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The Tradition of Christian Allegory Yesterday and Today

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Allegory and Its Cultured Despisers

Many modern readers of the Bible disdain allegory, whether practicing Christians or academics, regarding it as a relic of a fanciful, unscientific Catholic past, an arbitrary way of imposing foreign meanings onto texts which has been fully superseded by modern ways of reading and interpreting rooted in common sense. In his brilliant essay on allegory, Andrew Louth writes, "There seems to be a fundamental distaste for, or even revulsion against, the whole business of allegory."[1] Why? Louth continues:

> Basically, I think because we feel that there is something *dishonest* about allegory. If you interpret a text by allegorizing it, you seem to be saying that it means something which it patently does not. It is irrelevant, arbitrary: by allegory, it is said, you can make any text mean anything you like.

The root of this judgment is the conviction that texts have one, simple, plain sense:[2]

> Behind this, perhaps, lies a feeling that there is something relatively unproblematic about the meaning of a literary passage: roughly, the meaning is what the author of the passage meant when he wrote it.[3]

R. C. P. Hanson's words are representative of the attitude Louth describes:

> Origen's use of allegory, with the exception of those few cases where he is confusing allegory with simple metaphor, is today widely regarded as wholly indefensible and as merely a process which caused Origen to mislead himself and others. At the best we may describe it as quaint and somewhat poetical; at the worst it is a device for obscuring the meaning of the Bible from

1 Andrew Louth, "Return to Allegory," in *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1983), 97.

2 Louth, "Return to Allegory," 97.

3 Louth, "Return to Allegory," 97.

> its readers. … This is a conception which, since the arrival of historical criticism, has had to be entirely abandoned and is, as far as one can prophesy, never again likely to be revived.[4]

Louth's article is entitled "Return to Allegory" for a reason, and since its publication thirty years ago, theologians and ecclesially-minded exegetes have developed a renewed appreciation for the historical practice of allegorical reading (allegoresis) and the possibilities it may afford for the present as they have ever more endeavored to reclaim the Bible as the Church's Scripture and develop substantive theological exegesis for the present day.[5] The reasons largely concern both postmodern and postliberal turns in the humanities and theology, after which modern disdain for the past is considered a conceit and social location within a tradition taken as truism, as well as the failure of the so-called historical-critical method to deliver much of relevance or substance for the contemporary Christian life.[6]

My thesis is as follows: Reading for the spiritual senses of Scripture, commonly called "allegory," is a natural and normal way to read religious texts, is seen in the biblical texts themselves as well as premodern tradition, and is for Catholics affirmed by contemporary authorities from the Second Vatican Council to the present. Before discussing particular biblical texts and the tradition of spiritual interpretation in detail, two preliminary questions require attention. What, really, is "allegory"? And further, why has the Church engaged in it since its earliest days?

What Allegory Is—and Isn't

Allegory is not the questionable or illegitimate substitution of one thing for another, as many have defined it, nor wanton eisegesis in which interpreters read things into texts that simply are not there, but rather the practice of the disciplined, religious, spiritual interpretation of sacred, authoritative texts motivated by their inspired, inherent dynamism for the nurturing of the life of the community.

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4 R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen's Interpretation of Scripture* (London: SCM Press, 1959; repr., Lousiville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 367.

5 See, for instance, the cautious remarks of Brian E. Daley, S.J., in "Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable? Reflections on Early Christian Interpretations of the Psalms," *Communio* 29 (2002): 185–216.

6 The most bracing critique of the so-called historical-critical method remains Walter Wink's "The Bankruptcy of the Biblical Critical Paradigm," in *The Bible in Human Transformation: Toward a New Paradigm in Bible Study* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973; repr., 2010), 1–12. For a critique from an orthodox Christian perspective, see Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "Biblical Interpretation in Conflict: The Question of the Basic Principles and Path of Exegesis Today," in *God's Word: Scripture, Tradition, Office*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 91–126. This essay was first delivered orally on January 27, 1988, at Saint Peter's Church, New York, N.Y., as the Erasmus Lecture, sponsored by the Institute on Religion and Public Life, publisher of *First Things*.

Clarification of terms is in order. "Allegory" is generally used to refer to the three spiritual senses of Scripture, the other sense being the literal. The Western, Catholic tradition came to divide the spiritual sense further into the more narrow allegorical sense proper, the moral (or tropological) sense, and the anagogical sense (which concerns the pilgrimage to heaven). Now "allegory" is often misunderstood, as if Origen's brand thereof were definitive, but the Western, Catholic tradition delimits its proper scope. The Western Fathers and medievals generally use the term "allegory" to describe what most today call "typology." But premodern interpreters made no such distinction, and in fact the Latin word *typologia* did not appear until 1840, nor the English "typology" until 1844.[7] What premoderns called "allegory" resembles what moderns call "typology." For instance, for St. Thomas Aquinas, the "allegorical sense" (*sensus allegoricus*) concerns the Christological fulfillment of Old Testament events and figures. He writes, "so far as the things of the Old Law signify the things of the New Law, there is the allegorical sense."[8] Like him and before him, St. Augustine rooted all the spiritual senses in the letter and asserted that one does constructive theology from the literal sense alone. And before him St. Irenaeus saw in Scripture a record of the divine economy of salvation, with the Church's rule of faith serving as the hypothesis that revealed its mosaic unity, a unity centered on the risen Jesus Christ, a unity requiring spiritual exegesis. In our age the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has codified this longstanding understanding of the fourfold sense of Scripture and its interpretation in Christian tradition,[9] and teaches that allegory proper concerns the significance of Old Testament events in Christ.[10] Far from being a license for enthusiastic speculation, then, the Western tradition has understood "allegory" as that which concerns typological relationships between the Testaments as well as the other spiritual senses as rooted in and constrained by the literal sense.

Why Allegory Was, and Is, and Will Be

But why did the tradition of the fourfold sense evolve? Jesus and the Church engaged in spiritual exegesis (allegory in the broader sense) of the Bible because it is a natural and normal way to read sacred, authoritative texts, common to pagans and Jews as well as Christians, regardless of any particular philosophical undergirding. In general, spiritual interpretation in paganism, Judaism, and Christianity trades on several common assumptions and concerns. First, it is assumed the text is a

7 Louth, "Return to Allegory," 118, citing Alan C. Charity, *Events and Their Afterlife: The Dialectics of Christian Typology in the Bible and Dante* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 171.

8 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* [The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas], pt. 1a, q. 1, art. 10, resp. (London: Burns, Oates, and Washburne, 1920).

