

THE MODERNIST CRISIS AND THE SHIFTING OF CATHOLIC VIEWS ON BIBLICAL INSPIRATION

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On September 8, 1907, Pope St. Pius X condemned “modernism” as the “synthesis of all heresies” in *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, an encyclical on the doctrines of the modernists.¹ Scholars typically date the modernist crisis to St. Pius X’s promulgation of this encyclical. The crisis identified in *Pascendi*, however, reaches back into the nineteenth century and even earlier. Scholars of modernism typically emphasize several general trends as the root issues in the crisis: the focus on subjectivity in theological experience and the turn to the history of doctrinal development as opposed to engaging in theology as if doctrine was merely propositional. I argue, however, that at the root of the modernist crisis lies the biblical question. The full-flowering of the biblical question within Catholicism—that is, the issue of modern biblical criticism—arose with modernism. Modernism, at its heart, was about the full-scale appropriation of the modern historical-critical method into Catholic biblical interpretation. But it was much more than this. Modernism gave birth to the biblical question in the Catholic world.

This question over the role of modern biblical criticism, which has by and large come to be identified with the historical-critical method, is of fundamental importance for contemporary Catholic theology and exegesis. The near hegemonic status of historical criticism in the academy, with the attendant atrophy of theological exegesis, has occasioned a crisis in Catholic biblical scholarship. This crisis involves the near absolute separation of Catholic biblical scholarship from Catholic systematic theology, wherein both ignore the other as though they were unrelated. At most, Catholic systematic theologians will occasionally rely on a truncated appropriation of the “assured” conclusions of historical criticism. In their pretentious claims of objectivity and neutrality, meanwhile, Bible scholars often remain blind to the particular philosophical, theological, and political commitments to which their methods remain wedded, thus prompting Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger to call for a “criticism of criticism.”²

It is beyond dispute that Catholics must pay careful attention to history when it comes to biblical interpretation. Thus, some form of historical criticism

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- 1 Pope St. Pius X, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* [Feeding the Lord’s Flock], Encyclical Letter on the Doctrines of the Modernists (September 8, 1907), 39, in *The Papal Encyclicals*, vol. 3: 1903–1939, ed. Claudia Carlen (Raleigh, North Carolina: McGrath, 1981), 71–98, at 89.
 - 2 See Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation in Conflict,” in *God’s Word: Scripture—Tradition—Office* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2008 [2005]), 91–126.

is certainly necessary. If we take the incarnation seriously and understand the Catholic doctrine of Scripture's "dual" authorship, which includes the human authors as true instrumental authors, we cannot avoid historical interpretation. The problem is when the canons of modern history take precedent in one's biblical hermeneutic. Magisterial teaching, the doctrine of the Church, and faith must always remain primary. Unfortunately, much of contemporary Catholic biblical scholarship makes it difficult for the study of Scripture to be the "soul of theology," as called for by the Second Vatican Council.³ A resolution to this problem must be sought tirelessly.

This article will unfold in three parts. First, I will explain how the modernist crisis was the birth of the biblical question in the Catholic world. I will then proceed to show how problems with modernist appropriations of historical criticism continue to plague Catholic biblical studies and theology. Finally, I will suggest the importance of the Catholic doctrine of biblical inspiration for helping to unite faith and reason and tradition and history, in Catholic biblical interpretation. My overarching argument is that the Catholic doctrine of the dual authorship of Scripture requires a hermeneutic of faith wherein Catholic faith does not diminish or impair reason but empowers it.

The Modernist Crisis and the Birth of the Biblical Question

Concerns over the use of biblical criticism in Catholic exegesis predate the modernist crisis by centuries. Indeed, the roots of historical criticism can be traced back at least as far as medieval nominalist philosophy, if not earlier in the polemical works of various Roman philosophers and Gnostic thinkers. But it is only in the nineteenth century that we see historical criticism come of age; in the Catholic world, we find its most complete appropriation in the works of modernists like Alfred Loisy. Hence, it is my contention that the modernist crisis was fundamentally about the uncritical appropriation of modern historical criticism into Catholic biblical scholarship, and moreover, that the modernist crisis gave birth to the biblical question in the Catholic world. By the very launching of the biblical question, the modernist crisis and its immediate historical preface initiated Catholic magisterial teaching on biblical inspiration. In order to understand how the modernist crisis gave birth to the biblical question, we need to take a brief look at the development of the historical critical method itself and its entrance into the Catholic world, as well as the politics which gave rise to the historical critical method and the modernist crisis.⁴

3 Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* [The Word of God], Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (November 18, 1965), 24. Latin texts of all citations from the documents of the Church ecumenical councils are taken from Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 volumes (Washington, DC: Georgetown University, 1990).

4 I have summarized much of this history in Jeffrey L. Morrow, "The Politics of Biblical Interpretation: A Criticism of Criticism," *New Blackfriars* 91 (September 2010): 528–545.

A Criticism Forged in Theo-Political Polemics

Within both Jewish and Christian communities, certain hermeneutical assumptions and logical interpretive conclusions developed as the Scriptures were being canonized and rules for interpretation were being set forth. James Kugel maintains there were at least four basic assumptions implied in the exegesis of early Jewish and Christian interpreters. He explains:

[1] They assumed that the Bible was a fundamentally cryptic text: that is, when it said A, often it might really mean B. . . . [2] Interpreters also assumed that the Bible was a book of lessons directed to readers in their own day. It might seem to talk about the past, but it is not fundamentally history. It is instruction, telling us what to do. . . . Ancient interpreters assumed this not only about narratives like the Abraham story but about every part of the Bible. . . . [3] Interpreters also assumed that the Bible contained no contradictions or mistakes. It is perfectly harmonious, despite its being an anthology. . . . In short, the Bible, they felt, is an utterly consistent, seamless, perfect book. . . . [4] Lastly, they believed that the entire Bible is essentially a divinely given text, a book in which God speaks directly or through His prophets.⁵

Such views of Scripture came under attack even before the Christian period, and particularly on the issue of the divine origin of the Pentateuch. Early heretics attempted to curtail any Jewish claims to the divine authority of the Torah by attacking the history of its origins. The pre-Christian proto-gnostic group known as the Nazarenes attempted to do this by denying that Moses was the author of the Torah, which had been widely assumed throughout much of Jewish and Christian history.⁶ In the Christian period, the third-century Roman Neoplatonist philosopher, Porphyry, also questioned the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, as well as other traditional attributions of authorship and origin, in his polemical works against Christianity.⁷ He and other polemicists attacked the history of Jewish and Christian claims concerning Scripture in order to denigrate assertion that these texts were divinely inspired.

