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Response to the Respondents

William Kurz

Marquette University, william.kurz@marquette.edu

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Response to the Respondents

WILLIAM S. KURZ, SJ

Marquette University

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

READING THE FIVE thoughtful responses by scholarly colleagues to Luke Johnson's and my book awakened a grateful experience of our project being honored and vindicated. These responses constructively "continue the conversation" to which our book aspired to contribute. The three responses by Catholic scholars placed appreciative focus on the positive intent and implications of our dominant model of inclusive, generous "both/and" Catholic approaches, and mainly disregarded possibly negative comparisons to alternative "either/or" tendencies. The two scholars from other denominations expressed displeasure at what they perceived as the unfairness of our comparison. I will address their concerns, but my initial and overall response is to emphasize the positive and important insights in the inclusive approaches that we are recommending Catholic scholarship continue to foster, and to withdraw focus on possibly negative comparisons, at least with the approaches of other Christians.

Frank Matera's response was generally appreciative, especially of our inclusive turning to tradition when interpreting Scripture and of our declining to be embarrassed by our Catholic preunderstandings, but with critical awareness of how we apply them. His constructive contributions to the continuing conversation focused on "balance and proportion," in the inclusive "both/and" direction we had taken. He reminded us that there is no special "Catholic method" of exegesis. What characterizes

Catholic exegesis and interpretation is that it is consciously and forthrightly practiced within a living tradition and with the aim of fidelity to the basic revelation of Scripture.¹

His four areas in which balance and proportion in biblical interpretation are especially needed move the conversation forward by emphasizing the constructive application of Catholic exegetical predilections. In calling for a balance between the theology and history, he reminds us that there is even theological value in the historical approach in situating and relativizing the implications of some sharp controversies with Judaism in John and Matthew. I find especially helpful his characterization of Catholic exegesis as theological, as faith seeking understanding with the aid of historical investigation.²

Matera's second inclusive balance and proportion between an overall theology and the particular theologies of Scripture remind us that the mysteries of God are too profound for any single theology and require the multiple kinds of explanations in the various biblical books. He also makes a helpful distinction between a historical judgment that the Bible has many quite different theologies, and the necessity, from the perspective of belief, to posit unity to God's revelation in Scripture. Believers, in doing so, are in fact searching for God through the Scriptures.³

Regarding Christian balance between Old and New Testaments, Matera recalls the instruction of the Pontifical Biblical Commission's 2002 document on the Jewish people and Scriptures in the Christian Bible. Particularly pertinent to my concerns were his reminder that the Father of Jesus is identical to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and that Catholics who pray the Liturgy of the Hours "live in a liturgical world" that seamlessly integrates Old Testament and New Testament texts.⁴ His final balancing suggestions between ecclesial and academic approaches to Catholic exegesis primarily furthered Luke Johnson's observations in our book.

The contributions of Stephen Ryan, OP, and Olivier-Thomas Venard, OP, mainly presupposed the many book reviews about our book. They focused less on our book than on moving the conversation forward in two fascinating and constructive new directions, beyond the topics we raised. As a specialist in Old Testament, Stephen Ryan made some intriguing observations about how the pluriformity both of variant biblical manuscripts and of the major ancient versions (particularly the Greek,

¹ Matera, "The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship: Balance and Proportion," *Nova et Vetera* 4:1(2006): 122.

² *Ibid.*, 124.

³ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 130.

Latin, and Syriac) provide a further application of the inclusive “both/and” principle.

Ryan mentioned very encouraging developments for the future of Catholic biblical scholarship. Current projects of providing translations and commentaries on the Septuagint and Syriac Peshitta will make the rich Eastern interpretive tradition accessible to the Western readers. Interfaith cooperation between Catholics and Jews on the Hebrew Scriptures is complementing the ecumenical gains and goals of recent interdenominational biblical scholarship. The Oxford Hebrew Bible, a new critical edition that prints synoptic Hebrew parallels for passages that survive in more than one significant form, will enlighten readers to the realities of the pluriformity of many Old Testament texts. A 1969 ecumenical agreement between the United Bible Societies and the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity allows for Esther to be translated twice, the Hebrew text in the canon section, the Greek in the deuterocanonical section.

