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## Dei Verbum: Sacred Scripture since Vatican II

William Kurz

Marquette University, [william.kurz@marquette.edu](mailto:william.kurz@marquette.edu)

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*Dei Verbum*

*Dei Verbum*  
Sacred Scripture Since Vatican II

REVEREND WILLIAM S. KURZ, S.J.

**Introduction**

A dominant stimulus for transition in Catholic approaches to biblical exegesis and interpretation has been Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum* (promulgated by Pope Paul VI on November 18, 1965). This document removed most remaining official hesitations and solidified and greatly accelerated the Catholic Church's embrace of historical-critical approaches to the Bible. It reaffirmed Pius XII's encyclical, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, from about twenty-two years earlier (September 30, 1943), when Catholic magisterial suspicion of and resistance to these critical methods began to give way instead to their acceptance. The way for their reception was further and more immediately prepared by the Pontifical Biblical Commission's Instruction on the Historical Truth of the Gospels, *Sancta Mater Ecclesia*," dated April 21, 1964.<sup>1</sup>

This paper will first argue that, although Vatican II mandated a double charge to Catholic exegetes and biblical scholars, in the forty years since *Dei Verbum* was promulgated, Catholic scholars have admirably implemented only their first charge. At least until recently, many of them have to a great extent neglected or even avoided their second mandated task. Second, this paper will recommend some lessons from patristic writers that offer assistance for satisfying this second mandate, i.e., how to read the Bible more theologically and how to discover the revelational intent of the divine author.

***Dei Verbum's* Double Mandate**

*Dei Verbum* charged the biblical interpreter as follows. "However, since God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion, the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, *should carefully investigate what meaning the*

sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words" (DV #12).<sup>2</sup> Catholic exegetes have enthusiastically and with admirable success fulfilled this first mandate, namely, that they "should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended." However, they have been neither as enthusiastic nor as successful in fulfilling *Dei Verbum's* second charge, namely, that they investigate "what God wanted to manifest by means of their words" (DV #12).<sup>3</sup>

Among the possible explanations for this discrepancy in observing the double directive of *Dei Verbum*, there are both methodological considerations and reasons that related more to metaphysics and faith. Methodologically, contemporary critical approaches to Scripture are directed primarily if not exclusively toward understanding the Bible on the human level. Because of this focus on only the human level, not enough attention has been given to a more basic root problem at the level of faith and of metaphysical presuppositions about the nature of the Bible. Since the Enlightenment, both modernistic and now post-modernistic underpinnings of critical approaches to Scripture have been averse to beliefs and to metaphysical presuppositions that the Bible is in actual reality the Word of God written in human words.

The premise for Vatican II's directives for interpreting Scripture is the Council Fathers' endorsement of traditional Catholic belief in the two-fold nature of the Bible. The origin of this view goes back to the pre-modern pre-Enlightenment period. Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, re-affirms the traditional view that Scripture has a two-fold nature as God's Word expressed in human words. "In Sacred Scripture, therefore, while the truth and holiness of God always remains intact, the marvelous 'condescension' of eternal wisdom is clearly shown, 'that we may learn the gentle kindness of God, which words cannot express, and how far He has gone in adapting His language with thoughtful concern for our weak human nature'"<sup>4</sup>

The Council bishops even compared the divine and human nature of the Word of God in Scripture with the divine and human nature of the Word or Son of God made flesh in the Incarnation. "For the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just as the Word of the eternal Father, when He took to Himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men" (DV #13).<sup>5</sup> In both of these references, *Dei Verbum* accentuates how the divine-human nature of both the Incarnate Word, Jesus, and of the word of Scripture, facilitates the communication between God and humans.

It is this belief in the two-fold divine and human nature of Scripture

that is the primary foundation for the double mandate given to Catholic biblical exegetes. Because of the Catholic belief that the biblical Word has both human and divine aspects, exegetes must interpret both the human level of the historical writers and the divine level of God as ultimate author of all of Scripture. This is the ultimate reason why Vatican II requires that interpreters investigate not only the meaning of the human writers, but also "what God wanted to manifest by means of their words" (DV #12).

There is potential for conflict between the professed belief of Catholic biblical scholars that Scripture is the Word of God in human words, and their methodological training and practice, which is quite unrelated to such a belief in the two-fold nature of Scripture. The disparity in accomplishments regarding the two goals proposed to Catholic scholars seems logically related to the fact that only the goal of interpreting the meaning intended by the human authors is immediately accessible to historical and other academic forms of criticism. Contemporary Catholic scholars have been trained in historical criticism, which for decades has been regarded not only as the governing paradigm for interpreting Scripture, but also as the exclusively "technical" and academically respectable model for doing so.

Because the first commission to Catholic Scripture scholars is more suited to their training and scholarly interaction, following its ideals flows almost connaturally for them. "The interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances by using contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture. For the correct understanding of what the sacred author wanted to assert, due attention must be paid to the customary and characteristic styles of feeling, speaking and narrating which prevailed at the time of the sacred writer, and to the patterns men normally employed at that period in their everyday dealings with one another" (DV #12).<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, most contemporary Catholic scholars have received little or no formal training in methods or ways of achieving Vatican II's second goal of investigating what *God* wanted to manifest through the human writers. Most scholars find themselves unsure about how to pursue the Council's goal of reading Scripture in the sacred spirit in which it was written (or in some translations, the same Spirit by whom it was written).<sup>7</sup> I prefer a more literal translation of the (slightly ambiguous) Latin: "Sacred Scripture is to be also read and interpreted in the same Spirit in which it is written (or less grammatically, 'by whom' it is written)."

## Concerns Raised about This Discrepancy

For some time after Vatican II, a minority of Catholic exegetes called attention to this mandate. Ignace de la Potterie, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Dennis Farkasfalvy were among the forerunners of the current resurgence of concern about interpreting Scripture by the Spirit by whom it was written.<sup>8</sup> More recently, among both Catholic exegetes and those of other Christian denominations, there has been a developing awareness of the biblical guild's deficiency in addressing Scripture as the word and revelation of God.

One of the first books to confront this deficiency was co-authored by Luke Timothy Johnson and me. It challenged the exclusiveness of contemporary claims of historical criticism as the only rational approach to Scripture, while acknowledging the good historical-critical work of current and previous generations of Catholic biblical scholars.<sup>9</sup> In response to common "either/or" dichotomizing approaches in historical criticism among various sources, levels, theologies, and biblical authors – and between Scripture and tradition – we called for a renewed appreciation of characteristically Catholic interpretive principles such as a "both/and" inclusiveness that consults both Scripture and Catholic tradition in determining the messages of the Bible.<sup>10</sup>

## Other Recent Writings with Parallel Concerns

Already in 1993, the Pontifical Biblical Commission had briefly summarized and evaluated the many developing approaches to biblical interpretation beyond the classical methods of historical criticism. Although the Commission acknowledged many other approaches and was generally accepting of most of them, it nevertheless underscored historical-critical methods as indispensable for attaining the primary literal sense of Scripture. Not a few scholars were somewhat surprised to see so little PBC criticism of more radical approaches, such as some liberationist, feminist, and deconstructionist exegesis – which at least in their more radical forms appear quite alien to Catholic tradition and teachings.