In the medieval Muslim world, polemicists like Ibn Hazm and philosophers like Ibn Rushd (Averroes) followed suit. Ibn Hazm became one of the most im-

5 James L. Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 14–16. See also Thomas O’Loughlin, “The Controversy over Methuselah’s Death: Proto-Chronology and the Origins of the Western Concept of Inerrancy,” *Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale* 62 (1995): 182–225.

6 Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Gnostic Ethics and Mandaean Origins* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1970), 60.

7 Aryeh Kofsky, *Eusebius of Caesarea Against Paganism* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 30.

portant medieval thinkers to use philological analyses and historical assertion to deconstruct traditional Jewish and Christian views of Scripture, particularly historical claims. Ibn Hazm wanted to eliminate all forms of spiritual interpretation, and his work spread far and wide.⁸ Averroes, strongly influenced by Ibn Hazm, was even more important in the history of modern biblical criticism because he placed philosophy and reason as judge over faith and theology.⁹

Averroism spread throughout the Latin West at a rapid rate and became especially popular in university systems. We see this view enter biblical interpretation especially with the figure of Marsilius of Padua, who imbibed Averroist philosophy under the influence of Latin Averroists at the University of Padua. William of Ockham made similar exegetical moves, particularly in his attempts to curtail allegorical interpretation; for Marsilius and Ockham, there could be no spiritual interpretation. Nominalist biblical interpretation then spread throughout Europe from the University of Paris to the University of Heidelberg and elsewhere.¹⁰ Much of the biblical work in which Marsilius and Ockham engaged, however, was tied to the politics of Ludwig of Bavaria, under whose protection they lived. Notably, Ludwig was in conflict with Pope John XXII.¹¹

- 8 Abdelilah Ljamai, *Ibn Hazm et la Polémique Islamo-Chrétienne dans L'Histoire de L'Islam* [Ibn Hazm and Islamic-Christian Polemic in the History of Islam] (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 145–196; Theodore Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse: Ibn Hazm on Jewish and Christian Scriptures* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 57–96; Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Some Neglected Aspects of Medieval Polemics against Christianity," *Harvard Theological Review* 89:1 (1996): 61–84; and Muhammad Abu Laila, "Ibn Hazm's Influence on Christian Thinking in Research," *Islamic Quarterly* 31 (1987): 103–115.
- 9 Roger Arnaldez, *Grammaire et Théologie chez Ibn Hazm de Cordoue: Essai sur la Structure et les Conditions de la Pensée Musulmane* [Grammar and Theology According to Ibn Hazm of Cordoba: An Essay about the Structure and Conditions of Muslim Thought] (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1956), 319; and Miguel Asín Palacios, *Abenházam de Córdoba y su Historia Crítica de las Ideas Religiosas II* [Ibn Hazm of Cordoba and his Critical History of Religious Ideas Volume II] (Madrid: Tipografía de la "Revista de Archivos, Bibliotecas y Museos," 1928), 74; see also 74, n. 105.
- 10 See A. J. Minnis, "Material Swords and Literal Lights: The Status of Allegory in William of Ockham's *Breviloquium* on Papal Power," in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, and Joseph W. Goering (Oxford: Oxford University, 2003), 292–308; Frank Rosenthal, "Heinrich von Oyta and Biblical Criticism in the Fourteenth Century," *Speculum* 25:2 (1950): 178–179, 182, and 183, n. 5; and Erminio Troilo, "L'Averroismo di Marsilio da Padova" ["The Averroism of Marsilius of Padua"], in *Marsilio da Padova. Studi Raccolti nel VI Centenario della Morte* [Marsilius of Padua: Collected Studies on the Sixth Centenary of his Death], ed. Aldo Checchini and Norberto Bobbio (Rome: 1942), 47–77.
- 11 Jürgen Miethke, "Der Kampf Ludwigs des Bayern mit Papst und Avignonesischer Kurie in Seiner Bedeutung für die Deutsche Geschichte" ["The Struggle of Ludwig of Bavaria with the Pope and Avignon Curia and its Significance for German History"], in *Kaiser Ludwig der Bayer. Konflikte, Weichenstellungen und Wahrnehmung seiner Herrschaft* [Kaiser Ludwig the Bavarian: Conflicts, Choices, and Exercise of its Rule], ed. Hermann Nehlsen and Hans-Georg Hermann (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2002), 39–74; and Hermann Nehlsen, "Die Rolle Ludwigs des Bayern und seiner Berater Marsilius von Padua und Wilhelm von Ockham im Tiroler Ehekonflikt"

These very early examples of biblical exegeses exemplify polemics that are both theological and political. They are theological because they address biblical interpretation which has long-reaching implications for all aspects of theology. In some instances, matters of theological importance seem to be of primary concern. Political commitments, however, are present at every stage of the journey. The earliest polemics cannot be separated from the politics of the Roman Empire. When we reach medieval Muslim literature, and particularly the figure of Ibn Hazm, we encounter the politics of the Muslim caliphate structure and the concern over non-Muslims within that governmental structure. With Marsilius and Ockham, we see Christian concern with temporal authority, which they contended resided in state rulers. Ockham's insistence on evangelical poverty may have stemmed from sincere theological motivations but, practically speaking, his view would attempt to take property and wealth out of the hands of the Church and place them squarely with state rulers who were often in conflict with the pope.