Ryan draws attention to the incentives that such significant pluriformity of manuscripts provides for reconceptualizing the meaning of divine inspiration of the Bible. This in turn should provide a needed corrective to the “seductive certainties” of post-Enlightenment literalism (that affect both critical and fundamentalist forms of interpretation).⁵ Ryan celebrates the hope that the increasing ecclesial role of early biblical versions alongside the original texts will promote the ecumenical catholicity of the Church and better access to rich interpretive traditions of patristic and medieval saints and scholars.⁶

Another fascinating further stage in the conversation is the account by Olivier-Thomas Venard of how “fourth-generation” Catholic scholars (successors to Johnson and my “third generation”) are at work through the *École Biblique* to produce a “Christian Talmud” under the title *La Bible en ses Traditions*. This complete recasting of the next version of the *Bible de Jérusalem* plans to incorporate the irreducibility of several versions of the same book or passage (which Ryan also discussed). It plans to address the new importance of the history of reception in literary studies, which in turn is intimately related to renewed appreciation of patristic exegesis. It combines appreciation of the literary aspects with plain historical or doctrinal meaning of biblical texts.⁷

⁵ Ryan, “The Text of the Bible and Catholic Biblical Scholarship,” *Nova et Vetera* 4:1(2006): 141.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁷ Venard, “‘La Bible en ses Traditions’: The New Project of the *École biblique et archéologique française de Jérusalem*. Presented as a ‘Fourth-Generation’ Enterprise,” *Nova et Vetera* 4:1(2006): 142.

I find especially promising the prospect that the new edition will be structured analogously to the layout of the Talmud. At the center, on facing pages will be translations of the biblical texts (in synoptic parallelism with translations of any important irreconcilable variants). The "Text" register will supply the usual historical-critical notes on textual criticism, philology, and literary devices. "Background" will provide history and geography, social background, and parallel ancient texts. The largest section of annotation will be "Reception," on biblical intertextuality, Jewish and Christian traditions, theology, dogmas, liturgy, iconography, art, and literature. Such an ambitious project is being implemented by a large interdisciplinary team of scholars.

Venard then illustrates exciting ways in which his "fourth-generation" project is furthering our book's "postmodern and Catholic celebrations of language, diversity, otherness, culture, and faith."⁸ Venard's project will further Origen's insight (cited by Johnson) that it is the language of Scripture that teaches, whatever its relation to what happened.⁹ The close link between literary textual meaning and God's revelation requires scrupulous respect for the original text, as Venard illustrates by his work on the parable of the sower in Matthew, in which he shows that *in the Matthaean text* the seed refers to both the word sown by Jesus and the hearer of the word sown by God the Creator.¹⁰

Diversity will be respected, for example, by consulting important translations like the Vulgate along with the original New Testament Greek. Otherness will be celebrated by the very interdisciplinary nature of this project, and by adding to the usual scientific exegesis a more creative literary one. Appreciation for otherness will also appear in choosing more literal translations more attuned to "exotic" biblical and oral cultures.¹¹ Venard's work on Matthew begins with his and his assistant's draft of notes for all the registers, based especially on their own expertise. These drafts they submit to specialists in "patristics, ancient Judaism, history of the liturgy, iconography, or dogmatics" to modify, correct, or even suppress their proposals and to add better references.¹²

The collaborators in this Bible respect how human meaning is constructed, connected to faith commitments, and rooted in community traditions. They recognize in biblical interpretation the same kind of circle of preknowledge and knowledge that characterizes most commonplace

⁸ Ibid., 144.

⁹ Ibid., 146.

¹⁰ Ibid., 147, esp. 148.

¹¹ Ibid., 151.

