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Typology, Tabernacle and Tradition: A History of Interpretation of Hebrews 9:11-14



Honors Thesis

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Department: Religious Studies

Advisor: Meghan Henning, Ph.D.

April 2016

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Abstract

The texts of the Bible have been used and interpreted in various ways across different time periods and different cultures, and there is much to be gained by studying these changes. Changing attitudes about and uses of Scripture tell us something about other changes taking place in society. They reflect new ideas about religion, knowledge, and authority. Most of all, they demonstrate the techniques used by pastors, theologians, and other authors to make texts written long ago relevant to contemporary problems. The purpose of my study is to use Hebrews 9:11-14 to look at the ways in which the interpretation of Scripture and the uses of Scripture change across time and geographic locations. By analyzing the text itself in its first century context, as well as documents citing this passage from the Early Church, the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and the present day, I am able study both the ways that the interpretation of this particular passage has changed, and how methods of biblical interpretation themselves have changed.



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INTRODUCTION

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews begins his work by noting that God has communicated with humanity “in many and various ways.” This phrase could just as well be applied to the way the author’s own work has been interpreted throughout Christian history. Debates have raged over the authorship of the work, its literary genre, and the community to whom it was addressed. Interpreters have also disagreed about the purpose of the work, particularly its relationship to Judaism. Sometimes interpretations changed because better manuscripts became available, or someone came up with an insightful way to resolve a problem within the text. Usually, however, the changes had less to do the text itself than they did with the hermeneutical tools used on it.

In this thesis, I study the way methods of biblical interpretation have developed from the early church to the present day, using Heb. 9:11-14 as a frame. Proper biblical interpretation is a subject that has fascinated me for some time. As a child fascinated with dinosaurs, I struggled to understand how to reconcile what I was learning about them with the six-day account of creation in Genesis. As I grew older, I also wondered how I was to interpret verses of the Bible that seemed to condone or command actions deeply out of touch with contemporary ethics, or verses that simply contradicted one another. In college I learned that all these questions fell under the field of biblical hermeneutics, and sought to study the issue more thoroughly.

Surveying the different methods of biblical interpretation that have been employed throughout Christian history seemed like a logical place to begin in this endeavor, and that is the purpose of this thesis. The selection of Heb. 9:11-14 as a frame was not entirely arbitrary. Hebrews is one of my favorite books of the Bible. The author writes beautifully about the power of faith and the suffering of Christ. Furthermore, the particular passage I studied deals with

themes of special interest to me, such as the relationship between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament and how to understand the crucifixion. Ultimately, however, the central focus of this thesis is not on how interpretations of this passage have changed, but on what these changes tell us about changes in biblical interpretation.

The first chapter in this thesis places Hebrews in its first-century context. That is to say, in the first chapter I write about how the original audience of the work would likely have interpreted Hebrews. In doing this, I first discuss different theories about the community to whom the work was addressed and the work's literary genre. I then review its themes, paying particular attention to whether the frequently supersessionist and anti-Semitic interpretations of this text reflect the author's intent. Finally, I look at how the work, and my passage in particular, addresses the problems the community is facing.

The second chapter deals with the reception of the text in the early church. I start with the general overview of how Hebrews was received, focusing on debates of the authorship of the work and its journey to the canon. I then look at how four figures of the early church used Hebrews: Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, John Chrysostom, and Augustine of Hippo. For each of these authors, I first discuss their biblical hermeneutic generally, and then focus on the particular work where they made use of Hebrews, looking both at how the passage from Hebrews is interpreted and what the work says about their reading practices. I am interested, in other words, not simply in what an author's interpretation is, but in what tools and understandings the author used to reach that interpretation. In this section, I pay particular attention to the role of allegory and philosophy in biblical interpretation. I also highlight some of the common elements that will form the basis of orthodox biblical interpretation for centuries to come.

The third chapter focuses on the Middle Ages. The two figures analyzed in this period are Bernard of Clairvaux and Thomas Aquinas. Bernard represents a monastic reading style characterized by adherence to orthodoxy and applying Scripture to daily life. Aquinas represents a tradition of Scholastic interpretation focused on using literal interpretations to find first principles for theology. This chapter provides the first opportunity to look at how biblical hermeneutics develop. I show how rather than Bernard following the path of particular patristic figures while Aquinas follows the others, they both mixed hermeneutical elements of a variety of authors. I also discuss how even when medieval authors and patristic authors used the same reading practices or confronted similar situations, the ideological space in which they make these interpretations is often significantly different.

The fourth chapter looks at how Heb. 9:11-14 was used during the Reformation era. I first review the use of Hebrews and the general biblical hermeneutics of Protestant leaders such as John Calvin, Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and Matt Henry. Next, I discuss the decisions the Council of Trent made regarding Scripture, and how Hebrews was used in its discussion of the Mass. Special attention is paid in this chapter to what it means to focus on the “literal sense” of Scripture, and what role tradition should play in biblical interpretation. I also touch in this chapter on anti-Catholic biases in Reformation scholarship and surprising similarities between the biblical hermeneutic of Protestants and Catholics.

The fifth chapter covers the rise of the historical-critical method, and two contemporary theologies that attempt to make use of the method’s insights. I begin by reviewing the history of the historical-critical method and its connection to Reformation hermeneutics. After discussing the history of the method, I look at how contemporary historical-critical scholars have interpreted Heb. 9:11-14 and how they have addressed the issues of the works authorship and purpose. I then

study the attempts of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and Gustavo Gutiérrez to connect historical-critical scholarship with theology. While often at odds, these figures both see value in critical biblical scholarship but find that by itself the method is insufficient in providing guidance for Christian living. The sixth and final chapter compares and contrasts the findings of the previous five chapters. I look both at how interpretations of Heb. 9:11-14 have changed and at how biblical hermeneutics in general have changed.

Reception history can often seem like dry, abstruse work utterly lacking in value outside the academy. I hope to show over the course of this thesis that reception history can add important insights to our knowledge about a topic. Reception history can show us where biases in scholarship exist. Reception history can show us where the center of disagreement between competing factions is, and where these factions are similar as well. Reception history can rehabilitate texts that in the past have been used for bigoted or oppressive reasons. Studying the reception of biblical texts is particularly important. Different hermeneutical tools produce different readings, and these readings affect the way Christians understand and live their faith. The search for the proper biblical hermeneutic is not an esoteric theological discussion, but a search for how Christianity can respond effectively to new cultural contexts. Reviewing the way that past Christians have confronted the challenges of their day with the words of Scripture can show us the way to scripturally respond to the problems of our era.

“But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!”

Hebrews 9:11-14

CHAPTER 1: FIRST CENTURY CONTEXT

Introduction

Most Christians today are introduced to the Bible as a collection of timeless truths given to us by God for our instruction. This makes it easy to forget that before the various books within it became part of the Bible, they were texts written to a particular community for a particular purpose. For this reason, before considering how later authors made use of Heb. 9:11-14, I will put the passage in its historical context and attempt to determine how the community to which it was addressed interpreted it. I will discuss the composition and history of the community to whom the work was likely addressed, and the challenges they were facing. I will then consider its literary genre and primary themes. Finally, I will consider how the themes of Hebrews, and specifically how the themes of Heb. 9:11-14 worked to alleviate the community's concerns.

Community

While ascertaining the meaning of any ancient text is difficult, Hebrews presents a special challenge in this regard. Both the author and the community to which the work was sent are uncertain. The latter presents a particular difficulty, for as Kenneth Schenck notes, different communities may have interpret the same symbols differently, and may respond differently to the same argument.¹ Establishing some basic ideas about the composition and location of the community is therefore a necessary part of interpreting Hebrews.

This issue is further complicated by the fact that the ethnic composition of the community, the location of the community, and the problems they faced are related questions. Until the past few centuries, there was almost unanimous agreement that Hebrews was written to an audience of Jews or Jewish Christians. The early ascription of the title "to the Hebrews"

¹ Kenneth Schenck, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1.

testifies to this.² Likely for this reason, many ancient authors believed the destination of the letter was Jerusalem or somewhere else in Palestine. The idea of Palestine as the destination of the work has since fallen out of favor, and many now favor Rome as a destination.³ There has been a similar shift in opinion over the ethnic composition of the audience. Many now believe that the Hebrews was sent to a community of both Gentile and Jewish Christians.⁴

Some of the most detailed work on the history of Hebrews' audience has been done by Craig Koester in his Anchor Bible commentary on Hebrews. Koester argues that Hebrews was written to a specific community that had a close relationship to the author.⁵ Using mostly internal evidence from Hebrews, he divides the history of the community into three periods. The first period consists of the initial evangelization of this community. They received a message of salvation, likely interpreted as deliverance from divine judgment and entrance into the Kingdom of God. This period probably occurred some time ago, as the author is frustrated by the lack of progress the community has made, thinking they should be teachers by now (5:12). Perhaps most importantly for what is to come, the community was given a new way to identify (Christian) that was to be more important than all previous "unenlightened" identifications (6:4, 10:32).⁶

² J.H. Davies, *The Cambridge Biblical Commentary on the New English Bible: A Letter to the Hebrews* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 3.

³ Harold Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. Helmut Koester (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 9-10. This idea was first advanced by J.J. Wettstein in 1752, and many since then have argued against Palestine as destination. Many, such as Alan Mitchell, base this argument in the author's depiction of the Jewish cult through LXX descriptions of worship practices rather than through the cultic practices associated with the temple. Rome has become an increasingly popular destination for a number of reasons, including the use of Hebrews in *1 Clement* and similarities to other Roman documents. Alan Mitchell, *Sacra Pagina: Hebrews*, ed. Daniel Harrington, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007), 13.

⁴ Eric Mason has noted that scholars who believe the audience was largely composed of Jewish Christians generally argue that the problem the author sought to address was "Judaizing" pressure. Those who argue for a community of Gentile and Jewish Christians generally believe the problem was apathy or malaise. Eric Mason, "The Epistle (Not Necessarily) to the 'Hebrews': A Call to Renunciation of Judaism or Encouragement to Christian Commitment?" *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 37 (2010): 8.

⁵ A not uncontested point, as will be discussed below.

⁶ Craig Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 65-67.

The next stage Koester identifies is a stage of persecution, citing as evidence the prisoners mentioned in Heb. 10:34. Koester argues that members of the community experienced a series of nonlethal hardships, including property seizure and imprisonment, perhaps carried out by mobs rather than by official authorities. Koester speculates that this community, which Hebrews frequently describes as special and distinct from their non-Christian counterparts, was perceived as too inwardly focused and insufficiently civic-minded. He also argues that based on the evidence of the work, this persecution seems to have strengthened the commitment of the community, rather than destroying it.⁷

By the time of the writing of Hebrews, however, their situation had changed. The community was now characterized by apathy and malaise. Koester and other scholars have proposed a number of reasons for the waning commitment of the community, including the continuing imprisonment of its members, the absence of the Parousia, and social stigmatization.⁸ Skeptical of the traditional hypothesis that the author was concerned with a Jewish Christian audience reverting to Judaism, Koester identifies the problem more as general drift than apostasy.⁹

Genre

Determining the genre of Hebrews is also crucial for ascertaining what Hebrews meant for its first century audience. As Edgar McKnight notes in his 2005 study on the literary form and structure of Hebrews, we read texts of distinct genres differently. Our thoughts about the genre of a work color our reading of that text.¹⁰ The early inclusion of Hebrews in the Pauline

⁷ *Ibid.*, 68-70.

⁸ Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 13 and Koester, *Hebrews*, 71.

⁹ Koester, *Hebrews*, 72.

¹⁰ Edgar McKnight "Literary and Rhetorical Form and Structure in the 'Epistle to the Hebrews,'" *Review and Expositor* 102 (2005): 257.

corpus¹¹ suggests that in the early church it was considered (and therefore read as) an epistle. This does not, however, mean that the original audience of the work also thought it was an epistle. Much like the text's attribution to Paul and the inscription "to the Hebrews," modern scholars have called Hebrews' status as a letter into question.

The case against viewing Hebrews simply as a letter rests largely on its introduction and conclusion. As Harold Attridge notes, Hebrews does not open with the standard formula for salutation seen in almost all Christian and Hellenistic epistolary literature. Lacking this formula, while not unheard of (1 John also lacks a standard salutation), is highly unusual.¹² Alan Mitchell feels the work's conclusion is also atypical.¹³ While in the past some tried to resolve these difficulties by arguing that either the salutation was lost or that the conclusion is not original to the work, most scholars today find both these arguments unconvincing.¹⁴

Several alternative genres have been suggested for the text. Some have argued that Hebrews is a kind of Christian midrash, but this view has not been widely accepted.¹⁵ The suggestion that Hebrews is really a christological or exegetical treatise addressed to no community in particular has also failed to find wide acceptance among scholars.¹⁶ The most widely accepted theory today is that Hebrews was originally a sermon or homily, although many caution against assuming that Hebrews must fit strictly within one genre.¹⁷ Taking as a starting point Hebrews' self-designation as a "word of exhortation," most scholars classify Hebrews as

¹¹ Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 13.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Mitchell, *Sacra Pagina*, 14.

¹⁴ Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 13.

¹⁵ Mitchell, *Sacra Pagina*, 16-17.

¹⁶ Koester, *Hebrews*, 80.

¹⁷ Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 14 and McKnight, "Literary and Rhetorical Form and Structure," 263.

an example of first-century Christian preaching, perhaps later edited to better match the form of an epistle.¹⁸

Hebrews is now commonly considered a sermon primarily for two reasons. The first is based on Hebrews' conformity with other "words of exhortations" in early Christian literature, particularly Acts of the Apostles. A three-part structure has been identified consisting of biblical examples, conclusions drawn from these examples, and exhortation, a structure that matches Hebrews well.¹⁹ The other reason is that, as Edgar McKnight notes, the genre of sermon is the best way to combine the distinct aspects of the work. Hebrews contains both passages of exhortation and expositions on doctrine.²⁰ Viewing the document as a sermon avoids the danger of seeing its exhortations as subservient to its expositions, or *vice versa*. Both its christological expositions and its pastoral counseling are integral elements of the work.²¹ As will be discussed in greater detail below, the author uses these expositions to try and alleviate the community's problems.

Themes

Three of the most important themes in Hebrews are the contrast between the old covenant and the new covenant, Christ's high priesthood, and the importance of faith. Harold Attridge shows in his commentary on Hebrews that the author's purpose is to articulate the relationship between these themes so as to call his congregation to stand fast in their faith.²² These themes are

¹⁸ Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews* 14. Ironically, then, the Epistle to the Hebrews is probably not an epistle and probably wasn't written to the Hebrews!

¹⁹ Mitchell, *Sacra Pagina*, 16.

²⁰ Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 14.

²¹ McKnight, "Literary and Rhetorical Form and Structure," 263.

²² Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 27-28.

particularly prominent in Heb. 9, with some scholars identifying this chapter as the climax of the author's argument.²³

The emphasis on the new covenant is one of the most prominent themes within Hebrews, and likely the reason it has long been believed to be a caution against converting or reverting to Judaism. The author argues in the work that Christ came to inaugurate a new and superior covenant. Through his saving work on the cross he inaugurated the covenant foretold in Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-34). This argument reaches its climax in Chapter 9. The first half of the chapter is spent detailing (sometimes incorrectly)²⁴ the Day of Atonement rituals in the Old Law. These rituals, while in some sense efficacious, could not cleanse the conscience, and were a sign by the Holy Spirit that something greater was to come (9:8). In v. 11-14, the author begins explaining why the covenant Christ inaugurated is greater by setting up a series of contrasts. While the Levitical priests entered an earthly tabernacle, Christ enters a heavenly one (9:11). While the Levitical priests entered with the blood of animals, Christ entered with his own blood (9:12). Therefore, while prior to Christ there was only bodily cleansing (9:13), Christ's sacrifice cleanses the conscience (9:14).²⁵ The remainder of the chapter discusses the new covenant of which Christ is the mediator (9:15).

The most important contrast drawn is the contrast between the Levitical high priesthood, and Christ's high priesthood. This contrast forms the basis of the author's christology, which Attridge identifies as Hebrews' "major doctrinal element."²⁶ Christ's priesthood is distinctive for a number of reasons. Because Jesus was without sin (4:15), he did not have to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as the Levitical high priests did (5:3). Jesus is a priest in the order of Melchizedek,

²³ For example, Martin Emmrich "'Amtscharisma'": Through the Eternal Spirit (Hebrews 9:14)," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 12 (2002): 17.

²⁴ Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 248.

²⁵ Mitchell, *Sacra Pagina*, 184.

²⁶ Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 25.

which the author argues is superior to the Levitical priesthood. Again, the most important contrast comes in Chapter 9. Like the tabernacle and sanctuary he enters, Christ's priesthood is eternal and heavenly (9:11-12). And again because of this, the redemption he brings is eternal (9:12) and can cleanse the conscience (9:14).

Less obviously related but clearly important in Hebrews is faith. The author discusses the desert generation in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, chastising them for their lack of belief (3:16). They were unable to enter God's rest (3:19). They are contrasted with the heroes mentioned in the beautiful exposition on faith in Heb. 11. The women and men mentioned in this chapter are hailed for the sacrifices they made by faith. The sacrifice discussed in Chapter 9, however, is also intimately related to faith. One of the distinctive elements to Christ's covenant is its spiritual, and therefore interior nature. Christ purifies not the body, but the conscience. Jesus and the heroes of faith in Chapter 11 are exalted because of their interior faith and obedience. Attridge ties these themes together to identify the central argument Hebrews is making. The author uses a christological typology based in the covenant foretold in Jeremiah to stir in his community the faith required to maintain their confession and boldly live it. In imitation of Jesus, they are to have faith in God even unto death.²⁷

Issues Addressed

At first glance, the themes of the work may seem to suggest Judaizing pressure was indeed the primary danger the author felt his community faced. The author highlights the superiority of the new covenant over Jewish rituals and condemns the faithless generation in the desert. The style and content of the argument being made, however, makes fears of Christians converting or reverting to Judaism an unlikely concern. The most damning piece of evidence against the hypothesis that Judaizing pressures were the author's main concern is that the author

²⁷ Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 21-22, 27-28.

never speaks explicitly about it. Calls to maintain the faith abound, but the threat of drift is general, not directed against conversion to a specific group.²⁸ Furthermore, the comparisons made with Judaism are based not in the practices of contemporary Jews but in the practices commanded in the LXX.²⁹ Finally, the argument the author is making would not make sense if he was anti-Jewish. If Jewish rituals are wicked, Christ's superiority to them is meaningless. No doubt many things would be superior to them. Only if the author and his audience think highly of the Jewish rituals does his argument for Christ's superiority mean anything.³⁰ In fact, some later commentators, such as John Chrysostom, worried that their audience might gain too positive an impression of the Old Law from Hebrews, and cautioned them against thinking too highly of the "low" sanctification mentioned in 9:13.³¹

The far more likely hypothesis is that the community was suffering from a kind of fatigue or apathy. There are a number of ways the themes of the work could serve to address these problems. Attridge describes the faith Hebrews tries to instill in its audience as having both a "dynamic" and a "static" element. The faith is static inasmuch as it is faith in beliefs they already have, and encouragement to maintain them. The faith is dynamic, however, inasmuch as it also calls the community to mature in faith, and move into God's rest.³² The work's aim, then, is to exhort a community growing lackadaisical in their faith to renew their commitment and in fact

²⁸ Mason, "The Epistle (Not Necessarily) to the 'Hebrews'," 9.

²⁹ Mitchell, *Sacra Pagina*, 13.

³⁰ Mason, "The Epistle (Not Necessarily) to the 'Hebrews'," 15. Some modern scholars continue to hold that the audience desired a return to Judaism, but for more complex reasons, such as Judaism's status as *religio licita* or a desire to practice a more conservative kind of Jewish Christianity. Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 11.

³¹ John Chrysostom, *The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Gospel of St. John and the Epistle to the Hebrews in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series II Vol. 14*, ed. Philip Schaff. (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1889), 15.5. Chrysostom stresses that the sanctification brought by the Jewish rituals only purified the body. The rituals could not purify the conscience. That power belongs to Christ alone.

³² Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 21-22.

seek to move farther. Their example in this is Christ Jesus, whose humble obedience to the Father was rewarded with exultation.

The work can also be seen as a stabilizing force in a destabilizing community. As noted above, this community was likely enduring some kind of persecution and severe malaise. These forces may have threatened the recipients' sense of community and their dedication to the faith. Edgar McKnight describes Hebrews as "didactic and propagandistic literature, whose purpose is 'to communicate...a confirmation of values already known.'" The purpose, in other words, was to steady the community by reinforcing and deepening values the community already had.³³ This is an example of the importance of understanding the relationship between the doctrinal and exhortative portions of Hebrews. The doctrinal portions discuss and reflect on commonly held beliefs, while the exhortations use these beliefs to instill a sense of unity and purpose. Both are essential to the work. In writing Hebrews, the author hopes to strengthen the communal bonds necessary to resist both oppression and apathy.³⁴

The function of Heb. 9:11-14 is to extoll the power of this faith the community shares. To a community doubting the value of their confession, the author reminds them that the Christ event is something fundamentally new. The sacrifice of Jesus, for the reasons discussed above, was different from and superior to what preceded it. Because of this, the community's consciences are purified. The impediments that kept them from God have been eradicated. Furthermore, this is not a distant promise. Christ is "high priest of the good things that *have come*" (emphasis mine). The recipients experiencing malaise and persecution can take heart, for the transforming power of faith has already been made available to them. The author thus not

³³ McKnight, "Literary and Rhetorical Form and Structure," 258.

³⁴ Koester, *Hebrews*, 73.

only unites them by reminding them of elements of their shared confession, but also uses these elements to provide reasons for them to persevere in faith.

Conclusion

Hebrews was written to a community in need of joy. Persecution and apathy had weakened the initial hold the Gospel had on their lives. With this in mind, the author of Hebrews seeks to uplift them by reminding them of the values they hold in common. Using typological comparisons with the Jewish rituals commanded in the LXX, he reminds them of the superiority and uniqueness of Jesus Christ. He explains how through Christ's work as high priest a new, definitive, internal redemption is now available. He finds examples in the Hebrew Bible of those who were rewarded for their faith, and those who were punished for their lack thereof. By repeating and reinforcing the values the community shares, he hopes to renew bonds that have become frayed. Whether he succeeded in this or not, he created a beautifully written, enigmatic work that provided a number of puzzles for future Christians.

CHAPTER 2: THE EARLY CHURCH

Introduction

From the beginning, the study of Scripture was of central importance to the life and worship of the church. This is clear as early as the writing of the Pauline epistles. They abound with reference to and interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures, as do the canonical Gospels. Long before a canon is firmly established, the writings of the Church Fathers on almost any subject are filled with references and allusions both to the Hebrew Scriptures and the writings that will become the New Testament. The ubiquitous use of Scripture, however, does not mean that there was agreement on how to interpret Scripture, or even what qualified as Scripture. While some texts were near universally considered authoritative, others faced a long battle for acceptance. The Epistle to the Hebrews falls in the latter category.

Reception of Hebrews in the Early Church

Doubts about the authorship and authority of what would come to be called the Epistle to the Hebrews¹ have existed from the very beginning. In the Eastern church, there is evidence of belief in Pauline authorship as early as the second century. Clement of Alexandria and Origen, as well as later figures such as John Chrysostom, all attributed the work to Paul, though not without some qualifications. Clement believed the letter written *to* the Hebrews was originally written *in* Hebrew, and then translated to Greek by Luke. This, in Clement's mind, accounted for the stylistic discrepancies, and the absence of Paul's name within the work, for he believed the Jewish people would not be receptive to anything written by Paul.² Origen believed that while

¹ This title was given to the text at a later date by scribes who assumed that its audience was the Hebrew people. J.H. Davies, *The Cambridge Biblical Commentary on the New English Bible: A Letter to the Hebrews* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 3.

² Harold Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. Helmut Koester (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 1-2.

the content was undoubtedly Pauline, a student wrote the text itself.³ Thus while some in the East recognized the difficulties in putting the Hebrews in the Pauline corpus, they found ways to resolve them to their satisfaction.

In the Western church acceptance came much later. Many Latin writers doubted or rejected Pauline authorship. Tertullian, for example, believed the work was written by Barnabas.⁴ Hebrews would be better received in the West after its successful use as a proof text in the Arian controversy. The Council of Carthage officially placed it in the Pauline corpus in 397.⁵ Jerome regarded the work as Paul's, and for at least part of his life Augustine did.⁶ With conciliar and episcopal authorities in the West firmly behind Pauline authorship, the belief would persist until the Renaissance, although medieval figures such as Thomas Aquinas remained aware of the earlier doubts.⁷

Because authorship was accepted more readily in the East, most ancient writing on Hebrews comes from the Greek Fathers. The earliest extant commentary on Hebrews was written by John Chrysostom, likely while bishop of Constantinople at the beginning of the fifth-century. There is evidence of even earlier commentaries by Origen and Theodore of Mopsuestia, but only fragments of these commentaries remain.⁸ In the Latin West, even among those who accepted Pauline authorship, no commentary was written until the 8th-Century.⁹

³ Craig Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2001).

⁴ Tertullian, *Pud.*, 20.

⁵ Erik Heen and Philip Krey, introduction to *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Hebrews*, ed. Erik Heen and Philip Krey (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2005), xviii. Ironically, Arians also used verses from Hebrews to support their theology. Koester, *Hebrews*, 24.

⁶ Koester, 27. While Augustine's earlier writings attribute the work to Paul, he does not mention who the author is in his later writings, although he still considers it an authoritative text.

⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 6. English citations are from *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. and trans. Chrysostom Baer (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2006).

⁸ Heen and Krey, introduction, xxi.

⁹ *Ibid.*, xviii.

Clement of Alexandria

Biblical Hermeneutic

Clement of Alexandria was remarkably well-versed in Scripture and made it a prominent feature of his works. There are over 8,000 references to the Bible in his extant writings, a greater number than many of his contemporaries.¹⁰ His frequent use of Scripture can be attributed to what he believed it was, which is nothing less than the “voice of God.”¹¹ As a result of this, the Scriptures are enormously important for the Christian believer. They are the proof of the Christian faith, and the way in which the Christian comes to know God and God’s saving interventions throughout human history.¹² When we read Scripture, the voice of God testifies to the truth of God’s saving acts in human history, culminating in the coming of Christ.

Despite his identification of Scripture with the voice of God, Clement made use pagan literature in his writings, particularly Greek philosophy.¹³ This opinion was not universal, and in fact engendered fierce debate in the early church. Clement sought to situate himself as a middle ground between those who scorned philosophy entirely and Gnostic intellectuals.¹⁴ He held that philosophy came to the Greeks by God, mediated through angels, and was analogous to the Law given to the Hebrew people. When properly interpreted, philosophy led to the same truths contained in Scripture. Philosophy was not superior to faith, but rather an introduction to it, and a

¹⁰ Carl Cosaert, *The Text of the Gospels in Clement of Alexandria*, (Boston: Brill, 2008), 2.

¹¹ Benno Zuiddam, “Early Orthodoxy: the Scriptures in Clement of Alexandria,” *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 21 (2010): 310. Zuiddam writes that the human author is “almost irrelevant” for Clement.

¹² Zuiddam, “Early Orthodoxy,” 308.

¹³ This use of extrabiblical literature may seem strange when we consider that Clement believed Scripture was the voice of God. How can that which does not come from God be of use in interpreting God’s very voice? For Clement, however, although God spoke most definitively through Scripture, God also spoke through other media. In fact, Clement believed that, with the proper hermeneutic, the divine voice could be found in any text. While God spoke most clearly through the writings that would come to be known as the New Testament, the same truths could be seen more obscurely in the Hebrew Scriptures, and more obscurely still in pagan literature. Cosaert, *The Text of the Gospels*, 21.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

useful tool in defending it. The mature Christian should seek the true knowledge (γνῶσις) that comes from philosophy and dialectical inquiry.¹⁵

Also contested was the relationship between Jesus and the Hebrew Scriptures. Clement and other figures from this era frequently wrote against groups such as the Gnostics and the Marcionites, whom they condemned as heretics.¹⁶ Clement condemned these groups, among other things, for rejecting the continuity of the Hebrew Scriptures with Christianity. Clement believed that the Law was given by the Father Jesus spoke of during his ministry. He further claimed that God spoke through the prophets of the Hebrew Bible just as he spoke through the Gospels and the apostles.¹⁷ Thus for Clement, the New Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures, and Greek philosophy all testified to the same truth.

This position, however, is not without difficulty, for these three sources seem to frequently disagree with one another.¹⁸ Clement's tool for finding the same truth in these sources was allegory.¹⁹ Clement shared this method with many of the Church Fathers, and inherited it, especially as applied to Greek philosophy, from figures such as Philo of Alexandria.²⁰ For Clement, the entirety of a text's meaning did not become clear until it was read in the light of the new revelation of Christ.²¹ By reinterpreting texts in an allegorical fashion, Clement could find Christ in the Hebrew Scriptures and God in pagan literature. Clement was less willing than other

¹⁵ Luc Brisson, "Clement and Cyril of Alexandria: Confronting Platonism with Christianity," *Studia Patristica* 58 (2013): 20-22.

¹⁶ While it was once thought that there were clear dividing lines between proto-orthodox Christians and heretical groups such as these, recent scholarship has highlighted the diversity of early Christianity. Heretical groups often contained a wider range of beliefs than previously thought (some not even Christian), and the contrast between the "orthodox" and "heretical" Christians of this era is far less distinct.

¹⁷ Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.*, 7.94-96. The English translations are cited from *Clement of Alexandria: Stromateis Books 1-3*, trans. John Ferguson. (The Catholic University Press of America: Washington DC, 1991).