In contrast to its general openness toward virtually all contemporary academic approaches to Scripture, though, the PBC exercised significant rhetorical force in condemning fundamentalist exegesis. This, at least, might hint at a possible preoccupation by the members with defending historical and other scholarly approaches from certain alien pietistic forms of fundamentalist interpretation. The document seems to show less urgency for restoring theological and spiritual interpretation of Scripture as God's inspired word and revelation.<sup>11</sup>

Some very recent ecumenical publications have shown increasing emphasis on recovering the values of pre-modern theological and spiritual interpretations. They have much to offer contemporary Catholic concern about interpreting in Scripture the message of its divine author. Two collections contain very helpful chapters: Stephen Fowl's *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture* includes especially useful essays by de Lubac on spiritual understanding, by Steinmetz on pre-critical exegesis, and by Yeago on recovering theological exegesis. The 2003 collection by Davis and Hays, *The Art of Reading Scripture*, summarizes and promulgates the work of Princeton's ecumenical and interdisciplinary Scripture Project. Especially relevant to Catholic concerns about reading Scripture more theologically is the synopsis of the Scripture Project's main findings: "Nine Theses on the Interpretation of Scripture, *The Scripture Project*"<sup>12</sup> I have found particularly helpful the essays by Steinmetz comparing Christian reading of both Testaments with the experience of re-reading a mystery novel, by Bauckham on reading Scripture as a coherent story, by Daley on usability of patristic exegesis, by Howell on how saints' lives help interpret Scripture, and by Hays on reading Scripture in light of the resurrection.<sup>13</sup>

Some of the recent movement among New Testament exegetes toward reading Scripture more spiritually is the result of greater interdisciplinary cooperation with specialists in patristics and hermeneutics. David Williams compares classic pre-modern and modern authors and argues for an expanded meaning for the literal sense of Scripture, one that accounts for the authorial intention of the divine author.<sup>14</sup> Increasingly, exegetes have begun turning to scholars like Henri de Lubac, Frances M. Young, and Paul Quay for insights on how patristic and medieval authors read Scripture theologically.<sup>15</sup> A 2005 work by John J. O'Keefe & R.R. Reno and an introduction by Christopher Seitz have captured the essentials of patristic exegetical approaches in very understandable form and in ways that can be replicated in the twenty-first century.<sup>16</sup>

Questions remain about how one can live in a scriptural universe in the twenty-first century. I continue to look to pre-modern exegesis in the hopes that it can reintroduce some approaches and principles that would be viable today. One productive patristic paradigm is the importance of combining both philosophical and purely rational approaches with living within a biblical world view.<sup>17</sup>

The objective of my 2004–5 sabbatical was to discover ways to ascertain and articulate the intentions of the divine author of Scripture and, consequently, the spiritual senses of what God was communicating

in Scripture. To be useful in scholarship and teaching, findings about the divine author's intentions and communications cannot remain purely subjective and individual, such as some insights gained in prayer. These conclusions have to be able to be observed, taught, internalized, and furthered by other competent believing scholars.

### Three Interpretive Principles in *Dei Verbum*

The Constitution on Divine Revelation does not fail to provide some methodological suggestions for how to interpret Scripture in or by the Holy Spirit. It recommends three approaches or principles or evidence for discovering the divine spirit in which or by whom it was written, which have been repeated and summarized by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*. These three principles are: 1) the content and unity of all of Scripture; 2) the living tradition of the Church, and 3) the harmony that exists between the elements of the faith.

The first approach for getting beyond restrictive historical methods that pay no attention to divine intent of biblical passages is the admonition to scholars that "no less serious attention" be given "to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out" (DV #12). This statement plainly implies that exclusively historical methods which focus only on their original meanings and settings do not provide sufficiently correct meaning of individual biblical texts. Their meaning is only correctly determined if the texts are studied in the context of the entire biblical story and message.

The unity of Scripture has been persistently attacked, denied, or disregarded in historical-critical training and practice, in which the Bible is regularly treated as a collection of books from different authors, times, and places, with differing, even disagreeing theologies and perspectives. Although it is true that on the human level the Bible is a collection, belief that Sacred Scripture is God's revealing Word and message to humanity postulates in addition a single divine author ultimately responsible for the entire canonical Bible. Ever since the New Testament, Christian faith has believed that the (Old Testament) "Writings" are God's revealed message of salvation, with a unity based on this message's single author, God, and on its unified saving character, despite all the differences that the Bible incorporates.

The unity of Scripture is a judgment based more on faith than on empirical observation. Indeed the unity of Scripture is one of the foundations of Catholic and Christian faith. Because of their faith, the patristic authors insisted that Old and New Testaments together reveal an over-

arching biblical narrative and worldview that differs significantly, though not entirely, from all other competing worldviews. This biblical worldview remains today as alien from most contemporary secular and scientific worldviews as it was from the worldviews of the ancient gnostics, other heretics, and non-religious populace of that day.

Patristic authors, who were pastors and/or teachers or catechists as well as scholars, read individual books and passages of Scripture in the context of the overarching story of the Bible. They almost universally agreed that Scripture's teachings and revelation are fundamentally grounded in a unifying and overarching story of God's saving providence. This story of God's providence proceeded from creation through the fall and divine attempts to rescue and reconcile God's people to himself.

God's saving works and Scripture itself, in Old and New Testaments combined, come to a climax in the Incarnation of the Word, the Second Person in the Trinity, and in his continued presence through his body, the Church, until the final judgment and fulfillment at the end of time, as promised in Revelation. For example, in his book, *On the Incarnation*, St. Athanasius mentioned the following as key points of divine intervention into the world: "creation, fall, inspiration, incarnation, eschaton."<sup>18</sup> In the two-testament Scripture, patristic authors like Irenaeus also discerned recapitulation of human history and salvation in Christ.<sup>19</sup>

This worldview, to which Luke Timothy Johnson refers in a somewhat post-modern fashion as "imagining the world as the Scripture imagines it," insists that there is only one God, who created both the universe and human beings – good but free. In our freedom, we humans from the very beginning have rejected God's gifts as limitations on our autonomy and have so found ourselves alienated from God and from one another. After the original sin and fall from grace, sin became rampant, as narrated in the Old Testament.

A prominent context for observing, experiencing, teaching, internalizing, and developing this biblical worldview is the liturgy. According to the liturgical dictum, "God did not abandon us to the power of death," God promised to rescue us and reconcile us to himself. God formed a people through Abraham which was to prepare for the Incarnation of the Son of God. By this God-man and unique mediator, we are being reconciled to God, and, at the end of time, he will come in glory for a final public judgment.

The unity of Scripture in the eyes of Christian faith is thus centered on the salvation of humans by the God-man Christ. Christian faith views

the Old Testament as preparing for this salvation, and the New Testament as explaining it. Christian interpretation of Scripture – both Old and New Testaments – is therefore unapologetically Christological.