¹² Ibid., 152.

knowledge. They hope that their Bible will deepen understanding of how the "economy" of revelation occurs by means of "deeds and words intrinsically interconnected."¹³

Another area of convergence between the proposals of our book and their new Bible will be the explicit incorporation of faith into their scholarly exegetical work. They intend to consult Church teaching as an invitation to deepen their philological study of the text and its reception, enlarge the context of their reading of the text, and allow truths that were developed later to help readers notice textual facts or peculiarities.¹⁴ Finally, Venard envisages biblical scholarship as helping in the future to produce a biblical world that is, to be an agent changing the culture, especially its irrational and nihilistic foundations.¹⁵ Venard proposes making biblical texts places where our contemporaries can live today.

Because they came primarily in the form of challenges, the responses of David Yeago and Richard Hays proved especially productive for my own attempts to "continue the conversation." When I tracked down Yeago's references I found some especially useful writings and suggestions that were being written about the same time as Luke Johnson and I were composing our book, most of them not available to us at the time of writing. Many of my own current further steps toward reading Scripture more theologically and spiritually are relying heavily on both Yeago's own articles and David Steinmetz's analogy between reading Old and New Testaments and reading a mystery story, which appeared after our book in *The Art of Reading Scripture* co-edited by Hays.¹⁶

In fact, responses to our book have included practical guidance to excellent proposals and writings that run parallel to Johnson's and my concerns. Before attempting answers to particular criticisms of Yeago and Hays, I want to acknowledge that I consider their concerns and those of many others to be quite parallel to ours. I regard them not only as brothers in Christ but as significant partners in the conversation toward the future of both Catholic and Christian biblical scholarship. The following writings exemplify *contributions to the ecumenical and Catholic search for theological and religiously helpful exegesis* as an alternative to interpretation heavily indebted

¹³ *Dei Verbum*, no. 2; Venard, 154.

¹⁴ Venard, 155.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁶ David Steinmetz, "Uncovering a Second Narrative: Detective Fiction and the Construction of Historical Method," in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. E. F. Davis and R. B. Hays (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003).

to modernism and postmodernism. Most of these publications appeared at about the same time or after our book and were not available to us. I recommend that many of these be read in conjunction with our book, to supplement, complement, and at times correct some of our emphases.

Perhaps the most evidently parallel work to ours is the set of published essays resulting from the Duke University ecumenical Scripture Project, co-edited by Ellen Davis and Richard Hays, *The Art of Reading Scripture*. Their "Nine Theses on the Interpretation of Scripture," complement our suggestions.¹⁷ I intend to incorporate them into my Scripture classes and to recommend them as a fine starting point for all who share our common desire for interpretation more attuned to the Bible as God's Word. For my present search for something like the patristic overarching biblical narrative, I find particularly helpful Richard Bauckham, "Reading Scripture as a Coherent Story"¹⁸ and even more so, David C. Steinmetz, "Uncovering a Second Narrative: Detective Fiction and the Construction of Historical Method,"¹⁹ along with Brian Daley's essay on "Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable?"²⁰

Yeago's response alerted me to a 2005 book by John J. O'Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible*.²¹ It provides an extraordinarily helpful introduction to patristic interpretation. Also quite helpful is Christopher R. Seitz, *Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture*.²²

Especially productive for my search for a more theological method have been the following essays in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings*: Henri de Lubac, "Spiritual Understanding"; David C. Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis"; and especially David S. Yeago, "The New Testament and the Nicene

¹⁷ Davis and Hays, *The Art of Reading Scripture*, 1–5.

¹⁸ In Davis and Hays, *The Art of Reading Scripture*.

¹⁹ See note 16 above.

²⁰ A variant of *Communio* 29 (2002): 185–216.

²¹ 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).

²² Christopher R. Seitz, *Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001). A seminal book for understanding how patristic interpretation relates to Greco-Roman rhetoric, philosophy, and culture is Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997, 2002). A classic development of especially Irenaeus's recapitulation theory that deserves more attention is Paul M. Quay, *The Mystery Hidden for Ages in God* (New York: P. Lang, 1995). A short accessible version of de Lubac's classic four volumes on the four senses is Henri de Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition* (New York: Crossroad, 2000).

