objective truth. In this observation, Bultmann applies the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith alone without works of the law to the order of knowledge and being.[33]

On this background one can grasp Bultmann's concept of sin. Sin is the refusal of the challenge of the moment, rooted in the desire for security and expressed in the flight away from the moment into the sphere of the objective.[34] Sin is boasting in human power. The enemy is not, as it was for Luther, Catholic boasting in the salvific power of good works and indulgences available for purchase, but scientific boasting in human power and life-improving consumer goods, the modern equivalent of indulgences, also available for purchase.

> The existential meaning of hell is not that of an image of a physical place below the world full of torments. Instead, it is the recognition of the power of evil, indeed, the evil of the poisoned and poisoning atmosphere which humankind has created for itself when we began to assume that we could create *security through scientific knowledge* and the ability to dominate the earth. With this attitude, the world does become hell. Such confusion leads

31 Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, Pt. 6; *Oeuvres*, 6:61–62.

32 See Bultmann, *Theologische Enzyklopädie*, 107.

33 See Bultmann, *Theologische Enzyklopädie*, 39–40.

34 See Bultmann, *Theologische Enzyklopädie*, 85, 91, 93, 131–132.

> to the battle of all against all. Here are the *roots of our doubts*, our questioning the meaning of life.[35]

Bultmann's analysis of scientific-technological power over nature as the main issue of our times resembles in some respects what Benedict XVI says about Bacon, though Benedict is far from condemning science as sin. He recognizes much truth in it.[36]

> We must take a look at the foundations of the modern age. These appear with particular clarity in the thought of Francis Bacon. …But what is the basis of this new era? It is the new correlation of experiment and method that enables man to arrive at an interpretation of nature in conformity with its laws and thus finally to achieve "the triumph of art over nature" (Bacon, *New Organon*, Bk. 1, 117). …
>
> Anyone who reads and reflects on these statements attentively will recognize that a disturbing step has been taken: up to that time, the recovery of what man had lost through the expulsion from paradise was expected from faith in Jesus Christ: herein lay "redemption." Now, this "redemption," the restoration of the lost "paradise," is no longer expected from faith, but from the newly discovered link between science and praxis. It is not that faith is simply denied; rather it is displaced onto another level—that of purely private and other-worldly affairs—and at the same time it becomes somehow irrelevant for the world.
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> This programmatic vision has determined the trajectory of modern times and it also shapes the present-day crisis of faith which is essentially a crisis of Christian hope. Thus hope too, in Bacon, acquires a new form. Now it is called: *faith in progress*.[37]

God. The first two points of this sketch (truth and sin) constitute the dialectic which lies at the roots of Bultmann's thought. This dialectic has two sharply distinct sides: one side is the non-objectified challenge of the moment; the other is

35 Antje Bultmann Lemke, "Bultmann's Papers," in Edward Hobbs, ed., *Bultmann, Retrospect and Prospect: The Centenary Symposium at Wellesley* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 11–12; emphasis added.

36 See esp. the conclusion of Benedict's "Faith, Reason and the University," quoted at the end of this essay.

37 Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi* [In Hope We Are Saved], Encyclical Letter on Christian Hope (November 30, 2007), 16–17 (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007).

the sphere of objectified truth, the world of escape from the challenge, the world of science and sin.

Given these two sides, it is clear that Bultmann must locate God exclusively on the side of existential challenge.

> What is the question of God if not the question, "What is truth?" When the question of truth is posed accurately as the question of the moment, can it be anything but the question of God? For God, if he is thought at all, is thought as the power which rules the Now, as the challenge spoken into the Now.[38]

This definition of God must be taken in its full philosophical rigor. One must resist the temptation of distorting it by conforming it to the metaphysics of analogy and participation that informs the mainstream of the Christian tradition in conformity with its roots in Greek philosophy. For Bultmann, God does not have "being." God is the challenge of the moment and nothing besides. No being stands behind this challenge. For that being would be "objective," it would be something one can "talk about," something pulled down into the human sphere, something which is not necessarily felt as a challenge, something, therefore, which is contrary to the deepest nature of God as absolute Lord.

> The knowledge of God is the *knowledge of the challenge of the moment*. His call becomes heard as the demand which the moment places on us. God is invisible for the objectifying vision of scientific research.[39]

Scripture. The definition of God as the challenge of the moment does not imply that the voice of the moment is automatically God. If this were so, God would be available to philosophical analysis, because the moment is a universal human phenomenon. In fact, however, God is only available to faith in his historical revelation; he is a concrete historical Word spoken from beyond the moment into the moment.[40]

Can this revelation be identified? Yes, God is scriptural; God is a linguistic event which occurs when the Word of Scripture is proclaimed and preached.

> All proclamation points to Scripture, not as to its accidentally first stage, but as to that of which it speaks, namely, revelation. This first revelation, and nothing else, *is* revelation. …Thus Scripture is the authority, the only authority for theology.[41]

38 Bultmann, *Theologische Enzyklopädie*, 50.

39 Bultmann, *Theologische Enzyklopädie*, 57.

40 See Bultmann, *Theologische Enzyklopädie*, 63.

41 Bultmann, *Theologische Enzyklopädie*, 169.

Bultmann thus affirms the principle *sola Scriptura* ("Scripture alone") in the most radical form possible. God himself is *sola Scriptura*.

Jesus. The definition of God as the linguistic event which occurs when the historical word of Scripture is proclaimed into my moment can be further specified. Jesus Christ is this Word of God.

> *God's revelation as a historical event is thus Jesus Christ as the Word of God*. This Word was instituted in the contingent historical event Jesus of Nazareth and it is alive in the tradition of the Church. The fact of Jesus Christ does not take on importance as a fact which is visible outside of the proclamation, but only as a fact which we encounter in the proclamation, as a fact made present by the proclamation. Jesus Christ is the Word.[42]

Bultmann makes two fundamental assertions in this text. On the one hand he asserts that Jesus is the unique Word of God. On the other hand he excludes any objective or metaphysical implications from this assertion. Jesus is significant for faith, not as a person with certain objective characteristics, divine or otherwise, but as the preached Jesus. The traditional dogma of his divinity is contrary to the inner meaning of revelation, because it falsely objectifies God. In the world of objective history, Jesus is simply a mere man, one among other human beings, with no supernatural attributes. However, he *does become significant when he is preached as God's definitive Word. As preached, his significance is indeed paramount and exclusive.*

Bultmann: Critical Reflections from a Catholic Perspective

On the positive side, one must acknowledge that Bultmann understood and lived central aspects of our modern situation with remarkable clarity and intensity. He did not blink at the clash between the modern scientific worldview and the Christian faith, but faced it head on. His critique of power is particularly incisive and anticipates many facets of the post-modern critique.

But there are problems in the manner in which he interprets the struggle and attempts to bring its forces together into a new synthesis. In attempting to resolve the clash between the scientific worldview and the Christian faith, he takes a violent shortcut: He uncritically accepts the mechanist worldview and then stages an all out witch-hunt on it. By pressing it into such a Lutheran dialectic he grants it too much and too little. Too much because he does not criticize it in detail; and too little because he condemns it entirely as an expression of sin and negates the elements of truth in it.

Perhaps the most central objection against Bultmann from a Catholic perspective is that he abandons the assent to the fundamental goodness of the world as God's creature. His neo-Kantian Lutheran ontology does not allow any other

42 Bultmann, *Theologische Enzyklopädie*, 95.

position. The objective world is the result of an inauthentic mode of human knowledge, namely, science. Far from being caused by God it arises as a self-enclosed objectification from human sin. In this respect Bultmann's ontology is close to gnosticism. Gift, in particular the gift of being, plays no role in it. A "hermeneutics of the gift" cannot get even the slightest foothold in this ontology.

Almost equally important from a Catholic perspective is the objection that Bultmann does not sufficiently respect the historical, literal meaning of the biblical texts as normative. To preach the Word of God as located in the non-objective sphere of existential challenge requires great conceptual clarity, a clarity which became possible only after the development of Bultmann's dialectical doctrine of knowledge. The ancient Christians did not have this clarity. If ancient Christian texts are mired in objectification, then Bultmann gives them too much credit when he interprets them as really proclaiming the non-objective Word of God. He reads them against their meaning. In his 1988 Erasmus Lecture, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger points particularly to the interplay between historical critical scholarship and natural science in Bultmann's antagonistic reading.

> Modern exegesis, as we have seen [Bultmann was the example given], completely relegated God to the ungraspable, the non-worldly, and thus the ever inexpressible, but only in order to then be able to treat the biblical text itself as an entirely worldly thing, according to the methods of the natural sciences. In relation to the text it practices *physiologein* [reasoning in the manner of natural science]. As a "critical" science it claims an exactness and certitude similar to natural science. This claim is false, because it is based upon a misunderstanding of the dynamism and depth of the word.[43]

43 Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "Biblical Interpretation in Crisis," The Erasmus Lecture (January 27, 1988); published as "Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches of Exegesis Today," in Richard J. Neuhaus, ed., *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 17–18; translation revised. For the German text, which includes some sections not present in this official English translation delivered by Ratzinger, see "Schriftauslegung im Widerstreit: Zur Frage nach Grundlagen und Weg der Exegese heute," in Joseph Ratzinger, *Wort Gottes: Schrift—Tradition—Amt* (Freiburg: Herder, 2005), 83–116, at 106. Two independent English translations of the longer German text are available: "Biblical Interpretation in Conflict: The Question of the Basic Principles and Path of Exegesis Today," in Joseph Ratzinger, *God's Word: Scripture—Tradition—Office*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2008); "Biblical Interpretation in Conflict: On the Foundations and the Itinerary of Exegesis Today," trans. Aidan Walker, in José Granados, Carlos Granados, and Luis Sánchez-Navarro, eds., *Opening up the Scriptures: Joseph Ratzinger and the Foundations of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 1–29.

Bultmann protests emphatically, "Scripture is the authority, the only authority for theology."[44] But in fact, a neo-Kantian doctrine of knowledge determines what can, and what cannot, be Word of God. What is required to let the biblical text unfold its own dynamism is an "open philosophy." Two fundamental ideas characterize such an open philosophy, according to Ratzinger's Erasmus Lecture: human beings are open to transcending the world toward God; and God is able to open them from within by the gift of communion with himself.

