

THE PART TWO: INSPIRATION, INERRANCY AND THE INTERPRETATION OF THE CHRISTIAN BIBLE

Chapter Eight: The Doctrine of the Divine Inspiration of Sacred Scripture

Introduction. In this second part, we will deal with two doctrines which are fundamental for the Christian, and, especially, Roman Catholic believer, regarding the Holy Scriptures. We will attempt to be brief, as the purpose of these words are first of all to serve as an introductory biblical studies course. Furthermore, this part will be less original than the first, as there has been much written about these topics.

The Doctrine of Inspiration

Statement of the doctrine. The doctrine of the divine inspiration of Sacred Scripture states that the biblical books which make up the canon of the Bible—in this case, the Roman Catholic canon—are divinely inspired, that is, that they have God as their primary “author.”²⁵³ I put “author” in quotes because originally, and in Latin, *auctor* has a broader meaning than ‘one who penned or wrote the work’, or dictated it. No one maintains that God wrote the Bible himself, and notions that he dictated it to mere copyists are untenable, as we hope will become more apparent in what follows. The best analogy I can think of is that of the movie producer as *auctor*: he or she has gotten together all the persons necessary, has given directions, is “in charge,” and ultimately responsible for the product. But this is only an analogy. The second part of the doctrine holds that the human authors of the Bible are true authors, not mere scribes or copyists. Also part of this doctrine, which is receiving much attention today, is the fact that not only are the Scriptures inspired, they are inspiring.²⁵⁴ Such is the double meaning

²⁵³ See ALOIS GRILLMEIER, “The Divine Inspiration and the Interpretation of Sacred Scripture,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II. Vol. II* (H. Vorgrimler, gen. ed.; ET of German original; New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 203 (“The hagiographer [holy writer] was no longer described as an ‘instrument’, and God no longer as the ‘*principalis auctor*’, but simply as *auctor*.”). The Holy Spirit is called the “principal author” in *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), II.B.3, the most complete recent Pontifical Biblical Commission on these issues.

²⁵⁴ See DIANNE BERGANT, C.S.A., “Introduction to the Bible,” in *The Collegeville Bible Commentary* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1989), 14-16. *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, Introduction. B., states that “The Commission does not aim to adopt a position on all questions which arise with respect

possible for the classic scriptural passage on inspiration, 2 Tim 3:16-17; see the discussion in the *NJBC*, 65:8-16.

Problematical issues with simplistic notions of biblical inspiration. A simplistic view of the inspiration of Holy Scripture, such as that held by many “fundamentalists,” might be that God dictated the Bible to various individuals, who then wrote it all down without any mistakes, and that we have the originals of these documents, in the original languages, of course, and that they have now been printed or otherwise made available to good translators, who have made possible the various Bibles we have in English, etc. The translations may at times be off, or may not reflect the richness and multivalence of the original language (see already the prologue to Sir, verses 15-26, written by the Greek translator of the original Hebrew work), but the originals are always there for further consultation, and then the translations can be made more accurate.

Such a view fails to take into account many problems.²⁵⁵ First of all, there are no “originals” of any biblical book, what scholars call “autographs,” that is, something written by the same author and not just a copy made by another person. We have only copies of the biblical books. In the case of the New Testament, we are fortunate to have thousands of copies of many parts of the NT; discard the notion that by “copy” we mean a nice complete edition. Even venerable copies, like the famous Codex Vaticanus (a fourth-century C.E. Greek Bible, that is, a Greek translation of the OT and part of the NT), is missing everything after Heb 9:14. So we have many copies, but guess what: when copies were made by hand (not photocopied), mistakes and differences take place, so that we have some situations where it is hard to decide which copy is more faithful to

to the Bible —such as, for example, the theology of inspiration.” This document was presented by the then-Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, to Pope John Paul II, who “joyfully” accepted it (see his address commemorating the 100th anniversary of *Providentissimus Deus* [1893] and the 50th anniversary of *Divino afflante Spiritu* [1943] at the beginning of editions of this document); the preface is by Cardinal Ratzinger. The doctrine of inspiration is a work “in process,” as is pointed out in the *NJBC* 65:72. What we can know much better is how the Bible as a book or collection of books came to be written, and the historical context in which, and plausible theological purposes for which, each of its books came to be. From this we can follow an *inductive* (as opposed to deductive) method in arriving at an understanding of how divine inspiration may work. In other words, we start from facts that we can reasonably know and proceed to the spiritual realm which we cannot *adequately* know (it far surpasses our capacity, we are not *equal* to it).

²⁵⁵ *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, I.F., states that: “Without saying as much in so many words, fundamentalism actually invites people to a kind of intellectual suicide. It injects into life a false certitude, for it unwittingly confuses the divine substance of the biblical message with what are in fact its human limitations.”

the original (which we don't have). You should be getting the idea that this indicates that the situation is complicated.

Let me tell you a bit more; I think that there is nothing like raw data like this to make people aware that the good Lord did not make things easy or simple when he communicated himself to us. When we say that the Bible is the Word of God, we should perhaps nuance this by reformulating the phrase as 'the Bible witnesses to the Word of God'.²⁵⁶ The "Word of God" is God's revelation to us, his self-communication for purposes of our salvation. The biblical texts speak about God, and convey his revelation (but cf. Heb 1:1). But God's highest and fullest communication was Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. The Bible witnesses to Jesus, to God's salvation finally accomplished in him. But in another sense, the Bible "merely" witnesses to God's Word because all we have are actually witnesses to what God's biblical Word is, that is, we have just evidence that we need to sift and evaluate and put together in order to determine what God actually said in the Bible. It is this evidence that we call "witnesses." It is something like what goes on in court, where witnesses get up and testify as to what happened, and the jury as factfinder, or the judge when he has this role in cases without a jury, finally decides what happened from the testimony of the witnesses. Some witnesses are given much greater weight than others; some seem intelligent, trustworthy, with a good memory, and they make sense. Others seem to be bad or less good as witnesses, and their testimony has to be weighed accordingly.

Let me illustrate this. What Bible scholars and translators use are "critical editions" of the Hebrew Bible (HB) and of the NT. These are editions put together by a team of scholars (the "Committee"); usually there is only one such authoritative edition each for the HB and for the NT.²⁵⁷ Each of these editions has a text, in the one case in Hebrew (with some Aramaic), for the OT, in the other case, for the NT, in Greek. This text has been arrived at by a consensus among the Committee as to what the "best or most probable reading" is. This decision is made by analysis of the manuscript copies which witness to the text. So for the text set out in large type and dominating the page, in

²⁵⁶ See the *NJBC*, 65:67-69. One should keep in mind, however, that *Dei Verbum* no. 24 states that "the sacred Scriptures contain the word of God and, since they are inspired, really are the word of God."

²⁵⁷ On the Committee sat Cardinal Carlo Martini, S.J., former archbishop of Milan and a renown Bible scholar.

the bottom of the page there is a corresponding “critical apparatus” which lists (by symbols or identifying letters) the manuscripts which have that very “reading,” that is, which say just that. Now, there may be other manuscripts which “say” something else, but if these manuscripts, and the whole of the analysis, do not seem trustworthy (do not seem to be good evidence for what the original probably had), then they are not taken into account, and in some editions, not even included or listed in the critical apparatus. But in many cases there is a genuine doubt as to what the original said; these are cases where two groups of good manuscripts have two different readings, so that the good evidence is split, and the decision is difficult to make. We are talking mostly about “little details,” thankfully. I don’t want anyone to think that the text of the Bible is all up in the air. But I am trying to convey a sense of what is involved —how much human work, intelligence, effort and decision-making— in putting together a Bible.

I actually am having a bit of difficulty coming up with a good example of a hard decision regarding a *significant* textual discrepancy. This is good, because, unless I am even more ignorant than I fear, it means that we have a pretty reliable biblical text (though, again, let no one think it was dictated!). Here are two “little” examples (is anything “little” when what God actually said or wrote is at stake?). In Mark 1:41, almost all Bible translations read that Jesus was “moved with pity” at the sight of the leper. But there are good manuscripts which read that Jesus was “moved with anger” (the *New Oxford Annotated Bible. Third Edition [NOAB]* for example, shows this as a “variant,” the term used in most Bibles for alternate readings—, while many Bibles, such as the *Catholic Study Bible*, don’t even mention it). The Committee of experts debated this, and stuck to “pity,” but at one point gave their degree of certainty here (following established principles of “textual criticism” and biblical exegesis) a “C” grade, not very high for the “Word of God”! With the discovery of new manuscripts, especially the papyri which were not known for a long time, and which are older than the “sheepskins,” the new edition of the reasoning behind these scholars’ decision has upgraded the probability of the reading to “B.”²⁵⁸

²⁵⁸ See BRUCE METZGER, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament. Second Edition* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2002 fifth printing), 65-66.

Here's a better one. The venerable *Bible de Jérusalem* had a brilliant Dominican, Père Marie-Émile Boismard, in charge of the Gospel of John. Père Boismard, whom I was privileged to meet in Jerusalem, had very unusual views (in the opinion of many scholars, who did not buy them) about the text of the NT. In John 1:13, he chose the reading of Latin manuscripts (which he often preferred), which had the singular, so as to read "who was not born of blood nor of the will of the flesh" (thus referring to Jesus), rather than the plural of all Greek manuscripts ("who were not born," referring to believers in Jesus). Not even the new editions of the Jerusalem Bible follow Boismard here anymore, but the Bible I use is an older one, and has that unusual reading. The *CSB* (but not the *NOAB* here) mentions the Latin variant. The expert Committee gave the "normal," plural reading an "A" for certainty.

Let's come to a more important one. In John 1:18, the reading accepted by the Committee is in Greek "only-begotten God." This sounds awkward to readers in English and other languages, and may be awkward anyway. Being awkward alone is not a good reason to "emend" the text or prefer another reading; in fact, one of the cardinal rules of textual criticism is *difficilior lectio potest*, "the more difficult (awkward, even nonsensical) reading prevails" (is to be preferred). The reason for this is that we are dealing with copies and copyists; their tendency is to change what doesn't look or sound right into something more normal, or to make conform what one gospel manuscript says with what another gospel says ("harmonization"). Carried to its ultimate consequences, we would have all four gospels be exactly alike!

But in John 1:18, most Bibles add "Son," or change "only-begotten" to "only Son." The tendency today in good translation is to let the translation reflect what the often-times obscure original-language text reads, and then try to explain, clarify, etc. in the footnotes: but do not alter the biblical text! If this is done, access to what the Bible really says becomes impossible in translation. Nevertheless, the reality is that these translations are meant to sell, and publishers are loathe to have a weird-looking text that might turn off the typical reader, who often seeks out the familiar and comfortable.

A couple of more examples. Piety and even theology is a good thing, but do you want someone's piety or theology to get in the way of your biblical text? In other words, instead of reading the word of God, you would be reading x's pious additions or

theological explanations *in the very text of Holy Writ!* One famous example is in 1 John 5:8, where Latin manuscripts or authorities (sometimes the biblical text is witnessed-to in the quotes of Church Fathers) add “and they are three who testify in heaven, father, word and spirit.” Many editions based on the Vulgate included these added words, but they are relegated to a footnote in Bibles today. Notice I did not capitalize “father,” etc. This is to point out that the manuscripts we have been talking about are certainly not punctuated, and do not even have spaces between words, which are all in capital letters (in the oldest manuscripts), and contain shorthand ways (or abbreviations) of writing certain key words. So the grammar or grammatical construction of certain verses is debatable, as in John 1:3 (see the footnote here in *CSB*). And as far as the HB is concerned, we have an even more problematic situation: the original Hebrew text was purely consonantal, with no vowels. Vowels were added many centuries later —as even later came division into chapters and verses for the Bible— by the “Masoretes,” scholars steeped in the tradition, but nevertheless not inspired (or should we extend inspiration to them?). So oftentimes in very difficult passages which seem to make little sense, scholars are prone to emend the Masoretic Text (MT) by revocalizing, using different vowels than those in the MT. This gives you a further idea of the issues involved in producing an English Bible. Additionally, we know of a classic eighteen instances where the Hebrew scribes changed the original purposely to avoid inappropriate speech about God or for other theological motives.²⁵⁹ Although not on this list, Deut 32:8, in the MT, reads “according to the number of the sons of Israel.” Bibles today read “according to the number of the sons of god,” based on copies of this passage in Qumran and other sources. This indicates that the scholars believe that the reading of the standard Hebrew text, the Masoretic text, represents a change from the original reading of the Deuteronomic author. The Masoretes, probably following rabbinic tradition, considered that a reference to “the sons of god” was polytheistic (which it originally was, at least “sort of!”), so they changed it to the nonsensical “sons of Israel.” The LXX already interpreted “sons of god” as “angels,” and this is what it reads. Another example is in Job 2:9, where Bibles have Job’s wife

²⁵⁹ See *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible. Supplementary Volume* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 262-263.

saying “Curse God and die,” whereas the MT reads “bless God and die” (you can see why the change: the sense of propriety of the Masoretes).