Dogma: A Contribution to the Recovery of Theological Exegesis.”²³ The readily available classic *St. Athanasius on the Incarnation* nicely illustrates this theological approach.²⁴

Catholic contributions that overlap many of the concerns of our book (perhaps more my emphases than Johnson’s) are Peter S. Williamson, *Catholic Principles for Interpreting Scripture: A Study of the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*;²⁵ and David M. Williams, *Receiving the Bible in Faith: Historical and Theological Exegesis*.²⁶

Lutheran systematic theologian David Yeago expressed misgivings about Luke Timothy Johnson’s recommendation of “imagining the world as the Scripture imagines it.” He was primarily concerned about Christians using a postmodern approach without sufficient acknowledgement of how dangerous postmodernism’s proclivities can be to Christian faith. I share Yeago’s concerns about “the imagined world” of postmodern approaches being equated with an “imaginary” world. From his explicit faith perspective, Yeago argues that Scripture reveals the true meaning of the world, to which we tend to be blinded by sin. Despite rhetorical differences, I doubt that Johnson would disagree with Yeago’s insistence that it is not merely a matter of a postmodern (and arbitrary) choice to imagine the world in the way the Bible does. In faith we accept the reality of that biblical world. To this I would add that according to my own experience and study, the biblical worldview in fact makes more rational sense of reality than any modern or postmodern alternative views of reality that I know. And Venard’s proposal that biblicists actually help build a biblical world that we can live in today also contributes to this topic.

On the other hand, Venard emphasizes that there can be “a Christian version of postmodernity, which inverts the general relativism of postmodern thinkers into the conscious ‘second naivety’ provided by an illuminated faith regarding our possibility to know the truth.”²⁷ Postmodern relativism

²³ Stephen E. Fowl, ed., *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997): Henri de Lubac, “Spiritual Understanding,” 3–25; David C. Steinmetz, “The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis,” 26–38; and especially David S. Yeago, “The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma: A Contribution to the Recovery of Theological Exegesis,” 87–100.

²⁴ *St. Athanasius on the Incarnation: The Treatise De Incarnatione Verbi Dei* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, rev. ed., 1944, 1953, 1982).

²⁵ Peter S. Williamson, *Catholic Principles for Interpreting Scripture: A Study of the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2001).

²⁶ David M. Williams, *Receiving the Bible in Faith: Historical and Theological Exegesis* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004).

²⁷ Venard, 144.

can help dispose of an exaggerated assumption of criticism being “scientific,” which triggered the divorce of exegesis from the life of the Church. We now appreciate with Lyotard that every discourse, including scientific, “implies a rhetoric, a tradition, and many preconceptions.²⁸ After removal of its nihilist postulates, postmodernity “can help biblical scholars to recover confidence in cultural mediation.” That is, various cultural and other “prejudices shape every thought, and this is not fate, but fact—and should be simply taken into account.”²⁹

Venard also celebrates the epistemological shift away from the romantic prejudice in historical criticism that there was an original, pure good news that became progressively corrupted throughout Church history. He argues that in ancient semi-oral civilizations language reveals, rather than represents.³⁰ “In the world of Scripture, events, undetectable without texts that beforehand sharpen the attention of those that live them, come to enlighten those very texts. Inhabitants of this world experience the mutual illuminations of being and letter.”³¹ One effect of this is to render invalid many critical judgments against historicity in narratives because of their literary shaping and intra-biblical allusion. Historical effectiveness has to be judged “no longer *against*, but *through* the cultural mediations of knowledge.”³²

Questions remain about how one can live in a scriptural universe in the twenty-first century. I continue to look to premodern 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 worldview. Yeago has astutely remarked that in addition to the philosophical alternatives of secular versus scriptural worldviews, it is important to remember the culture-transforming effects of a scriptural mind set.³³

This recalls the more fundamental and critically important need for both *faith and reason* to be able to live within a biblical worldview. Faith believes in the God revealed in Scripture, a God who both creates and redeems and who exercises providential care for us creatures. Reason

²⁸ Venard, 144.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 152–53.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 153

³¹ *Ibid.*, 153.