Ratzinger singles out St. Thomas Aquinas as providing the true starting point by his metaphysics and theology of analogy and participation.

> Thomas Aquinas grasped these two ideas metaphysically in the principles of analogy and participation and thus made possible an open philosophy that is capable of accepting the biblical phenomenon in all its radicalism. Instead of the dogmatism of a supposedly scientific world picture, the challenge for today is to think further in the direction of such an open philosophy, in order to find once again the presuppositions for understanding the Bible.[45]

The development of such an open philosophy based on Aquinas, centered on analogy and participation, can prevent pressing the biblical text into a closed philosophy.

> At its core, the debate about modern exegesis is not a dispute among historians: it is rather a philosophical debate. Only in this way can it be carried on correctly; otherwise we continue with a battle in the mist. In this respect, the exegetical problem is identical with our time's struggle about the foundations as such. …
>
> The exegete should approach the exegesis of the text not with a ready-made philosophy, not with the dictate of a so-called modern or scientific worldview, which determines in advance what is permitted to be and what is not permitted to be. He may not exclude a priori that *God is able to speak as himself in human words in the world*.[46]

44 Bultmann, *Theologische Enzyklopädie*, 169.

45 Ratzinger, "Schriftauslegung im Widerstreit," 109. This passage is missing from "Biblical Interpretation," as delivered. For an English translation, see Granados, *Opening up the Scriptures*, 23.

46 Ratzinger, "Biblical Interpretation," 16, 19; "Schriftauslegung im Widerstreit," 104, 107; emphasis added; translation revised.

Raymond Brown on the Truth of Scripture

One of my advisors for my doctoral thesis on John at Harvard, a scholar close to Bultmann, warned me against Brown's commentary on John. "It is vitiated by a strong Catholic metaphysical bias and by an animus against the scientific discoveries made by Bultmann and his school, particularly John's close relation to gnosticism. Bultmann and Nag Hammadi are dirty words for Brown."

As happens at times with wayward students, this warning warmed my interest and I invested much time in studying Brown's commentary. Particularly in comparison with Bultmann, I found it to be a work of refreshing sanity and common sense in its use of the tools of historical criticism. I also found deep theological insight in it. I was therefore not surprised when, during the seminar that followed his 1988 Erasmus Lecture, Cardinal Ratzinger praised Brown, who was present among the participants at the seminar. The Cardinal expressed his wish that Germany had more exegetes who were as deeply rooted in the Catholic tradition and as faithful to the magisterium as Brown was.

Given this context, it is with reluctance that I focus on Brown's reading of the truth of Scripture in his 1980 essay "The Human Word of the Almighty God."[47] The essay proposes a violently simple and impatient solution of the complex problem of the truth of Scripture, a solution that comes in the end quite close to Bultmann. It cuts the Gordian knot of biblical truth with one stroke of the Enlightenment sword by claiming, "God does not speak." According to Brown, *Dei Verbum 11* ("All that the inspired authors and sacred writers affirm is to be held as affirmed by the Holy Spirit") is simply false. God is unable to speak as himself in human words in the world.

The best way to approach Brown's essay, I am convinced, is with a rigorous application of canonical criticism in light of Brown's work as a whole, especially his 1955 dissertation on the *sensus plenior* and his commentary on John. Such a canonical reading relativizes the thesis of the essay as a thesis at odds with Brown's real intentions.

First, however, let us focus on the essay in itself, outside the canon, as Brown himself would advise us in determining the *sensus literalis*. The clarity and simplicity of the thesis, "God does not speak," even if it is in the end too clear and simple, is extremely helpful for what Lichtenberg calls "philosophy and reflection."

> Many of us think that at Vatican II the Catholic Church "turned the corner" in the inerrancy question. …Those who wish to read *Dei Verbum* in a minimalist way [that is, as involving minimal change in the Church's position] can point out that the sentence immediately preceding the one I just quoted says that every-

47 Raymond E. Brown, "The Human Word of the Almighty God," in *The Critical Meaning of the Bible* (New York: Paulist, 1981), 1–22. The essay was first delivered as a lecture in 1980 at Georgetown University.

> thing in Scripture is asserted by the Holy Spirit and can argue that therefore "what God wanted put into the Scripture for the sake of our salvation" (which is without error) means every view the human author expressed in Scripture. However, there is noncritical exegesis of Church documents as well as noncritical exegesis of Scripture. Consequently, to determine the real meaning of *Dei Verbum* one must study the discussions in the Council that produced it, and one must comb a body of evidence that can be read in different ways. [Footnote:] The evidence is given and interpreted in the Grillmeier article.[48]

Brown explains what he means by a critical exegesis of Church documents. When the Catholic Church changes her mind, he argues, it is her practice "gracefully to retain what was salvageable from the past and to move in a new direction with as little friction as possible."[49] The original draft of *Dei Verbum*, which Brown classifies as "far-right" and "ultraconservative," suffered a stinging defeat in 1962, "and so it became a matter of face-saving that in the revisions and in the final form of the constitution the ultraconservatives should have their say."[50] The supposed face-saving left many traces, but its principal trace is the sentence, "All that the inspired authors and sacred writers affirm is to be held as affirmed by the Holy Spirit."

It is not easy to work out Brown's hypothesis in detail. Is he saying that the centrist majority allowed the ultraconservative minority to add a statement which they, the centrists, considered false? Is he saying that the centrists voted for that false statement to be included in an authoritative formulation of Catholic doctrine simply to perform a face-saving maneuver on behalf of their ultraconservative fellow-bishops? Would not the use of falsehood as official doctrine, just to avoid clerical friction, be rather shamelessly vapid horse trading? Is this a likely historical critical reconstruction of what actually happened at Vatican II, even leaving aside the Catholic belief that the Council's deliberation was guided by the Holy Spirit?

At the beginning of his essay Brown assures the reader. "First, I fully accept the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Bible as the Word of God and the whole discussion assumes that fact."[51] He adds that there is a need for discussion because a "real struggle" is going on about how the Roman Catholic doctrine is to be understood.

> The real struggle, which is between the Catholic center and the Catholic far right, does not imperil the Catholic doctrine

48 Brown, *Critical Meaning of the Bible*, 18–19.

49 Brown, *Critical Meaning of the Bible*, 18, n. 41.

50 Brown, *Critical Meaning of the Bible*, 18.

51 Brown, *Critical Meaning of the Bible*, 3.

> of the Bible as the Word of God, which both accept. In this instance, as in most others, the struggle concerns the *meaning* of the doctrine. It gets nasty only when the far right claims that its understanding of the doctrine constitutes doctrine.[52]

Brown sees an apparent contradiction in the phrase "Word of God" that needs to be resolved.

> *"The word of God" … is a human word, for God does not speak.* But it is *of* God, and not simply a human composition about God. The Bible makes us confront the seeming contradiction of a divine self-revelation in human terms.
>
> This is no minor issue, because if God did not actually speak words (external or internal) one must admit clearly and firmly that every word in the history of the human race, including the biblical period, is a time-conditioned word, affected by limitations of human insight and problems. The attribution of a Word to God, to Jesus, or to the Church would not enable that word to escape limitation.[53]

In a footnote at the end of this text Brown writes:

> This statement is sometimes translated hostilely as a denial of absolute truth. There is a God and God is truth; and so there is absolute truth. The affirmation made above would mean only that every human perception of that truth is *partial*. The opposite affirmation would be that a human statement about God can be exhaustive.[54]

Brown's argument in this footnote is very condensed and not fully clear. One possible way of understanding it is as an argument by *reductio ad absurdum* ("reduction to the absurd"). The conclusion to be established is, "God does not speak." As in any *reductio*, one assumes the opposite of the conclusion to see what follows. Let us assume, then, that God does speak human words, not in the sense of producing them by his own vocal chords or as actually distinct inner words, but in the sense of affirming the truth expressed by these words.

What follows from this assumption, according to Brown? The absolute truth, with which God is identical, is fully exhaustive. In the one Logos, God expresses himself and all things. Therefore, if God affirms the truth in a statement made by

52 Brown, *Critical Meaning of the Bible*, 3.

53 Brown, *Critical Meaning of the Bible*, 1, 4.

54 Brown, *Critical Meaning of the Bible*, 4, n. 8.

human words, that statement must be fully exhaustive, which is absurd. No human statement can be exhaustive, because all our perception of the truth expressed in words is partial. Therefore it is absurd to claim that God himself speaks in human words.

This argument makes a rather obvious mistake. From the statement, "God affirms the truth in a statement made by human words," it jumps to the statement, "God affirms the comprehensive truth in that statement." Why should God be incapable of affirming a partial truth, precisely what is affirmed in a particular statement, as long as it is "absolutely" true in the sense of being really true?

The main bulk of Brown's article, in fact, follows another path to the same conclusion, a path Brown considers proper to the historical critical study of Scripture. "My contribution will be entirely from the vantage point of biblical criticism."[55] Among other possible paths, Brown foregoes that of systematic theology.

> I do not plan to consider the Word of God … in the context … of systematic theology (for example, whether there is a magisterial position or a unanimous theological position on what 'the Word of God' means). [Footnote:] In any case, it would be almost impossible to show that past writers or magisterial statements were dealing with the problem to be discussed here, for *its particular nuance stems from modern biblical insights*.[56]

What are the modern biblical insights that supersede the point of view of systematic theology to such a degree that, even if there were a position of the magisterium or a consensus of Catholic theology as a whole on the meaning of "Word of God," it would be "almost impossible to show" its relevance, because the problem to be discussed is so new? These insights must indeed be weighty, if they can nuance the very problem so substantially that all past writers and magisterial statements become irrelevant.

Brown lays out the modern biblical insights in two sections, one of them devoted to revelation, that is, to intra-biblical claims to direct speech by God ("Thus says the Lord"), the other to inspiration, that is, to the claim that the Bible as a whole is the Word of God, even when no such direct intra-biblical divine speech is involved.