Finally, a word about “interpolations” in the text that seemingly cannot be removed. An interpolation is something added to the original, stuck in there. It is easy to spot when one can compare early, good manuscripts with the later, bad ones (this is not a rule, one can be early and bad or late and good, but normally, the closer to the time of the original, the better and the less time there was for alterations, etc.). But sometimes we are almost positive that there is an interpolation but have absolutely no manuscript with which to support removing it. A good example is in 1 Cor 4:6, which most Bibles try to make sense of, but which certainly appears to include a scribal “gloss,” that is, an added explanation which is not from St. Paul. The Greek original would say “These things, however, brethren, I have applied to myself and to Apollos for your sake, so that by us you may learn, so that no one over (another) one be puffed up against the other.” According to a great scholar, John Strugnell, a copyist left out the “no” and later wrote it over the letter “a” in one of the Greek words. A later (rather meticulous) copyist saw fit to gloss (explain) the text he was copying by writing in the margin “the ‘no’ has been written over the ‘a’.” Still later, as the manuscript was being read for copying (many manuscripts have been thus copied, by dictation, and you can imagine the errors that may result, although it is a lot faster to copy like this), the gloss was read and found its way into all the manuscripts we know of. And so our Bibles try to find ways to translate the passage as it exists, usually as “do not go beyond what is written,” which is at best a hopeful conjecture.²⁶⁰ With this, we can leave the problems of textual criticism aside. We get the idea that there is no such thing as a neat, clean, dictated text that is all very clear and that we simply have to translate. And we may think the Bible is difficult enough in translation, but, actually, all translations are already interpretations which a translator who is often also a scholar has come up with to smooth out and make sense of what is very often a difficult, very hard or impossible to understand original-language text. In these instances, recourse is had to ancient translations, especially the LXX and Latin versions, and to others as well. Oftentimes the LXX translators had before them an earlier

²⁶⁰ See JOHN STRUGNELL, “A Plea for Conjectural Emendation in the New Testament, with a Coda on 1 Cor 4:6,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36 (1974) 555-558. Earlier, ANDRÉ LEGAULT dealt with this, in “Beyond the Things that are Written,” *New Testament Studies* 18 (1971), 227-231.

version of the Hebrew than that reflected in the MT; this is an instance of a translation being more reliable than a version in the same language as the original language.

*To what does inspiration extend, and which is “the inspired text”?*²⁶¹ First, let’s get our bearings. In the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church (henceforth “the Catholic Church” or simply “the Church”), God has revealed himself to us, has communicated or made known to us Godself and other “things” which are pertinent to our salvation. This is known as “divine revelation.” In the Catholic Church, divine revelation is communicated to us through the Church in two different ways, those of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. A debate has taken place in the Church as to whether these constitute two sources of revelation. In the Vatican II “dogmatic constitution” *Dei Verbum*, on divine revelation, in nos. 9-10, it is said that there exists

a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and sacred Scripture.²⁶² For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end.²⁶³ For sacred Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit. To the successors of the apostles, sacred tradition hands on in its full purity God’s word, which was entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. . . . Consequently, it is not from sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Both sacred tradition and sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of devotion and reverence.

10. Sacred tradition and sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God [= divine revelation in its totality], which is committed to the Church.

The task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office [*magisterium*] of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously, and explaining it faithfully by divine

²⁶¹ See the *NJBC*, 65:60.

²⁶² I am respecting the case of the text I am quoting from, but Tradition should be capitalized, as it is to be distinguished from “traditions” (as Yves Congar, O.P., has pointed out in his book entitled with both words), and is moreover parallel to Scripture which is capitalized. Likewise I would capitalize God’s “Word.” The quotations from *Dei Verbum* are taken from *The Documents of Vatican II* (W.M. Abbott, ed.; Joseph Gallagher, trans.; New York – Cleveland: Corpus Books, 1966). Throughout, I omit footnotes that are in the quoted text.

²⁶³ The final approved text avoided the Latin word *fons* (“source, fount”) here in order not to come out one way or the other on the “controversy” as to one or two sources of revelation; instead, it used *scaturigo*, here translated “wellspring.” See the “authoritative” commentary of one who was present in the debates, JOSEPH RATZINGER, “The Transmission of Divine Revelation,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II. Vol. II* (H. Vorgrimler, gen. ed.; ET of German original; New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 190-191.

commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit; it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed.

It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God's most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.

I have not made any corrections to this translation, but will now make one: after the asterisks above, the word "authentically" (in the original Latin, *authentice*) should rather be rendered "authoritatively."²⁶⁴ The hierarchy of the Church is the final authority for resolving doctrinal disputes; it furthermore teaches with this special authority. But it is not just the magisterium or hierarchy that can teach "authentically," in the sense of genuinely; Bible scholars can do so, as well as even the simple faithful who have God's spirit.

This tradition [the transmission of divine revelation] which comes from the apostles develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. For there is a growth in understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts (cf. Lk. 2:19, 51), through the intimate understanding of spiritual things they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through episcopal succession the sure gift of truth.²⁶⁵

In no. 12, *Dei Verbum* states:

But, since holy Scripture must be read and interpreted according to the same Spirit by which it was written, no less serious attention [than must be given to the historical context] must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture, if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly brought to light. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith [the "analogy of faith"]. It is the task of exegetes [Bible scholars] to work according to these rules toward a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of sacred Scripture, so that through preparatory study the judgment of the Church may mature. For all of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgment of the Church, which carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God.

²⁶⁴ See FRANCIS A. SULLIVAN, *Magisterium. Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1983), 24-28.

²⁶⁵ *Dei Verbum* no. 8.

The Church teaches that the Holy Scriptures are divinely inspired. The Church does not say which version or versions of the Scriptures, only that

the books of both the Old and the New Testament in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because, having been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn. 20:31; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19-21; 3:15-16) they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself. In composing the sacred books, God chose men [*homines*] and while employed by Him they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted. *Dei Verbum* no. 11.

The version most venerated by the Church is the Latin Vulgate, translated by Jerome around 400 C.E. This version has been recently revised (or “improved”) by use of better manuscripts than Jerome had at his disposal.²⁶⁶ But this version is valuable because it reflects the Tradition of the Church in the rendering of the biblical texts; we must have recourse to the original-language texts and ancient versions in order to evaluate their witness to the Word of God. The LXX has pride of place among the versions. This Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures began to be done around 250 B.C.E., and in some books reflects an earlier stage of the text than that found in the standard Masoretic Text. The Hebrew OT copy of the Masoretic Text dates from around 900 C.E.; the oldest copies of (parts) of the HB have been found in Qumran. The only complete scroll of Isaiah, for example, was found at Qumran (1947); it dates to the “early part of the 1st cent. BC.”²⁶⁷ The Book of Jeremiah in the LXX, for example, is about two-thirds as long as the Hebrew MT, and the order of some chapters is different; this reflects a more original, earlier version (see, e.g., the footnote to Jer 33:14-26 in the *CSB*, page 1048). But now I want to conclude this portion of our discussion of the inspired text and the issues it raises by mentioning two interesting examples that show the untenability of simplistic notions of inspiration. Both pertain peculiarly to the Roman Catholic canon.

²⁶⁶ See the 1984 Letter of Pope John Paul II regarding the revision of the Vulgate (the “Neo-Vulgate”) in *Enchiridion Biblicum. Documenti della Chiesa sulla Sacra Scrittura. Edizione bilingue* (Bologna: Centro Editoriale Dehoniano, 1993, 1994²), nos. 907-908. The pope rejects the idea, however, that the new edition would “improve” (*in melius corrigeretur*) Jerome’s edition. But “improve” means “to make better,” and what, if anything, is such a revision for? The Church’s great respect for Tradition and traditions makes it often very (too?) circumspect in its language.

²⁶⁷ See the *NJBC* 68:27.

The first concerns 2 Macc, which is a “summary” (epitome) of a five-volume work by one Jason of Cyrene. If we read the “inspired” author’s preface, 2 Macc 2:19-32, we do not get the impression he felt very inspired. He is going to “attempt” to do the summary, v. 23; he is (merely) trying to make a difficult work more accessible to the simple reader.

For us who have taken upon ourselves the labor of making this digest, the task, far from being easy, is one of sweat and of sleepless nights . . . while we leave the responsibility for exact details to the original author, and confine our efforts to giving only a summary outline. As the architect of a new house must give his attention to the whole structure, while the man who undertakes the decoration and the frescoes has only to concern himself with what is needed for ornamentation, so I think it is with us. To enter into questions and examine them thoroughly from all sides is the task of the professional historian.²⁶⁸

The other illustration of the difficulties of simplistic notions of inspiration, now with the added issue of which version or versions are inspired, is from the prologue of Sir (the prologue, however, is not considered to be “inspired”).²⁶⁹ The translator complains of the inadequacy of Greek to render the more potent Hebrew his grandfather wrote in, but

You therefore are now invited to read it in a spirit of attentive good will, with indulgence for any apparent failure on our part, despite earnest efforts, in the interpretation of particular passages. For words spoken originally in Hebrew are not as effective when they are translated into another language. That is true not only of this book but of the law itself, the prophets and the rest of the books, which differ no little when they are read in the original.²⁷⁰

Note again the reference to “effort;” there is a lot of perspiration combined with this inspiration! Then, the problem with any translation is that it “betrays” the original because it can never exactly reproduce it (the Italians make a play on words given the similarity between *traduttore* —translator— and *traditore* —traitor). But then there’s a further “complication”: we had only the Greek translation of Sir and used it ‘as our inspired text’, or perhaps we should say as our (only known) *witness* to the inspired word of God as contained in this book. Then, at the end of the nineteenth century, about two-

²⁶⁸ 2 Macc 2:26, 28-30, *New American Bible* version (in the *CSB*).

²⁶⁹ See the introduction in *CSB* page 868.

²⁷⁰ Sir prologue/foreword in the *New American Bible* version.

thirds of Sir in the original Hebrew was found, and later other partial Hebrew copies were found. I have a Latin-Hebrew copy of these parts of Sir, and I can tell you that there are significant differences between the Greek and the Hebrew. As is the case with the LXX, and even more with the Aramaic translations, the Targums, it is seldom a simple matter of translation; a lot of interpretation and updating go on. The translator often has his own theology, and his times require an updated message in a new context. Remember, these are not scholarly, exact translations: they are vehicles which make available a valuable text, in this case God's Word, to a new audience, with different needs than the original audience. So, to give just one glaring example, the Hebrew text of Zech 2:10 reads "I scatter (or have scattered —tense is another of the ambivalences of Hebrew) you," whereas the LXX has it "I will *gather* you," that is, the opposite in both meaning and time. This is a clear case of a passage being updated from an original punishment to a future (eschatological) reversal of the same; it is no longer a translation. Editions such as the New American Bible take both "witnesses," the Hebrew (at least, as much of it as we have) and the Greek into account in coming up with an English version of Sir. Some, most notably the Dominicans' École Biblique in Jerusalem, have for years advocated the inspired nature of the LXX. We cannot go any further into these matters. Our intention here has been merely to set forth both Church teaching on inspiration and the complicated issues involved in understanding this doctrine whose full, contemporary elaboration is still very much, it would seem, a "work in progress."

To recap: God has communicated himself to us in what we call divine revelation; God has done this 'for the purpose of our salvation'. Divine revelation, or the "Word of God" (who became flesh in Jesus, after God had previously spoken through the prophets), comes to us in two ways: by the handing-on of what God has revealed—in its totality, including rites and sacraments— through Sacred Tradition (*traditio* means "what is handed-on or down, or delivered")²⁷¹ and by the Holy Books of Sacred Scripture, which contain "in a special way" what God has revealed (*Dei Verbum* no. 8). We have these Holy Books as witnessed-to by manuscripts, which we must analyze and evaluate and

²⁷¹ See *Dei Verbum* no. 8: "Now what was handed on ["Tradition"] by the apostles includes everything which contributes to the holiness of life, and the increase in faith of the People of God; and so the Church, in her teaching, life, and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes."

then translate for use by the faithful in their own language. God provides, so that God's Word can reach us, although effort is involved, and the process is not infallible, although God's Word is infallible. God's Word is witnessed-to by the Scriptures, as it is witnessed-to also by Sacred Tradition, which itself gives us the canon of Scripture. God will not be thwarted in his self-communication to us, for the sake of our salvation. This leads us to the next chapter.

Chapter Nine: The Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy

Relevance of this topic. For a long time now, the Bible has been studied as if it were profane literature, using all the critical methods of literary and historical analysis. The Church, specially since Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* in 1943, encourages this, and the 1993 PBC document *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, I.A., while pointing out its limitations, declares that

The historical-critical method is the indispensable method for the scientific study of the meaning of ancient texts. Holy Scripture, inasmuch as it is the “Word of God in human language”, has been composed by human authors in all its various parts and in all the sources that lie behind them. Because of this, its proper understanding not only admits the use of this method but actually requires it.

In recent years —and the PBC documents reflects this— the preponderant or even exclusive use of this method has been highly criticized, specially for dismantling the text (a “diachronic” approach, which examines the layers behind the text *through the time* or moments of various editions) without then analyzing or explaining what it means when it is “put back together” or seen in its final form (which is what the “synchronic,” the ‘text as timeless’ approach does).²⁷² Today, however, there are legions of Bible scholars who treat the Bible as a book to be studied like any other, whether they use diachronic or synchronic methods. The latter can be most useful today, based as they are on sophisticated linguistic and literary approaches, which focus on the text as story, with characters and a plot, or on its composition (we saw the concept of chiasm as an example of how the Semitic structure of texts can yield extremely valuable results for the understanding of Scripture). In much of biblical exegesis today, a truly *theological* approach is lacking; this is because what I define as “theological,” which I learned as a Dominican friar, requires faith, one of the theological virtues.²⁷³ In the Thomistic view,

²⁷² See Introduction.A, and I.A.1 in the 1993 PBC document.