³² *Ibid.*, 154

³³ See somewhat comparable comments by Venard mentioned above. Especially helpful is the treatment of how rhetoric, philosophy, culture, and the biblical vision mutually influence each other in patristic interpretation in Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*.

applies considerations of the dignity of persons and human rights, natural law and the common good, and justice, within the pluralistic realities among which we live.³⁴

In addition, as Catholics and other Christians reading Scripture today, we demonstrate the reasonableness of our faith in the loving, biblical God who created all things good and who rescues humans from our sinful misuse of our God-given freedom. Concern for the reasonableness of our faith reminds us that the biblical worldview requires that we respect the dignity and rights of the other human images of God. It requires us to live morally and justly, in ways that use material creation wisely and avoid mistreating or misusing it selfishly.

Yeago, Hays, and others have expressed intense ecumenical uneasiness and some personal offense taken with what Yeago calls our “oppositional self-definition,” and with some of our characterizations of Protestantism (undifferentiated and often linked to Enlightenment presuppositions). I certainly apologize for any offense I have given. In most cases, I believe upsetting statements on my part or their implications resulted either from my overgeneralizing from individual writings or actual pastoral or teaching experiences, or from insufficient care to specify the precise authors or settings of statements or methods that concerned me. In some cases, I think I was simply misunderstood. I cannot speak for Luke Johnson, but from my personal experience of his extraordinarily friendly personality and ecumenical openness, I think some of his rhetoric and expressions were likewise misunderstood.

As both Yeago and Hays agree, ecumenism does not mean reducing discussions to “least common denominator” concerns and theologies. In fact, I characterize even what seemed to me to be their sharpest criticisms as offered in a spirit of ecumenical dialogue and respect, and I accept them in that spirit. As they both recognized, I have never hidden my Catholic presuppositions and loyalties (some of which differ also from Luke’s, as Hays especially pointed out). In turn I am happy to be reminded of their differing personal presuppositions and loyalties.

I had already discovered some negative aspects and results of the “least-common-denominator” approach to dialogue as a graduate student at Yale, from an orthodox rabbi friend who was a fellow student there. He emphasized to me how offensive and condescending he found it when

³⁴ Although Hays provides reasonable arguments for finding substitutes for “rights language,” I find such terms too important components of long-standing Catholic social teaching to surrender. Cf. Pope John Paul II, encyclical letter “Faith and Reason” (*Fides et ratio*; 1998), www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_15101998_fides-et-ratio_en.html.

Christians talked to him about Christ in reductionistic ways, as if they, like he, were Jewish in their beliefs about Jesus. He expected me as a Christian to believe in the divinity of Christ, and to acknowledge that belief in conversations with him. "Least-common-denominator" dialogue was not only not helpful, but was actually dishonest.

Still, neither Johnson nor I ever wanted to emphasize oppositional self-definition as our *program* or as a desideratum. My remarks simply began from what abundant personal, professional, pastoral, and teaching experience indicated are noticeable differences that in fact occasion different interpretive perceptions and approaches between Catholics and Christians of other denominations. I believe the best ecumenical contribution I can make to any dialogue is to speak with both respect for others' views and a desire to learn from them, but also without apology for my personal Catholic presuppositions and beliefs—all of them, even those with which some other Catholics might disagree.

When I emphasized that there exist factual differences between Catholics and other Christians, I was not ignoring ecumenical efforts or concerns, but simply expressing my extensive experiential awareness of how seriously such differences influence both behavior and biblical interpretation. I was referring to grassroots teaching and exegetical experience, not the level of organized ecumenical discussions. On that level of ordinary give-and-take, I find it more productive simply to begin ecumenical exchange by having all parties speak from their actual current beliefs, opinions, and preferences, in which there happen to be not inconsiderable differences among them. Convergences come afterward, from listening to and learning from the views of others.