Under the heading of "revelation" Brown first considers claims by the prophets that they pass on words received from God. The redaction history of prophetic oracles is the main insight that leads Brown to conclude that these oracles are not, in fact, words directly received from God, but words formulated by the prophets. The prophets encountered a divine "message," but the mode of that "message"

55 Brown, *Critical Meaning of the Bible*, 5.

56 Brown, *Critical Meaning of the Bible*, 5, n. 11; emphasis added.

was not verbal. Brown does not explain how a "message" from God can be made intelligible to a human being without any concepts or words. "The message is the message of God, but the words are words of Jeremiah."[57]

Brown makes the same point about the Decalogue. "The question of whether a revealing God ever communicates in words comes to a head in an Old Testament perspective in the encounter between Moses and God on Sinai. In Jewish thought this was the supreme experience of God."[58] Brown once again uses redaction history (the two extant versions of the Decalogue) to argue that the Ten Commandments are not words spoken by God, but "human formulations of a less specified revelation of divine moral demand."[59] How a divine moral demand could be communicated to a human being without specific statements in inner or outer words is, once again, a point Brown does not explain.

For the words of Jesus, Brown changes the basis of his argument. His principal point (emphasized in the text below) resembles the *reductio ad absurdum* argument analyzed above.

> In the words of Jesus it is dubious that one encounters *an unconditional, timeless Word spoken by God*. The Son of God who speaks in the first three Gospels is a Jew of the first third of the first century, who thinks in much of the world view of this time. The Jesus of the Fourth Gospel, who is pre-existent, does claim to have heard words in the presence of his Father and to have brought them to earth … but when one examines the words of the Johannine Jesus critically, they are often a variant form of the tradition known in the synoptics.[60]

Redaction criticism plays an important role, but the whole question is decided ahead of time in the very first sentence by the phrase "an unconditional, timeless word spoken by God." As in the *reductio* analyzed above, there is a mistaken jump in Brown's argument. Conditioned, time-bound words can be true. Why should God's use of them to affirm a truth involve their being suddenly stripped of their conditioned, time-bound nature?

Words of the risen Jesus present a special problem in Brown's mind, because through his resurrection Jesus attained an unconditional, timeless existence. His words, therefore, could qualify as attaining an unconditional, timeless character. Yet, the redaction history of these words once again suggests that they are conditioned and time-bound. They are later human formulations of encounters with Jesus that involved entirely non-verbal encounters and revelations.

57 Brown, *Critical Meaning of the Bible*, 9.

58 Brown, *Critical Meaning of the Bible*, 9–10.

59 Brown, *Critical Meaning of the Bible*, 10.

60 Brown, *Critical Meaning of the Bible*, 12; emphasis added.

> What we seem to have is a communication by the risen Jesus that was only later vocalized in words as the various communities and writers came post factum to understand the import of the revelation. The category of "speaking" may be an inadequate way to describe the unique, eschatological encounter with the risen Jesus—an approximation of this revelation to ordinary experience. If so, the study of the "words" of the risen Jesus (who has passed *beyond* the limitations of human circumstances) may reflect the thesis that only human beings speak words and that revelation by the Word of God really means divine revelation to which human beings have given expression in words.[61]

This text concludes Brown's treatment of "Word of God" under the heading of "revelation," that is, of words about which the Bible itself claims that they are directly spoken by God. If in all these instances it can be shown that God does not speak, then the conclusion follows *a fortiori* for the "Word of God" under the heading of "inspiration," which covers the whole Bible, including words about which the Bible itself does not claim that they are directly spoken by God.

Brown's argument under the heading "inspiration" is much simpler. Historical critical exegesis has shown that Scripture contains errors, both in secular matters and in matters of faith and morals bearing on eternal salvation. An example of the latter, Brown argues, is the denial of immortality in Job 14:13–22 and Sirach 14:16–17; 17:22–23; 38:21. If Scripture were the word of God in the sense that God himself affirms what the text affirms, such errors should be impossible.

In what sense, then, is Scripture the word of God. It is not of God in the sense of being a word affirmed or asserted by God, in which case one could rely on God's truthfulness. It is of God in the sense of being only of man, but of man as an attempt to express a non-verbal "message" or "revelation" that is of God. This human attempt often falls into error. Nevertheless, the Bible as a whole is a reliable divine communication, because errors in one book are relativized when that book is placed in the canon of Scripture as a whole.

> If one discovers religious errors, one does not seek to explain them away; one recognizes that God is willing to work with human beings in all their limitations, and that each author's contribution is only part of a larger presentation of biblical truth. …We have spent too much time protecting the God who inspired the Scriptures from limitations that he seems not to have been concerned about. The impassioned debate about inerrancy tells us less about divine omnipotence (which presumably allows

61 Brown, *Critical Meaning of the Bible*, 14.

> God to be relaxed) than about our own insecurity in looking for absolute answers.[62]

Omnipotence is not the point, one must object against this evasive text. The point is truth or falsity. It is easy for God to feel relaxed (and for Brown to feel secure) about the truth of Scripture if he does not say anything.

Brown's "Human Word of the Almighty God" in Context

Brown's argument for the conclusion that God does not speak is an argument, he claims, that is drawn from insights gained by modern historical critical studies of the Bible. On the surface, the insights are mainly those of tradition and redaction criticism (in Part One of the essay) and the errors of Scripture both in secular matters and in matters of faith and morals (in Part Two of the essay).

Let us focus on Part One, which is more important and revealing. When one compares the arguments from tradition and redaction criticism with the conclusion they are supposed to establish, one notices a disproportion in universality. The arguments about the redaction history of prophetic oracles suggest that in some cases what the prophets call "words of God" in the most direct sense ("Thus says the Lord") are, in fact, mere human words, subsequently placed on the lips of God. At least in these particular cases, the arguments suggest, God did not speak. It is logically impossible to get the full universality of the conclusion, "God does not speak (God never speaks)," from these arguments. Might not one or the other prophetic oracle really be a verbatim rendition of actual words of God?

Another sort of argument is clearly involved in Brown's mind to supply the missing universality of his conclusion. One might suppose that it is the argument he sketches at various points as a *reductio ad absurdum*. If God spoke in human words, these words would have to be comprehensive, unconditional and timeless. No human words can have these qualities. Therefore, it is absurd to hold that God speaks in human words.

I do not think that this argument represents the true heart of Brown's concerns or that he invested the full power of his most considered thought in it. It sounds like a memory of his early neo-Scholastic training, a bad memory. In order to identify the argument (or, rather, the force) that pushes Brown, it is helpful to draw out an important corollary from the thesis that God does not speak.

If God does not speak, if only human beings speak, then the literal sense of Scripture is exclusively a human sense. There is no divine intention and affirmation in the letter of Scripture that needs to be taken into account in determining the literal sense, although a non-verbal divine message has passed to the inspired writer. The theologically neutral discipline of historical critical exegesis, which is practiced as a secular discipline in the academy, is the competent discipline to

62 Brown, *Critical Meaning of the Bible*, 17–18.

determine the sense of the letter. It is the only competent discipline and it is sufficiently competent. It does not need explicitly theological principles, such as those affirmed in the final paragraph of *Dei Verbum* 12, which speaks about reading Scripture in the same Spirit in which it was written: according to the unity of Scripture; its reading in the Tradition; and the analogy of faith. These theological principles would have a bearing on the literal sense of Scripture only if God himself affirmed what the text says. Just as mathematical physics does not need any theological principles, because it deals with matters that are intelligible in terms of this world alone, so also the historical critical exegesis of Scripture, because the literal sense of Scripture is exclusively human. Brown repeats this corollary like a mantra throughout the essay: historical critical exegesis is in charge of the literal sense. That is the consensus in the scientific academy.

In his 1955 dissertation, by contrast, Brown defines the literal sense as follows.

> The literal sense is that which both the Holy Spirit and the human author directly and proximately intended, and which the words directly convey, either properly or metaphorically. The literal sense must be intended by both God and the human author.[63]

This definition is closely related to *Dei Verbum* 11. "All that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm is to be held as affirmed by the Holy Spirit." According to Brown's 1955 definition of the literal sense, God *does* speak in it. He speaks by intending the sense of the words of Scripture. God himself, not only the human author, affirms the truth conveyed by these words. One can hold God himself accountable, not only the human author. Are you telling me the truth? If the meaning is intended by God, the answer is clear. The truthfulness of truth itself guarantees the truth of the words, understood rightly.

If God himself speaks in the literal sense, a method appropriate to merely human speech will not be sufficient. Theological principles for determining the literal sense will have to be used, above all the principles mentioned by *Dei Verbum* 12: Scripture must be read "in the same Spirit by whom (or in whom) it was written *[eodem Spiritu quo scripta est]*."

What Brown asserts in his 1955 definition of the literal sense is precisely what he denies twenty-five years later in the thesis that "God does not speak." The main difference is the disappearance of the *analogia verbi*, that is, of analogy and participation in the use of the terms "speak, intend, affirm, word" for both God and human beings.

63 Raymond E. Brown, *The Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture* (Baltimore: St. Mary's University, 1955), 4–5; emphasis in original.

Let us focus on the concept of analogy. In the Psalmist's line: "I will sing of your steadfast love … for you have been a fortress for me,"[64] "love" is an analogical term, "fortress" is a metaphor. God loves, properly speaking, but is a fortress only in an improper, transferred sense. A fortress is more truly a fortress than God is, but God is more truly love than human love is, even though we know and name human love first. Nevertheless, although "love" is used in a proper sense, it is not used univocally, because "between the Creator and the creature no likeness can be expressed without the need of expressing a greater unlikeness."[65]

In human speech one must distinguish the outer act of pronouncing words and the interior mental act of conceiving a statement. The outer act of speech, understood as producing sounds, can be said of God only metaphorically, because God has no body. Just as God does not walk, properly speaking, so he does not make sounds. The second, the inner speech in concepts, can be said analogously, just as "God knows" is analogous. In fact, the only speech that is truly and fully speech in that interior sense is God's own eternal speech, in which he expresses the truth about himself and all things by his interior Word.[66] "God spoke only once, once only because he keeps on speaking for ever. For He is one single, uninterrupted, and eternal speech act."[67] Finite human interior speech is an analogical participation in this true and full speech. Although God cannot make sounds by vocal cords, he can use sounds or letters to express his knowledge.

It is on this basis that the theological tradition understands Scripture as the Word of God. If God speaks the truth comprehensively in his eternal Word, he can *a fortiori* take up human words to speak in an analogous sense. He can affirm a partial truth in finite human words, since these words are analogous participations in his eternal Word. This *analogia verbi* was Brown's conviction in his dissertation. Brown's argument in the 1980 essay is thus rooted in the rejection of the *analogia verbi*. God never speaks.