Throne vs. Altar and the Rise of Modern Biblical Criticism

The conflict between state rulers and the Church would only increase as the centuries went by. In many ways the Renaissance period saw the development of new scholarly tools in philology and textual criticism that would place Scripture study on a firm footing. And yet, it was also during this time period that traditional authority was replaced by the authority of specialists. Renaissance scholarship continued a trend, already present in Ockham, of elevating the scholar over the Church's magisterium. We see this in the foundational work of Lorenzo Valla and especially Niccolò Machiavelli.¹²

The Protestant Reformation played an important role in continuing the trajectory set by nominalism and Renaissance philology. With their emphasis on the literal sense and their denigration of traditional Catholic spiritual exegesis, Protestant Reformers furthered the move toward modern biblical criticism, severing ties with the Catholic magisterium as the locus of biblical interpretive authority.¹³ And yet, the Reformation could never be completely severed from the

[“The Role of Ludwig of Bavaria and His Advisors Marsilius of Padua and William of Ockham in the Tyrolean Marital Conflict”], in *Kaiser Ludwig der Bayer*, 285–328.

- 12 Graham Maddox, “The Secular Reformation and the Influence of Machiavelli,” *Journal of Religion* 82:4 (2002): 539–562; John H. Geerken, “Machiavelli's Moses and Renaissance Politics,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60:4 (1999): 579–595; Steven Marx, “Moses and Machiavellism,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65:3 (1997): 551–571; Riccardo Fubini, “Humanism and Truth: Valla Writes Against the Donation of Constantine,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 57 (1996): 79–86; James L. Kugel, “The Bible in the University,” in *The Hebrew Bible and Its Interpreters*, ed. William Henry Propp, Baruch Halpern, and David Noel Freedman (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 143–165; and M. H. Goshen-Gottstein, “Christianity, Judaism and Modern Bible Study,” in *International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, Congress Volume: Edinburgh 1974*, Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum* 28 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 69–88.
- 13 Travis L. Frampton, *Spinoza and the Rise of Historical Criticism of the Bible* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 23–42.

changing political order. Western Europe was undergoing its bloody transformation from complex feudal space to the modern centralized states that would ultimately subordinate the Church to the state.¹⁴ European state rulers attempted to justify their opposition to the papacy. Regions which remained Catholic through the Reformation often had prior concordat agreements limiting the pope's arm within their realm, whereas the Protestant Reformation was most successful where no such agreements had been secured, and where rulers hence needed Protestant theology to justify their politics.¹⁵ The case of England is paradigmatic; support for the Reformation was driven by state politics, and all opposition was crushed.¹⁶

It was in the seventeenth century, however, where the most important shift occurred in the course of modern biblical criticism, namely, the decisive turn to *modern* history devoid of explicit theological concerns.¹⁷ The works of Isaac La Peyrère, Thomas Hobbes, Baruch Spinoza, and Richard Simon are pivotal;¹⁸ these four built a foundation that would launch modern biblical interpretation far into the future. In supporting his employer, the Prince of Condé, and the prince's political aspirations of ousting King Louis XIV and becoming the first Protestant king of France, La Peyrère built upon the Renaissance tools of biblical criticism to deconstruct Scripture. He did this by utilizing the newest historical findings and hence sowing the seeds of doubt about biblical and ecclesiastical authority, so as to reinterpret Scripture to suit his own and the prince's political machinations.¹⁹

14 Jeffrey L. Morrow, "The Bible in Captivity: Hobbes, Spinoza and the Politics of Defining Religion," *Pro Ecclesia* 19:3 (2010): 285–299.

15 William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2009), 166–167.

16 Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400–c. 1580*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University, 2005 [1992]), 377–523; and Anthony W. Marx, *Faith in Nation: Exclusionary Origins of Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2003), 128–139, 153–161, 175–184.

17 Moshe H. Goshen-Gottstein, "Foundations of Biblical Philology in the Seventeenth Century Christian and Jewish Dimensions," in *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Isadore Twersky and Bernard Septimus (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1987), 77–94.

18 Moshe H. Goshen-Gottstein, "The Textual Criticism of the Old Testament: Rise, Decline, Rebirth," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102:3 (1983): 365–399, at 376.

19 Fausto Parente, "Isaac de la Peyrère Interprète de Paul: Pourquoi le *Rappel des Juifs* a-t-il été Presque Entièrement Détruit au Moment de sa Publication?" ["Isaac de La Peyrère Interpreter of Paul: Why is *Rappel des Juifs* Almost Completely Destroyed at the Time of its Publication?"], *Revue des études juives* 167:1–2 (2008): 169–186; Élisabeth Quennehen, "L'Auteur des *Préadamites*, Isaac La Peyrère: Essai Biographique" ["The Author of *Pre-Adamites*, Isaac La Peyrère: A Biographical Essay"], in *Dissidents, Excentriques et Marginaux de l'Âge Classique: Autour de Cyrano de Bergerac: Bouquet offert à Madeleine Alcover* [Dissenters, Eccentric and Marginal, of the Classical Age: Around Cyrano de Bergerac: A Bouquet Offered to Madeleine Alcover], ed. Patricia Harry, Alain Mothu, and Philippe Sellier (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2006), 349–373; and Richard H. Popkin, "Millenarianism and Nationalism—A Case Study: Isaac La Peyrère," in *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture*, vol. 4, *Continental Millenarians: Protestants, Catholics, Heretics*, ed. John Christian Laursen and Richard H. Popkin (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2001), 74–84.