Already in the New Testament, authors like St. Paul saw persons and figures in the Old Testament as types of the antitype Christ. Thus Paul contrasts the first Adam to the second (and eschatological) Adam in Romans, Corinthians, and Philippians. The comparison between the first and last man and their respective effects on humanity is explicit in Romans 5:12–19.<sup>20</sup> In Corinthians, Paul contrasts the first Adam with Christ the last Adam by name.<sup>21</sup> Philippians implicitly contrasts the behaviors of the first Adam, who tried to be as God, and thus brought death to all humans, and Christ, who let go equality with God and emptied himself unto death so that humans could live.<sup>22</sup>

One reason for the contemporary unpopularity of the notion of the unity of the two-Testament Scripture is that such unity clearly implies that the meaning of Old Testament texts for Christians is only adequately clarified if these texts are somehow located within God's entire biblical plan for saving humans, and in its New Testament culmination in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of God's Son. In other words, the bishops at Vatican II at least implicitly maintained a similar perspective concerning the Christological unity of Scripture centered around the Incarnate Son of God, as was virtually universal among patristic and medieval authors. The contrast between faith in the unity of Scripture and the contemporary methodological rejection of biblical unity to emphasize biblical multiplicity and diversity in critical exegesis can be a source of significant discomfort for Christian exegetes. Another and related cause of discomfort is the contemporary desire to avoid exaggeration of some forms of patristic and medieval supersessionism and anti-Judaism, and more generally not to seem to devalue the intrinsic worth of the Hebrew Scriptures and Judaism.<sup>23</sup>

Equally alien to contemporary academic approaches to Scripture are the Council's next two principles for interpreting the Bible as God's Word. "The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith" (DV #12). Academic methods have been frequently adverse to acknowledging any clear-cut role of tradition in ascertaining the meaning of Scripture. In fact, critical methods initially were welcomed during the Enlightenment as rejections of traditional and doctrinal accretions to Scripture and as substitutions for them.<sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless, *Dei Verbum* from Vatican II insists that to understand

Scripture, Catholics must read it in the light of Catholic tradition. This tradition includes patristic and medieval Catholic interpretive traditions. It encompasses liturgical and ecclesial worship, living, preaching, catechesis, moral guidance, and government from the first to the twenty-first centuries.<sup>25</sup> Pre-modern exegesis showed a striking consensus about the need for reading Scripture in the light of church tradition, especially with the help of the Church's rule of faith.<sup>26</sup>

Even denominations that deny a prominent role to tradition in interpreting Scripture, including those that emphasize a *sola Scriptura* approach to biblical interpretation, nevertheless evidence a substantial influence from their respective ecclesial traditions of interpretation on how they interpret the Bible. For example, although Lutherans, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Pentecostals all profess *sola Scriptura* approaches to exegesis of Scripture, their respective interpretations quite evidently differ from each other along traditional denominational lines.<sup>27</sup>

The council also expects Catholic interpreters to consult recent Catholic magisterial instructions for interpretation. It presumes that Catholic exegetes will be guided by the contemporary magisterium of pope and bishops regarding Scripture, doctrine, and morality. Reluctance by academics, not excluding academic exegetes, to acknowledge such a guiding influence from Catholic or other religious authority is certainly a well-known and a not very surprising phenomenon.

Finally, *Dei Verbum's* exhortation to consider the harmony that exists between elements of the faith, although referring historically and primarily to objective relationships among the truths of the faith, might seem to some to introduce a further expectation that interpreters compare the matters treated in biblical texts with their own related personal or communal religious experience. This might appear to inject into exegesis and interpretation an unacademic element of "subjectivity." To do this could possibly also necessitate an uncomfortable self-revelation by the scholar regarding his or her personally held beliefs and religious experiences.

Yet for some of us, it was precisely a subjective nuance of harmony between elements of the faith as our personal experience, especially in charismatic settings, that "innoculated" us as graduate students from the reductionism of much of our training and biblical scholarship, which was routinely denying or downplaying acknowledgement of the miraculous, even of the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Personal experience of powerful communal worship of Jesus as alive, present and divine, as well as witnessing healings through prayer, provided us an antidote to reduc-

tionist exegetical theories. Personal experience of extraordinary events that were analogous to those mentioned in the Scriptures trumped theoretical denials by even learned professors that miracles can happen.

### Assistance from Patristic Writers

Therefore, in our book, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A Constructive Conversation*, Luke Timothy Johnson and I tried not only to reaffirm the importance of historical criticism as Vatican II acknowledges it, but also to challenge any exclusive focus on historical and other forms of academic criticism. Our challenge was one way of heeding Vatican II's call for spiritual or theological exegesis and interpretation in addition to historical and critical interpretation. As helps to understanding spiritual interpretation, Luke Timothy Johnson recommended renewing our conversation with the early patristic authors. He exemplified this conversation with chapters that sought to learn from the Greek father, Origen, and from the Latin father, Augustine.

I have focused my sabbatical research on investigating from the patristic authors what spiritual interpretation means, and how we might interpret Scripture spiritually in the twenty-first century. A few basic insights gleaned from patristic writers indicate their fundamental similarity to the interpretive principles of *Dei Verbum* #12. This similarity should not be surprising, since the bishops of Vatican II were greatly influenced by the patristic exegetes, by patristic and medieval *ressourcement*, as well as by later Catholic biblical interpreters.<sup>28</sup>

Whereas *Dei Verbum* laid out in the abstract three ways to read Scripture according to the Spirit in which it was written or to the mind of the divine author, patristic interpreters illustrated these and other approaches in their actual practice of exegesis and interpretation of Scripture. My first question to the Fathers was therefore "what is spiritual or theological interpretation of Scripture? What does it mean, and how does one read Scripture not merely as an ancient document from a vastly different time and culture, but also as the Word of God in which God is addressing believing readers and communities today?"

Most studies of patristic interpretation have emphasized the four senses of Scripture. The initial guide for my 2004–5 sabbatical research on the four senses of Scripture was Henri de Lubac. For my limited sabbatical temporal window, however, I found the four senses too complex for me to be able both to digest their foundational insights, and also to find ways in which the four senses might be adapted and utilized in our quite dissimilar postmodern and religiously pluralistic interpretive set-

ting. In my reading I was relieved to discover a more elementary point of entrance into the patristic approach to Scripture.

To take any "road less traveled" in research or methodological approaches to Scripture, my decided preference is for the simplest possible approach. Despite recognition of four senses of Scripture by biblical exegetes, they are not in fact commonly utilized by them. In my judgment, this simpler approach promises to be more productive and appealing for New Testament exegetes. Somewhat to my surprise, my favorites among possible initial patristic guides to this simpler point of entry into patristic interpretation turned out to be Irenaeus of Lyons and Athanasius of Alexandria.

The patristic authors, who were pastors and/or teachers or catechists as well as scholars, read individual books and passages of Scripture in the context of the overarching story of the Bible. As previously noted, the Fathers almost universally agreed that the teachings and revelation of Scripture are fundamentally grounded in a unifying and overarching story of God's saving providence. This story of God's providence proceeded from creation through the fall and divine attempts to rescue and reconcile his people to himself. God's saving works and Scripture itself, in Old and New Testaments combined, come to a climax in the Incarnation of the Word, the Second Person in the Trinity, and in his continued presence through his body the Church, until the final judgment and fulfillment at the end of time.