The Analogia Verbi in Brown's Commentary on John

The *analogia verbi* is much more resoundingly present in Brown's 1966 commentary on John than in his 1955 dissertation. My Bultmannian thesis advisor was quite right to see a pervasive Catholic metaphysics in that commentary. Given Luther's roots in nominalist philosophy, he labored hard to eliminate the metaphysics and

64 Ps. 59:16.

65 Fourth Council of the Lateran, "Constitution on the Error of the Abbot Joachim" (1215), in Henirich Denzinger, ed., *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitonum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum* [Handbook of Creeds, Definitions and Declarations concerning Matters of Faith and Morals], 32nd. ed. (Freiberg: Herder, 1963), 806; Eng.: *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* (Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto, 2002).

66 John 1:1.

67 St. Bernard, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 5, 2; as translated in Farkasfalvy, *Scripture & Interpretation*, 205, n. 2.

theology of analogy and participation, which had become unintelligible to him. With his nominalist glasses he inevitably saw analogy and participation as human boasting in competition against God. I have my own goodness (says the papist), which I can raise up as a claim before God. God must reward me for it, because it is truly my own. In the project of de-Hellenization Bultmann follows out Luther through Kant to the bitter end, as one can see in his commentary on John.[68]

The following passage from Brown's commentary on John 6:54–57 provides a sharp contrast to Bultmannian de-Hellenization. It exemplifies how analogy and participation are built into the very foundations of Brown's reading of John.

> A comparison of verses 6:54 ["The one who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life]" and 56 ["The one who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him"] shows that to have eternal life is to be in close communion with Jesus; it is a question of the Christian's remaining (*menein*) in Jesus and Jesus' remaining in the Christian. In verse 27 Jesus spoke of the food that lasts (*menein*) for eternal life, that is, an imperishable food that is the source of eternal life. In verse 56 the *menein* is applied not to the food but to the life it produces and nourishes. Communion with Jesus is really a participation in the intimate communion that exists between Father and Son. Verse 57 ["Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me"] simply mentions the communion between Father and Son with an assumption that the reader will understand. … Verse 57 is a most forceful expression of the tremendous claim that Jesus gives *man a share in God's own life*, an expression far more real than the abstract formulation of 2 Peter 1:4 ["sharers in the divine nature"]. And so it is that, while the synoptic Gospels record the institution of the Eucharist, it is John who explains what the Eucharist does for the Christian. Just as the Eucharist itself echoes the theme of the covenant ("blood of the covenant"—Mark 14:24), so also the mutual indwelling of God (and Jesus) and the Christian may be a reflection of the covenant theme. Jeremiah 24:7 and 31:33 take the covenant promise, "You will be my people and I shall be your God," and give it the intimacy of working in man's heart.[69]

68 See my "Evolution of Bultmann's Interpretation of John and Gnosticism."

69 Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 2 vols., Anchor Bible 29 (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 1:292–293.

From a Bultmannian perspective, it is precisely the analogy of the term "life" and the "real" participation in divine life that spoil Brown's reading of John 6. He is simply re-chewing Greek rational metaphysics, which John has shed by affirming the paradox of incarnation, the supreme offense against Greek reason. "The event of the revelation is a question, is an offense. *This and nothing else is meant by, The Word became flesh.*"[70] Brown misses the point most fundamentally when he writes about "the intimate communion that exists between Father and Son." Nothing exists between Father and Son. Father and Son are just the standard Greek fantasy about a supra-mundane divine world, a slight variation on Middle-Platonic and Gnostic motifs. As moderns, whose thinking is scientifically sophisticated, we cannot "still believe" that this Platonizing fantasy is true. We cannot go back behind Kant.

This is the first feature to be highlighted in Brown's text, namely, the solidity of the metaphysics and theology of analogy and participation in his reading of John. For Brown, Father and Son are not Greek fantasies. They are the real source of being, life and communion. "Life" and "communion" are said analogously of them and us; we receive a real participation in this life and communion above all in the Eucharist. What Bultmann dismisses as background overcome by John, Brown affirms as true. It is difficult to exaggerate this contrast. Brown and Bultmann are polar opposites in their reading of John.

The second feature of Brown's commentary on John 6:54–57 is the sense of the Word's presence. The text of John, which resumes the covenant promise, mediates a present "intimacy of working in man's heart." It is in the present that the God of the covenant says, "You are mine and I am yours," just as the Son says to the Father, "All that is mine is yours and what is yours is mine."[71] One can hardly overlook Brown's own faith in this reading of John. It is a reading, not only by a historical scholar, who ascertains a past act of speech as an uninvolved observer, but by a living man who is addressed by a living act of speech and apprehends it as a true testimony in personal faith: "I believe you." Brown does not write, "It was John who explained back then in Hellenistic categories what the Eucharist was back then thought to do for Hellenistic Christians; we today, of course, think quite differently, because we know that the universe follows exceptionless mathematical laws." He writes, "It is John who explains what the Eucharist does for the Christian."

Particularly the second feature shows that Brown's understanding of the literal sense in this passage is not sufficiently expressed in his definition of the literal sense in the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*.

70 Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, 21st ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 39; emphasis added. Eng.: *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971).

71 John 17:10.

> Most exegetes, if we may judge from their commentaries on Scripture, would be working with a definition of the literal sense closely resembling the following. *The sense which the human author directly intended and which the written words conveyed.*[72]

This definition is not a sufficient account of what Brown himself actually does as an exegete of John 6:54–57. It does not account for the present divine act of speech, the present divine testimony apprehended by personal faith. Brown's definition in his dissertation does more justice to his actual exegesis.

> The literal sense is that which both the Holy Spirit and the human author directly and proximately intended, and which the words directly convey, either properly or metaphorically. The literal sense must be intended by both God and the human author.[73]

In his opening meditation for the 2008 Synod, Benedict XVI reflected on a passage from Psalm 118 (verses 89–94) precisely along these lines of the Word's presence. The final words of the passage contain the urgent appeal, which is that of every believer in the present: "I am yours; save me." In hearing the Word of God, Benedict XVI comments, we do not only hear someone's past speech, as would be the case in mere human speech, but we also hear a present act of speech.

> It is a great danger … in our reading of Scripture that we stop at the human words, words from the past, past history, and we do not discover the present in the past, the Holy Spirit who speaks to us today in the words of the past. In this way we do not enter the interior movement of the Word, which in human words conceals and reveals divine words. Therefore, there is always a need for seeking. We must always look for the Word within the words. …
>
> With his incarnation he said: I am yours. And in baptism he said to me: I am yours. In the Holy Eucharist, he says ever anew: I am yours, so that we may respond: Lord, I am yours. In the way of the Word, entering the mystery of his incarnation, of his being among us, we want to appropriate his being, we want to expropriate our existence, giving ourselves to him who gave himself to us.

72 Raymond E. Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer, and Roland Murphy, eds., *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 1148.

73 Brown, *Sensus Plenior*, 4–5; emphasis in original.

> "I am yours." Let us pray the Lord that we may learn to say this Word with our whole being. Thus we will be in the heart of the Word. Thus we will be saved.[74]

What Benedict focuses on, particularly in the latter part of this text, which concludes his meditation, is the covenantal theme of self-gift and communion, which Brown focuses on in his comments on John 6:54–57. It is here that one finds the heart of the sense of presence of the Word. This sense of presence is possible only if someone really intends the meaning of the words in the present. It cannot be the human intention of John alone, because he spoke (and wrote) and then fell silent. If the literal sense were an exclusively human sense, if God did not speak as himself in it, the sense of presence would be lost. Against his own theoretical hermeneutical writings, Brown's commentary agrees with the *analogia verbi*.

Dei Verbum 8 helps to drive home this sense of the Word's presence. "God, who spoke in the past, speaks without any break with the bride of his beloved Son." In the spousal dialogue it is very important exactly who speaks to whom and when exactly. One may well be able to exchange marriage vows by proxy, letting someone else speak for oneself, even by authorized letters, but the consummation of the vows, the full gift of self, "I am yours," and its renewal in the total bodily gift of self throughout married life must be a present living word spoken in person. Unless God himself speaks to the bride as himself, he does not give the spousal gift of self, "I am yours." In that case, all we have is the memory of past words of a bridegroom who has long been dead, if he ever existed. This is the sharp existential point of the sword of God's word in the *analogia verbi*. This is what is really at stake in *Dei Verbum* 11, "All that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm is to be held as affirmed by the Holy Spirit."

Brown's Denial of the Analogia Verbi

Brown's 1980 essay on the "Word of God" throws this *analogia verbi* overboard in a spasm of de-Hellenization. No analogy, no participation connects the word of the Bible with the eternal Word. God does not speak. The *analogia verbi* disappears in a flash. By the same token, the analogy and participation of life must disappear as well. Is Brown ready to pay this price? Clearly not! He would have to renounce everything he says about John and the Eucharist. His commentary on John has more weight than his theoretical 1980 essay. In the seminar following the Erasmus Lecture, he emphasized again and again in discussion with Cardinal Ratzinger that he does not see himself as a theoretician of the historical critical method, but primarily as a practitioner (more on this below).

74 Pope Benedict XVI, Address at the Opening of the 12th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (October 6, 2008). Available oneline at: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/index.htm.

Nevertheless, it remains a fact that he says in his 1980 essay, "God does not speak." What force is responsible for this sudden denial of the *analogia verbi*, which is so deeply at odds with the fundamental intentions of Brown's work as a whole? Let us formulate the question slightly differently. What force in contemporary academic culture is most directly opposed to the metaphysics and theology of analogy and participation? Once the question is formulated in this way, the answer suggests itself of its own accord: modern natural science and its nominalist philosophical premises. The academy has great power to socialize its members into a "full obedience of intellect and will" with respect to these philosophical premises, which historically came to constitute this particular mode of natural science in its present form. Peer review is one of the modes in which this power is exercised, but there are many other capillary and atmospheric modes. Structures of plausibility and intellectual customs are slowly built up by this pressure and Enlightenment prejudices thereby achieve the status of the self-evident. The universe follows mathematical laws, without exception.