²⁷³ I think the learned and charismatic Père de Vaux agreed. See his “A propos de la Théologie Biblique,” in *ZAW* 68 (1956), 225-227; Chapter Three, “Is it possible to write ‘a theology of the Old Testament?’,” in his *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (ET trans. Damian McHugh of orig. French *Bible et Orient*; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 49-62. As JOHN STRUGNELL, “In Memoriam—Roland Guérin de Vaux, O.P.,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 207 (Oct. 1972), 4-5, wrote, “Yet in all this life of teaching and friendship, he saw himself as primarily a faithful priest, not a scholar who was accidentally a priest, but a priest who consecrated his abilities to the Church and who served it with all his energies. Here again, the memories are numerous . . . not just his devotion to a regular liturgical life . . . not

theology is a science with its “first principles” (an Aristotelian notion), just like any other science. Except that the first principles of theology depend on God’s own knowledge, and we have access to this only through faith. So we can only do this kind of Catholic theology with faith—as opposed to a “theology” which seeks to examine religious phenomena from purely profane or even “objective” points of view, with no faith presuppositions. This is “theology” only because of its subject-matter; in my view, it cannot be true theology because it does not partake of God’s own communicated or revealed knowledge. Without getting more into this great but vast topic, I refer here to only two elements already mentioned which are found in *Dei Verbum* no. 12: “holy Scripture must be read and interpreted according to the same Spirit by whom it was written” (I would add, “in order to be truly understood”), and “The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of faith,” which I take to mean that *faith* is required in order to properly understand the Scriptures, the kind of faith had by the biblical authors themselves.²⁷⁴

One of the most common results of the scientific study of Scripture, necessary as it is, is the belief or conviction that there are many “errors” in the Bible. Here we would

just the Mass at daybreak by the Dead Sea—though his excavations would be as unthinkable without that regular Mass as they would be without their sprightly dinners—both maintained amidst unpromising circumstances. There was a certain traditionalism in manner in this man who in his researches was so modern, a formality which hid his humility, a conservatism perhaps due to his background; but these were accidentals, the essential was the loyal service of God. One of his long-time friends wrote that his «sens de Dieu» ‘not only undergirded his life but was the source of his almost luminous character. Freedom of critical research went hand in hand with a deep-founded faith. . . . His historical and archaeological work he did as a priest and as a religious, consecrated to the service of God. After one of those archaeological guided tours, when he had enthusiastically brought back to life the days of Qumrân, he confided to his students that the ideal of his life remained to preach Jesus Christ, as the good Friar-Priest that he desired to be.’”

²⁷⁴ I must here quote from the Angelic Doctor (Aquinas) regarding a special kind of knowledge in theology, knowledge by “connaturality.” In the *Summa theologiae* 2-2, q. 45, a.2, in the response, he says that “wisdom has to do with a certain correctness of judgment according to divine reasons.” This can occur in two ways: one is by the “perfect use of reason,” the other “on account of a certain connaturality with those things of which it is presently to be judged” (*propter connaturalitatem quandam ad ea de quibus iam est iudicandum*). Thus, regarding things pertaining to chastity, one may judge correctly by learning “moral science” or by possessing the habit (virtue) of chastity. Correct judgment concerning divine things by way of the “examination of reason” (*ex rationis inquisitione*) belongs to wisdom as an intellectual virtue, while such judgment “according to a certain connaturality” belongs to wisdom as a gift of the Holy Spirit. The Aquinate cites what Dionysius says about Hierotheus, that he “is perfect in divine matters ‘not just learning, but also experiencing, divine things’” (*non solum discens, sed et patiens divina*). This “sympathy” (*compassio*) or connaturality with divine things takes place through charity, which indeed unites us to God. . . . Thus, therefore, wisdom which is a gift indeed has its cause in the will, namely, charity, while it has its essence in the intellect, whose act is to judge correctly, as was treated above (1 q.79 a.3).”

have to define what an “error” is, and according to some definitions (“what’s in a name?”), there are not only errors, but even bicycles in the Bible (if I so defined “bicycle”!). But more seriously, we are referring to “errors” in the sense of a “mistake” the author made, reflecting a limitation not just due to his place and time, but to a lapse of memory or ignorance of something which he would have written differently if only he had known. It is very common to state today that an evangelist or some other biblical author misunderstood something or made some other mistake.

Now, I am not talking about the limitations of science at the time the written was written. I am not referring to “error” here as the apparent belief that the sun was the one that revolved around the earth, and not the other way around, as reflected in Josh 10:12-13, the passage which got Galileo into trouble. Nor I am talking about six-day creation, or the belief that there are floodgates in the firmament which are opened to release the water stored there.²⁷⁵ Nor the notions about nature reflected in the Book of Job, specially in Yahweh’s speech towards the end of the book. These can pretty easily be considered part and parcel of the humanity in which God’s Word is expressed, a humaneness which, “incarnationally,” simply reflects the normal knowledge of the time and uses it, as it uses the language of that time and place, to great poetic advantage.

I am here limiting myself to a discussion of “error” in the Bible such as cannot so easily be explained as poetry, or due to the literary genre, the taking into account and study of which Pius XII strongly promoted, specially in his encyclical. Regarding this, the great expert on apocalyptic and Daniel, John J. Collins, states:

The tales in Daniel bristle with historical problems. The famous case of Darius the Mede may serve as an illustration. The conqueror of Babylonia was Gobryas, governor of Gutium, a general of Cyrus, king of Persia. No such person as Cyrus the Mede is known in history. The successor of Cyrus as king of Persia was named Darius. The author of Daniel inherited a schema of four kingdoms in which Media preceded Persia, and it seems highly probable that he created the figure of Darius the Mede to fit this schema. Similarly, there is a widespread consensus that the tale of Nebuchadnezzar’s madness was developed from a tradition that originally concerned the later Babylonian king Nabonidus. What is at issue in all this is not the veracity of the “word of God,” as literalists usually construe it, but a question of genre. An assumption that the “word of God” must be factual historical reporting, and cannot be literary fiction, is theologically

²⁷⁵ The PBC 1993 document states that “Fundamentalism likewise tends to adopt very narrow points of view. It accepts the literal reality of an ancient, out-of-date cosmology, simply because it is found expressed in the Bible; this blocks any dialogue with a broader way of seeing the relationship between culture and faith;” I.F.

unwarranted. Whether or not a given passage is historically accurate is a question of relative probability in view of our total evidence. Nothing is gained by straining credibility in the hope of saving the historical appearances.²⁷⁶

I am talking about “error” more specifically in the sense of a mistake that the author or speaker would not have made had he or she known better. I believe these are the sorts of “errors” in the Bible pointed to by Cardinal Franz König of Vienna in Vatican II, on Oct. 2, 1964, along with other Council Fathers.

The Cardinal first of all pointed out the new situation that exists in relation to the question of inerrancy. As a result of intensive Oriental studies our picture of the *veritas historica* [historical truth] and the *fides historica* [historical faith] of Scripture has been clarified. Many of the 19th century objections to the Old Testament in particular and its reliability are now irrelevant. But Oriental studies have also produced another finding: “. . . laudata scientia rerum orientalium insuper demonstrat in Bibliis Sacris notitias historicas et notitias scientiae naturalis a veritate quandoque deficere.” [“. . . the praiseworthy science of Oriental things additionally demonstrates that there are in the Sacred Books notions regarding history and natural science which sometimes are lacking in truth.”] Thus Cardinal König admitted that not all the difficulties could be solved. On the contrary, in certain cases they have an urgency that is borne out by scientific research. His speech mentioned a few examples: according to Mk 2:26 David had entered the house of God under the high priest Abiathar and eaten the bread of the Presence. In fact, however, according to 1 Sam 21:1 ff. it was not under Abiathar, but under his father Abimelech [*sic*; it was Ahimelech]. In Mt 27:9 we read that in the fate of Judas a prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled. In fact it is Zech 11:12f. that is quoted. In Dan 1:1 we read that King Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem in the third year of King Jehoiakim, i.e., 607 B.C., but from the authentic chronicle of King Nebuchadnezzar that has been discovered we know that the siege can only have taken place three years later. Other geographical and chronological points could be quoted in this connection.²⁷⁷

It is our intention to deal with Mark 2:26 and Matt 27:9 in the next chapter on interpretation; the chronological discrepancy in Dan I think is resolvable according to what Collins stated as quoted above, but we hope to also deal with this kind of “error” (at worst, it would seem to involve a small detail, but there is the rub) in the next chapter.

Cardinal König’s point had already been considered by Pope Pius XII in *Divino afflante Spiritu*, who called on exegetes to provide “a solid explanation” of the unresolved historical difficulties to be found throughout the Bible, “in total accord with

²⁷⁶ *The Apocalyptic Imagination. An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature. Second Edition* (Grand Rapids - Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans; Livonia, MI: Dove Booksellers, 1984, 1998), 86. I omitted the footnotes.

²⁷⁷ GRILLMEIER, “The Divine Inspiration and Interpretation,” 205-206. The bracketed translation is mine; I omit footnotes.

Church doctrine, especially that of biblical inerrancy, and at the same time capable of responding fully to the conclusions of the profane sciences.”²⁷⁸ The Council Fathers responsible for *Dei Verbum*, after lengthy discussions which contributed to this most important document being among the last to be finished, rejected “absolute inerrancy” regarding everything stated in the Bible as something which seemed to be based on naive notions of the veracity of Scripture; some spoke of this as a “‘monophysite’ doctrine of inerrancy, where the human aspect is completely absorbed by the divine (or what we imagine the divine to be).”²⁷⁹ But it was difficult and problematical to come up with an adequate formula that respected both the notion that it is repugnant to attribute error to God’s Word and that the Scriptures are also human compositions which seemingly have limitations which may be “errors.”²⁸⁰

What the final text of *Dei Verbum* has is the statement

Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation.²⁸¹

The comment to this passage in the Abbott edition of the *Documents of Vatican II* states:

An earlier draft of the Constitution had joined the adjective *salutaris* (“tending to salvation”) to the word “truth.” Another last-minute change substituted the phrase “for the sake of our salvation,” to avoid seeming to limit the truth itself. The point remains the same, and can be shown by quoting a text from the following official footnote. St. Thomas Aquinas says “Any knowledge which is profitable to salvation may be the object of prophetic inspiration. But things which cannot affect our salvation do not belong to inspiration.” Hence, Augustine says that although the sacred writers may have known astronomy, nevertheless the Holy Spirit did not intend to utter through them any truth apart from that which is profitable to salvation. He adds that this may concern either teachings to be believed or morals to be practiced.

The Bible was not written in order to teach the natural sciences, nor to give information on merely political history. It treats of these (and other subjects) only

²⁷⁸ *Enchiridion biblicum*, 563-564.

²⁷⁹ I am following GRILLMEIER, “The Divine Inspiration and Interpretation,” 200-201.

²⁸⁰ THOMAS A. HOFFMAN, in “Inspiration, Normativeness, Canonicity, and the Unique Sacred Character of the Bible,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982), 447-469, rejects the continuing validity of the notion of “inerrancy.”

²⁸¹ No. 11. This is the Gallagher translation in the Abbott edition.

insofar as they are involved in matters concerning salvation. It is only in this respect that the veracity of God and the inerrancy of the inspired writers are engaged. This is not a quantitative distinction, as though some sections treated of salvation (and were inerrant), while others gave merely natural knowledge (and were fallible). It is formal, and applies to the whole text. The latter is authoritative and inerrant in what it affirms about the revelation of God and the history of salvation. According to the intentions of its authors, divine and human, it makes no other affirmations.²⁸²

Raymond Brown, discussing this text, states that

Only gradually have we learned to distinguish that while all Scripture is inspired, not all Scripture is inerrant. The first step in narrowing the scope of inerrancy is to recognize that the concept is applicable only when a affirmation of truth is involved. In the Bible there are passages of poetry, song, fiction, and fable where the matter of inerrancy does not even arise. A second step is to recognize that not every affirmation of truth is so germane to God's purpose in inspiring the Scriptures that He committed Himself to it. Already in *Providentissimus Deus* (1893) Pope Leo XIII acknowledged that the scientific affirmations of the Bible were not necessarily inerrant, since it was not God's purpose to teach men science. Eventually the same principle was applied to historical affirmations, but the last frontier has been religious affirmations. Job's denial of an afterlife (Job 14:14-22) makes it difficult to claim that all the religious affirmations of the Bible are inerrant. Vatican II has made it possible to restrict inerrancy to the essential religious affirmations of a biblical book made for the sake of our salvation.²⁸³

There are significant problems with the above statement. I do not read Leo XIII the same way, as my footnote indicates. The "last frontier" language bespeaks the kind of "slippery slope" which circumscriptions of inerrancy tend to fall into. The citation of Job, as many other passages in the Bible, can be easily explained as the lament, prayer, etc. of the speaker, or as the result of the development of revelation in the Bible which need not even be further discussed here (Abraham's telling the Egyptians that Sarah was his sister to avoid danger to himself, Gen 12:10-29, or Judah's having sex with what he thinks is a prostitute, Gen 38:15-18, need not be taken to be moral teachings, as Qohelet's doubt as to the fate of souls, Qoh 3:20-21, need not be considered to be a definitive theological statement). Another issue would be unfulfilled prophecies of true prophets, such as

²⁸² *The Documents of Vatican II*, 119, footnote 31. Pope Leo XII, in the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*, II.D.3, rejects limiting inspiration to matters of faith and morals, and in II.D.3.a., citing Vatican I, rejects the notion that there is any error in Scripture. In II.D.3.b., he states: "And if in these books I met anything which seems contrary to truth, I shall not hesitate to conclude either that the text is faulty, or that the translator has not expressed the meaning of the passage, or that I myself do not understand;" footnote omitted; N.C.W.C. translation. I omit footnotes.

²⁸³ *Biblical Reflections on Crises Facing the Church* (New York – Paramus: Paulist, 1975), 115. I omit footnotes.

Jeremiah's in Jer 43:8-13 (these can be understood as typical "oracles against the nations," which is a literary genre.²⁸⁴ We could also mention the material inaccuracy of 'all the people, from the smallest to greatest, rose and went to Egypt' in 2 Kgs 25:26', whose theologico-literary purpose we discussed. "Inerrancy" is said to apply to the whole of Scripture; we have to find ways of understanding this, and of trying to resolve the 'unresolved historical (and other) difficulties to be found throughout the Bible', "in total accord with Church doctrine, especially that of biblical inerrancy," as Pius XII called on exegetes to do.