This overarching biblical narrative provided the early Fathers the unifying key to all the disparate events, strands, and theologies in the many books of the Bible. Because this narrative is centered on God's salvation through his incarnate Son, the Fathers understood the books of both Old and New Testaments according to a basically Christological interpretation. This helps explain the importance and popularity of the notion of the Christological unity of Scripture.

Christopher Seitz demonstrates that this kind of overall biblical narrative approach developed by the patristic authors has a grounding in the New Testament itself. Using especially Lukan examples, he illustrates how the expression "according to the Scriptures" situates the identity and mission of Jesus in the context of God's saving plan and actions recounted in the Old Testament. The Gospels and Fathers from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries portrayed Jesus by situating him in God's saving plan as revealed in their Scripture (= OT), combined with the apostolic witness to Jesus (before the completed "canonized" NT).<sup>29</sup> Seitz also relates the patristic use of the rule of faith to this use of the Old Testament narrative of God's saving plan. Because for Christians the Son and Father

are one, both Old and New Testaments provide a unified witness to them via the Holy Spirit.<sup>30</sup>

J.D. Ernest reviews the way Athanasius in his exegesis utilizes the "scope of Scripture," a summary narrative of the Word from his pre-incarnate existence with the Father as Word and Son, through his incarnation and mission, to his present coexistence with Father as Lord.<sup>31</sup> This becomes both his criterion and result of correct interpretation of Scripture. It amounts to placing oneself within the biblical story (with the help of summaries of the plot such as the rule of faith, or *regula fidei*, and the creeds).<sup>32</sup>

Thomas F. Torrance provides a more comprehensive treatment of the scope of Scripture in Athanasius as part of his chapter on Athanasius's hermeneutics. "The interpreter therefore operates on two levels: (a) that of the Scriptures in which he keeps to *the scope of biblical usage*; and (b) that of the objective reality in which he keeps to *the scope of faith or doctrine*."<sup>33</sup> "Athanasius thus refuses to isolate the understanding of the Scriptures from the continuity of faith and life in the Church, for since the Christian way of life is itself the product of the *kerygma* which has been handed down it furnishes a guide to the correct understanding of the biblical message."<sup>34</sup>

As a shorthand guide to keep the reader from getting lost in the maze of diverging, sometimes apparently even misleading, strands within the many Old and New Testament books and authors, the fathers used a rule of faith, or a basic hypothesis or story line of Scripture. They gleaned this rule of faith from scriptural narratives, teachings, and evidence. But the rule in turn helped to keep readers' bearings focused on the core of the overall biblical story and message so as not to get lost in myriad biblical details, stories, and theologies.

St. Irenaeus emphasized this "rule of faith" as an indispensable key to reading Scripture, especially to counteract the dramatically alien Gnostic interpretations of Scripture. Irenaeus commented on how Gnostics took biblical details completely out of their biblical context and significance, and created their own eccentric unbiblical doctrines by using biblical vocabulary in unbiblical ways. He likened their interpretations to taking apart a beautiful mosaic image of a king into its constituent pieces, and then rearranging those pieces into a new mosaic image of a dog.<sup>35</sup> To counter such chaotic and arbitrary "proof-texting" of biblical elements in ways completely alien to their biblical contexts and meanings, the fathers emphasized that the Scriptures needed to be read according to their basic message, which they summed up in "the rule of faith" or *regula fidei*.

In *On the Incarnation*, St. Athanasius conveys the primary dogmatic insights of the Council of Nicaea and its Nicene Creed. Through the course of his writings he came to consider one word as the pivotal and most important key to interpreting all of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments. This word was not even in the Bible, but for Athanasius and for the bishops at Nicaea, it summarizes the heart of the revelation that God makes of himself in both testaments of Scripture.<sup>36</sup>

For Athanasius, the Greek philosophical technical term, *homoousios*, became the key that unlocks the core meaning of both Testaments. Although this term *homoousios* comes not from Scripture itself but from Greek philosophy, Athanasius and others were convinced that it extracts the essential synopsis of what the Bible reveals about God in its many different stories, as well as in the revealing hindsight into Old Testament texts provided by the life of Jesus, his resurrection from the dead, and by the worship and life of the Church.<sup>37</sup> The term *homoousios* emphasizes that the Son shares the essence of the Father, that they are one and the same essence or being. This expresses the foundational insight that Jesus is the Son of God, not a creature of God, "begotten not made." Jesus is of the same nature, being and essence as the Father who sent him into this world.

If Jesus, the Son of God, is of the same being and essence as the Father, then, contrary to the Arians, the Son cannot be a creature made by God. The Son must be uncreated and therefore divine as much as the Father is divine. It also follows that the Son could never have begun to come into existence. He must exist eternally. As eternally existing but not a second God, the Son must always be I AM, the name that the Father revealed about himself to Moses in Exodus 3, and that Jesus claimed for himself to the Jews in John 8.

If the Son eternally exists as the same being, nature, and essence as the Father, then the patristic interpreters concluded that the God who revealed himself in the Old Testament as the creator of the entire universe is and must always have been the Father of the eternal Son. This remains true, even though the co-existence of the Son with the Father would not be explicitly revealed until millenia after the creation itself. The Church's still later explicit insight and acknowledgement that the Holy Spirit was also *homoousios*, or of the same being, essence, and nature as the Father and the Son, implied that the Holy Spirit is also eternally present and active from "the beginning," from before Creation until and beyond the End of Time.

If the Church later correctly realized that the sole eternal God is actually triune, then it necessarily follows that this only true God, whose



words and deeds are revealed and narrated throughout the Old Testament, must in fact be eternally a triune God, a Trinity of three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This triune nature would not be revealed until the New Testament. It would not be explicitly clarified and pronounced to be a binding dogma of Christian faith until even centuries later. For it took time before the Church was able to articulate the fundamental dogmatic implications of what the New Testament writings and early Christian experience and tradition had revealed about God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit who was sent by them both to the Church.

Unquestionably, the early Israelites who first read accounts that later were canonized in the Bible did not know that God was a Trinity. For the earliest revelation of God took place in contradistinction to the Israelites' pagan environments, in which neighboring nations were prone to the polytheistic worship of many gods. Therefore the first truth that God had to reveal to humans is that there is only one God, not many gods as most humans then believed.

However, the early Christian readers of Scripture were not the original Israelites. When they read their Scriptures (now the Old Testament) they maintained their monotheistic belief that there is only one God. But they also believed that the God of the Old Testament was the Father of Jesus, and that not only the Father himself but Jesus also was God.

Already in the New Testament, when Christians read about God, and about what God did and said in the Old Testament, they began to realize, at least implicitly, that this one and only God, who revealed himself to Israel as I AM, was actually Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Paul's letters were already using quasi-trinitarian blessings (e.g., II Cor 13:14: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all"). Matthew's Gospel commanded Christians to baptize "in the name [singular, not plural] of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). Eventually Christians realized that the single name that is shared by Father, Son and Spirit was a singular divine name because it reflected the reality of only one God. The fact that three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, were named in baptism as a single divine name eventually contributed to the Christian conclusion about the triune nature of the God of the Bible as three persons in one God, a Trinity. This also illustrates how "*lex orandi, lex credendi,*" and how liturgy contributes to a disciplined objective approach to spiritual exegesis.