Brown is clearly aware of the power of Enlightenment prejudices and he openly resists it to some degree. He responds to those who attack the historical critical method by conceding that it carries some such prejudices. At the same time, he adds qualifiers that all but eliminate his concession. The method carries them only in some instances and only as external accretions.

> Rhetorically I would wish to ask … what is there in the nature of the historical critical method that should have ever prevented its practitioners from being members of the believing community, and is … [one] not blaming a method for the prejudices of some who employ it. It is true that, as a child of the post-Enlightenment, biblical criticism has tended to be almost doctrinaire in its skepticism about the transcendent, for example, in ruling out of court any evidence that Jesus worked miracles … But it is time that we identify such prejudices as regrettable accretions rather than as intrinsic principles of the method.[75]

Brown's claim that Enlightenment prejudices are quite external to the historical critical method may *de iure* ["in principle"] be true, simply considering redaction criticism, for example, as a technique in the abstract. *De facto* ["in fact"] however, this claim is simply false. The phrase "regrettable accretions rather than intrinsic principles" underestimates the capillary and atmospheric action of Enlightenment prejudices in the historical-critical method as it has actually been practiced in the academy. Brown correctly locates the thesis, "There are no miracles," near the top of the list of Enlightenment philosophical prejudices. Yet, his own thesis, "God

75 Raymond E. Brown, "What the Biblical Word Meant and What it Means," in *Critical Meaning of the Bible*, 23–44.

does not speak," is simply another one of these prejudices, not far from the top either. That this obvious fact escaped his own notice is a sign of the great power of Enlightenment prejudices in academic practice.

In his "Addendum," written after the seminar on the Erasmus Lecture, Brown sees himself as untouched by philosophical prejudices. Already in the seminar discussion, he had deflected Cardinal Ratzinger's philosophical critique of Bultmann by claiming he himself, like many in the Anglo-Saxon world, were practitioners of the historical-critical method, interested in facts, not bound by abstract philosophical theories.

> Much of Cardinal Ratzinger's paper is directed against the philosophy that he detects in historical-critical exegesis. …The Cardinal argues, "The debate about modern exegesis is not a dispute among historians; it is rather a philosophical debate." …
>
> To explain my divergence here I must speak of my training. *I obtained a master's degree in philosophy, writing on the philosophical background of Einstein*, before I did any graduate biblical studies. …Yet, like many Americans and Anglo-Saxons who did not do their graduate biblical studies in Germany, *I never had laid out for me a master philosophy* according to which I should practice exegesis. My biblical training was highly historical critical. …
>
> I recognize that what the Cardinal has described has been the philosophy of many practitioners of the method, but *the fact that I could learn the method entirely differently calls into question whether the flaws are in the method itself*. I do recognize philosophical questions about the historical critical method, but in my judgment *they are not questions about the possibility of the supernatural*. … I hope that such a practical rather than a philosophical approach is not simply an American versus a German way of thinking.[76]

The question: "Can God speak as himself with human words in the world?" is, in fact, very well described as one of the "questions about the possibility of the supernatural." With noticeable pride Brown mentions his Master's thesis about the philosophical background of Einstein. "Einstein, on whom I wrote my thesis, is unimpeachable! Germans may revel in philosophy. We Americans are more practical. We are interested in facts. We are scientists, like Einstein at Princeton. We only do philosophy as far as we need it for science!" Einstein, of course, was a

76 Raymond E. Brown, "Addenda," in Neuhaus, *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis*, 37–49, at 44–47; emphasis added.

German, and Einstein's most direct intellectual ancestor Descartes, who supplied the master philosophy for Einstein, was not American either. America, Alexis de Tocqueville observes in his chapter on "Philosophical Method of the Americans," is the country "where the precepts of Descartes are least studied and are best applied. …The Americans do not read the works of Descartes … but they follow his maxims."[77] Brown did not learn the historical-critical method quite as differently as he thinks. Like Bultmann, he identifies with the scientific academy, apparently unaware of the violent self-limitation of reason to the master paradigm of mathematical mechanics in the wake of Bacon and Descartes. Bultmann realized the philosophical implications of this self-limitation more clearly.

Brown radicalizes his Enlightenment prejudices in the essay, "What the Biblical Word Meant and What it Means." He makes a sharp distinction between what the Bible meant in the past (when it was written, the literal meaning of the Bible) and what the Bible means at present (in the life of the Church, which is not its literal, but its ecclesiastical meaning, a kind of typological application). The Church's authority as an interpreter of the Bible extends only to the latter meaning. The Church has no authority to speak about the literal sense. Neutral historical critical scholarship is fully in charge of what the Bible meant, of the literal sense; the non-neutral Church is free to play only with the ecclesiastical sense. The two meanings can diverge to the point of sharp tension.

> What a passage *means* to Christians is the issue for the Church—not the semi-historical issue of what it *meant* to the person who wrote it. …To the best of my knowledge the Roman Catholic Church has never defined the literal sense of a single passage of the Bible. …[The Church was not wrong] at Trent in insisting that its doctrine of seven sacraments, eucharistic sacrifice, and priestly ordination were a valid interpretation of Scripture—an interpretation of what by symbiosis Scripture had come to mean in Church life, but not necessarily an interpretation of what it meant in the mind of those who wrote the pertinent passages.[78]

One reason why what the Bible meant cannot be determined by the Church (for example by the application of the theological principles of the literal sense in *Dei Verbum* 12: the unity of Scripture, its reading in the tradition, and the analogy of faith) is the theological neutrality of the historical-critical method. "What 'Matthew and Luke meant' is the literal sense of their Gospels; and critical scholars, whether Catholic or Protestant, have to use the same methods in determining

77 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 2, Pt. 1, Chap. 1. (New York: Library of America, 2004), 483–488.

78 Brown, *Critical Meaning of the Bible*, 40–41.

the sense."[79] Catholics, Protestants and atheists have to use the same method in mathematical physics. For the Church to intervene in determining the literal sense of Scripture would be the equivalent of her intervening in mathematical physics, as she did with disastrous consequences in the case of Galileo.

It is fascinating to observe that in proceeding more and more radically along this familiar line of the Enlightenment liberation of historical-critical exegesis from the bonds of ecclesiastical dogma, Brown comes to a point in his argument at which he suddenly takes a stand. A deeper Brown, the Brown of the book on the *sensus plenior* and of the commentary on John, suddenly emerges.

> Yet *personally* I would not accept … [the view that] allows the literal meaning and the church interpretation to be contradictory in the strict sense. If one takes an example from the few doctrines that I have mentioned above as including or presupposing specific historical facts, some would not be disturbed by a situation in which historical criticism would make it virtually certain that Jesus was conceived normally, even though church doctrine speaks of a virginal conception. Yet that is modernism in the classic sense whereby doctrines are pure symbols that do not need to be correlated at all with the facts of which they speak.[80]

It is certainly a curious rhetorical situation for Brown to find himself in. He brings the accusation of modernism against those among his fellow Catholics who would deny the fact of Mary's virginity on the historical-critical level of the literal sense (what the Bible meant) while generously allowing their Church to affirm it as a dogma and as the ecclesiastical sense of Scripture (what the Bible means, the legitimate playpen for Church authority).

Particularly interesting is the word "personally," which I emphasized in quoting the text above. We hear the personal, deeper Brown, who takes a stand. In order to unfold this deeper Brown, one can hardly do better than to turn to Joseph Fitzmyer who has a kinship with Brown on many levels.

> If the meaning of a biblical text could take on a meaning different from its originally expressed—and I would add, originally intended—meaning, then how could one say that the Bible is still the source par excellence of divine revelation, the means that God has chosen to convey to generation after generation of his people what his plans, his instructions, and his will in their regard actually are. This characteristic of the written Word of

79 Brown, *Critical Meaning of the Bible*, 36.

80 Brown, *Critical Meaning of the Bible*, 41; emphasis added.

> God demands that there be a basic homogeneity between what it meant and what it means, between what the inspired human author sought to express and what he did express, and what is being said by the words so read in the Church of today. *This, then, is the major problem that the literal sense of Scripture raises today, and one with which theologians and exegetes have to deal.* …The literal sense is the goal of a properly oriented historical-critical interpretation of Scripture. By "properly oriented" I mean the use of that method with the presupposition of Christian faith that one is interpreting the written Word of God couched in ancient human language, with a message not only for the people of old, but also for Christians today.[81]

What Fitzmyer calls "the major problem that the literal sense of Scripture raises today" is precisely the problem raised by Brown's essay on the Word of God. Fitzmyer's language partly converges with Brown's, particularly in the use of "message," which, for the Brown of the essay, is an entirely non-verbal form of divine communication, secondarily and often erroneously translated by human beings into words. Yet, Fitzmyer also brings out what Brown must unavoidably mean by "message." He calls the words of the Bible "the means that God has chosen to convey to generation after generation of his people what his plans, his instructions, and his will in their regard actually are." The formulation "chosen to convey," particularly the verb "convey," is close to what Brown says about the literal sense in his dissertation. "The literal sense is that which both the Holy Spirit and the human author directly and proximately intended." A divine intention is present in the words of Scripture. In these words, God speaks as himself. Fitzmyer's formulation is close to *Dei Verbum 11*, "All that the inspired authors and sacred writers affirm is to be held as affirmed by the Holy Spirit."

Consistent with this emphasis, Fitzmyer points out that the historical critical interpretation of Scripture needs to be oriented by the presupposition of faith that God is indeed speaking in this text. A theologically neutral orientation of the method will ultimately be a false orientation that will fail to do justice to the literal sense of the text. Brown himself makes the following argument for the necessity of faith as an orientation for exegesis. "Good sense in interpreting is the first and most indispensable fruit of faith."[82] The text quoted from his commentary on John proves his point, whatever his theoretical essay on the Word of God may say to contradict it.

The position formulated by Fitzmyer seems to be Brown's real intention in the 1980 essay on the Word of God when one considers his work as a whole. It

81 Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Interpretation of Scripture: In Defense of the Historical-Critical Method* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2008), 89, 91; emphasis added.

82 Brown, *Sensus Plenior*, 8.

would be interesting to work out in detail how one should label the meaning of Brown's text in this rereading of his 1980 essay in light of Fitzmyer. Should it be called s*ensus canonicus* or *sensus plenior* or *sensus caritativus*? At any rate, it is the *sensus literalis* of Brown's text in his commentary on John 6:54–57.