9 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2d. ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), nos. 109–119.

10 *Catechism*, no. 117 § 1.

coherent unity, the product of one ultimate mind that also reflects the reality of a coherent cosmos. Here allegory becomes a tool to reconcile myriad texts into a harmonious whole through some key so that they cohere with the divine and created reality. Second, ancient pagans, Jews, and Christians had developed substantive moral instincts and convictions based on reason, nature, and convention, and so the sacred text needed to be seen to conform with the claims of good morals. Third, most cultures have assumed an invisible world behind and above the visible, whether the ancient Greeks or animists today; in many ways Plato merely codified commonsense convictions about the nature of reality. Fourth, the desire to use authoritative texts for positive purposes in the present necessitates creative application.

It is not only premodern pagans, Jews, and Christians who read allegorically, however. Because allegory, broadly speaking, concerns the art of interpreting the Scriptures for their perpetual relevance and applying them to the life of the community in the present, many contemporary Christians, especially evangelical Protestants, who would reject the validity of allegorical interpretation if asked directly, regularly engage in it unwittingly in preaching, teaching, and Bible study. Any time one perceives and presents Biblical "typology" between the Testaments, at which Reformed Christians in particular excel, one is engaging in what Aquinas called allegory. Whenever one reads Christ as an example for the Christian life, even along the lines of something as simple and popular as the former "What Would Jesus Do?" phenomenon, one is engaging in what the tradition came to call tropology, the moral sense. And anytime a practicing Christian uses Scripture to learn about heaven or indeed to shape one's faith and life so that one might by God's grace achieve heaven, one is engaging in anagogy.

Sacred texts simply function in these dynamic ways in religious communities, and contemporary theologians and exegetes are ever more coming to this realization as theory catches up with practice. In the wake of the poststructuralist turn in literary and cultural studies, church historian David Steinmetz wrote a broadside entitled "The Superiority of Pre-critical Exegesis," in which he stated bluntly:

> The defenders of the single meaning theory usually concede that the medieval approach to the Bible met the religious needs of the Christian community, but it did so at the unacceptable price of doing violence to the biblical text. … I should like to suggest an alternative hypothesis. The medieval theory of levels of meaning in the biblical text, with all its undoubted defects, flourished because it is true, while the modern theory of a single meaning, with all its demonstrable virtues, is false.[11]

11 David C. Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-critical Exegesis," *Theology Today* 37 (1980): 38.

Steinmetz does not root his claim in any particular conception of God or metaphysics but rather in an appreciation for the dynamic nature of the process of interpretation as texts interact with readers. This is not to say premodern interpreters were wrong, but that they were fundamentally right: reading for the fourfold sense is a natural way to read the Christian Bible, as the four senses cover the totality of the normative function of sacred Scripture. The practice of Christian allegoresis precedes the theoretical, philosophical undergirding that Augustine and Aquinas (among others) would give it; it does not depend on it. Much Jewish exegesis (with the exception of Philo) operated in ways similar to early Christian allegoresis but without any sustained, reflective metaphysical undergirding. Christian theology (and exegesis) has always appropriated structures, concepts, and tools from the realm of philosophy to provide theoretical undergirding for theological conviction and Christian practice. In our own day, it may indeed be possible for spiritual exegesis to thrive without a particularly Platonic or Aristotelian metaphysics, or in accord with the theological and philosophical program provided by the *ressourcement* school in its drive to recover the riches of patristic resources for the present day, particularly as embodied in the work of Henri de Lubac.[12] As the four senses are so bound up with the story of the economy of salvation from creation to eschaton as inscripturated in the Biblical story, one suspects that the narrative theology of recent decades could also do much to reinvigorate spiritual exegesis, especially when done in a Catholic context, as it has already done so much for the postcritical retrieval of authentic Christian tradition in the face of theology's and exegesis' captivity to a withering modernity.

But let us now return to the past to examine spiritual exegesis in the Bible and then the work of the three seminal figures of the Western Catholic tradition mentioned above regarding the unity and interpretation of Scripture, so as to reveal the fundamental coherence of that tradition as it began with Jesus and the apostles and continued through the early and medieval Church.

Allegory in the New Testament

The modernity to which the Reformation gave birth[13] assumed the Reformation's rejection of allegory in favor of the "plain sense" of Scripture, and so many today regard allegory as something foreign to the Scriptures, something imposed upon them by the corrupting influence of Greek metaphysics. In recent decades, however, the significant interest in the use of the Old Testament by New Testament

12 See Henri de Lubac, "Spiritual Understanding," trans. Luke O'Neill, in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, ed. Stephen E. Fowl, (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 3–25; and Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998–2009).

13 See Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How A Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012).

writers[14] has shown, I believe, that early Christians stand in fundamental continuity with Jewish interpreters of sacred Scripture before them and the Fathers and the medievals after them, reading the Old Testament allegorically. Precision is required when examining how a particular figure appropriates and interprets Scripture, whether (say) the Dead Sea community, Hillel, St. Paul, Augustine, or Aquinas, but, broadly speaking, Jewish authorities, the New Testament writers, the Fathers, and the medievals all engaged in spiritual exegesis.

Galatians 4:21–31 presents the classic case. Therein St. Paul presents what he terms "allegories" (*hatina estin allēgoroumena* ["this is an allegory"], Gal. 4:24); he compares Abraham's slave-born son Ishmael to the Judaizing, enslaving earthly Jerusalem, his mother Hagar representing Mt. Sinai in Arabia, bearing children for slavery, while on the other hand he compares Abraham's free-born son Isaac to the free Jerusalem above, the Galatians' true mother. The passage is a radical spiritual interpretation of the Genesis accounts concerning Ishmael and Isaac, and thus constitutes an embarrassment for those dedicated to the ideology of reading for the plain sense alone. Either the rejoinder is made that Paul here is really doing typology,[15] or that Paul's "allegories" are driven by his opponents' use of texts Paul himself would not have chosen.[16] But claiming that Paul is doing typology while using the term allegory has no force, for the distinction is not made until many centuries later. The idea that Paul is interpreting Ishmael and Isaac ironically fails as well, for Paul makes his rhetorical point skillfully. Most importantly, Paul engages in similar radical acts of exegesis in Galatians (for instance, in Gal. 3:1–14) as well as in contexts involving less passion, such as 1 Corinthians 10; Paul's hermeneutical maneuvers in Galatians 4:21–31 are not an idiosyncratic, isolated instance.