Both Yeago and I want to remove as many differences between Christian groups as possible, but for me the most effective starting point is honest acknowledgement of our current positions and consequently their differences from positions of our dialogue partners. As each participant explains her or his reasons for their position, more areas of common concern and conviction can emerge, and more differences can be either overcome or relativized in their significance. This process may also give promise of eventually including denominational differences alongside social, ethnic, and sexual differences as overcome in the unity of the one Christ (cf. Gal 3:28), as Yeago hopes.

I furthermore concur with generally wanting to find common ground and to emphasize more fundamental points on the hierarchy of truths where Christians and other believers can agree, rather than to focus excessively on differences that divide us. Still, there are also important values that are contained within our very differences. We can learn from

the differing perspectives from other individuals and other denominations if we both listen to others' outlooks and express our own diverging values honestly and respectfully. Sometimes we may simply have to "agree to disagree." But more often we find complementarity in the differing views and approaches that can be mutually enriching.

The extraordinary productiveness (and enjoyableness) of respectful but open and frank ecumenical discussion, in which each participant in the conversation speaks from her or his personal faith and differing denominational perspectives, have been amply demonstrated in my recent large ecumenical seminars on Luke-Acts and on Johannine writings at Marquette. As I have become more aware of how our Catholic, Lutheran, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Episcopalian, Evangelical, Presbyterian, and other perspectives do influence what we notice, bring to, and read in biblical texts, I have begun testing my developing hypotheses that our differing denominational preunderstandings bring positive contributions and not merely limitations to our common efforts at exegesis.

I have begun encouraging students to exegete biblical passages not only using the standard historical, critical, and literary methods, but also acknowledging to the whole class any special emphases or insights their particular denominational and religious background, training, and experience suggested to them. Each student was encouraged to express honestly his or her opinion on the topic or passage as well as any particular disagreement with anyone else's opinion, including the professor's. The only basic ground rule in this mutual give-and-take was that it always be respectful of others and their suggestions, and never resort to personal attacks or to insulting the views of others.

Both the graduate students and I found these class sessions with their sharing and mutual critiques of exegetical papers and studies enormously enjoyable as well as profitable. Both they and I were especially proud when a pair of exegetical papers produced in the seminar, both of which explicated Lukan treatments of "breaking of bread," were accepted by a scholarly journal for publication explicitly as a pair. They were regarded as examples of how differing Baptist and Catholic presuppositions in exegeting the same biblical passages can lead to varying and often complementary emphases, in this case the Baptist stressing the communal aspects and the Catholic the Eucharistic facets of "breaking of bread" in Luke and Acts.

Regarding the hierarchy of truths, I agree with both Yeago and Hays that on such fundamental levels as creedal belief in central doctrines like Trinity and Incarnation we are primarily on common ground. This common ground extends more than I previously realized also to our

parallel searches and converging general principles for ways of doing biblical exegesis that are more attuned to Scripture as God's Word. I am happy to come to know and learn from them as brothers and allies in our common desires and efforts for the future of biblical scholarship. I think that both Catholics and other Christians, including Johnson and me, have for some time been earnestly cultivating such areas of common convictions. Sometimes, however, very significant disagreements remain among us on the level of truths that are not toward the top of the hierarchy of truths. I suggest that the serious disagreement expressed between Hays and me relates mostly to debated propositions that belong lower down in this hierarchy.

I am sorry if I did not sufficiently emphasize the extensive areas of agreement between Dr. Hays's chapter on abortion and my chapter critiquing his position. The main reason I chose the case history of his chapter was to avoid setting up a "straw man." It was to grapple with a book, a scholar, and a position for whom I had genuine respect, and whose overall agreement in general moral and interpretative principles allowed me to illustrate where our remaining real differences lay.