¹⁸ Indeed, all three contain within themselves competing ideas!

¹⁹ Terms such as "allegorical," "figurative," and "spiritual" readings differ in meaning for different authors and scholars. In this thesis I will use whichever term the author used, and explain what it meant to them.

²⁰ Brisson, "Clement and Cyril," 24.

²¹ Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1979), 9.

practitioners of this method to dismiss the literal meaning of scriptural texts, or at least their historicity.²² Clement condemned those who interpreted the miraculous events described in the Hebrew Scriptures as mere myths. These acts testified to a God who intervenes in history on behalf of humanity.²³ They were foreshadowings, not fictions.

Stromateis

Clement makes use of Heb. 9:14 in his *Stromateis*, a Greek word variously translated “patchwork” or “miscellanies” for its variety of topics. Usually dated towards the end of the second century,²⁴ there is debate over what the purpose of this writing was. Traditionally the work was believed to be part of a three-part series of “de-paganizing” works aimed at Greek converts to Christianity, but this is now disputed.²⁵ Luc Brisson has argued that the purpose of *Stromateis* was to explain the relationship heresies, Judaism, and Greek philosophy had to Christianity. Clement’s use of v. 14 comes in a section of the third book of *Stromateis* titled “On Marriage.” This section, in addition to providing an unusual interpretation of the “dead works” of v. 14, illustrates important parts of Clement’s biblical hermeneutic. Furthermore, because this work deals with how heretics interpret the Bible, the reader learns not only how Clement thinks Scripture should be read, but also how it should not be read.

Clement made frequent use of Platonic and Stoic philosophers in his writings and *Stromateis* is no exception. He begins this section of the text by noting that the Marcionite view that creation is evil is similar to beliefs about the evil of birth espoused by various Greek philosophers and poets. He describes specifically the beliefs on this subject of Plato,²⁶

²² Cosaert, *The Text of the Gospels*, 23.

²³ Zuiddam, “Early Orthodoxy,” 311.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 308.

²⁵ Cosaert, *The Text of the Gospels*, 16-18.

²⁶ Clement, *Strom.* 3.3.12.

Pythagoras,²⁷ Heraclitus,²⁸ Theognis,²⁹ Euripides,³⁰ and Herodotus.³¹ Moreover, the central argument made in this section of the *Stromateis* is that humans are called to master their base passions. The righteous life is one lived in continence (ἐγκράτεια). Clement usually references Scripture to defend his position,³² but he could just as easily cite Plato.³³ When properly interpreted, the same truth appears in both texts.³⁴

Clement also frequently criticizes the biblical hermeneutics of his opponents in this text. His central criticism is that they do not read verses in their proper context (part of which is the nascent canon),³⁵ and this often led them into heresy.³⁶ Some, as already mentioned, “ignore” the entire Old Testament. Clement, on the other hand, frequently pulls from the Hebrew Scriptures, Jeremiah in particular, to make his arguments. A good example of this comes in 3.4.33. Clement, while excoriating the heretics for their poor moral character, reminds them that the Lord said they must be more righteous than the Pharisees to enter the kingdom of heaven.³⁷ In the next sentence he points out that abstinence from food is considered righteous in the book of Daniel. Moving then to Psalms he points out that David says the way of correction is to obediently keep

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.3.14

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.3.15

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 3.3.16.

³² For example, Mt. 6:24 in 3.4.26, Mt. 5:28 in 3.4.31, and Col 3:5 in 3.5.43. All biblical citations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the NRSV.

³³ Plato argues in *The Republic* that in the well-ordered person, base passions are subjected to the control of reason. Plato, *Rep.*, 589c. The English translations are cited from *The Republic*, trans. John Llewelyn Davies and David James Vaughan, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1997), 589c.

³⁴ Clement would argue, however, that the Christian practice of continence is superior to what is called for by Greek philosophy. While the latter teaches control of desire, the former strives for elimination of desire. Clement, *Strom.*, 3.7.57. For Clement, Christianity was not just harmonious with the best of philosophy, but actually fulfilled it in a way similar to how Jesus fulfills the Law of the Hebrew Scriptures.

³⁵ Zuiddam, “Early Orthodoxy,” 309.

³⁶ Clement, *Strom.*, 3.6.50.

³⁷ Mt. 5:20.

the word of God.³⁸ And the word of God was made known through Jeremiah when the prophet said “Thus saith the Lord, You shall not walk in the ways of the heathen.”³⁹

The argument above clearly demonstrates that both the new writings about Jesus and the Hebrew Scriptures were sources of authority for Clement. Beginning with a declaration of Jesus about righteousness, he uses the Prophets and Psalms to show what Jesus means by righteousness, a move which only works if Scripture is thought to speak univocally. Clement more explicitly describes his view of the relationship between Jesus in the Hebrew Scriptures in 3.4.46. Using Mt. 5:17, Clement argues that Jesus’ coming does not destroy the Law, but fulfills it. For Clement, this means the Law’s prophecies are accomplished. The demands it places on our behavior are not, however, abolished, even if they are to be understood in a different way.

In an attempt to demonstrate the superiority of his biblical hermeneutic, Clement often criticizes his opponents’ interpretation of particular passages. These criticisms usually take one of two forms in *Stromateis*. The first is literal interpretation where allegorical interpretation is required. The second is ignoring the immediate context of a verse.⁴⁰ Both are found in an argument Clement accuses the heretics of making concerning the God of the Hebrew Scriptures. He claims that they point to a verse that says “They resisted God and were saved” as evidence for their belief that they should disobey the commands of the Creator.⁴¹

There are, according to Clement, many problems with the way this verse is being interpreted. Firstly, “they interpret in a literal sense sayings intended to be understood allegorically.” Furthermore, they do not even take the verse as it is, but add the word

³⁸ Ps. 119:9.

³⁹ Jer. 10:2.

⁴⁰ This is an interesting pair of arguments to make, as allegory depends, to some extent, on ignoring the context of a passage.

⁴¹ Clement, *Strom.*, 3.4.38. Where exactly this verse comes from is unclear. Malachi 3:15 is similar in meaning, but Clement later cites this verse as one that is “similar in sense to this saying,” indicating that it isn’t the same verse Clement’s opponents use. His argument, however, proceeds as if they are in fact quoting Malachi 3:15.

“shameless” before God. Finally, they ignore the clear context of the verse. God, speaking through Malachi, here answers a rhetorical question about how the Israelites have spoken against him. The Israelites were complaining that while they have suffered, people who do evil and test God were not punished.⁴² There is not, in context, any reason to think there is a causal relationship between resisting God and being saved. The verse is descriptive, not prescriptive.

This argument demonstrates several important aspects of Clement’s biblical hermeneutic. First, the fact that Clement uses the phrase ‘intended to be understood’ suggests that Clement does not see allegorical interpretation as something new and foreign imposed on the text, but rather as the way the text is supposed to be interpreted.⁴³ The way in which these heretics distort Scripture, if Clement is accurately reporting their arguments, is also interesting. They add words to texts and interpret them in ways that fall apart with the slightest context. There are a number of conclusions that can be drawn from this. Perhaps Clement is simply distorting their argument and creating a strawman. Another possibility is that in an era where few had access to biblical texts, groups (orthodox or heretical) could easily add words to Scripture or make wildly out of context interpretations. In a time when access to Scripture was limited, few would be able to detect their deceit.

The dearth of access to Scripture also makes the way in which Scripture is cited interesting. Clement’s audience probably did not have an extensive knowledge of Scripture, and Clement himself appears to have often quoted from memory rather than by copying down a text from a manuscript.⁴⁴ In most cases when Clement quote or uses Scripture, he uses a signal phrase establishing either the author of the text or the speaker in the narrative. Some examples include

⁴² Malachi 3:13-15.

⁴³ Whether the human author, the Holy Spirit, or both “intended” this meaning is unclear.

⁴⁴ Cosaert, *The Text of the Gospels*, 25.

“the divine apostle...says,”⁴⁵ “the Lord’s words to Philip,”⁴⁶ “says the apostle,”⁴⁷ “the Lord has said,”⁴⁸ “David speaks,”⁴⁹ and “Jeremiah said.”⁵⁰ In other parts, the signal phrase includes the word Scripture, such as “Scripture says,”⁵¹ “says the Scripture,”⁵² and “Scripture says to them.”⁵³ The first two refer to passages refer to the Gospels and a letter of John respectively⁵⁴, indicating the already high status in which these writings were held. In some cases, however, no indication is given that the word used come from Scripture. This is the case of the use of Heb. 9:14

Clement’s use of the verse comes in 3.7.59. Throughout *Stromateis*, Clement has stressed the importance of continence. In this paragraph he emphasizes that continence is not simply a matter of controlling our sexual desires, but all other passions. Citing Valentine, he says that Jesus was continent in this way, and in fact was continent to such a degree that “food did not pass out of his body,” for “food was not corrupted within him.” He goes on to proclaim continence the goal of all Christians, saying “It is good if...a man emasculates (εὐνοῦχίζω) himself from all desire, and ‘purifies his conscience from dead works to serve the living God.’”⁵⁵

For Clement, the dead works which need purifying are our passions and desires. In emasculating ourselves of them we become pure. This is consistent with the rest of the work, in which sin is equated with giving into one’s passion, and virtue with self-control. Interestingly, this text seems to suggest that human beings, not Jesus, are responsible for this purification. Whatever view is taken on the degree to which our actions help bring about our salvation, the

⁴⁵ Clement, *Strom.*, 3.3.18.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.4.25.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.4.30.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.4.31.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.4.33.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.4.38.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 3.4.27.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 3.5.42.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 3.6.49.

⁵⁴ Mt. 5:42/Lk. 6:30, 1 John 3:3. The third may be quoting James, but James in that verse is quoting Proverbs.

⁵⁵ Clement, *Strom.*, 3.7.59.

passage from Hebrews suggests that this cleansing comes directly from the crucifixion. Clement, on the other hand, suggests that we are the ones who purify our conscience, through the emasculation of our desires. There is no suggestion that the cross has anything to do with this.

Conclusion

Already in *Stromateis*, Heb. 9:11-14 is beginning to be used in ways distinct from its original context. The author of Hebrews attempts to reinvigorate a lackadaisical community by appealing to their common beliefs. Clement writes to a community divided, and tries to show the superiority of his beliefs over his opponents. The author of Hebrews writes about purification from dead works to remind his congregation that through Christ they have access to a fundamentally new cleansing. Clement uses the verse to call people to rid themselves of desire. Clement lived in a different time than the author and was confronting different challenges. His new interpretation of the verse testifies to this.

Tertullian

Tertullian's portrait has undergone many revisions. Though he was a prolific and influential author, many future writers ignored him due to his late conversion to the controversial New Prophecy movement. Once thought an enemy of philosophy and reason, now most scholars believe his arguments were directed against certain uses of philosophy, not reason *per se*.⁵⁶ While his writing style once led many to think he was a lawyer, this style is now recognized to come from training in rhetoric.⁵⁷ The groups Tertullian is famous for criticizing are also receiving a reassessment. Marcion and his followers are now recognized to have had a greater

⁵⁶ Peter Kaufman, "Tertullian on Heresy, History, and the Reappropriation of Revelation," *Church History* 60 (1991): 170, argues that Tertullian really opposed Christians who, in an effort to make Christianity more "respectful," denied important doctrines like the suffering and death of Christ. Eric Osborn also argues in *Tertullian, First Theologian of the West* that Tertullian used reasoned arguments in his writings rather than citing proof texts, and that his famous phrase *Credo quia absurdum est* only applied to the cross. Eric Osborn, *Tertullian, First Theologian of the West* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 56.

⁵⁷ David Wilhite, introduction to *Tertullian & Paul*, ed. Todd Still and David Wilhite (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), xix.

diversity of belief and greater similarity to the proto-orthodox church than previously thought.⁵⁸

Many of these changes and a general framework of Tertullian's biblical hermeneutic can be found in his famous work *Against Marcion*.

Biblical Hermeneutic

Tertullian, like other Church Fathers, saw a connection between proper interpretation of Scripture and proper behavior. Again like other Church Fathers, he stressed the unity of the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Gospel, an important point against both his Jewish and Marcionite opponents.⁵⁹ There are also distinctive elements to Tertullian's writings. Unlike many other Church Fathers, such as Clement, Tertullian seldom used allegory.⁶⁰ The historical and literary contexts of a verse were important to Tertullian, which made him wary not only of allegory but also of simply citing a verse as a proof text. These practices often neglected the full meaning of a passage and could lead to heresy.⁶¹

The centerpiece of Tertullian's biblical hermeneutic was the *regula fidei*. The *regula fidei* was composed of the traditions passed down from the apostles. The *regula* "was both the distillation of scripture and set the boundaries guarding Christians from biblical misinterpretation."⁶² The *regula* lacked specific wording at Tertullian's time, though its content resembled what would become the Apostle's Creed.⁶³ For Tertullian, the *regula* was the measure against which all biblical interpretations must be judged, for it was comprised of the teachings

⁵⁸ D.S. Williams, "Reconsidering Marcion's Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 (1989): 481. In addition to pointing out that our only sources of knowledge about these groups were written by their enemies, Williams provides specific reasons to doubt Tertullian's claims about Marcion. These will be discussed later.

⁵⁹ Judith Lieu, "'As Much My Apostle as Christ Is Mine': the Dispute over Paul between Tertullian and Marcion," *Early Christianity* 1 (2010): 41-42.

⁶⁰ Kaufman, "Tertullian," 175. In Kaufman's words, Tertullian "seems to hug the coastline of sacred literature, seldom experimenting with allegory, save for the relatively tame typological readings which permitted him to strike at Marcion's disrespect for the Old Testament."

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁶² Williams, "Reconsidering Marcion's Gospel," 218.

⁶³ Kaufman, "Tertullian," 168.

Christ gave to the apostles. The mark of the apostolic churches was that they had received these traditions, and because of this they had the authority to interpret Scripture.⁶⁴

Against Marcion

In Tertullian's *Against Marcion*, he seeks to counter what he believed to be the central claim of Marcionism: Jesus and the Hebrew Scriptures speak of different gods. This work has received much study and been the subject of much debate. Many have questioned how well Tertullian truly understood Marcion and his beliefs. As Sebastian Moll points out in his study on biographies of Marcion, all extant records come from those who wished Marcion either discredited or forgotten.⁶⁵ Suspicions of bias, however, are not the only reasons to doubt Tertullian fully understood Marcion's beliefs. Another Church Father, Epiphanius, also wrote about Marcion's Gospel, and Epiphanius and Tertullian differ over what parts of Luke were excised.⁶⁶ D.S. Williams also challenges the traditional belief that Marcion, in writing his Gospel, removed the passages from Luke that indicated continuity with the Hebrew Scriptures. Even in this "mutilated" version, Tertullian finds ample evidence that such continuity exists.⁶⁷

Scholars have also debated what kind of text Tertullian was using when he quoted Marcion's Gospel. Alfred von Harnack first advanced the argument that Tertullian was using a Latin translation of Marcion's work.⁶⁸ This argument was dominant for some time, and was advanced by others such as A.J.B. Higgins.⁶⁹ Other scholars, however, have challenged this idea.

⁶⁴ Everett Ferguson, "Tertullian, Scripture, Rule of Faith, and Paul," in *Tertullian & Paul*, ed. Todd Still and David Wilhite (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 30.

⁶⁵ Sebastian Moll, "Three against Tertullian: the Second Tradition about Marcion's Life," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 59 (2008): 169.

⁶⁶ Williams, "Reconsidering Marcion's Gospel," 480.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 482. Williams hypothesizes that the differences between Marcion's Luke and Tertullian's Luke may actually result from Marcion having a text of Luke that sometimes replaced Lukan stories with Matthean or Markan ones.

⁶⁸ Dieter Roth "Did Tertullian Possess a Greek Copy or Latin Translation of Marcion's Gospel?" *Vigilae Christianae* 63 (2009): 429.

⁶⁹ A.J.B. Higgins "The Latin text of Luke in Marcion and Tertullian." *Vigilae Christianae* 5 (1951): 10.

Dieter Roth and many others now argue that Tertullian had access to a Greek copy of Marcion's gospel that he translated as he was writing *Against Marcion*, citing as evidence similarities in vocabulary between Tertullian's citations of Marcion's Gospel and Tertullian's own citations of Luke that are not found in any other extant Lukan Latin manuscripts.⁷⁰

Book IV of *Against Marcion*, which makes use of Hebrews 9:14, is specifically concerned with linking Jesus and the Creator. The relevant section begins with the story of the Roman centurion's faith, found both in canonical Luke and in Marcion's Luke. In both accounts Jesus proclaims that he is amazed at the centurion's faith, for he "had found so great a faith not even in Israel."⁷¹ Why, Tertullian asks, would be this be in any way astonishing if Jesus' God and the God of the Hebrew Scriptures were different deities? According to Marcionism, this should make perfect sense to Jesus. Jesus' statement that "even in Israel" he had not found such faith only makes sense if "He ought to have found so great a faith in Israel," and this only makes sense if the faith of Israel spoke of him.⁷² In the next story in Luke, Jesus raises a widow's son from the dead. The people praise the God of Israel for the miracle Jesus has done, and say "God hath visited His people."⁷³ If they were in error, why would Jesus, who came "for the very purpose to cure them of their error,"⁷⁴ not correct them?

Tertullian also finds evidence of continuity in the next passage. In this story John the Baptist sends messengers to Jesus to ask if he is the one for whom they had been waiting. Jesus does not answer directly, telling them to tell John of what they have seen. After they leave, he tells the crowd that John the Baptist is the forerunner of the Christ prophesied in Malachi.

⁷⁰ Roth, "Greek Copy or Latin Translation," 441.

⁷¹ Tertullian, *Marc.*, 4.18. The English translations are cited from *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, trans. Allen Menzies in *Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 3*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1885).

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Tertullian argues that if Jesus is not the fulfillment of the prophecies of Hebrew Scripture, he is acting rather dishonestly, for in word and deed he does seem to be their fulfillment. The indirect answer to the disciples of John insinuates that Jesus *is* the one who is to come. Telling the crowd John is the forerunner of the Christ suggests that Jesus is the Christ. If Jesus is not the Christ of the Creator, he is acting in a quite “perverse” way.⁷⁵

Tertullian makes use of Heb. 9:14 in describing the motivation of John to question Jesus. Tertullian calls Jesus “the Word and Spirit of the Father.” Prior to his ministry, the part of the Holy Spirit which grants prophecy had dwelt in John, but now it must dwell in Jesus. This illustrates an important part of Tertullian’s writing and understanding of the Bible. Tertullian believed that when something was mentioned in Scripture, one should not stray far from it, for divine revelation is the surest footing of knowledge.⁷⁶ He also noted that in some ways the Bible is a “strange” and “alien” text⁷⁷ with its own “signifying conventions,”⁷⁸ often giving words a different sense or flavor than they hold in extrabiblical literature. Given these two beliefs, Tertullian sought to write in the language of Scripture. As the surest source of truth, Scripture should be used frequently in theological writing. Given that many words in Scripture have special meanings, these specific words should be used, rather than be replaced with imperfect or misleading synonyms. Since Scripture speaks in a unique way, speculation and expansion on it, which will necessarily use new words and ideas, may inevitably move us into error.

Conclusion

Unlike Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian was reluctant to use allegory. He sought to tie his interpretations to the clear, literal meaning of Scripture. Tertullian, while not as hostile to

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 90.

⁷⁷ Osborn, *Tertullian*, 158.

⁷⁸ Kaufman, “Tertullian,” 172.

philosophy as previously thought, was also far less likely to explicitly quote philosophers in his writings. He and Clement were not without similarities, however. Both were firm defenders of the unity of the Hebrew Scriptures and the message of Jesus, and identified as heretics those who disagreed. Both also felt that reading texts in their literary context was important, and that failing to do so often led to heresy. Clement and Tertullian saw Scripture as the source of Christian truth, and while they differed about how to obtain it, they both found these truths indispensable to the Christian believer.

St. John Chrysostom

Biblical Hermeneutic

The guiding belief in Chrysostom's biblical hermeneutic was that the reading and hearing of Scripture should lead people to live better, more moral lives, a common belief in the Eastern church. Theodore Stylianopoulos writes of Chrysostom "his goal was never a systematic focus on and application of specific hermeneutical and theological issues."⁷⁹ Chrysostom was more focused on the ability of Scripture to change the behaviors and attitudes of Christian believers.⁸⁰ This capacity to instill virtue was what made Christianity, for Chrysostom, better than Greek philosophy. Christianity had more success in changing people's lives.⁸¹ For Chrysostom, Scripture was intimately linked to moral action.⁸² While not at all unconcerned with doctrinal matters, the focus of his interpretation was to exhort his congregation to live better lives.

Chrysostom's style of interpretation emphasized three different humanities. The first was the humanity of Jesus. Chrysostom belonged to what is now called the Antiochene school. This

⁷⁹ Theodore Stylianopoulos, "Comments on Chrysostom, Patristic Interpretation and Contemporary Biblical Scholarship," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 54 (2009): 191.

⁸⁰ Pamela Jackson, "John Chrysostom's Use of Scripture in Initiatory Preaching," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 35 (1990): 350.

⁸¹ Gonzalez, *Story*, 227.

⁸² Heen and Krey, introduction, xxiii.

school arose in response to the Alexandrian school based on Clement and Origen. According to both the Antiochene and Alexandrian christologies, Jesus has a human and divine nature. The Antiochene christology, however, placed a far greater emphasis on Jesus' human nature than the Alexandrian christology did, and in particular on the distinction between his two natures. For Antiochene figures like Chrysostom who wanted to use biblical narratives as moral exhortation, emphasizing the humanity of Jesus made him more relatable and easier to use as an exemplar.⁸³ Chrysostom took care to show his congregation that Jesus, like them, was a human being.

Also typical of the Antiochene school, Chrysostom's interpretation highlighted the humanity of the biblical authors. Chrysostom's approach to Scripture was to focus on the literal/historical meaning of a text. He focused on the intent of the human author, often making use of the rhetorical analysis he had learned earlier in his career.⁸⁴ Although he often moved to sermons after offering commentary on a particular text, within the commentary itself he rarely digressed to discussions on doctrine, focusing instead on what the author was trying to say.⁸⁵ This was not, however, dispassionate analysis. In fact, Chrysostom believed one of an interpreter's most important tools was love for the author. Reading an epistle lovingly provided a window into the author's soul, which would allow the interpreter to more easily reconstruct the author's meaning.⁸⁶ This focus on the human author also helped interpreters use the Bible as moral exhortation, for however human they made Jesus, the human authors, not also being God, were easier still to imitate.⁸⁷

⁸³ Heen and Krey, xix.

⁸⁴ Lauri Thurén, "John Chrysostom as a Rhetorical Critic: the Hermeneutics of an Early Father," *Biblical Interpretation* 9 (2001): 213.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁸⁶ Margaret Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 38-43.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

The final humanity on which Chrysostom focused was the humanity of Scripture's audience. That is to say, the Bible is the word of God addressed to human beings. This belief, common to the Alexandrian and the Antiochene schools, was known as God's condescension (ἡ συγκατάβασις). Much as a parent does not speak to a child as if the child were an adult, God does not speak to humans as if they were gods. God speaks through human ways.⁸⁸ For Chrysostom, while the content of Scripture comes from God, the words come from human beings. Because of this, Chrysostom saw no issue with inconsistencies in the biblical narratives. Though he sometimes tried to harmonize them, if he could not, he was not perturbed.⁸⁹ The message was much more important to him than the particular manner in which a text relayed it.

Many who practiced this style of interpretation, including Chrysostom, were suspicious of allegory. Chrysostom did use it occasionally, but feared that it was easier to insert foreign ideas into Scripture through allegory than through literal-historical interpretation.⁹⁰ There were, however, other kinds of non-literal interpretation that Chrysostom used quite frequently. He often read Scripture typologically, seeing figures and stories in the Hebrew Bible as prefiguring the coming of Christ. This technique helped Chrysostom make use of the Hebrew Bible in his preaching. Chrysostom did not deny the historicity of immoral actions committed by figures in the Old Testament, nor did he deny that they were in fact immoral. He simply believed that the people alive at this time did not have access to the full revelation of God that Jesus Christ provided. Only after the coming of the Truth could the full truth of those Scriptures be revealed.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Rogers and McKim, *Interpretation of the Bible*, 19.

⁸⁹ Thomas McKibbens, "The Exegesis of John Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospels," *The Expository Times* 93 (1982): 269.

⁹⁰ Rogers and McKim, *Interpretation of the Bible*, 21-22.

⁹¹ McKibbens, "The Exegesis of John Chrysostom," 268.

Homilies of St. John Chrysostom on the Epistle to the Hebrews

The homilies contained in this volume were likely written down in shorthand by members of his congregation. Whether or not they were edited is unknown.⁹² Most consist of two parts, as is typical of Chrysostom's homilies.⁹³ The first part is a detailed commentary on a passage from Hebrews. The second is a sermon that speaks more generally about a topic, sometimes with little relation to the content of the verses. This commentary was enormously important for the understanding of Hebrews for later Christians.⁹⁴ In the fifteenth homily in this collection, Chrysostom first interprets Heb. 9:1-14 and then delivers a sermon about the dangers of greed, lust, and laughing in church.

The genre of commentary already existed in the Ancient World when Christians began seeking to write them about their holy texts. Born in the Hellenistic Period in Alexandria, the genre drew on hermeneutical tools from Classical Greece.⁹⁵ Like later Christians, many of these Greek authors were concerned with showing the moral exemplarity and consistency of their literature, as well as discovering authorial intent.⁹⁶ Again like later Christians, some frequently used allegory while others focused more on the literal-historical meaning of their texts.⁹⁷ The commentary portion of Chrysostom's homily draws heavily on the forms and techniques of this genre. Like the older commentaries it begins with a prologue. The commentary portion of the homily consists of a verse by verse breakdown where he traces the author's argument and paraphrases what the author is saying.⁹⁸

⁹² *Ibid.*, 266.

⁹³ Heen and Krey, xxiii.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, xxi.

⁹⁵ Alberto Viciano, "La *scriptorum interpretationes* en la antigüedad tardía" *Minerva: Revista de filología clásica* 5 (1991), 105.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 110.

Chrysostom does this by explaining the meaning of words and concepts that might puzzle his congregation. In examining the first verse, he explains what “ordinances” are and to what “the first” mentioned in Heb. 9:1 refers.⁹⁹ Later, in treating v. 11, he anticipates his congregation might be confused by the inconsistent symbolism employed. In Hebrews, according to Chrysostom, flesh is called both veil (10:20) and a tabernacle (9:11). He then explains that these symbols highlight particular aspects of heaven and the flesh, and for this reason different symbols are employed.¹⁰⁰ He also explains to his congregation why the author at times chose a particular phrasing. Why, for example, does v. 11 say “being come” (παράγενομενος) a high priest rather than “become” (γενόμενος) a high priest? Chrysostom answers that Jesus came and became High Priest simultaneously. This was his purpose for coming into the world, and thus High Priest is not a title or an office he obtained at some later time, but a part of his being from the moment of the Incarnation.¹⁰¹

In the commentary, Chrysostom not only clarifies the meaning of verses but also demonstrates how they work together to form an argument. In between his commentary on v. 12 and the final two verses of the passage, he writes “Next that which is calculated to persuade.”¹⁰² He then explains how the argument works. He first warns them against thinking that the word “sanctifieth” (ἁγνίζουσα) means anything “great,” for the sanctification spoken of here is “low.” As the verse points out, this sanctification only cleansed the body, while the sacrifice of

⁹⁹ John Chrysostom, *Hom. Heb. 15.1*. The English translations are cited from *The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Gospel of St. John and the Epistle to the Hebrews in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series II Vol. 14*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Frederic Gardiner (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1889).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.4.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 15.5.

Christ purifies the spirit of dead works. Therefore if this lower purification was effective, the higher purification must be even more effective.¹⁰³

Here Chrysostom also demonstrates a typological reading of Scripture. The purifying of body uncleanness through animal sacrifice in the Hebrew Scriptures foreshadows the purifying of spiritual uncleanness through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Linking bodily uncleanness to disease and spiritual uncleanness to sin, he discusses the ways in which the two are similar. Just as people become polluted after touching a corpse, so too do they become polluted spiritually when they come into contact with sin. Just as a dead body cannot make use of its senses, neither can humans corrupted by sin make use of their reason. The phrase “through the Holy Spirit” is also part of a typology. What was offered through fire in the time of the Law is now offered through the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁴

He describes this typology earlier in the homily as well. In the Day of Atonement ritual described in v. 7, he says we can “seest that the types were already laid down beforehand.” In discussing another typology, he calls the events “ordained.” The sacrifices in the Hebrew Scriptures are a type of the sacrifice of Jesus. The blood with which the high priest enters is a type of the blood that Jesus offers on the cross.¹⁰⁵ Chrysostom is careful, even while engaging in a non-literal reading, not to stray far from the literal-historical meaning of the text.¹⁰⁶ The sacrifices of the Hebrew Scriptures do not foreshadow something wildly different, but simply a new kind of sacrifice.

After v. 14, Chrysostom moves into the sermon portion of the homily. In his elucidation of v. 14 Chrysostom links the dead works spoken of with sin and then discusses sin’s corrosive

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.2.