Daniel Harrington, discussing *Dei Verbum* no. 11's "doctrine of inerrancy of Scripture" —'Scripture teaches firmly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted to be written for the sake of our salvation'—, states that

This may sound like a statement of limited inerrancy —that is, only what pertains to our salvation, and not historical or scientific matters, in the Bible is free from error. But, in fact, the theologians who wrote this document and the council fathers who voted their approval deliberately sought to avoid approving either complete inerrancy or limited inerrancy as the church's teaching . . . there is no attempt to explain in detail *how* inspiration and inerrancy function or what scope these terms may have. It was more a matter of reaffirming venerable theological teachings without specifying which interpretation of them is best.²⁸⁵

A final word about the statement in *Dei Verbum* no. 11. Most translations render it "that truth which God wanted to be put into the Sacred Books for the sake of our salvation."²⁸⁶ In Latin, the phrase is *veritatem, quam Deus nostrae salutis causa Litteris Sacris consignari voluit*. *Veritatem* is simply "truth" in the accusative case (direct object of verb); there is no necessary demonstrative pronoun "that" such as to tend to separate out "*that*" kind of truth from another kind. And so we agree with Jesuit Father Harrington, and, trying to also follow Pius XII's summons, will, God willing, in the next and last chapter attempt to explain why Jesus or Mark said "Abiathar" rather than "Ahimelech," and why Matthew wrote "Jeremiah" instead of "Zechariah," as we discuss biblical interpretation in general.

²⁸⁴ There is a classic book on fulfilled and unfulfilled prophecies, ERNST JENNI, *Die politischen Voraussagen der Propheten* ["The Politician Predictions of the Prophets"] (Zürich: Zwingli Verlage, 1956).

²⁸⁵ DANIEL J. HARRINGTON, in "Catholic Interpretation of Scripture," in *The Bible in the Churches. How Different Christians Interpret the Scriptures* (Kenneth Hagen et al.) (Paulist Press: New York – Mahwah, 1985), 40. I omit footnotes.

²⁸⁶ See the *NJBC*, 65:3-4.

Chapter Ten: The Interpretation of the Christian Bible

Preliminary remarks. In the remaining pages of this work, we cannot present a whole treatise on the interpretation of the Christian Bible (CB). Rather, our whole approach in this regard has been to set forth an understanding of CB that takes into account history and the canon, or actually, principal canons of Scripture, in order to allow the reader to get a grasp of the whole CB and understand it as a theological work or collection. It should have become apparent to the reader that, implicitly, our presentation did not focus on mere questions of history or on what really happened, but that the focus was on the theology and the religious hopes that are expressed in the pages of Scripture. These are composed so as to inculcate or preach a message, born out of an understanding of what God has done and has promised to do in the world, beginning especially with his people Israel, but with a certain centrifugal tendency apparent in a number of OT texts. It is the Christian, and specifically Roman Catholic belief, that all the Scriptures point to Jesus Christ, and are to be read, understood and interpreted accordingly. *Dei Verbum* no. 15 states that

The principal purpose to which the plan of the Old Covenant was directed was to prepare for the coming both of Christ, the universal Redeemer, and of the messianic kingdom, to announce this coming by prophecy (cf. Lk. 24:44; Jn. 5:39; 1 Pet. 1:10), and to indicate its meaning through various types (cf. 1 Cor. 10:11).

A word must be said about our methodology, as evidenced by the Part One of this book. In the preliminary remarks to Chapter Two, we said that ours would be a theological interpretation of the Scriptures, that we would deal with the *facts*, but that we were heuristically interested in how they pointed to the coming of Jesus. In this sense, our reading of the “Old Testament” was rather Christological. This was the ancient Christian way to understand the Jewish Scriptures, and it was given to lots of exaggeration, so that the original integrity of these Scriptures in their historical context was often minimized if not completely disregarded. We have tried to correct this, and in this sense, ours is a “post-modern” return to the holistic, even somewhat Patristic reading of Scripture. This had fallen into disuse and even been abandoned as anti-modern. As the most recent

extensive document by the Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, states

Today, there is the danger of going to the opposite extreme of denying outright, together with the excesses of the allegorical method, all Patristic exegesis and the very idea of a Christological reading of Old Testament texts. This gave rise in contemporary theology, without as yet any consensus, to different ways of re-establishing a Christian interpretation of the Old Testament that would avoid arbitrariness and respect the original meaning.

5. The Unity of God's plan and the idea of fulfillment

21. The basic theological presupposition is that God's salvific plan which culminates in Christ (cf. Ep 1:3-14) is a unity, but that it is realized progressively over the course of time.

The Exodus, the primordial experience of Israel's faith (cf. Dt 6:20-25; 26:5-9), becomes the [model of later experiences of] salvation [see French original]. Liberation from the Babylonian Exile and the prospect of an eschatological salvation are described as a new Exodus. Christian interpretation is situated along these lines with this difference, that the fulfillment is already substantially realized in the mystery of Christ.²⁸⁷

The definitive fulfillment will be at the end with the resurrection of the dead, a new heaven and a new earth. Jewish messianic expectation is not in vain. It can become for us Christians a powerful stimulant to keep alive the eschatological dimension of our faith. Like them, we too live in expectation. The difference is that for us the One who is to come will have the traits of the Jesus who has already come and is already present and active among us.

[The Christian interpretation of the Old Testament] is a theological interpretation, but at the same time historically grounded. Far from excluding historical-critical exegesis, it demands it.

Although the Christian reader is aware that the internal dynamism of the Old Testament finds its goal in Jesus, this is a retrospective perception whose point of departure is not in the text as such, but in the events of the New Testament proclaimed by apostolic preaching. It cannot be said, therefore, that Jews do not see what has been proclaimed in the text, but that the Christian, in the light of Christ and in the Spirit, discovers in the text an additional meaning that was hidden there.

7. Contribution of Jewish reading of the Bible

22. The horror . . . of the extermination of the Jews (the Shoah) . . . has led all the Churches to reconsider their interpretation of the Jewish Bible, the Old Testament.

²⁸⁷ See CHARLES H. MILLER, "Translation Errors in the Pontifical Biblical Commission's THE JEWISH PEOPLE AND THEIR SACRED SCRIPTURES IN THE CHRISTIAN BIBLE," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 35 (2005), 34-39 (compare page 59 in the English with page 52 in the French). Whereas the French has it as we render it above (the Exodus "becomes the model of later experiences of salvation"), the English "Vatican translation" (see the back of the title page) skews the original text by rendering it as "becomes the symbol of final salvation."

. . . Christians can and ought to admit that the Jewish reading of the Bible is a possible one, in continuity with the Jewish Sacred Scriptures from the Second Temple period, a reading analogous to the Christian reading which developed in parallel fashion. Both readings are bound up with the vision of their respective faiths, of which the readings are the result and expression. Consequently, both are irreducible.

On the practical level of exegesis, Christians can, nonetheless, learn much from Jewish exegesis practiced for more than two thousand years, and, in fact, they have learned much in the course of history.²⁸⁸

Aim and scope of this chapter. We cannot present a whole treatise on biblical interpretation or hermeneutics. Our more modest aim here is to try to explicate the presuppositions and interpretative principles which lie beneath much of our presentation in Part One of this book. We shall be brief, due both to time and length constraints and also to the fact that I have not worked out in any great detail just how it is that I interpret the Bible. But I do hope and think that what follows—a statement of my view of the biblical inerrancy and inspiration, general hermeneutical principles and how some problematic examples are dealt with—will make this a bit clearer.

My view of biblical inerrancy and inspiration. As a believing and practising Roman Catholic steeped in the Tradition, I accept the biblical canon as containing the Word of God consigned to writing (with all due nuances regarding the notion of the text or texts as witnesses, etc. discussed in Chapter Eight). Through all the vicissitudes of the biblical texts, God's providence, which is always active and guiding all things and providing for our salvation, has made come down to us what we have as Sacred Scripture. Whether we read it in the vernacular, or in the original languages, God reveals himself to us in the Scriptures, and that is their purpose. In the sublime words of *Dei Verbum* no. 2:

Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (cf. Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17) out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends (cf. Ex. 33:11; Jn. 15:14-15) and lives among them (cf. Bar. 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship

²⁸⁸ (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002), II.A.5-7. See also on these points IV.B (Pastoral Orientations). On "post-modern" hermeneutics, see ALBERT C. OUTLER, "Toward a Postliberal Hermeneutics," *Theology Today* 42.3 (Oct. 1985), 281-292; DENIS FARKASFALVY, "In search of a 'post-critical' method of biblical interpretation for Catholic theology," *Communio* 4 (Winter, 1986), 288-307; IGNACE DE LA POTTERIE, "Reading Holy Scripture 'in the Spirit': Is the patristic way of reading the Bible still possible today?," *Communio* 4 (Winter, 1986), 308-325.

with Himself. This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity . . .

And in no. 8:

The words of the holy Fathers witness to the living presence of this tradition, whose wealth is poured into the practice and life of the believing and praying Church. Through the same tradition the full canon of the sacred books becomes known to the Church, and the sacred writings themselves are more profoundly understood and unceasingly made active in her; and thus God, who spoke of old, uninterruptedly converses with the Bride of His beloved Son; and the Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the gospel resounds in the Church, and through her, in the world, leads unto all truth those who believe and makes the word of Christ dwell abundantly in them (cf. Col. 3:16).

Finally, in no. 21:

The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since from the table of both the word of God and of the body of Christ she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life, especially in the sacred liturgy. . . . For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets his children with great love and speaks with them [*et cum eis sermonem confert*] . . .²⁸⁹

Having thus set the tone, we can say that biblical interpretation has as its aim to understand what God is revealing to us in the Scriptures. This requires understanding them (that is, the nature of the biblical text), to begin with at the textual and linguistic level; this is the first step in exegesis, which includes delimiting the biblical unit in question (the pericope or other passage, or maybe just a verse or word). Remember that chapter and verse numbers in our Bibles are very late and do not determine how the author or redactor of the text intended to divide his writing (as is the case with punctuation, and sometimes even with the vocalization of the Hebrew, and even the consonantal text may require emendation). Diachronic methods of situating the text in its time and culture are important, but ultimately the synchronic task of explaining or applying the meaning of the final text is the task of the Catholic exegete.

The Bible is inspired and inspiring. This means that it is read as God's voice, saying many things in many different ways but at the same time only one thing: his salvific intent, and all that this requires. In the Bible God reminds us of paradigmatic

²⁸⁹ The expression "*sermonem confert*" can mean "exchanges words, discusses."

situations, for purposes of our conversion, of our turning to him. God reminds of us of power and saving love, to comfort and strengthen us, to enable us not to fear, but to trust in him to save us and to free and empower us to serve others and be a light in this dark world. The notion that there is error in the Bible is, as has been said, “repugnant,” literally “fights against” our belief in a mysterious, inscrutable, unfathomable but ultimately “all-powerful” God.²⁹⁰ We do not, cannot, understand how the utterly simple God is or “works,” but in trusting in his Word, which is unfailing (Isa 55:10-11), we seek to understand what may lie behind discrepancies, “unresolved historical difficulties” and other conundrums in the Scriptures, before impugning “error” to the holy writer.²⁹¹ Here we will only deal with three “good candidates” for errors, as pointed out by Cardinal König in Vatican II; the first, the historical problems in Daniel, were already sufficiently dealt with—for our purposes—by John Collins. We have only to deal with the Abiathar problem in Mark and the Jeremiah-Zechariah problem in Matt. This we will do at the end.

Some general principles of biblical interpretation, or, some observations about the nature of the biblical texts.

1. *Take the Bible as a whole.* The first observation we make is that in the Catholic Tradition, the Christian Bible is taken as a whole, as a library considered to be a canon, that is, a normative rule of faith. I have sought to understand the whole of the Christian Bible as a story of a people who experienced both the nearness of God and God’s distance and punishment due to their sins, and Part One should then be an example of one attempt to interpret the Christian Bible as a whole. The primary image of this punishment, or distance from God, is “Exile.” Exile stands as the situation at the end of the Torah, a situation which it is hoped will change, what will mean “salvation.” The

²⁹⁰ James A Sanders, in the now classic *Torah and Canon. Second Edition*, xxv, states: “What happened at the “great divide” was a shift in the Jewish understanding of the nature of the text: not only was there a shift by the end of the first century CE from relative fluidity to remarkable stability of the text [when it was copied], there was a shift in understanding what the biblical text really was, its nature. . . . I called the shift the introduction of the concept of ‘verbal inspiration’. This marked the birth of the masoretic phenomenon that eventually guarded, protected, and counted every word of the text. Prior to the great divide, it was the message conveyed that was thought to have been inspired. After it, each word was considered ‘inspired’.”

²⁹¹ *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1990), 423, defines “error” as “**a** an act or condition of ignorant or imprudent deviation from a code or behavior **b** an act involving an unintentional deviation from truth or accuracy **c** an act that through ignorance, deficiency, or accident departs from or fails to achieve what should be done”

Former Prophets tell the story of how an initial entry into the Promise was thwarted by sin, which was followed by the punishment of Exile in Babylon (or Egypt). In this “desert of the peoples” (Ezek 20:35), Israel meditates and returns to her Lord, but this is temporary, and after this conversion (concomitant with the birth of Judaism) and physical return to the Land, the real end of Exile is still awaited. This is what Jesus proclaims under the primary image of the Kingdom of God, which has drawn near. For Christians, the end of Exile has begun and intimacy with God in Christ is possible, so that in some sense—and without being able to develop this further here—the curse announced in Genesis has been removed (see, e.g., Rom 5:1-2; 8:1; Eph 2:4-6). But still we await the new heavens and new earth, and must confess that we have not turned swords into plowshares or otherwise shown fruits worthy of conversion (Luke 3:8), generally speaking in this world of ours (nor did we do so in the Christian Middle Ages). Except for undeniable points of light: Francis of Assisi, Dominic Guzmán, Catherine of Siena, Thérèse of Lisieux, Charles de Foucauld, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Pope John Paul II, and really a multitude of others (cf. Rev 7:9-17).