The way that I applied the "both/and" and "either/or" contrast was unfortunate and now regretted, but we both agree with my main point that our differences are primarily related to differing denominational preunderstandings and preferences when it comes to how we apply extra-biblical reasoning to our interpretation. (As Matera had remarked, there are no particularly Catholic methods of exegesis, but what characterizes Catholic interpretation is their doing it explicitly from within their tradition.) Our areas of agreement extend to most of the fundamental methodological priorities for reading Scripture as the Word of God and seeking guidance from it in areas that we both agree are not explicitly treated in Scripture, like abortion. Our respective chapters also agree in our strong aversion to abortion and in how the worldview and narratives of Scripture strongly discourage it.

I also regret and apologize for not clearly enough acknowledging that not only Hays's fundamental approaches but also his ultimate conclusion from his exegetical and interpretive quest for biblical guidance about abortion come to an analogous basic judgment. As he puts it, "My own judgment in this case is that the New Testament *summons the community to eschew abortion* and thus to undertake the burden of assisting the parents to raise the handicapped child."³⁵ Further, as someone with pastoral experience

³⁵ Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation* (San Francisco: Harper-SanFrancisco, 1996), 457, emphasis added.

myself, I too acknowledge the difference between giving an unambiguous ethical directive (for me it would be against abortion in any circumstances) and dealing pastorally with the imperfect and even sinful decisions people actually make. I also agree that the Church should assist people in keeping difficult moral commandments, but that does not completely absolve the actual parents from their own responsibility.

The point of clear divergence between us is that ultimately I have to characterize the choice that this fortyish couple made to kill their preborn baby who had Downs Syndrome as morally wrong, not merely a tragedy. From my belief that God has a plan for every human being in creating each human soul, I cannot see that God approves killing one's handicapped baby in the womb for any reason. This personal conviction stems both from the general biblical worldview on which I think Hays and I mostly agree and from my denominationally influenced attitudes to using traditions such as natural law and moral absolutes. (This particular instance does not happen to result particularly from my tendency to show more dependence than others on magisterial teachings.) The conclusion of my argument from Scripture and rational reflection and reasoning is confirmed by extensive personal experience in helping women and men who bitterly grieve over and repent of aborting their child in even significantly worse circumstances than the example under discussion. The key to their healing was their honestly acknowledging their guilt and repenting of what they have done, as in the biblical pattern exemplified in Psalms 32 and 51.

The main reason I may be seeming to belabor this difference is that I believe such ethical concerns extend far beyond the narrow purview of hard cases concerning abortion. I believe the churches are going to need biblical and traditional guidance for many critical recent ethical questions that are not mentioned in Scripture but that have enormous ethical, economic, scientific, and cultural ramifications. I am alarmed by current bioethical developments that seem to be headed in the direction described in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, in which "mother" is a dirty word, babies sorted according to genetically graded abilities are produced in factories, and sex is reduced to trivialized pleasure.³⁶ I believe there is an ecumenical urgency to find in Scripture and tradition, with helping guidance from ecclesial leaders, orientations for sorely needed ethical principles in such financially lucrative but morally problematic biomedical areas as cloning, artificial creation of human embryos, and embryo experimentation and harvesting for stem cells, not to mention end-of-life

³⁶ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (Cutchogue, NY: Buccaneer Books, c1946, 1997).

concerns exacerbated by developing medical technologies. In these areas, I believe Catholic scholars, tradition, and magisterium have achieved many pioneering results that are of potential value to all Christians and moral people of good will.

I also regret that my disagreement about discernment was experienced as judgmental. Because Hays alluded to St. Ignatius Loyola and discernment in reference to this decision, I was merely trying to insert a necessary distinction about Ignatian practices of discernment, in which I have been steeped throughout my Jesuit life. The misapplication of Ignatian discernment that I was addressing is a common one, not in any special way focused on Dr. Hays.