¹⁰⁶ In fact, an argument can be made that Chrysostom’s reading is both literal and typological, as the author’s intent was to make a typological comparison.

nature. He finds lust and greed especially corrosive, and describes for a while the ways they corrupt people.¹⁰⁷ From there, he condemns the way people treat harlotry as a laughing matter, and despairs that even in church nothing is taken seriously.¹⁰⁸ He then references a variety of Scripture passages condemning laughter and jesting, and tells his congregation that though laughter is a gift, church is not the time to make use of it.¹⁰⁹

Chrysostom's use of Scripture varies depending on whether he is commentating or sermonizing. He seldom uses other books of Scripture in the commentary section. While references to other parts of Hebrews are frequent,¹¹⁰ the only references from outside Hebrews in this section come in defending his interpretation of the tabernacle (σκηνή) in v. 11 as Christ's flesh. His flesh is "greater and more perfect" because the spirit dwells in him (Jn. 3:34) and his flesh is "not of this creation" because he is "of the Spirit." (Mt. 1:20).¹¹¹ Interestingly, Chrysostom does not indicate that these are Scripture citations. They are near word for word quotes of the verses, so there can be little doubt, particularly in the former case, that they are in fact pulled directly from Matthew and John. Yet unless Chrysostom speaks of these verses often or has previously explained they are from the Gospels, his congregation would have no way of knowing the evidence he uses to support his argument comes from Scripture.

Once Chrysostom shifts into the sermon portions of the homily, the Scripture citations become more explicit. They are introduced by signal phrases such as "hear the prophet saying,"¹¹² "dost thou not hear Christ saying"¹¹³ and "Hearest thou not the Scripture saying."¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.7.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.8.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.8-15.9.

¹¹⁰ 6:19 and 10:20 are referenced in v. 1, 8:7 in v. 9, and 10:20, 6:19, and 9:24 in v. 11. *Ibid.*, 15.1-15.4.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 15.4.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 15.7.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 15.8.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

As is clear from these signal phrases, Chrysostom believes that the words of Scripture speak to the needs of the congregation. Scripture, Christ, and the prophet (Jeremiah) speak to *them*. He uses these citations to demonstrate that Scripture agrees with the point he is making. After calling harlotry shameless, he tells the congregation that Jeremiah linked harlotry and shamelessness as well.¹¹⁵ Chrysostom was angry that people make light of everything. Paul felt the same way.¹¹⁶ Chrysostom valued the power of Christianity to change lives, and so uses Scripture to exhort his congregation to moral behavior.

Conclusion

This commentary demonstrates several of the key elements of Chrysostom's interpretation and its differences and similarities to the methods of other interpreters. Like Tertullian and Clement, Chrysostom read the Scriptures canonically, including the Hebrew Scriptures. This method, however, was employed in his commentary less frequently than in Tertullian's or Clement's works. This could be caused by a hermeneutical difference or a simply a difference of genre. Compared to other authors, Clement in particular, Chrysostom emphasizes the human author of individual texts and their intent. A hermeneutic focused on God's authorship of the Scripture can easily float freely from text to text, for the author is always the same. A hermeneutic focused on the human author's intent must focus on a particular author. On the other hand, neither *Stromateis* nor *Against Marcion* were written to be expositions on particular texts, but to argue theological points. While Chrysostom's commentary is still paraenetic, he is focusing on a particular text.

Where Chrysostom clearly differs from Clement is in his opinion of allegory. While Clement used it frequently and believed it necessary towards finding God in certain texts,

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.7.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Chrysostom, like Tertullian, is far more reticent about its use. As his commentary on Hebrews shows, however, he has no aversion to other kinds of non-literal readings. Typology is used extensively throughout, and while interpreting Hebrews accurately without discussing typology is impossible, this is true of his other works as well. While allegory and typology are not precisely the same, they are both ways insert Christ and Christian truths into texts whose human authors certainly did not intend them. This difference between Chrysostom and other interpreters, then, may be more minor than it first appears.

St. Augustine of Hippo

Biblical Hermeneutic

Augustine had the most developed biblical hermeneutic of any of the figures so far studied. Scripture was incredibly important for Augustine. Its words are God's living voice,¹¹⁷ and the place where Christians encounter God.¹¹⁸ The purpose of Scripture, according to Augustine, was to lead humanity to salvation. Scripture elaborates on the eternal realities placed in our minds by God. Careful study of it shows us the path of righteousness that will lead to salvation, for in the study of Scripture, an opportunity is created for the Holy Spirit to change the heart of the reader.¹¹⁹ The human author has a role as well, although a subordinate one, for Augustine held that sometimes, particularly in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Holy Spirit intended a

¹¹⁷ Michael McCarthy, "'We Are your Books': Augustine, the Bible, and the Practice of Authority," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 75 (2007): 327.

¹¹⁸ C. Clifton Black, "Serving the Food of Full-Grown Adults: Augustine's Interpretation of Scripture and the Nurture of Christians," *Interpretation* 52 (1998): 347.

¹¹⁹ Rogers and McKim, *Interpretation of the Bible*, 23-26. An interesting corollary of this view is that there comes a point where one no longer needs Scripture. Because its purpose is to make us into loving people, Augustine believed that once we become sufficiently loving people, we no longer need Scripture. Using Paul's discourse on ἀγάπη in 1 Corinthians 13, he argues that if prophecy is nothing without ἀγάπη, once we love in this way there is no need for prophecy. Augustine of Hippo, *Doctr. chr.*, 1.39.43. The English translations are cited from from *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R.P.H. Green (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

meaning the human author did not.¹²⁰ Because the ultimate meaning came from God, true understanding of Scripture requires an acknowledgement of God's voice in it and acceptance of being molded by it. We must believe before we can understand.¹²¹

Though Scripture is essential for the salvation of the believer, Augustine also found Scripture to quite frequently be unclear or ambiguous.¹²² This ambiguity was inevitable, for Scripture's purpose is to make the incomprehensible God comprehensible to human beings. Like Chrysostom, Augustine emphasized the condescension of God in transmitting the Scriptures. Biblical authors, limited by their human nature, could only relay God's message imperfectly.¹²³ For these reasons, Augustine found having a good teacher in the Scriptures essential to proper Christian living.¹²⁴ Only with guidance could the Christian faithful hope to discover the divine mysteries of Scripture.

One of the difficulties of Scripture, according to Augustine, was that a literal reading of a text was often insufficient. Allegorical readings were often necessary to uncover the divine truth in the text. Augustine himself struggled with the seeming immorality of certain figures in the Hebrew Scriptures, and the emotions and mutability of its God, until Ambrose introduced him to

¹²⁰ Tarmo Toom, "Was Augustine an Intentionalist? Authorial Intention in Augustine's Hermeneutics," *Studia Patristica* 70 (2013): 191.

¹²¹ Roland Teske, "Augustine, the Manichees, and the Bible," in *Augustine and the Bible*, ed. and trans. by Pamela Bright (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 213.

¹²² Robert Kugler, "Tyconius's *Mystic Rules* and the Rules of Augustine," in *Augustine and the Bible*, ed. and trans. by Pamela Bright (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 135. Augustine provides several possible reasons for these obscurities. Perhaps they served to combat pride. Perhaps they made biblical exegesis fun. Augustine, *Doctr. chr.*, 2.6.7-8.

¹²³ Rogers and McKim, *Interpretation of the Bible*, 28. Augustine used God's condescension to account not only for the confusion of the readers of Scripture, but also the confusion of the biblical authors, who sometimes had inconsistent narratives. *Ibid.*, 29.

¹²⁴ McCarthy, "Practice of Authority," 329. Augustine changed his mind over the course of his life over the most important qualifications for this teacher. Early in his life he emphasized the importance of training in grammar and biblical languages. Towards the end of his life however, and especially during his time as bishop, he came doubt the power of academic and human authorities to understand the true meaning of Scripture. *Ibid.*, 333.

allegorical readings.¹²⁵ Furthermore, Augustine understood language itself to be allegorical, for the *res significans* (signifying things) were not the same as, but merely pointed to the *res significada* (things signified).¹²⁶ Ultimately, biblical allegories always pointed to one thing, for in Augustine's thinking all Scripture, properly interpreted, spoke of Christ and his Greatest Commandment.¹²⁷ All Scripture spoke of this love.

Another important element of Augustine's hermeneutic was the authority of the apostolic churches and their traditions. A scriptural text's canonical authority was based in its use and reception in the apostolic churches. Augustine proclaims in *Confessions* "I would not believe the Gospel, if the authority of the Catholic Church did not move me."¹²⁸ The church has the office and responsibility to "liberate" the meaning from the *res significans* in the text. In this way Augustine conceives of the relationship between church and Scripture as a dialectic where the church is both a product of Scripture and its normative interpreter.¹²⁹ The church's interpretive authority is so powerful for Augustine that it is more important than literary context. In offering advice about how to interpret difficult passages from Scripture, Augustine advised interpreters that the literary context should be used to select between multiple meanings in accord with the church's traditions and authority.¹³⁰ For Augustine, the Bible was very much the church's book.

Augustine also found several non-Christian sources useful in understanding Scripture, one of which was Greek philosophy. Like Clement, Augustine did not see philosophy as

¹²⁵ Although this was an important step in Augustine's conversion, he did not always simply allegorize texts whose literal meaning seemed to condone immorality. In *On Christian Teaching*, Augustine cautions Christians not to assume that the world the biblical authors lived in was exactly the same as their own. For example, while polygamy was wrong in Augustine's day, in biblical times it was necessary that the Hebrews become a numerous race, so it was permitted. Augustine, *Doctr. chr.*, 3.12.20. Augustine here, in his own way, anticipates the modern caution of assuming that words and practices have the same meaning today that they had in ancient texts.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.2.3.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.15.23.

¹²⁸ Augustine of Hippo, *Conf.*, 5.6.21. The English translations are cited from *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding, (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).

¹²⁹ Kugler, "Rules of Augustine," 143.

¹³⁰ Augustine, *Doctr. chr.*, 3.2.2.

something wholly apart from revelation, but believed certain important matters such as “virtue, and eternal principles...were implanted in the mind by God from our birth.”¹³¹ Thus much of philosophy, whether done by a Christian or a pagan, came from God.¹³² Reason also held a prominent place in his hermeneutic. As he explains in *On Christian Teaching*, “logic is of paramount importance in understanding and resolving all kinds of problems in the sacred texts.”¹³³ However, he also warns of the dangers of sophistry,¹³⁴ and later says when speaking of how to interpret difficult passages that it is far safer to rely on other Scripture than on reason alone.¹³⁵ As important as rationality is to Augustine, the Bible, not reason, leads us to salvation.¹³⁶

Psalm CX

The very first sentence of Augustine’s commentary on Psalm 110 illustrates one of the hermeneutical principles listed above: the centrality of Christ. Augustine begins his commentary “This Psalm is one of those promises, surely and openly prophesying our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; so that we are utterly unable to doubt that Christ is announced in this Psalm.”¹³⁷ This principle is also reflected in the rest of the commentary, which focuses primarily on the use of this Psalm in the Gospel of Matthew¹³⁸ and on Christian doctrines involved in the discussion of it. Indeed, the first two paragraphs of the commentary deal entirely with establishing the context

¹³¹ Rogers and McKim, *Interpretation of the Bible*, 23.

¹³² Sometimes the connection is even more direct. Augustine claims to have learned that Plato learned much of his philosophy from Jeremiah. *Doctr. chr.*, 2.28.43.

¹³³ Augustine, *Doctr. chr.*, 2.31.38.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.28.29.

¹³⁶ Rogers and McKim, *Interpretation of the Bible*, 26.

¹³⁷ Augustine of Hippo, *In Ps.*, 110.1. The English translations are cited from *Expositions on the Book of Psalms by St. Augustin, Bishop of Hippo*, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series II, Vol. 8*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1888).

¹³⁸ Mt 22:42-45, in which Jesus questions the Pharisees about the relationship between David, the Messiah, and the Lord.

of the Matthean narrative.¹³⁹ The third is dependent on Jesus' Ascension to the right hand of the Father.¹⁴⁰ Because his translation of v. 3 contains the phrase "With Thee is the beginning," the writing on this section becomes a commentary on the coeternity of the Father and Son.¹⁴¹ The commentary made by Augustine is entirely dependent on the psalm being about Christ. Something similar occurs in his commentary on v. 5, which he elucidates using Heb. 9:11-14. The verse appears to read, in Augustine's translation, "The Lord on Thy right hand, Thy right hand shall wound even kings in the day of His wrath."¹⁴² Augustine begins by using the passage from Hebrews to discuss what it is Christ does at the right hand of the Father. He intercedes for us as a priest by entering into the holy of holies (the mysteries of heaven) and purifies us from dead works (sins).¹⁴³

Augustine then writes that because of this Christ has authority to judge and punish the rulers of nations. The next sentence reads "He therefore 'on Thy right hand shall wound even kings in the day of His wrath.'" He goes on to say that kings are "wounded by His glory, and by the weight of His name made kings weak." Christ can wound them because of "His glory, and by the weight of His name."¹⁴⁴ This interpretation likely comes from the Christ hymn in Philippians 2, part of which Augustine uses to conclude his commentary on this psalm.¹⁴⁵ This hymn says that Jesus received the name above every name because of his obedient death on the cross, and as a result of this every knee should bend and profess Jesus as Christ Lord.

Augustine's commentary on this psalm also illustrates his use of allegory. Like many other Church Fathers, Augustine used allegory when a literal reading produced an absurdity.

¹³⁹ Augustine, *In Ps.*, 110.1-110.2.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.3.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 110.5.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 110.12.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.14. The last sentence of this portion of the commentary is a direct quote from the part of the Christ hymn dealing with his exultation.

Augustine sees such an absurdity in v. 3, which reads “From the womb I have begotten Thee, before the morning star.” As a non-material being cannot have a womb, Augustine seeks an allegorical interpretation. A womb, he says, is a “secret place,” thus “from the womb” means “from what is secret, from what is hidden.” Specifically, God here speaks of his own substance, from which Jesus was begotten before all ages. Augustine also characteristically provides a secondary “literal” interpretation of this verse. According to the Gospel of Luke, the Jesus was born from the womb of the Virgin Mary at night, and thus before the morning star.¹⁴⁶ This interpretation, while still importing Christ into the psalm, is literal in the sense that the phrase “before the morning star” denotes a literal period of time (night, before the morning star has risen) rather than a figurative meaning (before all ages).

Allegorical readings in this commentary follow the pattern Augustine lays out in *On Christian Teaching*. When interpreters reach an ambiguous passage, there are a series of steps they must follow. First, they must make sure the error is not on their part, or on the part of a translator or copyist. If this is not the case, they should first consult the *regula fidei*, other Scripture, the authority of the Church, and the golden rule. These (which in Augustine’s mind are consonant with each other) should make the meaning clear. Literary context should only be used to decide between meanings derived from these methods.

This is demonstrated in the interpretation of the final verse of the psalm. The verse reads “He shall drink of the brook in the way, therefore shall he lift up his head.” Augustine begins by asking what the brook is. He interprets it as the onward flow of human mortality. Just as brooks constantly flow so too is there a constant flow of humans being born and humans dying. The drinking from the brook is the Incarnation, when Christ enters into the flow of human mortality, so that he too may be born and die. Lifting up his head is his humble death on the cross. The

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.10.

commentary ends with the aforementioned Christ hymn. The verse then, is interpreted entirely out of its literary context, and linked to other Scripture and the tradition of the church.

Augustine frequently uses Scripture from outside this chapter of Psalms, and usually does so in a way that makes it clear it is Scripture. Most Scripture references contain a signal phrase such as “the Gospel of St. Matthew beginneth,”¹⁴⁷ “Those to whom imagining vain things it is said,”¹⁴⁸ “For hast Thou not also said,”¹⁴⁹ and “such the Scripture saith.”¹⁵⁰ In other cases, while there is no signal phrase there is something to suggest Scripture is being referenced. Romans 10:10 is cited after the phrase “But let us, brethren, both believe and declare.”¹⁵¹ Such a statement suggests something authoritative is to follow. In other cases, the Scripture referenced is quite possibly well known by his congregation, such as the Logos hymn¹⁵² and the Christ hymn. In other places, however, Scripture is used without any signal phrase or other construction indicating what it is. This is how the passage from Hebrews is used.¹⁵³

Conclusion

Augustine’s biblical hermeneutic has a number of similarities with Clement. Both emphasized that all truth came from God, and Christians should not fear the use of pagan sources, though they both held Scripture in higher esteem. Their hermeneutics are also similar in their frequent use of allegory. Allegory provides a way for Clement and Augustine to find Christians truths in Jewish and pagan writings, and allowed texts written centuries ago to speak to the contemporary needs of their audiences. They are not without their differences, however. Clement seems far less willing to pry a passage from its literary context, and in fact chastises

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 110.2.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 110.4, another example of Scripture speaking to contemporary Christians.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.8.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.13.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 110.2.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 110.5.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 110.12.

heretics for doing so, while Augustine nowhere in his commentary on Psalm 110 considers the intent of the human author.

Tertullian's hermeneutic also has a number of similarities with Augustine's. Both Tertullian and Augustine emphasize the necessity of reading Scripture in the *regula fidei*. The purpose of the Scriptures is to reveal Christ, and this is best done with read in the context of the traditions that came from his mouth and were passed down by his apostles to their churches. Like Clement, however, Tertullian fears that reading passages outside their historical and literary context can lead to heresy, a worry Augustine, though he likely shared it to some degree, did not find particular concerning. Augustine has no qualms about allegorizing passages out of their literary context, as seen in the commentary above.

The differences between Augustine and Chrysostom are indicative of the subtle differences between typology and allegory. Both these methods are used to put Christ in texts that did not originally speak of him. Chrysostom limits his typological reading to showing how rituals and rites in the Old Law foreshadowed the person and work of Christ. The blood the High Priest offered was a type of the blood Christ would offer on the cross. The fire in which sacrifices were burned is a type of the Holy Spirit. Augustine's allegorical interpretations are largely based in symbolism. He finds an image, and considers what kinds of things that image brings to mind. A womb, for example, may bring to mind secrecy, or hiddenness. A brook brings to mind the idea of flow. The ideas these image bring to mind are then linked to Christian truths. Typology, then, is based in parallels and prefigurements, and moves directly from the text to a Christian truth. Often it identifies to the purpose of a ritual or journey, and relates this to the work of Christ. Allegory, on the other hand, is based on symbolism, and what kinds of ideas the symbol brings to mind represent an intermediate step between the text and the Christian truth.

Conclusion

Given that of the authors studied only Chrysostom gives any systematic treatment of Hebrews, comparing how the different authors interpreted the passage is difficult. Interestingly, though neither Clement nor Tertullian explicitly use Hebrews for this purpose, both *Against Marcion* and *Stromateis* were used in part to argue for continuity between the Hebrew Scriptures and the message of Jesus, an obviously important idea in Hebrews. Both Clement and Augustine use this passage to discuss salvation, and Chrysostom touches on this theme in his commentary as well. Chrysostom and Clement both use Hebrews as part of a call to ethical action, though Chrysostom's sermon is far more loosely tied to the text of the passage than Clement's call to emasculate oneself from the dead works of passion.

The early church had a variety of reading practices, and they are displayed in these selections. Some, like Chrysostom and Tertullian, favored staying within the literal meaning of the text. Others, like Augustine and Clement, felt allegory was necessary to discover the highest truths of Scripture. Even amongst those who favored allegory, the importance of a text's literary context was a matter of disagreement. The authors also had varying degrees of trust for non-Christian sources, although none rejected them entirely and all placed Christian sources as the highest authority.

Their reading practices also have much in common, however, and these commonalities would come to form the basis of Christian biblical hermeneutics. All of the authors studied fiercely affirmed the unity of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. All affirmed that the texts of Scripture also had human authors, although they received varying degrees of prominence in their interpretation. Perhaps most importantly, all believed that in some way Christ spoke to future believers through the words of Scripture, not as a voice from the distant

past, but a contemporary call to conversion. Furthermore, being thus affected and brought to Christ was the whole purpose of the Scriptures and their study. These beliefs were all carried into the Middle Ages, but were practiced and conceptualized in new ways to meet the needs of the new time.

CHAPTER 3: THE MIDDLE AGES

Introduction

Hebrews' original author wrote to a community experiencing persecution because of their faith. Many of the authors who used Hebrews in the early church were concerned with how to make Christianity amenable to the surrounding culture. By the time medieval figures such as Bernard of Clairvaux and Thomas Aquinas were writing, neither of these were of great concern. Christianity was the dominant power in Europe. Particularly for those who lived in the Latin West, there was no need to fear persecution or exclusion, or to show Christianity was compatible with some other system. This is not to say there were no common concerns between medieval authors and their predecessors. Bernard, like the author of Hebrews, is concerned about a Christian community that is insufficiently zealous. Both Bernard and Aquinas, like many patristic writers, are concerned with the relationship between philosophy and theology. Whatever thematic similarities existed, however, these issues were raised in different contexts. While these new contexts did not much alter the reading of Heb. 9:11-14, they did produce distinctive reading practices.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux

Bernard of Clairvaux is remembered today primarily as a hunter of heresies and a reformer of monasteries.¹ Born in 1090 CE, an age in which many monasteries had either been destroyed or become little more than tools for political gain,² Bernard became a member of the recently formed Cistercian movement. This movement was dedicated to returning monasticism to its origins, and Bernard would become the movement's most powerful and well-known

¹ William Loyd Allen, "Bernard of Clairvaux's *Sermons on the Song of Songs*: Why They Matter." *Review and Expositor* 105 (2008), 406.

² Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 327.

figure.³ His influence, however, stretched far outside his monastery. He was deeply involved in the political and theological debates of the day. Bernard helped resolve papal schisms, preach crusades, and condemn new ideas he considered heretical.⁴ His own writing also gained renown, earning him the title “Doctor Mellifluus.”⁵

Biblical Hermeneutic

Bernard’s biblical hermeneutic, like the rest of that theology, is characterized by conservatism and adherence to orthodoxy. Like many other monks of his day, he practiced the *lectio divina* tradition of scriptural interpretation.⁶ This tradition was and is practiced in a variety of different ways, but all versions share two important, related, characteristics. The first is that there are multiple “senses” to Scripture. Passages in Scripture have more than one meaning, and these meanings often require different interpretive tools to unearth.⁷ The second characteristic is that Scripture is to be read not simply as an ancient document, but as communication from God that concerns the problems and struggles of its reader. This second characteristic means that for those like Bernard who practice *lectio divina*, the interpretation of Scripture is primarily an encounter with God. Roland Murphy writes of Bernard concerning his sermons on Song of Songs, “He is a mystic...and he writes for those who would use the Song for the purpose of knowing and loving God.”⁸

Perhaps for these reasons, Bernard was deeply skeptical of the proto-Scholastic movement of his day. Bernard was responsible for setting up a biased trial that condemned Peter

³ *Ibid.*, 333.

⁴ Joanne Robinson, “Bernard of Clairvaux,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Theologians*, ed. Ian Markham (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2009), 264.

⁵ Gonzalez, *Story*, 334. The title indicates his words were sweet like honey.

⁶ Roland Murphy, “Patristic and Medieval Exegesis: Help or Hindrance.” *CBQ* 43 (1981): 519.

⁷ Common senses include the literal/historical sense, the allegorical sense, the moral sense, and the tropological sense.

⁸ Murphy, “Help or Hindrance,” 514.

Abelard and his writings.⁹ He was similarly “alarmed” by the growing prominence of a new way of interpreting Scripture, one based in grammar, rhetoric, and logic. Bernard favored the monastic methods, “focusing less on intellectual explanation than on making the Scriptures relevant to human experience.”¹⁰ He feared that these new Scholastic methods obscured the encounter with God which, for Bernard, was the whole purpose of the Scriptures. Biblical interpretation, being a part of theology, belonged to the church, and the role of Christians was to defend what had been passed down to them, not to innovate.¹¹

Letter to the Monk Adam

Bernard writes this letter to chastise a wayward monk for following the orders of a heretical abbot.¹² Though he does not make his purpose immediately apparent, its harsh tone is clear from the first sentence. Bernard questions the monk’s spirit of charity, and tells him he has been the cause of scandal.¹³ The reason, as the reader discovers later in the letter, is that Adam, under orders of his now-deceased abbot, left his monastery, despite knowing that what he was doing was wrong.¹⁴ This flight was done without the permission of the Abbot of Cîteaux or the bishop. The group later petitioned the Holy See to sanction their departure,¹⁵ a sanction that does not appear to have come. Bernard closes ominously, calling on Adam and those following him to return to the monastery, warning “Those who return shall live, those who resist shall die.”¹⁶ In

⁹ Norbert Gaughan, “*Ratio vs. Auctoritas*-the Never-Ending Issue,” *American Theological Library Association Summary of Proceedings* 23 (1978): 104.

¹⁰ Robinson, “Bernard,” 265.

¹¹ Gaughan, “*Ratio vs. Auctoritas*,” 106.

¹² As Bernard makes explicit later in the text, however, he also intends for this to be read by any who feel similar temptations. Bernard of Clairvaux “Letter II To the Monk Adam” in *Some Letters of St. Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux*, ed. and trans. Samuel Eales (London: Ballantyne Press, 1904), 27.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

making this case Bernard also speaks at length about the importance of charity¹⁷ and proper obedience,¹⁸ as well as anticipating some objections.¹⁹

The most common way that Scripture is used in this letter, characteristic of the *lectio divina* tradition, is to make an argument about proper belief, and especially about proper moral behavior. For Bernard, Scripture is not just a collection of stories and writings from the ancient past. Indeed, even calling the Bible a series of ancient writings that are still relevant today does not accurately describe Bernard's position. Bernard believes that when Christians read Scripture, God is speaking directly to them. Bernard, for example, claims that God speaks to the wayward monk through the mouth of Jeremiah²⁰ and later that a reproach from Jeremiah "clearly and specially" belongs to him.²¹ The way that Bernard uses Scripture also implies its foundational authority. If Bernard can show that what he is saying aligns with what God says through Scripture, he has successfully made his case.

Due to its authority and its timelessness, Scripture can be used to exhort others to proper morals and belief, and Bernard frequently uses Scripture as premises of his arguments. Early in the letter, Bernard accuses Adam and his supporters of lacking a "spirit of charity" because of the division and scandal they are causing. He then questions how they can possibly think this is acceptable, since St. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians that without charity "even martyrdom profiteth nothing."²² Later he argues, again citing an argument from Paul, that if a woman is free from the law of her husband after her husband's death, this brother should have disregarded the command of his heretical abbot once the abbot died.²³ The arguments do not all function in precisely the

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5-10.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 22, 24-25

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

²² *Ibid.*, 4. 1 Corinthians 13:3.

²³ *Ibid.*, 5. Rom 7:2.

same way. Sometimes the simple use of Scripture constitutes an implicit argument, while other times Scripture is used as evidence in a larger argument. In either case, Bernard uses his prodigious knowledge of Scripture to argue that his positions are in line with the will of God and those of his opponents are not.

Scripture is also used in this letter as a means of providing examples. Often, after Bernard feels a point has been sufficiently argued, he will add a narrative from Scripture that, according to Bernard, demonstrates a similar point. When criticizing Adam for being obedient to his abbot, for example, he compares him to Balaam from Numbers.²⁴ Earlier, he compares Adam unfavorably with his namesake in Genesis; both Adams, though knowing they were in sin, chose to hide rather than remedy their wrong.²⁵ In neither case is Scripture used as evidence in an argument, but as an example, used after an argument has been shown to be valid.

Bernard's use of Hebrews comes in the seventh section of the letter. This section begins with Bernard listing, in ascending order, the authorities the wayward monks have subverted. He begins with the Abbot of Cîteaux, and moves up to the bishop, both of whom, according to Bernard, Brother Adam and his followers did not consult prior to their departure. Knowing that they did make an appeal to the pope, Bernard moves on to the highest authority they have violated: the Supreme Pontiff, Jesus Christ "who by His own blood entered in once and alone into the Holy Place to obtain eternal redemption." A verse from Matthew is then referenced, in which Jesus forcefully condemns those who cause little ones to sin.²⁶

Bernard's purpose in using this passage from Hebrews seems to be to demonstrate the power and authority of Jesus, and to chastise Adam and his followers for disobeying him. Jesus

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 18. Numbers 22-24. The reasoning here by Bernard is unclear, since the only obedience Balaam showed was to God, which Bernard presumably approves of.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

comes at the end of a list of figures with progressively greater authority and stature.²⁷ The fact that Bernard selects here a verse that discusses the crucifixion to demonstrate the supremacy of Jesus is interesting. A variety of verses could have been chosen. Bernard could have picked texts such as John 1 or Colossians 1, which praise Christ for his primacy and role in creation. He could have picked a text such as Matthew 25 that discusses Jesus as judge. Of all the verses he could've selected, Bernard selects one that deals with the cross and salvation.²⁸ He may be trying to suggest that in flouting the authority of Christ they were putting their salvation at risk. He may have been trying to make them feel guilty about disobeying the savior who died for their sins. Whatever the reasoning, Bernard hopes that reminding them of Jesus' redemptive work will encourage Adam and his compatriots to repent.

Conclusion

In a sense, Bernard's use of Hebrews is similar to the use its original author intended. Just as Hebrews' original author sought to reinvigorate a community that had lost its initial passion and fervor, Bernard hopes that his letter will encourage the dissident monks to practice the faith as they did before their desertion. This similarity, however, should not obscure the significant differences in its usage. The spiritual malaise of Hebrews' original audience was likely caused by the social exclusion and derision Christians experienced as a result of their faith. No such risks existed for Brother Adam or other Christians in Western Europe. Spiritual malaise was more likely to be caused by the Catholic Church's corrupt collusion with political authorities than its persecution by them.