2. *Interpret biblical books as coherent compositions.* The second principle, much more wieldy, is that each biblical book should be interpreted as a whole, as a coherent literary unit and unified theological composition as far as this seems possible. There are books that resist this much more than others; sometimes, we have to begin by examining one or more major themes in a book. I have studied the whole Gospel of Mark under the theme of Jesus’ replacing the Temple (very roughly said).²⁹² Ostensibly just an

²⁹² The fact that I interpret a gospel such as Mark’s as intimating that Jesus replaces the Temple, as a theological teaching or presentation, does not imply—and I do not believe—that this means all Jews should now convert, that Judaism has been superseded, and that Christians should tell Jews this. It simply means that this is what Mark’s gospel teaches, and that we as Christians should understand the full historical and theological context in which this gospel was written, and furthermore, that we accept Mark’s teaching as we accept dissimilar teachings in other New Testament writings, finally to put them together, along with and according to other elements of Sacred Tradition and Church teaching, so as to arrive at an understanding of the continued existence of Jews and Judaism which is uniquely respectful of both: our relationship, and obligation to respect and love the Jews is unique as regards all other faiths; the Jews are our “elder brethren.” The present Pope, Benedict XVI, citing St. Bernard of Clairvaux, has said: “‘God saved, reserved for himself, the salvation of Israel. He will do it in His Own Person’. And so, we have to leave it to God’s self, see, convinced and knowing that Christ is Savior of all of His Own people, and of all people. But how He will do it is in God’s hand.” “The World Over: Cardinal Ratzinger Interview. Raymond Arroyo with Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger,” <http://www.ewtn.com/library/ISSUES/RATZINTTV.HTM>. See also former Cardinal Ratzinger’s “Interreligious Dialogue and Jewish-Christian Relations,” *Communio* 25 (Spring 1998), 29-40. For the views of an enlightened Orthodox rabbi on Christianity, see

extended commentary on Mark 11:15-17, my doctoral dissertation, published as *The Theological Significance of Jesus' Temple Action in Mark's Gospel*, is in effect a commentary on the whole gospel from the point of view of salvation and the Jewish sacrificial cult, and there are very numerous references to practically all the books of the Christian Bible. One would not offhand see the immediate relevance of many OT books here. And, as an added comment, I would note that close study of a biblical passage often reveals deeper and deeper layers, so that, in this case, the “Temple cleansing” turns out to be the opposite of that in Mark (by somewhat subtle comparison with a real, so-described cleansing in the books of Maccabees). Pope Gregory the Great wrote that “the Scriptures grow with the reader.”²⁹³ I think this is a good image of what I experience when I read the Scriptures or study them, and experience what “inspiration” is: the feeling of the boundless, bottomless richness of God revealing to us his ways, communicating with us at ever deeper levels. Of course, this experience cannot be separated from the ability (which study, *lectio divina*, and biblical meditation provide) to recognize in biblical passages re-readings and references to other Scriptures —what the great Paul Beauchamp, S.J. calls “the pleasure of recognition.” At some point in our biblical studies —on a par with our spiritual development, no doubt— we begin clearly to hear God speaking with *one voice*, saying the very same “thing” in an infinite number of ways,

IRVING (YITZ) GREENBERG, *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth. The New Encounter between Judaism and Christianity* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 5764 · 2004).

²⁹³ DE LA POTTERIE, “Reading Holy Scripture ‘in the Spirit’, 323, discussing Heidegger’s philosophy of interpretation, states that “To interpret a text is to disclose the virtualities that it conceals, ‘to liberate its interior forces.’ It is to disengage whatever *implicit* it contains, to bring to light its hidden riches. So one can say that Heidegger’s hermeneutical lesson for theologians and exegetes invites them to seek out ‘what is *unthought* in the Tradition, the *unsaid* in the Scriptures themselves’ (William Richardson). We can’t help but be struck by the resemblance between these formulas and those from the patristic texts on the ‘spiritual sense’ of the Scriptures. We can say that St. Hilary and St. Gregory demand that the reader of the Gospel seek out its ‘*interior* intelligibility.’ Or with St. Jerome that the ‘meaning’ of the Scriptures is found behind the ‘words.’ It is found ‘not on the surface, but in the *marrow* . . . , in the *root* of *understanding*, . . . in the *spirit* of Scripture.” On 324, he says that “On many different occasions, in his biblical commentaries, Gregory insists on the fact that ‘the divine words *grow* with him who reads them’ (*In Ezechielem homiliae*, 1.7.8).” Also in *Moralia in Iob*, 20, 1 (Patrologia Latina 76, 135 B-D), where he says that “Sacred Scripture in some way grows together with the readers” (*aliquo modo cum legentibus crescit*),” quoted in DE LA POTTERIE, “L’esegesi biblica, scienza della fede,” in *L’esegesi cristiana*, 147; in *ibid.*, 162, he quotes Ricoeur as often reminding us that there is always “a surplus of meaning” in texts. This “phenomenon” is discussed by PAUL RICOEUR in “The Nuptial Metaphor,” in ANDRÉ LACOCQUE – PAUL RICOEUR, *Thinking Biblically. Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies* (ET David Pellauer; Chicago - London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998), 227 (“In this way are born interpretations that augment the meaning of the text, through a meaning that is, in a way, in front of the text, without necessarily claiming that this meaning preexisted in the text.”).

each deeper than the other (“deep calls to deep,” Ps 42:7). Ultimately, this one voice is Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh.²⁹⁴

Related to this principle is that improper importation of the vocabulary and ideas of one book into another is to be avoided. “Improper” means that you are ‘mixing apples and oranges’. A good example is interpreting what Jesus does in the Temple in Mark according to the Lukan account of the “same” event. In Luke, the Temple is important, his gospel begins and ends there (unlike in Matt and Mark, the disciples are *not* told to go to Galilee to see the risen Jesus), there is no accusation against Jesus regarding the Temple in his trial, Luke has Jesus throw *only* the *sellers* out and generally minimizes the scene. In short, in Luke it appears to be “cleansing” so that Jesus may teach there, while in Mark it is a portent of the destruction of the Temple (reserved by Luke for Acts 6:14, when Jesus is dead). Similarly, Mark has an abrupt abrogation of the Jewish dietary laws, Mark 7:19, while Luke has a gradual process, Acts 10:9-43.

3. *Take the Bible literally in the right way.* The following exegetical principle I would indicate is that the Bible is to be read and interpreted literally, only, in the *right way*. This means taking the words at their face value, in order to try to understand what the biblical writer is trying to say or convey (and not what we think he means from our point of view, modern, religious, or otherwise). The first great example is Gen 1, six-day creation with rest on the Sabbath. The P writer is conveying the importance of Sabbath observance; he is not using a “day” to represent ‘a thousand years’, or a billion years, as those who think the writer’s aim must include the scientific point of view seek to interpret him as doing, misusing Ps 90:4 and 2 Pet 3:8. 2 Kgs 25:26 is another great example: ‘all the people, from the smallest to the largest went to Egypt’. Literally, taken in the *wrong* way, this flies in the face of the fact that we know from other passages that numerous people were deported to Babylon. Read the right way, this author is telling us that the curse of Deut 28:68 is being literally fulfilled; he has made his story (according to Richard Friedman, “Dtr²,” the second edition of the Deuteronomistic History) an “Egypt to Egypt” tale of tragedy, full of the symbolism of the intimation that the people are back

²⁹⁴ “You recall that one and the same Word of God extends throughout Scripture, that it is one and the same Utterance that resounds in the mouths of all the sacred writers, since he who was in the beginning with God has no need of separate syllables; for he is not subject to time.” Fn.: “St. Augustine, *En. in Ps.* 103,4,1: PL 37, 1378; cf. *Ps 104; Jn 1:1*,” quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (ET United States Catholic Conference; Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1994), no. 102.

where they started, in the proto-exile of Egypt before they are even God's people. And further *theological* observations could be elaborated here. But little or nothing is gained, and much could be lost, by the attempt to explain-away this verse and harmonize it with other passages, even though the final text indeed reads smoothly and seemingly coherently. But it is in these "seams" in the texture that the full richness of the biblical story shines forth, giving much room for thought and reflection, as opposed to a banal defence of exact "historicity," etc.

Exact attention to words is necessary in order to detect *inclusiones*, the biblical way of making connections between passages in a day before there were footnotes or even paragraph divisions, and other "markers" and significant compositional or redactional elements. One connector is the verb "visit" (Hebrew verb *paqad*) in the sense of "come to one's aid, save" in several passages. In Gen 50:24-25, Joseph prophesies that God "will certainly or indeed visit" his brothers, meaning that God will take them out of Egypt and bring them up to the Promised Land. Translations render this verb in different ways ("will come, will heed, etc."), so that the connection is lost. Counterpart passages in Exodus are Exod 3:16, where Yahweh, the God of the Fathers, says that he has visited (the elders, etc.) and has seen what the Egyptians have done to them (cf. Exod 3:7-8). In Exod 4:31, the people believe when they are told that Yahweh has visited them and seen their affliction. The real clincher is Exod 13:19, where the prophecy made by Joseph is literally fulfilled. See also Jer 27:22, now in reference to Babylon. If your translation does not have "visit," know that it is not being very literal when it comes to this important verb, so that the connections are lost. Luke uses "visit" in a "saving" sense in Luke 1:68 and 7:16, and in Acts 15:14.

Specific words may be important, but may be "difficult," may appear to make no sense. In our view, they should be kept, for with further study they may make sense and be very significant. One such word is "sprinkle" in Isa 52:15. Only a few Bibles translate thus; most follow the LXX and have "startle, or astonish." The verb (*naza*) means "sprinkle," and it is the one used in Lev 16:16 for the Yom Kippur sprinkling of the cover

of the Ark of the Covenant, resulting in the forgiveness of all the sins of the Israelites.²⁹⁵ This might be how the complete Qumran scroll of Isaiah (1QIsa^a) understood it.

Luke twice uses a Greek word, *katáluma*, that in the NT is found elsewhere only in Mark 14:14, where it probably originated. In Luke 2:7, it is said that, there being no place in the *katáluma*, Jesus was placed in a manger (a place where animals eat). In Luke 22:11, Jesus asks where his *katáluma* is so that he may eat the Passover with his disciples. In this Last Supper, Jesus, the poor one of Yahweh, the *'anav*, will give himself, pour out his blood, for his disciples. His being placed in the manger prefigured this act of self-giving. The unusual (at least for the NT) *katáluma* serves to link both passages in Luke, and in both the word should probably be translated “guest or dining room.” This may have meant the upper quarters of the house in Luke 2:7, as opposed to the lower quarters where the animals were kept (and where they put the Holy Family).²⁹⁶

The meaning of certain words often have to be determined from the whole context of the book, as they may be used in a technical or semitechnical sense by the author. This is the case with the Greek verb *lambanō* in Matt 8:15, where the meaning is that Jesus, as the Servant of Isaiah, *took away* (and not just bore or simply “took”) our infirmities. This is based on Matt use of this verb in two other passages with the meaning “take away”: Matt 5:40 (‘if someone wants to take away your tunic’), and 15:26, ‘it is not good (or seemly) to take away the bread of the children’. A perhaps more important example for its theological implications is the meaning of the Greek expression *eis martúrimon autois* in Mark 1:44. Often it is translated “as a witness to them,” which might not have any effect on the question whether Jesus actually means for the healed leper to indeed go to the Temple and offer the prescribed sacrifices. This gibes very poorly with Mark’s view

²⁹⁵ Cf. WILLIAM H. BROWNLEE, “The Servant of the Lord in the Qumran Scrolls, I,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 132 (1953), 10 (indicates sprinkling with the Spirit). The Servant is anointed by the Spirit, and Brownlee and F.F. BRUCE, in *Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran Texts* (den Haag: Uitgeverij van Keulen, 1959), 50-58, agree that this indicates his consecration for priestly office. We have seen that eschatological expiation on Yom Kippur was expected in Qumran, and this is the theme of the Letter to the Hebrews (with Christ as high priest). Allusions to Yom Kippur “expiation” by Christ are found in Rom 3:25; Heb 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10. Cf. R.E. CLEMENTS, “Isaiah 53 and the Restoration of Israel,” in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant*, 51-52. He refers to Ezek 36:25, which he translates as “sprinkle with clean water.” But this is not the same verb as in Lev 16:16 or Isa 52:15 (which should be translated “sprinkle;” the verb in Ezek might be translated “splash,” perhaps more abundant than “sprinkle”). See the discussion regarding messianic atonement, the Servant of Isaiah and the eschatological high priest in BAUMGARTEN, “Messianic Forgiveness,” 537-544.

²⁹⁶ The word more appropriately translated “inn” (*pandocheion*) is found in Luke 10:34, in the parable of the “Good Samaritan.”

of the Temple, which shall be destroyed and which Jesus seems to replace with his actual forgiveness of sins and healings which really outdo anything the Temple sacrificial system has to offer. But when we examine two other places in Mark where the same Greek phrase is used, we see that it should be translated “as a witness *against* them;” this is the meaning more clearly in Mark 6:11 and 13:9. In both these cases, the activity is performed against adversaries who reject the messenger of the gospel. If this is the meaning in Mark 1:44, and I submit that it is (or at least that in all three instances the same translation should be used), then the meaning in Mark 1:44 would be that Jesus tells the leper to show the Temple priests what Jesus has done —heal a leper, which they could not do (see Lev 14; 2 Kgs 5:6-7). In fact, the healed leper does not go to the Temple, but begins to preach about Jesus in the Galilean countryside, Mark 1:45 (cf. Luke’s version, where nine lepers start for the Temple, and only a Samaritan returns to thank Jesus and is praised for this, Luke 17:11-19; the Temple is very important in Luke).

