

Book Symposium

The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A Constructive Conversation

by Luke Timothy Johnson and William S. Kurz, SJ
(Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002)

The Future of *Christian* Biblical Scholarship

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I AM PLEASED that *Nova et Vetera* has invited me, as a Protestant biblical scholar, to join the “constructive conversation” that Luke Timothy Johnson and William S. Kurz seek to initiate, a conversation about future directions for biblical interpretation. While their book addresses itself explicitly to the future of *Catholic* biblical scholarship, its preface implies the hope that their proposals might be of more general relevance.¹ Their diagnosis of the present situation is indeed pertinent for other ecclesial communities, and many features of their constructive program will prove instructive for interpreters outside the Roman Catholic Church. I want to begin this response, therefore, by emphasizing the substantial common ground between this book and my own perspective.

Finding Common Ground

Johnson’s diagnosis of the problems that we face hits the mark at numerous points.² I concur with him that biblical scholarship within the

¹ “Others can help us discover whether what we say on these things . . . applies also to other spheres.” Luke Timothy Johnson and William S. Kurz, SJ, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A Constructive Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), viii.

² I refer here particularly to the book’s opening chapter, written by Johnson, “What’s Catholic about Catholic Biblical Scholarship? An Opening Statement,” in *ibid.*, 3–34.

professional guilds has frequently been overdetermined by certain post-Enlightenment tendencies: a distaste for theology; a predisposition for highlighting disunity among the biblical witnesses; a hankering to reconstruct hypothetical layers, sources, and origins “behind” the biblical texts (even where there is no real evidence) and to assign privileged authority to these hypothetical earlier materials over the canonical witnesses; and an assumption that the Church’s history of interpretation is chiefly a history of misreading the original (and therefore “real”) meaning of the texts. Johnson’s description accurately characterizes the state of affairs in many sectors of the New Testament guild: “In short, the study of the Bible (not understood as “Scripture”) is increasingly an academic activity that is not merely secular but often actively antireligious in character” (26).³

Johnson correctly observes that this *Tendenz* of scholarship has had its impact even on interpreters who teach in seminaries and church-related colleges: While they may privately hold to traditions of Christian faith and piety, their actual teaching of the Bible is constrained by professional allegiance to illusory ideals of scientific objectivity and intellectual neutrality, and their understanding of the historical data may be shaped by critical paradigms that are implicitly anti-ecclesial. Thus, for example, courses on the Old Testament—even in seminaries—may teach students to eschew Christological interpretations of Isaiah or the Psalms and may insist that “Hebrew Bible” texts must be understood *only* within their hypothetically reconstructed historical context in ancient Israel. Or, to take a couple of New Testament examples, the hypothetical “Q” may be regarded as a more reliable source for understanding Jesus than the Gospel of John; and the Pastoral Epistles and Catholic Epistles may be treated as having lesser value than the seven undisputedly authentic Pauline letters.⁴ Such tendencies are widespread in Protestant scholarship no less than in the Catholic scene that Johnson describes; indeed, one of his claims is that these tendencies infected Catholic scholarship because “second generation” Catholic biblical scholars uncritically reproduced characteristics of the Protestant historical criticism that they sought to emulate. The result has been that biblical scholarship—Catholic and Protestant alike—finds itself alienated from theology and distanced from the prayer and practice of the Church.

As I shall suggest below, Johnson’s portrayal of the situation is selectively and unsympathetically drawn. Nonetheless, the difficulties to which

³ Ibid., 26. Subsequent parenthetical page numbers in this essay, unless otherwise noted, refer to Johnson and Kurz, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship*.

⁴ These examples are mine, not Johnson’s, but I think they fairly illustrate the point he seeks to make.

he points are not imaginary. Anyone who surveys the field of professional biblical scholarship at the beginning of the twenty-first century will readily recognize that Johnson has identified tendencies and forces that do in fact exercise powerful influence in the academic world.

In light of this diagnosis of the problem, Johnson and Kurz offer a number of prescriptive proposals, all of which are to be welcomed. They call for a recovery of biblical interpretation as a properly *ecclesial* activity that seeks not merely the acquisition of knowledge (*scientia*) but also the formation of wisdom (*sapientia*). Interpretation so conceived must conduct its business in open and sympathetic conversation with the Church's liturgy, with theology, and above all with the history of interpretation, in the expectation that interpreters today stand to learn much from skilled Christian readers in the past. As Johnson and Kurz rightly indicate, such an approach to interpretation will necessarily open itself to figurative senses of Scripture, as well as literal ones, recognizing that a text's meaning is not exhausted by its initial historical reference. Both authors are careful to stipulate that "the doing of history must remain a permanent aspect of biblical study" (18). Their chief concern, however, is to summon biblical scholars to a new and edifying dialogue with the Church's rich tradition of scriptural interpretation.

To their credit, Johnson and Kurz offer us not merely prescriptive declarations but actual examples of the sort of interpretation they advocate: Kurz through several chapters expounding passages from the Gospel of John, and Johnson through two incisive chapters on Origen and Augustine as biblical interpreters. These two chapters in particular are so strong that this reader finds himself wishing for more; perhaps Johnson will favor us in the future with further studies of patristic exegesis. One fears that the fine insights of Johnson's treatment of Origen and Augustine may not receive the attention they deserve, since they are tucked away within a book that is chiefly a programmatic manifesto.

As I read *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, I was immediately struck by the intellectual and spiritual convergence between this book and several other recent scholarly proposals. One thinks, for example, of the pioneering efforts of Brevard Childs to recover the history of exegesis, including premodern exegesis, as an integral element of biblical interpretation.⁵ Or one recalls Hans Frei's influential argument, in *The Eclipse*

⁵ See, for example, Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974); idem, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); idem, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004).

of *Biblical Narrative*, that biblical interpretation in the German academy during the Enlightenment and afterward lost its bearings by its inability to read biblical texts as coherent narratives that must be read figurally.⁶ To cite more recent examples, one thinks of the work of New Testament scholars, such as Francis Watson and Stephen Fowl, who have sharply challenged some of the same aspects of the prevailing historical-critical paradigm that Johnson and Kurz identify; in different ways, each calls for a robust recovery of theological exegesis.⁷ Or, to mention one particularly striking instance, one thinks of David Steinmetz's widely cited 1980 essay, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," which concludes with the following provocative assessment:

The medieval theory of levels of meaning in the biblical texts, with all its undoubted defects, flourished because it is true, while the modern theory of a single meaning, with all its demonstrable virtues, is false. Until the historical-critical method becomes critical of its own theoretical foundations and develops a hermeneutical theory adequate to the nature of the text which it is interpreting, it will remain restricted—as it deserves to be—to the guild and the academy, where the question of truth can be endlessly deferred.⁸

Certainly Steinmetz's view of things ought to be profoundly congenial to Johnson and Kurz's program.

Finally, as a participant in an initiative called the Scripture Project, sponsored during the years 1998–2002 by the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton, I am impressed by the very substantial convergence of Johnson and Kurz's agenda with the findings of our research group, published in a collection of essays called *The Art of Reading Scripture*.⁹ The members of the Scripture Project—a group of fifteen scholars, both Protestant and Catholic, spanning the disciplines of Old Testament, New Testament, theology, Church history, and the practice of ministry—articulated their agreement in a set of "Nine Theses on the Interpretation of Scripture" that envision a future for biblical interpretation that closely

⁶ Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974).

⁷ Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997); Stephen Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

⁸ David C. Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. S. Fowl (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 26–38. The quotation is found on p. 37.

⁹ E. F. Davis and R. B. Hays, eds., *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003).

parallels Johnson's five "Premises of Premodern Interpretation" (47–60) and four "essential elements in recovering a scriptural imagination" (131–42). The Scripture Project's nine theses insist that Scripture is chiefly about the triune God and call for, *inter alia*, reading Scripture in and for the Church, in light of the Church's rule of faith and the hermeneutical example of the saints.¹⁰

Thus, a good case can be made that Johnson and Kurz are speaking in chorus with an impressive cloud of witnesses, not only in the Church's past but also in the present moment. They are not lonely voices in the wilderness; rather, they stand within the ranks of a widespread reforming movement in biblical studies.

Questions and Puzzlements

And yet, despite my appreciation for the work of Johnson and Kurz, and despite my fundamental agreement with key aspects of their program, I come to the end of their book with certain nagging questions and puzzlements. These may be enumerated briefly as follows: (1) Why is their proposal formulated in a way that seems unnecessarily uncharitable toward Protestant interpreters? (2) What, if any, criteria enable us to decide when it might be appropriate to *disagree* with interpretations that have become traditional within the Church? and (3) Are Johnson and Kurz proposing a common vision, or do their distinct sections of the book embody materially different prescriptions for biblical interpretation? In the following remarks, I shall address each of these questions in turn.

Polemic Against Protestantism

First, is it really necessary for Catholic biblical scholarship, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, to define its task in polemical opposition to Protestantism? Throughout *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, one stumbles over careless caricatures of Protestantism and a puzzling tendency to conflate Protestant biblical interpretation with Enlightenment worldviews. We read that the deleterious aspects of the historical-critical paradigm are a result of certain "mental reflexes" of "the Protestant form of Christianity from which the model derived" (15). The "reflexes" to which Johnson refers are then explained as follows: "In contrast to the conjunctive 'both/and' that I have suggested expresses the spirit of Catholicism, the Protestant ethos is expressed in terms of the disjunctive 'either/or'" (15–16). The Lutheran slogan *Sola Scriptura* is said to entail the consequences that Scripture and Tradition can never be in dialectical

¹⁰ For the nine theses, see Davis and Hays, *Art of Reading Scripture*, 1–5.

harmony, that “the development of Christianity must be regarded as *opposed* to the spirit of its origins,” and that “the literal sense of Scripture must be *opposed* to figurative interpretations” (16).

It must be admitted that Johnson’s sweeping caricature of Protestantism has some basis in historical reality—as caricatures usually do—and that some Protestant scholarship has exhibited the tendencies that Johnson deplores. Nonetheless, Lutheran interpreters would surely reply that Luther’s own understanding of the relationship between Scripture and Tradition was far more nuanced than Johnson’s bumper-sticker dichotomies would allow: Luther believed that *authentic* Christian tradition was in fact harmonious with Scripture, while Scripture provides the criteria whereby one can identify inauthentic and abusive developments of tradition, such as the selling of indulgences.¹¹

The simplistic polemic against Protestant interpretation reaches its climax in Kurz’s chapter, “Voices in the Church: Preunderstandings in Applying Scripture” (182–202), which mounts a critique of the chapter on abortion in my book, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*.¹² The difference between Kurz’s position and my own is said to present a contrast between Protestant and Catholic hermeneutical preunderstandings, in which my argument allegedly reflects “a *Sola Scriptura* insistence that something has to be expressly treated in Scripture to be binding,” whereas Kurz’s argument represents a Catholic way of interpreting Scripture “within our broader Catholic context of Revelation” (187). I shall return later in this essay to reply specifically to Kurz’s assessment, which I believe represents an unfortunate misreading of my book—a misreading seemingly fostered by his reading of my work through the lens of this Protestant/Catholic dichotomy. For now, I simply register the question whether “the future of Catholic biblical scholarship” requires this kind of aggressive posture toward Protestant interpreters. It seems to me that *it is Johnson and Kurz who are pressing a disjunctive “either/or” mentality* that disregards the complexity of hermeneutical debates within Protestantism and threatens to undermine some of the goodwill built up during the past forty years of ecumenical conversation.¹³ (Johnson notes in a humor-

¹¹ See D. C. Steinmetz, *Luther in Context*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002).

¹² Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 444–61.

¹³ One notes with gratitude in the book’s concluding chapter a brief affirmation of the importance of ecumenical conversation in biblical interpretation (267). While welcoming this affirmation, I find it somewhat dissonant with the features of the book noted above.

ous aside [5] that his own dichotomous characterization of Protestantism and Catholicism embodies precisely the disjunctive reflex against which he is polemicizing, but he excuses this disconcerting fact by observing that “Catholics also have a high tolerance for paradox!”)

The antagonistic stance of *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship* toward Protestant biblical interpretation is particularly strange in light of the developments I described above: Some very influential Protestant interpreters have for the past generation been engaged in sustained efforts to reclaim precisely the hermeneutical approach that Johnson and Kurz advocate: respect for the history of premodern exegesis, openness to figural readings, the recovery of theological interpretation, and efforts to inhabit Scripture’s imaginative world.¹⁴ (Has anyone achieved the last of these aims more impressively than Karl Barth?) It is perhaps worth remarking that the publisher of *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship* is not one of the traditional Roman Catholic publishing houses but rather William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, a publisher traditionally identified with the Reformed branch of Protestantism. This is surely a fact worth pondering.