Most patristic writers were trained in Greco-Roman rhetoric. In their book, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible*, John J. O'Keefe and R. R. Reno describe how

Irenaeus borrows from classical rhetoric three key terms, *hypothesis*, *economy*, and *recapitulation*. Rhetorical teaching and theory called "the gist of a literary work" its hypothesis.<sup>38</sup> It follows that the hypothesis of an argument is the basic outline of that argument, whereas the hypothesis of a narrative is the basic story line of that narrative. According to Irenaeus, the main problem with heretical interpretation of Scripture was that it ignored the primary "hypothesis" of the Bible. While focusing on details and symbols, it failed to show how "the beginning, middle, and end hang together."<sup>39</sup>

Thus for Irenaeus, the hypothesis of Scripture is that Jesus fulfills all things. Jesus came in accordance with God's economy, and recapitulated everything in himself.<sup>40</sup> For Irenaeus the economy is the "outline or table of contents of Scripture."<sup>41</sup> Later generations were to prefer the expression "salvation history" to the patristic word "economy." The recapitulation (in Greek, *anakephalaiosis*) is a work's final summing up, repetition, drawing to a conclusion. In rhetoric it refers to the summary at the end of a speech that drives home the point of its strongest arguments. For Irenaeus, Jesus is the Father's summary statement, the Word or Logos, the purpose for the biblical economy as incarnating the purpose of God's economy.<sup>42</sup>

Contrary to some misconceptions, patristic interpreters did not simply impose an extrinsic hypothesis or plot outline on Scripture to give it an artificial order it did not have.<sup>43</sup> That illegitimate process was precisely what Irenaeus accused the Gnostics of doing with Scripture. Rather, we have seen that the Fathers distilled the basic plot line from their Christian reading of the story of God's saving plan and providence communicated in the books of the Old and New Testaments and in the light of the Church's experience.

In their very close and perceptive reading of the text, at least the Greek Fathers had another advantage over us contemporary exegetes – the Greek of Scripture was very close to their native tongue. Thus they were more easily able than most twenty-first century interpreters to catch the nuances of biblical words, grammar, idioms, and linguistic contexts in their intensive reading of the texts of their Greek Old and New Testaments. This connatural linguistic advantage provided another control against an *a priori* eisegesis when they applied the hypothesis of Scripture to guide their close textual readings and to keep their interpretations within an interlocking biblical whole.<sup>44</sup>

### The Analogy of a Mystery Novel.

David Steinmetz of Duke has a very helpful analogy and comparison between reading the Christian Bible (Old and New Testaments) and

words and deeds are revealed and narrated throughout the Old Testament, must in fact be eternally a triune God, a Trinity of three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This triune nature would not be revealed until the New Testament. It would not be explicitly clarified and pronounced to be a binding dogma of Christian faith until even centuries later. For it took time before the Church was able to articulate the fundamental dogmatic implications of what the New Testament writings and early Christian experience and tradition had revealed about God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit who was sent by them both to the Church.

Unquestionably, the early Israelites who first read accounts that later were canonized in the Bible did not know that God was a Trinity. For the earliest revelation of God took place in contradistinction to the Israelites' pagan environments, in which neighboring nations were prone to the polytheistic worship of many gods. Therefore the first truth that God had to reveal to humans is that there is only one God, not many gods as most humans then believed.

However, the early Christian readers of Scripture were not the original Israelites. When they read their Scriptures (now the Old Testament) they maintained their monotheistic belief that there is only one God. But they also believed that the God of the Old Testament was the Father of Jesus, and that not only the Father himself but Jesus also was God.

Already in the New Testament, when Christians read about God, and about what God did and said in the Old Testament, they began to realize, at least implicitly, that this one and only God, who revealed himself to Israel as I AM, was actually Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Paul's letters were already using quasi-trinitarian blessings (e.g., II Cor 13:14: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."). Matthew's Gospel commanded Christians to baptize "in the name [singular, not plural] of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). Eventually Christians realized that the single name that is shared by Father, Son and Spirit was a singular divine name because it reflected the reality of only one God. The fact that three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, were named in baptism as a single divine name eventually contributed to the Christian conclusion about the triune nature of the God of the Bible as three persons in one God, a Trinity. This also illustrates how "*lex orandi, lex credendi,*" and how liturgy contributes to a disciplined objective approach to spiritual exegesis.

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### The Analogy of a Mystery Novel.

David Steinmetz of Duke has a very helpful analogy and comparison between reading the Christian Bible (Old and New Testaments) and

reading a mystery novel. His analogy can help contemporary readers appreciate the patristic writers' approach to both Old and New Testaments of Scripture. He draws an analogy to the plot of a detective mystery or "Who-done-it"<sup>45</sup> As readers progress through mystery story narratives, they are often distracted or confused by evidence that turns out to be either misleading or irrelevant. Finally, in the last chapter of the mystery narrative, the detective hero summarizes what really happened in the murder and reveals who the murderer was. The detective ignores all the false leads in order to trace out the relevant plot lines that point to the actual killer and circumstances.

Once one knows "what really happened," one cannot re-read the original mystery novel the same way a second time. The final summarizing second narrative of "what really happened" and "who really did it" has made clear which among the many plot lines and pieces of evidence and information were most relevant to solving the mystery. Some events will be known in retrospect to be the heart of the matter, others the proverbial "red herrings" of mystery novels.

Similarly, once the New Testament's second narrative explains what was really going on in God's plan and in the story of salvation in the Old Testament, Christian readers will no longer be able to re-read the Old Testament the way the original Hebrew readers read it. By hindsight, Christians can distinguish which threads of salvation history were less pertinent, and which were core components in God's saving plan. For example, New Testament hindsight makes clear that some plot lines were not, as widely expected, at the center of God's plan. Contrary to many expectations, God's design did not feature restored Davidic kings liberating God's people from oppressive empires like Rome by physical warfare. Instead, seemingly minor plots and themes, such as the "suffering servant" motifs in Isaiah or the "persecuted righteous man" in Wisdom, took on far greater importance than would have been noticed by earlier readers of the Old Testament books and proved to be at the heart of God's plan.<sup>46</sup>

Amidst the reciprocal action and reaction of sinfulness and heroic virtue in the many Old Testament books, amidst the true and falseologies and teachings propounded by saints or sinners, God's people or pagan neighbors, a central line of thought and action becomes discernible after the incarnation, death, resurrection, and vindication of the Son of God as Savior. He is revealed to be a Savior not through conquest, as expected, but through sacrificing himself and submitting to the most painful rejection, torture and death to which his human brothers and sisters could subject him.

## Conclusion

As I have mentioned, what the fathers referred to as the "overarching story," which is related to the rule of faith, is similar to what, in our book, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A Constructive Conversation*, I call "the biblical worldview," and to what Johnson refers under the more post-modern expression of "imagining the world that the Scripture imagines." The way that the patristic authors typify about how to read and interpret the Bible, scripturally and theologically, as God's Word and not merely as an ancient human document, is to insert oneself as reader into the overarching story, into the basic storyline. However, this insertion is done not after the post-modern manner of the autonomous reader making of the text whatever he or she wills, but as one's personally fundamental and willed act of faith.