From Brown's Literal Sense to Aquinas's Spiritual Sense

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes the "spiritual sense" of Scripture:

> According to an ancient tradition, one can distinguish between two *senses* of Scripture: the literal and the spiritual, the latter being subdivided into the allegorical, moral and anagogical senses. The profound concordance of the four senses guarantees all its richness to the living reading of Scripture in the Church.
>
> The *literal sense* is the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture and discovered by exegesis, following the rules of sound interpretation: "All other senses of sacred Scripture are based on the literal."
>
> The *spiritual sense*. Thanks to the unity of God's plan, not only the text of Scripture but also the realities and events about which it speaks can be signs.
>
> 1. The *allegorical sense*. We can acquire a more profound understanding of events by recognizing their significance in Christ; thus the crossing of the Red Sea is a sign or type of Christ's victory and also of Christian baptism.
>
> 2. The *moral sense*. The events reported in Scripture ought to lead us to act justly. As St. Paul says, they were written "for our instruction."
>
> 3. The *anagogical sense* [Greek: *anagoge*, "leading up"]. We can view realities and events in terms of their eternal significance, leading us toward our true homeland: thus the Church on earth is a sign of the heavenly Jerusalem.[83]

Many Scripture scholars consign this text to the antiquity to which it belongs as "an ancient tradition." "The individual doctrines that the *Catechism affirms have no*

83 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2d. ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), nos. 115–117.

other authority than that which they already possess."[84] This one possesses none. It is just that, an ancient tradition. It was not even mentioned in *Dei Verbum*.

Brown's dissertation stands unimpressed by this argument against the spiritual sense.

> The typical sense is generally defined in the textbooks as: "that meaning by which the things, which are signified by the words of Scripture, signify according to the intention of the Holy Spirit yet other things." In other words, some "thing" about which the text of Scripture speaks literally is used by God to foreshadow something else. ("Thing" is here used in a wide sense, referring to persons, actions, events, laws, et cetera.). …*The existence of types in the Bible is a dogma of faith*.[85]

If the existence of the spiritual sense is "a dogma of the faith," then its presence in the *Catechism is simply the reaffirmation of the formidable authority which it already possesses*.

Brown's position in his dissertation can be sustained on the basis of the two main features drawn above from his commentary on John 6:54–57: analogy/participation and the presence of the divine act of speech. Analogy and participation as affirmed in Brown's commentary on John 6:54–57 necessarily give rise to a great semiotic system, a system of signs and sacraments, that includes all creatures. A sign is that which, when known, makes known something else. If all creatures share in God's being, then all are signs *(semeia)* of God in some way. What we understand about them and express by words makes God known, in some instances only in the manner of metaphor (for example, in the words "rock, fortress, lion"), in others by way of analogy (for example, in the words "being, life, knowledge, love").

At the beginning of his account of the sacraments, Thomas Aquinas argues that all signs of the sacred can be called "sacraments." His first argument against his own position is the following.

> All sensible creatures are signs of sacred things, according to Romans 1:20, "the invisible things of God are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made." But not all sensible things can be called sacraments. Therefore, not every sign of a sacred thing is a sacrament.[86]

84 Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the Optimism of the Redeemed," *Communio* 20 (1993): 469–484, at 479. Emphasis added.

85 Brown, *Sensus Plenior*, 10–11, emphasis added.

86 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* [Summary of Theology], pt. 3a, q. 60, art. 2, obj. 1, in *Summa Theologica*, 3 vols. (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1947).

The body of the article lays down the anthropological principle of the sacramental semiotic system: human beings are by their very nature semiotic animals. "Signs are given to human beings, because it belongs to them to make their way through the known to the unknown." In the fullest and most specific sense of "sacrament," a sign is a sacrament when it not only signifies what is sacred, but when God's holiness reaches out through it to make a person holy. This effective gift of the sacred takes place above all in the Eucharist, as Brown understands it in the text of John. Yet, in a broader sense, "sacrament" includes all signs of the sacred.

The response to the first argument turns on this distinction. Granted, not all creatures are sacraments in the full and specific way the Eucharist is. Still, in the wider sense all of them are, because they are necessarily signs of the sacred.

Two important points need to be added. First, the sacramental function of creatures as signs does not attach to them from the outside, if God is truly "more interior than my innermost."[87] As the innermost source of being, God shapes the sign-function of creatures not from the outside, but most deeply from within. God alone can give such a sign-function to creatures. No creature can use another to signify in this manner. It is a divine mode of signification through things. Together with analogy and participation, of course, this interior signification of creatures will become unintelligible in the degree to which one takes nominalist premises for granted.

Second, the semiotic system is not only metaphysical (manifesting God through the very being of all creatures), but historical, due to God's plan as it is worked out in history. It is above all here, in this historical dimension, that the spiritual sense of Scripture is at home. If history is directed toward a goal, its earlier phases will point ahead to the goal, just as the first part of a planned trip points ahead to the remainder. The early phases of the plan are signs of the plan's overall intention. One clearly sees this signification only when one is able to see the whole plan, at least in outline. Once again, this signification is not just accidentally attached to events, though a certain divine freedom in an accidental and still significant disposition of events should not be excluded.

If the divine act of speech reflected in Brown's commentary on John 6:54–57 is a real event, what happens in this semiotic system? What happens when God (to use Ratzinger's formulation in the Erasmus Lecture) "speaks as himself in human words in the world"? The necessary consequence of this unheard-of event is the fusion of the two kinds of signification. God's speech through words takes up and absorbs into itself his signification through the things signified by the words.

One needs to focus on two points about speech and things to grasp the impact of this fusion. First, it is only in full speech that one finds a personal testimony

87 St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk. 3, Chap. 6, 11, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 1st series, 14 vols., ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994 [reprint]), 1:63. Translation altered.

that can be grasped by personal faith (I believe you) while things are, in comparison, mute. Second, it is only in things that one finds full reality in all its depth while spoken or written words are, in comparison, mere signs. In the eternal Logos, both sides (sign and reality) simply coincide. The fusion of the two significations in human speech has, therefore, a profound impact on both sides: God's Word gives speech to things: things become a testimony in which God himself affirms a truth that can be grasped by personal faith. And the reality of things gives weight and depth to the words beyond their usual power. It is somewhat like a man giving flowers to a woman while saying, "I love you. I am yours and you are mine." The words give eloquence to the flowers and the flowers give reality and depth to the words. It is only somewhat like the spiritual sense because, just as God alone can signify through things, so he alone can speak through words that integrate the signification of things into themselves. The man who gives flowers cannot truly absorb the significance of the flowers into his words, because their sign-value does not flow, at root, from his intention. The significations remain separate, even if they are complementary.

The spiritual sense, understood as a fusion between the meaning of words and the signification of things is truly a sense of Scripture. What is at stake in it is not the significance of things alone, which remains relatively mute, but the meaning of the words of Scripture, enriched by its fusion with the signification of things. It is a strict and inescapable extension of the literal sense, due to the power of the divine speech act in the literal sense, which cannot be limited to the words, because God is the innermost source of being that gives to all beings their specific semiotic note and value.

The Account of the Spiritual Sense in Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas sees the spiritual or mystical sense of Scripture as necessarily arising in this manner from the literal sense, that is, as arising precisely because that literal sense is intended by God and therefore absorbs the signification of things. Once again, "Thing is here used in a wide sense, referring to persons, actions, events, laws, et cetera."[88] In his late *Lectura Romana on Peter Lombard* he sees this expansion of meaning as a necessary property of Scripture that is found in no other text.

> The mystical meaning is that which arises, not from the signification of the words, but from that of the things signified by the words. In other sciences, only words are passed on as signs to signify things, because their author is man, who can only signify things through words alone. In this Scripture even the things signified by the words signify something else. This is because

88 Brown, *Sensus Plenior,* 10.

> the Holy Spirit ordained that those things signified by the words would signify something further.[89]

In the *Summa Theologiae*, not long after the *Lectura Romana*, his argument is similar.

> The author of Scripture is God, in whose power it is not only to fit vocal sounds to the act of signifying (which man can do as well), but even things themselves. And therefore, while in all sciences vocal sounds signify, this science [namely, God's teaching in Scripture] alone has the property that the very things signified by vocal sounds signify something in turn. That first signification, by which vocal sounds signify things, belongs to the first sense, which is the historical or literal sense. The signification by which in turn the things signified by the vocal sounds signify other things is called the spiritual sense, which is grounded on the literal and presupposes it.[90]

The division of the spiritual sense into three senses—allegorical, moral and anagogical—is clear and transparent. It turns first on the distinction between practical truth (moral sense) and theoretical truth, and then within theoretical truth on the distinction between the preliminary truth of history (allegorical sense) and the definitive truth of the end (anagogical sense).[91] In the traditional order followed by Thomas, the two theoretical senses frame the practical sense.

Allegorical Sense: Littera gesta docet ("The letter shows things done"). Of the senses that express theoretical truth, the allegorical bears on the unity of the divine plan as it works itself out on a still imperfect level within the *gesta*, the deeds and events of history ("things" in the wide sense). It includes two main relations between distinct historical periods in this plan: the Old Testament in relation to its fulfillment by Christ; and the earthly life of Christ in relation to its fulfillment in the life of the Church on earth.

For example, when Scripture presents Christ himself as the Eucharist in the literal sense, "This is my body … this is my blood of the covenant,"[92] it speaks through the reality of the Eucharist itself about the innermost unity of the Church. This allegorical reading is supported by the literal sense of Paul's statement,

89 St. Thomas, *Lectura Romana in Primum Librum Sententiarum Petri Lombardi* [Roman Lectures on the First Book of the Sentences of Peter Lombard], prol. 4.1, reply obj. 3 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2006).

90 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, pt. 1a, q. 1, art. 10, contra.

91 See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales* [Miscellaneous Questions], quod. 7, q. 6, art. 2, contra.