Thomas Hobbes attempted in his biblical criticism to support the status quo in post-Reformation England where the state sovereign had absolute control over the spiritual and temporal realms within the land, including biblical interpretation, which was to be state-sponsored scholarship. Like La Peyrère, Hobbes used the newly forming modern discipline of history in order to support his claims, likewise deconstructing the sacred text, and naturalizing the supernatural in his biblical interpretations.²⁰

Spinoza took both Hobbes's and La Peyrère's work further in laying the foundations for a more precise, ostensibly scientific, method of biblical interpretation than had thus far been developed.²¹ Simon followed his predecessors' work even as he attempted to distance himself from them. Unlike his three exegetical forbears, Simon attempted to defend Catholic tradition, but he did so by tearing apart the Bible, piece by piece, to emphasize that without Catholic tradition all that remains is a bundle of contradictions. His prioritization of secular scholarship over Catholic orthodoxy, however, is demonstrated in his refusal to refrain from publication even after his book was placed on the Church's Index Librorum Prohibitorum ("List of Prohibited Books"). His work became instrumental in early modern English and German biblical criticism which furthered Spinoza's agenda into the eighteenth century.²²

In the eighteenth century, several scholarly trends advanced the trajectory that had been set for modern biblical criticism in the seventeenth century works of La Peyrère, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Simon. La Peyrère and Hobbes had attempted

20 Jeffrey L. Morrow, "Leviathan and the Swallowing of Scripture: The Politics Behind Thomas Hobbes's Early Modern Biblical Criticism," *Christianity & Literature* (forthcoming); Frank M. Coleman, "Thomas Hobbes and the Hebraic Bible," *History of Political Thought* 25:4 (2004): 642–669; Michel Malherbe, "Hobbes et la Bible" ["Hobbes and the Bible"], in *Le Grand Siècle et la Bible* [The Great Century and the Bible], ed. Jean-Robert Armogathe (Paris: Beauchesne, 1989), 691–699; and Arrigo Pacchi, "Hobbes and Biblical Philology in the Service of the State," *Topoi* 7 (1988): 231–239.

21 Jeffrey L. Morrow, "The Early Modern Context to Spinoza's Bible Criticism," *Scottish Journal of Theology* (forthcoming); David Laird Dungan, "Baruch Spinoza and the Political Agenda of Modern Historical-Critical Interpretation," in *A History of the Synoptic Problem: The Canon, the Text, the Composition, and the Interpretation of the Gospels*, David Laird Dungan, Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library (New Haven: Yale University, 1999), 198–260; and R. David Freedman, "The Father of Modern Biblical Scholarship," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 19 (1989): 31–38.

22 Justin A.I. Champion, "Père Richard Simon and English Biblical Criticism, 1680–1700," in *Everything Connects: In Conference with Richard H. Popkin: Essays in His Honor*, ed. James E. Force and David S. Katz (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 39–61; John D. Woodbridge, "Richard Simon le 'Père de la Critique Biblique'" ["Richard Simon the 'Father of Biblical Criticism'"], in *Grand Siècle*, 193–206; Henning Graf Reventlow, "Richard Simon und seine Bedeutung für die Kritische Erforschung der Bibel" ["Richard Simon and his Importance for the Critical Study of the Bible"], in *Historische Kritik in der Theologie: Beiträge zu ihrer Geschichte* [Historical Criticism in Theology: Contributions to its History], ed. Georg Schwaiger (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 11–36; and Paul Hazard, *La Crise de la Conscience Européenne (1680–1715)* [The Crisis of the European Consciousness (1680–1715)], vol. 3 (Paris: Boivin, 1935), 125–136.

to deconstruct the biblical texts, but they lacked the necessary philological skills and tools to make their project a success. Spinoza laid down a methodological framework that would be followed into the twenty-first century, and yet he never engaged sufficiently with the text critical tools forged in the Renaissance, which many of his contemporaries in the seventeenth century were using. In Simon we can see the Scripture begin to dissolve as a result of his more thorough incorporation of careful textual and philological analysis, in addition to his linguistic abilities which far surpassed those of La Peyrère and Hobbes. Although Simon used his methodological framework as an apologetic defense of Catholic tradition, in the eighteenth century, such methods began to erode Scripture further, setting firmly in place Spinoza's core hermeneutical method, which was nothing other than the entrance of Cartesian skepticism into the realm of biblical criticism.

Although Spinoza's and Simon's works were both brought into the world of German scholarship in the eighteenth century, the most significant shift in biblical studies that occurred then was in the work of Johann David Michaelis. Michaelis was not intending to deconstruct the Bible; in fact, his work represents a very sophisticated attempt to defend traditional views concerning Scripture. In the realm of Pentateuchal source criticism, for example, he provided a scholarly response to Jean Astruc, who, building upon Simon's work, divided Genesis into various sources. Astruc wanted to defend traditional attributions of authorship against La Peyrère, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Simon, but Michaelis believed that Astruc conceded too much ground. Where Michaelis's significance lies, however, was in his nearly complete transition of the study of the Bible from the realm of theology to the realm of history and culture. Michaelis was a faithful biblical exegete, but, basing himself on the reigning German classical scholarship of the day, he attempted to create a neutral and objective philological approach to biblical interpretation.²³

The important context here is Prussian nationalism and the rise of Enlightenment universities in the German-speaking world, such as the University of Göttingen and the University of Berlin. These university systems existed to make productive civil servants for the Germanic state.²⁴ The burgeoning fields