²⁷ Although the context is not given, the verses surrounding this passage also serve to establish the authority of Christ.

²⁸ This interpretation, which focuses on the crucifixion rather than the resurrection as the source for Christ's authority, ironically has more in common with the interpretations of liberation theologians than the triumphalist and supersessionist readings common in Bernard's day.

With regard to his biblical hermeneutic, Bernard's reading practices do not perfectly match any of the patristic figures studied. Like Augustine, Bernard emphasizes the fact that Scripture has multiple senses, but Augustine had a far friendlier attitude towards philosophy. Like Chrysostom, Bernard frequently uses Scripture for moral exhortation, but Bernard was far more willing to allegorize than Chrysostom was. Bernard's writing style is similar to Tertullian's in that both seek to write in the language of Scripture. Both deftly interweave their own words and arguments with the words and arguments of Scripture such that it is difficult to separate them.

What Bernard shares with all of them, however, is the conviction that Scripture is where Christians find God. Reading Scripture is an "encounter with the living Word" and an "intimate dialogue."²⁹ Bernard's many comparisons of Scripture with food are a testament to its edifying function for Christians.³⁰ This, for Bernard, is what the Bible is for. While Bernard has tendencies, his hermeneutic is not as detailed or consistent as other authors. For him, the purpose of the text is an encounter with the Spirit, who speaks to us in a variety of ways and is not bound by any particular exegetical method.

St. Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas and Bernard of Clairvaux share many things in common. Both joined what were at the time relatively new religious orders, Aquinas the Dominicans, and Bernard the Cistercians. Both were the great figure of their movement, Scholasticism in the case of Aquinas, and the Cistercian movement in the case of Bernard. Both were prolific authors, and many of their writings survive to this day. Both were canonized saints in the Roman Catholic Church, and both have been proclaimed Doctors of the Church.

²⁹ Robinson, xii.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 180-81.

Even in these similarities, however, there are indications of the differences that also exist between these two medieval giants. The Cistercians were (and are) a contemplative order, the oldest kind of religious order, while the Dominicans were one of the new mendicant orders. Though both canonized saints, the period between death and canonization was twice as long for Aquinas, and during this period his writings were condemned by Rome. While both are today Doctors of the Church, if they had been contemporaries, Doctor Mellifluous likely would have tried to have the Angelic Doctor tried for heresy.

Biblical Hermeneutic

Despite the prominence and importance of Aquinas in Christian theology, his biblical hermeneutics, until relatively recently, have not received much attention. Indeed, when they have been addressed, the purpose has often been to attack him as a typical example of Scholasticism's supposedly unscriptural, rigidly philosophical character.³¹ More recent studies of Aquinas, however, have highlighted the importance of Scripture in his writings, and argue that Aquinas' works can truly be called biblical theology. His commentaries on Scripture, similarly neglected, have also increasingly become a focus of study for Christians of many denominations.³²

According to Aquinas, revelation is necessary for our salvation, which Aquinas defines as perfect knowledge of God. While some knowledge of God can be discovered on our own, human beings are limited, and certain truths can only be known through God's revelation.³³ Scripture, though not itself this revelation, is the authoritative expression of it. The duty of the church,

³¹ Wilhelmus Valkenberg, *Words of the Living God: Place and Function of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Nijmegen: Thomas Instituut te Utrecht, 2000), 1. While certain Scholastics are certainly guilty of this charge, the movement itself actually arose from a desire to gain more biblical knowledge. John Franklin Johnson "Hermeneutics in Thomas Aquinas: An Appraisal and Appreciation," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 45 (1981): 224.

³² Nicholas Healy, introduction to *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to his Biblical Commentaries*, ed. Thomas Weinandy, Daniel Keating, and John Yocum (New York: T&T Clark International, 2005), 1-2.

³³ John Boyle, "St. Thomas Aquinas and Sacred Scripture," *Pro Ecclesia* 4 (1995): 93. For this reason, though Aquinas of course holds that Scripture has both a human and divine author, he is far more concerned with discerning the divine author's intent.

through the Holy Spirit, is to bring this revelation to people.³⁴ The teachings of the church are authoritative reflections and interpretations of the revelation God has made through Sacred Scripture. This is why the terms *sacra doctrina* and *sacra scriptura* seem to be used interchangeably in Aquinas' writings. The line between Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and theology is blurry in Aquinas precisely because the latter two function as explanations of the former. The reading of Scripture, then, is a theological and ecclesial process.³⁵ The role of interpreters is to explore new questions and find ways to confront the problems new historical contexts bring.³⁶

On the above points, Bernard and Aquinas would have been more or less in agreement. Where Aquinas and the Scholastic tradition begin to diverge from Bernard and the *lectio divina* tradition is not in what Scripture is but in how it is to be interpreted. Aquinas and the Scholastic and Dominican traditions of which he was characteristic placed a much more singular emphasis on the literal/historical sense of Scripture.³⁷ Aquinas did not think that the spiritual senses of Scripture were useless, but he emphasized that doctrines must be based in the literal sense of Scripture, not allegory.³⁸ In terms of the senses of Scripture, the change Aquinas and his fellow Scholastics brought was subtle. Allegory was not eliminated, but diminished in emphasis and importance.³⁹

The greatest break between Bernard and Aquinas was in what “outside” tools they brought to the interpretation of Scripture. Aquinas and other Scholastics used dialectical inquiry,

³⁴ Healy, introduction, 13.

³⁵ Boyle, “Aquinas and Sacred Scripture,” 102.

³⁶ Valkenberg, *Word*, 9-17.

³⁷ For Aquinas, the “literal/historical” sense was the author’s intent. Also included within it were the etiological and analogical senses. These were to be contrasted with a spiritual reading, which included the allegorical, moral, anagogical, and tropological senses of Scripture. Johnson, “Hermeneutics,” 230.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ José María Revuelta Somalo, “Los comentarios bíblicos de Santo Tomás,” *Scripta Theologica* 3 (1971): 578.

textual criticism, grammar, and rhetoric⁴⁰ to understand Scripture, a practice Bernard and many others opposed, seeing these methods as a threat to orthodoxy.⁴¹ The Scholastics' shift in emphasis was not the result of a desire to challenge orthodoxy, however, but to convey orthodoxy more effectively. Members of the new mendicant orders like Aquinas read and studied Scripture in universities with the intent to go out and preach. These orders, sanctioned by the Catholic Church in order to combat heresy, had to be able to defend their interpretation of Scripture. In the words of Nicholas Healy, "the aim was to use reason and logic to raise difficulties and questions that, once resolved, would deepen understanding of the text."⁴² Trained in this way, Dominicans and Franciscans were prepared to challenge spiritual interpretations of the Gospel with the literal and historical meanings they had been expertly trained to defend.

Many of the shifts Scholasticism brought to theology and biblical interpretation were the result of the influence of the "new" philosophy of Aristotle. Aquinas and many other Dominicans, such as his mentor, Albert Magnus, tried to show that this philosophical system was not opposed to the Christian faith, but in fact could be used to help understand it.⁴³ Because of the influence of "The Philosopher," Aquinas understood theology as a science, with the Bible as its "first principles."⁴⁴ He rejected the Platonic theory of forms that lent itself so well to allegory in favor of a view based on sense-experience and inferential reasoning.⁴⁵ Biblical interpretation

⁴⁰ Ironically, though using these tools to study Scripture was characteristic of Scholasticism, Aquinas was not particularly good at using some of them. He could read neither Greek nor Hebrew, and was not a particularly skilled textual critic. *Ibid.*, 566-569.

⁴¹ Minlib Dallh, "Thomas Aquinas, OP" in *The Blackwell Companion to Theologians*, ed. Ian Markham (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2009), 257.

⁴² Healy, introduction, 9.

⁴³ Vivian Boland, *St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007), 12.

⁴⁴ Johnson, "Hermeneutics," 231.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 224-225.

became a space where the fields of grammar, philosophy, patristics, and exegesis all met.⁴⁶ The interpretive tools applicable to other rational endeavors were now appropriate to Scripture.

Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews

Though long neglected, Aquinas' commentaries are starting to receive the study they deserve. If, for Aquinas, the words of Scripture are the basis of theology, his commentaries must be seen as the basis of his thought. Indeed, José María Revuelta Somalo, in his extensive 1971 study on Aquinas' commentaries, calls them the "most faithful reflection of his theological thought."⁴⁷ The basis for Aquinas' commentaries, like other Scholastic commentaries, was his class lectures and the discussions they engendered.⁴⁸ They provide a window, then, not only to the foundations of Aquinas' theological thought, but what was discussed in the classrooms of medieval universities.

Aquinas' commentary on Hebrews was likely composed between 1265-1268 at Naples, where Aquinas was a professor.⁴⁹ The commentary begins with a citation from the book of Psalms in which the Lord is praised as being like no other.⁵⁰ In this introduction, a number of characteristic themes of Aquinas' exegesis are made clear. Firstly, Aquinas practices canonical exegesis; the books of Scripture can be used to understand each other, and in fact their full meaning only comes becomes clear when they are read in light of each other.⁵¹ The psalm used, for example, is understood christologically. In the very first sentence Thomas identifies "the

⁴⁶ Revuelta Somalo, "Los comentarios" 542.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 534, translation from Spanish mine.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 540. Notes from class would form the basis for these texts. Some of Aquinas' commentaries were later redacted by him, while others never were, although the thoughts in them are still believed to have come from Aquinas. Those edited by him are labeled *expositio*, while those that weren't are labeled *lectura*. His commentary on Hebrews falls into the latter category. *Ibid.*, 544-47.

⁴⁹ Leo Elders, "La lectura *Super epistolam ad Hebraeos* de Santo Tomás de Aquino," *Scripta Theologica* 41 (2009): 785.

⁵⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. and trans. Chrysostom Baer (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2006).

⁵¹ Thomas Weinandy, "The Supremacy of Christ: Aquinas' *Commentary on Hebrews*" in *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to his Biblical Commentaries*, ed. Thomas Weinandy, Daniel Keating, and John Yocum (New York: T&T Clark International, 2005), 223-24.

Lord” spoken of in the psalm as Christ.⁵² The reader is also here introduced to the subtle distinctions characteristic of Scholasticism. Aquinas quickly moves on to the distinctions between the One who is God by nature, and the many who are gods by participation.⁵³ Finally, at the end of the prologue, a small example of the *quaestio disputatio* can be seen. Aquinas raises the ancient question of whether or not this work was really written by Paul, and presents two arguments against Pauline authorship of Hebrews. Aquinas then cites two Church Fathers (Jerome and Dionysius), declares his opinion to be contrary to those who doubt Pauline authorship, and responds to their arguments.⁵⁴

Aquinas divides his interpretation of the work into sections, one of which is 9:11-14. He begins his exegesis by trying to outline what exactly Paul is trying to say. Aquinas believes that in this passage Paul is attempting to identify a part of the Old Law that prefigured Christ, and in doing so make an argument about salvation.⁵⁵ Aquinas goes on to compare the tabernacle pertaining to the Old Law with the one pertaining to the New Law. He outlines how each are discussed in Hebrews, and how the new is superior to the old.⁵⁶ In doing so he gives his position on some of the difficulties in the verses.

In v. 11, Christ is discussed as a high priest. Every priest is a “distributor of a testament,” and for Aquinas the testament Christ brings is the “good things to come.” These are contrasted with the testament of the Levitical priesthood. Citing Isaiah, Aquinas argues that they brought “the good things of the land,” but the reward Christ brings, according to Matthew, is in heaven. Furthermore, the rewards of Christ are “spiritual things,” prefigured by the good things of the Hebrew Bible. Thus Aquinas here allows that we can interpret the good things to come either as

⁵² Aquinas, *Hebrews*, 5.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

the kingdom that awaits the faithful in heaven or the spiritual goods wrought for Christians by Christ's resurrection.⁵⁷

Aquinas then describes the tabernacle. The tabernacle in the new law is "the tabernacle of heavenly glory" and is "a place of pilgrims." Aquinas pulls again from Isaiah and Psalms in identifying what the tabernacle is and why it is "greater and more perfect." The tabernacle is superior because it is immobile, as is foretold in Isaiah. The Lord dwells in it, according to the Psalmist.⁵⁸ He then discusses what exactly is meant when Paul writes "by a greater" and here appeals to the original language to provide an alternate meaning.⁵⁹ Turning to the phrase "not made with human hands, that is, not of this creation," Aquinas argues that this too is part of why the new tabernacle is superior, for the former was made by hand, but this new one is of spiritual goods. In this part of the commentary, then, Aquinas interprets the tabernacle as being a place in heaven where God dwells. In the next section, however, he discusses John Chrysostom's interpretation,⁶⁰ and allows that the tabernacle may be interpreted as Christ's human body, and argues with a variety of Scripture references that Christ's body is great, perfect, and not made with human hands.⁶¹

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 185-86. Aquinas frequently allows for multiple interpretations. Even within the literal sense, there can be multiple correct interpretations, as authors, human and divine, often intend for passages to have multiple meanings. Boyle, "Aquinas and Sacred Scripture," 97.

⁵⁸ This is a good representation of what Aquinas does with unclear or ambiguous terms in Scripture. Believing that all books in the Bible are in agreement with each other, if the meaning of a word or passage is ambiguous, Aquinas searches elsewhere in the Bible for clearer exposition. If the passage continues to be unclear, Aquinas turns to patristic authorities. Revuelta Somalo, "Los comentarios," 575.

⁵⁹ Although Aquinas did not himself read Greek, he knew enough to have a basic understanding of the debates of other interpreters who did.

⁶⁰ John Chrysostom, *The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Gospel of St. John and the Epistle to the Hebrews in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series II Vol. 14*, ed. Philip Schaff. (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1889), 15.4

⁶¹ Aquinas, *Hebrews*, 187. Although Aquinas allows both interpretations, the frame of the commentary suggests he favors the former. The frame through which he discusses this passage is a comparison between the Levitical priesthood and Christ's priesthood, and interpreting the tabernacle as a place in heaven fits into this model much better.

Aquinas then moves to v. 12, and explains, using Scripture, that while the high priest in the Hebrew Bible entered with the blood of calves and goats, Christ enters with his own blood, and this is salvific. He takes the typology even farther and speaks of qualities of goats and calves that prefigure Christ, again referencing Scripture to make his point. He then expands on further reasons the sacrifice of Christ is superior to the sacrifices of the Hebrew Bible. While the high priest entered once a year, Christ “entered for the whole of time.” Furthermore, because of Christ’s perfection, his sacrifice obtains eternal redemption with its infinite power.⁶²

Proceeding to v. 13, Aquinas explains the type of argument that Paul is making in this passage. By pointing to the efficacy of Hebrew Bible sacrifices, Paul makes an *a fortiori* argument that Christ, who is greater in nature and in sacrifice, can achieve an even greater redemption. In doing this Aquinas references Leviticus and Numbers to explain the references being made in v. 13 to goats, oxen, and heifers, and the various irregularities they cleansed. Connecting the end of v. 13 to the beginning of v. 14, he then explains the three ways Paul demonstrates the power of Christ’s blood, using further Scripture references in each explanation. The blood sacrificed belongs to Christ, and it is written in Matthew “He will save His people from their sins.” Also important is that Christ offered himself by Holy Spirit, and according to Isaiah, the spirit of judgment cleanses. Finally, Aquinas again points to Jesus’ perfection, citing a requirement for the Passover Lamb in Exodus and a verse from Ecclesiasts arguing that the unclean cannot cleanse anything.⁶³

Aquinas here breaks from line-by-line analysis of the text to pose a question: if the unclean cannot cleanse, how could the priests of the Hebrew Bible, themselves unclean, cleanse people, as the Bible says they do? This question is also raised in the *Summa*, and Aquinas uses

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 188-89.

this passage in his reply to one the objections. Aquinas argues that the blood of the animals the priests sacrificed did have a cleansing power, but only of “exterior stains” These stains came from actions which are not inherently sinful, such as touching the dead. The conscience, however, can only be cleansed through faith (Aquinas here references a verse from Acts), and so any cleansing of this nature that took place in the Hebrew Bible came not from the priests themselves, but from their faith and the power of Christ.⁶⁴

Aquinas ends by connecting this digression back to v. 14. The blood of Christ, Aquinas argues, purifies not from contact with the dead, but with the works of death, which are sins. Sins separate our souls from God, and this separation removes the means by which the soul lives. Thus, in cleansing our souls, they are restored to life, and for this reason Paul speaks of us now being able to worship the “living God.”⁶⁵

Summa Theologica

Aquinas’ magnum opus is intimidating in length, scope, and influence. In this work, Aquinas makes several references to Heb. 9:11-14, and provides us with a unique insight into his biblical hermeneutic. In the *Summa*, we not only see how Aquinas thinks Scripture should be used, but also see how Aquinas thinks it should *not* be use, and how he argues against those who use it poorly. By looking at the objectors use of Scripture, and the way in which Aquinas corrects them, his own biblical hermeneutic is demonstrated.

Aquinas uses Heb. 9:11-14 eleven times in the *Summa*, covering a variety of topics. In many cases, the article deals with questions about salvation. Some discuss the manner in which salvation is obtained.⁶⁶ Others focus on the manner in which the sin that impeded our salvation is

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 3 vols. (New York: Benziger Brother, Inc., 1948), 4.73.6, 4.22.3.

forgiven.⁶⁷ Two deal with his priesthood.⁶⁸ Several deal with the relationships between the Old Law and the New Law,⁶⁹ while the rest deal with sacraments and their forms and figures.⁷⁰ His interpretation of the passage in the *Summa* is largely consistent with interpretation in his commentary. The “dead works” of v. 14 are identified with sin.⁷¹ The good things to come are identified with the heavenly kingdom to which Christ has given humanity access.⁷² The same typology between the sacrifices of the high priests that healed bodily irregularities and the sacrifice of Christ that cleanses our conscience is made repeatedly.⁷³

To offer a detailed analysis on each of the eleven articles in which Aquinas uses the passage would be tedious and unnecessary, particularly given that Aquinas’ interpretation of the passage in the *Summa* is consistent with his interpretation of it in the already-discussed commentary. Instead, I have elected to first take an in-depth look at one article which offers a clear demonstration of Aquinas’ reading practices, and next analyze what the objectors’ use of Scripture can tell us about Aquinas’ hermeneutics.

Prima Secunda Partis Question 102 Article 5

The subject of this question is the cause of the sacraments of the Old Law. In this question the objectors attempt to make the case that the prescriptions of the Old Law were unfitting and unreasonable. They contradicted other verses of Scripture (Objection 1, 2), they were unreasonable (Objection 4, 5, 9) and they did not seem to take into account the true nature of sin (Objection 7, 8, 10). Aquinas argues that in fact there are reasonable causes for the prescriptions of the Old Law. He offers in answer to each objection a “literal reasons,” which

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.19.1 and 4.66.12.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.22.3 and 4.22.5.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.19.1, 2.102.5, 2.103.2, and 4.49.5.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.49.5, 4.66.12, and 4.89..6

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 4.22.3.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 4.49.5.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 2.102.5 and 2.103.2.

focus on why they were reasonable in the context of the Old Testament, and a “figurative reasons,” which sees them as prefiguring something.

In Objection 1, a verse from Deuteronomy is referenced which commands the people of Israel to not imitate the actions of idolaters. The Old Law, however, commanded circumcision, and other nations which worshipped idols also took knives to their own body. Aquinas offers first a literal reason for this practice. Through circumcision, the Hebrews reminded themselves that they were the people of Abraham, the first man to be circumcised. The mark on their flesh was a sign of their covenant. After expounding at length upon this, Aquinas offers other possible literal reasons including the weakening of concupiscence. To answer the question directly, Aquinas also replies that only cutting *in honor of idols* is prohibited, not cutting the body *per se*. Aquinas then speaks of several figurative reasons for circumcision and the manner in which it was done. The removal of the foreskin foreshadowed the removal of corruption brought by Christ, and circumcision being done on the eighth day after birth referenced that the resurrection of the dead will come in the eighth age.⁷⁴

The next objection follows a similar pattern. An objection is raised that the laws regarding Passover were unreasonable and in fact lacked the decorum proper in worship of God. Aquinas again begins with a literal reason. The objector does not understand the context of the first Passover. The “unreasonable” sprinkling of lamb’s blood marks the Hebrews as different from the Egyptians, who worshipped the ram. They ate in haste because there was danger from the Egyptians, demonstrated in what they ate (unleavened bread). Aquinas then moves to figurative reasons. The paschal Lamb prefigures Christ, who was slain for us, and who like the

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.102.5. Worth noting here is that Aquinas sometimes thought that, even in the Hebrew Bible, a christological interpretation could fit within the literal sense. Prophecies about the Messiah, for example, spoke of Christ in their literal sense. Aquinas, like Chrysostom, also tries to link the literal sense of non-Messianic texts to Christ by basing typologies or allegories firmly in the literal sense of Scripture. Johnson, “Hermeneutics,” 229.

lamb slaughtered, was without blemish. The unleavened bread eaten prefigures the faithful sharing Christ's body.⁷⁵

The remaining objections function in the same fashion. An objection is made that a practice of the Old Law is unreasonable, and Aquinas finds both a reason that fits within the historical context of the Old Law, and reasons that prefigure Christ. The literal reason is listed first and is described at greater length. This sense alone would suffice to answer the objector.⁷⁶ This article demonstrates Aquinas' devotion to the literal sense of Scripture, and the ways he attempts to integrate christological reasons into that sense.

Objectors

It would seem that the objectors misuse Scripture primarily in two ways. The most common way is that they interpret the passage correctly, but make a mistake in applying the passage to a particular situation. For example, in discussing whether or not it was Christ's Passion that opened up the gates of heaven, an objector argues that Elias was taken up to heaven in 2 Kings, yet this event occurred before Passion. Aquinas points out that while Elias went to heaven, he went only to "atmospheric heaven," not the "empyrean heaven, which is the abode of the saints."⁷⁷ In another question, dealing with whether Christ's priesthood has expiated sins, an objector argues that because Christ is a priest as God, not as man, and in Isaiah it is written that only God can forgive sin, expiation of sins is not an effect of Christ's priesthood. Aquinas answers that while it is true that only God can forgive sins, to divide what Christ's natures can do in this way is to deny the Council of Ephesus.⁷⁸ Often the misuse of Scripture in the *Summa* is a matter of poor application, not poor interpretation.

⁷⁵ Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, 2.102.5.

⁷⁶ Healy, "Introduction," 8.

⁷⁷ Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, 4.49.5.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.22.3.

In other cases, however, Scripture itself is interpreted poorly. This usually occurs because the verse is missing its proper context. In the aforementioned question about Christ's Passion, another objection raised is that Proverbs 11:18 states that there is a reward for those who are just. Therefore, according to the objection, those who were just before Christ's passion obtained the kingdom of heaven. Aquinas answers that while the holy Fathers indeed merited entrance to the kingdom, this merit came by faith (Heb. 11:13). Specifically, their merit came by faith in Christ's Passion.⁷⁹ Similarly, in a question about the form in which Christ will judge humanity, an objector cites Daniel 7:9, arguing that in this passage God is portrayed as judge, and is called the Ancient of Days. Therefore the judicial power granted to God comes from his eternity, and while the Son is eternal, his humanity is not. Aquinas answers that this reading neglects the context of the passage. In Daniel 7:13-14, the Ancient of days gives power and a kingdom to the son of *man*.⁸⁰

In these corrections we can see Aquinas' commitment to the literal sense of Scripture and his caution in applying Scripture. When Scripture is not used in its proper context, mistakes will be made, a fact to which the objectors testify. Also noteworthy is that when an objector cites Scripture, ordinarily only a single verse is referenced. Aquinas' replies often contain two or three Scripture references, as well as commentaries by Church Fathers on these passages. This indicates the importance for Aquinas of reading Scripture as a cohesive whole. The meaning of a particular verse may be unclear if read in isolation.

Conclusion

Bernard would have found much to oppose in Aquinas' biblical hermeneutic. Aquinas' use of Aristotle and his application of grammar, logic, and dialectic to the Scriptures would have

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.49.5.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.90.1.

seemed to Bernard an alarming departure from orthodoxy and tradition. Tertullian would have been similarly concerned. As the previous chapter demonstrated, however, Christian authors had been making use of pagan philosophers for centuries. Clement and Augustine had no qualms about using the works of such philosophers. Like Aquinas, their motivation for this was not a desire to abandon orthodoxy. All three were convinced that all truth came from God, whatever medium related it. Furthermore, though for different reasons, they all felt integrating pagan philosophy might be useful in evangelization.

Another position on which Aquinas differs from Bernard, his focus on the literal/historical sense of Scripture, also has precedent in the early church. Ironically, though, the figures that would have agreed with Aquinas are flipped. Aquinas would have been against Clement and Augustine and with Tertullian regarding the importance of allegory. While Clement and Augustine often felt it was necessary to produce an adequate interpretation, Aquinas stood much more in the tradition of Tertullian and Chrysostom with their emphasis on the literal/historical sense. He also shared with Chrysostom a desire to find ways to allow christological interpretations to fit within this literal sense.

Aquinas was not, however, totally dissimilar from Bernard. Aquinas did not deny that there were multiple senses of Scripture. His shift in emphasis, though important, should not obscure that fact. Both medieval saints also shared the conviction, as have all authors thus far studied, that Scripture mediated truths necessary for salvation. Although Aquinas used many of the tools that will become characteristic of historical-critical scholarship, he still very much performed theological exegesis. Like Bernard, Aquinas seeks in Scripture theological truths that can be used to confront contemporary issues.⁸¹

⁸¹ Revuelta Somalo, "Los comentarios," 542.

With regard to his interpretation of Hebrews, Aquinas does little that is novel. His preferred interpretation of the tabernacle as a place in heaven is likely closer to the author's intent than Chrysostom's interpretation of it as the body of Christ. Like the previous figures studied, Aquinas interprets the "dead works" as sin and the "eternal spirit" as the Holy Spirit. Thematically, he uses the passage similarly as well. Like the original author and Augustine, he uses the passage when discussing salvation. Like the original author, he uses the passage to discuss the relationship between the Gospel and the Hebrew Bible. While Aquinas' biblical hermeneutic contains several important shifts in emphasis, his interpretation of this passage remains largely traditional.

Conclusion

The Catholic Church faced many new challenges in the Middle Ages. Heretical groups such as the Cathars and Albigensians were springing up across Europe. Both monasteries and hierarchies were filled with corruption, decadence, and political intrigue. A new Abrahamic faith, Islam, continued to grow in territory and adherents. States in Europe were becoming less theocratic, and the West was being brought into contact with new civilizations. Perhaps most importantly for Aquinas, universities were beginning to form in Europe, and the ideas of Aristotle were being rediscovered, leading to fierce debate ensued over whether this new system was compatible with Christianity.

Aquinas and Bernard were both deeply concerned about how confront these challenges. In some ways, they selected opposite responses. Bernard joined an ancient tradition of monasticism. Aquinas joined a new kind of religious order and began integrating Christianity with a "new" philosophy. What connects them, however, is their conviction that Scripture must be the foundation of their response. Both had extensive knowledge of the Bible, and both felt

Scripture was essential to the Christian encounter with God. As different as their interpretive methods and the charisms of their orders were, both were seeking the same goal; they both hoped to make the words of Scripture relevant to the challenges of their era.

CHAPTER 4: THE REFORMATION

Introduction

The Reformation brought with it an entirely new series of challenges for Christian writers to confront. Luther's theses were the catalyst for an intellectual and theological revolution. New debates sprang up concerning the authority of the church, the authority of Scripture, and the authority of tradition. What exactly were these things, and how do they relate to one another? Vehement debates were held over liturgy, soteriology, ecclesiology, and a number of other topics. Christians on all sides endeavored to prove that the Bible, properly interpreted, was on their side. Yet making this argument was more difficult than ever, for proper biblical interpretation itself was a subject of debate. John Calvin, Martin Luther, Matt Henry, Ulrich Zwingli, and the Council of Trent all sought to demonstrate the truth of their method of biblical interpretation over and against those of their opponents.

John Calvin

Biblical Hermeneutic

John Calvin was convinced that the message of Scripture was easy to understand, a belief many reformers shared. In the *Institutes*, he contrasts the “sophistry” of Catholics regarding the intercession of the saints with “the language of Scripture, with whose simplicity every pious man will be satisfied, without paying any regard to those importers.”¹ Debates over passages arise not because the texts are unclear, but because impious men “imported” their own bias into the text. Elsewhere, he warns of the dangers of excessive allegory, arguing “Those who speculate subtly on the details advance some questionable motives,”² and, more sharply in his commentary on

¹ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1845), 704-705.

² John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Last Four Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, ed. and trans. Charles William Bingham (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1847-1850), 42.

Hebrews “to philosophize beyond limits, which some do, is not only useless, but also dangerous.”³ As others have noted, Calvin thought the focus of exegesis should be on what a passage means in its literary and historical context.^{4 5} To deviate from the plain reading was to import foreign ideas into Scripture.

Calvin’s condemnation of allegory, however (a condemnation echoed by many other reformers), must be placed in context to be fully understood. When Calvin and other authors demanded adherence to the literal sense of the text, they meant something different than modern exegetes do. In the late Middle Ages, there was a shift in the understanding of which meanings fell into which sense of Scripture. The literal sense, which originally was the narrative sense, or the way the text presented itself, came to include a prophetic sense as well. Thus christological fulfillments and types and antitypes were no longer considered allegorical readings, but part of the literal sense of the text. Calvin and other reformers understood the literal meaning of the text to include these elements as well.⁶

Like many Christian thinkers of his time, Calvin was motivated by humanist desires to study ancient sources and read texts in their original language. This influence can be seen in the arguments he makes against Pauline authorship of Hebrews.⁷ Calvin notes that the author

³ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, ed. and trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1853), 173.