With these brief indications on how to read the biblical text: giving close attention to each word, since each has a function and a meaning within the whole, we can pass now to our final section.

A hermeneutical analogy. I liken the biblical presentation of people and events to the representations found in paintings. We are in an age of digital cameras and video, and we want to find the same kind of exactitude in the Bible. But like paintings, especially by great artists, the Bible re-presents and interprets. One can take a digital picture of someone who just woke up, or at a bad moment, and this is one representation of the person. But a great artist, especially an inspired one, can paint the person and capture and reveal her soul. This is the case with paintings of Thérèse of Lisieux by her sister Céline (Sœur Geneviève de Sainte-Thérèse). They all are different, but each captures Thérèse in a different light, some extremely beautifully. Compared to photos of the saint, they reveal much more about her, and certainly are much more inspiring than a photo of someone tired who has had to pose for a long while. Even if a picture can be taken instantaneously, they often simply show a pose, usually quite superficial. A great photographer can take artistic photos, but cannot have at his disposal the many resources that a painter can use: symbols, intricate insertions of meaningful objects, colors, *trompes-l’œil*, etc.

As with a painting or other work of art, one must interpret the Bible with careful observation, musing (the rabbis speak of ‘chewing the cud’), imagination and repeated readings, and with ever-increasing knowledge.²⁹⁷ What one can discover is infinite. And thus, one of the early giants of modern biblical studies, Hermann Gunkel, could say that biblical “exegesis, in its highest sense, is more art than science.”²⁹⁸ An analogous attitude, or really, a formal principle in Judaism, is the distinction between *halakah* and *aggadah* in biblical texts. *Halakah* (plural *halakot*) are the legal (Christians might say “moral,” or perhaps “theological”) rules, principles or teachings that the text mandates; *aggadah* (Aramaic for “narrative”) is the setting in which such teachings are imbedded (I liken this to what is the case with medications, you have the active and inactive ingredients).²⁹⁹ Everything is necessary, but if you miss the point by focusing too much on how it is conveyed (for example, by fixating on a six-day period in Gen 1 as cosmologically-binding rather than on the meaning of this six-day period), you lose sight of the forest because of the trees.³⁰⁰

Let’s go on to discuss some problematic passages.

Problem passages and possible solutions.

1. *Isaiah or Malachi?* We begin with a passage that is not often considered so problematic, but which can illustrate how the biblical writers cite the Bible, which will be at issue later on in these pages. Mark’s gospel begins with a citation from “Isaiah the prophet,” 1:2, but in fact it is Mal 3:1 conflated (mixed-with) with Exod 23:20. My interpretation here is that Mark, with economy of words and assuming his reader (or the reader’s teachers) recognizes the references to Mal and Exod, prefers to mention Isaiah as

²⁹⁷ See the great book by JAMES L. KUGEL, *The Bible as it was* (Cambridge, MA – London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1997, especially 1-49.

²⁹⁸ “Exegese im höchsten Sinne ist mehr eine Kunst als eine Wissenschaft,” *Reden und Aufsätze* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913), 14, quoted in JEAN LOUIS SKA, *Introducción a la lectura del Pentateuco. Claves para la interpretación de los cinco primeros libros de la Biblia* (Estella [Navarra]: Verbo Divino, 2001), 159.

²⁹⁹ JAMES A. SANDERS, “Torah and Christ,” *Interpretation* 29 (1975), 373, distinguishes, in “Torah” (as = divine revelation), between “*muthos* — gospel — story — identity — *haggadah*,” and “*ethos* — laws — ethics — life style — *halachah*.” In *Torah and Canon*, 55, he defines myth as “the overriding truth recited by a given society about themselves and their past.”

³⁰⁰ On *aggadah*, see *Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, 23-24; on rabbinic biblical interpretation, see *Mikra. Text, Translation, Reading & Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism & Early Christianity* (M.J. Mulder – H. Sysling, eds.; Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 2004), 547-594. *Biblia de Jerusalén* states that the stories in Matt 2 (the Magi, the persecution, and the flight into and return from Egypt) are “haggadic in nature, teaching by way of events what Luke 2:30-34 teaches through the prophetic words of Simeon” (my translation).

having the preponderant importance for his gospel. Exod refers to the first Exodus, and Mal to the sending of Elijah before God's final visitation, but Isaiah refers to the New, Eschatological Exodus, which is the most important and definitive one.³⁰¹ As James Sanders states, "The more common and well-known a biblical concept was, the less likely the community was to cite it in its final written form and the more likely they were to assume that the congregation or community would know it *and* its canonical authority."³⁰²

2. *Where does it say "Nazorean"?* We turn to Matt 2:23, where it is said that Jesus' taking up residence in Nazareth was to fulfill "what was spoken by the prophets that he would be called a Nazorean." There is no matching text in the Prophets (*Biblia de Jerusalén* suggests Judg 13:5, 7, regarding Samson); Num 6, in the Torah, speaks of the Nazirite vow (*neder nazîr*), whereby one consecrated him- or herself to the Lord. Jesus refers to his consecration in John 10:36 (by God); 17:19 (himself) using the same verb as in Num 6:11-12. *Nazîr* sounds a bit like *notzrî*, "Nazorean" in Hebrew and Aramaic, and also like *nêtzet*, the "*sprout*" from the root in Isa 11:1 (*CSB* has "roots" instead of my "*sprout*"). This is a most important messianic passage, and it would seem that Matthew wants to evoke it and several others. Matthew knows his Bible quite well, and can "play around" with it at will.³⁰³ Other possibilities suggested by *Biblia de Jerusalén* are Isa 42:6; 49:8, in the context of the first and second Servant Songs. There, the Hebrew verb *natzar* ("to guard, watch over") is used to denote Yahweh's protection of the Servant.

Note that in Matt, Jesus is born in Bethlehem in what appears to be the Holy Family's house. It is after Herod the Great's persecution that they flee to Egypt (retracing Israel's steps, Matt 2:15), and it is only then that they decide to take up residence in Nazareth, fulfilling various prophecies (Matt 2:22; 4:12-16). In Luke, Mary and Joseph live in Nazareth and go down to Bethlehem for the census, after which they return to their hometown. I look askance at attempts to reconcile the two pictures; I prefer to look at them as different paintings based on a common tradition that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. They are different representations of the story. Matt weaves OT themes like

³⁰¹ See the great book (also literally, at over 600 pages!) by RIKKI E. WATTS, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1997; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000).

³⁰² SANDERS, *Torah and Canon*, xi.

³⁰³ See the seminal study by KRISTER STENDAHL, *The School of St. Matthew, and its use of the Old Testament. With a new introduction by the author* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1954, 1968).

the massacre of the new-born males (which Moses survived in Exod) and Egypt; Luke, perhaps only evoking a census many scholars date to 6 C.E. (that is, some ten to twelve years after Jesus was born), presents a universal picture, set in the Roman Empire. What God is communicating to us in these pictures is, I think, something far greater than a desire to satisfy what ‘inquiring minds’ want to know.

Incidentally, the above multiple-angle situation is like that at the foot of the cross. We saw that the Mother of Jesus has an important, eschatological and symbolic (as well as salvific) place at the foot of the cross in the Fourth Gospel. Why are the Synoptics different in this regard? Mark 15:40-41 and Matt 27:55-56 (who follows Mark) have women (Matt says “many”) “beholding from afar.” These two gospels do not have the developed mariology that the latter two, Luke and John, have. But perhaps Luke gives us the theological clue as to why the scenes in Jesus’ final *supplicium* (“torture, distress, capital punishment”): Luke 23:49 says that “All his *gnōstói* (“relatives, acquaintances,” in Spanish *conocidos*) stood from afar;” this is the language of LXX Ps 37:12 (“my friends or loved ones and neighbors;” Ps 38 in the MT), but even more closely, of the terrible Ps 88, recited at Compline on Fridays. Ps 88:9 (Ps 87 in the LXX) says that the Lord (Yahweh in the Hebrew) has caused the distance between the sufferer and his *gnōstói*; v. 19 says that Yahweh has made loved ones and neighbors to keep their distance, and made the darkness his only acquaintances (*gnōstói*). Jesus’ desolation is complete, with no human comfort, in fulfillment of these and all the Psalms; see Luke 24:44.

3. “*Their*” purification? Luke 2:22 presents a “difficult reading.” The text speaks of the completion of the days of *their* purification. Now, only the mother was to be purified after giving birth, Lev 12:1-4; cf. Num 18:15. Why say “them”? Is Luke including Jesus, or Joseph, or both? Catholic tradition has here seen Jesus closely associated with Mary (as Mary is with Jesus in Luke 2:33-35). The eminent Père Lagrange pointed out that both are involved in the rite, but that Luke has used *katharismós* (“purification”) instead of *kátharsis* (the technical term in the LXX for the woman who has given birth) in order to make it more suitably applicable to Jesus.³⁰⁴ We can also understand his “purification” in the sense of Wis 3:6; Dan 12:10 (which use

³⁰⁴ MARIE-JOSEPH LAGRANGE, *Évangile selon Saint Luc* (Paris: Gabalda, 1941⁵), 82.

different words; cf. Sir 51:20, using *katharismós*), but especially of his “baptism by fire” (his Passion, Luke 12:49-50).³⁰⁵ But see also LXX Isa 53:10 (“the Lord wishes to purge him of the plague,” “plague” being like that in the curses in Deut 28:59, 61).

4. *A tricky ride*. An interesting passage that seems to humorously demand a literal reading for purposes of inculcating the exact fulfillment of Scripture. Matt 21:1-10 narrates Jesus’ “messianic entry” into Jerusalem. Jesus is enacting and fulfilling the great messianic prophecy in Zech 9:9. This prophecy harks back to the original “messianic” oracle in Gen 49:8-12 regarding Judah’s preeminence. In “step parallelism,” where there is not just repetition, but progression, Judah ties his *purebred jackass* (not just any donkey) to the “choicest vine” (not just any vine; cf. *NAB*).³⁰⁶ In Zech 9:9, the peaceful king rides “on a jackass, the offspring of a jenny,” meaning a purebred jackass. The dual mention of the donkey would serve to connect Gen, Zech and Matt. Matthew, perhaps excited as to Jesus’ fulfillment of these prophecies of the Law and the Prophets, makes his point by declaring that Jesus’ disciples put their cloaks over the ass and the colt and that Jesus sat *upon them*, 21:7. I like this text for its ambiguity and ambivalence, artfully employed to evoke total, profound fulfillment of the Scriptures. Mark, similarly, as we briefly saw, devoted lots of attention and space to the tying and untying of the ass, evoking Gen 49:11.

5. *Luke, keep the story straight!* As a corrective to the need to seek exact historical reconstructions, compare Acts 9:7 with 22:9. In the first account of his “conversion,” it is said that the men (*ándres*) who were with Paul heard the voice but saw no one; in the second account (the third is in Acts 26), Paul says that those who were with him saw the light but did not hear the voice. I maintain that the finely-sensitive Luke was aware of the discrepancy, or at least cared little about avoiding it, and instead wished to convey to us, in different ways, the “meta-historical” experience of Jesus’ revelation to Paul. Compare what Paul writes in Gal 1:15-17.

³⁰⁵ LAGRANGE, in “La Présentation de Jesus au Temple,” *La Vie spirituelle* 26 (1931), 134, citing John 17:11-19, says that this consecration of Jesus portended (*présageait*) his sacrifice (to which Mary was united, 135). See also ORIGEN, *Homilies on Luke*, in *The Fathers of the Church. A new translation* (ET J.T. Lienhard; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 57-61.

³⁰⁶ See KENNETH C. WAY, “Donkey Domain: Zechariah 9:9 and Lexical Semantics,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129.1 (2010) 105-114. On the space devoted to tying and untying the donkey as significant, see JOSEPH BLENKINSOPP, “The Oracle of Judah and the Messianic Entry,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 80 (1961) 55-64.

And now, to the two other passages cited by Cardinal König at the Second Vatican Council (as I stated, I think we—or rather John Collins— already adequately dealt with the third problem, in Daniel). Note that, unwittingly, the seven passages turned out to be in chiasmic structure: 1 and 7 are from Mark, 2 and 6 from Matthew, 3 and 5 from Luke, and in the center, the messianic entry. Seek to find structure in biblical and other composition, and you will find surprising things!

6. *Jeremiah or Zechariah?* In the heady days of the Second Vatican Council, with a certain sense of liberation from the shackles of a still constraining, unrenewed “ultra-orthodoxy,” it was bold to announce that the Bible contained errors.³⁰⁷ Today we are much more cautious about the text, seeking in the first place to take it on its own terms, without resorting to the notion of mistake too quickly, or perhaps even at all. With what we have come to realize about biblical composition, it is rather easy today to discard the idea that Matthew miswrote when he says, in 27:9, that, in fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy, “they took the thirty pieces of silver, the value of the one-valued which they valued from the sons of Israel” (literal translation).³⁰⁸ The “quote,” loose as it is, is easily recognizable as stemming from Zech 11:12-13. This is in one of the most obscure sections of the prophetic books, but it seems clear that a shepherd closely associated with Yahweh is hired to tend a doomed flock, and, the relationship having been broken ‘according to the word of the Lord’—as those who had hired him realized—the shepherd asks for his wages, if they are willing to pay him. His pay is then calculated at thirty pieces of silver, an amount known to be the price of a slave (or servant) gored by an ox in Exod 21:32. Yahweh then scoffs at this amount, ironically saying that this is “the lordly sum” (*NRSV*; the Hebrew is not easy here) in which they have valued him. So the rejection of this shepherd is the rejection of Yahweh (cf. 1 Sam 8:7, where the people’s asking for a king is a rejection of Yahweh as King). So far, we see that the loose but clear-enough citation of Zechariah is appropriate in Matthew’s presentation of the rejection of Jesus, the Shepherd-Servant of Yahweh.