23 For Michaelis, see Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2010); on Astruc, see Legaspi, *Death of Scripture*, 136–140; Pierre Gibert, "De L'Intuition à L'Évidence: La Multiplicité Documentaire dans la Genèse chez H. B. Witter et Jean Astruc" ["From Intuition to Evidence: The Documentary Multiplicity in Genesis according to H.B. Witter and Jean Astruc"], in *Sacred Conjectures: The Context and Legacy of Robert Lowth and Jean Astruc*, ed. John Jarick (London: T & T Clark, 2007), 174–189; Aulikki Nahlkila, "The Memoires of Moses and the Genesis of Method in Biblical Criticism: Astruc's Contribution," in *Sacred Conjectures*, 204–220; Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2005), 103–104, 114–115, 126, 180, 184, 186–187, 190, 197, and 210–215; and Anna-Ruth Löwenbrück, "Johann David Michaelis et les Débuts de la Critique Biblique" ["Johann David Michaelis and the Beginnings of Biblical Criticism"], in *Le Siècle des Lumières et la Bible* [The Enlightenment and the Bible], ed. Yvon Belaval and Dominique Bourel (Paris: Beauchesne, 1986), 113–128.

24 Legaspi, *Death of Scripture*, 27–51.

of classical studies and Pentateuchal source criticism influenced and shaped each other, as German scholars were attempting to cut their moorings from their Catholic past, with deep roots in Judaism and the Old Testament, and to seek a home elsewhere in ancient Rome and Greece. In so doing, they reconfigured their view of Christianity, not as flowing out of the Semitic ancient Near Eastern world, but as at its core Indo-European, which these scholars began to call Aryan.²⁵ Ancient Rome, Greece, and these scholars' own mythic pagan German past, became the new virtuous model on which to build a prosperous future.

Such scholarship culminated in the studies of Julius Wellhausen in the period just before and after Bismarck's anti-Catholic *Kulturkampf* ("culture war"). Many of the moves made within biblical studies, which soon became viewed as unquestioned starting points, as the assured results of "objective" scholarship, received their classical formulation in this period, in the wake of the First Vatican Council's definition of papal infallibility in 1870, and thus they represent the response of increasingly anti-clerical states to the Catholic Church. Judaism was denigrated as a symbol of Catholicism wherein Old Testament priesthood and modern Jewish traditions were viewed as representative of Catholic priests and Catholic traditions.²⁶

The Politics of Modernism

As the twentieth century was beginning to approach its close, Edwin Yamauchi remarked that, "Catholic scholars are now accepting interpretations that were earlier proposed by antisupeanatural critics of Christianity."²⁷ How this occurred is the story I wish to tell now. As we have seen, Catholics have been involved in the development of modern biblical criticism, at least as early as the medieval period with Marsilius and Ockham. Such scholarship, however, always remained on the fringe within the Catholic world, whereas it rapidly became dominant in the

25 Legaspi, *Death of Scripture*, 53–77; Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005), xii–xiii, 24–26, 145–206; Brian Vick, "Greek Origins and Organic Metaphors: Ideals of Cultural Autonomy in Neo-Humanist Germany from Winckelmann to Curtius," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63:3 (2002): 483–500; and Suzanne Marchand, *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750–1970* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1996).

26 Michael B. Gross, *The War Against Catholicism: Liberalism and the Anti-Catholic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2004); William R. Farmer, "State Interesse [Interest] and Markan Primacy: 1870–1914," in *Biblical Studies and the Shifting of Paradigms, 1850–1914*, ed. Henning Graf Reventlow and William Farmer (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 15–49; and Arnaldo Momigliano, "Religious History Without Frontiers: J. Wellhausen, U. Wilamowitz, and E. Schwartz," *History and Theory* 21:4 (1982): 49–64.

27 Edwin M. Yamauchi, "The Episode of the Magi," in *Chronos, Kairos, Christos: Nativity and Chronological Studies Presented to Jack Finegan*, ed. Jerry Vardaman and Edwin M. Yamauchi (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1989), 15–39, at 22.

Protestant world.²⁸ It was the modernists during the modernist crisis that brought such modern biblical hermeneutics into the heart of Catholic scholarship.

The scholarly assumptions of modernists like Loisy go back at least as far as Spinoza, and they pretended to be neutral and objective, that is, absent of prior commitments. This is not only false, but simply impossible. Such scholarship does not represent the absence of commitment, but rather the relocation of commitment.²⁹ This scholarship, devoid of traditional theological commitments, in fact represented state-sponsored biblical criticism.³⁰ Thus when anti-clerical violent revolutionaries appealed to the works of modernists like George Tyrrell, this made sense in the broader theo-political context.³¹ The theoretical anti-Catholicism implied in such works was now made explicit in violent political action, as had already occurred centuries earlier with the Reformation and its violent liquidation of the monasteries.

The political context within the century leading up to the modernist crisis helps make the picture clearer. The early theological debate between throne and altar became a battle between the Church and ever more secular states in the modern period. States used their monopoly on coercive violence to remove Church lands from the public sphere, exile religious orders, and more. Portugal, Spain, Naples, Sicily, and France banned the Jesuits and deported them to the Papal States. In 1773 these states forced Pope Clement XIV to suppress the Jesuits, who were viewed as transnational since they circumvented the diocesan authority structures and were thus not under the direct control of state-appointed bishops.³²

Within twenty years, Napoleon invaded the Papal States and compelled Pope Pius VI to agree to the Peace of Tolentino. On February 20, 1799, Napoleon's French soldiers captured Pius VI, who was deathly ill, and whisked him away to France where, six months later, he died as a prisoner. In 1801 Napoleon signed the Napoleonic Concordat with the Pope's successor Pius VII. Based on this Concordat, Pius VII reconstituted the hierarchy according to Napoleon's desires,

28 See Kugel's comment that, "It is no accident that, to this day, the great centers of modern biblical scholarship are to be found in largely Protestant countries—Germany and the Netherlands, Scandinavia and Great Britain, Canada and the United States." Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, 28–29.