⁴ Brian Dennert, “John Calvin’s Movement from the Bible to Theology and Practice,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54 (2011): 361.

⁵ Gary Neal Hansen, “Calvin as Commentator on Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles” in *Calvin and the Bible*, ed. Donald McKim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 275.

⁶ David Steinmetz, “Divided by a Common Past: The Reshaping of the Christian Exegetical Tradition in the 16th Century,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27 (1997): 249. This raises an important point. The reformers (and many of their followers) claimed they were returning to a more honest, simpler style of exegesis free of the importations and sophistry the Catholic Church allows by going beyond the literal sense. The reformers, however, still use figurative interpretations, but consider them part of the literal sense. This regrouping predates the Reformation. While Catholics and Protestants had very real differences in their attitudes regarding Scripture, which will be addressed in the Catholicism section, when it came to the method of interpretation and the meaning of the text, there was not a sharp delineation between Protestant and Catholic practices. *Ibid.*, 246.

⁷ Hansen, “Calvin as Commentator,” 260. Though Calvin firmly denies the possibility of Pauline authorship, he asserts with equal force that it is undoubtedly apostolic, even calling doubts about it demonic in the introduction to

intentionally plays on the double-meaning of διαθήκη (covenant/testament) in Hebrews.⁸ While this double meaning exists in Greek, the Hebrew language has separate words for covenant and testament.⁹ Thus, the argument offered by supporters of Pauline authorship that the stylistic differences between Hebrews and the Pauline epistles come from it having been originally written in Hebrew are untenable. Calvin also notes that the author of Hebrews states that they heard the Gospel secondhand (Heb. 2:3), something Paul would never say.¹⁰

Calvin was also influenced by older traditions. He was interested in the history of interpretation of passages and the thought of the Church Fathers¹¹, particularly Augustine and John Chrysostom.¹² He even made use of parts of the monastic *lectio divina* tradition. Like a focus on the plain reading of Scripture, the *lectio divina* tradition allowed Calvin to democratize the reading of Scripture. This tradition encourages letting the words of Scripture become our own vocabulary, a clear element of Calvin's writing. Furthermore, the *lectio divina* tradition calls for making Scripture reading the basic practice of Christian life. The Bible was not a relic of ages past, but the word of God speaking to us about our issues and challenges.¹³ Calvin even speaks of Scripture engaging in contemporary debates, saying the "word of God not only affirms but proclaims and protests" against the Catholic Mass.¹⁴

Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews

Calvin uses this commentary to outline the argument its author makes and apply his theology to contemporary situations. After discussing issues with authorship, he describes what

his commentary on Hebrews. Calvin, *Hebrews*, 17. For this reason, Calvin often prefaces a citation with a signal phrase such as "as the apostle says."

⁸ The author of Hebrews speaks of how Christ's covenant was inaugurated at his death, just as a testament is bequeathed when the testator dies. Heb. 9:16-17.

⁹ Calvin, *Hebrews*, 18.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹¹ Dennert, "John Calvin's Movement," 62.

¹² Hansen, "Calvin as Commentator," 264.

¹³ Wesley A. Kort, "Calvin's Theory of Reading," *Christianity & Literature* 62 (2013): 190.

¹⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1129.

he believes to be central argument of the work, saying “the design of the writer was to prove what the office of Christ is.”¹⁵ Hebrews is meant to show people that the ceremonies commanded in the Old Law have ended with the coming of Christ. This, Calvin writes, is similar to “Our business with the Papists,”¹⁶ for they too don’t understand that “the efficacy of the sacrifice (the crucifixion) is perpetual.”¹⁷ Calvin uses this commentary not simply to explain the view of its author, but to use that view in his polemics against the Catholic Church.

Calvin’s interpretation of Hebrews 9:11-14 is largely consistent with that of past authors. Like Aquinas, Calvin sees the superiority of Christ as the central theme of the work. The purpose of this particular passage is to show us we must abandon the Old Law, and look to Christ for salvation, for he “alone possesses the dignity of the office of a high priest.” Christ’s priesthood is distinct from the priesthood discussed in the Hebrew Bible. This new priesthood brings unique security, and the sacrifice he offers is uniquely efficacious. The sacrifices offered by the high priests in biblical times “obscurely prefigure the sacrifice offered once and for all by Christ.”¹⁸

Calvin, again consistent with Aquinas, interprets the “good things to come” mentioned in v.11 as eternal things, and specifically the eternal life Christians will enjoy in the kingdom of heaven. Like in Chrysostom, the “greater and more perfect tabernacle” is interpreted as Christ’s body, but with a qualification to evade the difficulty of this tabernacle being “not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building.” Calvin argues that while Christ’s human body certainly “proceeded from the seed of Abraham,” the author is here not talking about the body itself, but “the spiritual efficacy which emanates from it to us.” There is nothing “earthly” or

¹⁵ Calvin, *Hebrews*, 18.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 176-77.

“material” in the way Christ’s body and blood nourishes us, and this is what the author means when he calls it “not of this building.”¹⁹

V. 12-13 show the reader that while the ceremonies and rituals of Hebrew Bible did have some effect, Christ’s blood is far more efficacious, and has reduced the Old Law to nothing. The ceremonies of old are another typology in which the words of the Hebrew Bible prefigure the New Testament. In interpreting v. 14, Calvin focuses on the “eternal Spirit.” Precisely because Christ offered himself “through the eternal Spirit,” his death was efficacious, for the eternal Spirit brings eternal redemption. Because of this sacrifice we are free from dead works, which Calvin defines as “works as produce death, or such as are the fruits or effects of death.” The need for sacrifice has now ended, and we can “serve the living God” because through Christ’s blood we are no longer enemies to God, and our works no longer abominable.²⁰

Commentaries on the Last Four Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony

This work is a commentary on Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Calvin seeks in this book to explain the uses of the law and demonstrate the harmony of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.²¹ Unlike Calvin’s other commentaries, this work does not go through the books verse by verse, but groups passages thematically. This was likely motivated by concerns Calvin had about making this commentary easier to read.²² Hebrews is used in this commentary to note the typologies that point to the harmony between the Old Law and the New.

Calvin seems chiefly concerned in this commentary with explaining rituals and ceremonies that may have confused his audience. He discusses rituals of purification in Num.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 174-78.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 178-180.

²¹ Calvin, *Harmony* i.

²² Barbara Pitkin, “Calvin’s Mosaic Harmony: Biblical Exegesis and Early Modern Legal History,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 41 (2010): 466.

24,²³the specifications given for the altar in Ex. 27,²⁴ the making and use of anointing oil in Ex. 30,²⁵ and the offering of a scapegoat in Lev. 16.²⁶ As mentioned above, Calvin does not think these are empty rituals. They were in some manner efficacious at the time they were given, even if they were insufficient. If nothing else, they often served as “teachable moments,” where a typology was established that would point to the full truths brought by Christ.

This commentary provides a good example of what reformers meant when they condemned speculative exegesis of Scripture. Calvin condemns those who “speculate subtly on the details.” He pledges to “leave them...to the enjoyment of their conceits,” and not himself engage in such practices. Yet even in the very section where Calvin makes this statement he does seem to engage in some questionable speculation regarding the details of the passage he’s explaining. Calvin is here interpreting Num. 14, and the purifying ritual it prescribes. In the passage the Lord orders that “a red heifer without spot...and upon which never came yoke” be used in the sacrifice. Calvin suggests that the heifer is red because red was a common color. This seems to be the kind of subtle speculation Calvin discourages, although he does note that he is merely venturing a guess. Calvin also argues, however, that the Lord commands that the heifer be without yoke so that this sacrifice “might have nothing of humanity about it,” indicating our total reliance on God for salvation. Calvin offers no equivocations on this speculation, and then begins to attack the Catholic understanding of the Eucharist. Thus while Calvin condemns speculation and the motives of those who practice it, he engages in it himself, reading contemporary debates into ancient Jewish texts.²⁷

²³ Calvin, *Harmony*, 41.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 186.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 233.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 335.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 41-43.

Calvin usually sees the utility of these texts as forming typologies. The heifer's blood, after it had been sacrificed, was to be sprinkled on the altar. Calvin suggests that the Lord ordered this to show the Hebrew people that even though the heifer was cursed, its blood was not unclean. This principle is "most clearly seen in Christ," who although he was made a curse and sacrificed for sin, lost none of his purity. Calvin uses the language of Heb. 9:11-12 to reinforce this typology. According to these verses, Christ also entered the holy place with his own blood, and it was through this that humanity obtained "eternal redemption."²⁸ Similarly, the burnt offerings spoken of in Exodus 27 teach the Hebrew people that "flesh must be burnt in the Spirit" before being offered. This is a type of Christ, who receives divine power in this way to propitiate God. This is what is meant by the phrase "through the Spirit" in 9:14.²⁹

Calvin also sees the use and making of anointing oil as a typology that the Lord uses to teach the Hebrew people about his nature. The anointing oil is a type of the Holy Spirit. In biblical times, the Holy Spirit brought humanity spiritual gifts, and the oil was an outward sign of this endowment. This served to teach the Hebrews that "exercises of piety profited them nothing without the Spirit."³⁰ Calvin uses v. 14 to argue that Christ's offering, to be efficacious, had to be offered "through the Spirit." Calvin finds another typology in the annual atonement ritual prescribed in Leviticus 16. The high priest's offering of the scapegoat prefigures Christ's superior "once and for all" offering. To further this argument, Calvin then quotes the allusions made to this ritual and its typology in Hebrews.³¹

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 186.

³⁰ Another instance of a very Protestant idea being the meaning of an ancient Hebrew text.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 335-36.

Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke

Perhaps the most salient of Calvin's commentaries for studying his biblical hermeneutic is his commentary on the Synoptic Gospels. The very format of this commentary indicates something about Calvin's hermeneutic. Rather than treating the three Gospels separately, Calvin treats them together, as if they tell a single narrative. His treatment of the inconsistencies in the accounts provides insights to Calvin's beliefs about the continuity of Scripture and how he confronts difficult passages.

Calvin use of Hebrews in this commentary comes in his treatment of the crucifixion narrative. The section also provides a number of insights into his biblical hermeneutic. All three synoptic Gospels claim that at the sixth hour darkness came over the land.³² Calvin characteristically goes through several common explanations for the meaning of this darkness, even discussing what this event usually meant in pagan literature. He then examines what is meant by "there was darkness over all/the whole land." Some interpreters, Calvin informs his audience, think this means the whole world was covered in darkness. Calvin rejects this interpretation because it was "impossible for so remarkable a miracle to be passed over in silence by many other authors."³³ Thus while Calvin is perfectly willing to accept an event as historical based solely on its clear attestation in the Gospels, extrabiblical literature can affect his interpretation of ambiguous verses.

Calvin's response to inconsistencies in the narrative also provides insights into his biblical hermeneutic. In both Matthew and Mark Jesus is jeered, but in Mark it is by a soldier and in Matthew it is by several others. Calvin resolves this difficulty by positing that one person began the jeering and others then joined. Jesus' words on the cross also differ in the Synoptic

³² Mt. 27:45, Mk. 15:33, Lk. 23:44.

³³ John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, ed. and trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1845), 262.

Gospels. Only in Matthew and Mark does Jesus cry out in abandonment,³⁴ and only in Luke does Jesus say “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit.” Calvin holds that both of these statements occurred, and that the different authors simply chose not to mention certain parts.³⁵ In both cases, then, Calvin resolves an inconsistency by finding a way for all of the texts to be historically accurate.³⁶

Calvin’s uses Hebrews to discuss the significance of the veil-tearing that occurred after Jesus’ death. This tearing represents both the abolition of the “figures of the law” and the inauguration of a new closeness between God and humanity. Through Jesus’ crucifixion “the substance and truth of the shadows had been fulfilled, the figures of the law were changed into spirit.” The spiritual nature of the sacrifice is crucial, because “as the Apostle tells us it must be viewed spiritually, that we may enjoy its value and its fruit.”³⁷ Calvin interweaves the language of Hebrews with his own argument to expand upon the theme and add authority to his argument.

Institutes of the Christian Religion

The *Institutes* is a different kind of literature than the previous three works. They are commentaries, whereas the *Institutes* are a work of systematic theology. The purpose of this work is not to explain the meaning of a particular verse or book, but to systematize the theology derived from these meanings and apply it to the debates going on in Calvin’s day.

³⁴ Calvin’s treatment of this passage also demonstrates his understanding of the relationship between the human and divine authors of Scripture. In both Matthew and Mark the Cry of Dereliction is transliterated from Aramaic, and then translated. Calvin attributes this choice to the Holy Spirit, arguing that the Spirit “has chosen to relate it in the Syriac language” in order to make it more memorable. *Ibid.*, 264. For Calvin, then, the Holy Spirit is responsible not only for the content of the Scripture, but for the specific words chosen to relate that content.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 265.

³⁶ When confronted with a scenario in which resolving the narrative discrepancies is logically impossible, such as Luke’s inversion of the order of the eclipse and the veil being torn, Calvin remarks “the Evangelists, as we have frequently seen, are not careful to mark every hour with exactness.” *Ibid.*, 266.

³⁷ Although there is no citation of Hebrews here, and the language used is general, Calvin usually introduces Hebrews with a signal phrase such as “the apostle says” (See also 322) and as shown above, this is the verse Calvin usually references to discuss the importance of the spiritual nature of Christ’s sacrifice.

The first use of Hebrews in this work comes in the second book of the *Institutes* in a section focused on soteriology and the Passion. Calvin discusses how on the cross, Jesus became a curse for us, and our guilt was imputed to him. By taking on sin, he also destroyed sin. Calvin's use of Hebrews comes at the end of an extended discussion of this idea. In this section, he draws on Hebrews, several New Testament works, and Isaiah such that almost every sentence is a paraphrase of Scripture. Hebrews 9:14 is one of several verses used to defend Calvin's assertion that though Christ took on our sin he himself was still "without spot."³⁸ Later in the book Calvin discusses how the sacrifice of Christ is a fulfillment of figures in the Hebrew Bible, and references several verses from Hebrews, including 9:12-14, to back up his position.³⁹

Calvin uses Hebrews again in the fourth book while discussing how the Catholic Mass "not only profanes but annihilates the Lord's Supper." This book focuses on whether the Mass is a sacrifice, and thus, on the finality and uniqueness of the cross. Like many other works of Calvin, this section is filled with sharp language. The Catholic Mass "sinks and buries the cross and passion of Christ" and the cross is "overthrown the moment an altar is erected."⁴⁰ Calvin says of those who think Christ's sacrifice can be repeated that it requires "Satanic audacity to oppose a truth so clear and transparent."⁴¹ He uses Hebrews to provide scriptural evidence for the assertion that Christ's sacrifice is eternal and unrepeatable. He argues "on the cross, he offered himself in sacrifice, that he might sanctify us forever, and purchase eternal redemption for us."⁴² These ideas, clearly based in Hebrews' description of the crucifixion as a "once for all" sacrifice

³⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, 413-414.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 429.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1128.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1129. This is another indication of how Calvin thinks Scripture speaks quite clearly, and those who come to different interpretations than he must have ill motives.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 1128.

that would obtain “eternal redemption,” are used to argue that the Catholic Church’s understanding of the Mass and the Passion are patently unscriptural.

Hebrews is also used by Calvin in the third book of the *Institutes* while discussing the intercession of the saints. Calvin again uses a number of passages that discuss Christ as mediator, and argues that the scriptural understanding of Christ as mediator precludes the saintly intercession taught by the Catholic Church. Calvin designates the interpretations of his opponents “sophistry,” and here makes another appeal to the simplicity of Scripture. “Very different is the language of Scripture,” argues Calvin, “with whose simplicity every pious man will be satisfied, without paying any regard to those importers.”⁴³ Once again, Calvin makes clear that reading Scripture should be easy, and those who dispute his readings must either have ill motives or be “importing” their own ideas into the texts.

Calvin’s use of Hebrews in this text is indirect. He cites Augustine’s *Contra Parmenian*, in which Augustine also discusses what it means that Christ was mediator. Using language from Hebrews, Augustine discusses how as mediator Christ entered the holy of holies and obtained an eternal redemption.⁴⁴ While Calvin frequently uses the insights of previous interpreters, this is one of the few instances in which the interpreter is mentioned by name.⁴⁵

Conclusion

Calvin uses Hebrews to address many of the same themes as previous interpreters. Like Tertullian and Clement, he uses Hebrews in texts that discuss the relationship between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. This is most clearly seen in his commentary on the Law, but Calvin also uses it to draw out typologies in other contexts, such as his commentary on Hebrews and his discussion of soteriology in the *Institutes*. He also, like Bernard, uses it while

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 704-05.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 705.

⁴⁵ Hansen, “Calvin as Commentator,” 265.

discussing salvation. For other themes, however, Calvin is among the first to use Hebrews to address them. Unsurprisingly, this is primarily the case for doctrines that were at the center of debates in the Reformation, such as the nature of the Mass and the intercession of the saints.

Like Aquinas and Chrysostom, Calvin values the literary and historical meaning of the text over allegorical interpretations. His style of biblical interpretation, influenced by humanism, has many of the elements of historical-critical exegesis. Calvin is interested in discovering the historical meaning of Scripture and the author's intent, and looks to the original languages to elucidate difficult passages. He is even willing to use extrabiblical literature in his interpretations when Scripture is ambiguous.

Other characteristics of Calvin's hermeneutic, however, indicate that he is still doing biblical theology. He practices canonical interpretation, arguing that "the meaning of any one biblical text must and will be harmonious with the rest of Scripture."⁴⁶ For this reason, he is more than willing to fill in the blanks when there are inconsistencies in the Gospels, finding a way for all of them to be true and in harmony with one another. He also sees Scripture as something that continues to speak to contemporary situations, using it repeatedly in his polemics against the Catholic Church and arguing that it "protests" against the Mass.

Martin Luther

Biblical Hermeneutic

Biblical exegesis was not, for Martin Luther, solely the province of academics or clergy, but a central element to the life of all Christian believers. Similarly, proper interpretation is not something that comes to one after years of academic learning, but from the Holy Spirit, and was only possible for orthodox Christians.⁴⁷ In Luther's anthropology, there was an infinite distance

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 276.

⁴⁷ Mark Krause, "Martin Luther's Theory of Bible Translation," *Stone Campbell Journal* 2 (1999): 62.

between the sinful human and the perfect God. Thus the Augustinian idea that through careful study, a reader could move from the *res significans* (signifying thing) of the text to the *res significada* (thing signified) in the mind of God was no longer tenable. No amount of study could bridge the gap between the human and divine minds.⁴⁸ Only through the gift of the Holy Spirit can proper biblical interpretation come, and because of this, only an orthodox Christian can interpret Scripture properly.

This belief may sound quite strange. After all, a non-Christian could certainly read Amos and figure out as well as any Christian that God was angry with Judah for its idolatry and contempt for the poor. For Luther, however proper interpretation was less about intellectual comprehension and more about emotional movement.⁴⁹ The reception of the Holy Spirit that leads to proper interpretation is a transformative experience that leads the reader to know Christ.⁵⁰ Thus Luther could maintain (and did maintain) that any learned person could understand the Scriptures on an intellectual level, but what interpreting the Scriptures was really about was getting to know Christ.⁵¹

Luther, like Calvin, also claimed to favor the grammatical-historical reading of a text over allegorical interpretations. The study of Scripture should focus on the “simple words.” Luther believed it was obvious that God should speak to humans using simple words, not

⁴⁸ Priscilla Hayden-Roy, “Hermeneutica gloriae vs. Hermeneutica crucis: Sebastian Frank and Martin Luther on the Clarity of Scripture,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 81 (1990): 62-63.

⁴⁹ Birgit Stolt “Luther’s Translation of the Bible.” *The Lutheran Quarterly* 28 (2014): 378. This dichotomy should not be pressed too far. A sharp division between the head and the heart did not exist at the time of Luther, and is not representative of his anthropology.

⁵⁰ Rudolf Fickler, “*Ut simplicissime tractaretis scripturas*: Martin Luther as Interpreter of Scripture,” *Bangalore Theological Forum* 15 (1983): 184.

⁵¹ This is the reason Luther felt so free to create a “canon within the canon.” Scripture was valuable to the Christian inasmuch as it leads the Christian to Christ. Luther believed that some books do this better than others. The Gospels of course were useful, and many of the Pauline epistles, particularly Romans, were seen by Luther as being of chief value. He felt that other books, however, most famously James’ “epistle of straw,” were not as useful, and perhaps even detrimental to the faith. Certain books, then, received what John Flood calls a “quasi-deuterocanonical” status. Significantly for this study, Hebrews is included in this list. John Flood, “Martin Luther’s Bible Translation in its German and European Context,” in *The Bible in the Renaissance: Essays on Biblical Commentary and Translation in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century*, ed. Richard Griffiths (Aldershot: Routledge, 2001), 179.

complex allegory.⁵² Figurative interpretations are not completely absent from Luther's exegesis. When the author seemed to clearly be using metaphorical language or a literal reading led to an interpretation contrary to the faith, Luther had no issue interpreting a text figuratively.⁵³ Furthermore, as noted above, Luther's interpretation of the "grammatical-historical" sense of Scripture included much that in other periods of history would be considered allegorical. Though Luther condemns allegory and demands adherence to the "simple words," in his reading of Genesis 1 he interprets the words spoken by God as *the Word*, Jesus Christ, and God's pleasure at creation to be the Holy Spirit.⁵⁴

A third important element of Luther's biblical hermeneutic is his theory of translation. One of Luther's most enduring contributions to Christianity is his translation of the Bible. The Luther Bible was not the first translation of Scripture into the vernacular, nor even the first German Bible. Bible publishing was a big business years before Luther was even born.⁵⁵ Its significance comes from Luther's attempt to do a dynamic translation rather than a formal correspondence. Luther was one of the first biblical translators to focus more on the "sense of the text" than on a strict word to word correspondence.⁵⁶

Desiring to break the "hegemony" of the three sacred languages (Hebrew, Greek, and Latin), Luther wanted a Bible where the characters spoke like ordinary Germans. Luther had nothing against the ancient languages. He used the oldest Hebrew and Greek manuscripts he

⁵² Interestingly, as we saw in the early church chapter, it was just as obvious to Augustine that the Bible was a complicated text that required allegory.

⁵³ Fickler, "Martin Luther as Interpreter," 190. In this the former Augustinian monk sounds very Augustinian.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 192. Fickler argues that this interpretation is "no arbitrary allegory," but that Luther "confines himself here to a logical analysis of the text." This interpretation, and Calvin's interpretation of the heifer's lack of yoke, belies the claims of the reformers (and their followers) that they adhere strictly to the literal sense of the texts while the "papists" sophistically import their own ideas. If the reformers can find the Holy Trinity and Total Depravity in the texts of the Pentateuch, they are still engaging in a type of exegesis that imports Christian ideas into ancient Jewish texts. Whether this is called allegory, typology, or an "artifice of abstraction," the effect is the same. *Ibid.*, 144.

⁵⁵ Flood, "Martin Luther's Bible Translation," 45.

⁵⁶ Krause, "Theory of Bible Translation," 61.

could find in his translations. What Luther wanted was a Bible that was understandable for Germans of all classes.⁵⁷ Luther's motives for doing this were simultaneously theological and strategic. He was aware that sometimes a word by word translation obscured the meaning of the original text, and believed the meaning in the texts was more important than the specific words or word order used to express them. He was also aware that an easily understood vernacular Bible was necessary if the Bible was to supplant the pope as a source of authority.⁵⁸ *Sola scriptura* and vernacular Bibles are inextricably linked, for if people must always turn to the church or a scholar for what a text means, the text is not the only source of authority.⁵⁹

Christ Our Great High Priest

Luther's most extended treatment of Heb. 9:11-14 comes in a sermon given on the passage entitled "Christ Our Great High Priest." Luther begins the sermon by telling his audience that this passage cannot be understood in isolation. Some general idea of what the rest of Hebrews is about is a prerequisite for understanding it. Like Calvin, Luther is concerned with reading texts in their context. Luther summarizes the work as being about a contrast between the former material priesthood, and the new spiritual priesthood inaugurated by Christ. His sacrifice was spiritual, because it was offered through the Holy Spirit, and because of this we now have

⁵⁷ Flood, "Martin Luther's Bible Translation," 48.

⁵⁸ Krause, "Theory of Bible Translation," 58.

⁵⁹ Flood, "Martin Luther's Bible Translation," 49. Luther was not always consistent in translating dynamically for a number of reasons. Sometimes he did not know exactly a text meant, and thus could not translate dynamically. Stolt, "Luther's Translation," 385. He has also been accused of altering the meaning of texts through his dynamic translation. The clearest example of this is his adding the word *allein* (alone) to Rom. 3:28, suggesting we are saved *only* through faith, when neither *sola* nor *μόνος* appears in ancient versions of this text. Krause, "Theory of Bible Translation," 67-68. Luther defends its inclusion on the basis of it being good German. Stolt, "Luther's Translation," 381. Another common criticism is his translation of the greeting of Gabriel to Mary at the Annunciation, *κεχαριτωμένη* in Greek and *gratia plena* in Latin, to *du holdselige*. Given the confusion surrounding the meaning of *κεχαριτωμένη* and Luther's view on the Immaculate Conception, it is unclear if this is another example of a polemical translation. Krause believes Luther was correcting an error in the Vulgate. Krause, "Theory of Bible Translation," 67.

spiritual forgiveness, not merely the “external absolution” previously offered.⁶⁰ “External absolution,” however, is, according to Luther, precisely what the Catholic Church is offering in place of the spiritual absolution Christ has won for us. Luther firmly believed that Scripture, though written long ago, could speak to contemporary situations,⁶¹ and frequently identifies the Catholic Church with negative figures in the Bible. He later writes later in the sermon “I can make no better comparison than to say that it was the same in the old Jewish priesthood as now in the Papal priesthood.”⁶²

After briefly reflecting on this passage and its applications to contemporary debates, Luther begins an in depth analysis of some of the phrases in the passage. V. 11 contrasts the material and eternal priesthood, for while the former brought only temporal and material gains, the latter brings spiritual and eternal blessings, enjoyed now in faith and to be enjoyed fully in eternity. Like Aquinas, Luther interprets the “greater and more perfect tabernacle” as a heavenly place. Luther says the tabernacle “exists only in the sight of God” and is beyond words. Foretold in Isaiah, it is the place about which Christ said “I go and prepare a place for you” (Jn. 14:3).⁶³ Luther uses v. 12 to support his argument that we are saved by faith alone. This verse teaches us that though we sin repeatedly, the blood of Christ does not fail. Through it, we are saved “without work or merit on our part,” for “no sin is forgiven, nor the Holy Spirit given,⁶⁴ by reasons of works or merit on our part, but alone through the blood of Christ.”⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Martin Luther, “Christ Our Great High Priest,” in *Assorted Sermons by Martin Luther*, ed. and trans. Shane Rosenthal (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1909), 12.

⁶¹ Fickler, “Martin Luther as Interpreter,” 191.

⁶² Luther, “High Priest,” 13.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁴ This line again indicates that for Luther, receiving the Holy Spirit, a prerequisite for proper biblical interpretation, comes not from our own powers or abilities, but from God.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

On the Babylonish Captivity of the Church

Martin Luther's essay *On the Babylonish Captivity of the Church* provides a wealth of information about his biblical hermeneutic and his understanding of Hebrews. The tract concerns a series of liturgical debates. Should communion in both kinds be distributed to the laity? Does transubstantiation accurately describe what happens in the Eucharist? Is the Mass a sacrifice? In making his arguments, Luther also explains why he feels his biblical hermeneutic is superior to that of his opponents.

The polemical nature of this essay is evident from the title, which equates the papacy to Babylon.⁶⁶ Like Calvin, Luther is fond of attributing ill motives to his opponents, claiming that for them "names and words when transposed mean the same things and everything" and that they are "possessed by an angel of Satan." They use Scripture inconsistently and frequently read things into the passage that are not there.⁶⁷

Luther then attempts to use the debate over whether the laity should receive communion in both kinds to prove these assertions. He first rules out the use of John 6 in this debate, saying it clearly does not speak of the Eucharist, but of faith. He justifies this claim using two passages from Augustine, in which he argues that people can be saved without receiving the Eucharist, for God would not condemn infants and sick people who through no fault of their own cannot receive the sacrament. Thus when Christ said "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" he was speaking of faith, not the Eucharist.⁶⁸

The narratives that do concern the Eucharist are the Last Supper narratives in the Synoptic Gospels and 1 Corinthians. In these narratives, Luther argues, there is every indication

⁶⁶ Martin Luther, "On the Babylonish Captivity of the Church," in *First Principles of the Reformation or the Ninety-Five Theses and the Three Primary Works of Dr. Martin Luther*, ed. Henry Wace and C.A. Buchheim (London: William Clowes and Sons Ltd., 1883), 172.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 173, 175.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 176-77.

that all present both ate bread and drank from the cup. Therefore there is no basis for making any sort of a distinction here. To make exceptions is incredibly dangerous, “for in dealing with Scripture, one special exception does away with any general statement.” Thus whatever was practiced during the Last Supper should be practiced now.⁶⁹ Luther will go so far as to argue that even Paul’s epistles, though addressed to specific communities to answer specific issues, must be read in their totality as referring to the universal church.⁷⁰

Luther then moves to discussing transubstantiation, and here discusses the place of extrabiblical sources in theology. Unlike some later reformers, Luther did not hold that Scripture was the only source of theology. In fact, he found the idea that one could only do what was explicitly prescribed in Scripture ludicrous and impossible.⁷¹ Scripture is not the only source of theology, but is the only source that can make a belief binding. He argues that “that which is asserted without the support of the Scriptures, or of an approved revelation, it is permitted to hold as an opinion, but it is not necessary to belief.” This is one of the reasons Luther opposed transubstantiation. His disagreement was not so much with what the bread and wine became, but with the idea that the unbiblical explanation provided by this doctrine must be accepted as binding.⁷²

Luther also reaffirms in this section of the essay his commitment to the plain reading of Scripture. Just as extrabiblical sources cannot create new doctrine, they also should not change the way we interpret the simple words of Scripture. The Bible must be understood primarily in its “grammatical and proper signification,” and those who do differently do “violence” to the

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 181. He also, in this section, reaffirms his commitment to the plain reading of Scripture, condemning interpreters who rely on “figments” rather than the “manifest teaching” of the Bible (181).