Johnson describes himself as “a Catholic whose professional training as a New Testament scholar took place at Yale, the very belly of the Enlightenment beast” (4–5). Presumably this is another attempt at humor. I, for one, find the humor in dubious taste; it gratuitously dishonors the work of Christian scholars such as Childs, Frei, and George Lindbeck, all of whom were members of the Yale faculty during Johnson’s years as a student and junior faculty member there.¹⁵ Surely Johnson’s characteristic emphases on narrative hermeneutics and recovery of the history of tradition must have been encouraged by his Yale environment more than he acknowledges in this book.

¹⁴ I note, for example, that twelve of the fifteen scholars who participated in the Scripture Project were Protestants, who found much common ground with—and were richly instructed by—the three Catholic participants: Gary Anderson, Brian Daley, and Robin Darling Young (all three of whom are now members of the faculty at Notre Dame). I think it would be fair to observe that *The Art of Reading Scripture* is free of the “Catholic vs. Protestant” polemic that appears in *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship*.

¹⁵ Admittedly, none of these scholars taught specifically in the field of New Testament, Johnson’s own discipline. Perhaps there is a more complex story to be told here; some clues may be detected through reading Wayne Meeks’s stringently anti-theological presidential address to the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas in Barcelona in 2004 (now published as “Why Study the New Testament?” *New Testament Studies* 51 [2005]: 155–70). But even in the field of New Testament, one can hardly avoid recalling the work, in an earlier generation, of Yale’s Paul Minear, a scholar whose life work might aptly be summed up in Johnson’s phrase, “imagining the world that Scripture imagines.”

In short, one of my first impulses after reading *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship* was to pick up the phone, call the authors, and say, "Hey, Luke and Bill, hold your fire; we're on the same side!" I did not do that. But this essay represents my attempt to re-establish diplomatic relations between interpretive forces that ought to be allies. The real enemy of Johnson and Kurz's hermeneutical project is not Protestantism but Enlightenment secularism and its strange postmodern derivatives. My point here can be made simply: I would find their book more generous, and wiser, if they had chosen to imagine and write about *The Future of Christian Biblical Scholarship*.¹⁶

A corollary of *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship*'s antagonism toward Protestantism is Johnson's searing indictment of "biblical theology." In Johnson's view, the enterprise of "biblical theology" seeks to impose "a false harmony" on the diverse witnesses of Scripture "by means of some extrinsic category." (Would it be fair to ask how such procedures might differ from Augustine's insistence on the unity of Scripture, his explicit attempts to harmonize the Gospels, and his use of "charity" as the material hermeneutical norm for all scriptural interpretation?) Or, to state a different accusation, biblical theology seeks "to close the gap between historical criticism and the Bible" simply through "the use of more history." But this attempt is doomed, because "Biblical theology manages to keep the world of Scripture firmly in the past." Biblical theology, according to Johnson's account, "derives neither inspiration nor authority from the life of the Church, and it does not address itself to the transformation of human existence within a community that imagines itself living within the world imagined by Scripture" (129–30). This is an astonishing charge.

I am at a loss to identify the actual targets of Johnson's polemic against biblical theology. Perhaps Johnson's harsh judgments are, to some limited extent, true of the exponents of the "Biblical Theology Movement" of the 1950s and 1960s, but it is very difficult to see how such charges can be sustained against the interpreters I have listed above, including Watson, the most articulate recent advocate of "biblical theology." (Consider the concluding sentence of Childs's most recent book: "By reviewing the

¹⁶ I might also raise the question of whether Johnson's polemic does justice to the Christian motivations and contributions of the Catholic biblical scholars of what he calls the "second generation." Kurz is characteristically more cautious on this point and more appreciative of the positive pastoral contributions of the "second generation" (see, for example, 146). I am sure, however, that this question has already been vigorously debated within the Catholic Biblical Association, and perhaps it would be wiser for me to stay out of this family dispute.

history of the Church's biblical interpretation, we can derive new confidence in confessing with the creed: I believe in the one holy catholic and apostolic Church.")¹⁷ It is simply baffling that Johnson seeks to document his case by referring in a footnote to Wayne Meeks's *The Origins of Christian Morality* as an illustration of the alleged tendency of biblical theology to devolve into "an exercise in the history of ideas, or an ethnography of ancient culture." (130, note 21) In fact, there is no more adamant foe of biblical theology than Wayne Meeks.¹⁸ Johnson is once again firing at the wrong target.¹⁹

This is perhaps the place to state my puzzlement about a powerful ambivalence that runs through Johnson's discussion. Does he or does he not see himself living within the world imagined by Scripture? Or to use Johnson's own metaphor, is Scripture for him a lost city or a living city? On the one hand, he is fiercely critical of biblical theologians and historical critics who no longer inhabit the scriptural world and who must therefore "approach" Scripture from "somewhere else" (127–28). On the other hand, within the very same chapter, he can describe himself as a postmodern person who is "estranged from the world of Scripture, but . . . not contemptuous of it." He can declare that "the greatest difficulty our

¹⁷ Childs, *Struggle to Understand Isaiah*, 323.

¹⁸ "[W]e should start by erasing from our vocabulary the terms 'biblical theology' and, even more urgently, 'New Testament theology.' Whatever positive contributions these concepts may have made in the conversation since Gabler, we have come to a time when they can only blinker our understanding" (Meeks, "Why Study the New Testament?" 167–68).

¹⁹ Equally strange is Johnson's complaint (129, note 19) that my book *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* makes "the historical Jesus" a key element of New Testament theology." As even the casual reader of my book will see, the problem of the historical Jesus is treated in a ten-page excursus following a much more extensive discussion of the individual Gospel witnesses. This excursus begins with a lengthy explanation of my decision *not* to make the historical Jesus central: "the historian's re-imagining of Jesus, however informative and interesting, can never claim the same normative theological status as the four diverse canonical accounts" (*Moral Vision*, 160). Further, the excursus leads to this judgment in the final paragraph: "Thus, in one sense, the reconstruction of the historical Jesus adds nothing new to New Testament ethics. If it adds anything at all, it is merely what Luke calls *asphaleia*, a confidence in the truth of the things about which we have been instructed by the storytellers who wrote the Gospels" (167). When my book moves in its last section to the treatment of specific ethical problems (*Moral Vision*, 313–470), "the historical Jesus" plays virtually no role at all. Johnson has elsewhere articulated other criticisms of *Moral Vision* that are more substantive, but on this point his critique is misplaced. It appears that my book has simply gotten caught in the crossfire of Johnson's indiscriminate assault on Protestant biblical theology.

generation has in doing theology is our distance from the imaginative world of Scripture, which means, our distance from the God revealed by the world as imagined by Scripture" (122). And he can describe his own hermeneutical project in the following language: "I argue that the peculiar challenge to faith today is to oscillate creatively between worlds constructed by secular analyses and the world constructed by Scripture" (132, note 24). Is that not precisely what Rudolf Bultmann did in his day? And is it not very much the same thing attempted by the "biblical theologians" for whom Johnson expresses such dismissive contempt? The dizzying rhetorical reversals enacted within these few pages rival the dialectical self-accusations performed by that master of theological dialectics, the Apostle Paul, in Romans 7: "I do not understand my own actions, for I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." At the very least, in light of this complex hermeneutical situation, Johnson ought to consider adopting a more charitable posture toward other interpreters who grapple with very similar problems.

Criteria for Discernment

We turn now to a different issue. On what basis might we as interpreters of Scripture take positions that differ from the received traditions of the Catholic Church? Johnson explicitly indicates that respectful and receptive reading of the tradition does not necessitate agreement with it: "Closer examination of these ancient interpreters will reveal the ways in which we can and should disagree with them" (61).²⁰ But on what grounds? Johnson never offers an explicit, focused answer to this question, but as the discussion unfolds, several examples of such disagreement—or development—come to the surface.

First, Johnson evidently believes that late modernity has developed an understanding of *narrative meaning* that is more sophisticated than, and at least in some respects superior to, the hermeneutical theories accessible to patristic interpreters. This point emerges particularly in Johnson's critique of Augustine: "Augustine lacked a theory of language that would enable him to find a place between allegory and literal-as-referential as a mode of truth-telling in Scripture." This theoretical deficiency left Augustine caught in a bind in his attempts to respond to Faustus the Manichaean: In order to defend the truth of the Gospels' witness to Jesus, he was forced to fall back on literalistic attempts at harmonization. "Trying to prove too much, he falls into the danger of the very vice he

²⁰ One looks in vain for any such suggestion in Kurz's contributions to the book. This is one of the significant differences to which we shall return below.

despises, namely of manipulating the evidence in order to achieve the desired result” (104–6). Johnson’s critique—a critique surrounded by much appreciative exposition of Augustine’s underlying concerns—is exactly correct: “His anxiety concerning the historicity of the Gospels . . . led him to downplay the very real critical problems presented by their differences” (108). Indeed, Augustine’s *Harmony of the Gospels* is replete with strained and unpersuasive attempts to explain away these differences, while at the same time remarkably oblivious—from our point of view—to the literary and theological distinctiveness of each of the four witnesses. Augustine’s literalistic harmonizing, which finds its modernist counterpart in fundamentalist apologetics, offers no real solution.

Scholars in modernity who did recognize “the very real critical problems” presented by the differences among the Gospels, however, plunged almost inescapably into the realm of historical speculation that so absorbed Johnson’s “second generation” of Catholic scholars, as they attempted to reconstruct the historical events behind the Gospels and the processes of composition and editing that yielded the texts as we now have them. Johnson also regards this sort of explanatory effort as a hermeneutical dead end.

The alternative, in Johnson’s view, is a “theory of ‘narrative truth’ ” (106) that allows us to escape from the conundrum posed by Augustinian literalism on one hand and historical criticism on the other. He articulates this constructive approach to narrative in a couple of brief paragraphs near the end of the book, in his “Response to Bill Kurz”:

Patristic and medieval interpreters rarely if ever saw compositions whole. The premise of contemporary literary criticism, that narratives bear meaning immanently in and through the composition as such and as a whole, is only rarely spotted in antiquity. Patristic and medieval interpreters had much more of an atomistic approach to narratives, seeing them in more oracular terms.

The development of literary criticism within biblical scholarship is . . . to be applauded because it enables us to ask the question about the truth of narratives in ways that are more creative and flexible than were available, for example, to Augustine. We can think of the Gospels as rendering the figure of Jesus truly even if they disagree in their telling and cannot be harmonized as historical sources. They speak truth precisely as witnesses and interpretations, in and through the form of narrative (250–51).

Once again, I find myself, broadly speaking, in agreement with Johnson at this point.²¹ The problem, however, is that *The Future of Catholic Biblical*

²¹ Here again Johnson’s work is strikingly convergent with the proposals of *The Art of Reading Scripture*.

Scholarship offers very little explicit development of this extremely important claim. What precisely does it *mean* to say that the Gospels render the identity of Jesus “truly” even if they are not referentially factual? Is the correspondence between narrative and history a matter of complete indifference for theological interpretation? If not, how do we understand the relationship between them? And why is Johnson’s literary-critical theory of narrative truth preferable to Augustine’s?

These are not novel questions, and—to be fair—Johnson has addressed them to some extent in other books.²² Nonetheless, one comes away from *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship* with the slightly uneasy sense that Johnson and Kurz are tying the future of Catholic biblical scholarship to a particular hermeneutical proposal about narrative that is decidedly underdeveloped in the present volume. If they hope to rally Catholic (or, as I would prefer, Christian) scholars around their proposal, they owe us a more expansive account of these matters.

The closest Johnson comes in *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship* to addressing these questions is in his final substantive chapter, “Imagining the World That Scripture Imagines” (119–42). Here he sketches the outlines of a *sapientia* that will enable us to interpret the Bible more faithfully. His proposal, in brief, has four components: (1) We must learn to apprehend Scripture not as a descriptive or propositional text but as a fountainhead of imaginative vision, “as a vast collection of interconnected and internally coherent images” (133). (2) We must read Scripture together in “communities of practice” (134), small reading communities dedicated to Christian discipleship. (3) We must learn anew to read Scripture imaginatively, moving beyond the literal/historical to grasp “the rich world of image and metaphor within Scripture’s compositions” (136).²³ (4) We must read Scripture in dialogical interaction with “close and obedient attention to actual human experience in the world” (141).