92 Mark 14:22–24.

"Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all participate in the one bread."[93]

Moral Sense: The moral sense answers the question of practical truth, "What am I to do?" In the same literal statement about Christ in the Eucharist,[94] God directs an appeal to the eucharistic assembly for each individual person and the Church as a whole to conform its actions to the reality of the eucharistic Christ.[95]

Anagogical Sense: The whole of God's plan is most of all intelligible in terms of its end. The anagogical sense depends on the signification by which the whole plan, including the present life of the Church militant, points ahead to that end. When the letter speaks about the Eucharist, it speaks through the very reality of the Eucharist about the definitive city, the bride and wife of the Lamb,[96] in which the reciprocal vow between bride and bridegroom, "I am yours and you are mine," is consummated.

The traditional order of senses is intelligible. The inner logic of history (allegorical sense) is the basis for understanding the moral sense. For example, the objective fact of the Church's Eucharistic unity as a historical fact encountered in experience (which is the object of the allegorical sense of literal statements about Christ) is the proximate basis for understanding the moral sense in the concrete. Both the allegorical and the moral sense are ultimately completed by the orientation of everything to the end (anagogical sense). Both the Church's eucharistic unity and the eucharistic morality built on it are intelligible only as anticipations of the definitive city built by the slaying of the Paschal Lamb and by the consummation of the marriage between the Lamb and the city: I am yours and you are mine. The anagogical sense is the most sapiential.

In his *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, Thomas argues in detail that not all four senses are found in all passages of Scripture.[97] The following presentation follows this text closely, but uses the Eucharist as the example to preserve the thematic focus of the whole essay.

Only One Sense: Some passages, for example the description of the definitive Jerusalem in Revelation 20–21, bride of the slaughtered Lamb, have no spiritual sense at all, only a literal sense. Unless one has a clear grasp of "literal sense," this statement may appear strange. The literal sense is whatever the words really mean. Revelation 20–21 with its rich symbolic vocabulary is one of the most Spirit-filled passages in the whole of Scripture. All of this belongs to the literal sense. Such complex symbolism is not an example of the allegorical sense. It is part of the literal sense in describing the reality of the city. Since the city is the definitive reality, it

93 1 Cor. 10:17.

94 Mark 14:22–24.

95 See Donald J. Keefe, "Toward a Eucharistic Morality," *Communio* 2 (1975): 99–125.

96 Rev. 20–21.

97 See Aquinas, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, quod. 7, q. 6, art. 2, reply obj. 5.

signifies nothing beyond itself. It is for this reason that this text cannot have a spiritual sense. "What belongs according in the literal sense to the state of glory is traditionally interpreted in no other way [than the literal], because it is not the figure of something else, but figured by everything else."[98]

Two Senses: "What is said morally according to the literal sense is traditionally interpreted only allegorically."[99] For example, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you,"[100] the literal sense of which is the moral norm taught by Christ, speaks through that norm allegorically about the eucharistic gift of self as constitutive of the Church's life. It is not clear why Thomas does not consider the anagogical sense as a possibility in literally moral texts. The whole second part of the *Summa* treats moral matters as a great anagogical movement toward God. Why could the moral norm of love not point anagogically to the fulfilled eucharistic love that will be the principle of life of the glorified Church?

Three Senses: When the literal sense of Scripture speaks about the Church it cannot be interpreted allegorically. Paul's statement about the Church, "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body,"[101] has a literal, moral and anagogical sense, but not an allegorical sense, because it already refers in the sense of the letter to the final object of the allegorical sense, namely, the life of the Church. The only exception to this rule for Thomas are literal statements about the early Church, which can be interpreted allegorically with reference to the present Church.

Four Senses: All four senses are found in passages of the Old Testament about saving events and deeds, which point ahead to Christ and in passages of the New Testament about Christ, which point ahead to the Church. The example of the Eucharist given above illustrates the latter. "This is my body … this is my blood of the covenant"[102] speaks literally about Christ in the Eucharist, allegorically about the unity of the Church, morally about a eucharistic norm of action, and anagogically about the very end, the wedding of the Lamb.

Literal Statements about Christ as the Center of the Spiritual Sense

It is unfortunate that in his dissertation Brown has a decided preference for the term "typical sense" rather than "spiritual" or "mystical sense." In this preference, he follows the rather abstract neo-Scholastic discussion, which centered on the allegorical sense of Old Testament types, leaving the moral and anagogical sense as well as literal statements about Christ in relative obscurity. The search for allegorical types of Christ resulted in many forced and artificial constructions that

98 Aquinas, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, quod. 7, q. 6, art. 2, reply obj. 5.

99 Aquinas, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, quod. 7, q. 6, art. 2, reply obj. 5.

100 John 13:34.

101 1 Cor. 10:17.

102 Mark 14:22–24.

make no distinction between the literary technique of allegory and the allegorical sense. What might work in an inventive literary allegory is then assumed to be the spiritual sense of the words. It is not surprising that the typical sense does not enjoy Brown's favor. It embodies for him one of the main flaws in traditional exegesis that needs to be overcome by historical criticism faithful to the literal sense.

In actual Christian life, the main texts of Scripture in which God speaks to the Church in the spiritual sense are the Gospels and apostolic letters when they speak in the literal sense about Christ, as in the example of the Eucharist given above. Let us return to the concluding passage of Benedict XVI's meditation for the opening of the 2008 Synod on the Word of God.

> With his incarnation he said: I am yours. And in baptism he said to me: I am yours. In the Holy Eucharist, he says ever anew: I am yours, so that we may respond: Lord, I am yours. In the way of the Word, entering the mystery of his incarnation, of his being among us, we want to appropriate his being, we want to expropriate our existence, giving ourselves to him who gave himself to us.
>
> "I am yours." Let us pray the Lord that we may learn to say this word with our whole being. Thus we will be in the heart of the Word. Thus we will be saved.

The sentence, "In the Holy Eucharist, he says ever anew: I am yours, so that we may respond: Lord, I am yours," can be taken as an entrance door into reading the spiritual sense of the words, "This is my body … this is my blood of the covenant."[103] These words speak in their literal sense about Christ in the Eucharist, but, precisely because it is God who is speaking, he is speaking to us through the very reality of the eucharistic Christ, because that very reality is turned by his providence toward us now, toward our present moment: "I am yours."

In the present moment, in which the eucharistic assembly hears the Word of God about the Eucharist, it hears a present testimony of the covenantal God expressed not only through the words, but through the full richness and depth of the eucharistic Christ himself and it can embrace this testimony with the bride's words to her bridegroom, "My beloved is mine and I am his."[104]

Where in the letter of Scripture does God primarily speak to us through the very reality signified by the literal sense? The answer is clear. "God, who spoke in many partial and various ways of old to the fathers through the prophets, has spoken to us in the last of these days through [his] Son."[105] When he explains how

103 Mark 14:22–24.

104 Song 2:16.

105 Heb. 1:1–2.

the spiritual sense of biblical words about Christ arises out of their literal sense, Thomas Aquinas shows indirectly why this particular instance of the spiritual sense is indeed so central. In the *Quaestiones Quodlibetales* he goes first through the threefold basis of the spiritual senses in literal statements about Jesus, and then through the three senses themselves.

> What belongs to the head is prior to what belongs to the members, for the body is truly Christ's,
> (1) and what is done in him is a figure of Christ's mystical body and what is done in it,
> (2) so that it is in him, Christ, that we must find the exemplar for living.
> (3) It is also in Christ that the future glory is shown to us already now.
> For this reason, that which is said according to the *letter* about Christ himself, the head,
> (1) can be set forth *allegorically*, referring to his mystical body,
> (2) and *morally*, referring to our acts that must be formed anew following him himself,
> (3) and *anagogically*, inasmuch as in Christ the way of glory is shown to us.[106]

The fundamental reason for the spiritual sense of literal statements about Christ is that "the body is truly Christ's": I am yours and you are mine. It is created by Christ's complete eucharistic gift of self. This interior and constitutive mutual relation between Christ and his body gives rise to the spiritual sense. It is primarily when God speaks to the eucharistic assembly in the literal sense about Christ that he speaks through "things," namely, through the very reality of his Son in his act of giving himself. He speaks in all three dimensions, about the journey of history experienced by the Church in the present, about what we should do as members of that Church, and about the final goal toward which we tend.

This speech through his Son has, therefore, an interior ordination to his sacramental real presence in the Eucharist, which is irreducible to the words of Scripture, including its spiritual sense. God's speech in Scripture, including the spiritual sense, is completed by Christ's saving deed in his real presence. "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within yourselves."[107]

> There is a close connection between Scripture and the Eucharist. "The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as

106 Aquinas, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, quod. 7, q. 6, art. 2, reply obj. 5. Emphasis added.

107 John 6:53.

> she venerates the Body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's Word and of Christ's Body" (*Dei Verbum*, 21). In the Bible, God himself speaks the words of his love in human words in the course of the long history of his covenant with his people. "All that the inspired authors and sacred writers affirm is to be held as affirmed by the Holy Spirit" (*Dei Verbum*, 11). The Eucharist concentrates these many words of God in the Lord's bodily gift of self to his own, whom he "loves to the end" (John 13:1). For this reason, the Eucharist is a hermeneutical principle of Scripture, just as Scripture is an unfolding and explanation of the Eucharist.
>
> The written word does not, however, contain the totality of the eternal Logos made man. The incarnate Word, which is at the same time God's definitive deed, transcends the written word. The power of the written word, therefore, lives from the remaining presence of this greater Deed-Word. Our transformation by hearing and receiving the word happens by the power that is at work in the eucharistic real presence of the Deed-Word. The Word of God that consists of Scripture is a mode of the presence of the Lord that points toward the Eucharist. The presence of the Lord in the Word calls for his presence in the Eucharist.
>
> In both modes of presence, God is also deeply hidden, accessible only through the love of the Holy Spirit poured out in the heart, visible only for the eyes of faith that have gained sight through this love. Without an interior relation of love to the Lord, the letter of Scripture remains dead. Revitalizing the Word of God in the life of the Church stands and falls thus with the renewal of faith in Christ today.[108]

Conclusion

The choice of Brown's commentary on John 6:54–57 as the central thematic focus made the argument of this essay rather easy. A more difficult text would have been Brown's commentary on the end of 2 Maccabees, if he had written one. "So I myself will here bring my story to a halt. If it is well written and elegantly dispositioned, that is what I myself desired; if it is poorly done and mediocre, that was all

108 Proposal of the German bishops at the 2008 Synod of Bishops on the Word of God. This proposal was accepted in a much abbreviated form in the Synod's Final List of Propositions, Prop. 3. Available online at: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/index.htm.