⁷¹ Jack Pearl Lewis, “Silence of Scripture in Reformation Thought,” *Restoration Quarterly* 48 (2006): 82.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 183-84. This is not to say that Luther’s only problem with the doctrine was that it was binding. He also found it nonsensical.

text.⁷³ For this reason, Luther is also skeptical of philosophy in this essay, arguing “What if philosophy does not understand these things? The Holy Spirit is greater than Aristotle.” Luther argues that those who would use complex philosophical systems to understand the Bible should “cast away these curious enquiries; and simply adhere to the words of Christ.”⁷⁴

The final section of the essay concerns whether the Mass is a sacrifice, and Luther uses the understanding of “testament” present in Hebrews to make his case. He begins by arguing that the Mass should be stripped of the “pomp of visual things” and be simple. Furthermore, our understanding of it must be based firmly in the words of Christ as related to us in Scripture. Hebrews, for example, helps the reader understand the Mass because the “sacrament of the altar is the testament of Christ.” A testament is given by someone who is about to die, and Heb. 9:11 speaks of the death of Christ, and how he died with his own blood. A testament also assigns an inheritance, and the passage tells us that our inheritance is the “good things yet to come,” that is, remission of sin. Finally, a testament appoints heirs, and the heirs in this case are the Christian people. The Mass is a “promise of the remission of sins.” This testament was prefigured by the promises of God, and has been made clear in Christ. Faith in this testament will allow us to escape “dead works,” and lead us to “living works.” The Mass, then, should not be filled with visual adornments, but focus on the spiritual gift won for us by Christ.⁷⁵

Conclusion

Luther uses Hebrews 9:11-14 in slightly different ways than Calvin does. While Calvin almost always speaks of typologies when using this verse, Luther does not. Both, however, use the passage to discuss the proper understanding of the Mass and the Lord’s Supper. Luther also

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 186-87. Luther is not altogether opposed to reason. He lists it as one of the two things (along with the clear testimony of Scripture) that change his mind. Scripture, however, clearly has greater authority. Fickler, “Martin Luther as Interpreter,” 177.

⁷⁵ Luther, “Captivity,” 189.

uses the passage to discuss the proper understanding of priesthood. While the themes they treat are sometimes different, both make frequent use of their text in their polemics against the Catholic Church.

Luther's hermeneutic differs very little from Calvin's. Both of them express concern with wild allegorizing, favoring a contextual understanding based in the plain sense of Scripture. They also both attribute the interpretations of their opponents to demonic possession and importing foreign ideas into Scripture. In this their reading practices are similar to those of Chrysostom and Aquinas, though the latter authors were far more willing to engage in allegory occasionally. Luther's attitude towards philosophy is similar to that of Tertullian. Neither reject philosophy entirely, but are opposed to particular uses of it, and find it unnecessary and dangerous when applied to questions clearly answered in Scripture.

Matthew Henry

Despite his widespread publication and influence, there is very little scholarship on Matthew Henry. Born in Wales in 1662, both Henry and his father were nonconformist ministers who endured persecution at the hands of the government.⁷⁶ Henry was enormously popular, traveling and giving sermons all across the country. These sermons would become the basis for his *Commentary on the Whole Bible*.⁷⁷ This commentary, which was the first English commentary aimed at ordinary Christians rather than scholars or clergy, would also become immensely popular. The work has been translated into a number of languages and has been in print continuously for over three centuries.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Allan Harman, "The Legacy of Matthew Henry," *The Reformed Theological Review* 73 (2014): 181.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁷⁸ Allan Harman, "The Impact of Matthew Henry's Exposition on Eighteenth-Century Christianity," *Evangelical Quarterly* 82 (2010): 3.

The influence of Henry's commentary can be clearly seen in the work of the Wesley brothers. John Wesley recommended the commentary to his followers, and was amazed at the Henry's ability to write in a manner simultaneously deep and plainspoken. His followers were so taken with the commentary that they began to adopt literary devices present in it such as antithesis and quaint language that Wesley himself opposed.⁷⁹ Many of Charles Wesley's hymns are clearly dependent on sections from the commentary.⁸⁰ George Whitfield was also influenced by the commentary. He integrated both the insights and the literary style of it into his own sermons.⁸¹

Despite its widespread influence and publication, almost nothing has been written about the biblical hermeneutics employed by Matthew Henry or the theology present in his writings. The reason for this is unclear. Perhaps he is overshadowed by the figures he influenced such as the Wesley brothers and George Whitfield. Perhaps it is because his commentaries were aimed at ordinary Christians, not scholars or clergy. Whatever the reason, there is much to be gained from studying how Henry uses Scripture, and more research should be done concerning his writings.

Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry begins his commentary on Hebrews by discussing the controversies regarding the authority and authorship of the work. Like Calvin, he takes a hard line on its authority, suggesting it is only those "whose distempered eyes could not bear the light of it or whose errors have been confuted by it" doubt the authority of Hebrews. Its harmony with the rest of Scripture and its reception in the early churches should be evidence enough for any doubter. With regard to its authorship, Henry is more equivocal. He notes that in all of the definitively Pauline epistles, Paul mentions himself by name, but no such mention occurs in Hebrews. Though he

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁸⁰ Harman, "Legacy," 185.

⁸¹ Harman, "Impact," 10.

does not take a side, he seems receptive to the counterargument that this was done so the Hebrew people would not immediately reject the epistle. They were its intended audience, and through this work Paul hoped to convince them that the Gospel was superior to the Law.⁸²

Henry argues that Hebrews reveals many of the correspondences⁸³ between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. The division of the tabernacle, for example, represents the two aspects of the church (militant and triumphant) and the two natures of Christ (human and divine). The distance between a candle and a table for bread represents the light of Christ and love of neighbor. Sometimes, he offers two interpretations for a passage. The bread placed on that table, for example, can be interpreted either as provisions for the king of Israel, or as “the provision made in Christ for the souls of his people.”⁸⁴ Henry thus offers both a literal and typological reading of certain passages. This is the way the Old Testament is to be read for Henry. The Hebrew Bible is edifying for contemporary Christians inasmuch as it shows the hidden teachings of the Spirit, now made clear by Christ and his Gospel.⁸⁵

Henry’s interpretation of 9:11 is also based in typology. The “good things to come” are those things promised in the Old Testament that “now have come under the new.” They are the promises of Jesus to his chosen, and the promises of heaven. In heaven they will be completed in the same way that the New Testament completed the promises of the Old. Henry interprets the tabernacle as Christ’s body, which is infinitely superior to all created things. His interpretation of v. 12 is also based in types and antitypes.⁸⁶ While the high priests of old had to enter the temple annually for a temporary redemption, Jesus entered the temple “once and for all” and obtained an

⁸² Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible Volume 6*, ed. William Tong (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1828), 1569-70. He says that those who advance this argument have “well answered” the doubters.

⁸³ His word for typology

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 1634-35.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 1638.

⁸⁶ The New Testament fulfillment of an Old Testament type

“eternal redemption.” This shows the reader the infinite superiority of the antitype over the type.⁸⁷

Henry’s interpretation of v. 13-14 focuses more on soteriological concerns, although typological language is still present. After explaining the author’s *a fortiori* argument, Henry moves to a discussion of why Christ’s blood was efficacious. Firstly, his blood is efficacious because the Word took on human nature and offered himself, making a sacrifice that “could not but be propitiatory.” Secondly, Christ offered himself in obedience through the eternal Spirit.⁸⁸ Thirdly, as v. 14 states, Christ offered himself “without spot.” Thus our soul is purified from sin (a dead work) and we can now worship the living God by “the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit.”⁸⁹

Conclusion

Thematically Henry’s interpretation of this passage is quite similar to Calvin’s. Like Calvin, Henry focuses most of his commentary on how Hebrews explains the relationship between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. He also uses this text to discuss soteriology, particularly the cleansing power of Christ’s blood and the importance of the spiritual nature of the sacrifice. None of the themes Henry touches upon are particularly polemical. His commentary was likely not directed at those participating in public debates, but at everyday Christians simply seeking a greater understanding of the Bible.

Henry’s reading practices differ substantially from the methods previously discussed. Both Luther and Calvin were incredibly wary of allegory. They condemned “importers” and stressed the primacy of the plain, contextual sense of a text. Henry, on the other hand, uses allegory quite freely, in the same way as those “who speculate subtly on the details.” His

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Here interpreted to be the Holy Ghost.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 1640.

discussion of literal and typological reasons for the prescriptions of the Old Law is reminiscent of Thomas Aquinas. This practice again demonstrates that the hermeneutical shifts of the Protestant Reformation defy simplistic delineations between literal and allegorical readings. While Henry may venture farther into allegory than Calvin or Luther, all look for more in Scripture than what would today be called its literal meaning.

Ulrich Zwingli

Biblical Hermeneutic

Many of the important points in Ulrich Zwingli's biblical hermeneutic can be seen in the ways he broke with the traditions of previous biblical interpretation. Zwingli gained notoriety early in his career for a series in which he read the Gospel of Matthew to his congregation sequentially. While today this seems uncontroversial, this reading challenged the way the Catholic Church wanted the laity to hear the Scriptures. Rather than hearing small sections of them mixed with readings from other books, Zwingli's parishioners were for the first time hearing a book sequentially in its entirety. His congregation loved it. Rome did not.⁹⁰

This shift meant the stories and teaching contained in Matthew were being read more in the context of the rest of Matthew and less in the context set by the Catholic Church. According to Peter Opitz, the absolute and unparalleled centrality of Scripture was the focal point of Zwingli's reformation.⁹¹ To suggest that the Catholic Church or any other institution had authority over Scripture was not just incorrect, but blasphemous.⁹² Zwingli's sequential reading was a simple but powerful way to diminish the influence of the Catholic Church in the way

⁹⁰ Iren L. Snively Jr., "Zwingli, Froschauer, and the Word of God in Print," *Journal of Religious and Theological Information* 3 (2000): 68.

⁹¹ Peter Opitz, "The Authority of the Church in the Early Zurich Reformation (1522-1540)," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 5 (2011): 297.

⁹² William Peter Stephens, "Authority in Zwingli in the First and Second Disputations," *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 1 (1999): 57.

people read Scripture. He saw this act as one of liberation. Scripture was liberated from a context imposed on it by the church, and the readers were free to more directly encounter the living God spoken of in its pages.⁹³

Zwingli also broke with previous traditions of interpretation in his views on conciliar and patristic authority. The conflict again stems from the absolute centrality of Scripture for Zwingli. Councils do not and cannot determine the proper interpretation of Scripture. There is nothing intrinsic to them that inevitably produces a correct interpretation. In making this point, Zwingli is drawing not only on his convictions regarding the centrality of Scripture, but on his knowledge of history. Councils have been inconsistent, proving themselves capable of error. For Zwingli, the size and scope of councils were irrelevant. What mattered was if they accurately read Scripture.⁹⁴

Zwingli's use of patristic texts was similar. Their readings of Scripture hold no authority on their own, and they are sometimes incorrect. He does cite them in his writings, but they are more rhetorical effect than source material. If Zwingli can prove that his views align with those of the Church Fathers, then those who would call him heretical are calling the Fathers heretical as well.⁹⁵ There is, for Zwingli, no human person or institution whose interpretation of Scripture is intrinsically infallible. Proper interpretation is a gift that comes from trusting and receiving the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is what guarantees right reading of the Bible, and the Spirit, Zwingli argues, is not limited to any person or group, but comes to any place "where two or three are gathered in my name."⁹⁶

⁹³ Opitz, "Authority of the Church," 297.

⁹⁴ Stephens, "Authority in Zwingli," 58.

⁹⁵ William Peter Stephens, "Confessing the Faith: the Starting Point for Zwingli and Bullinger," *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 8 (2006): 69.

⁹⁶ Stephens, "Authority in Zwingli," 62. Matthew 18:20.

A third break Zwingli made with the Roman Catholicism, and even some of his fellow reformers, was his view on issues where Scripture was silent. Zwingli claimed that because of the absolute centrality of the Bible, Scripture was the only permissible source of authority.⁹⁷ This set him apart from some other reformers, including Martin Luther. Luther held that it was not desirable or even possible to adhere only to what the Bible said. Scripture, for him, had to be the basis of all that was binding, but not all that was permissible. Zwingli's stated position (which his actions did not always match)⁹⁸ represented an even more radical movement towards sole dependence on the Bible.

Finally, Zwingli also broke with the tradition of reading Scripture in the context of medieval theology and philosophy. This break, however, should not be reduced to a simple rejection of them. Zwingli certainly found them to be less useful than Scripture, and in fact sometimes impeded one's understanding of Scripture. He writes that the Bible became far more intelligible to him when he stopped trying to understand it through the lens of theologies, philosophies, and commentaries, and simply asked God for help.⁹⁹ Despite his cautions, philosophical reasoning does occasionally appear in his writings.¹⁰⁰ Philosophy should be seen less as something detrimental, and more as something unnecessary. Right understanding of Scripture comes in Zwingli's theology not from the effort or learning of the interpreter, but from the Holy Spirit. The words of Scripture have an intrinsic moving power that requires no

⁹⁷ Lewis, "Silence of Scripture," 74.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 77. Many have argued that regardless of Zwingli's statements on using nothing besides Scripture, the actions and beliefs of his church suggest a more nuanced position. Scripture does not lay out precise instructions for everything, and sometimes it is impossible to fulfill its commands without doing something not mentioned explicitly in Scripture. The Bible commands commemoration of the Lord's Supper, for example, but does not say what kind of bread should be used in doing so. On matters such as these, Zwingli let his congregation decide amongst themselves, with the only guideline being that their decision not contradict Scripture or cause scandal. In fairness to Zwingli, his position on how to make decisions on matters Scripture is silent is itself scriptural (1 Corinthians 8). *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Opitz, "Authority of the Church," 298.

¹⁰⁰ Stephens, "Confessing the Faith," 70. Zwingli argues for the necessity of an unmoved mover in *Exposition of Faith*, for example.

interpretation.¹⁰¹ Philosophy may be useful in making arguments, but is unnecessary in interpreting Scripture.

Acts of the First Zurich Disputation

On January 23rd, 1523, a debate took place before the city council of Zurich between Ulrich Zwingli and John Faber, a Vicar General, to decide which version of Christianity the council would support. A transcript of this debate was published in 1901 as part of a collection of Zwingli's works translated by Lawrence McLouth and edited by Samuel Macauley Jackson, both professors at New York University at the time. The record of this debate is composed primarily of three sources, with the first being seen as most authoritative. The sources are an account produced from memory by a schoolmaster in Zurich, edited by Zwingli, an account produced by John Faber, and a satirical account written in response to Faber's. While the footnotes of the collection make clear the bias present in Faber's version, they do not mention any possibility of bias in the version edited by Zwingli.¹⁰²

Zwingli and the Vicar debate a number of topics, eventually coming to whether or not the Mass is a sacrifice. Zwingli chides the Vicar, asking how he can claim Scripture teaches the Mass is a sacrifice when St. Paul clearly states in Hebrews 9:12 that "Christ not more than once was sacrificed." Indeed this was a crucial element of his sacrifice, for it was precisely the fact that the sacrifice need not be repeated that distinguished it from the offerings made by the high

¹⁰¹ Opitz, "Authority of the Church," 301.

¹⁰² Ulrich Zwingli, "The Acts of the First Zurich Disputation, January 1523," in *Selected Works of Ulrich Zwingli (1481-1531): The Reformer of German Switzerland*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson, trans. Lawrence McLouth and Henry Preble. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1901), 40-41. Fortunately, while this bias limits the utility of the account in determining what actually happened, its utility in studying Zwingli's biblical hermeneutic is not similarly limited. In fact, his opportunity to edit the material may make it an even more reliable indicator of his hermeneutic than a transcript of the debate would have been.

priest in the Old Testament. Only an “unreasonable” person could contradict such a clear passage. Those that do maintain it, Zwingli argues, do so purely out of self-interest.¹⁰³

The Vicar proceeds to accept the challenge, and says he will debate Zwingli on this topic before a university. Zwingli declares himself ready to debate, but counters that only the Scriptures, not any professor at a university, nor any other human being, must be the judge. The Vicar calls this a “queer affair,” pointing out that in many other arenas people appeal to an impartial judge when there is a dispute. Zwingli answers that while this may be true regarding earthly affairs, for heavenly matters there can be no judge but “the Spirit of God speaking from the Scriptures.”¹⁰⁴

The Vicar replies to this by pointing out that Scripture requires a judge to be interpreted consistently. In Matthew, for example, Christ both claims to “be with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt. 28:20) while in another place saying “you will not always have me” (Mt. 26:11). Zwingli answers “The Spirit of God decided itself from the Scriptures that the Lord is speaking of two kinds of presences.” After detailing the differences between these two presences, Zwingli claims “one needs no other judge besides the divine Scriptures; the only trouble is that we do not search and read them with entire earnestness.”¹⁰⁵

Zwingli is here challenged by a member of the audience, who claims that while that is his judgment of the passage, other people will come to other judgements, and one must always decide which meaning is correct. Zwingli responds that his interpretation is no different “than it is interpreted by means of the Spirit of God.” Humans cannot understand such things, and thus cannot act as judge. Faber was willing to allow the primacy of Scripture, but argued that there must be a judge to settle disputes. The traditions of the universal church, particularly as

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 101-02.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 102-03.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 103-04.

presented in ecumenical councils, should be the judge of competing interpretations.¹⁰⁶ Without such councils, the Vicar argues, the heresies of Arius and Sabelius would still persist. Zwingli counters that in those councils the Fathers did no more than show that Scripture clearly contradicted the heretics' positions, arguing "the Scriptures interpreted the Scriptures, not the fathers the Scriptures," and later "the Scriptures and not they, were the judges."¹⁰⁷

Furthermore, this capacity is not only available to especially holy men like the Fathers, but to all good Christians, for diligent and spiritual readers of the Bible cannot help but uncover the truth. The multiplicity of interpretations that existed in Zwingli's day were not caused by the difficulty of the passages or legitimate disagreement, but corruption and greed. Those that were given the ability to judge Scripture were corrupted by their power and the men that then held those positions only had the semblance of wisdom, and "knew naught concerning the right Spirit of God or the Scriptures."¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

Thematically, Zwingli uses Hebrews for the same purpose as Luther and Calvin. Like them, Zwingli finds that the emphasis on the eternal redemption earned by Christ and the "once and for all" nature of his sacrifice preclude the possibility of the Mass being a true sacrifice. His biblical hermeneutic is also similar. Like Luther, Zwingli feels that humans are utterly incapable of interpreting the Scriptures on their own. Proper interpretation comes not from human understanding, but from the Spirit. Different interpretations, therefore, are evidence that the Spirit is not in his opponents, and that they are motivated by nefarious purposes.

¹⁰⁶ Opitz, "Authority of the Church," 58.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 106. Zwingli here either ignores or is unaware of the position of Tertullian, who never would have claimed arguments from Scripture could settle a dispute between the orthodox and heretics. The *regula fidei* was necessary to settle disputes.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

The Council of Trent

Finding texts where Catholics of this era used Heb. 9:11-14 is significantly more difficult than finding texts from their Protestant counterparts. This is not because Catholics did not use this text. Thomas Cajetan, a Dominican cardinal, and Cornelius a Lapide, a Jesuit priest, both wrote historically significant commentaries on Hebrews. Cajetan was one of the first figures since the early church to argue against the Pauline authorship of Hebrews, and unlike other commentators who later acknowledged this, Cajetan felt this stripped the work of its authority.¹⁰⁹ Cornelius a Lapide, writing after the Council of Trent, demonstrates what Catholic biblical interpretation looked like after the council. His commentary is based on the Vulgate, but did make use of Greek and Hebrew. He also utilized the four senses of Scripture rejected by many of the reformers.¹¹⁰ Despite their importance, these works are not easily accessible to the modern reader. Many of Lapide's commentaries, including his commentary on Hebrews, have not been translated from Latin, and Cajetan's commentaries, in addition to not having been translated, are extremely difficult to find.¹¹¹ Given the ease with which even relatively obscure works of relatively obscure Protestant reformers can be found in English, this appears to represent a bias in the scholarship of this era.

Biblical Hermeneutic

Given the importance of Scripture to the Protestant Reformation, articulating the Catholic Church's beliefs on Scripture was an important part of the council called in response to it. The differences between the Catholics and the Protestants concerning Scripture dealt less with how to

¹⁰⁹ Craig Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 39.

¹¹⁰ Koester, *Hebrews*, 40.

¹¹¹ Though written over one hundred years ago, these words of Robert Jenkins still hold true: "The Commentaries of Cajetan are scarce and not easily produced, and they are moreover entombed in large folios, a circumstance which renders them inaccessible to the general reader." Robert Jenkins, *Pre-Tridentine Doctrine* (London: David Nott, 1891), xi.

read Scripture, and more with what was Scripture, who could read it, and what (if anything) it should be read with. These matters were far more controversial than questions about particular methods of interpretation.

Perhaps the most fundamental debate was what exactly constituted Scripture. Luther found certain books much more helpful in leading the reader to Christ than others. Works that were simply unhelpful, such as Hebrews and James, would ultimately get to remain in Luther's canon. The deuterocanonical (or Apocryphal) books, on the other hand, were not so lucky. Luther and the other reformers rejected the deuterocanonical books found in the Septuagint but not the Masoretic Text. John O'Malley writes in *Trent: What Happened at the Council* that Trent's decision on the deuterocanonical books was the first of many that were misinterpreted following the council. The council prelate came to the decision that given the disputes concerning the deuterocanon in the early church, it would be improper for the council to attempt to resolve the matter. The text they produced, however, gave the impression that they unambiguously endorsed placing the deuterocanon on the same level as the rest of the Bible, and this was the interpretation that would prevail.¹¹²

The Reformation also raised questions about which translations of Scripture should be used. The growing popularity of philology and ancient languages as well as the burgeoning printing industry presented two related problems for Vulgate so long used by the Catholic Church. Scholars were discovering that the Vulgate did not always accurately reflect the oldest Greek and Hebrew manuscripts. Some of these same scholars were producing vernacular editions of the Bible, and through the print industry these could be easily distributed to lay Christians.¹¹³ Those present at Trent were sharply divided over whether these were problems.

¹¹² John O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2013), 91-92.

¹¹³ Robert McNally, "The Council of Trent and Vernacular Bibles," *Theological Studies* 27 (1966): 206.

Many of the bishops, having been trained in ancient languages, were well aware that the Vulgate had issues, but were concerned about how and by whom it should be corrected.¹¹⁴ The council endorsed the Vulgate as the reliable version while also endorsing its revision. Although the council did not condemn other Latin translations or the use of the Greek and Hebrew manuscripts, the use of these would come to be frowned upon.¹¹⁵

The permissibility of vernacular Bibles was even more contentious. Some vigorously condemned vernacular Bibles as the root of all heresy. They gave the laity and women, groups never meant to interpret Scripture, unfiltered access to the sacred texts. Others found the vernacular Bibles to be a wonderful innovation, seeing no sense in separating the people from Scripture.¹¹⁶ Political considerations were in play as well. European governments had already made decisions about whether to ban or permit the publishing of vernacular Bibles. Thus whether Trent rejected or endorsed their use, they would be at odds with several European governments. For these reasons, the council declined to pass over the issue of silence.¹¹⁷

Another contentious debate concerned the relationship between Scripture and tradition. Even within the Catholic Church there was not broad agreement on this, in no small part because there was not broad agreement over what exactly tradition was. As seen in the previous chapter, Thomas Aquinas saw tradition as nothing more than the church's authoritative reflection on the meaning of Scripture. Even before Aquinas, however, works such as *Sic et not* by Peter Abelard had introduced the reality that there were tensions in the teachings of the church that had to be resolved. By the time of Trent, the Catholic Church was divided on this issue. Some maintained a unity between the two, while others argued that tradition was a separate collection of teachings,

¹¹⁴ O'Malley, *Trent*, 94.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 98 and R. Gerald Hobbs, "Reading the Old Testament after Trent: Cardinal Robert Bellarmine and his Italian Predecessors on Psalm IV," *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 12 (2010): 232.

¹¹⁶ McNally, "Vernacular Bibles," 209, 215.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 213.

still authoritative, but not found in Scripture. There were also debates about what exactly constituted tradition, with some arguing traditions could come only from the apostles and others arguing they could come from any point in the church's history.¹¹⁸

While the disagreements made producing a unified position on this issue difficult, this was not a matter the council could pass over in silence. The council "clearly postulated two media" by which we receive sacred revelation, arguing that the teachings of Christ were passed down both in books and "unwritten traditions." The council also ruled that these traditions were apostolic in origin and practiced by the universal church. On other matters the council's decree is ambiguous. Left unanswered, for example, is whether Scripture alone is sufficient for salvation.¹¹⁹

On the Institution of the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass

Discussion about the Mass as sacrifice came in the third meeting of the Council of Trent. The introduction to this session states that its purpose is to correct the "errors and heresies" concerning the Eucharist.¹²⁰ Hebrews is used from the beginning. The authors discuss the "testimony of the apostle Paul" concerning the Levitical priesthood and its insufficiency.¹²¹ They proceed to follow the argument made in the work, making uses of the themes present in Heb. 9:12. The Levitical priesthood was imperfect, so the Father sent his Son, Jesus Christ, who offered himself once, to obtain an eternal redemption by his death. The Church, his Spouse, does not profane this sacrifice, but is a visual sign of this sacrifice. Though the "bloody" sacrifice was accomplished but once, this visual sacrifice directs the memory of humans to that bloody

¹¹⁸ Richard Baepler, "Scripture and Tradition in the Council of Trent," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 31 (1960): 347-349.

¹¹⁹ O'Malley, *Trent*, 97.

¹²⁰ H.J. Schroeder, trans, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (St. Louis: B Herder Book Co., 1960), 144.

¹²¹ Elsewhere Trent also lists Hebrews as being within the Pauline corpus. Pauline authorship was the dominant opinion within the Catholic world at this time. Koester, *Hebrews*, 39.

sacrifice. Furthermore, the “salutary effects” won by this sacrifice continue to effect forgiveness of sin. This sacrifice, in which Christ offered up his body and blood, is commemorated, per Christ’s command, by priests, successors of the apostles, in the Eucharist.¹²²

The second chapter of the session elaborates on this process and responds to the objections of the reformers who felt the Eucharist profaned the sacrifice of Christ. Again drawing on the language of Hebrews 9:12, the council affirms that Jesus “once offered himself in a bloody manner upon the altar of the cross.” This sacrifice is the source of all mercy, grace, and forgiveness. Its fruits, however, are obtained through the unbloody sacrifice of the Eucharist. “So far is the latter (the Eucharist),” the council adds as a rejoinder, “...from derogating in any way the former (the crucifixion).” The Eucharist is not a re-sacrifice of Christ, but a way of accessing the fruits of it and purifying the faithful.¹²³

Conclusion

Thematically, Trent uses Hebrews to address the same issues as the reformers. This cannot come as a surprise, as the reason for the council’s calling was to rebut their claims. Both Luther and Calvin used this passage from Hebrews to condemn the Catholic understanding of the Mass as a sacrifice. Ironically, Trent’s interpretation of the verse does not differ substantially from the reformers’ interpretations. What is different is how they understand the Mass. The reformers interpret the Mass as a repeating of a sacrifice that cannot be repeated, while Trent interprets the sacrifice as distinct but related Christ’s singular sacrifice on the cross.

There exists no sharp division between how Protestants and Catholics interpret Heb. 9:11-14, despite the text’s frequent polemical use in works on the priesthood, the intercession of the saints, and the Mass as sacrifice. Most everyone who interpreted the passage in this era found

¹²² Schroeder, *Trent*, 144-45.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 145-46.

it to be about the insufficiency of the Old Law and the uniqueness of Christ's sacrifice. The differences come in how they understand the contemporary issues to which this verse is applied. This would seem to gainsay the predictions of Catholics who feared that divorcing Scripture from tradition and ecclesial authority would produce wildly different interpretations. As the years passed, however, enormous differences would emerge.

Conclusion

The Reformation was an era of new divisions and new issues for Christianity. Though there were many areas of disagreement, Scripture was perhaps the fiercest battlefield. Catholics and Protestants came to disagree over what books belonged in the Bible, what language the Bible should be read in, what manuscripts were authoritative, what the role and nature of tradition was, and many other issues. Nor was there even agreement within Catholicism or Protestantism about these issues. Luther and Zwingli disagreed over how to handle the issues on which Scripture was silent. Catholics disagreed, even after Trent, about the permissibility of vernacular Bibles. Foundational beliefs about the foundation of Christianity were being challenged.