The most important passage for biblical allegory, however, is Luke 24:13–35, the story of the two disciples who encounter the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus.

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14 See C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Sub-structure of New Testament Theology* (London: Nisbet & Co., Ltd., 1952); Donald H. Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the New Testament in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998); Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Richard B. Hays, Stefan Alkier, and Leroy A. Huizenga, eds., *Reading the Bible Intertextually* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009). Indeed, given the sheer size and depth and history of composition of the Hebrew Bible, it is not surprising to find Israelite and Jewish tradents engaging in the phenomenon that Michael Fishbane calls "inner-biblical exegesis" within the broad bounds of the Hebrew Bible itself. See Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

15 See Gregory K. Beale, "Positive Answer to the Question Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?" in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994, repr. 2007), 387–403.

16 See C. K. Barrett, "The Allegory of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar in the Argument of Galatians," in *Essays on Paul* (London: SPCK, 1982), 154–168; Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 219; Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary 41 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 210.

After Jesus' passion, two disciples are walking to Emmaus discussing "the things that have happened."[17] The risen Jesus draws near and walks with them, but "their eyes were kept from recognizing him."[18] Luke employs the divine passive here: God is keeping them from recognizing the risen Jesus, and will reveal him to them at a moment of particular significance. Jesus inquires about the substance of their discussion, and in an instance of intense irony they proceed to relate to the risen Jesus much of what has just happened to Jesus.[19] What they relate lacks coherence; they tell of events—Jesus' mighty prophetic ministry, his unjust execution, reports of visions of angels and the empty tomb—and their dashed hopes that he might have been "the one to redeem Israel,"[20] but they can make no sense of the data.

But the risen Jesus can and does make sense of it for them,[21] and here Luke's story teaches both that the Old Testament is the necessary matrix for understanding Jesus while it takes the risen Jesus to bring coherence to the Old Testament: "And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself."[22] Here lies the root of the fundamental Christian claim that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ provides the hermeneutical key to the Scriptures, that he is the lens that brings them into focus.

But Luke is not finished, as if Scriptural interpretation were merely a matter of drawing the proper connections between Old Testament types and New Testament antitypes on an intellectual level. The two disciples compel Jesus to remain with them, for it is "evening."[23] They sit down for supper, and the risen Jesus—still unknown to them—"took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them."[24] Luke's language is patently eucharistic, recalling the institution of the Lord's Supper in Luke 22:14–23. And it is precisely when the risen Jesus begins to celebrate the Eucharist that "their eyes were opened and they recognized him" and he then "vanished out of their sight."[25] If it takes the risen Jesus to reveal the ultimate coherence of the Scriptures, it then takes the Eucharist to reveal Jesus (something Luke reinforces in Luke 24:35 as the two disciples relate "how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread").[26] Further, his vanishing suggests he has not

17 Luke 24:13–14.

18 Luke 24:15–16.

19 Luke 24:17–24.

20 Luke 24:21.

21 Luke 24:25–27.

22 Luke 24:27.

23 Luke 24:29.

24 Luke 24:30.

25 Luke 24:31.

26 In *Verbum Domini* [The Word of the Lord], Pope Benedict observes, "The Eucharist opens us to an understanding of Scripture, just as Scripture for its part illumines and explains the mystery of the Eucharist. Unless we acknowledge the Lord's real presence in the Eucharist, our

departed, but that going forward he remains present in the Eucharist. And here, then, we see that Scriptural interpretation goes beyond intellectual construals; Scriptural interpretation comes to full fruition in the liturgy, at the center of which stands the Eucharist. Emmaus implies mystagogy, to which we must later return.

Scripture and Allegory in the Western Tradition

St. Irenaeus

St. Irenaeus explicitly describes much of what Luke's Emmaus story suggests and implies about the Christological unity of Scripture and reading for the spiritual sense. For Irenaeus, there is one authoritative Church beginning with Jesus himself marked out by apostolic succession from Jesus, with one monotheist, Trinitarian rule of faith, and the Church rightly possesses the proper interpretive key for construing the mosaic of the Scriptures, Christ himself, the same Christ who founded and vivifies that same Church.

Irenaeus engaged in mortal struggle with the heresy of "Gnosticism," a term of art used to group together various diverse movements nevertheless related by certain family resemblances.[27] In general, the Gnostics filtered the Christian faith through an extreme Platonic lens with the result that that which was invisible and spiritual was considered good but that which was material, including the human body, was evil. This necessitated a minimum of two gods, one responsible for evil creation and another, the god of the New Testament, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. In some gnostic systems many gods or aeons mediate between true divinity and the material order. Salvation concerns the liberation of the spirit from the body and is attained through knowledge ("*gnōsis*," hence "Gnosticism"): knowledge that the illusory material order is evil, knowledge that one is a member of the elect, and knowledge of a secret key. Gnosticism is hierarchal and elitist: those elites who have spirits (*pneuma*) may attain salvation by knowledge, while those who have souls (*psuchē*) may attain some enlightenment if not salvation, while the vast majority of humanity belongs to those who have only bodies, the hylics (*hūlē*, "matter"), who can be neither enlightened nor saved.

In general, Gnostic doctrine and practice (such as contraception, abortion, extreme abstinence from sex and food or, conversely, extreme indulgence) flow from a rejection of the goodness of creation. Traditional, orthodox Christianity, being fundamentally Jewish, affirms the goodness of creation, both before and after the Fall, and from this traditional Christian doctrine and practice flow. Indeed, all of Christian doctrine and practice can be conceived of in terms of creation:

understanding of Scripture remains imperfect" (*The Word of the Lord: Verbum Domini: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation* [Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 2011], at 55).

27 For an examination of the diversity of these movements, see Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

God is the triune Creator, creation is damaged in the Fall, and the entire story of redemption culminating in the eschaton is the story of the triune God redeeming and transforming creation. For traditional Christianity, then, there is one God responsible for both creation and redemption, the Creator and the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. The material world is good, if fallen, and so salvation consists in the redemption of human bodies (as well as spirits or souls or both, depending on one's anthropology) made possible by Christ's bodily incarnation, life, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and (ultimately) return. Further, in principle all can be saved, not merely some elite, and salvation is achieved not by some secret knowledge but by saving, personal faith in a loving, personal God who gives the Church the sacraments as means to participation in his divine life, a salvation made known by a public gospel.