29 Jon D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 125.

30 Farmer, "State Interesse," 24.

31 William L. Portier, *Divided Friends: Portraits of the Roman Catholic Modernist Crisis in the United States* (New York: Paulist, forthcoming); and Paul Misner, "Social Modernism in Italy," in *Political and Social Modernism*, ed. Ronald Burke, Gary Lease, and George Gilmore (Mobile: Spring Hill College, 1988), 18–35.

32 Eamon Duffy, *Saints & Sinners: A History of the Popes*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University, 2006 [1997]), 193–194, 203–204; and William L. Portier, "Church Unity and National Traditions: The Challenge to the Modern Papacy, 1682–1870," in *The Papacy and the Church in the United States*, ed. Bernard Cooke (New York: Paulist, 1989), 25–54.

and then crowned Napoleon emperor in France. After French troops occupied Rome, Napoleon asked Pius VII to give up his leadership of the Papal States. Pius VII refused, so Napoleon had his soldiers kidnap the Pope; he was only liberated when the Austrians forced Napoleon to abdicate his throne. Within his first three months back in Rome, Pius VII restored the Jesuits.

For the remainder of the nineteenth century, this political background leading up to the modernist crisis was a concern for both the magisterium as well as those espousing theological and philosophical views that would ultimately be condemned as modernist. In response to these threats, Pope Gregory XVI asked Austria to invade and occupy the Papal States. With the succession of Pius IX to the papal throne, the Piedmontese revolutionaries asked the Pope to join their forces in ousting the Austrians, which the Pope refused. In response, they assassinated the prime minister of the Papal States while he was in parliament. France entered the fray after the Austrians fled in fear of the Piedmontese. Vatican I ended early when the French left to fight the Prussians, leaving a vacuum in the Papal States that was filled by the Piedmontese who wrested the region from the Catholic Church.³³ This anti-clerical and anti-Catholic hostile political climate of the nineteenth century was in a very real sense the start of what would become known as the modernist crisis.

Some of the anti-modernist measures taken to stomp out modernism were overly harsh, in particular the clandestine operations of the semi-official group of theological censors known as the Sodalitium Pianum, or the Fellowship of Pius X. Pope Benedict XV, himself once suspected of being a modernist along with Pope John XXIII, ultimately suppressed this organization.³⁴ Marvin O'Connell's description of the Sodalitium Pianum's head, Umberto Benigni, as "sinister" and as "spy-master of a ragtag crew of informers and fanatics" is on target.³⁵ Their anonymous denunciations of Catholic professors, regardless of whether or not they were in fact modernists, created a climate of hostility and even terror throughout Europe and the United States. Pope Benedict XVI's reflections on this time period show that he is deeply saddened by the ways in which his own professors were hurt during this conflict. When he was still Prefect for the

33 Gary Lease, "Vatican Foreign Policy and the Origins of Modernism," in *Catholicism Contending with Modernity: Roman Catholic Modernism and Anti-Modernism in Historical Context*, ed. Darrell Jodock (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000), 31–55.

34 Portier, *Divided Friends*; Marvin R. O'Connell, *Critics on Trial: An Introduction to the Catholic Modernist Crisis* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1994), 321, 341, 348 n. 68, 361–365; and Émile Poulat, *Intégrisme et Catholicisme Intégral: Un Réseau Secret International Antimoderniste: La 'Sapinière' (1909–1921)* [Integralism and Integral Catholicism: A Secret International Anti-modernist Network: The "Piney Wood" (1909–1921)] (Paris: Casterman, 1969).

35 O'Connell, *Critics on Trial*, 361. O'Connell writes further that, "No one was safe. . . . The files of the sodality eventually bulged with the names of such alleged malefactors, whose guilt was maintained simply by the fact that they had been denounced," at 363.

Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, he wrote: "The danger of a narrow-minded and petty surveillance is no figment of the imagination, as the history of the modernist controversy demonstrates."³⁶ Despite the unfair and at times unchristian response to supposed modernism, however, the Church was undeniably threatened by modernism.

The case of Loisy is particularly instructive since he was the paradigmatic modernist. Loisy is the infamous Bible scholar who, in his *L'Évangile et l'Église* ("The Gospel and the Church") quipped that, "Jesus announced the Kingdom and what arrived was the Church."³⁷ Loisy's scholarship was not politically disinterested; in fact, political intrigue looms large behind much of his work. While writing his *L'Évangile et l'Église*, Loisy was lobbying to become a bishop. The anti-Catholic Prince of Monaco was attempting to get Loisy elected as bishop of Monaco. Of course the plan failed, but Loisy worked hard at rallying support for the position.³⁸

Catholic Magisterial Teaching as a Response to Modernism

Long before Loisy was on the Vatican's radar, Pope Pius IX had called the First Vatican Council. The Council intended not only to resolve theological issues, but also to resolve the political problems that were inextricable from such theological issues. The clearest example is the document *Pastor Aeternus*, with its declarations on the authority of the papacy.³⁹ The theological issue involved whether ultimate authority rested with a council of bishops or with the pope. The closely related political issue can be seen by the fact that the majority of the world's bishops were appointed by heads of state, and thus the call for a council of bishops to trump the pope was a thinly veiled attempt to subjugate the Church to the concerns of modern European states.

When it comes to magisterial teaching on Scripture, modernists like Loisy were often in view, even though they went unnamed. Throughout most of the Church's history, Scripture's divine inspiration was assumed and clearly taught, but there were no systematic treatises on Scriptural inspiration. However, "the growing climate of intellectual skepticism," in the nineteenth century, first caused "the doctrine of inspiration" to be "subjected to serious examination."⁴⁰ The first

36 Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology: Essays to Orient Theology in Today's Debates*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995 [1993]), 66.