Ironically, however, in terms of how sacred texts were interpreted, there is a large degree of agreement between Catholics and Protestants and continuity between this period and the past. While Protestants inveighed against the allegorizing of the Catholics, they practiced something very similar. The style of "literal" interpretation they practiced had room for certain kinds of spiritual readings, and was in many ways similar to the reading practices of Aquinas and Chrysostom. Furthermore, both Catholics and Protestants saw Scripture as a divinely inspired text where the reader encountered God. Whatever they believed about which texts qualified as Scripture, and if traditions or a church should mediate this encounter, they interpreted their texts

as sacred texts, just as all Christians up to this point have. This fundamental point, however, would soon be changing.

CHAPTER 5: THE MODERN PERIOD

Introduction

The intellectual and political developments that followed the Reformation would present a profound challenge to Christianity. The development of Enlightenment led to radical reinterpretations of almost every part of Christianity, particularly biblical interpretation. Western Christendom went from fractured to destroyed as European governments and peoples became increasingly secular. Missionary efforts turned Christianity into a truly global faith. This world church was forced to adapt to new ideological climates, new geographical locations, and new socio-political contexts. In this chapter, I will look at the development of the historical-critical method and its use in the interpretation of Heb. 9:11-14, as well as how newer theologies developed by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and Gustavo Gutiérrez address this passage, and biblical interpretation more generally.

The Historical-Critical Method

History

The principles of historical criticism represent a sharp break from previous methods of interpretation. Almost all previous interpretation was done canonically. One book of the Bible could be used to elucidate something unclear in another. All scholarship took place in the context of an ecclesial community, and interpretations were used to create theologies and guide congregations. After all, for everyone thus far studied, Scripture was the inspired word of God, and the place where Christians encountered their salvation. These beliefs naturally influenced the methods of biblical interpretation that were employed. The historical-critical method would sideline or eliminate all of these presuppositions.

Despite the sharp break, the principles of this method did come out of nowhere. Scholars such as William Baird and Werner Georg Kümmel have demonstrated a link between the biblical hermeneutics of certain Protestant theologians, particularly Martin Luther, and the beginnings of critical biblical scholarship. For Protestants in this period, the Bible was an absolute and central authority.¹ The Bible had been extracted from the suffocating grasp of the Catholic Church, and was finally allowed to “speak” for itself. Authorities extrinsic to Scripture were rejected, and only one sense, the literal/historical, was seen as valid.² The Catholic Church’s reaffirmation of the authority of ecclesial traditions at Trent further spurred Protestant authors to find new ways to understand the Bible as the sole source of authority in Christianity.³

Convinced both of the unique authority of the Bible and of the primacy of literal sense of Scripture, many Christians sought to gain a better understanding of the historical circumstances of its authors and the transmission of its texts. Initially, most interpreters came to conclusions almost entirely consistent with earlier orthodoxies, but used a more historical methodology. Hugo Grotius, for example, conducted a study of the New Testament “marked by broad philological and historical leaning” in which he maintained the traditional chronology of the four Gospels and interpreted Jesus’ miracles as historical events.⁴ Similarly, Anglican priest John Lightfoot made unparalleled use of rabbinic sources in works on the New Testament that were

¹ William Baird, *History of New Testament Research: From Deism to Tübingen* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 3.

² Werner Georg Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of its Problems*, trans. S. MacLean Gilmour and Howard Clark Kee (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 21-22. As we saw in the previous chapter, the “literal” sense of the reformers actually included a fair amount of typology and allegory. Regardless, simply claiming to adhere to a literal/historical sense, regardless of whether or not this was actually the case, helped move conversation surrounding biblical scholarship in a historical direction.

³ *Ibid.*, 27. Luther also foreshadowed the arguments of historical-critical scholars in his acknowledgement of theological diversity in the New Testament. He considered Hebrews and James deuterocanonical because he felt their teachings contradicted the message of Paul and the Gospels. This practice was not widely adopted, however, nor did Luther pursue the theological implications of this diversity of opinion. For this reason, making a connection between Luther’s actions and the arguments of later scholars is more difficult. *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴ Baird, *New Testament*, 10-11.

largely in line with traditional teaching.⁵ Richard Simon, a Catholic priest from France, is a particularly intriguing example. Simon was one of the first figures to engage in a truly critical and historical study of the transmission of the biblical manuscripts, and was intimately aware of the difficulties in translating these texts. He felt that the variety of manuscripts in existence and the difficulties involved in translating the Bible were arguments for the authority of the Catholic Church. Interpreting the Bible was emphatically *not* a simple endeavor that would be clear to anyone with a pure heart. Institutions and traditions were required to preserve proper interpretations.⁶

These scholars represent a transition period between premodern biblical interpretation and the historical-critical method. For the most part, their findings were in line with orthodoxy, although some, particularly Simon, encountered strong ecclesial pushback. Their difference from previous interpreters was in their methods. They made use of philology, textual criticism, and historical context on an unprecedented scale.⁷ They also represent a transition period between different views on divine inspiration. Hugo Grotius argued that the reliability of the Bible was based in the character of its human authors, not divine inspiration.⁸ Richard Simon held that those who added vowels to the Masoretic Text were not inspired.⁹ Jean Le Clerc, a contemporary of Simon's, felt that while the Bible was generally reliable, its contradictions prevent us from calling it divinely inspired.¹⁰ Interpretations at this point in time had not changed much, but methods and presuppositions were changing radically.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶ Kümmel, *Investigation*, 40-41.

⁷ They were not, of course, the first to use these methods. Aquinas and Calvin, among others, compared biblical manuscripts, and figures such as Jerome made use of philology. What separates these figures is their consistent application of these methods.

⁸ Baird, *New Testament*, 8.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

In time, however, interpretations changed too. The advances of the Scientific Revolution encouraged other fields to adopt a scientific framework as well.¹¹ Combined with a rising Deism characterized by a desire for rational thought and a rejection of the supernatural,¹² there now existed an ideological climate in which the tools of historical criticism could bear fruit. Readers came to focus almost entirely on the ethical teachings of Jesus, cutting out (sometimes literally) the parts of the Bible that seemed to counter his teachings or spoke of supernatural events.¹³ While authors in the Reformation speculated that medieval authorities had corrupted the true message of Jesus, authors in this era speculated that even the apostles may have misunderstood Jesus.¹⁴ The desire to be scientific and rational, coupled with rapidly shifting orthodoxies, led Christians to study biblical texts in a fundamentally new way. The Bible came to be studied the same way other historical documents were studied,¹⁵ and the only purpose of biblical criticism was to discover the author's purpose.¹⁶

Background Issues

The authorship of Hebrews is an example of a topic where historical-critical study led to a broad change in biblical interpretation. While doubts about Pauline authorship of Hebrews preceded historical-critical scholarship, only after the method's coming did the opinion become nearly universal among scholars. While Frank Matera exaggerates in saying that there is "unanimous" agreement that Paul did not write Hebrews, the creative arguments of Origen and

¹¹ William Baird, introduction to *History of New Testament Research: From Deism to Tübingen* by William Baird (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), xiii.

¹² Kümmel, *Investigation*, 51.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁵ Baird, *New Testament*, 3.

¹⁶ Kümmel, *Investigation*, 108. Other authors, as we have seen, called for a nearly-exclusive focus on the author's intent. What distinguishes this period is that this was also the end point of the investigation. Premodern authors sought to use that intent in theological study. If the intent seemed inconsistent with the faith or factually incorrect, there was an effort to harmonize it or find a different reading. In historical-critical work, however, finding the author's intent was the end goal of study, and whether or not the author was correct was irrelevant.

Clement in defense of Pauline authorship have been rejected by almost all biblical scholars.¹⁷

Who did write Hebrews is still a matter of debate. Luther suggested Apollos, a choice that has appealed to more recent commentators such as J.H. Davies. Acts describes Apollos as being eloquent and part of the Alexandrian school of thought, characteristics shared by Hebrews.¹⁸

Barnabas, first suggested by Tertullian, has also been a popular choice.¹⁹ Some scholars, such as Alfred von Harnack and more recently Ruth Hoppin, have made the argument that Hebrews was written by a woman, most likely Priscilla.²⁰ Many commentators, including Harold Attridge²¹ and Alan Mitchell,²² decline to take a position on the work's authorship. They are willing to rule certain figures out, but believe there is not sufficient evidence to take a positive position.

Historical-critical scholars have also questioned traditional ideas about the purpose of Hebrews. There is general agreement amongst both modern and premodern scholars that the purpose of this work is to demonstrate a superiority. While authors speak variably of the superiority of Christ,²³ the superiority of the new covenant,²⁴ and the superiority of the whole Christian religion,²⁵ these are not sharply delineated categories, but matters of emphasis. What exactly this message of superiority was intended to do, however, is a subject of great debate.

¹⁷ Frank Matera, *New Testament Theology: Exploring Diversity and Unity* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2007), 353.

¹⁸ J.H. Davies, *The Cambridge Biblical Commentary on the New English Bible: A Letter to the Hebrews* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 10-11.

¹⁹ Alan Mitchell, *Sacra Pagina: Hebrews*, ed. Daniel Harrington, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007), 4.

²⁰ Ruth Hoppin, "The Epistle to the Hebrews is Priscilla's Letter" in *A Feminist Companion to the Catholic Epistles and Hebrews*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Maria Mayo Robbins (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 147. Hoppin bases her assertion that the author is female in the unique sort of anonymity this work has (149) and its "womanly concerns" (156-57). On the basis of an early dating, she also argues that the author must be mentioned in Scripture, and sees Priscilla as by far the best candidate (170).

²¹ Harold Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. Helmut Koester (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 5.

²² Mitchell, *Sacra Pagina*, 5-6.

²³ Juan Carlos Pizarro, "Acceso al santuario celestial por la sangre de Cristo," *Davar Logos* 5 (2006): 43. Also Thomas Aquinas.

²⁴ Roger Omanson, "A Superior Covenant: Hebrews 8:1-10:18," *Review and Expositor* 82 (1985): 361. Walter Brooks, "The Perpetuity of Christ's Sacrifice in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 89 (1970): 205. Michael Martin and Jason Whitlark, "The Encomiastic Topics of Syncretism as the Key to the Structure and Argument of Hebrews," *New Testament Studies* 57 (2011): Hoppin, "Priscilla's Letter," 152. John Calvin and Matthew Henry.

²⁵ Davies, *Cambridge Biblical Commentary*, 3.

Early commentators, including whoever gave this work the inscription “to the Hebrews,” believed the work had been written to convince the Hebrew people that Jesus was the fulfillment of Judaism.²⁶ More recently, commentators have argued that it was written to Jewish Christians, or Christians of Jewish ancestry.²⁷ Others have dismissed the idea that the audience was Jewish in any way, for the author does not speak of a conversion *back* to Judaism.²⁸ Attridge has argued that the community to whom Hebrews was written need not be Jewish for typological arguments to be effective. The point of the work, Attridge suggests, is not to argue specifically against Judaism, but to convince a community wavering in its commitment and fearing persecution that Christ was worthy of renewed devotion. The comparison of covenants is simply a tool used to make this argument.²⁹

Hebrews 9:11-14

While historical critical exegetes introduced some new ideas concerning the interpretation of their passage, most interpretations have some continuity with earlier opinions. On the general purpose of the passage, exegetes are largely (but not entirely)³⁰ consistent with their premodern counterparts. The passage serves to explicate a comparison between the Day of Atonement rituals and the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.³¹ The differences come in exactly what kind of parallels are being made.

²⁶ The title of the work was not original, but given to it at a later date. Davies, *Cambridge Biblical Commentary*, 3.

²⁷ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans, 2012), 9. Hoppin, “Priscilla’s Letter,” 151. Brooks, “The Perpetuity of Christ’s Sacrifice,” 205.

²⁸ Davies, *Cambridge Biblical Commentary*, 5-6.

²⁹ Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 13.

³⁰ Felix Cortez, “From the Holy to the Most Holy Place: The Period of Hebrews 9:6-10 and the Day of Atonement as a Metaphor of Transition,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125 (2006): 529. Cortez suggests that this passage does not set up a typology between Christ’s death and the Day of Atonement ritual, but is instead a parable about the transition between the old and new covenants.

³¹ Steve Stanley, “Hebrews 9:6-10: The ‘Parable’ of the Tabernacle,” *Novum Testamentum* 37 (1995): 399. Albert Vanhoye, *A Different Priest: The Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. Leo Arnold (Miami: Convivium Press, 2011), 261. Omanson, “A Superior Covenant,” 361.

The first source of disagreement in the passage is whether the ἀγαθῶν (good things) have arrived yet. Some manuscripts describe them as γενομένων (having come), while others describe them as μελλόντων (about/yet to come). While most of the commentators and theologians previously studied have opted for the latter manuscript tradition, today the former is almost unanimously favored in biblical scholarship. The New Revised Standard Version, English Standard Version, and New American Bible, while differing in their precise wording, all indicate that the good things have already come, and this translation is favored by almost all commentators.³² They argue that γενομένων is better attested in ancient manuscripts, and better fits the author's theology. Vanhoye favors μελλόντων, but the arguments he uses in its favor make the difference smaller than it appears. He argues that the author of Hebrews elsewhere uses this designation to speak of Messianic things, which by their very nature have partially come into being but also have an eschatological element.³³ Thus even in a translation that describes the good things as "to come," in some sense the good things already have come.

What exactly the ἀγαθῶν are is also debated. Most commentators connect the ἀγαθῶν with something mentioned elsewhere in the text. Vanhoye argues they are the eternal redemption spoken of in the next verse.³⁴ Davies and Mitchell both interpret them as the benefits of the new covenant. Davies identifies these benefits as access to God, perfection, and Sabbath rest,³⁵ while Mitchell identifies them as eternal redemption, purification of conscience, and salvation. Attridge writes that they are what was foreshadowed by the Law without listing

³² Omanson, "A Superior Covenant": 365. Davies, *Cambridge Biblical Commentary*, 86. Mitchell, *Sacra Pagina*, 181. Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 244.

³³ Vanhoye, *A Different Priest*, 272.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 261-62.

³⁵ Davies, *Cambridge Biblical Commentary*, 86-87.

specifically what they are.³⁶ While these interpretations are largely similar, others take a different position entirely. Sebastian Fuhrmann argues that these verses should be interpreted christologically, not soteriologically. They refer not to anything we obtain because of Christ's sacrifice, but the perfection that Christ earned through suffering.³⁷

The most perplexing element in 9:11 is doubtless what the σκηνῆς οὐ χειροποιήτου, τοῦτ' ἔστιν οὐ ταύτης τῆς κτίσεως (tent/tabernacle not made with human hands, that is, not of this creation) is. As we have seen, some authors, such as Chrysostom, read σκηνή allegorically, and interpreted it as Christ's human body. Others, such as Luther, interpreted it as a place in heaven. Today the former interpretation has largely fallen out of favor among scholars, although Vanhoye again stands as an exception. Similar to Calvin, Vanhoye qualifies the previous interpretations, seeing the σκηνή not simply as the body of Christ, but the resurrected and glorified body of Christ, first fruit of the new creation.³⁸ Most other exegetes base their interpretation in the Yom Kippur typology being used in this chapter. There is still debate, however, over what exactly the σκηνή represents. Some interpret it to be heaven itself,³⁹ while others argue that the author envisions a structure in heaven similar to the earthly temple, and the σκηνή is the outer sanctuary.⁴⁰

A closely related issue, particularly for those who favor maintaining the Yom Kippur imagery as closely as possible, is how to translate τὰ ἅγια. τὰ ἅγια is entered διὰ (through)

³⁶ Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 245.

³⁷ Sebastian Fuhrmann, "Christ Grown into Perfection," *Biblica* 89 (2008): 97-99.

³⁸ Albert Vanhoye, "«Par la tente plus grande et plus parfait...» (He, 9,11)," *Biblica* 46 (1965): 28.

³⁹ Kenneth Schenck, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 145. Schenck qualifies this by noting that while this is what the term most nearly means, we should be cautious about trying to assign one meaning to an intentionally ambiguous metaphor.

⁴⁰ Omanson, "A Superior Covenant," 365. Carlos Pizarro, "Acceso al santuario," 49. Brooks, "The Perpetuity of Christ's Sacrifice," 210. Mitchell, *Sacra Pagina*, 181.

the σικηνή. Debate exists over whether διὰ should be understood here in an instrumental sense (Christ entered by means of) or in a locational sense (Christ entered by going through). Those that favor an allegorical interpretation tend to favor the instrumental sense, while those that favor interpreting the tent as part of heaven favor the locational sense. Also unclear is what exactly τὰ ἅγια is. The Yom Kippur imagery suggests τὰ ἅγια would be the Holy of Holies, and this is how many have translated it.⁴¹ Carl Cosaert argues against this interpretation, noting that while it does correspond to the Day of Atonement ritual, τὰ ἅγια is never used in the Septuagint, Josephus, Philo, or any other extant extrabiblical source to refer to the Holy of Holies. The word has many different referents, but Holy of Holies is not one of them.⁴²

The final phrase whose meaning is disputed in this passage is the πνεύματος αἰωνίου (eternal spirit) through which Christ's sacrifice is offered. This phrase, a hapax, is likely the section of this passage about which there is the least consensus. Interpretations can be roughly divided between those who believe that the πνεύματος αἰωνίου refers to the spirit of Jesus, and those who argue it refers to the Spirit of God.⁴³ F.F. Bruce, like several of the reformers, believes the purpose of this phrase is to contrast the spiritual sacrifice Christ offered with the bodily sacrifices offered under the Old Law.⁴⁴ Attridge also believes the πνεύματος αἰωνίου belongs to Christ. He cautions against reading a Chalcedonian two-nature christology into this phrase, but argues it most likely refers to the internal spiritual dimension of the act.⁴⁵ Among

⁴¹ Schenck, *Cosmology*, 146. Mitchell, *Sacra Pagina*, 181.

⁴² Carl Cosaert, "The Use of ἅγιος for the Sanctuary in the Old Testament Pseudegraphia, Philo, and Josephus," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 42 (2004), 102.

⁴³ Debate also exists over whether the proper translation of this phrase is "eternal Spirit or Holy Spirit." Given that both of these titles could refer either to Jesus' spirit or the Spirit of God, I have chosen to frame the discussion surrounding this verse not on how to translate πνεύματος αἰωνίου, but on what the phrase refers to.

⁴⁴ Bruce, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 217.

⁴⁵ Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 251.

those who believe the πνεύματος αἰωνίου is the Spirit of God, there is still debate over what exactly is being referenced. Vanhoye, for example, believes the πνεύματος αἰωνίου references the eternal fire in which Old Testament sacrifices burned, which the early church took to be a symbol of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁶ Martin Emmrich is skeptical of this interpretation. He agrees that πνεύματος αἰωνίου does not refer to anything of Jesus, as we would expect αὐτοῦ to be part of this phrase if the spirit belonged to Jesus. There is also no reference to fire in this passage, and for this reason Emmrich doubts Vanhoye's hypothesis is accurate.⁴⁷ Emmrich instead argues that the Spirit of God is often connected to the high priest's duties in extrabiblical literature. πνεύματος αἰωνίου likely refers to this, with the modifier αἰωνίου adding an eschatological dimension.⁴⁸

Conclusion

For some biblical passages, historical-critical scholarship asked entirely new questions, and produced interpretations never made in premodern times. This is not the case with Heb. 9:11-14. Unlike, for example, the Gospels, debates about the authorship of Hebrews preceded historical-critical research. Historical methods made the already existing doubts of Pauline authorship much more popular and defensible. Something similar occurred with the interpretation of σκηνή as a heavenly place. Sharper breaks with premodern interpreters can be seen in the favoring of γενομένων over μελλόντων, and in the debates about the purpose and audience of Hebrews.

⁴⁶ Albert Vanhoye, "Espirit éternel et feu du sacrifice en He 9,14," *Biblica* 64 (1983): 269.

⁴⁷ Martin Emmrich, "'Amtscharisma': Through the Eternal Spirit (Hebrews 9:14)," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 12 (2002): 18-20.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 26-32.

The methods used to exegete Hebrews, however, do differ sharply from those of previous interpreters. While premodern interpreters consciously read these texts as the infallible word of God, historical-critical scholars, whatever their personal beliefs about the text, read them the same way they would read any other historical document. Previous interpreters read the Bible canonically, while historical-critical scholars emphasize letting a text “speak” with its own voice. The premodern figures studied were also theologians, and sought to synthesize their readings with their faith. In historical-critical scholarship, finding authorial intent is an end in itself. None of this is meant to suggest that reading texts this way is wrong or contrary to Christianity. Indeed, while initially hostile, many Christian denominations have officially sanctioned, and even demanded the use of the historical-critical method in biblical scholarship. However, the method’s practices, and particularly its presuppositions represent a definite break from premodern biblical interpretation. And while many contemporary Christian authors endorse its use, many also argue something must supplement it.

Pope Benedict XVI

Biblical Hermeneutic

In a 1988 lecture in New York City, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger described what he called a “crisis” in biblical interpretation. According to the future pope, the historical-critical method had not brought clarity and objectivity to the search for Jesus, but instead had produced innumerable conflicting pictures of him, often more a reflection of the exegetes themselves than the historical Jesus.⁴⁹ He does not wish to abandon the historical-critical method, which he calls an “indispensable” tool for a religion that claims to be about events that really took place in

⁴⁹ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* trans. Adrian Walker, (New York: Image, 2007), xii.

history.⁵⁰ What is also required, Benedict argues, is a way that this method can move past picking “history to death by its dissection,” and find a way “reawaken” the text and allow it to “speak” to us.⁵¹

When this lecture was given in 1988, Ratzinger freely admitted that “a truly convincing answer has yet to be formulated” to the question of how historical-criticism and theological methods could be combined.⁵² In the *Jesus of Nazareth* series published during his papacy, he attempts to lay the framework for how such a synthesis might be made. Like many previous interpreters, Benedict calls for canonical and christological criticism. In his own words, “the aim of this exegesis is to read individual texts within the totality of one Scripture, which then sheds new light on all the individual texts.”⁵³ He further argues that such a reading “does not contradict historical-critical interpretation, but carries it forward in an organic way toward becoming theology in the proper sense.”⁵⁴ He makes no claim in this work to be doing historical-critical scholarship strictly speaking. He has described the book as “my personal search ‘for the face of the Lord.’” He does, however, hope to use the insights of historical-critical methodology in this search.

Jesus of Nazareth

Pope Benedict uses Hebrews 9:11 while discussing the interrogation⁵⁵ of Jesus before the Sanhedrin. In this “dramatic encounter,” the high priest of Israel confronts Jesus, “whom

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, xv.

⁵¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches of Exegesis Today* (Rockford: Rockford Institute, 1988), 5.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Benedict, *From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, xviii.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, xix.

⁵⁵ I use the word “interrogation” rather than “trial” because Benedict, following the work of Martin Heigel, sees this as more of an informal interrogation than a formal trial. Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week*, trans. Philip Whitmore, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), 175.

Christians recognize as ‘high priest of the good things to come.’”⁵⁶ Like the author of Hebrews, Benedict wishes to use this story to draw contrasts. The interrogation will illustrate the differences between the Sanhedrin’s concept of Messiahship and Jesus’ concept of it.

After applying this description to their encounter, Benedict discusses the way this interrogation is described in the four Gospels. He begins with the question Caiaphas asks Jesus and the answer he gives. Benedict points out that “With regard to the precise formulations, Matthew, Mark, and Luke differ in detail; their respective versions of the text are shaped by the overall context of each Gospel and by consideration of the particular perspectives of the audience being addressed.” Despite this, Benedict will also hold that the “essential content...emerges quite unequivocally.” The details added by Matthew and Luke to the story of Mark do not contradict Mark’s narrative, but rather add “further important elements that help us arrive at a deeper understanding of the full episode.”⁵⁷

The content that emerges unequivocally in these stories is how Jesus redefines the idea of what the Messiah will do. In the Synoptic narratives, Caiaphas asks Jesus in some manner if he is the Christ, the Son of God. In Mark, Jesus gives a clear answer (“I am”)⁵⁸ while in Matthew and Luke his answer is indirect.⁵⁹ In all the accounts, however, Benedict argues that Jesus uses Scripture to qualify the meaning of his Messiahship. Jesus uses the language of Psalm 110⁶⁰ and Daniel 7 to strip Messiahship of military claims, preaching instead a Messiahship based in judgment and his closeness to God. This is similar to Jesus’ claim in John that his kingdom is “not of this world.”⁶¹ The Sanhedrin finds this claim of closeness to God blasphemous, and

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 178-179.

⁵⁸ Mk. 14:62.

⁵⁹ Mt. 26:64, Lk. 22:67-70.

⁶⁰ This Psalm is also frequently used in Hebrews.

⁶¹ Jn. 18:36.

hands Jesus over to Pilate.⁶² Thus, just as Hebrews contrasts the new covenant with the old covenant, this story contrasts Jesus' new idea of Messiahship, which culminated in his high priestly offering on the cross, with the Messiahship the Sanhedrin sought.

Conclusion

While Benedict does not speak at length about Heb. 9:11-14, some similarities can be drawn between his usage of the passage and that of previous interpreters. Like the original author of Hebrews, Benedict uses the comparison between Jesus and the Old Law in the passage as a means to an end. He uses this contrast to elucidate what makes the salvation Jesus offers unique. Benedict also stands in the tradition of Bernard and several Protestant authors, who used this text in their discussion of the Passion. He is, however, the first of the figures studied link it to the interrogation of Jesus.

With regard to his biblical hermeneutics, Benedict's method has both similarities with past figures and unique elements. Augustine and Chrysostom also argued that while the Gospel accounts differ in their particulars, their message is essentially the same, a fact of which Benedict is no doubt aware. He also, however, tries to listen to the insights brought by historical-criticism, most clearly seen in his efforts to understand the first-century context in which these texts were written. He is perhaps most similar to the transitional figures such as Grotius, Lightfoot, and Simon, who made comprehensive use of historical methods while coming to largely orthodox conclusions. None of these figures, however, felt the need to supplement their historical methods with another kind of interpretation. They did not feel that their research in any way threatened orthodoxy, and in fact hoped that their research would bring much needed clarity to Christian theology. Benedict, aware that these predictions did not pan out, seeks to do more than simply apply the tools of historical criticism to the Bible.

⁶² Benedict, *Holy Week*, 179-181.

Regretfully, while Benedict deserves credit for confronting a difficult and important problem, he does not truly achieve a synthesis of historical-critical scholarship and theological methods. One of the great insights of the historical-critical method, and perhaps one of the most difficult to integrate into theology, is that the texts of the Bible do not speak univocally.⁶³ They offer different perspectives and different theologies. Yet Benedict, despite his promise to take historical-critical insights into account, regards differences between books of the Bible as ultimately unimportant for the ultimate meaning of the text. Rather than trying to understand the uniqueness of each authors' presentation of Jesus' interrogation at the Sanhedrin, he claims from the beginning that they, in essence, speak of the same thing.⁶⁴ Like Calvin and the patristic authors, he accepts diversity only in small particulars, not in the essentials of the message the authors are trying to convey. Only a hermeneutic that takes into account the full scope of the Bible's diversity, not just on details but on important theological questions, can hope to bridge the chasm between historical-critical scholarship and theology. While Benedict's *Jesus of Nazareth* series is a beautifully written and carefully researched work, it does not solve the crisis of biblical interpretation.

Gustavo Gutiérrez

Biblical Hermeneutic

Pope Benedict is concerned that historical-critical scholarship is preventing the message of the Bible from transforming Christians. Gustavo Gutiérrez, a Peruvian priest, is also

⁶³ Indeed, historical-critical scholars have discovered that certain books have multiple authors, some have endings added on later, and many have interpolations within the text. Even single books of the Bible do not speak univocally!

⁶⁴ The lengths to which Benedict will go to harmonize texts can be seen most clearly in his argument that in all four Gospels, the crucifixion took place on Passover. He argues that the meal described in the Synoptic tradition was not a Jewish Passover. The evangelists refer to it as a Passover dinner because the disciples later recognized the meal as a new kind of Passover, distinct from the former and inaugurated by Jesus. This new Passover took place the day before the Jewish Passover, allowing all the Gospels to place the account of Jesus' crucifixion on the same day. *Ibid.*, 114-115.

concerned about the Bible not being able to transform Christians, but identifies a different barrier: ideology. Gutiérrez is often considered the founder of Latin American liberation theology. This theology, which was developed in the 1960's, "seeks radical changes in the political and economic structures in Latin America on behalf of the poor and oppressed."⁶⁵ In its practices and its presuppositions, liberation theology is quite different from theologies that came before it, although as we will see, there are several points of continuity with previous traditions.

To the traditional Catholic sources of revelation, Tradition and Scripture, liberation theologians add another: "critical reflection on historical practice."⁶⁶ Liberation theology is deeply informed by Marxism. While they two are obviously not identical, liberation theologians borrow both Marx's diagnostic tools and his prescriptions for society's ills.⁶⁷ In this theology, Scripture and Tradition can only be properly interpreted if one comes to them after first recognizing the divisions that exist in society between the oppressed and their oppressors.⁶⁸ The Christian is then called to reflect on what this oppression means in light of Scripture. When approached this way, the Bible's theme of liberation, often obscured by ideologies that serve to maintain the status quo, will become clear. This realization must then spur the reader to go out and transform society.⁶⁹

For the liberation theologian, the preferential option for the poor is about more than just a particular love of God or a particular responsibility society has to the oppressed. The poor approach the Bible from a privileged epistemological position.⁷⁰ They are the ones who need no

⁶⁵ Eddy José Muskus, *The Origins and Early Development of Liberation Theology in Latin America: With Particular Reference to Gustavo Gutiérrez* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2012), 1.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

⁶⁹ Charles Villa-Vicencio, "The Use of Scripture in Theology: Towards a Contextual Hermeneutic" *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 37 (1981): 8-9.