For Irenaeus, there is one Church founded by Jesus, a visible Church marked out by bishops who stand in apostolic succession going back to the apostles themselves and who bear forth the teaching of Jesus throughout the ages. In his famous work *Against Heresies*, he writes:

> It is possible, then, for everyone in every church, who may wish to know the truth, to contemplate the tradition of the apostles which has been made known to us throughout the whole world. And we are in a position to enumerate those who were instituted bishops by the apostles and their successors down to our own times, men who neither knew nor taught anything like what these heretics rave about.[28]

Later he will remind his readers, "The true knowledge [*gnōsis*] is the doctrine of the apostles, and the ancient organization of the Church throughout the whole world, and the manifestation of the body of Christ according to the succession of bishops, by which succession the bishops have handed down the Church which is found everywhere."[29]

It is fashionable nowadays to speak not of the early Christianity but of "Christianities," and to claim that the idea that there was one Church was the anachronistic revision of history on the part of the religious victors. True, many claimed to be "Christians" in antiquity, and there were many bodies claiming Christian status proclaiming various doctrines (as Irenaeus himself describes). But to say that this means we must speak of "Christianities" is to smuggle in a value judgment under the guise of objective sociological description, for even though there were many groups claiming the name Christian, is does not follow

28 St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols., eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004 [reprint]), vol. 1., 3.3.1; cf. 3.3.2, 3.3.4.

29 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.33.8; see 3.4.1.

that they were all entitled to it. The question concerning what counts as authentic Christianity cannot be decided on sociological or historical grounds.

Irenaeus' answer, as we have seen, is that authentic Christianity is found in the Church Jesus founded. The bishops of this visible Church guard and proclaim Christian doctrine according to what many in the early Church call the *regula fidei*, the "rule of faith," or sometimes other phrases such as the "rule of the Church," or the "rule of truth;" Irenaeus will employ the phrase "the canon of truth."[30] Versions of the Rule as given by various early tradents are rudimentary monotheistic and Trinitarian statements not unlike the Apostles' Creed with which modern Christians are familiar. Irenaeus describes it as follows:

> The Church … has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith: [She believes] in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and His [future] manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father …[31]

Irenaeus, then, operates with a hermeneutics of authority. The Bible is the Church's book which, being outside the visible Church and lacking its rule, heretics have no right to interpret. The Church founded by Jesus has the rule of faith given by that same Jesus, and the Scriptures may not and cannot be interpreted contrary to it.

Here we see subtly an idea found repeatedly in the Fathers and medievals: any spiritual, allegorical readings are constrained by the rule of faith, for the rule is a summary of the Faith that Scripture itself presumes and presents. Indeed, Irenaeus will anticipate Augustine and Aquinas by his insistence on the clarity of the letter of Scripture such that the doctrinal contents of the Faith presented in the rule "are such as fall under our observation, and are clearly and unambiguously in express terms set forth in the sacred Scriptures."[32]

For Irenaeus, then, the monotheist, Trinitarian rule of faith functions as the "hypothesis" of the Christian Bible, the plot, the narrative, the story of Scripture.[33] For Irenaeus, "the rule is the principle or logic of scripture itself. It is the right rule

30 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.2.1.

31 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1.10.1.

32 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 2.27.1.

33 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1.9–10.

to use because it articulates the divine order within Scripture. It is the right plan because it describes that actual architecture of the Bible."[34]

The rule is necessary because Scripture can appear to us as bits and pieces. And so Irenaeus speaks of it as a mosaic that must follow a particular pattern if it is to remain coherent:

> [The heretics'] manner of acting is just as if one, when a beautiful image of a king has been constructed by some skillful artist out of precious jewels, should then take this likeness of the man all to pieces, should rearrange the gems, and so fit them together as to make them into the form of a dog or of a fox, and even that but poorly executed; and should then maintain and declare that *this* was the beautiful image of the king which the skillful artist constructed, pointing to the jewels which had been admirably fitted together by the first artist to form the image of the king, but have been with bad effect transferred by the latter one to the shape of a dog, and by thus exhibiting the jewels, should deceive the ignorant who had no conception what a king's form was like, and persuade them that that miserable likeness of the fox was, in fact, the beautiful image of the king.[35]

It is the rule of faith given by Jesus to the Church he founded, then, that provides the hypothesis, the proper key for organizing the mosaic of the Church's canonical Scriptures. Crucial here are the concepts of economy and recapitulation, as they require spiritual exegesis or allegoresis. *Oikonomia* (economy) in the ancient world meant orderly arrangement, particularly with reference to literature, and so for Irenaeus, the divine economy means that God works in an orderly way in creation and history and thus Scripture, with Christ as the center, as the goal of sacred history. In Christ, then, all things in heaven and earth are "recapitulated" in Christ: "from David's belly the King eternal is raised up, who [recapitulates] all things in Himself, and has gathered into Himself the ancient formation [of man] … recapitulating Adam in himself."[36] For Irenaeus, then, the divine economy in which Christ recapitulates all things enables not only allegorical (typological) relationships between the Testaments but their continuation in mystagogy, as the risen Christ is not merely textual but real, ascended into heaven.

One is here reminded of the encounter of the despairing disciples on the road to Emmaus: they were not able to organize the data of their experiences into

34 John J. O'Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 120.

35 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1.8.1.

36 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.21.9.

any coherent image. But the risen Jesus—who, in Luke's presentation[37] and according to the ancient Christian concept of *Christus Totus* is the Church—was able to provide the key, even himself, which brought coherence to the Scriptures and their experiences as he explained he was the center of both. For Irenaeus, then, like the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus, there is an allegorical relationship between the Testaments seen clearly when one reads spiritually according to the rule of faith.

St. Augustine

St. Augustine has much to say about biblical interpretation. Indeed, whereas for Augustine the Scriptures' perceived crudity proved an obstacle to his conversion, St. Ambrose's allegorical homilies opened them up for Augustine in a way that made his eventual conversion possible. And so the mature Augustine presents a sophisticated understanding of Scripture and its interpretation that allows for disciplined allegory.

Augustine operates with a fundamental neoplatonic worldview; visible things, including words, are signs of invisible, intelligible things. Like many others in antiquity, then, whose allegorical interpretation was rooted in a fundamental conviction that reality was both visible and invisible, for Augustine reading for the spiritual sense was natural, for it accorded with the nature of reality. One reads the visible words of Scripture, then, to discern and learn the invisible, intelligible doctrines of the Christian faith. But this is not a raw intellectual exercise; it is also a matter of existential involvement as biblical interpretation is meant to increase the interpreter's faith, hope, and (especially) charity, for God is love and Scripture functions to cultivate love of God and love of neighbor.