The last of these “four essential elements in recovering a scriptural imagination” (131), though it receives the briefest development (141–42), seems to be singled out as particularly important. (Note that in contrast to the first three elements, it receives a new bold heading in the text.) Johnson wants us to attend, precisely in our reading of Scripture, to “the work of the

²² L. T. Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996); idem, *Living Jesus: Learning the Heart of the Gospel* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999); idem, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991).

²³ The difference between Johnson’s first and third points here is not immediately evident; clearly, they are closely related. In any case, I eagerly endorse at least the first three of Johnson’s four desiderata.

Living God in the world” as it is encountered through “human stories.” Johnson suggests (remarkably) that contemporary theology has been inattentive to human experience²⁴ and argues that “the human drama of idolatry and sin, grace and faith” can be “if properly heard, revelatory.”

Johnson’s recommendation at this point is strongly reminiscent of a powerful strain of Protestant liberalism, running from Schleiermacher to Bultmann to some contemporary feminist theologies. It would be illuminating for Johnson to clarify how his program parallels or differs from these sorts of experientially centered theologies—whose besetting weakness is a tendency to turn theology into anthropology. One worries slightly about Johnson’s mandate that we give “obedient attention” to human experience. What might it mean to owe “obedience” to the many and varied narratives of human subjectivity? (I confess that, upon encountering this phrase, I could not get out of my mind the advertising slogan for the soft drink 7-Up: “Obey your thirst!”)

Of course, much hinges on the qualifier: “if *properly* heard.” Experience is hardly an unambiguous teacher.²⁵ I believe that Johnson must have in mind—as Kurz certainly does in his chapters—a way of interpreting experience that is given normative guidance by the Rule of Faith, by the Church’s historic creeds, and by the Church’s liturgy. But—at least in his chapter on “Imagining the World that Scripture Imagines”—Johnson does not clearly say so. To the contrary, “experience” seems to be revelatory in its own right; indeed, it becomes—alongside a modern theory of narrative truth—a second sort of criterion that might provide leverage for critique or revision of Christian tradition—as Johnson has elsewhere proposed.²⁶

If I am reading Johnson rightly at this point, what response would he give to those interpreters, whose voices have grown more insistent in the

²⁴ I can only assume that Johnson means to refer here to certain types of Roman Catholic theology. Protestant theology, both in its liberal and evangelical forms, has been awash in the seas of human experience for the past two hundred years. This would be particularly true of my own Wesleyan tradition.

²⁵ Interestingly, in his “Response to Bill Kurz,” Johnson reacts warily to Kurz’s argument that the experience of repentant postabortion women supports the Catholic teaching against abortion, because the counterargument made by proponents of abortion also “uses the criterion of experience to make the exact opposite point.” Consequently, Johnson reminds both his colleague and himself that the criterion of experience “is as slippery as Scripture itself and must be discerned as carefully” (254). It is a salutary reminder. The question of *criteria* for discernment looms, unresolved.

²⁶ For the outworking of this revisionary function of “experience” with regard to the Church’s teaching on human sexuality, see L. T. Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996).

academy, who read “human experience” as the definitive evidence that the Bible and the Christian gospel are inherently violent and oppressive? How are such experientially based claims to be evaluated? One of the surprising features of Johnson’s chapters is that he expends so much energy in his polemic against the historical criticism of a generation that is passing away, while mostly ignoring the much more pressing challenges posed by the postmodern hermeneutics of suspicion and the polarizing hermeneutics of various identity-group theologies.²⁷ Surely the *future* of Catholic biblical scholarship depends much more on how it will answer *these* challenges faithfully than on how successfully it fights rear-guard battles against the generation of Raymond Brown and Joseph Fitzmyer.²⁸

Kurz does devote about two pages to the hermeneutics of suspicion, in which he concludes flatly that, whatever its value for “the domain of history and sociology,” it has no value for discovering the spiritual sense of Scripture (226–28). Johnson addresses the issue briefly in his response to Kurz, with a wise cautionary remark that the concerns of “those who have been hurt badly by readings of Scripture . . . that justify intolerance or oppression of humans” cannot be so lightly dismissed. His prescription for response to this situation is the formation of a community of reading that “empowers all readers” (254). If I may be permitted to speculate, it seems to me that Johnson is relatively uncritical of experientially based theologies because they are *methodologically* congenial, at least in crucial aspects, to his own program: They are indeed giving obedient attention to human experience and expecting to find a revelation of the Living God there, precisely within the messy human drama.

I do not doubt that we stand to learn much that is theologically valuable by careful listening to human stories, and I join Johnson in affirming that human experience provides significant input for theological reflection. The crucial question, once again, is *how* one processes and evaluates the reports of human experience. What criteria enable us to distinguish the work of the Living God from the claims of idols and the self-deceptive desires of the

²⁷ The topic is not entirely absent from Johnson’s field of vision: on p. 130, he offers a couple of sentences sharply critical of “ideological criticism within the academy that only makes more explicit the assumed moral superiority of the contemporary reader to the world imagined by Scripture.” On this issue, see my essay, “A Hermeneutic of Trust,” in R. B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 190–201.

²⁸ At recent meetings of the AAR/SBL, one is hard-put to find papers doing the sort of old-fashioned reconstructive historical work that Johnson frets about; however, one finds numerous papers about reading the text from particular social locations, or through the eyes of various marginalized groups.

human heart? With regard to these questions, I find Kurz's more forthrightly tradition-bound position far clearer than Johnson's—even while I find Johnson the more hermeneutically subtle of the two authors.

A Common Vision?

This comparison between Johnson and Kurz can serve as a transition to the third big question I have about *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship*: To what extent are these two authors really advocating the same program of interpretation? To what extent do they share a common vision? To be sure, Johnson and Kurz share many common concerns, as I indicated in my initial outline of the book's key programmatic emphases. The more closely one reads their constructive discussions, however, the more one wonders whether they may be on divergent paths.

Kurz is, from start to finish, committed to performing biblical interpretation within the framework of Catholic teaching, as mediated through the Church's *magisterium*. He champions the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as an appropriate guide to reading Scripture, and his sample exegetical probes unfailingly support contemporary Catholic doctrine and practice, whether the issue is Christology, abortion, Eucharist, or the sacrament of reconciliation. At no point does he entertain the notion that Scripture might play a critical role in relation to tradition, or that received ecclesiastical interpretations might be in need of some correction. He comes across, in these chapters at least, as a good company man, who strongly believes that the institution of the Catholic Church provides comprehensive and satisfying guidelines for interpreting Scripture. This gives his chapters the virtue of clarity and consistency, but one never has the sense that Kurz is actually *learning* anything through his exegesis or that Scripture might have the capacity to *surprise* the Catholic reader. Rather, his exegesis consistently reinforces preestablished beliefs and practices—and vice-versa.

Many of the examples that he chooses to illustrate the value of reading Scripture from a Catholic perspective are obvious and unilluminating. For instance, it is not exactly a hermeneutical breakthrough to show that the prologue of John's Gospel is consonant with the Nicene Creed (178–81). Kurz could hardly have chosen a *less* illuminating text to show how Catholic interpretation goes “Beyond Historical Criticism” (the title of his chapter on the Johannine prologue).²⁹ A more interesting challenge

²⁹ Kurz states: “Recently, under the unexamined influence of historical criticism, teachers and preachers have often seemed to go out of their way to minimize connections between this biblical prologue which Christians read and the Creed which they recite and doctrines which they believe. Consequently, many Catholics seem intimidated into not allowing themselves to recognize their

would have been to show how, for example, the Gospel of Luke—which is often thought to manifest a “low” or “prophetic” Christology—expresses a Christology consistent with the Church’s creedal traditions.³⁰

Johnson, by contrast, is edgier and more hermeneutically adventurous. He shares Kurz’s commitment to read within Catholic tradition, but for him that seems to mean engaging in direct conversation with patristic primary sources, not with contemporary official ecclesial documents and structures. He believes that to read within the tradition is to be inspired to “imagine the world” afresh in the way that earlier readers did. As we have seen, such reading may lead to unexpected conclusions, even to a posture that is directly critical of the present Church’s teachings and practices.

The contrast between the two is elegantly illustrated by one instance where these two colleagues permit themselves a relatively clear expression of difference: the interpretation of John 20:19–23 and its application to the practice of forgiveness of sins within the Church. This is the passage in John’s Gospel in which the risen Jesus appears to the disciples in Jerusalem on the evening of the day he was raised from the dead. Jesus shows them his hands and his side, pronounces peace upon them, and tells them that he is sending them just as he was sent by the Father. Then, the narrator tells us, “he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’”

Kurz discusses this text as a test case for “applying Scripture with the *Catechism*” (237–48). First he notes that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* replaces John’s reference to “disciples” with the statement that Jesus conferred this authority on the “apostles.” Kurz describes this terminological substitution as an “actualization” of the text. This “actualization” is hermeneutically crucial for what follows. The fourth Gospel’s generic “disciples” are read as ciphers for ordained clergy who alone are authorized to pronounce forgiveness. Kurz writes:

Trinitarian and Christological beliefs as being expressed in this prologue” (165). Because Kurz offers no citations in support of this claim, I find myself at a loss to know what he is talking about. In fact, there is really nothing in Kurz’s own reading of the prologue that is not supported, as Kurz’s own footnotes indicate, by Raymond Brown’s commentary—generally acknowledged for the past forty years as the preeminent historical-critical commentary on the fourth gospel in the English language. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John I–XII* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966).

³⁰ For an important engagement of this issue, see C. Kavin Rowe, “Luke and the Trinity: An Essay in Ecclesial Biblical Theology,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56 (2003): 1–26. I cannot resist observing that Rowe is (a) a Protestant; and (b) a strong advocate of biblical theology.

in John 20, the recipients of Jesus' commission to judge sins are *undoubtedly* the group of "official" disciples who would later be the Church leaders. . . . This kind of judgment can *obviously* not be entrusted to every individual believer or *private member of the Church* but *necessarily* only to its leaders, whose authority to judge sins of Catholics furthers their mission to lead and direct the Catholic Church. [242–43, emphasis added]

The italicized words and phrases highlight the several ways in which Kurz has superimposed a hierarchical, institutionalized understanding of Church and ordination on a text that notably lacks such an ecclesiology.³¹ The foil against which Kurz sets his reading is some unidentified group of "Bible Christians [that is, Protestants?] who do not believe in confession to a human minister" (240).

My copy of *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship* is strewn, on these pages, with numerous marginal question marks, exclamation points, and other more vivid expressions of dismay. Not only as a historical critic but also as a reader formed by a "believers' church" tradition that strongly encourages all Christians to see themselves as recipients of the Holy Spirit and as commissioned by the Risen Lord to confess their sins to one another and to proclaim God's forgiveness, I found Kurz's reading tendentious and unpersuasive. I was therefore delighted to discover, a few pages later, that Luke Johnson found Kurz's treatment of this material nearly as problematical as I did. Johnson suggests, in an artfully interrogative sentence, that by confining the authority to forgive sins to ordained clergy, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has "achieved an institutional shrinkage of the scriptural witness." Rather than directly challenging Kurz's exegesis of John 20, Johnson cites a counter-text, James 5:14–20, which calls the whole community to "mutual confession of sins and mutual prayer within the community, as well as mutual correction of wrong doing." Thus, Johnson finds within the New Testament itself "a richer understanding of an ecclesial practice of forgiveness and healing than that presented by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*" (258). I would add that Johnson's side of this argument could be supported also by more careful critical exegesis of the Fourth Gospel itself, in which the disciples are not Church authorities but representative figures for all believers who in subsequent generations find themselves in union with Jesus.

³¹ On this point, see particularly the helpful remarks of Raymond E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), who comments on the "egalitarianism" of Johannine ecclesiology and finds no sign in the text that the Johannine community had an ordained priesthood, or even clearly established structures of authority (99–101).

The issue here is larger than the exegesis of one text or the justification of one sacramental practice. As Johnson rightly frames the matter, there is a “necessarily dialectical relation between tradition and Scripture.” Not only on this point but also more generally in his contributions to *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, “Father Kurz has properly emphasized the positive pole of that dialectic, the way in which tradition can be seen as legitimately developing and deepening the sense of Scripture,” but he has unfortunately “given less attention to the negative pole of the dialectic, which is the way in which Scripture also must challenge the tradition” (257). And with these words, near the end of the book, Johnson suddenly sounds—dare I say it?—like a Protestant. Or, rather, more precisely, he articulates a hermeneutical stance that I take to be healthy and necessary for Protestant and Catholic Christians alike.