According to my Ignatian training and experience, ethics is in critical ways different from discernment: Ethics seeks to know what God has commanded as right or wrong, to be done or to be avoided. Ignatius would tend to seek answers to these ethical questions in the commandments, Scripture, Catholic teaching, tradition, and the magisterium. Then one would determine what to do and how to do it by applying the resulting general principles with prudence to one's particular circumstances.

This approach would not tend to seek answers to whether something is ethically right or wrong in prayer over one's interior movements or one's options and individual circumstances. A much more common kind of Ignatian discernment in prayer is to seek the Spirit's guidance among multiple choices that are evidently morally good or neutral—for example, is God guiding me to be a doctor or a teacher, to seek marriage or a single life dedicated to extraordinary availability and service. In my Ignatian experience, a question about abortion would be an ethical question of right or wrong, and therefore not a matter of discernment in the usual Ignatian sense.

Ultimately, I do not think it is surprising that on some points, Hays and I may have to "agree to disagree," but even in these matters I believe we can disagree respectfully. Longstanding differences and deeply held convictions regarding natural law, moral absolutes, magisterium, and various hard ethical cases, such as those regarding abortion, are not able to be overcome in the small space of our interchange here. These particular disagreements need not hinder us from together searching among our abundant common convictions, beliefs, values, and exegetical priorities for a future for Catholic and Christian biblical scholarship that is more explicitly addressed to the needs of the Church and of believers.

Despite the positive reception most Catholic reviewers and respondents have given to our promotion among Catholics of an inclusive "both/and" approach to interpretation, this image also occasioned signif-

icant objections. Yeago, Hays, and several reviewers have registered particular dismay and criticisms of Luke Johnson's contrast, which I also used extensively, between a more characteristically Catholic "both/and" approach and a more typically Protestant "either/or" approach to biblical interpretation. Probably the majority of reviewers found our fundamental contrast between "both/and" and "either/or" exegetical predilections illuminating and corresponding to their own experience. However, I now think that linking the latter so explicitly to a generalized Protestantism was unfortunate. I regret any impression that our book was glorifying our Catholic proclivities at the expense of those of other denominations, or that it seemed to lump all denominations together as generically Protestant, or that it too closely equated Protestant predilections with those of the Enlightenment and secularistic mindsets.

As I recall, our descriptions came about from our actual and painful experience of this "either/or" emphasis especially in the German and post-Bultmanian critical tendencies reigning during our graduate studies in the early 1970s. The tendency to emphasize dichotomies, along with some anti-Catholic nuances disguised in such standard exegetical constructs as "early Catholicism" to exemplify decline from the pristine Pauline-Johannine gospel, were so apparent to us that it even elicited our protests, mere graduate students though we were. I am convinced that such exegetical mindsets were common to most mainstream graduate programs at the time, and perdure among some of the more secularistic approaches to Scripture to this day. However, perhaps our linking this legitimate contrast between dichotomizing and inclusive exegetical approaches to a contrast between Catholic and Protestant owed too much to our personal, painful, but now long-past experiences as a Catholic, graduate-student minority in the face of some alienating exegetical presuppositions.

For purposes of the ongoing constructive conversation about the future of both Catholic and ecumenical biblical scholarship, I believe that the three Catholic responses in this journal and the majority of book reviews both confirm that our emphasis on inclusive exegetical and interpretive approaches has merit, and also suggest reasonable ways to implement it. Stripped of the possibility of negative implications regarding other Christian denominations, we can pursue what is valuable in convictions about inclusive manners of interpreting Scripture, especially with acknowledged consultation of tradition. Cautions against eisegesis and simply reading one's presuppositions into the text will always be important and necessary. We must also allow the biblical text to change and correct our presuppositions and traditions when necessary. In these

matters, not only our “separated brothers and sisters” but also Catholic practitioners from earlier “generations” who continue to emphasize mostly critical exegesis will have important contributions to make to this ongoing conversation about biblical scholarship. **NY**