De doctrina christiana ("On the transmission of Christian culture," or, more simply, "Teaching Christianity") is Augustine's treatise training teachers how the canon cultivates Christian culture. He means to empower readers by giving them rules to solve obscurities and get at hidden meanings of passages.[38] For Augustine, everything—his theology, his conception of the Trinity, Scriptural interpretation—comes down to love, for God himself is love. Augustine informs his readers that "the fulfillment and the end of the law and of all the divine Scriptures is love,"[39] and this love is twofold: "love of the thing which is to be enjoyed" (God), and "of the thing which is able to enjoy that thing together with us" (neighbor). Thus, Augustine argues, Scriptural interpretation must edify in love: "So if it seems to you that you have understood the divine Scriptures, or any part of them, in such a way that by this understanding you do not build up this twin love of God and

37 See Acts 9:4–5: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me … I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

38 *De doctrina christiana, Prol.* 9. Quotations of *De doctrina christiana* are from the translation in *Teaching Christianity,* trans. Edmund Hill, O.P., The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996).

39 Augustine, *Teaching Christianity,* Bk. 1, Chap. 39, alluding to Rom. 13:8 and 1 Tim. 1:5.

neighbor, then you have not understood them."[40] For Augustine, unlike most modern biblical interpreters, interpretation is self-involving, not merely descriptive or objective but something that requires embodiment and transformation.

Ultimately, as Augustine reads Paul's words regarding the three theological virtues in 1 Corinthians 13, the goal of interpretation is eschatological blessedness: "all knowledge and all prophecy are into service" for the sake of "faith, hope, charity," but in the end "faith gives way to sight, and hope gives way to bliss itself, which we are going to arrive at, while charity will actually grow when these other two fade out."[41] Indeed, Augustine here speaks of the instrumental nature of the Scriptures in a way perhaps shocking to those who have been trained to revere them: "And so people supported by faith, hope and charity, and retaining a firm grip on them, have no need of the Scriptures except for instructing others."[42]

But the beginning of the path to such lofty spiritual stature begins with the letter of Scripture. Having developed familiarity with the Scriptures to the point of memorizing them, the teacher is to master "those things put clearly in them," for "in the passages that are put plainly in scripture is to be found everything that touches upon faith, and good morals, that is to say hope and charity." Only then can one use the clear passages to understand the unclear: "instances from the plainer passages are used to cast light on the more obscure utterances, and the testimony of some undoubted judgments is used to remove uncertainties from those that are more doubtful."[43] Later Augustine will assert that one must phrase and pronounce the written Scriptures (which at that time were written in *lectio continua*, that is, continually, with no spaces between words or punctuation) and thus interpret them in accord with the *regula fidei*, the rule of faith, "which you have received from the plainer passages of Scripture and from the authority of the Church."[44] Augustine assumes the Church's rule and the "plainer passages" of Scripture itself do not contradict each other; Christian Scripture and tradition both come from the one Word of God. Further, we also see how important the rule of faith is, for Augustine adverts to it first before context; only if the rule and the plainer passages fail to resolve questions about interpretation in pronunciation does one then refer to the wider literary context.

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40 Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, Bk. 1, Chap. 40.

41 Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, Bk. 1, Chap. 41–42.

42 Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, Bk. 1, Chap. 43.

43 Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, Bk. 2, Chap. 14.

44 Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, Bk. 3, Chap. 2. St. Augustine provides an example: *In principio erat Verbum et Verbum erat apud Deum et Deus erat* ("In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and God was") is a heretical reading of John 1:1, as severing it from what follows, *Verbum hoc erat in principio apud Deum* ("This Word was in the beginning with God") "is a refusal to confess that the Word is God. But this is to be refuted by the rule of faith, which prescribes for us the equality of the three divine persons" (*Teaching Christianity*, Bk. 3, Chap. 3).

Augustine now begins to discuss "metaphorical" signs. Signs (here, words) are either proper or metaphorical. Knowledge of proper signs (words) is necessary for the letter, and securing that knowledge involves learning Latin, Hebrew, and Greek.[45] Metaphorical signs for Augustine function allegorically, and he employs the classic example from 1 Corinthians 9:9, "You shall not muzzle the ox that threshes the corn." The word "ox" signifies the animal "ox," but the thing that is the bovine creature signified by the verbal sign can in turn function as a further signifier and signify what Paul means in his metaphorical point: "the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel."[46]

But again, for Augustine, spiritual exegesis is not merely a matter of apostolic example. Rather, it is rooted in the nature of that twofold reality of visible and invisible which Scripture itself describes. If one remains in the realm of the letter and fails "to refer what is signified in this proper sense to the signification of something else," one suffers "the wretched slavery of the spirit, treating signs as things, and thus being unable to lift up the eyes of the mind above bodily creatures, to drink in the eternal light."[47] The examples Augustine uses, however, reveal that he is thinking of what moderns might call typology: "sabbath" should point beyond one of the seven days of the week, presumably to the eschaton,[48] while "sacrifice" should point beyond animal and grain offerings, presumably to Christ.

But how does one determine when something is meant "metaphorically" or allegorically? Augustine writes, "And here, quite simply, is the one and only method: anything in the divine writings that cannot be referred either to good, honest morals, or to the truth of the faith, you must know is said figuratively. Good honest morals belong to loving God and one's neighbor, the truth of the faith to knowing God and one's neighbor."[49]

St. Thomas Aquinas

St. Thomas Aquinas discusses the question of whether Scripture has multiple senses in the *Summa* at 1.1.10. Although appropriating an Aristotelian framework rather than Augustine's neo-Platonism, Aquinas saw himself as an Augustinian and saw himself as a servant of the Christian tradition. Thus we see in Aquinas much of the substance we have surveyed regarding Augustine. Aquinas asserts that God is the author of Scripture, and thus it is in his divine power "to signify His meaning, not by words only (as man can also do), but also by things themselves."[50]

45 Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, Bk. 2, Chap. 16.

46 1 Cor. 9:14, even though Paul says he has not made use of that right in 1 Cor. 12b and 15.

47 Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, Bk. 3, Chap. 9.

48 See Augustine, *Confessiones* [Confessions] Bk. 13, Chap. 50–53, in *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick, Oxford's World Classics (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 304–305.

49 Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, Bk. 3, Chap. 14.