Perhaps Johnson and Kurz would say that their differences represent complementary viewpoints within a cordial conversation between colleagues engaged in a common project. Perhaps each requires the balancing influence of the other in order to represent the scope of Catholic hermeneutics faithfully. Perhaps it is so. But surely “the future of Catholic biblical scholarship” will have to choose to some extent between the options represented by their different assessments of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*’s handling of John 20:19–23. Is the task of Catholic biblical scholarship chiefly to show how the Bible authorizes the Church’s “official” practices and pronouncements? Or is the task of biblical scholarship to bring Scripture and Church into a conversation that is mutually edifying, mutually critical, and open-ended? Johnson clearly advocates the latter, while Kurz, at least for the most part, represents the former. In my judgment, the future of the Church lies with Johnson’s approach. The ninth and final thesis of the Scripture Project reads as follows: “We live in the tension between the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’ of the kingdom of God; consequently, Scripture calls the Church to ongoing discernment, to continually fresh re-readings of the text in light of the Holy Spirit’s ongoing work in the world.”³² This kind of eschatologically chastened hermeneutics is profoundly consonant with Johnson’s proposals about how to read Scripture.

Preunderstandings and the Issue of Abortion

William Kurz devotes one entire chapter of the book, as I have noted, to elucidating his Catholic hermeneutical perspective by setting it in contrast to my chapter on abortion in *The Moral Vision of the New Testa-*

³² Davis and Hays, *The Art of Reading Scripture*, 5.

ment. Readers will perhaps therefore forgive me if I bring this review essay to a close by responding briefly to Kurz's critique of my position. I hope that this response will serve not merely as an exercise in self-defense but also as a further clarification of the issues that *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship* seeks to raise.

I must begin by emphasizing that on this particular issue—as on the wider issue of the appropriate agenda for biblical scholarship—there is extensive agreement between Kurz and me. Kurz and I agree that the Bible contains no explicit prohibition of abortion. We agree that it is therefore necessary to address the question by looking for a broader biblical framework: as I described it in *Moral Vision*, “placing the problem in the broader context of the New Testament’s *symbolic world*.”³³ In view of this broader biblical framework, we agree that “[t]hough the New Testament gives no explicit prohibition, its portrayal of God as the author and giver of life creates a general presumption against any human decision to terminate life.”³⁴ We agree that “the New Testament example and words of Jesus lead to a much more radical and complete rejection of killing” than is to be found in the Old Testament (197). We agree, further, that “Christians are to obey the commandments, even to a heroic degree, in imitation of Christ’s self-sacrificing obedience and supported by the Church” in caring for the weak and helpless (198). We agree that the evidence of Christian tradition speaks strongly against the practice of abortion—even to the extent of citing precisely the same texts from the Didache and the Epistle of Barnabas. And finally, we agree that Christians ought not to choose to abort unborn children, even in a society where such practices are legal. As I concluded, “My own judgment in this case is that the New Testament summons the community to eschew abortion. . . . The New Testament envisions a more excellent way.”³⁵

In view of this wide-ranging agreement, I must register my own sense of saddened puzzlement that Kurz has singled out my book to illustrate what is wrong with contemporary biblical interpretation and how Catholic biblical interpretation overcomes the “‘either/or’ mentality” that afflicts Protestantism (183). Perhaps, though, the basic similarity between our positions may serve, as Kurz intends, to shed even brighter light on important hermeneutical questions where we diverge. Let us then, attend more carefully to Kurz’s bill of complaints against my work and seek to identify where in fact we do differ.

³³ Hays, *Moral Vision*, 450.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 455–56.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 457.

First of all, to get this matter out of the way in the beginning, it seems to me that Kurz has misread my chapter in a way that causes him to overlook many of the fundamental agreements I have listed above. A reader unacquainted with my book who learned of it only through Kurz's account would never know how significant the areas of agreement are. Kurz makes one passing remark that my treatment "shares several pro-life sympathies" (188), but otherwise his references create the impression that my chapter on the topic is driven by a narrow, fundamentalist logic that looks for specific prohibitions of abortion, finds none, and therefore functions as "a kind of *Sola Scriptura* justification, in an argument from silence, for treating abortion as something much more contingent on circumstances" (190). I can only protest that this is a serious misrepresentation of my position.

The purpose of my chapter on abortion, within the larger argument of my book, is precisely to show how the New Testament can be understood to provide moral guidance on a question on which it offers no explicit teaching.³⁶ In short, it is exactly the opposite of the "*Sola Scriptura* insistence that something has to be expressly treated in Scripture to be binding" (187)—the caricature with which Kurz associates my work.³⁷ As I have indicated above, my method for doing this bears important similarities to Kurz's discussion; particularly striking is the fact that both of us appeal to "a more inclusive canonical horizon" (191) to address the issue—to say nothing of the fact that both of us conclude that the force of the New Testament's teaching is to call Christians to bear witness against abortion. Kurz, however, seems to ignore this. It is almost as though he read the first five pages of my chapter, in which I survey a few biblical passages sometimes wrongly used as proof texts³⁸ and then stopped, without reading my constructive argument against abortion.³⁹

Having lodged that protest against Kurz's disappointing misconstrual of my book, I turn now to three issues on which there really is a serious difference between us, three points at which Kurz helpfully identifies how his Roman Catholic preunderstanding (his term) shapes his response to the question of abortion and his reading of the biblical evidence in relation to it. The three issues are: (1) whether it is appropriate to speak of a "right to life"; (2) the role of the Roman Catholic *magisterium* in provid-

³⁶ Ibid., 313–15, 455–57.

³⁷ I am grateful at least for the paragraph on p. 183 in which Kurz recognizes something of the larger purpose of my book, before he opines that my chapter on abortion represents an unconscious slippage into a different viewpoint.

³⁸ Hays, *Moral Vision*, 444–48.

³⁹ Ibid., 449–61.

ing moral and hermeneutical guidance; and (3) whether abortion belongs to a class of actions prohibited by an absolute divine command to which there can be no exceptions. We take these points in turn.

Is There a "Right to Life"?

Kurz correctly observes that "Hays categorically denies the notions of the sacredness of human life and the biblical relevance of rights language" (189). My position here is based not only on the fact that "human rights" language is absent from the Bible and emerged in Western intellectual history only at the time of the Enlightenment,⁴⁰ but also on a more fundamental theological point: Life is always a gift of God. From a theological perspective, we have no inalienable right to life; we possess life only as a contingent gift from our Creator. Kurz of course does not deny this, but he argues that "once God has freely given the gift of life to a human, that particular human as God's image now has a right to life which other humans must respect" (189). In explicating this right, Kurz is willing to speak of the "sacredness" or "sanctity" of life. My concern is that such language often is used to speak of human life as an end in itself, as the source and center of autonomous meaning, quite apart from the Jewish and Christian conception of human beings as created in the image of God. I continue, therefore, to agree with my colleague Stanley Hauerwas that "[t]he Christian prohibition of abortion derives not from any assumption of the inherent value of life, but rather from the understanding that as God's creatures we have no basis to claim sovereignty over life."⁴¹ It is simply a matter of getting the theological accent in the right place.

Underlying this difference of opinion, there probably is, as Kurz suggests, a difference between Catholic and Protestant sensibilities. I would suggest, though, that the issue here may be related to differing theological judgments about "natural law," a concept long embraced in Catholic/Thomist circles and regarded with wariness by many Protestant theologians. I do not suppose that I can settle that argument in a paragraph or two, so I merely name the difference as one background element in the hermeneutical argument. To the extent that this is so, Kurz is correct to highlight different "preunderstandings" as a factor in our dispute.

Patient theological conversation might ultimately show this dispute to be more a matter of rhetoric than substance. Kurz and I agree that God

⁴⁰ For the best defense known to me of "human rights" in biblical perspective, see C. D. Marshall, *Crowned with Glory and Honor: Human Rights in the Biblical Tradition* (Telford, PA: Pandora, 2001).

⁴¹ Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 225.

is the giver of life and that human beings do not have a “right” to take it away. We also agree that human beings have distinctive value and dignity in God’s eyes, though I hesitate to use the word “sacredness” to describe this divinely given status.

The Magisterium as Hermeneutical Guide

Another central difference between us, unsurprisingly, hinges on the authority of the teaching office of the Roman Church. I quote at length from an important paragraph that expresses Kurz’s view:

Further, when we read the Scriptures as Catholics, the Church’s rich moral tradition (handily summarized in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and Vatican II) and explicit magisterial treatments of abortion (such as *The Gospel of Life [Evangelium vitae]*) can be used as a “rule of faith” analogously to how the early patristic authors used the creeds as criteria for whether a biblical interpretation was acceptable or heretical. . . . Although one should not claim that all of these are explicitly biblical teachings, for Catholics they are legitimate traditional helps in interpreting and applying the evidence which Scripture does provide about the meaning of human life in relation to our creator God. [197–98]

This paragraph clearly articulates one of the admirable strengths of traditional Catholic biblical hermeneutics: There is not only a strong *tradition* of teaching but there is actually an institutionally embodied *magisterium* that can resolve disputes and provide authoritative guidance for the community. Protestantism, on the other hand, always faces the danger of radical individualism and communal incoherence, of having every interpreter of the Bible do “what is right in his own eyes.”

Kurz is careful to state that the magisterial statements “can be used” in a way that is *analogous*—not equivalent—to the early Church’s rule of faith and the ecumenical creeds. I applaud the caution of this formulation, and I am quite glad to acknowledge the status of such sources as “legitimate traditional helps” in biblical interpretation. If that is all that Kurz really means to assert, then the difference between his position and mine is insignificant. I might say, for my part, that the rich moral tradition of Luther, Calvin, Wesley, and Barth informs my moral reflection in a similar way. Indeed, I would gladly include in this list of sources key theological voices of the Catholic tradition. Surely my treatment of abortion in *Moral Vision* would have been richer had I included *Evangelium vitae* as one of the “legitimate helps” to my interpretation of the biblical witness on this issue. With the wisdom of ten years’ hindsight, I wish I

had done exactly that. In point of fact, however, my book's treatment of abortion gives only the briefest attention to the Church's tradition, and it looks very Protestant in its concentration on direct interpretation of the biblical texts.

Two of the Scripture Project's nine theses speak to these matters, affirming that "faithful interpretation of Scripture invites and presupposes participation in the community brought into being by God's redemptive action—the Church" and that "The saints of the Church provide guidance in how to interpret and perform Scripture."⁴² These affirmations are meant to counteract the dangers of individualistic interpretation, and to emphasize the importance of reading Scripture from within ecclesial tradition.

The key question, however, is whether the statements of the Catholic *magisterium* are more than "helps." Do they have a *binding* claim on the work of subsequent biblical interpreters? Kurz never quite puts it so baldly, but as I noted earlier, his position is unlike Johnson's in that he never offers any example of a question on which he would disagree with Catholic tradition or argue for its correction. And, if I understand him correctly, he regards the *magisterium*'s prohibition of abortion as a definitive application of "moral absolutes" to a particular ethical issue. This would seem to foreclose any possibility for biblical interpreters to challenge the *magisterium* or to undertake fresh, corrective readings that appeal directly to exegesis of the Bible to open up room for what I call "humility about our claims and convictions concerning abortion."⁴³

Once again, this difference of opinion on the weight of magisterial teaching would seem to be a traditional Catholic-Protestant dispute. On this point, however, I note that Johnson seems to be, in principle, on my side! As he puts it later in the book, "Catholic biblical scholarship, therefore, should be critically loyal to the teaching of the hierarchy but also loyally critical" (277). Would Kurz accept that formulation? If so, the difference between us is perhaps not insurmountable.

Is the Prohibition of Abortion a Moral Absolute?

Finally, Kurz writes disapprovingly of "Hays's *refusal to allow any moral absolutes* that may be applicable to the treatment of abortion" (190, original emphasis). Because of my willingness to treat "hard cases" as at least morally debatable, Kurz offers this judgment: "His approach does not sound like a question of discovering what God commands in this case, nor like an application of an absolute divine command or an absolute

⁴² Davis and Hays, *Art of Reading Scripture*, 3–4.

⁴³ Hays, *Moral Vision*, 445.

moral principle to this decision” (190). In one respect Kurz is quite right. The central argument of *Moral Vision of the New Testament* is that the New Testament should not be read chiefly as a source of moral rules or absolute principles; rather it should be read as a source of *narrative paradigms* that shape the Church’s moral action analogically or metaphorically. (Kurz makes an argument of this type also, when he points to the self-sacrificial example of Jesus as part of his argument against abortion [197–98].) The rhetorical pressure in Kurz’s chapter toward the quest for “absolutes” clearly indicates his discomfort with the greater flexibility and contingency of my approach to New Testament ethics and hermeneutics. There is no doubt that on that point the difference between us is both real and significant.