As a way of fulfilling the second mandate of *Dei Verbum*, therefore, as a believing reader I choose to approach the text with a hermeneutic of faith and trust. Because I believe that the biblical text is God's Word, I submit my own life and thoughts to the judgment of Scripture. This is in direct contrast to some exaggerated forms of post-modern hermeneutics of suspicion, by which one mistrusts, doubts, and judges the biblical text as a limited time- or culture-bound product of an obsolete perspective, which is somehow ethically unworthy of our more enlightened consciousness today.<sup>47</sup>

With adjustments appropriate for our changed twenty-first-century circumstances and insights, I believe that Catholic exegetes as well as historians and theologians can learn much from patristic writers about how to read the Bible as God's Word, according to the intent of the divine author and attuned to spiritual senses of Scripture interpreted within a unified overarching narrative of God's saving plan. Like the ancient Church Fathers, contemporary Catholic exegetes and theologians can find ways to insert themselves in an act of faith into the overarching narrative of Scripture.

Reverend William S. Kurz, S.J., received his Ph.D. in biblical studies in 1976 from Yale University. He has been teaching Scripture at Marquette University in Milwaukee since 1975, where he is currently a Professor of New Testament. He has published over 40 professional articles and a number of books: *The Acts of the Apostles, Following Jesus: A Biblical Narrative, Farewell Addresses in the New Testament; Reading Luke-Acts: Dynamics of Biblical Narrative*. In 2002, he co-authored with Luke Timothy Johnson *The Future of Biblical Scholarship: A Constructive Conversation*, about which the journal *Nova et Vetera* ded-

icated a special issue consisting of a symposium in which various notable biblical scholars contributed open-ended “responses” to the issues raised in the book, to which the two co-authors then replied. The latest book by Father Kurz, *What Does the Bible Say about the End Times? A Catholic View*, was published by St. Anthony/Servant in 2004.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 For all these texts and other related ones, see *The Scripture Documents An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, ed & trans Dean P. Bechard; foreword by Joseph A. Fitzmyer (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2002)
- 2 Emphasis added The Latin reads, “*interpres Sacrae Scripturae, ut perspiciat, quid Ipse nobiscum communicare voluerit, attente investigare debet, quid hagiographi reapse significare intenderint et eorum verbis manifestare Deo placuerit.*”
- 3 Among classic commentaries on *Dei Verbum*, including this paragraph 12, see esp *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, Volume III* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969 [German original 1967]), “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation,” with commentaries on different chapters by Joseph Ratzinger, Alois Grillmeier, and Béda Rigaux Bernard-Dominique Dupuy, ed., *La Révélation Divine Constitution dogmatique “Dei Verbum,” texte latin, et traduction française* par J-P Torrell, *Commentaires* par B.-D. Dupuy, J. Feiner, H. de Lubac, Ch. Moeller, P. Grelot, L. Alonso-Schoekel, X. Léon-Dufour, A. Grillmeier, R. Schutz, M. Thurian, J. L. Leuba, E. Schlink, K. Barth, A. Scrima, A. Kniazeff, 2 Vols (Unam Sanctam 70A/B; Paris: Cerf, 1968), René Latourelle, S. J., *Theology of Revelation Including a Commentary on the Constitution “Dei Verbum” of Vatican II* (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1966), and Latourelle’s two articles, “La Révélation et sa transmission selon la Constitution “Dei Verbum,” *Gregorianum* 47 (1966) 5–40, and “Le Christ Signe de la révélation selon la constitution, “Dei Verbum,” *Gregorianum* 47 (1966) 685–709, Gerald O’Collins, *Retrieving Fundamental Theology The Three Styles of Contemporary Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1993), 48–78 (notes pp. 159–64), 136–49 (notes pp. 170–3), G. G. Blum (RESUME GETFULL), *Offenbarung und Überlieferung Die dogmatische Konstitution ‘Dei Verbum’ des II Vaticanums im Lichte altkirchlicher und moderner Theologie* (Forschungen zur systematischen und ökumenischen Theologie, 28) (Göttingen: GETFULL, 1971), M. A. Molina Palma, *La interpretación de la Escritura en el Espíritu Estudio histórico y teológico de un principio hermeneútico de la Constitución ‘Dei Verbum’* 12 (Burgos, GETFULL, 1987) Regarding the need for more emphasis on the divine author’s intent, see esp Peter S. Williamson, *Catholic Principles for Interpreting Scripture: A Study of the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Subsidia Biblica, Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2001)

- 4 *Dei Verbum* #13, citing St. John Chrysostom, “On Genesis,” 3, 8 (Homily 17, 1); PG 03,134, “*Attemperatio*,” in Greek “*synkatabasis*”
- 5 A similar comparison between the Incarnate divine-human Word or Son, and the divine-human natures of Scripture in the PBC’s *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, was sharply criticized from a post-modern perspective by Lewis Ayres and Stephen E. Fowl, “(Mis)Reading the Face of God *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*,” *Theological Studies* 60 (1999) 513–528 Especially telling is their refutation of the PBC’s use of *Dei Verbum*’s analogy between Scripture and the Incarnation to argue the necessity of historical critical methods to ascertain the literal sense of Scripture (pp. 521–3), and how the PBC’s notion of literal sense differs significantly from that of the patristic authors and Aquinas (pp. 518–21)
- 6 *Dei Verbum* #12 adds the intriguing qualifying phrase “and actually expressed” to its mention of intention of the sacred writer. Perhaps this modification of the notion of authorial intent is meant to address post-modern uneasiness over the extent to which it is even possible to determine an author’s intention, since generally the only evidence for authorial intention is what the author actually wrote. What one actually writes may or may not conform fully to what one intended to communicate. See the critical and bibliographic note 2 in Gerard O’Collins, *Retrieving Fundamental Theology*, 170–2
- 7 The translation, “in the sacred spirit in which it was written,” is from the Vatican web site (accessed June 13, 2005). [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651118\\_dei-verbum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html). The translation, “by the same Spirit by whom it was written” is from the 1966 translation supervised by Walter M. Abbott, S.J. The Latin is ambiguous and provides only limited support for either translation. It reads “*Sed, cum Sacra Scriptura eodem Spiritu quo scripta est etiam legenda et interpretanda sit,*” *Dei Verbum* §12, cf. Benedictus XV, *Litt. Encycl. Spiritus Paracletus*, 15 sept. 1920: EB 469; Hieronymus, *In Gal* 5, 19–21 PL 26, 417. The translation by A. Flannery is rather loosely related to the Latin, and “weakens considerably the advice the Second Vatican Council drew from St. Jerome . . . about reading and interpreting the Scriptures with the same Spirit through which they were written” (O’Collins, *Retrieving Fundamental Theology*, 139). It reads: “But since sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted *with its divine authorship in mind*” (emphasis added), Austin Flannery, O.P., gen. ed., *Vatican Council II The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Vol. 1 (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing Company, 1975), 758. The translation in the Tanner edition more accurately reads, “Further, holy scripture requires to be read and interpreted *in the light of the same Spirit through whom it was written*” (emphasis added), Norman P. Tanner, S.J., ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils Volume Two Trent to Vatican II* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 976. This is similar to the standard French translation in the Latin-French edition of *Dei Verbum* in *Les Conciles Oecuméniques*, Tome II-2, *Les Décrets Trente à Vatican II*, eds., G. Alberigo

et al (Paris: Cerf, 1994). "Mais puisque la sainte Écriture doit aussi être lue et interprétée à la lumière du même Esprit que celui qui la fit rédiger." Cf. also the earlier translation reprinted in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*: "Cependant, puisque la sainte Écriture doit être lue et interprétée à la lumière du même Esprit qui la fit rédiger" (NRT 88 (1966) 170-188, p. 179)