³⁰⁷ See the possibilities suggested for Matt 27:9 by DALE C. ALLISON, JR., “Matthew,” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (J. Barton – J. Muddiman, eds.; Oxford – New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001), 883.

³⁰⁸ The Vulgate has *acceperunt triginta argenteos pretium adpretiati quem adpretiaverunt a filiis Israel*. “From Israel” is a Hebraism for “some of the sons of Israel” (as in the *NRSV*).

Matthew, like Mark in his citation of Mal and Isa while only mentioning Isa, is well-aware of whom he's citing; of all the gospels, Matthew's is most of all the product of a school of Bible scholars, intent on proving that the Scriptures have been fulfilled by Jesus.³⁰⁹ Matthew, similarly to Mark, quotes a well-known passage from Malachi without identifying it, identifying only Isaiah in order to indicate the preponderant importance (Second) Isaiah has in his gospel. Matthew does not identify Zechariah as the source of his well-known citation, but rather purposely "misidentifies" it as coming from Jeremiah. The Bible has places where an "error" is *purposely* made (and thus, is not a real error) in order to spark the attention of the hearer or reader. "Their" purification may be such a one.³¹⁰ Matthew intends for the reader to think of Jeremiah; as the *NOAB* puts it, "The citation is loosely based on Zech 11.12-13, though these verses also form a midrash on Jer 18-19."³¹¹

Biblia de Jerusalén ("BJ"), as so often, has excellent footnotes to Matt 27:8-9. It begins by noting that some manuscripts omit "Jeremiah;" we can easily understand why a copyist would balk at writing the name of the "wrong" prophet, materially-speaking. Nevertheless, in textual criticism we respect the reading of the best copies (which have "Jeremiah"), even though it may take time to figure out the "more difficult" readings, such as here.

³⁰⁹ See, most famously, Krister Stendahl's *The School of St. Matthew* previously mentioned. There is a recent book which I have not been able to consult, by CLAY ALAN HAM, *The Coming King and the Rejected Shepherd: Matthew's Reading of Zechariah's Messianic Hope* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005), reviewed by Mark J. Boda in the *Review of Biblical Literature* (Aug. 2006). Matt has at least seven references to Zech; some scholars have seen as many as eighteen. See Matt 19:26 (Zech 8:6); Matt 21:1 (Zech 14:4), Matt 21:5 (Zech 9:9); Matt 24:30 (Zech 12:12, 14); Matt 26:15 (Zech 11:12), Matt 26:31 (Zech 13:7). See "*Loci citati vel allegati*" in *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece*. 26th edition (B. and K. Aland, et al., eds.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1898, 1993), 799-800. See a similar conflation of passages (Hos 2:1 + Isa 10:22, with mention only of Isa), in Rom 9:27.

³¹⁰ The best examples that I know of have been pointed out by my professor Ugo Vanni, S.J. in literary studies of the Book of Revelation; see his *La struttura letteraria dell'Apocalisse* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1980²). For example, he points out that in Rev 1:4_a, the ungrammatical *apo ho òn* (the preposition "from" followed by a nominative rather than the correct genitive) is *una sferzata all'orecchio*, "quite a whiplash to the ear."

³¹¹ *Ad locum*, that is, see the corresponding place in the *NOAB* (that is, the note to Matt 27:9). "Midrash" is defined (by Pheme Perkins) in the *NOAB*, page 477 of the Essays, as "a traditional Jewish form of interpretation, in which one text is supplemented by others to extract a further meaning. Psalm 32.1-2 plays this role in Rom 4.7-8. John 6.30-51 contains a lengthy dispute in which the incarnate Christ is said to be the meaning of the Exodus. Biblical references in the Fourth Gospel are notoriously indefinite. John 6.31 reflects some combination of Ex 16.4,15; Ps 78.24; and Wis 16.28." See also the PBC 1993 document, *The Interpretation of the Bible*, I.C.2; III.A.1.

BJ states that Matt has combined a free citation of Zech 11:12-13 with the idea of the purchase of a field paid for with silver pieces suggested by Jer 32:6-15. In Matt 27, Judas regrets his betrayal and tries to return the money to the chief priests and elders, saying that he has betrayed innocent blood. When the “religious leaders do not accept the “blood-money,” Judas throws it into the Temple, and then hangs himself. The chief priests then took the money and said that they could not *cast* it into the Temple-treasury, because it was “the price of blood.” So with the money, the priests “took counsel” and bought the Potter’s Field, in which to bury foreigners (*xenoi*). “Took counsel” is peculiarly Matthean and is used in plots against Jesus, Matt 12:14; 22:15; 27:1, and in 28:12, when they bribe the soldiers to quash any resurrection report; *xenoi* is otherwise used by Matthew in the Last Judgment parable in Matt 25:31-46 (usually translated “stranger”).

The silver (money; in Spanish *plata* can be synonymous with “money”) involved in Jesus’ death is thus blood-money. It is thus associated with horrible things, the most gruesome and appalling. The mention of Jeremiah, along with “potter,” points the Jewish-Christian reader and/or his teachers to Jer 18. There Jeremiah goes to a potter to watch him work; when the potter fashioned a piece badly, he started over, transforming it into a good piece. “Potter” in Hebrew (*yotzēr*) is from the verb “to form or fashion,” what God does in Gen 2:7-8, or Ps 33:15. This becomes an image, Yahweh tells Jeremiah, of God’s ability to do with his people as he seems fit, for their improvement (conversion, Jer 18:11; cf. Rom 9:20-24).

After an intervening section, Jer 18:18-23 narrates an attempt on the life of Jeremiah, with the prophet’s prayer for vengeance. Then in Jer 19, the “potter” is back; this time Yahweh tells Jeremiah to buy an earthen bottle from him. He is to take with him elders and priests (as in Matt 27) and go to the Valley of Ben Hinnom at the entrance of the Potsherd Gate.³¹² There Jeremiah is to announce great calamity, because the people have profaned “this place” by idolatrous worship, including child sacrifice, thus filling up the place with *innocent blood*. The place will have a name change, from Topheth, or the Valley of Ben (son) of Hinnom, to Valley of Slaughter. The sword will punish the

³¹² For some reason, *BJ* gives as an alternative translation of “Potsherd Gate” “Pottery Gate.” The LXX is different here: it says “go out to the common burial place of the sons of their children.”

unfaithful people, the city will be a desolation (or horror), there will be cannibalism of one's own children (a curse for breaking the covenant, Deut 28:53-57) during a military siege. The sign for this will be Jeremiah's breaking the potter's earthen bottle into pieces. There is no repair for such a piece, which has become potsherds. The denunciation and punishment announced here are quite similar to that in what is considered Jeremiah's inaugural speech in Jer 7, for which he was tried for a capital crime in Jer 26.³¹³

The "Valley of the son of Hinnom," in Hebrew *gēy ben ḥinnom*, a place of idolatry and child sacrifice by burning, became "Gehenna," like a Jewish hell; see Matt 5:29-30; 18:9; 26:24.

With the money, after the chief priest had "taken counsel," they bought the "Potter's Field" as a burial place. Since it had been bought with blood-money, it was called "Field of Blood," the place called in Aramaic *ḥaqel dema*, transliterated in Greek *Akeldamách*.³¹⁴ This place, according to what *BJ* calls a "very ancient tradition," was situated in the Valley of the son of Hinnom. It is in this region that Jeremiah broke the potter's bottle as a sign of judgment against the people.³¹⁵

Matt 27:3-5 says that Judas regretted his betrayal, and hung himself. Acts 1:18-19 has a different recollection. Judas himself buys the field and somehow explodes, so that his entrails poured out. This is the fate of the wicked in Wis 4:19, in the broader context of a text that was applied to Jesus' Passion (Matt 27:43 quotes Wis 2:18). Luke attributes the name Akeldama to this event, quoting Ps 69:26 (from the psalm "most quarried" for the Passion).

³¹³ There are strong similarities between the trial of Jeremiah and that of Jesus in Mark-Matt, especially the accusation that he spoke against the Temple and that false witnesses (in LXX Jer, "false prophets") rose against them.

³¹⁴ *Eerdman's Dictionary of the Bible*, 38.

³¹⁵ SANDERS, *Torah and Canon*, 130, states: "The destitution experience of the sixth century BCE could never be viewed as one in a string of historical events. For the Chronicler, as for the Deuteronomist historians, the breaking of the old vessel (Jeremiah 18) by the Potter/Creator was a complete breaking, a shattering. But equally important is that at the end of 2 Kings as at the end of 2 Chronicles, a ray of light shone into the chaos, however dimly." WILFRID J. HARRINGTON, *Revelation* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 65 fn. 27, cites Jer 18 as a possible background to understanding Rev 2:27 as meaning "he (those victorious in Christ) will smash them with an iron rod." The text literally says "shepherd" instead of "smash," but Harrington points out that the Hebrew of Ps 2:9 (being alluded to here) has "smash" (a Hebrew verb very similar in form and sound to the Hebrew verb for "shepherding"), while the LXX has "shepherd." He thinks John may be equating shepherding with smashing in this context, which "is that of a potter smashing a rejected vessel (see Jer 18:1-18)."

So the mention of Jeremiah in Matt 27:9 serves to evoke these associations. But there's more. Matt 27:9 loosely quoted Zech 11:13. The Hebrew text of Zech which has come down to us as the Masoretic Text (the "official" one) reads: "And Yahweh said to me cast it [the thirty silver pieces] to the "potter" (or "the one who fashions"). Many translations have "treasury," following the reading in the Syriac and Targum versions (both are in Aramaic; Matthew's gospel is often thought to have been written in Syrian Antioch). The sound of "potter, fashioner" in Hebrew (*yotzēr*) sounds very similar to "treasury" in Hebrew (*otzar*). Matt was probably acquainted with both a Hebrew text and an Aramaic one, and the two different readings may have spurred him to connect the silver and potter/treasury in Zechariah with the silver, potter in Jeremiah. Matt wanted the reader to do some midrashic exploration in Jeremiah, as Jeremiah was a great, suffering prophet that to a large extent was a "type of Jesus." Some have actually seen a connection between Jesus' celibacy and Jeremiah's (see Jer 16:1-2); according to Matt 16:14, some people thought Jesus might be Jeremiah. Jeremiah stands as the last prophet of the Deuteronomic History, just before and up to the Exile (he was taken to Egypt). Matt began his gospel with a genealogy, which divides into three parts, the first ending with David, the second with the Babylonian Exile, and the third with Christ. The Exile occupies the crucial middle place; the only other mention of Jeremiah besides the two we have seen is in Matt 2:17. It is from Jer 31:15, where the prophet refers to the first exile (of the northern tribes), for which Rachel weeps; Rachel's tomb was not far from Bethlehem (Gen 35:19).

Jeremiah was in some sense the "prophet like Moses" of Deut 18:15. So it is very possible that with the mention of Jeremiah, Matt wants the reader to think of the same broad picture in a major prophet that Mark wanted his reader to do regarding Isaiah. We need not discuss this further, having shown, I think, how exploring "midrashically" what Matt's "mistake" may mean yields much better interpretative fruit than considering the holy writer to have had a "lapse," as some have posited. These "mistakes" are actually a very economical way to avoid waste of valuable space by indicating the banal, and instead take the opportunity to point to unthought directions.

Abiathar or Ahimelech? We finally come to one of the best possibilities for error in the New Testament. In Mark 2:23-28, Jesus and his disciples are making their way

through a sown field, and the disciples, seemingly to clear the path, are plucking the heads of grain. It was a Sabbath. In Matt 12:1, the hungry disciples are said to also eat the grains; in Luke 6:1, they not only eat, they also “reap and thresh” (they plucked the heads of grain and then rubbed them with their hands to loosen the edible grains). Given Jesus’ reply in Mark 2:25, we may suppose that his disciples were hungry and ate the plucked grains.

Plucking and eating such grains was allowed travelers through someone else’s sown field, Deut 23:26 (use of a sickle was prohibited). Exod 34:21 prohibited harvesting on the Sabbath (Luke seems to have upped the ante by adding the rubbing/threshing).

Jesus’ disciples are accused by the Pharisees of harvesting grain on the Sabbath, which they take to be a violation of one of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:10; Deut. 5:14). At issue is the question of legal interpretation and ultimately of who has the authority to rule on such matters. The Pharisees apparently think that picking just enough grain to satisfy one’s own hunger [Matt 12] (v. 1) counts as harvesting; Jesus disagrees³¹⁶

So what is at issue is legal interpretation of the Torah, what is known as *halakah*. This term, from the Hebrew verb “to walk,” is most associated with the Pharisees, who followed an oral tradition (the Oral Torah given to Moses on Mount Sinai simultaneously with the written Torah) which would come to be written down in the Talmud centuries later. This is the “traditions of the Fathers” which Jesus criticizes in Mark 7:1-13, and which Paul said he had been so zealous for as a Pharisee in Gal 1:13-14. But other Jewish parties, such as the Sadducees and Essenes, also interpreted Torah in their manner, and so had their own *halakah*, although this term is only used by the Pharisaic tradition.