I do think it is unfair, however, for him to say that my approach is not interested in discovering what God commands. I am urgently interested in discovering precisely that, but I approach the question in a different way. I will leave it to readers of my book to adjudicate this disputed point for themselves.

The basic problem with Kurz’s argument, as I see it, is the considerable slippage between his desire for absolute moral commands about abortion and the rather fuzzy way that he derives his *knowledge* of such commands. At several points in the chapter, he describes his discernment of such matters as “instinctive.” For example, after admitting that “the commandment ‘you shall not kill’ does not answer the question whether abortion is included in the prohibition of killing,” he goes on to assert that “the step to including abortion as a species of killing which is forbidden by the fifth commandment is a rather instinctive one” (200–201). Indeed! But surely Kurz’s “instinct” on this matter has been tutored, as he affirms, by his particular ecclesial community. He rightly describes his own methodology when he says, “if one reads the Bible as a convinced member of the Catholic Church, *one will spontaneously fill in biblical silences and gaps such as the non-mention of abortion* with fundamental Catholic moral principles and the historical tradition of Catholic practice” (200, emphasis added). In the concluding summation of his chapter, he describes such acts of filling silences and gaps as a way to “actualize” and “apply” biblical passages to “new and different situations, like abortion, which are admittedly beyond those original concerns and situations discovered by historical-critical exegesis” (202). This description is a precisely accurate account of Kurz’s hermeneutical procedure.

But if Kurz’s Catholic position on abortion is derived through such intuitive acts of filling gaps and silences, of imaginatively actualizing texts

by applying them to questions and situations unimaginable to the original authors (a necessary process that I call “Moral Judgment as Metaphor-Making”),⁴⁴ how is it possible to claim *absolute* moral certainty for his findings? It seems to me that Kurz simply refuses to face the *epistemological* problem raised by his own description of his process of moral reasoning. Surely any process of intuitive “actualization” is fallible and not capable of yielding absolute knowledge of God’s will.

If, then, we cannot attain absolute certainty about such matters, surely we must at least entertain the possibility that our conviction about the wrongness of abortion—a conviction, I repeat, that I share with Kurz—might be open to certain qualifications. We might, for example, have a serious argument among Christians about whether there can be exceptional circumstances that allow for abortion as a tragic but justifiable option.

Such an argument, of course, would require us to explore carefully the contingent circumstances of particular human lives—that is to say, to take human experience into account as a factor in moral deliberation. It is a final irony that Kurz castigates me for giving “so much weight to economic and social considerations, which are more closely related to historical and social-scientific than to theological approaches, in an abortion decision” (183). This is, I am sure, the first time I have ever been criticized by a Catholic interpreter for paying *too much* attention to concrete human experience in the process of ethical discernment—the very thing that Johnson highlights as the climactic essential element in the Catholic project of imagining the world that Scripture imagines (141–42). This is one of many indications that the deeper issue to which *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship* points may not be a dispute between Catholics and Protestants, but between the substantially different hermeneutical perspectives represented by Kurz and Johnson themselves.

Conclusion

At the end of the day, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship* places me in a very unusual position. This is a book that caricatures and gratuitously attacks my own ecclesial community as the source of mischief and error in modern biblical interpretation. It also contains a chapter that singles me out as a polemical target and seriously misrepresents what I wrote on a topic of urgent moral concern in our time. And yet I find myself in enthusiastic agreement with nearly all of its fundamental concerns and constructive proposals. I therefore warmly commend the book to the community of Catholic theologians and biblical scholars.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 298–306.

My commendation is subject, however, to the substantial qualifications expressed in this rather lengthy critical review. Johnson and Kurz's work should be read alongside *The Art of Reading Scripture* and some of the other recent hermeneutical works mentioned at the beginning of this essay. When it is so contextualized, it can be seen as a stimulating contribution to the revitalization of biblical interpretation as an *ecclesial* practice that offers both intellectual challenge and spiritual nourishment.

I want to reiterate that the fundamental purpose of this essay is to join the "constructive conversation" that Johnson and Kurz propose and to seek to bridge the gulf they seem to perceive between Catholic and Protestant interpreters of the Bible. In our time, it is urgently important that we make common cause and see one another as brothers and sisters within the Church of Jesus Christ, seeking to read Scripture carefully, faithfully, and imaginatively for the sake of the Church's mission. If I have responded to their sharp criticisms with serious criticisms of my own, it is in the hope that truthful conversation will enable us all in the end to glorify God with one voice. N.V.

The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship: Balance and Proportion

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Introductory Remarks

THE TITLE OF THIS ESSAY presents a minor semantical problem since it might seem that I am trying to prognosticate. Or it may appear that I am dictating what the future of Catholic biblical scholarship should be. My purpose, however, is more modest. I have adopted the title from the work of Luke Timothy Johnson and William S. Kurz, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, in order to suggest some ways in which Catholic biblical scholarship can become even more fruitful.¹ Like Johnson and Kurz, I do this in a spirit of entering into "a constructive conversation" about the future of our discipline.

According to Luke Timothy Johnson the future of Catholic biblical scholarship is to rejoin a long conversation with our patristic and medieval ancestors, not so much to do what they did as to learn how they

¹ Luke Timothy Johnson and William S. Kurz, SJ, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A Constructive Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002).

approached and appropriated the sacred text.² Johnson's suggestion has a great deal of merit, for even if we disagree with the exegesis of patristic and medieval writers on particular points, we cannot but admire the reverence and awe with which they approached the sacred text and the manner in which they conceived of Scripture as a unified word of God. Thus, there is a paradoxical sense in which the way forward is to retrace our steps and discover anew where we have been. It must be acknowledged, however, that the riches of patristic and medieval exegesis do not belong solely to Catholics. Orthodox and Protestants can and do lay claim to these treasures as well.

According to William S. Kurz, the future of Catholic biblical scholarship is to make greater use of our Catholic preunderstanding.³ Since modern hermeneutics has taught us that we always approach texts with a certain preunderstanding and social location, Catholic biblical scholarship should make more explicit use of its own preunderstanding and social location in its interpretation of texts. This point is well taken, and to his credit Kurz provides several essays that exemplify this approach. There are times, however, when our preunderstanding can mislead us, a point made by the Pontifical Biblical Commission.

All preunderstanding, however, brings dangers with it. As regards Catholic exegesis, the risk is that of attributing to biblical texts a meaning that they do not contain but which is the product of a later development within the tradition. The exegete must beware of such a danger.⁴

This said, I agree with the general direction Kurz provides for Catholic biblical scholarship: There is no need to be embarrassed by our Catholic preunderstanding of the text, provided we remain critically aware of how we are employing that understanding.

Unlike Kurz and Johnson, I do not have a single formula that points the way forward for Catholic biblical scholarship. Perhaps this is due to

² Johnson makes this point in chapter 2, "Rejoining a Long Conversation," 35–63.

³ Kurz makes this point in all of his essays. See especially pages 159–66 in the essay titled, "Beyond Historical Criticism: Reading John's Prologue as Catholics."

⁴ *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, 4th ed. (Washington, DC: The United States Catholic Conference, 1994, 2001), 24. The text, with commentary, can also be found in Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Biblical Commission's Document "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church": Text and Commentary* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1995), 133. For a recent commentary on the text that tries to identify the Catholic principles for interpreting Scripture that this text presupposes, see Peter S. Williamson, *Catholic Principles for Interpreting Scripture: A Study of the Pontifical Biblical Commission's The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2001).

my social location. I teach at a Catholic university where the university's Catholic identity is discussed, but, in my view, not seriously in jeopardy. I work within a vibrant Catholic tradition and find no need to justify my scholarship to the wider university community. Thus, my social location may make me naïve as to what is happening elsewhere and more sanguine about the present situation of Catholic biblical scholarship.

This said, I would like to take up a point that Johnson and Kurz make about the inclusive nature of the Catholic spirit, what they call the “both/and” emphasis of Catholicism and what Johnson identifies more specifically as “a spirit of inclusion and generosity.”⁵ Here, I heartily agree. When most true to itself, Catholicism is a big tent that embraces diverse points of view. In this sense, Jesus’ image of the kingdom applies to Catholicism: “But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade” (Mk 4:32).⁶ Because it is inclusive, Catholic biblical scholarship can and should embrace a variety of methods without claiming any particular one as distinctively its own. There is room for patristic and medieval exegesis, and a variety of modern approaches to the text—provided we maintain a sense of balance and proportion. As Kurz and Johnson remind us, it is not “either/or” but “both/and.” The following statement of the Pontifical Biblical Commission is apropos:

Catholic exegesis does not claim any particular scientific method as its own. . . . What characterizes Catholic exegesis is that it deliberately places itself within the living tradition of the Church, whose first concern is fidelity to the revelation attested by the Bible.⁷

There are moments, however, when Catholic biblical scholarship can lose its sense of balance and proportion by focusing on one method to the exclusion of others, or by emphasizing one aspect of a question to the detriment of another. In what follows, I discuss four areas where it will be helpful for Catholic biblical scholarship to maintain a sense of balance and proportion: (1) The role of history and theology in exegesis; (2) the relationship between the theology and the theologies of the Bible; (3) the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments; and (4) the ecclesial and academic dimensions of exegesis.

⁵ *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, 265.

⁶ Scriptural quotations are taken from *The New American Bible*.

⁷ *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, 24; Fitzmyer, *The Biblical Commission's Document*, 132.

The Role of History and Theology in Exegesis

One of the most vexing issues in contemporary biblical scholarship is the relationship between history and theology in exegesis. Is exegesis a form of historical study, or is it a theological discipline? Is it faith seeking understanding, or is it history looking to reconstruct the past? Can one be true to both the historical method and theological truth, or must one choose between the two? It is possible, of course, to conceive of exegesis as a purely theological discipline in which history plays little or no role, just as it is possible to conceive of exegesis as a purely historical discipline from which theology is excluded. The future of Catholic biblical scholarship, however, does not belong to such extremes that would compel exegetes to choose between interpreting the text apart from history or apart from theology.

Consider for a moment how dangerous it could be to read the Gospel of John with its multiple references to “the Jews”—many of which are quite hostile—without some understanding of the historical situation that occasioned that writing. To be more specific, consider the fierce polemic between Jesus and “the Jews” in John 8 that comes to a highpoint when Jesus says to them, “You belong to your father the devil and you willingly carry out your father’s desires” (Jn 8:44). Or, consider the cry of the people in Matthew’s Gospel (and only in Matthew’s Gospel) at Jesus’ trial, “His blood be upon us and upon our children” (Mt 27:25). The reader who is unaware of the historical context that gave rise to these texts might think that the Jewish people are indeed the progeny of the devil, a people eternally guilty of the Messiah’s death. By taking into consideration the historical circumstances that gave rise to these texts, however, contemporary exegesis has shown that these statements derive from the redactional work of the Evangelists and echo the polemics of a debate between synagogue and church in a period after Jesus’ death, a debate in which we can no longer participate.⁸ Read apart from their historical contexts, texts such as these can foster sentiments of anti-Jewishness, if not outright anti-Semitism. Read in light of their historical setting, it becomes apparent that they must be interpreted in light of their historical background.

⁸ Contemporary Johannine scholarship has shown that the fourth Evangelist often employs the expression “the Jews” to signify the unbelief of “the world.” It argues that the particularly harsh episode in chapter 8 reflects the debates between the Johannine community and the synagogue of its day rather than the actual debates between Jesus and the Jewish people of his day. Similarly, contemporary Matthean scholarship, which accepts the priority of Mark, attributes the cry of the people in the Matthean Passion narrative to Matthew’s redactional work. It is a comment that reflects the struggle between the Matthean congregation and the synagogue rather than an historical account of what the people actually said.

Conversely, consider the results of reading the infancy narratives for the sole purpose of determining the historical events surrounding Jesus' birth. Although the task is legitimate, the final result would surely miss the theological richness of the Matthean and Lukan narratives. The historian might well conclude that the infancy narratives are of little historical value since Matthew and Luke apparently contradict each other at several points. For example, according to Luke, Joseph and Mary must travel to Bethlehem because they are residents of Galilee (Lk 2:4) but according to Matthew they already reside in Bethlehem where they appear to have a home (Mt 2:11). Only later do they move to Galilee in order to escape Herod's son, Archelaus (Mt 2:22–23). A purely historical approach might be correct in its historical conclusions, but it would miss the theological depth of the Matthean and Lukan infancy narratives, which provide rich theological commentary on the person of Jesus, presenting him as the climax of his people's history and his birth as the fulfillment of the promises made to David.