- 8 For a convenient gathering of articles, see especially the special issue of *Communio* 13/4 (Winter 1986) 280-377, "On the Reading of Scripture," with articles by von Balthasar, de la Potterie, Farkasfalvy, Quinn, Kereszty, and *Lectio divina* by Roose see especially Denis Farkasfalvy, "In search of a 'post-critical' method of biblical interpretation," 288-307, and Ignace de la Potterie, "Reading Holy Scripture 'in the Spirit' Is the patristic way of reading the Bible still possible today?" 308-325. See also the classic twenty-fifth year assessment of Vatican II, *Vatican II Assessment and Perspectives Twenty-Five Years After (1962-1987)*, Vol. I, ed René Latourelle (New York: Paulist, 1988). Note esp Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., "Interpretation of Holy Scripture in the Spirit in Which It Was Written (*Dei Verbum* #12)," 220-66. At 25 years, he complained that these recommendations of the Council have received scarcely any attention since the Council and have "not yet been truly 'received' into contemporary Catholic exegesis" (p. 220). Editor David L. Schindler dedicated a significant portion of the 2001 *Communio* volume to updating and bringing out contemporary applications of the theme of the "Word of God" *Communio International Catholic Review* 28 (1 Spring) 3-111.
- 9 Luke Timothy Johnson and William S. Kurz, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A Constructive Conversation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2002). In 2005, the journal *Nova et Vetera* is dedicating a special forthcoming interdisciplinary and interdenominational symposium issue to responses to our book. Frank Matera of CUA in NT, Stephen Ryan, O.P., in OT, and Olivier-Thomas Venard, O.P., of the École Biblique, and Protestants David Yeago and Richard Hays wrote assessments, to which Johnson and I as authors responded.
- 10 Recovering pre-modern (in this case, patristic) exegesis is a major goal of the ecumenical series, "Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture." Its first volumes began appearing in 1998: *Mark*, ed. Thomas C. Oden & Christopher A. Hall (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998) and *Romans*, ed. Gerald Bray (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998). At the time of this writing, about 17 of the projected 28 volumes of Old and New Testament have appeared.
- 11 Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Boston: St. Paul Books & Media, 1993). Cf. Avery Dulles, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church: A Theological Appraisal," in W. Geerlings and Max Seckler, eds., *Kirche sein Nachkonziliare Theologie im Dienst der Kirchenreform: Für Josef Pottmeyer* (Freiberg: Herder, 1994) 29-37; Terence J. Forestell, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,"

*Canadian Catholic Review* 13 (1995) 11-21, Christoph Dohmen, "Was Gott sagen wollte: der 'sensus plenior' im Dokument der Papstlichen Bibelkommission," *Bibel und Liturgie* 69 (1996) 251-54, James Leslie Houlden, ed., *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church: A Document from the PBC* (London: SCM, 1995)

The priority of historical criticism is quite evident in the commentary by commission member Joseph Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Biblical Commission's document "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church": Text and Commentary* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1995). The document's predilection for historical methods and comparatively less enthusiastic emphasis on spiritual or theological interpretation is explicitly queried by Peter S. Williamson, *Catholic Principles for Interpreting Scripture: A Study of the Pontifical Biblical Commission's The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Subsidia Biblica, Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2001). Cf. also Peter Williamson, "Catholicism and the Bible: An Interview with Albert Vanhoye," *First Things* 74 (June/July 1997) 35-40.

- 12 The nine theses are as follows: 1. Scripture truthfully tells the story of God's action of creating, judging, and saving the world; 2. Scripture is rightly understood in light of the church's rule of faith as a coherent dramatic structure; 3. Faithful interpretation of Scripture requires an engagement with the entire narrative: the New Testament cannot be rightly understood apart from the Old, nor can the Old be rightly understood apart from the New; 4. Texts of Scripture do not have a single meaning limited to the intent of the original author. In accord with Jewish and Christian traditions, we affirm that Scripture has multiple complex senses given by God, the author of the whole drama; 5. The four canonical Gospels narrate the truth about Jesus; 6. Faithful interpretation of Scripture invites and presupposes participation in the community brought into being by God's redemptive action - the church; 7. The saints of the church provide guidance in how to interpret and perform Scripture; 8. Christians need to read the Bible in dialogue with diverse others outside the church; 9. We live in the tension between the "already" and the "not yet" of the kingdom of God, consequently, Scripture calls the church to ongoing discernment, to continually fresh rereadings of the text in the light of the Holy Spirit's ongoing work in the world (Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, eds., *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), "Nine Theses on the Interpretation of Scripture," 1-5)
- 13 Fowl, Stephen E., ed., *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1997). I especially recommend the following essays: Henri de Lubac, "Spiritual Understanding," 3-25; David C. Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," 26-38; David S. Yeago, "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma: A Contribution to the Recovery of Theological Exegesis," 87-100; Davis and Hays, *Art of Reading Scripture*. See esp. "Nine Theses on the Interpretation of Scripture," 1-5; David C. Steinmetz,

- “Uncovering a Second Narrative: Detective Fiction and the Construction of Historical Method,” 54–65, Brian E. Daley, S. J., “Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable? Some Reflections on Early Christian Interpretation of the Psalms,” 69–88, Richard Bauckham, “Reading Scripture as a Coherent Story,” 38–53, James C. Howell, “Christ Was like St. Francis,” 89–108; Richard B. Hays, “Reading Scripture in Light of the Resurrection,” 216–38.
- 14 David M. Williams, *Receiving the Bible in Faith: Historical and Theological Exegesis* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2004).
- 15 Henri de Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, trans. Luke O’Neill (Milestones in Catholic Theology; New York: Crossroad, 2000), has excerpts from his classic four volume work on medieval exegesis and his seminal study of Origen. Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002, orig. Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997) is quite helpful for exegetes, as are her other writings. Paul M. Quay, *The Mystery Hidden for Ages in God* (American University Studies; New York: P. Lang, 1995) draws theological inspiration especially from Irenaeus’s theory of recapitulation in Christ.
- 16 John J. O’Keefe, and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), Christopher R. Seitz, *Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture* (Louisville [Ky.]: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001). See also Christopher A. Hall, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998).
- 17 Especially helpful is the treatment of how rhetoric, philosophy, culture and the biblical vision mutually influence each other in patristic interpretation in Frances Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*.
- 18 Cited from Telford Work, *Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002) 36. See *St. Athanasius on the Incarnation: The Treatise De Incarnatione Verbi Dei* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, reprinted 1982 [orig. 1944, rev. 1953]).
- 19 Cf. Paul M. Quay, *The Mystery Hidden for Ages in God* (American University Studies, New York: P. Lang, 1995).
- 20 “Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned (Rom 5:12 RSV). Then as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous” (Rom 5:18–19).
- 21 “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive (I Cor 15:22 RSV). Thus it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a