37 Alfred Loisy, *L'Évangile et l'Église* [The Gospel and the Church] (Paris: A. Picard and Sons, 1902), 111.

38 Harvey Hill, "The Politics of Loisy's Modernist Theology," in *Catholicism Contending with Modernity*, 184–186; and Marvin R. O'Connell, "The Bishopric of Monaco, 1902: A Revision," *Catholic Historical Review* 71 (1985): 26–51.

39 First Vatican Council, *Pastor Aeternus* [The Eternal Pastor], Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ (July 18, 1870), in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1.

40 "Inspiration," in *Catholic Bible Dictionary*, ed. Scott Hahn (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 381–391, at 383.

papal encyclical on Scripture was Pope Leo XIII's 1893 *Providentissimus Deus*, which, among other things, sought to counter specific trends in biblical criticism like Loisy's.⁴¹ In the storm of the modernist crisis, Pius X issued his 1907 apostolic letter, *Lamentabili Sane*, clarifying Catholic teaching on divine inspiration against modernist attempts to limit inspiration.⁴² In several magisterial documents, the Church continued to develop, hone, and clarify its dogmatic teaching on the dual authorship of Scripture, and on the unique divine inspiration that extends to every part of the sacred page: the Pontifical Biblical Commission's 1915 response to questions on the second coming of Christ in the letters of St. Paul; Pope Benedict XV's 1920 encyclical *Spiritus Paraclitus* ("The Holy Spirit the Comforter"); and Pope Pius XII's 1943 encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* ("Inspired by the Divine Spirit"). These clarifications culminated in the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum* ("The Word of God"). Ironically, the birth of the biblical question in the modernist controversy is what necessitated the Church's clarification and detailed examination of the closely related questions of biblical interpretation and biblical inspiration.⁴³

The Current Crisis in Biblical Interpretation

The hermeneutical problems identified in the modernist crisis are still with us. The abuses remain, as is evident in classrooms across the Catholic world. Unfortunately, the history has been misinterpreted and these misinterpretations have become the standard revised histories through which important teachings, such as contained in *Dei Verbum*, have been interpreted. Some trends within Catholic biblical scholarship have downplayed traditional patristic and medieval forms of exegesis, particularly typology, where Old Testament texts are read in light of their full flowering in the New Testament. The overwhelming majority of contemporary Catholic biblical interpretation in the academy virtually ignores magisterial teaching on Scripture's divine inspiration.⁴⁴ Since the focus of Catholic biblical scholarship leans heavily in the historical-critical direction, Scripture's hu-

41 Claus Arnold, "'Lamentabili Sane Exitu' (1907): Das Römische Lehramt und die Exegese Alfred Loisy's" ["'Lamentabili Sane Exitu' (1907): Roman Teaching and the Exegesis of Alfred Loisy"], *Zeitschrift für Neuere Theologiegeschichte* 11:1 (2004): 24–51; and Harvey Hill, "Leo XIII, Loisy, and the 'Broad School': An Early Round of the Modernist Crisis," *Catholic Historical Review* 89:1 (2003): 40.

42 Pope St. Pius X, *Lamentabili Sane* [With Truly Lamentable Results], Syllabus Condemning the Errors of the Modernists (July 3, 1907), in *On the Doctrines of the Modernists, Pascendi Dominici Gregis: Encyclical Letter; and Syllabus Condemning the Errors of the Modernists, Lamentabili Sane* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1980).

43 For complete texts, see *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, ed. Dean P. Béchard (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002).

44 On the Church's teaching on biblical inspiration, see Brant Pitre, "Catholic Doctrine on Scripture: Inspiration, Inerrancy, and Interpretation," in *The Sacred Text: Excavating the Texts, Exploring the Interpretations, and Engaging the Theologies of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. Michael Bird and Michael Pahl (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2010), 177–197.

man authorship tends to be the focus of such studies. But, like its modernist past, much of contemporary Catholic biblical scholarship implicitly calls into question magisterial teaching on the dual authorship of Scripture.

What has transpired is that the Catholic biblical scholarly guild has made its own the modern mythology of methodological neutrality to which the modernists subscribed.⁴⁵ As with the modern academic discipline of history, modern Catholic biblical scholarship in general tends to operate under the false assumption that the methods used are comparable to the laboratory methodology of the hard sciences like chemistry and physics.⁴⁶ Geometric reason and the discipline of mathematics, with its language of "proof," remains the paradigmatic example of rationality to many Bible scholars, Catholic or otherwise. Postmodern thought, now widespread in all humanities disciplines, simply takes farther the very modern project it seeks to transcend.⁴⁷

In the retelling of the history of Catholic biblical scholarship, the modernists are cast as the heroes, and Church authorities such as Pope St. Pius X are the villains. Most of the actual historians of the modernist controversy are very careful historians who have done extremely valuable and important work in helping to shed light on a number of contextual matters that are essential in gaining an understanding of the events that transpired. Yet, even among such historians we find prejudicial exaggerations, for example, the description of Loisy as "among Roman Catholic biblical scholars the only one of outstanding distinction."⁴⁸

Pope Benedict XVI has become one of the most significant voices in this discussion. In his programmatic 1989 essay on "Biblical Interpretation in Conflict," he pointed out the dangers of the failure to recognize and critique the philosophical positions giving life to various biblical hermeneutics. Modern biblical criticism styles itself on the hard sciences with a façade of neutrality and objectivity, but, as Benedict points out, even the hard sciences are bereft of a purely neutral objectivity. And yet, we cannot simply return to pre-modern biblical interpretation as if the historical-critical method was never created. Nor can we turn a blind eye to our

45 See Harvey Hill, "Henri Bergson and Alfred Loisy: On Mysticism and the Religious Life," in *Modernists and Mystics*, ed. C. J. T. Talar (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2009), 104–136, at 120, where he writes that, "Loisy had insisted historical scholarship be free of theological or philosophical presuppositions and instead rely on those facts that historians could ascertain based on the available evidence. Philosophy and theology followed from history, in his view, not the reverse."