My point is simply this: We are no longer in a position—if ever we were—to do exegesis apart from history. But this does not mean that exegesis is merely an historical discipline. Exegesis is also an act of theology. Exegesis is faith seeking understanding, and this act of theology requires the assistance of historical investigation. For example, when contemporary Catholic exegetes come to the texts of John 8:44 and Matthew 27:25 mentioned above, they are faced with a problem. In its *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, the Second Vatican Council declared:

Even though the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ (see Jn 19:6) neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his passion. It is true that the church is the new people of God, yet the Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accused as if this followed from holy scripture.⁹

How, then, should the exegete interpret Jesus' words to "the Jews" that the devil is their father and the cry of the people who call guilt upon themselves and their children? This is a case where historical research into the background of the Johannine community and an understanding of

⁹ *Nostra Aetate*, no. 4. The translation is taken from *The Basic Sixteen Documents: Vatican Council II: Constitutions Decrees Declarations: A Completely Revised Translation in Inclusive Language*, ed. Austin Flannery, OP (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), 573.

how Matthew edited his Markan source in the Passion narrative can assist exegetes to interpret what they believe about Jesus and God's faithfulness to Israel.

If Catholic biblical scholarship is to nourish the Church, it must be concerned with theology as well as with history, and with history as well as with theology—history in order to clarify the meaning of the text in its historical setting; theology to understand the text in light of the Church's faith. Exegesis, then, is a discipline that involves both history and theology. To be sure, there will be moments when scholars will emphasize one more than the other, but at some point both must come into play. Theology must listen and learn from history, and history must leave room for theology to interpret.

The Relationship between the Theology and Theologies of the Bible

Catholic biblical scholarship has long been aware of the different theologies in the Bible. For example, the canonical text of the Old Testament includes diverse strains of tradition such as the Priestly document and the Deuteronomistic history, which represent differing and sometimes competing theological voices. More importantly, the canonical writings themselves testify to God's revelation in a multiplicity of ways. Consider, for example, the distinctive manners in which the Book of Proverbs and the Book of Job present God. In the former, there is a rhyme and reason to God's ways in the world; in the latter, God's ways are puzzling and disturbing. The same phenomenon occurs in the New Testament, even though its writings were composed within sixty to seventy years after Jesus' death. New Testament specialists speak of the theologies of the Synoptic Gospels, the Johannine writings, the Pauline and the deuteropauline letters, not to mention Hebrews, James, Revelation, 1 and 2 Peter.

The recognition of the diverse theologies of, and in, the biblical writings has led to a deeper appreciation of the biblical witness to God's revelation. It reminds believers that God's self-revelation is a profound mystery that cannot be captured in a single formula. This is why the biblical writings portray God and the salvation God brings in diverse ways. It is why Genesis offers two accounts of creation, and why the Book of Job takes up the question of suffering and evil in a new way. It is why John begins with the incarnation and Paul with Christ's death and resurrection. It is why the Synoptic Gospels focus on Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God, whereas the fourth Evangelist speaks of the Son's revelation of the Father. It is only by listening to the diverse voices of the biblical writings that exegesis hears the full richness of God's revelation.

The presence of so many voices, however, presents biblical scholarship with a vexing question. What is the relationship between these different theologies? Are the many theological witnesses of the Old Testament related to each other in any way? Can the variety of theologies in the New Testament be brought together in a coherent way? In other words, can we speak of *the theology* of the Old Testament or *the theology* of the New Testament, as well as *the theologies* within the Old and the New Testament?¹⁰ The answer to this question depends, in large measure, upon how one approaches the text.

The historian of Israelite religion or of early Christianity approaches the Bible as a diverse collection of writings that provide a window into the past. Consequently, the question of whether or not there is a unifying principle that justifies collecting these writings into what is now called the Old and the New Testament is an historical problem that needs to be solved. The historian does not and should not begin by positing the unity of the biblical witness. Whether or not there is a principle that unites these diverse writings is a problem to be resolved by careful historical analysis. At the end of this analysis, the historian may even decide that there is no unifying principle apart from historical development.

The situation is, and it ought to be, quite different for the exegete who works within the living tradition of the Church. The very concept of revelation presupposes unity, unless the God who discloses himself purposely seeks to conceal himself—in which case it would be better to speak of concealment than of revelation. Put another way, it would be strange for a believing community to affirm on the one hand that its Scriptures witness to God's revelation but on the other hand to be unconcerned about the inner unity of that revelation. Consequently, whereas the historian need not and should not begin by positing unity, the believer can and must.

Although faith posits unity because it believes in the truth and unity of God's self-revelation to which the writings of Scripture testify, Catholic exegesis must continually seek out that unity, first within each of the Testaments, and then between the Testaments, a point I will consider below. The purpose of seeking the unity in the Old and the New Testaments, however, is not to do away with the diversity of theologies in each, or to find a principle to control and tame the biblical witnesses. The purpose is more profound because the subject matter of exegesis is so profound. Searching for the unity of Scripture is another

¹⁰ This question is examined by James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999).

way of searching for God. Who is the God to whom the law, the prophets, and the writings testify in such diverse ways? Who is the God to whom the Synoptics, John, Paul, Hebrews, James, Peter, and Revelation witness in a multiplicity of ways? For the believer, this diverse witness paradoxically points to the unity of the mystery, and the unity of the mystery paradoxically requires a multiplicity of witnesses.

At the present moment in Catholic biblical scholarship, the goal of most studies is to investigate the diverse witnesses of both the Old and New Testaments. This is quite understandable. Having emerged from a period when any suggestion of diversity was suspect, Catholic biblical scholarship turned to a neglected area of research: diversity within the Bible. Catholic exegesis is now aware that before one can grasp the whole, it is necessary to understand its parts. But there should also be a moment when some seek the inner unity of this diverse witness. There should be a moment when some scholars address the question of *the* theology of the Old Testament and *the* theology of the New Testament, asking what is the unity of the diverse witnesses to God's revelation in Israel and Jesus. Given the mystery of the God whom biblical scholarship confronts, no scholar can present the definitive answer to this question. But the question needs to be addressed again and again by those who appreciate the rich diversity of the biblical witness.

The Relationship between the Old and New Testaments

The relationship of the Old and the New Testaments is analogous to the question of the relationship between the theology and theologies of the Bible. Ultimately, however, it is a question about the faithfulness of God. For, if the two Testaments are not related to each other in a meaningful way—if the New Testament does not illuminate the Old, or if the Old Testament does not foreshadow and prepare for the New—then the God and Father of Jesus Christ is not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Furthermore, to the extent that the Old Testament is the Scripture of the Jewish people, the question of the relationship between the testaments is a question about the Church's relationship to the Jewish people. The relationship between the testaments then is the most vexing of all questions, and how Catholic biblical scholarship addresses it reveals a great deal about its understanding of God and the covenant people of Israel.

Although most Catholic scholars, like their Protestant colleagues, tend to work in either the Old or New Testament, there is a growing sense that the relationship of the testaments needs to be addressed anew. In this country, Brevard Childs has engaged the issue, and in Germany, Peter Stuhlmacher, Ferdinand Hahn, and Hans Hübner have done the same,

though in different ways.¹¹ Moreover, the Pontifical Biblical Commission has recently considered the issue in its 2002 publication *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*.¹² That document notes that “the Christian Bible is not composed of one ‘Testament,’ but of two ‘Testaments,’ the Old and the New, which have a complex dialectical relationships between them” (42). It goes on to say, “This relationship is also reciprocal: on the one hand, the New Testament demands to be read in the light of the Old, but it also invites a ‘re-reading’ of the Old in the light of Jesus Christ” (43).

There are a number of reasons why it has become difficult for contemporary biblical scholars to address the issue of the unity of the testaments. First, most scholars are specialists in one testament or the other, and they rarely venture outside their discipline except when the exegesis of a particular text requires it. Second, a lack of familiarity with the early Church’s Bible, the Septuagint, means that some New Testament scholars do not read the same Bible the authors of the New Testament did. Consequently, the linguistic unity between the Old and New Testament is not always as apparent to them as it might be if they were working from the Greek as well as from the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. The question of how the testaments are related to each other, however, is of vital importance since it is ultimately a question about God and the faithfulness of God to his covenant people.

The first Christians were already aware of the problem raised above, though they framed it in another way since the New Testament did not yet exist. For the authors of what would eventually be the New Testament, the crucial question was the relationship between what God did in Jesus of Nazareth and God’s covenant promises to Israel. If Jesus was the Messiah, in what sense was he the Messiah? How did Jesus fulfill the covenant promises God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? How was his life and ministry related to God’s will as revealed in the Mosaic law?

Because those who first confessed Jesus as the Messiah belonged to the people of Israel, or were closely related to the chosen people, they answered these questions by *re-reading* Israel’s Scriptures in light of Christ’s life, death,

¹¹ Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testament: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993). Peter Stuhlmacher, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 2 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992, 1999). Ferdinand Hahn, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); Hans Hübner, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 3 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990, 1993, 1995).

¹² Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in The Christian Bible* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002).

and resurrection. It is not surprising, then, that Matthew begins his Gospel with a genealogy that portrays Jesus as the culmination of Israel's history, that the fourth Evangelist sees Jesus as the Son who reveals the Father to the world, that Paul argues that Christ is the singular descendant of Abraham, and that the author of Hebrews portrays Christ as a high priest who entered into the true holy of holies, the sanctuary of heaven, when he died on the cross. The New Testament struggles again and again to make a single point in a variety of ways: God's revelation in Christ is in continuity with God's revelation to Israel. Jesus' death brings a new creation not a rupture with the past. The God whom Jesus reveals in a new and striking way as his Father is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Because the mystery is profound, the answers the New Testament writers provide are sometimes in tension with each other. For example, Matthew certainly has a greater sense of the enduring validity of the law than does Paul (compare Mt 5:17 and Rom 10:4), and Luke is more concerned to show that Jesus is the Davidic Messiah than is Mark (compare Lk 1:32–33 and Mk 12:35–37). But all agree that Jesus is the Messiah—even though the nature of his messiahship requires massive redefinition in light of his death and resurrection. And all concur that the law has found its fulfillment in Jesus, even when there are varying views about its enduring validity.

In effect, each of the New Testament writers tries to “inscribe” the story of Jesus into the story of Israel. Indeed, one could say that the major narrative writings of the New Testament (the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles) seek to bring Israel's story, as recorded in the Scriptures, to closure by telling the story of Jesus and, in the case of Acts, the story of the Church. This is most apparent in Luke–Acts, which comprises nearly one-fourth of the New Testament. In this work, which begins as if it were an Old Testament narrative, Luke shows how the events that have recently transpired among those who believe are, in fact, the culmination of Israel's history. In Stephen's speech (Acts 7:1–53) and in Paul's inaugural sermon in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:16–41), Luke recounts the story of Israel in such a way as to show that Israel's history finds its climax in the coming of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. For Luke, there is continuity between old and new, and God has been faithful to Israel.

The point I am making is quite simple. Before there was a New Testament, those who composed the writings of what would eventually constitute the New Testament already affirmed the continuity between God's revelation to Israel and God's revelation in Jesus of Nazareth. It was inconceivable to these writers that it could be otherwise since God is faithful. From the perspective of the New Testament, the two testaments

are intimately related to each other, and their unity is apparent. A fruitful direction for Catholic biblical scholarship, then, would be to examine anew the relationship between Old and New Testaments.

The relationship between the testaments is analogous to the relationship between the theology and theologies of the Bible. Just as faith posits that there is a unity to God's revelation, so it posits that there is an inner unity between the testaments, even if scholarship cannot perfectly express that unity in a single formula upon which all agree. This unity, however, should be second nature to Catholics nurtured by the Church's liturgy in which texts from Old and New Testaments are regularly juxtaposed in order to mutually illumine each other. Consider, for example, the Church's Liturgy of the Hours, which moves so easily between the texts of Old and New Testaments to show the believing community the intimate relationship between its story and the story of Israel. Here, as Kurz notes, the Church's life of faith flows from its life of prayer.¹³ There is, of course, a difference between scholarship and prayer, but they are not mutually exclusive. Those who live in a liturgical world that moves so easily between Old and New Testaments understand, at least at the level of worship and faith, that it is not a matter of Old or New Testament but both: the Old in the New and the New in the Old.