50 Aquinas, *Summa*, pt. 1a, q. 1, art. 10, resp.

In theological science, then, "things signified by the words have themselves also a signification."[51] For Aquinas, as for Augustine, this double signification explains the relationship between the literal and the spiritual senses: "That signification whereby things signified by words have themselves also a signification is called the spiritual sense, which is based on the literal, and presupposes it."[52] Note well the import of this claim: the spiritual sense is logically and theologically secondary to the literal sense, which therefore functions as a constraint.

Aquinas then divides the spiritual sense into three divisions, echoing the codification of the tradition that had been achieved by his time. First, the "allegorical sense" (*sensus allegoricus*) is found when "the things of the Old Law signify the things of the New Law."[53] Aquinas mentions Hebrews 10:1 as Scriptural support, which teaches that the law is a shadow of further realities, not the realities themselves. This means that "allegory" for Aquinas was not speculation born of monastic practice or spiritual enthusiasm, but was what moderns call typology, something demanded by the structure of Scripture itself and defended with apostolic warrant. Second, Aquinas says that insofar as things which Christ does or which signify him are concerned with what we ought to do, there we encounter the moral sense (*sensus moralis*), or tropology, for in the New Law "whatever our head [Christ] has done is a type of what we ought to do."[54] Finally, that which signifies "eternal glory" concerns "the anagogical sense" (*sensus anagogicus*), drawing on (pseudo-) Dionysius, who says, "The New Law itself is a figure of future glory,"[55] which implies mystagogy, as liturgical and sacramental life is a participation of heaven in time.

Aquinas then roots the coherence of the four senses in the divine author, claiming that God comprehends the multiple senses of Scripture in his intellect while intending the literal sense. Further, God does not generate those senses by pure divine will; it is also in the nature of Scripture's words. Aquinas says that the multiplicity of senses does not depend on words having multiple meanings but "because the things signified by the words can be themselves types of other things."[56] In what follows, we see the classic Western constraint of spiritual exegesis by the literal sense:

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51 Aquinas, *Summa*, pt. 1a, q. 1, art. 10, resp. We are here reminded of Augustine's discussion of 1 Cor. 9:9.

52 Aquinas, *Summa*, pt. 1a, q. 1, art. 10, resp.

53 Aquinas, *Summa*, pt. 1a, q. 1, art. 10, resp.

54 Aquinas, *Summa*, pt. 1a, q. 1, art. 10, resp.

55 Aquinas, *Summa*, pt. 1a, q. 1, art. 10, resp., quoting Pseudo-Dionysius, *De caelesti hierarchia* [*The Celestial Hierarchy*] 1, in Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid; Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist, 1987), 147.

56 Aquinas, *Summa*, pt. 1a, q. 1, art. 10, rep. obj. 1.

> Thus in Holy Writ no confusion results, for all the senses are founded on one—the literal—from which alone can any argument be drawn, and not from those intended in allegory, as Augustine says. Nevertheless, nothing of Holy Scripture perishes on account of this, since nothing necessary to faith is contained under the spiritual sense which is not elsewhere put forward by the Scripture in its literal sense.[57]

For the West, then, the spiritual sense of Scripture was rooted in the nature and will of God and the twofold structure of reality. Further, God, Scripture in all its senses, and reality formed a coherent unity understood by the Church and fundamentally articulated by the Church's rule of faith, whose story proclaimed God as creator and consummator with Christ at the center. For the west, "allegory" is somewhat narrow, concerning typological and mystagogical relationships in the economy of salvation, while all the three spiritual senses are rooted in the letter, which, in turn, constrains spiritual exegesis.[58]

Allegory and Mystagogy

Let us return to Emmaus, in which the risen Jesus provides dominical warrant and example for the practice of allegory consummated in mystagogy. But given that we are dealing here with the risen Jesus, who is soon to ascend into heaven,[59] allegory in this strict sense is not merely one salutary practice among many or simply a good idea. Much more than that, Luke's Christology of the risen and ascended Jesus suggests allegory is inherent in the structure and function of Scripture, and indeed not just Scripture but the entire cosmos, since, as Paul puts it, "in him all things hold together,"[60] the same Risen One who was revealed to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. We encounter this risen Jesus supremely in the eucharistic liturgy, which the Second Vatican Council taught is "the summit toward which the activity

57 Aquinas, *Summa*, pt. 1a, q. 1, art. 10, rep. obj. 1.

58 If allegory is as reasonable and defensible as the tradition claims, why did the Reformation reject spiritual exegesis? First, not all exegetes were as cautious as Augustine and Aquinas would have them be; some interpreters do worse than their theory. Second, the tradition buttressed the spiritual senses with a metaphysical worldview the Reformers (being voluntarists and nominalists) rejected. Third, the Reformers were trained in rhetoric, and throughout Church history, those trained in rhetoric, which concerns the human use of words in concrete situations on the ground, were skeptical about the philosophical commitments undergirding allegory (such as the Antiochene Fathers, who had plenty to say against Alexandrian allegory). Finally, our late formal distinction between "typology" and "allegory" owes itself to the Reformation. On the one hand, the Reformation rejected allegory in its desire to pursue the "plain sense" of Scripture through the grammatico-historical method, but, on the other hand, could not reject the obvious correspondences between the Testaments. The material distinction between what would later be called typology and allegory is perhaps first seen in William Tyndale.

59 Luke 24:51.

60 Col. 1:17.

of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows."[61] The Mass is indeed heaven breaking into earth, with architecture, art, music, and *ars celebrandi* (the "art of celebration") all ideally functioning to point us to the eschatological moment which even now breaks in, as it did on the road to Emmaus. As Scott Hahn writes, "[E]very eucharistic liturgy conforms to the pattern established at Emmaus: the opening of the scriptures followed by the breaking of the bread, the liturgy of the word followed by the liturgy of the eucharist. The Mass, then, is the place par excellence of the scriptures' faithful reception."[62]

The linking of Scriptural word and liturgical eucharistic sacrament in the Emmaus story points to a truth largely forgotten. In our individualistic, post-Gutenberg age, in which Bibles are readily available and literacy widespread, most Christians read Scripture as individuals and as members of small groups. For this reason, many are unaware that both historically and theologically the Bible's natural habitat is the liturgy. Indeed, in the biblical story itself what would become the original Scriptures of Israel—the Ten Commandments and the broader Torah—were given to Moses in the midst of an encounter with the Lord God on Sinai,[63] and the covenant with Israel is sealed with sacrificial liturgy,[64] after which Moses receives many detailed instructions concerning Israel's sacred sacrificial liturgy going forward.[65] From the outset, the first Scriptures were received in and with liturgy, concerned liturgy, and were handed down in liturgy. Later Christian questions concerning the contents of the canon of the New Testament were also driven by liturgical concerns. The question was, "Which documents could be read, chanted, and proclaimed in liturgy, and which were forbidden?" For early Christians and Jews before them, then, the Bible was learned and experienced in the context of the liturgy. The Scriptures were read or chanted and preached in synagogues and churches. Most of the young learned the Jewish or Christian faith not by reading scrolls or codices they did not possess, given their great expense, and could not read, given near-universal illiteracy, but from their parents and in liturgy.