I could manage."[109] There is little to be seen in this text, at least on the immediate level, of spousal dialogue and eucharistic self-gift. If the *analogia verbi* is true and God affirms what the human author affirms, then God affirms the mediocrity of 2 Maccabees—and speaks the truth. Yet God does not say about himself, "That is all I could manage."

Farkasfalvy suggests a fruitful line of argument in the analogy between incarnation and inspiration. As he points out, in the incarnation there is one person in two natures; in Scripture there is one written word with two affirmations, human and divine, proceeding from two distinct agents.[110] The human author's "I" cannot simply be identified with the divine "I." Many difficult questions of the *analogia verbi* remain to be addressed. One of the most interesting proposals is Origen's extended account of the analogous use of "gospel" in the first book of his commentary on John.[111] The difficulties mentioned by Cardinals König and Grillmeier as well as Bultmann and Brown do not disappear, but are intensified if one accepts *Dei Verbum* 11. The present essay simply proposes the *lectio difficilior* ("the more difficult reading") as the *lectio potior* ("the stronger reading").

It is easy to slice through the Gordian knot of this *lectio difficilior* with one stroke of the Enlightenment sword, as Bultmann does. He simply submits to the pressure of Baconian and Cartesian Nominalist premises transported by natural science in its present, academically established form. The universe follows mathematical laws, without exception. "Sire, I did not need this hypothesis," Pierre-Simon Laplace famously responded when Napoleon asked him why his five-volume Mécanique Céleste ("Celestial Mechanics") did not mention God. Laplace's response, some argue, is not a "philosophical commitment."

> It is, rather, the best research strategy that has evolved from our long-standing experience with nature. …Over centuries of research we have learned that the idea "God did it" has never advanced our understanding of nature an iota, and that is why we abandoned it.[112]

The final claim, "and that is why we abandoned it," is false. We abandoned it because in the founders of modern science, above all in Bacon and in Descartes, we chose power over nature as the end of understanding and therefore chose mathematical mechanics as the supreme way of understanding. "God did it" cannot, as a matter of principle, be a factor within a mathematical mechanical account, just as goodness or beauty cannot play any role in it. The claim that this is the one true way of

109 2 Macc. 15:37–38.

110 See Farkasfalvy, *Inspiration & Interpretation*, 219–220.

111 See Farkasfalvy, *Inspiration & Interpretation*, 233, n. 33.

112 See Jerry A. Coyne, "Seeing and Believing: The Never-Ending Attempt to Reconcile Science and Religion, and Why it is Doomed to Fail," *The New Republic* (February 4, 2009).

understanding nature, replacing all others, is an imposition of the will to power; it is not an insight gained in the simple experience of attempting to understand nature. Nevertheless, the academic mainstream affirms this claim.

> What is the nature of reality? Where did all this come from? … Traditionally these are questions for philosophy, but philosophy is dead. Philosophy has not kept up with modern developments in science, particularly physics. Scientists have become the bearers of the torch of discovery in our quest for knowledge.[113]

Posing as the latest and most sophisticated contribution to the debate between science and religion, this proclamation of the death of philosophy unwittingly proclaims its life. It is simply a restatement of Kant's thesis of the impossibility of metaphysics and the self-limitation of reason to the Baconian-Cartesian project.[114] Quantum mechanics may differ from Newtonian mechanics, but it is still mathematical mechanics. It is a curious irony of history that the school of Aristotle produced the *Questions of Mechanics* (which show both a clear awareness of the power of mechanics and a lack of interest in increasing such power) and that Bacon appeals to this Aristotelian text in his proposal for scientific knowledge.[115]

> Aristotle [said it] best. Physics and mathematics give rise to practical science and mechanics.[116] Inquiries into nature have the best result when the physical is brought to its term in the mathematical.[117] We give this precept: everything in nature relating both to bodies and powers must be set forth (as far as may be) numbered, weighed, measured, determined. *For it is works we are in pursuit of, not speculations.* Physics and mathematics, in due combination, give rise to practical science.[118]

Bultmann does not raise the fundamental question whether this Baconian limitation of reason by the interests of power is legitimate. He simply takes the absence of God from the mechanical cosmos as inevitable and attempts to neutralize it in

113 Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* (New York: Bantam, 2010), 5.

114 See, for example, Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, 4:275 (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2004).

115 For the importance of the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Questions of Mechanics* for the development of modern science, particularly for Galileo, who wrote a commentary on the text, see Paul Rose and Stillman Drake, "The Pseudo-Aristotelian *Questions of Mechanics* in Renaissance Culture," *Studies in the Renaissance* 18 (1971): 65–104.

116 Bacon, *Advancement of Knowledge*, Bk. 3, Chap. 6; *Works* 1:576.

117 Bacon, *New Organon*, Bk. 2, 8; *Works*, 1:235.

118 Bacon, *Parasceve ad Historiam Naturalem et Experimentalem* [Preparative for Natural and Experimental History], Apho. 7; *Works* 1:400; emphasis added.

a neo-Kantian Lutheran dialectic between sin and justification. Science is sin; it is boasting in human power; it is resistance against God as Lord. Yet, I cannot escape science and pretend that I am not a modern. I inescapably accept mathematical mechanical laws as the true way of understanding nature. I thereby create hell on earth. While I remain a sinner, the word of God smashes the self-security of my scientific reason and thereby liberates me to exist authentically in the challenge of the moment. *Simul justus et peccator* ("at the same time righteous and a sinner"). I am simultaneously an enlightened modern (enlightened with the light of science, which is the darkness of sin, producing hell) and a believer (enlightened by the truth of a divine Word that cannot enlighten my darkness). Scripture speaks to me now as the sovereign voice of God, but what it says will for ever remain unknown to me, because to know it would be to objectify it sinfully into sin.

> The Word of the Spirit never takes on form, never becomes concrete; it never becomes outward and objective, but is merely "picked up" at times in a sort of existential faith, a faith, however, which by no means truly exists because it vanishes as soon as it appears. Here everything remains uncertain, including the certitude of our uncertainty in the presence of the self-revealing God.[119]

Brown recognizes the catastrophe of this Bultmannian path. He resists the pressure of nominalist premises, because he is deeply rooted in the Catholic tradition. His roots are fragile, however, and his resistance is a highly dramatic struggle with partly disastrous outcome, as documented by his 1980 essay and its main thesis, "God does not speak." Still, in his practice as an exegete, as exemplified by his comments on John 6:54–57, he holds on to two key truths threatened by nominalist premises, namely, analogy/participation and the sense of the presence of a divine act of speech.

Brown's affirmation of these two truths opens up from within itself into the fuller understanding of the truth of Scripture, including the divinely intended literal sense and the spiritual sense as understood by Thomas Aquinas. What we can learn from Brown as readers of Scripture is to hold on to the same two truths.

Analogy/Participation: A renewal of the study of nature on the philosophical basis of analogy and participation is the most urgent need of exegesis, as Benedict XVI argues in his Regensburg lecture.

> Modern scientific reason has to assume simply as a given that there are rational structures of matter and that there is a cor-

119 Heinrich Schlier, "A Brief Apologia," in *We are Now Catholics: Rudolf Goethe, Martin Giebner, Georg Klunder, Heinrich Schlier*, ed. Karl Hardt (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1959), 187–215, at 205.

> respondence between our spirit and the prevailing rational structures of nature, on which the path of its method is based. Yet the question why this [given] is a fact is a real question, and one which has to be remanded by the natural sciences to other modes and planes of thought—to philosophy and theology.
>
> For philosophy and, albeit in a different way, for theology, listening to the great experiences and insights of the religious traditions of humanity, and those of the Christian faith in particular, is a source of knowledge, and to ignore it would be an unacceptable narrowing of our listening and responding. Here I am reminded of something Socrates said to Phaedo. In their earlier conversations, many false philosophical opinions had been raised, and so Socrates says: "It would be easily understandable if someone became so annoyed at all these false notions that for the rest of his life he despised and mocked all talk about being—but in this way he would be deprived of the truth of being and would suffer a great loss."
>
> The West has long been endangered by this aversion to the fundamental questions of its reason, and can only suffer great harm thereby. The courage to engage the whole breadth of reason, and not the denial of its grandeur—this is the program with which a theology grounded in biblical faith enters into the debates of our time. "Not to act reasonably, not to act with *logos*, is contrary to the nature of God," said Manuel II, according to his Christian understanding of God, in response to his Persian interlocutor. It is to this great *logos*, to this breadth of reason, that we invite our partners in the dialogue of cultures. To rediscover it constantly is the great task of the university.[120]

The renewal of the study of nature, overcoming the limits imposed on reason by nominalism as well as the Baconian-Cartesian will to power, is a huge task that will occupy generations of scientists, philosophers and theologians. At the very roots of that renewal, the metaphysics of analogy and participation needs to be thought through afresh, especially what follows from it for the semiotic system, the sacramental organism of signs.

The Divine Intention in the Literal Sense: In Scripture, God speaks as himself by human words in the world. If it is indeed God who is speaking, then we may "believe again" in the full truth of Scripture's literal sense and its full richness unfolded in the spiritual sense. Believing again is a sign of genuine philosophy and

120 Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University," translation revised.

reflection, of an open philosophy that is able to affirm the *analogia verbi* reaffirmed by Vatican II. "God, who spoke in the past, speaks without any break with the bride of his beloved Son. …All that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm is to be held as affirmed by the Holy Spirit."[121]

In conclusion, we can return to the text by St. Bernard quoted at the introduction of this article. It expresses the two truths in powerfully synthetic and deeply suggestive form.

> "He spoke and they were made" (Ps. 148:5). Yet, he who made me by merely speaking, by speaking once, certainly remade me *by speaking* much *and by doing* wonders ["Do this in memory of me"]. …In the first work he gave me myself; in the second *himself*, and where *he gave himself*, he gave me back to myself. As one given and given back, I owe myself for myself, and owe myself twice. What shall I render to God for himself? Even if I could give myself back to him a thousand times, what am I [compared] to God?[122]

121 *Dei Verbum*, 8, 11.

122 St. Bernard, *De Diligendo Deo*, Chap. 5, 15; emphasis added.