Ecclesial and Academic Dimensions of Exegesis

There has been a subtext to this essay that can be stated in a question: Can Catholic biblical scholarship be ecclesial and academic? The answer depends, in large measure, upon how one defines the terms. By ecclesial, I mean scholarship that is done within the context of the Catholic tradition for the sake of the Church. By academic, I mean scholarship that can receive a hearing within the university because it makes a significant contribution to human knowledge.

The proper starting point for understanding what is "Catholic" about Catholic biblical scholarship is the statement of the Pontifical Biblical Commission: "What characterizes Catholic exegesis is that it deliberately places itself within the living tradition of the Church, whose first concern is fidelity to the revelation attested by the Bible" (24). Catholic exegesis does not depend upon a particular exegetical method, nor does it require one to teach in a specifically Catholic environment. The determining factor is that exegetes place themselves within the living tradition of the Church, a tradition whose first concern is to remain faithful to the revelation to which the sacred writings testify. Such an exegetical stance

¹³ *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, 264–265.

accepts the biblical writings as the Church's Scripture, which is intended to nourish and strengthen the community of believers. It believes that these writings witness to God's revelation, first to Israel, then in Jesus Christ. Consequently, it approaches the writings as the Word of God from a stance of faith seeking understanding.

This said, Catholic biblical scholarship is also academic because God's Word is clothed in human words, thereby mirroring the mystery of the incarnation. John Paul II noted this in his address on the occasion of the publication of the Pontifical Biblical Commission's document, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*:

The strict relationship uniting the inspired biblical texts with the mystery of the incarnation was expressed by the encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* in the following terms: "Just as the substantial Word of God became like men in every respect except sin, so too the words of God, expressed in human languages, became like human language in every respect except error" (EB, 559). Repeated almost literally by the conciliar constitution *Dei Verbum* (no. 13), this statement sheds light on a parallelism rich in meaning.¹⁴

It is not surprising then that the Biblical Commission's document reserves its harshest critique for biblical Fundamentalism stating: "The basic problem with fundamentalist interpretation of this kind is that, refusing to take into account the historical character of biblical revelation, it makes itself incapable of accepting the full truth of the incarnation itself" (19).

A rigorous academic approach to the text, then, is not alien to Catholic biblical scholarship that remains within the living tradition of the Church. Anything less would be unacceptable. Within the context of the university, Catholic scholars should work with the same academic standards required of their colleagues in other disciplines of learning, thereby establishing a fruitful dialogue between the academy and the Church. This, of course, does not mean that biblical study belongs only to the professional exegete, or that only the professional exegete can understand the text. It simply indicates that Catholic biblical scholarship can and should be both ecclesial and academic.

To summarize, Catholic biblical scholarship will discover its identity by finding its place "in the mainstream of the great Tradition,"¹⁵ not by withdrawing from the academy or ecumenical dialogue. The future of Catholic biblical scholarship will be found in the present as well as in the past: in the

¹⁴ Pope John Paul II, address, "On the Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," in Fitzmyer, *The Biblical Commission's Document*, 4.

¹⁵ Ibid., 7.

past inasmuch as it must rejoin a long conversation as Johnson maintains, in the present inasmuch as it must live within the liturgical life of the Church as Kurz reminds us. Catholic biblical scholarship, however, will not find its identity by retreating behind closed walls.

Conclusion

Luke Timothy Johnson and William Kurz have invited us to enter into a constructive conversation about the future of Catholic biblical scholarship. Following their lead, I have tried to do this in a way that takes into account four aspects of the discipline, arguing that it is not a matter of history or theology but both. Nor is it a question of the theology of the Bible or the theologies in the Bible but both. The Old and the New Testaments are not to be read in isolation from each other but together. It is not a choice between ecclesial or academic exegesis but both. This Catholic spirit is found in the great Tradition we share, a Tradition that embraces many methods and approaches to Scripture and in which Catholic exegesis has its home. The future of Catholic biblical scholarship belongs to those who live in and out of this Tradition, within and for the sake of the Church. NV

The Text of the Bible and Catholic Biblical Scholarship

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LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON and William S. Kurz, SJ, have written a timely book, one that delves deeply into the past in order to assess the current state of Catholic biblical scholarship in the United States.¹ Since the book has already been reviewed appreciatively by my colleague Jody Vaccaro Lewis in the pages of this journal, and since its import has been assessed elsewhere, I will address myself to the “future” featured in the book’s title, specifically to the future of the text of the Old Testament. I will seek to relate a rather specific discussion about the form of the text of the Old Testament to larger questions this discussion raises for ecumenism, for the doctrine of biblical inspiration, and for the future of

¹ Luke Timothy Johnson and William S. Kurz, SJ, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A Constructive Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002).

Catholic biblical scholarship. It is my hope that these remarks will add both an Old Testament complement to the work of Johnson and Kurz, both of whom are New Testament scholars, and a new dimension to the larger discussion about the future of Catholic biblical scholarship.

The text of Scripture is generally regarded as fixed and stable and we are seldom tempted to add to or subtract from it. But establishing the text of Scripture has become slightly more complicated in the last fifty years. For example, when the New Revised Standard Version was published in 1989, one can imagine that relatively few readers noticed that the translation of the Old Testament was slightly longer than that found in the Revised Standard Version of 1952. The reason for this change had nothing to do with new theories of translation or even with the use of inclusive language, but can be traced rather to the momentous textual discoveries at the Dead Sea some fifty years ago. In the books of Samuel, for instance, the New Revised Standard Version restored four sentences to 1 Samuel 10:27 on the basis of new Hebrew evidence from Qumran. In the book of Tobit, the New Revised Standard Version chose to translate the longer and more original textual form of the book, again on the basis of evidence from Qumran, adding some seventeen hundred words to the Revised Standard Version translation, which had used the shorter Greek text. And this is only the tip of the iceberg. The quiet and generally unnoticed revolution in textual studies generated by the Dead Sea Scrolls has revealed that for several books of the Old Testament the traditional Masoretic Hebrew text represents only one of several textual forms that have a claim to representing the earliest recoverable or "original" form of the book. Jeremiah is a case in point. Here the Greek text, which in several chapters differs significantly from the Hebrew, arguably represents in certain chapters a different and earlier literary form of the book. Similar examples could be added. Adrian Schenker has argued recently, for example, that in large sections of the book of Kings, the Old Greek text represents an earlier form of the text than that preserved in the Masoretic text.² This raises several related questions about the goals of textual criticism and how one determines the textual form to be translated.

Johnson and Kurz discuss the question of the textual form of the Bible only in passing. Johnson notes that authors like James, Paul, and Luke "read

² A. Schenker, OP, *Älteste Textgeschichte der Königsbücher, Die hebräische Vorlage der ursprünglichen Septuaginta als älteste Textform der Königsbücher* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2004); see also the theoretical discussion in Schenker's earlier article, "Was übersetzen wir? Fragen zur Textbasis, die sich aus der Textkritik ergeben," in *Die Übersetzung der Bibel-Aufgabe der Theologie*, eds. J. Gnllka and H. P. Rüger (Bielefeld: Luther-Verlag, 1985), 65–80.

and interpreted the Greek translation of Torah called the Septuagint (LXX)” (47), and goes on to observe that some Hellenistic Jews regarded the Greek text to be divinely inspired (48). Later, having observed that Kurz signals the importance of the Septuagint as the intertext for New Testament authors (167–69, 215–16), Johnson writes,

The richness of this exposition presses the issue of the status of the Septuagint for Catholic biblical interpretation. Everyone acknowledges that the New Testament itself is unintelligible without reference to the Septuagint. But this recognition has no effect on anything else. Catholics who do not have Greek have no sense of these interconnections. But even when they are pointed out by scholars, ordinary Catholics cannot find them in their Bibles, or hear them in the liturgy, for all modern translations are from the Hebrew (256).

Without doing so explicitly, Johnson seems to argue in favor of facilitating wider popular access to the form of the Old Testament used by many of the writers of the New Testament, namely the Septuagint. While this is in itself a laudable goal, recent developments in the field of Old Testament textual criticism raise even broader issues about the early biblical versions and their status. Below I will briefly raise four questions dealing with the text of the Bible that I should like to propose for the future agenda of Catholic biblical scholarship.

1. Multiple literary editions. Eugene Ulrich has written recently about the phenomenon of multiple literary editions of some books of the Old Testament.³ The discoveries at the Dead Sea have helped scholars like Ulrich to recognize more clearly that several books of the Old Testament circulated in more than one literary form. Examples of this phenomenon are found in certain chapters of the books of Exodus, 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings, Jeremiah, and Daniel. In some cases two Hebrew forms are preserved, while in other cases one form is preserved in Greek and another in Hebrew. Textual criticism itself is not always equipped to determine which of these forms was earlier. In the beginning, it seems, there was multiplicity. And this multiplicity seems to have continued long past what scholars used to refer to

³ E. Ulrich, “Double Literary Editions of Biblical Narratives and Reflections on Determining the Form to be Translated,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible*, ed. E. Ulrich (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 34–50. Angela Kim Harkins explores some of the theological implications of textual pluriformity in a forthcoming article titled, “Theological Attitudes towards the Scriptural Text: Lessons from the Syriac Exegetical Tradition and Qumran.”

as the period of the stabilization of the biblical text.⁴ The editors of a new critical edition of the Hebrew Bible known as the Oxford Hebrew Bible have correctly decided in such cases to print two Hebrew texts in parallel synoptic columns.⁵ It will not be long before popular translations follow suit, printing translations of both Hebrew texts side by side.

In addition to the questions such plurality might elicit from lay readers, Catholic biblical scholars will no doubt be forced to consider more closely the editorial decisions underlying popular diplomatic editions of the Masoretic text such as the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. This *editio minor*, which prints one of the best complete Masoretic manuscripts and adds a modern, critical apparatus, is often cited as if it represented “the Bible” in some pristine and normative form. While the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, its text and critical apparatus, represented the best standards of scholarship of its day and continues to provide convenient access to one early form of the Masoretic text, the manner in which the texts have been chosen, edited, and presented, and the readings proposed in the critical apparatus, give evidence of unarticulated historical and theological presuppositions. The result is that editions such as the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, though useful, can hardly be assumed to give us the definitive text of the Old Testament. The Oxford Hebrew Bible critical edition will undoubtedly likewise contain very provisional and personal scholarly interpretations. In effect it will approximate an original that should have been but never was. But the simple fact that this edition will make occasional use of synoptic parallel columns will help to awaken greater awareness of the limitations of textual criticism and of the difficulties in the seemingly simple task of establishing the text of the Bible.⁶

⁴ For a different view, one that would see textual uniformity associated with the Jerusalem temple alongside of textual pluriformity elsewhere, see A. S. van der Woude, “Pluriformity and Uniformity, Reflections on the Transmission of the Text of the Old Testament,” in *Sacred History and Sacred Texts in Early Judaism*, ed. J. N. Bremmer and F. García Martínez (Kampen: Pharos, 1992), 151–69.

⁵ Similarly T. Nicklas and C. Wagner (“Thesen zur Textlichen Vielfalt im Tobitbuch,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 34 [2003]: 141–59), who have argued that it is impossible to reconstruct an Urtext of the book of Tobit and call for a synoptic presentation of the extant texts, suggesting that only such plurality can do justice to the “riches of the reception and interpretation history of the book of Tobit” (159).

⁶ See the important reflections on the task and limits of textual criticism in James A. Sanders, “Stability and Fluidity in Text and Canon,” in *Tradition of the Text, Studies offered to Dominique Barthélemy in Celebration of his 70th Birthday*, eds. G. Norton, O. P., and S. Pisano, SJ (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1991), 203–17; and

2. The ancient versions. One of the major trends in Old Testament studies in the past twenty years has been a growth of interest in and appreciation of the major biblical versions (LXX, Peshitta, Vulgate). While the versions have traditionally been used by text critics as resources for reconstructing the original Hebrew text, increasingly they are studied and appreciated as precious literary and theological texts in their own right. The Spanish textual critic N. Fernández Marcos, demonstrating a Catholic preference for the “both/and,” has observed: “The procedure adopted by the Polyglot Bibles has something to teach us today: to edit the different ancient texts that circulated among the distinct communities and which constitute *sensu pleno* the Books, *ta biblia*.”⁷

The Septuagint in particular has been increasingly recognized to have played an instrumental role in the formation of Christian culture. The late Dominique Barthélemy, OP, who devoted most of his scholarly life to the establishment of the critical Hebrew text of the Old Testament, called repeatedly for the recognition of a Christian Old Testament in two columns: one containing the Septuagint of the first centuries of our era, the second the Hebrew text canonized by the scribes of Israel.⁸ A preliminary step in this direction has been taken already in the case of the translation of the book of Esther. A 1969 agreement between the United Bible Societies and the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity allows for this book to be translated twice, based on both the Hebrew (in the Hebrew canon

idem, “The Task of Text Criticism,” in *Problems in Biblical Theology, Essays in Honor of Rolf Knierim*, eds. H. T. Sun and K. L. Eades (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 315–27; for a popular discussion of the differing approaches to textual criticism underlying forthcoming editions of the Hebrew Bible, see James A. Sanders, “Keep Each Tradition Separate,” *Bible Review* 16 (2000): 40–49, 58.