⁷⁰ Jeremy Punt, "Quo Vadis: Bible, Hermeneutics, and Liberation" *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 140 (2011): 39.

help understanding the oppressive structures of society, and who have not been blinded by ideology. The message of the Bible is simple, and obvious to those who have struggled because of sinful economic and political systems.⁷¹ For those outside of these groups, however, liberation theologians caution that misunderstanding the Bible is all too easy. For centuries, after all, socially privileged biblical interpreters largely neglected the message of political and economic liberation present in the Bible.⁷² For this reason, while critical of the detachedness of many historical-critical scholars, liberation theologians feel the Bible must be approached critically by scholars. Approaching the text critically helps readers look past their own biases and see the Bible's message of liberation.⁷³

Sharing the Word Through the Liturgical Year

Once every three years in the Catholic liturgical calendar, Hebrews 9:11-14 is read on the feast of Corpus Christi, a solemnity celebrating the Eucharist. The passage is read with the story of the Ratification of the Covenant in Ex. 24:3-8 and the institution of the Eucharist in Mk. 14. In a sermon given on these readings, Gustavo Gutiérrez expounds a Eucharistic theology that is simultaneously a call to action. He begins by noting that the Eucharist was instituted at a Passover feast, and the Passover commemorates the defining event in Israel's faith: an event of liberation in which the Hebrew people were freed from an oppressive political and economic system. This should serve to remind us that sin is the "root of injustice," and in response to it we must create "just and loving relations between people."⁷⁴

This liberation is also important for the Christian faith. The Passover sets up the theological and historical context of the Eucharist and is an anticipation of the new covenant.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁷² Christina Bucher, "New Directions in Biblical Interpretation," *Brethren Life and Thought* 60 (2015): 32.

⁷³ John Goldingay, "The Hermeneutics of Liberation Theology," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 4 (1982): 136-37.

⁷⁴ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Sharing the Word through the Liturgical Year*, trans. Colette Dees (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 122.

Furthermore, the first reading makes clear the intrinsic link between worship and ethical action. The people are asked repeatedly if they will *do* “What the Lord has spoken.”⁷⁵ Gutiérrez then argues, paralleling the argumentation of Hebrews, that if this was true in the old covenant, how much more true is it in this new covenant inaugurated by the sacrifice of Christ, who rids us “of sin that is expressed in deeds of death and injustice, so we can worship ‘the Living God.’” If we do not do what the Lord commands us, we are “turning our backs on the Lord’s surrender of his body and blood.” We make the Eucharist meaningless when we do this, for the new covenant will not allow “injustice and marginalization of the poor.” He closes by arguing that during the Eucharist, we should call to mind structures of sin, and repent of our contribution to them, which demands “working towards a society on the basis of the needs of the oppressed and of those who are excluded from it.”⁷⁶

Conclusion

In some ways, Gutiérrez’s use of Hebrews is radically new. While interpreting the $\nu\epsilon\kappa\rho\tilde{\omega}\nu \ \xi\rho\gamma\omega\nu$ as “deeds of death and injustice” is far from new, few in the past would have connected these deeds with exploitative political and economic systems and our participation in them. In other ways, however, this interpretation is deeply rooted in the Catholic tradition. Gutiérrez’s central argument in this passage is that because of the sacrifice of Jesus we have “rid ourselves of sin...expressed in deeds of death and injustice.”⁷⁷ We must continue working deeds of life and justice in the world or this sacrifice is useless. Gutiérrez is essentially applying the idea that faith without works is dead.⁷⁸ While Protestants such as Calvin used this text to speak of our total inability to save ourselves and our complete reliance on the work of Christ, Gutiérrez

⁷⁵ Ex. 24:3.

⁷⁶ Gutiérrez, *Sharing the Word*, 123.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Jm. 2:17.

argues that humans very much have a role to play in continuing to keep their conscience purified from dead works. If we do not work to establish just relations amongst peoples, even the Blessed Sacrament cannot save us.

Gutiérrez's hermeneutic contains an interesting mix of elements from premodern interpretation and historical-critical interpretation. In his theology, Scripture is a place where the Christian meets God and is guided towards salvation, but this means something different than it did for premodern interpreters. According to liberation theologians, what the Christian encounters in Scripture is a cry for liberation that demands personal transformation and action. Scripture calls us to salvation in that its words inspire us to fight against oppressive political and economic structures. The salvation spoken of here is salvation not just from sin, but from the oppressive political and economic structures that sin has created.

Gutiérrez's hermeneutic also bears a similarity with Zwingli's and Luther's in its insistence on openness and transformation. Zwingli and Luther believed that proper biblical interpretation could only occur when readers opened themselves up to the spirit of God and allowed themselves to be transformed by the sacred text. Liberation theologians believe something similar, but with a Marxist twist. According to this model, proper biblical interpretation can only occur when readers recognize the struggle between the exploiter and the exploited in society and allow themselves to be transformed (and therefore called to action) by the sacred texts. Like Zwingli and Luther, Gutiérrez believed that biblical interpretation was less about intellectual comprehension than it was about being inspired to live a truly Christian life.

Conclusion

The historical-critical method developed in this period presented a fundamentally new way of looking at the Bible. In terms of methodology, the changes were a matter of scope.

Practices such as textual criticism were applied much more comprehensively and consistently. What was truly radical about this method of study were its presuppositions. The Bible was no longer assumed to be univocal. Ideas about interpretation were changed. Scripture was to be treated, for the purposes of interpretation, as a historical document written by humans, not the word of God. This method of interpretation has led to many important insights for Christianity. Divorced from ecclesial demands and rules of faith, texts were allowed to “speak” for themselves to a greater degree than they had been since the earliest days of the church. This had led to striking discoveries about the diversity of opinion that exists between biblical authors, discoveries that may never have been made absent critical scholarship.

What Benedict and Gutiérrez both realize though, albeit in quite different ways, is that historical-critical readings must be supplemented by something else to make biblical interpretation truly Christian. Both find incredible value in the method, but also fundamental flaws. For Benedict, historical scholarship is necessary for a historical faith, but these insights, because they are historical, are trapped in the past. For Gutiérrez, critical reading practices help the privileged escape from their ideologies and see the Bible’s message of liberation. However, while discovering an author’s intent is an end in itself for historical-criticism, the liberation theologian’s job is not finished until the interpreter is moved to action.

In a certain sense, they share the same basic belief concerning the method’s usefulness. The historical-critical method provides valuable insight, but lacks an intellectual framework to apply these insights to Christian life. Another similarity is that while both attempt to synthesize historical-critical readings with theology, neither truly succeeds. Both of their readings are insufficiently critical. Benedict appears unwilling to depart from orthodoxy, and Gutiérrez appears unwilling to depart from liberation. A historical-critical reading of the Bible should

reveal that not everything in Scripture is perfectly compatible with orthodoxy, nor is everything in Scripture liberating.⁷⁹ The search for a true synthesis of history and theology continues.

⁷⁹ As Jeremy Punt notes, liberation theology has been criticized, particularly by postcolonial theorists, for its uncritical acceptance of the Bible as a liberating text. The Bible has been used as a tool of oppression not because ideology blinded people to its true liberating character, but because some texts within it very much lack a liberating character. For example, after the Exodus, a central text for liberation theologians, the same God that freed the Hebrews from bondage gave them a Law that endorsed slavery. Punt, "*Quo Vadis*," 42.

CHAPTER 6: SYNTHESIS

Introduction

With the “many and various ways” Hebrews has been interpreted now analyzed, we can delve into how these interpretations developed over time, as well as how the tools used to interpret the passage developed. The picture painted here is not one of neat delineation or clear trajectories. As we have seen, authors rarely completely mimic a past figure’s biblical hermeneutic. In fact, they often mix hermeneutical elements of figures who in their time were on opposite poles of debates about biblical interpretation. The interpretations of Heb. 9:11-14 show greater continuity, but still defy simple delineations. Both testify to the diversity of Christian literature and Christian methods of biblical interpretation, and the continued ability of Christian authors to adapt texts to the struggles of their particular era.

The Use of Hebrews

First Century

Hebrews began as a sermon addressed to a particular community, likely Roman. The community was facing both external persecution and internal doubt. The sermon was an effort to raise their spirits and strengthen their resolve by uniting the group around their shared belief of a great high priest and a great future. Heb. 9:11-14 is one of many *a fortiori* arguments present in Hebrews, and one that begins the climax of the sermon’s argument. The author explains why the sacrifice of Christ is even better than the rituals prescribed in the Hebrew Bible. Christ, “high priest of the good things that have come,” inaugurated a new era of worship and an “eternal redemption” that allows not just cleansing of the body, but will “purify our conscience of dead works.” The sermon admonishes the community to hold fast to the faith that had been passed down to them.

Early Church

This sermon to this Roman community would eventually become known as the Epistle to the Hebrews, and be used in a variety of different contexts. In the early church, Clement of Alexandria used the verse in a work condemning Gnosticism. Identifying dead works with excessive passion, he called on Christians to emasculate themselves from such desires to “worship the living God.” Tertullian also used the passage in a work condemning heresy, infusing his description of Jesus with the language of Heb. 9:14. Augustine uses the passage in a commentary on the Psalms, using the entrance into the “Holy Place” mentioned in v. 12 to discuss Jesus as savior and judge.

Chrysostom uses the passage in a commentary as well, although this commentary is on Hebrews itself. His commentary on Hebrews outlines what he believed to be Paul’s argument: the superiority of the priesthood of Jesus Christ to the Levitical priesthood. He identifies the “greater and more perfect tabernacle” as the body of Christ, the “dead works” as sin, and the eternal spirit as the Holy Spirit. Chrysostom then moves into a homily where he discusses some particularly corrosive sins, such as lust, greed, and irreverence.

In some ways, the use of these texts is similar to the way the sermon was used in its first century context. Tertullian, Clement, and Chrysostom, like the original author, are concerned with exhorting their audience to hold fast to their confession. However, whereas the original author was concerned with persecution and apathy, Tertullian and Clement are more concerned with maintaining orthodoxy against groups they see as heretical, and Chrysostom is more concerned with exhorting his congregation to ethical action. Augustine, like the original author, uses the passage to discuss the connection between Jesus’s crucifixion and salvation.

The Middle Ages

Medieval authors continued to interpret the text in ways that highlighted the superiority of Christ. While chastising a monk who has left his monastery, Bernard of Clairvaux uses the passage after describing Jesus as the highest authority in the church. V. 12 is used to link Christ's sacrifice and the redemption he earned for us to his authority. Thomas Aquinas uses the passage in a variety of ways. He uses it in the *Summa Theologica* in discussing topics such as salvation, the priesthood, the sacraments, and the relationship between the Old Law and the New Law. In his commentary on Hebrews, he identifies its purpose as explaining the superiority of Christ. Like Chrysostom, he writes that Paul's purpose in this passage is to explain why Christ's priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood, and also links the dead works to sin. With regard to the "greater and more perfect tabernacle," he holds that this can be interpreted as a place in heaven or Christ's body.

Both Bernard and Aquinas continue the tradition of using this passage from Hebrews when discussing salvation and the relationship between the Levitical priesthood and Christ's priesthood. For Hebrews original author, however, the *a fortiori* comparisons between the Hebrew Bible and Jesus's sacrifice were a means to an end. The elevation of Christ and emphasis on his unique testament served to strengthen the resolve of his audience against doubt and persecution. For many later authors, however, the superiority of Christ against the Jewish priesthood is taken to be the entire purpose of the letter, and particularly of Heb. 9:11-14. Aquinas's commentary is largely consistent with Chrysostom's, although Chrysostom does not speak of the possibility that the tabernacle is place in heaven. The interpretation of the tabernacle

as a place in heaven is likely closer to the author's intent. As Harold Attridge notes, interpreting the tabernacle as Christ's body "does violence" to the Yom Kippur typology being made.¹

The Reformation

The authors of the Reformation era, faced with new challenges and questions, used Heb. 9:11-14 in new ways. Calvin uses the passage both in commentaries and in works of systematic theology. In his commentary on Hebrews, he argues that the purpose of the work is to prove the office of Christ, and specifically the superiority of his sacrifice to the sacrifices proscribed in the Hebrew Bible. Like Aquinas and Chrysostom he highlights the typologies present in Hebrews. The tabernacle is interpreted as the spiritual efficacy of Christ's body, and the eternal spirit is in the commentary interpreted as the spirit of Christ, although in other works it seems to be interpreted as the Holy Spirit. In both his commentaries and his systematic works, Calvin invokes the insufficiency of the sacrifices of the Hebrew Bible to suggest that as humans we are totally dependent on Christ for our salvation. He also uses the passage to highlight the spiritual, internal nature of the sacrifice Christ offered and the cleansing it procured. Finally, like many other reformers, including Ulrich Zwingli, he argued that the Mass was an attempt to repeat the "once for all" sacrifice of the cross. The Council of Trent would also use this verse, arguing that while Christ's sacrifice was indeed "once for all," in the Mass there is participation in that sacrifice.

Luther uses Heb. 9:11-14 in a sermon on Christ's high priesthood and a theological treatise on liturgy. In the sermon he interprets the passage and relates it to his debates with the Catholic Church. He interprets the dead works as sin, and the tabernacle as a heavenly place that human words cannot describe. While he does not discuss who or what the eternal spirit mentioned in v. 14 is, he does, like Calvin, emphasize the spiritual nature of Christ's sacrifice.

¹ Harold Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. Helmut Koester (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 246.

Again like Calvin, he links the unique efficacy of Christ's sacrifice to the idea that only faith in Christ can save us. In his liturgical work *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Luther uses the spiritual nature of Christ's sacrifice to condemn the ornateness of the Mass. The efficacy of the Passion comes not from ornate rituals or beautiful adornments, but the inner disposition of the obedient Son.

Reformation authors continued to use the passage when speaking about salvation, although the idea that the passage points to a general human insufficiency rather than an insufficiency specific to the Levitical priesthood is new. Like the original author, several reformers also use the passage to emphasize the spiritual nature of Christ's sacrifice, and the transformation it brings, some identifying the eternal spirit with the spirit of Christ. New is the use of the passage in debates about liturgy. Several Reformation era authors also break from their predecessors in their acknowledgment that Hebrews was not written by Paul. The authors studied continued to move away from the interpretation of the tabernacle as Christ's body, with Calvin offering an important qualification and Luther rejecting it entirely. Some, however, like Matthew Henry, continued to hold that interpretation.

The Modern Period

Unlike some other passages, historical-critical exegesis did not bring with it radical changes to the interpretation of Heb. 9:11-14. Most positions taken by historical-critical scholars had precedent in premodern times, although often there was consolidation towards a particular position. Almost all modern scholars reject the idea tabernacle is the body of Christ, a movement that was already being made by the time of the Reformation. Most now believe the tabernacle is a structure in heaven, although there is debate about precisely what it is. There is greater debate about the eternal spirit, with some thinking it to be the Holy Spirit, others the spirit of Christ.

Dead works are again almost universally interpreted as sin, although some seek to identify them with a particular kind of sin, as Clement did. Gutiérrez, for example, uses the passage in a homily that calls upon Christians to fight against structural oppression.

There are, however, several radical changes that historical-critical exegesis did bring to the interpretation of Hebrews. Indeed, many now argue that the Epistle to the Hebrews was not an epistle and was not to the Hebrews. There is near-unanimous agreement among critical scholars that Hebrews was not written by Paul, the dominant belief of Christian scholars throughout the Middle Ages. Also now rejected by many is that the audience of the work was primarily composed of Jews or Jewish Christians, with many arguing for a mixed or even entirely Gentile audience. The genre of the work has occasioned considerable debate as well, with many arguing it is actually a sermon of theological treatise.

Conclusion

Hebrews has been on quite a journey. Church Fathers used it to argue against heresy. Bernard and Aquinas used it to discuss the authority of Christ. Reformers used it to highlight humanity's inability to save itself. Contemporary thinkers use it as an example of how sometimes historical-critical thought can be used to rehabilitate a passage once interpreted as anti-Jewish. What started out as a sermon exhorting a community to hold fast to their confession become an epistle with a wide variety of functions, taking center stage in debates about salvation, liturgy, and Christianity's relationship to Judaism. The changes in Hebrews interpretation, however, are only one part of this study. How have biblical hermeneutics developed over this period?

Biblical Hermeneutics

Tracing the developments in biblical hermeneutics will require more than simply looking at the conclusions different interpreters reached about a particular phrase, or the overall meaning of the passage. Interpreters' conclusions are often nuanced, and defy simple comparisons. We cannot, for example, learn much by looking at which figures interpreted the “greater and more perfect tabernacle” as Christ’s body, and which interpreted it as a place in heaven. Where would Thomas Aquinas, who offers both interpretations, be placed? Should Calvin and Vanhoye be included among those who interpret it as Christ’s body even though they qualify what exactly this means? Similarly, should Gutiérrez and Clement of Alexandria, who interpret “dead works” as specific kinds of sin, be separated those who interpret it as sin in general?

This is not to say that the specific interpretations offered by these figures are not useful or instructive. But more important than the conclusion they reached, for the purposes of this study, is *how* they reached their conclusion. This section of the chapter is dedicated to looking holistically at the biblical hermeneutics evidenced in the documents discussed in the previous chapters, tracing their development and comparing and contrasting the characteristics of the various areas.

Early Church

As the chapter on the early church demonstrated, biblical hermeneutics do not have a single starting point. On some issues, the figures studied were in near uniform agreement, such as the unity of the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Gospel, the human and divine authorship of Scripture, and the centrality of Scripture in experiencing God and receiving salvation. There were, however, areas of deep disagreement. Christians did not agree on the permissibility of allegory, the role of philosophy and other pagan sources, the importance of context, and the

simplicity of Scripture. Nor did Christians fall into neatly divisible camps. Tertullian and Augustine would have been in agreement on the importance of ecclesial tradition, but disagreed on the importance of literary context. Tertullian and Clement were in agreement on the importance of literary context, but disagreed on the appropriateness of allegory.

These different styles of interpretation can be seen as different conceptions of how Christianity should interact with the Greco-Roman world. Christians in the early church were faced with the challenge of taking a religion with Jewish roots to a Gentile world that found many of its beliefs repulsive. Some Christians, such as Clement and Augustine, responded to this challenge by attempting to demonstrate the compatibility of the best of Greek philosophy with the Christian Gospel. Furthermore, they could use allegory to make biblical stories that seem barbaric have a deeper, more acceptable meaning. Others, such as Tertullian, and to a lesser extent Chrysostom, desired to highlight the distinctiveness of Christianity. Finding Christianity a superior path to Truth and conversion, they sought to stick closely to the biblical texts and the traditions of the church.²

The way these authors interpret Heb. 9:11-14 often demonstrates their particular interpretive tools. Clement, a vehement defender of the use of philosophy in Christian writings, identified as passion the “dead works” mentioned in Heb. 9:14. Tertullian, much more suspicious of using pagan literature, uses the exact language of Heb. 9:14 in his writings. Chrysostom, for whom identifying the intent of the author is key, rarely strays outside of Hebrews in his exegesis of the passage. These figures and their writings represent the great diversity that characterized the biblical hermeneutics of the early church.

² This is not to suggest that Augustine and Clement did not find Christianity to be a superior path to Truth, only that Chrysostom and Tertullian responded to this differently than the former figures.

The Middle Ages

The medieval figures also testify to the diversity present in the early church, for neither can be said to simply inherit the tradition of one patristic author. Bernard's hermeneutic is most similar to Augustine's. Both Bernard and Augustine believed scriptural texts have different kinds of meaning, including a literal meaning, and various allegorical/spiritual meanings. The purpose of Scripture for both was to change the heart of the hearer, and conform them to God's ways. Often, this involved going "beyond" the literal meaning of the texts and divining a moral meaning from it. Thus, like Augustine, and Clement, Bernard frequently makes use of allegory. A strong proponent of orthodoxy, Bernard also found it important to read scriptural texts in the tradition of the church, just as Augustine and Tertullian emphasized ecclesial tradition in their own times.

In other ways, however, Bernard was quite different than Augustine. Augustine was no enemy of philosophy, believing that because certain knowledge is implanted in all people by God, the best of philosophy could be seen as a sort of indirect revelation. Nor was he an enemy of reason. Though he did not believe Christians could be saved by reason alone, reason was an important tool in deciphering the Scriptures. Bernard, on the other hand, sought to condemn the proto-Scholasticism of his day that elevated reason and the philosophy of Aristotle.

Aquinas would come to be the giant of the movement that Bernard opposed. Aquinas freely used the work of non-Christian authors and reason in his theology, and his biblical hermeneutic is no exception. While he, like Bernard, sometimes interpreted texts allegorically, he was more concerned with the literal interpretation of biblical texts. While he frequently offers multiple interpretations of a verse, the literal interpretation is fundamental. His exegesis of Hebrews 9:11-14 demonstrates this. While Aquinas holds that the "greater and more perfect

tabernacle” mentioned in v. 11 can be interpreted as either a place in heaven or a symbol Christ’s body, he frames his interpretation of the passage by looking at the differences between the earthly tabernacle the Jewish high priests entered and the heavenly tabernacle Christ entered. While both a heavenly place and a body are mentioned, the whole of Aquinas’ interpretation shows he clearly favors the former, more literal meaning.

This represents an interesting contrast with the biblical hermeneutics of the patristic figures studied. In the early church, the authors that favored allegorical readings (Clement and Augustine) were also the ones most open to the use of philosophy and reason. Those who focused on the literal sense of a text (Tertullian and Chrysostom), while not rejecting philosophy and reason entirely, tended to use them less frequently and less explicitly. In the Middle Ages, however, the proponent of allegory (Bernard) is loath to use non-Christian sources and the advocate of literal readings (Aquinas) frequently quotes the Philosopher.

The shifting requirements for successful evangelism may again have played some role in this coupling. In the early church, allegorical readings and integration of Greek philosophy both made it easier for Christianity to integrate itself with the dominant culture of the time. By Bernard’s time, however, Christianity was the dominant culture. The need to integrate non-Christian literature was far less pressing and allegory become more a way of relating biblical texts written at least a millennium ago to contemporary problems than a way of softening the Bible’s rough edges. Similarly, Scholastics such as Aquinas did not favor literal readings of texts to maintain the purity of Christianity from outside philosophy and influence. Aquinas believed all truth ultimately came from God. Literal readings were a check against excessive spiritualizing, not pagan influence.

The Reformation

During the Reformation several new questions came to the forefront of debates over Scripture. What books should be included in Scripture? What language should it be read in? Who should read and interpret it? In addition to these new questions, older debates continued. One of the most controversial matters was the use of extrabiblical literature to interpret Scripture. Although there was debate over the proper use of philosophy in interpreting Scripture, the debates this time focused more on the place of the traditions of the church.

John Calvin and Martin Luther represent a tradition of interpretation that, while not rejecting outright extrabiblical sources and church tradition, sought to give them a less prominent and less dogmatic role. Martin Luther's hermeneutic is a particularly good example of this. Luther has many problems with transubstantiation, but his most fundamental problem was that the Catholic Church was trying to make something not explicitly found in Scripture a dogma. Luther did not wish to expel philosophy from theology or biblical interpretation, only to ensure that no philosophical explanation or extrabiblical doctrine became a required belief. Similarly, John Calvin, though wary of foreign ideas being imported into Scripture, used the writings of the Church Fathers in his biblical interpretation.

Ulrich Zwingli offered a much more radical approach. He sought to make Scripture the absolute, central, unique authority of his movement. Zwingli rejected the authority of patristic writers and of ecumenical councils, arguing that they are only useful to the extent that they correctly interpret Scripture. On matters where Scripture was silent, Zwingli held that Christians should be silent as well. Zwingli thus created a different hermeneutic than many of his fellow reformers, and a radically different hermeneutic than earlier figures such as Tertullian and Augustine, for whom the *regula fidei* had been so key.

Though the reformers' hermeneutics have important differences, an important similarity is that they all serve to make the Bible more comprehensible to the ordinary Christian.

Diminishing the importance of philosophy and tradition (or eliminating them entirely) allowed those with a less thorough education to feel they could properly interpret the Bible. Luther and Calvin emphasized the literal-historical meaning of a text, often easier to grasp than complex allegory.³ Luther translated the Bible into a German that Germans of all classes could understand. Zwingli held that all that was necessary to understand Scripture was to call on the help of God. Centuries later, Matthew Henry wrote one of the first biblical commentaries aimed at ordinary Christians, not scholars or clergy. All of these interpretive tools served to create a hermeneutic that allowed Christians to interpret the Bible on their own, not have it interpreted for them by church authorities.

The Catholic Church in this age, particularly after the start of the Reformation, sought to reaffirm traditional beliefs.⁴ Scripture included the books of the deuterocanon.⁵ The Vulgate was the authoritative text of the Catholic Church, although a new one should be made. With regard to what constituted tradition, Trent affirmed that Scripture and tradition were two media through which sacred revelation had been transmitted, and that the teachings of tradition came from the apostles. On other scriptural matters, including tradition's precise relationship to Scripture and Scripture's sufficiency, the council was ambiguous or silent.

Despite their many differences in scriptural theology, Catholic and Protestant authors often interpreted texts in the same way, even when the texts concerned polemical matters. Both

³ While in fact what Calvin and Luther understood to be the "literal-historical" meaning of a text involved what was formerly known as and now known as allegory, allegorical interpretations did tend to be a less important part of their work.

⁴ Although, as we have seen, there is a great amount of diversity in the "traditional" biblical hermeneutic of the Catholic Church.

⁵ Or, at least, this is how their decision came to be interpreted.

Catholics and Protestants interpreted v. 12 to mean that Christ's sacrifice was a unique, once for all (ἐφάπαξ) event that could not be repeated. They differed on whether the Mass constituted an attempt to repeat this sacrifice or a participation in this sacrifice. Both Catholics and Protestants found in the passage and example of how the works of Christ were infinitely superior to the works of the Old Law. They differed on whether Catholic ideas about sacrament constituted a return to the ways of the Old Law. This is not to say there were no differences. Authors such as Calvin and Luther read Christ's superiority and unique ability to offer this sacrifice as a sign that humans had to rely totally upon faith for their salvation, a teaching Catholics rejected. Nonetheless, for as different as the foundations of their hermeneutics were, and for as bitter as the debates were, there were substantial similarities in their interpretations.

Modern Period

The historical-critical method represents the sharpest break in biblical hermeneutics seen thus far, though elements of it can be seen in previous hermeneutics. Authors like Luther and Calvin stressed the importance of reading texts in their original languages. Chrysostom and Aquinas emphasized the literal sense of a text over allegorical interpretation. Augustine cautioned his readers against assuming that the historical situation of characters in the text was identical to their own. These similarities, however, pale in comparison to the fundamental break the historical-critical method made with premodern interpretation; the purpose of historical-critical exegesis is to uncover history, not theology.

All previous authors, whatever their beliefs on allegory, reason, or tradition, held that the Bible was a place where Christians encountered the message of God. The Bible, which should be read canonically, was a source of Truth whose teachings should mold Christians and their beliefs. While many historical-critical exegetes of course continue to hold these beliefs,

historical-critical exegesis rejects them. Texts are allowed to “speak” with their own voice, and are analyzed in their historical and literary context. Extrabiblical literature and other scriptural texts are only used in elucidating a passage if there is reason to believe the author or authors knew of them and were influenced by them. This method uses the tools of historical analysis to uncover clues about the intent of a text’s author and the audience’s reception of the text.

While today most mainline Christian churches accept some version of the historical-critical method, many supplement or modify it. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, for example, has frequently spoken of the importance of finding a method of interpretation that is both historical and theological. Concerned that historical-critical scholarship has, in practice and in theory, failed to connect Christians to the message of God, Benedict tries to construct a method that takes advantage of historical-critical insights while also being able to confront contemporary problems. One example of this, though certainly not an example Benedict endorses, is the work of Gustavo Gutiérrez, who uses the insights of the historical-critical method to create a theology that can confront economic and political oppression.

Conclusion

Biblical hermeneutics do not have a uniform starting part or a uniform ending point. They history in between is just as diverse. Opinions on allegory, philosophy, tradition and history fluctuate throughout Christian history. Fluctuating as well are what these terms mean, and how they are applied to Scripture. As the circumstances of society change, the tools required to effectively convey the message of the Gospel change as well. With this in mind, we can perhaps say that rather than there being a “right” answer to the question of whether allegory or literal readings should be prioritized, we must discern what is most beneficial in a particular situation.

The history of biblical interpretation provides us with a wealth of tools to understand the words of Scripture.

Conclusion

Reception history can often seem like dry, abstruse work utterly lacking in value outside the academy. Over the course of this thesis, I have shown that reception history can add important insights to our knowledge about a topic. Reception history can show us where biases in scholarship exist. Reception history can show us where the center of disagreement between competing factions is, and where these factions are similar as well. Reception history can rehabilitate texts that in the past have been used for bigoted or oppressive reasons. Studying the reception of biblical texts is particularly important. Different hermeneutical tools produce different readings, and these readings affect the way Christians understand and live their faith. The search for the proper biblical hermeneutic is not an esoteric theological discussion, but a search for how Christianity can respond effectively to new cultural contexts. Reviewing the way that past Christians have confronted the challenges of their day with the words of Scripture can show us the way to scripturally respond to the problems of our own era.

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