- man of dust, the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven” (I Cor 15:45–49).
- 22 “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name . . .” (Phil 2:5–9 RSV). The comparison with Adam and presence or absence of preexistence in Philippians 2 have been debated in recent historical criticism of the hymn, but most early fathers presumed both the comparison of first and second Adam and also preexistence in their interpretation of Philippians 2 as part of the biblical canon. See William S. Kurz, “Kenotic Imitation of Paul and of Christ in Philippians 2 and 3,” *Discipleship in the New Testament* (Fernando F. Segovia, ed. with introd., Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 103–126.
- 23 See esp. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (Vatican Press/Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2001), also accessed July 2005 at [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb\\_documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20020212\\_popolo-ebraico\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020212_popolo-ebraico_en.html). For a balanced monograph on the issue, see Roy H. Schoeman, “Salvation Is from the Jews” (John 4:22). *The Role of Judaism in Salvation History from Abraham to the Second Coming* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2003).
- 24 For historical context, see the brief overview of the Enlightenment critique of theology, scriptural interpretation, Christology, and religious beliefs in revelation and miracles in Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 219–225.
- 25 See *Dei Verbum* #8. This whole section is relevant, but note in particular. “The expression ‘what has been handed down from the apostles’ includes everything that helps the people of God to live a holy life and to grow in faith. In this way, the Church, in its teaching, life, and worship, perpetuates and hands on to every generation all that it is and all that it believes” (Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol. 2, p. 974).
- 26 For example, see the account of how Irenaeus, Augustine, and Clement of Alexandria exemplified the common patristic view of the role and relationship of the church’s rule of faith in interpreting Scripture in *Sanctified Vision* by O’Keefe and Reno, pp. 119–28.
- 27 Cf. my claim in the Baptist Professors of Religion *Festschrift* for Charles Talbot. “The second criterion (within tradition) is more explicit in Catholic interpretation than in most denominations, but in fact all Christian churches have at least implicit traditions of interpretation and practice. Even

- though Baptists, Lutherans, Pentecostals and others all emphasize *sola Scriptura*, they nevertheless self-evidently differ among themselves in their ecclesial and interpretative traditions and uses of the Bible" (William S. Kurz, S.J., "The Johannine Word as Revealing the Father. A Christian Credal Actualization," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 28 1 (Spring 2001). 67–84, p. 82. Similarly, Richard Hays argues for the necessity also of extra-biblical sources of authority, *tradition, reason, and experience*, since even *sola Scriptura* Protestants cannot interpret Scripture in a vacuum (Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament Community, Cross, New Creation, A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York, N.Y.: HarperCollins Publishers, HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 208–10.
- 28 The insights from the patristic authors also are quite similar to many of the "nine theses" of the Princeton Scripture project cited above, probably because they influenced the formulation of those theses.
- 29 Christopher R. Seitz, *Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture* (Louisville [Ky]: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 104.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 6. Cf. Luke 16:31, "He said to him, – If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead." Cf. also Luke 24:27, "And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." Cf. also Luke 24:44–49, "Then he said to them, 'These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you, but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high'" (RSV).
- 31 J. D. Ernest, "Athanasius of Alexandria: The Scope of Scripture in Polemical and Pastoral Context," *Vigiliae Christianae* 47 (1993): 341–362, pp. 343–344.
- 32 Cf. Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).
- 33 Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), chap. 8, "The Hermeneutics of Athanasius" 229–88, part 1, "The scope of Divine Scripture," 235–44, p. 237.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 244.
- 35 *Irenaeus Against Heresies*, Book I, Chap. VIII. How the Valentinesians pervert the Scriptures to support their own pious opinions. "Their manner of acting is just as if one, when a beautiful image of a king has been construct-

- ed by some skilful 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 skilful 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. In like manner do these persons patch together old wives' fables, and then endeavour, by violently drawing away from their proper connection, words, expressions, and parables whenever found, to adapt the oracles of God to their baseless fictions" (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, rev. A. Cleveland Coxe; Vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* [American reprint of Edinburgh ed., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1969], 326).
- 36 Many of Athanasius's fullest arguments against the Arians that Father and Son shared the same essence or being, which focused on the meaning of controverted biblical passages, can be found in St. Athanasius, *Ad Afros Epistola Synodica*, in *Four Discourses against the Arians* (the fourth seems pseudonymous, possibly also the third), and in his *De Synodis*. Concerning his admission that his technical term is not in Scripture, see *De Sententia Dionysii* (On the Opinion of Dionysius) #18. "For even if I argue that I have not found this word (*homoousion*) nor read it anywhere in the Holy Scriptures, yet my subsequent reasonings, which they have suppressed, do not discord with its meaning," (in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series II, Vol. IV, ed. Henry Wace, 1891). Perhaps surprisingly, St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word*, focuses less on questions of essence and more on the overarching biblical narrative of why and how the Son became incarnate. Thus it begins with this initial overview (from the same volume IV of the Nicene Fathers edition): "1. Introductory – The subject of this treatise is the humiliation and incarnation of the Word. Presupposes the doctrine of Creation, and that by the Word the Father has saved the world by Him through Whom He first made it."
- 37 Cf. Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 253. "The *homoousion* is thus a supreme example of a strict theological statement arising out of the examination of biblical statements, derived by following through the ostensive reference of biblical images, and giving compressed expression, in exact and equivalent language, not so much to the biblical words themselves but to the meaning or reality they were designed to point out or convey. Once established it served as a further guide to the Scriptures, although of course it continued to be subordinate to the inspired teaching of the Apostles and to what the Church learned from the Scriptures which mediated it." Cf. also T. F.



- Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids Eerdmans reprint of SCM Press Ltd, 1965), 35–40, esp p 40 “We must now return to the fact that the *homoousion* was gained through hard exegetical activity. It is not itself a biblical term, but it is by no means a speculative construction, an interpretation put upon the facts by the fathers of Nicaea, rather is it a truth that was forced upon the understanding of the Church as it allowed the biblical witness to imprint its own patterns upon its mind”
- 38 John J O’Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 34
- 39 *Ibid.*, 35
- 40 *Ibid.*, 37.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 38.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 39.
- 43 Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 40
- 44 *Ibid.*, 45
- 45 David C. Steinmetz, “Uncovering a Second Narrative: Detective Fiction and the Construction of Historical Method,” pp 54–65 in Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (eds.), *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003)
- 46 Nevertheless, there remains a value in trying to re-read the Old Testament through the eyes of the original readers. Even though Christians may know “the ending of the story,” they can get a deeper appreciation of the richness of God’s providential plan by attending to its intricate windings from its early stages with “fresh eyes.” Therefore, at least in educational settings, there remains a place for a focus on “Hebrew Scriptures” for their own theological insights, without flattening out their distinctiveness from later Christian re-readings.
- 47 However, with common-sense moderation, some hermeneutic of suspicion is necessary and useful against abuses in applications of Scripture, just as secularism provided a needed historical antidote to the evils of the wars of religion.