⁷ Fernández Marcos, “The Use of the Septuagint in the Criticism of the Hebrew Bible,” *Sef* 47 (1987): 59–72.

⁸ Dominique Barthélemy, OP, “La place de la Septante dans l’Église,” reprinted in D. Barthélemy, *Études d’histoire du texte de l’Ancien Testament* (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 1978), 126; see also Adrian Schenker, OP, “L’Ecriture Sainte subsiste en plusieurs formes canoniques simultanées,” in *L’interpretazione della Bibbia nella Chiesa, Atti del Simposio promosso dalla Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2001), 178–86; and the expanded German version of Schenker’s article, “Die Heilige Schrift subsistiert gleichzeitig in mehreren kanonischen Formen,” in *Studien zu Propheten und Religionsgeschichte*, ed. A. Schenker, OP (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2003), 192–200.

section) and the Greek (in the deuterocanonical section).⁹ This practice has been adopted by the NEB, REB, New Revised Standard Version, GN, and the French TOB translations. It is to be hoped that in the future consideration will be given to printing both versions synoptically in parallel columns.

Several major international projects are now underway to provide not only translations but also commentaries on the Septuagint and the Syriac Peshitta.¹⁰ This is a welcome development and one that will make the rich heritage of the Eastern churches accessible to Western audiences. As Brian Daley, SJ, has recently noted, "Christian exegesis must not only become more theological but more theologically ecumenical, if it is to nourish the Church."¹¹ The inter-faith (Christian-Jewish) and ecumenical gains involved with the use of a critical Hebrew text based on the work of the Masoretes have been significant, especially with regard to the increasing convergence of lectionary practice in North America. One might anticipate similar ecumenical gains to be had with a greater accessibility of the Greek and Syriac Bibles in English translation, though the widespread use of these versions in the Western liturgies is not likely.¹² The Catholic Church, with its supra-national organizational structure, long history of utilizing non-Hebrew versions of the Old Testament, and its theoretically multi-cultural and multi-lingual nature, is the Church best equipped to foster the use of the versions alongside of critical and scholarly editions based on the earliest recoverable texts. As the pioneering Catholic biblical scholar Richard Simon

⁹ United Bible Societies Executive Committee and the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, "Guiding Principles for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible," *The Bible Translator* 19 (1968): 103.

¹⁰ The three Septuagint projects are known as the New English Translation of the Septuagint; La Bible d'Alexandrie, and Septuaginta Deutsch. The New English Annotated Translation of the Syriac Bible is sponsored by the Peshitta Institute in Leiden.

¹¹ Brian E. Daley, SJ, "Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable?: Reflections on Early Christian Interpretation of the Psalms," *Communio* 29 (2002): 213.

¹² At a conference on the interpretation of the Bible held in Romania in 1998, Orthodox and Western scholars identified the questions of the status of the Septuagint and of Christological reading of the Old Testament as related questions and as open issues remaining to be resolved; see the editor's comments in "Konvergenzen und offene Fragen," in *Auslegung der Bibel in orthodoxer und westlicher Perspektive, Akten des west-östlichen Neutestamentler/innen-Symposiums von Neamt vom 4.-11. September 1998*, eds. J. D. G. Dunn, H. Klein, U. Luz, and V. Mihoc (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 219.

noted long ago, “L’Église Romaine reçoit toutes ces nations avec leurs Bibles.”¹³ The preservation of an ecclesial role for the Septuagint, Vulgate, and Peshitta, and perhaps for other important early translations as well, would manifest in a clear way that the Bible of the whole Church, East and West, has been inspired by the Holy Spirit in radically rich and diverse ways. Though the Catholic Church clearly calls for modern biblical translations to be based on the original scriptural languages, there is a growing body of official teaching on the role the biblical versions are to play alongside the original Aramaic, Greek, and Hebrew texts. *Dei Verbum*, number 22, for example, refers to the honor with which the Church holds these versions, even while going on in the next sentence to call for translations to be based on the original texts: “For this reason the Church, from the very beginning, made her own the ancient translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint; she honors also the other Eastern translations, and the Latin translations, especially that which is called the Vulgate.”¹⁴ The recent instruction *Liturgiam authenticam* suggests a similar concern for preserving the riches of the biblical versions when preparing liturgical translations:

[O]ther ancient versions of the Sacred Scriptures should also be consulted, such as the Greek version of the Old Testament commonly known as the ‘Septuagint,’ which has been used by the Christian faithful from the earliest days of the Church. . . . Finally, translators are strongly encouraged to pay close attention to the history of interpretation that may be drawn from citations of biblical texts in the writings of the Fathers of the Church.¹⁵

This official ecclesial sanction for the use of the versions may be understood as another expression of a Catholic predilection for “both/and” inclusivity.

¹³ R. Simon, *Réponse au livre intitulé Défense des Sentiments de quelques Theologiens de Hollande sur l’Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament* (Rotterdam: 1699), as quoted in D. Barthélemy, “L’enchevêtrement de l’histoire textuelle et de l’histoire littéraire dans les relations entre la Septante et le texte massorétique,” in *De Septuaginta, Studies in Honor of John William Wevers on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, eds. A. Pietersma and C. Cox (Mississauga, ON, Canada: Benben, 1984), 37.

¹⁴ *Dei Verbum*, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, OP (Northport, NY: Costello, 1987), no. 22.

¹⁵ *Congregatio de Cultu Divino et Disciplina Sacramentorum*, *Liturgiam authenticam*, March 28, 2001 (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2001), no. 41.

3. The history of interpretation based on non-Hebrew versions of the Old Testament. Attention to the various early translations of the Bible can have a pastoral impact in that it can facilitate access to the history of biblical interpretation in the Church. Johnson (256) notes that even when readings and interpretations based on the versions are pointed out by scholars, people cannot find them in their own Bibles. A fine example of how the treasures of the biblical versions and the patristic tradition can be exploited in popular commentary can be seen in Pope John Paul's recent commentaries on the psalms and canticles of Morning Prayer. There the pope occasionally cites interpretations of the Psalter based on the text of the Vulgate and the Septuagint alongside of his comments on the Hebrew text.¹⁶ In this way the pluriform nature of the Word of God is highlighted and the richness of the history of interpretation in both the Western and the Eastern traditions, particularly spiritual and Christological interpretation, is made accessible to a new generation.¹⁷
4. Textual pluriformity and biblical inspiration. Finally I would suggest that the developments in textual criticism outlined above make even more urgent the call for a renewal of the study of biblical inspiration by Catholic biblical scholars and theologians.¹⁸ The fundamental idea behind the doctrine of inspiration is the secure link between God's words as delivered by the prophets and sacred authors and the Scripture preserved by the Church. In the not too distant past prominent Catholic biblical scholars have suggested that inspiration is to be located at the level of particular textual forms of Scripture. George

¹⁶ I have consulted an English translation of the pope's commentaries on the psalms and canticles of morning prayer titled, *Psalms & Canticles, Meditations and Catechesis on the Psalms and Canticles of Morning Prayer* (Chicago: LTP, 2004). In this edition examples of the pope's use of the Vulgate and Septuagint alongside rather than in place of the Hebrew can be found on p. 94 (Ps 150:1), p. 108 (Ps 43:4), p. 177 (Ps 96:10), and p. 189 (Ps 86:2). The pope's practice is similar to that of Jerome, who likewise commented on both Greek and Hebrew lemmas in his Old Testament commentaries; on Jerome's practice see Adrian Schenker, OP, "Septuaginta und christliche Bibel," *Theologische Revue* 91 (1995): 461.

¹⁷ One might also note in this context that the first volume of the Church's Bible (*The Song of Songs, Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators*, ed. R. A. Norris [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003]) prints complete translations of the Vulgate and Septuagint at the beginning of each unit of commentary.

¹⁸ D. Janthial ("Livres et révélation: le cas d'Isaïe," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 126 [2004]: 16–32) has suggested that recent developments in biblical research require a new articulation of the Church's teaching on biblical inspiration.

Montague, SM, for example, has referred in the case of Judith to “the superiority of the Greek text in determining the Word of God to the Church.”¹⁹ In this particular case, Montague’s position is defensible, given the textual history of this particular book. But one wonders if the recovered Semitic texts of Ben Sira would require H. Duesberg, OSB, and P. Auvray, who argued in 1958 that it is specifically the Greek text of Ben Sira that enjoys inspiration, to revise their opinion.²⁰ L. Hartman, CSSR, specifically identified the inspired biblical text with “the original manuscript of the inspired author.”²¹ P. Benoit, OP, and other Catholic scholars went so far in the opposite direction as to argue explicitly for the inspiration of the entire Septuagint, an argument made particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, but one that seems to have been largely abandoned.²² I would suggest that these arguments could be included in a more general theory of a multiform inspired Bible.

It seems more prudent, and more in keeping with the textual evidence, to locate inspiration at either the level of the book or of the Bible as a whole, rather than at the level of particular textual forms, particular manuscripts, or particular authors. E. Ulrich has preferred to speak of canonicity at the level of the book. With regard specifically to canonicity, Ulrich notes, “Both in Judaism and in Christianity it is books, not the textual form of the books, that are canonical.”²³ Since canonicity and inspiration are related, one might infer that Ulrich would locate inspiration at this level as well. It is not clear that this particular formulation is entirely a happy one, for books, of course, have content; they are not empty shells. The question of the textual form remains. In Judaism there is clear evidence that it is specifically the Masoretic text itself that has a sacred status not shared by the textual forms of books in the early biblical translations such as the Septuagint.

Other scholars, such as Norbert Lohfink, SJ, argue that inspiration should be located at the level of the Bible as a whole.²⁴ Lohfink bases his argument on the function of the canon. When an individual book

¹⁹ G. Montague, SM, *The Book of Judith* (NY: Paulist, 1973), 13.

²⁰ H. Duesberg, OSB, and P. Auvray, *La livre de l'Ecclesiastique, La Sainte Bible*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Cerf, 1958), 22.

²¹ L. Hartman, CSSR, “Sirach in Hebrew and Greek,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 23 (1961): 444.

²² For a recent discussion, see M. Müller, *The First Bible of the Church: A Plea for the Septuagint* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

²³ E. Ulrich, “The Canonical Process, Textual Criticism, and the Latter Stages in the Composition of the Bible,” in Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 57.

²⁴ N. Lohfink, SJ, “The Inerrancy of Scripture,” in *The Inerrancy of Scripture and Other Essays* (Berkeley: BILBAL, 1992), 24–51.

is taken into the canon its context is radically reshaped and its meaning necessarily modified. This reception into the canon that gives a book its final form can be understood as a new act of authorship, and Lohfink would locate the final act of authorship, and inspiration, here at this level. The many individual books, as part of the canon, become one inspired book, the Bible. As Hugh of St. Victor put it: "The whole divine Scripture is one book, and this one book is Christ." While Lohfink's interpretation of inspiration is not without problems, it nicely emphasizes the formative role of the Church in shaping the biblical text and avoids speaking of inspired textual forms of individual books.

Throughout their book both Johnson and Kurz demonstrate a concern that Catholic biblical scholarship maintain the highest academic standards while also building up the Body of Christ. Scholarly reflection on the pluriformity of the text of the Word of God may contribute to these goals in two ways. Firstly, such reflection may help the Church's teaching on biblical inspiration to mature and to avoid the seductive certainties of enlightenment forms of biblical literalism. Secondly, maintaining a role for the early biblical versions alongside the original texts in the liturgical and intellectual life of the Church may also help safeguard the ecumenical catholicity of the Church and provide it with greater access to the rich tradition of the saints and scholars who have gone before us.²⁵

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²⁵ I am grateful to Angela Kim Harkins, Jody Vaccaro Lewis, Francis Martin, James A. Sanders, Adrian Schenker, OP, and Gregory Tatum, OP, for reading earlier drafts of this paper.