Our problem, however, is found in Mark 2:25-26, where Jesus cites a “legal precedent” in support of his disciples’ breaking a rule, that of the Pharisaic interpretation that plucking grains on the Sabbath amounts to harvesting prohibited by the Torah. Jesus has his own interpretation of Torah (he goes back to the very beginning of the Torah, often before even the time of Moses), and it differs from that of the Pharisees. The Pharisees, certainly by the time Mark was written, had gained the upper hand in Judaism, and were already, or would very soon be, the predominant party in Judaism, laying the foundation for Rabbinic Judaism, which is normative Judaism to this day.

³¹⁶ MARK ALLAN POWELL, “Matthew,” *HarperCollins Bible Commentary* (James L. Mays, gen. ed.; New York: Society of Biblical Literature, 1988, 2000), 884.

Jesus' legal precedent supports breaking an established rule under exigent circumstances, a bit like *epieikeia* ("leniency, tolerance") in moral theology, where sound common sense abrogates strict application of the normative.³¹⁷ He cites the story of David and his "lads" in 1 Sam 21:2-7, when David was fleeing from King Saul, who wanted to kill him. David and his hungry entourage approach the priest Ahimelech for something to eat. The priest has only the Bread of the Presence; the Zadokite Book of Leviticus, in 24:5-9, will reserve this bread for Aaron and his sons only (the Zadokite priests), but Ahimelech consents to give it to the hungry men in dire circumstances, provided only that their "bodies are holy" (often translated "pure," though this is another Hebrew term; however, the LXX allows for this translation), that is, that they have had no sex or other polluting activity.³¹⁸ Such is the case, and we can be sure that the men eat.

The problem is that Jesus, when he cites this story, gives the name of the priest as Abiathar (according to Mark 2:26; the name is omitted by Matt 12:3-4 and Luke 6:3-4), instead of Ahimelech. Why? Let us explore some possible reasons.³¹⁹

Abiathar was almost certainly the son of Ahimelech, 1 Sam 22:20 (and not the father, as in 1 Chr 24:6). Abiathar was the lone son of Ahimelech who was able to escape Saul's massacre of Yahwistic priests. Abiathar fled to David, himself fleeing Saul; when David became king, he appointed two chief priests, one from the north (Abiathar) and one from the south (Zadok); 2 Sam 8:17; 20:25.³²⁰ Abiathar came from the Mushite (from Moses), Elide priests, who had served at the ancient shrine of Shiloh. These were of "pure Levitical stock" (*BJ*), and could trace their priestly "vocation" to Egypt, 1 Sam

³¹⁷ See KARL RAHNER – HERBERT VORGRIMLER, *Diccionario teológico* (Spanish trans. Ramón Areitio; Barcelona: Herder, 1966), col. 204.

³¹⁸ What is here translated "bodies" (*NRSV* "vessels") is in Hebrew "vessel, piece of equipment, weapons." The *BJ* note to 1 Sam 21:6 (with reference to Deut 23:11) says this is a euphemism for male member; we might thus translate "tool."

³¹⁹ There are no variant versions of this episode. See what appears to be a variant version of the "slaying of Goliath" story in 2 Sam 21:19, where in a war against the Philistines, a certain Elhanan from Bethlehem slew Goliath from Gath, "the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam" (*NRSV*). The famous story about David slaying Goliath, in 1 Sam 17, features the same name (Goliath), the same provenance (Gath) and the same description of the spear, vv. 4, 7. How likely is it that there were two such Goliaths in Gath?

³²⁰ See the work of the great Bible scholar FRANK MOORE CROSS, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic. Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA – London: Harvard Univ. Press, 1973, paperback 1997), 195-215.

2:27-36.³²¹ On the other hand, the origins of Zadok were much more obscure and questionable.³²²

Solomon, David's son, banished ("defrocked") Abiathar to Anathoth after Abiathar supported a rival to Solomon's throne. There in Anathoth, Levitical-Deuteronomic circles stemming from Abiathar maintained their own traditions, which were different from those of the Zadokites, who were on the ascendancy. The prophet Jeremiah was from those circles.³²³ De Vaux points out how Jeremiah aroused the fury of the Temple priests (Zadokites) with his preaching, which predicted that the Temple would suffer the same fate as had Shiloh, the Elide shrine Yahweh had punished for the wickedness of the sons of Eli.³²⁴ Friedman has demonstrated the bitter rivalry between the priestly circles of D (Mushite-Levite) and P (Aaronid-Zadokite), and how they had competing *torot* (plural of torah, priestly teaching or decisions).³²⁵ A prime example is in Jer 7:21-23, where the defrocked-priest/prophet rejects the Zadokite view, expressed none other than in Leviticus, that Yahweh had commanded sacrifices in the wilderness. Theological disagreement could not get any sharper than that in ancient Israel.

Eventually there was a compromise between the two priestly houses, but the Zadokites would maintain their superiority.³²⁶ Suffice it to say that, as so often in the Bible, concocted (or perhaps we should say "creative," as in "creative accounting"!) genealogies were used to make both Zadok and Abiathar descendants of Aaron (and thus,

³²¹ See the work of another very great Bible scholar, ROLAND DE VAUX, O.P., *Ancient Israel. Its Life and Institutions* (ET of 1958, 1960 French orig. by John McHugh; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Livonia, MI: Dove, 1961), 372-405. Père de Vaux likes to write "Sadoq" and "Ebyathar" (this latter following the Hebrew pronunciation more closely). I consider myself an indirect disciple of de Vaux (and ultimately, of Lagrange) by way of having begun my serious biblical studies with the Dominicans, under the Mexican José Loza, O.P., a disciple of de Vaux.

³²² See the work of yet another great scholar, my professor JOSEPH BLENKINSOPP, *Sage, Priest, and Prophet. Religious and Intellectual Leadership in Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 72-114.

³²³ See CROSS, *Canaanite Myth*, 233-234, fn. 62. BLENKINSOPP, in his very valuable book *Prophecy and Canon*, 178 fn. 5, states that Otto Plöger, in his classic *Theocracy and Eschatology* (ET: Richmond: John Knox Press, 1968), 24-25, attributes the collection and editing of the Latter Prophets to apocalyptic-eschatological circles. The Latter Prophets are usually thought to have been edited by Deuteronomist circles, and thus there may be a connection between the Deuteronomists and apocalyptic, despite Deut 29:28, which Blenkinsopp thinks is an anti-apocalyptic-speculation verse. Certainly I consider the late additions to the Latter Prophets, e.g., Amos 9:11-15, "apocalyptic-eschatological."

³²⁴ *Ancient Israel*, 376, with references to Jer 7 and 26. Jesus in his day also predicted the destruction of the Temple.

³²⁵ *The Exile and Biblical Narrative*, 65-76.

³²⁶ DE VAUX, *Ancient Israel*, 396-397. Cf. BOCCACCINI, *Roots of Rabbinic Judaism*, 43-72.

all post-exilic priests were “Aaronids” or “sons of Aaron”).³²⁷ The Zadokites were presented as descendants of Aaron’s son Eleazar, while other priests were “sons of Ithamar,” Aaron’s other surviving son; other sons of the ancestor Levi had been disqualified from founding priestly lineages by alleged improprieties, see, e.g., Num 16-17; Ezek 44).³²⁸ The “Levites” (“non-Zadokites”) as a group became “minor clergy,” not allowed to officiate at the altar. The two branches that gave rise to the twenty-four divisions or courses of priests. in the post-exilic period were then those of “Zadok” (16 families assigned 16 courses) and those of Ithamar (8 families assigned 8 courses).³²⁹ The Zadokites were preponderant, but note that Zadok’s historical partner, Abiathar, is “unmentionable” in the list in 1 Chr 24; there Zadok is paired with Ahimelech, 24:3! And so, we have a reason why Jesus, who is anti-Sadducee and thus anti-Zadokite, should have rubbed-in, so to speak, the unmentionable name of Abiathar instead of simply giving the correct name of the priest at the time of the incident with the Bread of the Presence. This would have been pedestrian, commonplace —and, for Mark, a waste of space, as shown by the omission in Matt and Luke. Instead, Jesus mentions Abiathar, evoking the great memory of a high priest in the time of David with a more illustrious lineage and origins than Zadok, going back to Egypt. And Abiathar represented a time when there were different *torot*, priestly rulings, as evidenced by Jesus’ prophetic predecessor Jeremiah. Jesus could then counter the Pharisaic *halakah* (Torah-interpretation/application) which prohibited plucking on Sabbath with his own, which stemmed from the Son of Man’s plenipotentiary dominion, as we saw in our discussion of the New Testament and especially Mark.³³⁰ In the days of Ahimelech, father of Abiathar, David and his men (note the parallelism?) had been allowed to eat of the Bread of the Presence, which normally they would not have been allowed to do (since it was

³²⁷ See also RICHARD D. NELSON, *Raising Up a Faithful Priest. Community and Priesthood in Biblical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 5-15.

³²⁸ See BLENKINSOPP, *Sage, Priest*, 93.

³²⁹ One of these courses, the eighth, that of Abijah, 1 Chr 24:10, was the one to whom John the Baptist’s father Zechariah belonged, Luke 1:5.

³³⁰ JOHN BOWKER, in *Jesus and the Pharisees* (Cambridge: Univ. Press, 1973), 40, fn. 1, states that: “It is important to note that many of the sayings of Jesus in controversy [with the Pharisees, in Mark] are equally accurate, in the context suggested here, often in a brilliant and subtle way. Even the supposedly mistaken reference to Abiathar ([Mark] ii.26) can be seen as acute and highly penetrating polemic deliberately intended – but *only* while the Sadducaic/Zadokite claim was in being, and was being resisted; it would make little sense after the fall of Jerusalem.” In Mark 12:18-27, Jesus responds to the Sadducees, who only accept the Torah, by arguing from the Torah.

reserved for priests), by the priestly ruling suspending the normal rule, given exigent circumstances, with the condition of purity. Jesus is telling the Pharisees that there are other paradigms than theirs, and under Jesus' (for the reader, authoritative) paradigm, it is ok for his disciples to pluck and eat: it is not harvesting that is prohibited on the Sabbath.

CONCLUSION

It is not my desire to prolong these pages too much. We have come a long way, I think, in our overview of the Christian Bible and Christian, and especially Catholic, interpretation of it. I would like to summarize or conclude these pages by quoting an important Bible scholar, James A. Sanders, with whose views I may not agree totally, but who expressed himself in a 1975 article, "Torah and Christ," in ways that are very appropriate as concluding remarks to our work.

Sanders quotes another great one, James Barr, who in

The Bible and the Modern World, claims that the Bible is "soteriologically functional." He means . . . that the whole Bible functions in the believing communities to effect salvation; this is and always has been its job description for synagogue and church in their recitation and interpretation of it through the ages. This is to speak of the nature and function of canon. The Bible as the church's book is not primarily a historical document (though I am among those who insist that it is full of historical fact; that is not the point). It is primarily a canonical document, functioning in believing communities as canon to assist the on-going believing communities to seek answers in their times to the questions: *Who are we?* and *What are we to do?* In dialogue with believers, the Bible as canon addresses itself to the questions of identity and obedience—and in that order—first identity and then life style. To know who we are and to act like it is to experience and engage in salvation.

In Hebrew, and to a limited extent in biblical Greek, the words "salvation" and "righteousness" mean the same thing in certain contexts. Paul claims that Jesus Christ is God's righteousness and God's salvation for humankind, and when he does so he is saying the same thing in each case. In certain contexts in the Bible both salvation and righteousness mean a saving act or a victory of God. And the claim of the New Testament is that Jesus Christ is God's righteousness or salvation for us all. . . . Jesus is God's victory for us.³³¹

After stating (380) that Torah primarily means revelation, Sanders goes on to say:

In [Rom] 10:4, Paul says the following: "For Christ is the *telos* of the Torah righteousness-wise for all who believe." *Telos* means end in the sense of *finis*, but it

³³¹ SANDERS, "Torah and Christ," 378.

also means climax, main point or purpose. [fn. omitted] Paul in this statement summarizes the central belief of the early church: God had committed another righteousness in Christ, that the Christ event was like the exodus event, or the wanderings-in-the-desert event, or the conquest event, and like them was a mighty act of God [he calls this “good news” for Jews]. It was different only in the fact that it was climactic to them: it brought all those chapters of the Torah story to completion, fulfillment and made sense of them all. Paul in this whole section from the beginning of Romans 9 has been saying that to concentrate on the righteousness, or ethics, of which humankind or Judaism is capable, can be to miss the main point of the Torah story, namely, the righteousness or salvations or mighty acts of God in the Torah story.

* * *

In other words, Paul is here saying if you really have in mind the Torah story and that point of view, then you can discern the righteousness of God. If you really know the Torah, and know what righteousness of God is, then you know that Christ is precisely that kind of act of God. And you know that in Christ, God really committed an ultimate kind of righteousness; he came *all the way* this time.

* * *

Nobody succeeded in adding a chapter to the basic Torah story until the New Testament; and even then not for most of Judaism. Now what we can see from the point of view of the divine odyssey is that the New Testament really makes this quite bold and scandalous claim that in Christ God committed another salvation or righteousness and that it should be added to the Torah story as a climax, as the ultimate chapter of the whole story or odyssey.³³²

And so, we have little or nothing to further say, except to add Paul’s words in 2 Cor 3:14_b-16, regarding his fellow Jews and their reading and interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures, but applicable to all of us, too: “for until this day the same veil over their reading of the old covenant remains, it is not unveiled, because in Christ it is removed.”

And finally, a beautiful quote from Saint Bonaventure which is also an admonition: *Qui sine isto ligno [crucis] vult intrare mare Scripturae, submergitur.*³³³

³³² SANDERS, “Torah and Christ,” 382-383.

³³³ “Whoever wishes to enter the sea of Scripture without this wood [of the cross], will sink.” *In Hexaëmeron*, columns 13,5 (Quaracchi edition, vol. V, page 388).