46 Constantin Fasolt, "History and Religion in the Modern Age," *History and Theory* 45 (2006): 10–26; Constantin Fasolt, "Red Herrings: Relativism, Objectivism, and Other False Dilemmas," *Storia della Storiografia* 48 (2005): 17–26; Constantin Fasolt, *The Limits of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2004); and Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1988).

47 David L. Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996).

48 Lawrence Barmann, "The Pope and the English Modernists," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 25:1 (2007): 31–54, at 40.

rich heritage in the patristic and medieval interpretive traditions. Rather, what we need to do is use the best of both traditional biblical exegetical traditions and of modern historical interpretation.⁴⁹ The guide to any such *ressourcement* ("return to the sources") has to be the Church's Tradition and magisterium so that the Bible is studied and read from the heart of the Church. This requires not only a hermeneutic of faith, as opposed to the Cartesian hermeneutic of skepticism that lies at the heart of modern biblical criticism, but also a hermeneutic of continuity. Pope Benedict XVI has shown us what this looks like in his seminal work, *Jesus of Nazareth*.⁵⁰

*The Mystery of Dual Authorship*⁵¹

One of the fears modern Catholic Bible scholars apparently have is the eclipse of historical biblical interpretation. The magisterium has again and again stressed the importance of the literal sense of Scripture, of reading the Bible within its proper historical context. There should be no talk of the death of the historical-critical method if by such method is meant a scholarly historical study of Scripture. At their best, however, these methods are pre-theological and have very firm limits in what they can actually teach us. Too often contemporary exegetes make claims which far outreach the capabilities of the methods they employ.

What needs to return to Catholic biblical scholarship is something that was prominent in the work of Catholic exegetes prior to the modernist crisis, namely, the firm conviction that reason must be purified by faith. In the words of *Dei Filius* from the First Vatican Council, "faith is above reason." There are several explanations for this. One is that, in the words of the Council, "faith delivers reason from errors and protects it and furnishes it with knowledge of many kinds." But ultimately, as *Dei Filius* makes clear, "reason is never rendered capable of penetrating these mysteries in the way in which it penetrates those truths which form its proper object. For the divine mysteries, by their very nature, so far surpass the created understanding."⁵²

Historical criticism is certainly indispensable, but it is not more indispensable than the Catholic doctrine of the divine inspiration of sacred Scripture. If anything, the mystery of the dual authorship of Scripture is more important than historical criticism, or any modern form of exegesis. Negatively this is because of historical criticism's limits, but positively it is also because of the implications

49 Paul T. Stallworth, "The Story of an Encounter," in Richard John Neuhaus, ed., *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 107–108; and Ratzinger, "Biblical Interpretation in Conflict," 91–126.

50 Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

51 "Inspiration," in *Catholic Bible Dictionary*, 384.

52 First Vatican Council, *Dei Filius* [The Son of God], Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith (April 24, 1870), chap. 4, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1.

of divine inspiration. Historical criticism by definition cannot demonstrate the mysteries of faith, and those sacred mysteries are of the utmost importance for Catholic biblical interpretation. Furthermore, the Church's teaching concerning the divine inspiration of sacred Scripture calls for an interpretation that does not exclusively rely on historical criticism. The Church's teaching that God is the primary author of Scripture imposes a hermeneutic of faith and of continuity on the biblical exegete.⁵³

In this brief article we have taken a look at the roots of the modernist crisis in the Catholic Church at the end of the nineteenth century and at the dawn of the twentieth century. I argued that at its heart, the modernist controversy was not only fundamentally about the biblical question, but also gave birth to the biblical question in the Catholic world. Moreover, the issues involved in early twentieth century modernism have not left us; they remain in the contemporary debate over the future of Catholic biblical scholarship. It has been my goal to emphasize how the Church's teaching on the divine inspiration of Scripture demands a hermeneutic of faith and of continuity. Only such a hermeneutic, which relies upon the best current methods of interpretation and the best of the past, engaged in from the heart of the Church, can move us forward positively in reading and living the Scriptures as Catholics. All Catholic biblical exegesis should be oriented toward mystagogical exegesis; exegesis that draws us into participation in the divine liturgy where we become divinized. That is the ultimate goal of reading and studying Scripture.⁵⁴

53 For a programmatic discussion of what such a biblical interpretation can look like see Scott W. Hahn, *Covenant and Communion: The Biblical Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009); Scott W. Hahn, "Worship in the Word: Toward a Liturgical Hermeneutic," *Letter & Spirit* 1 (2005): 101–136; and Scott Hahn, *Letter and Spirit: From Written Text to Living Word in the Liturgy* (New York: Doubleday, 2005).

54 I owe a debt of gratitude to a number of scholars for assistance at various stages of this project: William Portier for providing me with his work prior to publication, and for helping me see clearly the role of politics behind modern biblical criticism; Fr. Pablo Gadenz for providing me with resources and for numerous fruitful conversations on this topic; Timothy Furry for pointing me to the work of Constantin Fasolt; Michael Legaspi, Biff Rocha, and Michael Barber for fruitful conversations and correspondence on this topic; Brant Pitre for providing me with his own work prior to publication; Maria Morrow for her insightful comments and critiquing drafts of this manuscript; and finally Scott Hahn and Benjamin Wiker not only for important conversations on this topic but especially for providing me with drafts of their work tentatively entitled *The Bible Politicized* from which I learned a great deal, especially pertaining to Averroes, Marsilius, Ockham, Machiavelli, and Locke.