But the liturgical habitat of Scripture is not merely a function of ancient social conditions in which scrolls were scarce, codices uncommon, and readers rare. Rather, Scripture's home in the liturgy is a function of theology. In fact, it is more than that, more than an intellectual datum; it is a function of Catholic

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61 Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* [This Sacred Council], Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (December 4, 1963), 10, in *Vatican Council II: Volume 1: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. and trans. Austin Flannery, O.P. (rev. ed.; Northport, New York: Costello, 2004), 1–36, at 6.

62 Scott Hahn, *Letter and Spirit: From Written Text to Living Word in the Liturgy* (NY: Doubleday, 2005), 29.

63 Exod. 19–20.

64 Exod. 24.

65 Exod. 25–31, 35–40

culture (which the Catholic liturgical cultus cultivates). As the Pontifical Biblical Commission put it:

> From the earliest days of the Church, the reading of Scripture has been an integral part of the Christian liturgy, an inheritance to some extent from the liturgy of the synagogue. Today, too, it is above all through the liturgy that Christians come into contact with Scripture, particularly during the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. In principle, the liturgy, and especially the sacramental liturgy, the high point of which is the Eucharistic celebration, brings about the most perfect actualization of the biblical texts, for the liturgy places the proclamation in the midst of the community of believers, gathered around Christ so as to draw near to God. Christ is then "present in his word, because it is he himself who speaks when sacred Scripture is read in the Church" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7). Written text thus becomes living word.[66]

There is an organic relationship among the economy of salvation in history, its inscripturation in the Bible, and mystagogy, which is salvation history continuing in our present. As Jean Daniélou writes:

> The sacraments are conceived in relation to the acts of God in the Old Testament and the New. God acts in the world; His actions are the *mirabilia*, the deeds that are his alone. God creates, judges, makes a covenant, is present, makes holy, delivers. These same acts are carried out in the different phases of the history of salvation. There is, then, a fundamental analogy between these actions. The sacraments are simply the continuation in the era of the Church of God's acts in the Old Testament and the New. This is the proper significance of the relationship between the Bible and the liturgy. The bible is a sacred history; the liturgy is a sacred history.[67]

A purely intellectual conception of Christian faith would content itself with examining the typological relationships between the Testaments as they present the economy of salvation culminating in Jesus Christ. But salvation history does not

66 Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (April 15, 1993), IV.C.1, in *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, ed. Dean P. Béchard, S.J. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 244–316, at 308.

67 Jean Cardinal Daniélou, S.J., "The Sacraments and the History of Salvation," *Letter & Spirit* 2 (2006): 210.

stop with Jesus Christ or the effective closing of the New Testament canon (if we could indeed put a firm date on it). Daniélou continues:

> But did sacred history stop with Jesus Christ? This is, indeed, what we usually seem to ask. And this is because we do not place the sacraments in the perspective of sacred history. We forget that, although Jesus Christ is the goal of sacred history, his coming into the world is only the inauguration of his mysteries. In the Apostles' Creed, after the mysteries of the past, we speak of a mystery still to come: *inde ventúrus est* ("he will come again"). But between the two there is a mystery of the present: *sedet ad déxteram patris* ("he is seated at the right hand of the Father").[68]

Daniélou was a leader of the *ressourcement* school leading up to and during the Second Vatican Council, and the influence of this movement proved decisive in the substance of the conciliar documents and later fruits of the Council such as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. As mystagogy is the sacramental completion of typological allegory, this official affirmation of mystagogy is part and parcel of the official affirmation of allegory one finds in *Dei Verbum* and the *Catechism*. Therefore we should not be surprised to find mystagogy codified therein: "'The mysteries of Christ's life are the foundations of what he would henceforth dispense in the sacraments, through the ministers of his Church, for 'what was visible in our Savior has passed over into his mysteries.'"[69]

Return to Allegory

Unfortunately, the intellectual and existential riches of this approach are often neglected as many Catholic biblical scholars have opted for a sterile historicism, finding in documents such as *Divino Afflante Spiritu* ("inspired by the divine spirit") and *Dei Verbum* little more than official approbation of the historical-critical method. For instance, the Jesuit scholar John Donahue claims that *Dei Verbum* gave the historical-critical method "the highest stamp of ecclesiastical approval."[70] But far from codifying historical criticism as the method par excellence for approaching the Scriptures, *Dei Verbum* subtly affirms the traditional fourfold sense of Scripture.

Dei Verbum 12 is crucial but controverted, with assumptions about conciliar desires to crown historical criticism as the queen of all methods driving faulty translations. *Dei Verbum* 12 falls naturally into three paragraphs, the first instructing interpreters to investigate the intentions of both the human authors of scripture

68 Daniélou, "Sacraments," 213.

69 *Catechism*, no. 1115, quoting St. Leo the Great, *Sermo* 74,2.

70 John R. Donahue, S.J., "Scripture: A Roman Catholic Perspective," *Review & Expositor* 79 (1982): 233–234.

and also God as divine author, the second then dealing with the human authors, and the third with God as divine author. But mistranslation of a crucial line obscures this. The end of the first paragraph of section 12 reads *attente investigare debet quid hagiographi reapse significare intenderint et eorum verbis manifestare Deo placuerit*. As Avery Cardinal Dulles contends, many translations of this line reduce divine intention to the literal sense.[71] In Austin Flannery's edition, for instance, the phrase reads, "[the interpreter] should carefully search out the meaning which the sacred writers really had in mind, that meaning which God has thought well to manifest through the medium of their words."[72] The translation conflates the human and divine authors and eliminates the spiritual sense by eliding the Latin *et*. Better is the translation on the Vatican website, which reads, "the interpreter of Sacred Scripture … should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words."[73] This translation permits God to intend spiritual senses beyond any literal (or spiritual!) senses intended by the human author in the way Aquinas suggests.

It is clear, then, that both the literal and spiritual senses are in view. Indeed, *Dei Verbum* here appropriates the distinction Pius XII made in *Divino Afflante Spiritu* 26[a]:

> For what was said and done in the Old Testament was ordained and disposed by God with such consummate wisdom, that things past prefigured in a spiritual way those that were to come under the new dispensation of grace. Wherefore the exegete, just as he must search out and expound the literal meaning of the words, intended and expressed by the sacred writer, so also must he do likewise for the spiritual sense, provided it is clearly intended by God.[74]

For its part, the *Catechism* receives and interprets *Dei Verbum* 12 in a striking way, making explicit its implications about the fourfold sense. Paragraphs 109–119 are entitled "The Holy Spirit, Interpreter of Scripture," in which it presents and in-

71 For what follows, see Avery Cardinal Dulles, "Vatican II on the Interpretation of Scripture," *Letter & Spirit* 2 (2006): 18–19.

72 Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* [The Word of God], Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (November 18, 1965), 12, in *Vatican Council II: Volume 1: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. and trans. Austin Flannery, O.P. (rev. ed.; Northport, NY: Costello, 2004), 1–36, at 6.

73 http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html. Béchard's own translation in *SD* reads, "the interpreter of Sacred Scripture … should carefully search out what the sacred writers truly intended to express and what God thought well to manifest by their words" (24), thus bringing out the force of the Latin and preserving both literal and spiritual senses.

74 Pope Pius XII, *Divino afflante Spiritu* [Inspired by the Divine Spirit, Encyclical Letter Promoting Biblical Studies], September 30, 1943, 26, in *SD*, 115–139, at 126.

terprets *Dei Verbum* 12. First, no. 109 reads, "To interpret Scripture correctly, the reader must be attentive to what the human authors truly wanted to affirm and to what God wanted to reveal to us by their words," thus translating the crucial Latin phrase in *Dei Verbum* 12 correctly in a way recognizing the fourfold sense. Then the next two paragraphs discuss the sacred author's intention (no. 110) and the divine intention of the Holy Spirit (no. 111), echoing the structure of *Dei Verbum* 12. Then, nos. 112–114 follow *Dei Verbum* 12's "three criteria for interpreting Scripture in accordance with the Spirit who inspired it": attention "to the content and unity of the whole Scripture," reading Scripture within "the living Tradition of the whole Church," and attention to the analogy of faith. Then in the midst of this presentation of *Dei Verbum* 12, the *Catechism* in nos. 115–118 explicitly affirms the classic Western approach to Scripture: there are two fundamental senses of Scripture, the literal and spiritual, and spiritual is divided into the allegorical, moral, and anagogical senses. This section of the *Catechism* then closes in no. 119 with a direct quote from *Dei Verbum* 12 § 3:

> It is the task of exegetes to work, according to these rules, toward a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture in order that their research may help the Church to form a firmer judgment. For, of course, all that has been said about the manner of interpreting Scripture is ultimately subject to the judgment of the Church which exercises the divinely conferred commission and ministry of watching over and interpreting the Word of God.

The *Catechism* is an authoritative document for Catholics, one of the greatest fruits of the Second Vatican Council, and in this section it has made explicit what the text of *Dei Verbum* 12 implies: that the classical fourfold sense of Scripture abides. Far from giving the historical-critical method pride of place, *Dei Verbum* 12 preserves the tradition of the fourfold sense.

Of course, *Dei Verbum* (as well as the *Catechism*) does demand the use of proper philological, historical, and literary tools, but this is not new; Augustine requires as much in *De doctrina christiana*. It must here also be remembered that the historical-critical method engages in the impossibility of objective neutrality, even while it is not; its assumptions are rooted in a reductionist rationalism that John Paul II and Benedict XVI did so much to counter. At best, the historical-critical method brackets God and the community of faith, regarding them as afterthoughts, treating the Bible as an accidental collection of ancient artifacts, not sacred Scripture inspired by the one Holy Spirit of God. For this reason, Pope Benedict writes in *Verbum Domini*, "It is important that the criteria indicated in Number 12 of the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* receive real attention

and become the object of deeper study. A notion of scholarly research that would consider itself neutral with regard to Scripture should not be encouraged."[75]

But the letter is Scripture too, and as *Dei Verbum* 12 affirms, modern tools help us in our quest for it. Yet attention to the Scriptural letter is required not merely because the letter belongs to human history as human speech but because the letter is human speech inspired by God. We have theological reasons, not just anthropological reasons, for investigating the letter. And so, in *Verbum Domini* Pope Benedict roots the validity of modern methods of interpretation in the Incarnation:

> Before all else, we need to acknowledge the benefits that historical-critical exegesis and other recently-developed methods of textual analysis have brought to the life of the Church. For the Catholic understanding of sacred Scripture, attention to such methods is indispensable, linked as it is to the realism of the Incarnation: "This necessity is a consequence of the Christian principle formulated in the Gospel of John 1:14: *Verbum caro factum est*. The historical fact is a constitutive dimension of the Christian faith. The history of salvation is not mythology, but a true history, and it should thus be studied with the methods of serious historical research."[76]

Therefore, the Catholic warrant for the study of the letter is not historical-critical curiosity or a passion for facts inferred from textual artifacts but rather the Incarnation. Christian theology can have it no other way, for the Word is the Creator of the cosmos, in whom all things in heaven and on earth hold together.[77] History must be God's story, for Christ is the key to all creation. History is theological; history is Christological.

Thus, in *Verbum Domini* Benedict calls for more real theological interpretation:

> While today's academic exegesis, including that of Catholic scholars, is highly competent in the field of historical-critical methodology and its latest developments, it must be said that comparable attention needs to be paid to the theological dimension of the biblical texts, so that they can be more deeply understood in accordance with the three elements indicated by the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*.[78]

75 *Verbum Domini*, 47.

76 *Verbum Domini*, 32.

77 See John 1:1ff; Col. 1:16–17.

78 *Verbum Domini*, 34.

Heeding the tradition culminating in *Dei Verbum*, the *Catechism*, and *Verbum Domini* by studying the Bible as sacred Scripture under the aegis of the Holy Spirit need not be constraining. Rather, given the richness of the tradition and the indispensable interdisciplinary work involved in such an endeavor as one engages in fields such as patristics, philosophy, literary theory, historical theology, as well as all the varied tools and methods of the contemporary guild, Catholic scholars ought to find reclaiming proper theological interpretation liberating and intellectually satisfying as they engage in the discipline of biblical studies under the joyful discipline of prayer and the gracious discipline of the Church.